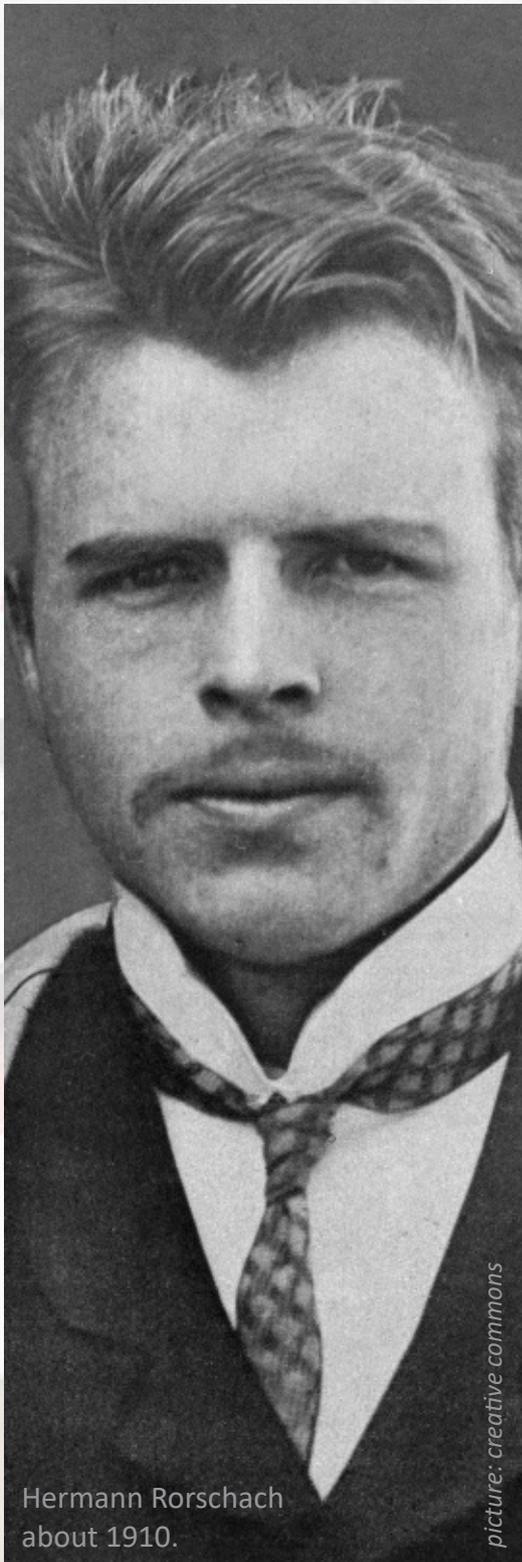


# 100 YEARS OF RORSCHACH TEST

by Kristian Kloofß



Hermann Rorschach  
about 1910.

picture: creative commons

**June 1921:** The Swiss psychiatrist [Hermann Rorschach](#) (1884-1922) publishes his work "[Psychodiagnostics](#)". The book describes the [implementation and evaluation](#) of a personality test based on blotographs. In a slipcase enclosed with the book, Rorschach presents ten ink blot plates for the test.

The coding and interpretation of the test depends on several factors. Do the probands use the whole blot or parts of it to form their answers? Do the things they see make a coherent whole? Do they focus on shape, color, or shading? Are the things they see static or do they move? Do they associate the pictures with animals or humans? Do they see typical things that others have seen before? Or do they see something unusual?

**April 2, 1922:** Rorschach dies at the age of 37 less than a year after the publication of his work "Psychodiagnostics" as a result of peritonitis.

**1920s:** Rorschach's testing method is used after his death by former colleagues such as the Swiss psychiatrists **Walter Morgenthaler** and **Emil Oberholzer**. And it is also spread by his former students in Switzerland and some other countries.

**1923:** The U.S. psychologist **David Levy** (1892-1977) learns about the Rorschach test during a study visit to Switzerland. Levy takes the book with the ten ink blots back to the USA. He also takes back a lecture manuscript in



Rorschach plate No. 1

pictures: Klooß

which Rorschach had summarized the last state of his method in 1922 shortly before his death. Levy offers the first seminars on the new form interpretation test in the United States.

**1925:** The Japanese psychologist **Yuzaburo Uchida** (1895-1966) comes across Hermann Rorschach's "Psychodiagnostics" in a bookstore in Tokyo. He then [spreads](#) the Rorschach method in Japan.

**1932:** Levy's student [Samuel Beck](#) (1896-1980) writes the first English-language dissertation on the Rorschach test. He takes a strongly empirical approach. Whether someone sees a bloodstain or a rose makes nearly no difference in this approach.

**1933:** The German child psychologist [Bruno Klopfer](#) (1900-1971), a person of Jewish faith, flees from the Nazis to Switzerland. There he is introduced to the Rorschach test. He later takes the book and the ten picture plates with him to America, where he emigrates. In New York in the 1930s, he begins to instruct students in the Rorschach method. He pursues the approach of interpreting answers and individual associations instinctively in the sense of Freudian psychoanalysis. Whether someone sees a bloodstain or a rose does makes a big difference in this approach.

**1937:** The Rorschach test is used by psychiatrists and psychologists in at least fourteen countries worldwide.

**1941:** After the United States enter the **Second World War**, Rorschach tests are also used in the recruiting offices of the U.S. Army. However, the method is heavily modified: Up to 200 prospective soldiers are shown the blotographs on overhead projectors in a darkened room. For each ink blot, they have a choice of ten multiple-choice answers, such as "A bat", "An army or navy emblem", "A dirty mess", or "Part of my body". Recruits who give no more than three "bad" answers are considered fit for World War II.

**1945:** Rorschach tests are used at the [Nuremberg trials](#). Together with other personality tests, they are intended to show whether accused Nazis such as [Hermann Göring](#), commander-in-chief of the German Air Force during World War II, are mentally fit to stand trial.

**After 1945:** After the war, clinical psychology experiences a massive boom. Psychological tests that provide seemingly predictable numbers boom. Intelligence tests and the Rorschach test are those methods that benefited most from this trend.

**1946:** In the psycho-thriller "[The Dark Mirror](#)", the Rorschach test reaches Hollywood. In the motion picture, a psychiatrist and an investigator try to find out which of two twin sisters committed a murder. They use the modern psycho tests at their time, such as the Rorschach and the polygraph.





Rorschach plate No. 3

**1951:** German-born **Ewald Bohm** (1903-1980) writes a [textbook](#) on the Rorschach test. Translated into several languages, the book becomes a basis for the application of the new projective method in various countries in Europe.

**1952:** The journal "[Rorschachiana](#)" of the [International Rorschach Society](#) (ISR) is published for the first time. The ISR contributes to the worldwide academic dissemination of the test.

**1950s:** The Rorschach test is the most widely used personality test in the world by the middle of the decade.

**1957:** The board game "[Person-alysis](#)" is launched. It is based on the interpretation of inkblot pictures. The associations are evaluated in a brochure, which is part of the game.

**1960s:** The Rorschach test loses importance compared to other personality tests. It is still used hundreds of thousands of times. However, different schools of Rorschach's interpretation of form mean that results are hardly objectively comparable between them. In addition, the linking of some answers and ratios with diagnoses proves to be unreliable or even invalid.

**1973:** The psychologist [John Exner](#) (1928-2006) publishes a book in which he compares and unifies the five most important U.S. Rorschach systems. It is entitled: "The Rorschach: A Comprehensive System". This unified system

stipulates, for example, that the tester and the test person do not sit opposite each other, but next to each other. Also the coding of the answers (Form = F, Movement = M, etc.) increases to more than a hundred codes – with Hermann Rorschach it was just under a dozen. Formulas in which the number of certain answers are entered are also supposed to help make egocentricity, depression or suicide risk quantitatively measurable.

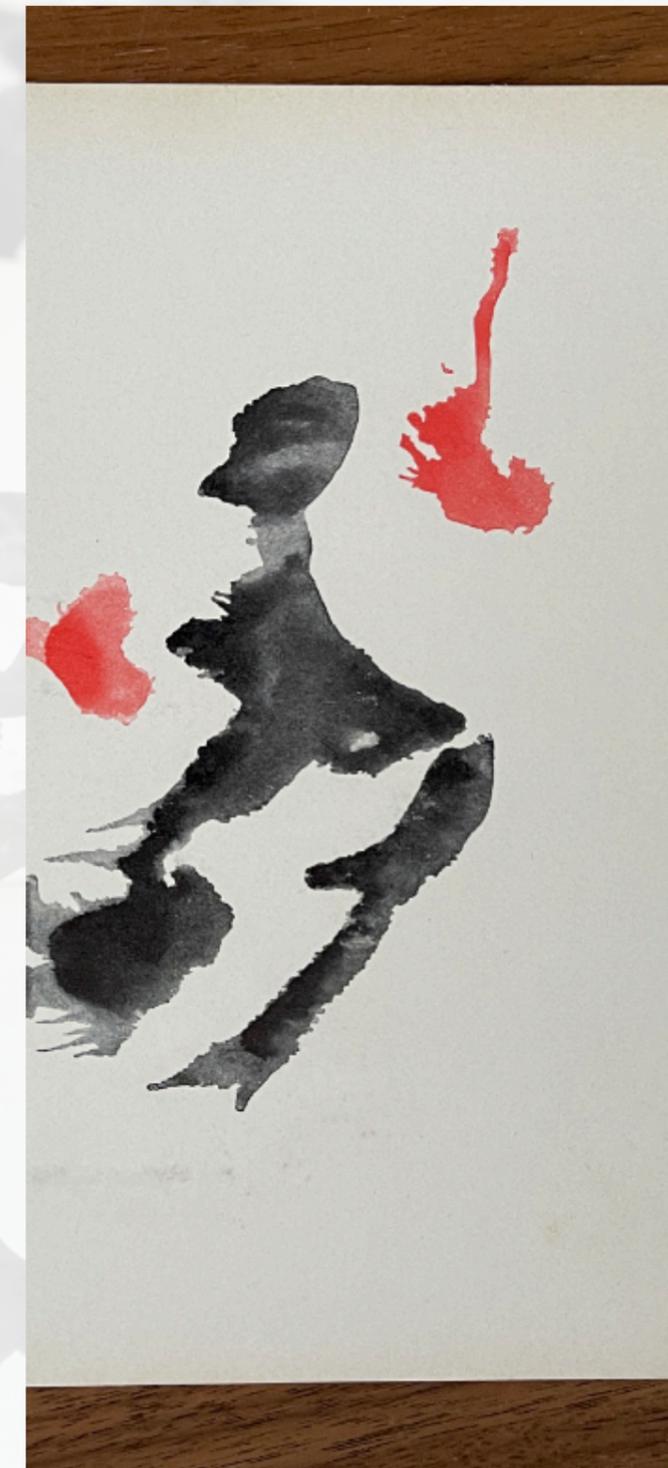
**1982:** German poet [Peter Rühmkorf](#) (1929-2008) publishes the poetry collection "[Kleine Fleckenkunde](#)" (Little blot knowledge), in which he rhymes about inkblot pictures.

**1984:** Pop artist [Andy Warhol](#) (1928-1987) paints a series of more than fifty symmetrical blotographs on large canvases. Each of the works bears the same title: "[Rorschach](#)".

**1987:** The graphic novel "[Watchmen](#)" is published. It stars the anti-hero "Rorschach", on whose white mask black ink stains mix to form ever new blotographs. In 2009, "Watchmen" is made into a [movie](#) and released as a video game. A TV series follows in 2019. In 2020, a separate comic book series is dedicated to the dark hero "Rorschach".

**1991:** The animated series "The Simpsons" takes up the Rorschach test in an [episode](#).

**1980s and 1990s:** In psychiatry, the Rorschach test is displaced by less expensive procedures such as the [MMPI](#) test, in which subjects answer hundreds of questions with "agree" or



"disagree". In schools, however, the Rorschach test is becoming a preferred method for assessing the personality of children and adolescents. The same is true in forensic settings, such as custody proceedings. Experts estimate that the Rorschach test is still administered around a few million times worldwide shortly before the turn of the millennium.

**1999:** [Criticism](#) of the Rorschach test grows again. Around the turn of the millennium, some skeptics even call for a [moratorium](#) on the test, which would mean a suspension of its use in clinical and forensic examinations.

**2003:** Psychologist James Wood and several other critics write an influential book entitled "[What's wrong with the Rorschach?](#)". In it, they criticize Exner's system. For example, they say that some of the data used as the basis for the assessment were incorrectly evaluated. In addition they write that the methodology is not transparent, because the data Exner uses is not public. Wood and his colleagues also criticise that key figures are not valid. For example, test persons who have given many answers tend to be classified as abnormal. Last but not least, the personal views of the testers distort the results the critics say.

**2006:** The music video for the worldwide number 1 hit "[Crazy](#)" by the soul duo Gnarls Barkley consists exclusively of a sequence of blob images reminiscent of the Rorschach test.

**2009:** In the online encyclopedia **Wikipedia** the ten [Rorschach plates](#) are made accessible to a wide audience for the first time. In addition, the most frequent associations to the individual blot pictures are published. This triggers a [debate](#) as to whether it is morally responsible and practically relevant for test subjects to take the test even though they may already know the Rorschach plates and typical answers to them.

**2011:** After the death of John Exner in 2006, some of his former employees have substantially revised his system. Finally, they create a competing system: the **Rorschach Performance Assessment System** ([R-PAS](#)). This "Rorschach Performance Assessment System" incorporates new studies and makes corrections. Numerous variables that are not considered valid are deleted. Thus, the test is simplified.

**November 8, 2013:** **Google** honors Hermann Rorschach with a [Doodle](#).

**2018:** The **European Court of Justice** [rules](#) that questions of sexual orientation may not be determined by psychological methods such as the Rorschach test. The background: a Nigerian refugee was tested in Hungary in 2015 by a Rorschach test, among other methods, after he had stated that he was homosexual as the reason for fleeing his home country. Based on the psychological test results, the Hungarian authorities rejected this justification.



Rorschach plate No. 8

**2018:** Researchers at the **Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** test the Rorschach ink blots with various artificial intelligence (AI) systems for image recognition. These experiments show that computer systems can also develop psychopathic traits. For example, the AI "[Norman](#)" created by the researchers sees a man being shot in front of his wife on the eighth Rorschach plate, while a standard AI sees a person holding up an umbrella there. The other plates evoke similar results.

**2021:** The Rorschach test is regularly used in numerous countries around the world for various purposes: in clinics, in court, in job application tests. It is still very common in the [USA](#) and [Japan](#), and is also frequently used in Latin American countries such as [Argentina](#) and [Brazil](#). The International Rorschach Society lists a total of [21 countries](#) where psychologists and psychiatrists use the test and share research results: including France, Spain, Italy, Austria, Switzerland, the Netherlands and Great Britain. In other countries such as [Germany](#), the test is practically no longer used today.

**2021:** 100 years after the publication of the Rorschach test, the [board game "Rorschach"](#) by author Kristian Klooß is published by [Capstone Games](#). The [communication game](#) contains 100 inkblot images, including blotographs from Hermann Rorschach's test published in June 1921.



A reprint of Hermann Rorschach's book "Psychodiagnostics" from 1954.

picture: Klooß



# RORSCHACH

**1** FORM TWO TEAMS

**2** EACH ROUND, A PLAYER SECRETLY PAIRS WORDS WITH INKBLOT IMAGES

**3** THE OTHERS TRY TO GUESS A PAIRING

**4** WHICH TEAM WILL PASS THE RORSCHACH TEST?

RED

NEW YORK

BIRD

DEVIL