

# A Systems Analysis Approach to Understand Psychological Meanings of Pictorial Expressions

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SSCA (Seven Step Configuration Analysis) is a psychodiagnostical tool. At this level SSCA requires a lots of practice and a solid psychological knowledge or background. Although the specific methods, techniques used in SSCA, and the holistic and systematic point of view gives us the possibility to work with values outside of therapeutic setting: mainly as a spectator/examiner or as a creator.

For this purpose in this document we highlighted those techniques (specifically at the step of Intuitive analysis), which are the most useful and can be easily adapted, while the ones that require much deeper prior knowledge are summarized for understanding.

Using these tools as a spectator we have the chance to gain deeper understanding through a visual medium which is essential nowadays: visual information is influencing our life in a way that never happened before. It can help to raise the spectator's sensitivity towards others and stay in contact with its target group and their reality, while creating the opportunity to discover their values. A creator can use these methods to build up dialogs consciously through a visual medium – possibly sharing its values. In our work the most important way to use it to create a deeply grounded and specific activities *to reflect back* someone's own values, which looks hidden for the first sight.

## What is SSCA?

The Seven-Step Configuration Analysis (SSCA) is a method of psychological interpretation of pictorial expression (e.g. projective drawings and paintings) in a systems analysis approach. The SSCA is a scheme of psychological interpretation derived from studies of expert thinking. It was developed in the building of the ESPD (Expert System for Projective Drawings) as a cognitive model. The model consists of seven phases, each of which builds upon the previous one, which represent the successive individual steps of the psychological understanding of pictures or other projective tests. The SSCA has two basic theorems derived from the ESPD model: the first theorem of SSCA is that pictures are analyzed only in context, i.e. they are related to case history, test behavior, current conditions, the subjects' own interpretation, as well as other items in the present and previous pictures by the same subject; the second theorem is that only configurations are interpreted. The final result of the SSCA is the 'essence' of the picture, i.e. a concise but extendable summary of a picture's psychological significance.

## What is a projective drawing?

The term 'projective' means the subjects are given maximum freedom to draw. Everyone draws the same things differently: they project different expectations onto the same instruction and situation. It is those individual differences that the examiner looks for and interprets. For the sake of comparison, it is recommended to use exactly the same wording (standard instruction) when asking the subjects to make the pictures, however, this does not mean that only classic drawing tests can be used—all pictures are open to (psychological) interpretation.

To provide a more scientific definition of 'projective drawing' in a general sense, a projective drawing (painting, scribble etc.) is an externalization of cognitive–emotional structure. The term 'cognitive–emotional structure' can not be simplified by saying conscious or unconscious content. The term 'externalization' also cannot be replaced with the term 'projection', for it may contain both conscious and not conscious components. The picture should be considered an imprint or an incomplete fragment of the totality of the subject's expressive behavior. In this sense, pictures are similar to footprints left on the ground: the examiner's task is to draw conclusions about the personality based on such imprints.

A projective drawing or painting, as an externalized cognitive–emotional structure, consists of several components, present to different extents in each case. Some of the most important components are:

- Construction of the individual's world, defined projection to be a way of structuring (i.e. giving meaning to) an unstructured situation that is characteristic of the individual. The same instruction and situation represent different stimuli to different subjects. Their reactions are determined by their unique perceptions that lead their own unique cognitive–emotional models of the world. The individual's world model is not a random product: it is determined by the personality, thus, it is a significant source of psychodiagnostic evaluation.

- Communication process. Pictures are also forms of communication. Asking someone to draw for us is equivalent to asking to tell us something about himself. The SSCA interprets the picture (and the process of creation) as a message of communication. That communication may even be more important than the product itself.

- Unconscious projection, as introduced by Freud in 1895 and subsequently used by the classic authors on projective drawings (Machover, Buck, Hammer, Levy, etc.). This is the most common way of interpreting projective tests and disclosing, for example, psychodynamics, defense mechanisms and unconscious conflicts.

- Expressive movements or expressive behavior, either consciously controlled or not, such as psychomotor tempo or use of space. In the simplest formulation, expression is the external, bodily manifestation of an emotional state or personality. Expressive behavior may be manifested in gestures, facial expressions, gait, sitting, resting, posture, voice, speech, handwriting and even the

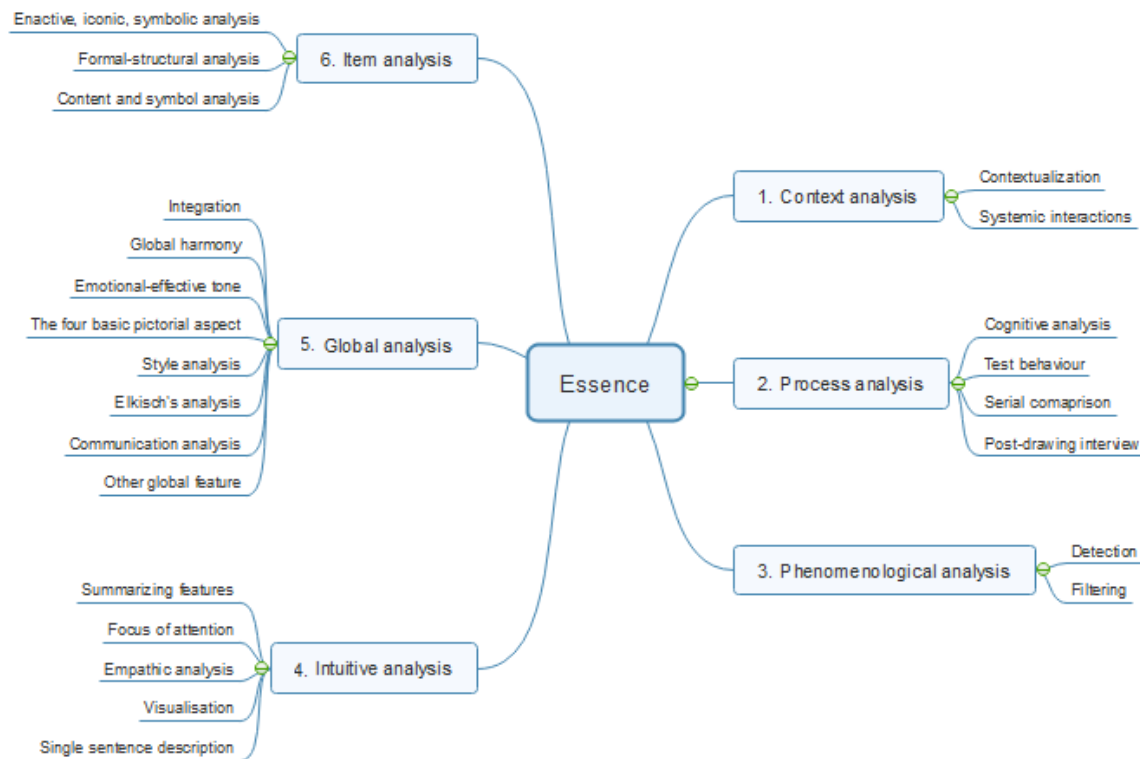
style of scientific work can be expressive. The individual forms of expressive movements show a high degree of consistency within a single person, and the various forms of expression are interconnected so that they are activated together, although to varying degrees.

## The SSCA method

The seven phases can be summarized as shown in a systems analysis approach. It consists of the

- (1) Context analysis
- (2) Process analysis
- (3) Phenomenological analysis
- (4) Intuitive analysis
- (5) Global analysis
- (6) Item analysis
- (7) Finding the essence

In practice, the examiner starts with drawing a phenomenological map, which represents his observations about the subject and the picture. It includes all the observations on a single page and helps him to focus on the relationships between the observations. As the last step, he may also construct a semantic map, which represents the essence of the picture.



In the SSCA, the psychological meaning of pictorial features is explained with the multiple causation. A disorder can be expressed visually in many different ways, and any pictorial feature may have multiple interpretations. Therefore, pictorial features can only be understood in context.

## 1. Context analysis

Context analysis summarises all significant factors in seven kinds of bidirectional interactions pertaining to five main components. The components are the picture itself, the subject, the examiner and the situation. The fifth component is the other person, if more than one subject draws at the same time or other persons are present during the test situation. Context analysis consists of two steps: Contextualization and the exploration of systemic interactions. Contextualization means placing the picture in an individual context. To do this, the examiner evaluates the psychological, social and physical context of the system's main components: the subject(s), the picture, the situation and the examiner. Systemic interaction analysis refers to the exploration of the interactions between components.

The term "systemic interactions" refers to the interrelationship between components in the subject-product-examiner-situation system. The system consists of three types of interactions: situational/ interpersonal and picture-person. The aim is to disclose contextual factors that influence or modify the picture's psychological meaning in an individual case. Examiner should explore both psychological, social and physical context.

The following questions serve as good starting points and should always be viewed in light of what they reveal about the subject's psychological functioning:

*What effect did the assessment situation, the room and the time have on the subject?*

*What was the subject's attitude toward the assessment situation?*

*How did the subject relate to the task or activity he was instructed to do? For example, does the subject like to draw in general?*

*What was the subject's attitude toward psychological assessment in general?*

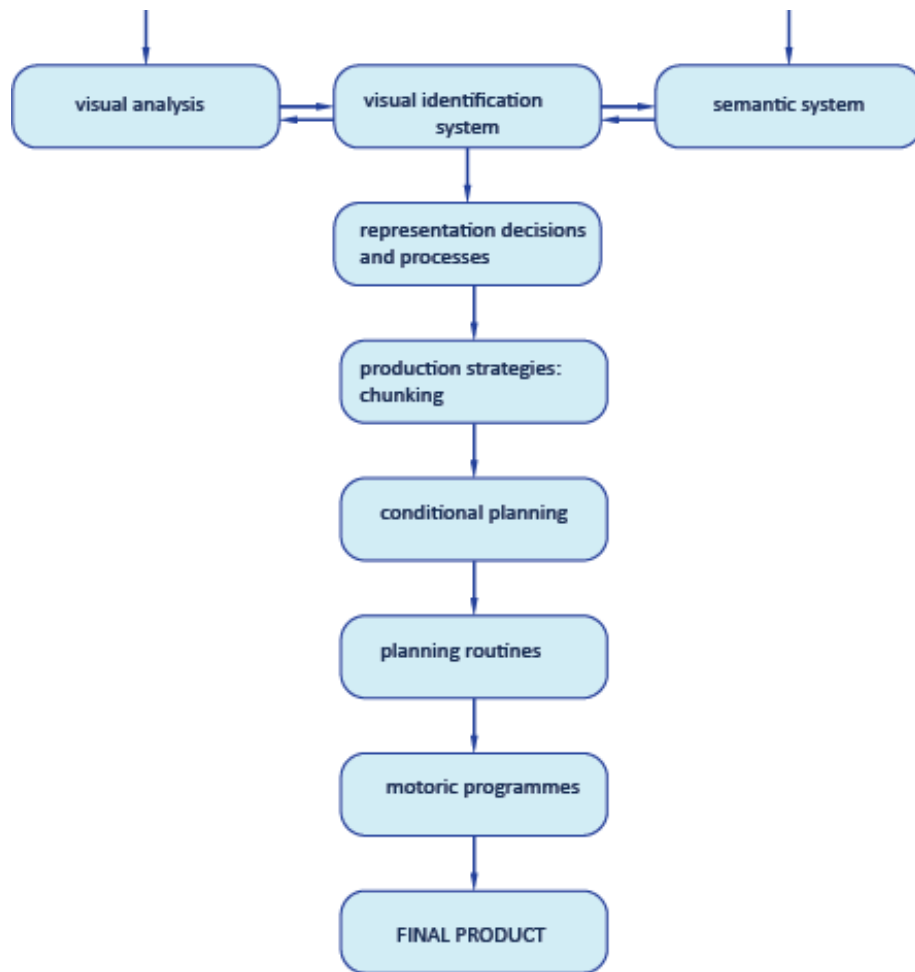
*What was the subject's interpretation of the situation? For example, did he consider it to be a measure of his academic achievement, a personality test, an interesting challenge or child's play?*

*What was the subject's interpretation of the instruction?*

*What was the subject's psychological impact on the situation?*

## 2. Process analysis

This step is about describing the genesis of the pictorial phenomena. Observing the actual-genesis is one of the most important source for understanding it. The examiner will search for (and record the most important information on the phenomenological map) information in *verbal behavior, verbal comments and projections, gesture, mimic, non-verbal reactions, psychomotoric reactions, reaction time and overall time spent on drawing, proportion of parts, item sequences while drawing*. Drawing itself is a dynamic and interactive process. Dynamic interactivity describes the phenomenon that the subject and the pictorial phenomena are in constant interactions: the end product is influenced by the process itself, already drawn parts has an influence on the subject. In the genesis of the drawings much more inner processes are happening than we might suppose.



### 3. Phenomenological analysis

This step is about describing the pictorial phenomena without attempting to interpret them. Phenomenological analysis helps us to separate our projections from the observable facts. If the observer believes he's right about his assumptions, it can easily lead to making mistakes. Description can be purely mental, or it can be verbalized or written down, the essential thing is to use phenomenological method to notice everything in the picture (figures, events, individual details etc.) and to inventory them. If we find that we cannot tell what a particular detail depicts, we should accept it as it is, it's ambiguity. The most important and difficult part of this step to avoid confusing descriptions with interpretation. After a full analysis is completed, it's worthwhile to do a reality-check in order to see whether any important phenomena was left out during the interpretation.



#### 4. Intuitive analysis

The process of intuiting is “a complex set of inter-related cognitive, affective and somatic processes, in which there’s no apparent intrusion of deliberate, rational thought. Moreover, the outcome of this process (an intuition) can be difficult to articulate. The outcomes of intuition can be experiences as a holistic ‘hunch’ or ‘gut feel’, a sense of calling or overpowering certainty, and an awareness of a knowledge that is on the threshold of conscious perception” (Hodgkinson, Langan-Fox and Sadler Smith)

In the SSCA method, intuition is viewed as one of the most important means of gaining knowledge. It is considered to be a type of perception in which the pictorial phenomenon only becomes conscious partially or not at all – only the effect that it has on us perceived consciously. The effect may be an emotion, a mood, a thought or the recognition of an interconnection. In practice this means that we may have sudden insights or impressions that are difficult to formulate on a verbal level while we reflect on a picture. These are very valuable information for understanding the picture. Of course , no assessment should be made on the basis of pictures or intuition. In this step we don’t consciously control our attention, but allow it to wander openly and freely. The risks of intuition is that these insights may also be projections of the examiner’s personality: intuitive impressions should be recorded accurately, but it should not be accepted in an uncritical manner. They should be put aside until the seventh step of the analysis, when they can be examined in context.

Methods that helps the intuitive exploration of the psychological content of a pictorial:

##### *The five most important impressions*

Consider the picture with an accepting attitude and open-mind for a few minutes and simply allow it to exert its influence on you. How would you characterize the feelings and impressions evoked by the picture? After formulating your own ideas, you may also use descriptive lists.

Movement aspects		Form aspects		Use of space	
continouos	interrupted	independent	dependent	harmonious	disharmonious
fluid	hesitant	personal	impersonal	rounded	angular
dynamic	shaky	individual	by-the-book	soft	hard
flowing	sketchy	unique	banal	heavy	light
free	restricted	well-formed	rough	rough	fine
sharp	dull	composed	scattered	massive	fragile
carefree	cautious	learned, trained	untrained	determined	loose
hurried	restrained	refined	ordinary	proud	modest
rushed	deliberate	aesthetis	plain	straight	curved
violent	eased	stylised	organic	powerful	flaccid

Movement aspects		Form aspects		Use of space	
excited	calm	crowded	simple	relaxed	timorous
restless	measured	exacting	modest	competent	helpless
unrestrained	restrained	conceited	unobtrusive	professional	unprofessional
uninhibited	inhibited	fantastic	sober	skillful	unskillful
scattered	collected	hectic	motionless	sure	unsure
far-reaching	groping	differentiated	undifferentiated	natural	contrived
lively	tired	rich	poor	real	unreal
relaxed	restricted	dense	empty	lively	monotonous
roaming	localised	clourful	pale	original	stereotypical
flexible	fragmented	burgeoning	bare	casual	affected
rythmic	confused	succulent	desiccated	enriched	constrained
unrectricted	rigid	warm	cold, cool	disintegrating	concentrated
loose	stiff	vital	spiritual	loose	tense
vibrating	smooth	confused	clear	chaotic	regulated
		muddled	precise	twisted	straight
		smearred	clean	indeterminate	determinnate
		blunt	pointed		

Other lists of descriptive adjectives are also available for the house, tree, animal and human figure drawings (Leibowitz, Koch, Süle)

### ***Spontaneous focus of attention***

Attention is usually attracted to the part of the picture that is the most important for the subject. That part, figure or motif contains more expressive and projective content than other, less significant or less interesting parts. The method is also useful with free drawings and abstract compositions: the motif selected by spontaneous attention is worth dealing with in greater detail and if possible, it should also be discussed with the subject and free associations also be elicited. ("What does this remind you of?") The spontaneous attention tends to be focused on:

- the motif in the centre of the picture
- the head and and eyes of the human figure or animal
- anything that is more colorful than the rest
- anything that is different from the rest (contrast)
- anything that is livelier, more conspicuous, more detailed (or emptier)
- anything that is "alone" (surrounded by empty areas)
- anything that the composition leads the eyes to

The physical and the psychological focus of the subjects's attention may differ in certain pictures. In these cases, at first sight, accidental details grab the examiner's attention.

### ***Motor empathy***

Motor empathy (described by István Hárđi, 1983) states that it helps to understand the picture if the examiner copies it and imitates the lines thereby recreating the entire process of the genesis of the picture in the individual movements. This may be particularly important with pictures that are otherwise difficult to interpret. Motor empathy brings the examiner's attention to the parts of the drawing that are most important and that have the highest emotional-effective charge. The following questions help to understand and practice motor empathy:

- At what point does your attitude towards the picture change?*
- Which part are you happy to draw?*
- Have you found any incongruities or discrepancies in the details of the picture that you did not notice before?*
- Is copying the picture a pleasant experience, or it is a joyless, boring activity?*
- Which part of the picture did the subject enjoy the most?*
- Does the picture have any parts that you would have drawn differently?*
- Does it have any parts that you emphasised, enlarged or changed?*

An advanced exercise: Draw the exact opposite of the picture! Do not change the content of the depiction but only the style and manner of the process of creating the picture (e.g. size, line quality, spontaneity versus rigidity, psychomotor tempo, careful vs. hastily drawn).

Once the picture is known in greater detail, the examiner may find that the erroneously copied details, like a microscope, magnify the problematic details, the parts that were, consciously or unconsciously, conflict-laden for the subject as well.

### ***Kinaesthetic empathy***

In the method of kinaesthetic empathy the examiner attempts to "decode" the human figure drawing by copying the posture of the figure, he makes an attempt to understand and verbalize the emotions, tensions and incongruence expressed in the picture through bodily experience. (Facial expressions should only be attempted in highly differentiated drawings!) In Deridre Sklar's definition kinaesthetic empathy is a technique that involves the capacity for participation in another's feelings or ideas. The word empathy derives from the Greek πάσχειν (paschein - to experience or suffer) and is related to παθητικός (patheikos - capable of feeling), kinaesthesia from κινεῖν (kinein – move) and αἰσθησις (aisthis - perception), as a sense mediated by end organs located in muscles, tendons and joints and stimulated bodily movement and tensions. Also sensory experience derived from this sense. In our case kinaesthetic empathy is a skill involving bodily memory and bodily intelligence. It

is a matter of recognizing kinaesthetically what is perceived visually, aurally, tactilely. It is a translation capacity that we all inherently possess.

The technique of kinaesthetic analysis is worth applying if we find it difficult to get to the essence of the picture. It is enough to maintain the posture for a short while, but it is very important. to reproduce exactly. Once the technique is acquired, it will be possible to apply mentally.

Helping questions to the SSCA method of kinaesthetic empathy:

*Is the figure or motif in balance?*

*If not, which way does it lean, which way do you lean when you imitate it?*

*How intensive is the feeling of loss of balance?*

*Is it only slight, or is it physically impossible to maintain the exact posture depicted?*

*Is there a tendency to move? If so, in what direction? With what intensity?*

*Does a picture evoke emotions? What emotions? With what intensity?*

*Is it a single, definite emotion or are there several?*

*Is the posture tense or calm? If it is tense, in which body part do you sense the tension?*

*Are there any somatic symptoms, perhaps only barely perceptible, such as dizziness, stress or pain?*

*Is the posture natural or contrived?*

*What would the figure like to do? What is its intention? Continue or complete the movement!*

*What can develop from this posture?*

*Will it stay the same or will it develop into something entirely different?*

*If it remains constant, what would you change about it?*

*Which way would you turn or lean? Where would you move which body parts?*

*Would you make many or only a few changes to the figure?*

Advanced exercise: Construct the exact opposite posture of the one depicted in the picture. How do you feel when you imitate it? How does the opposite posture help you to understand the original picture?

### **Visualisation**

In searching for intuitive insights, imagine the picture coming to life. The motif is no longer on the paper, but it appears in physical space.

*What are your general impressions as the viewer?*

*What size would the motif be in physical space according to your first, spontaneous impression?*

*Where does it appear? It is near or far?*

*Is it in the middle of the room or in a corner? Floating in the air or flat against the floor?*

*Is it moving? How does it move? Fast or slow? Approaching or gaining distance?  
 If it is not moving, is it stable on its feet or is it tilting, falling?  
 Does it speak, say something does it remain silent? What is its sound or voice like?  
 What are its first words?  
 Does it have a smell or odor?  
 How does it feel to the touch? Does it want to touch you?  
 Is it looking at you?  
 Does it initiate interaction with you? Does it communicate? How?  
 What does it want from you, directly or indirectly? Does it want to manipulate you?*

Advanced exercise: Construct the exact opposite! How do you feel when you visualize it? How does the opposite of the picture help you to understand the original depiction?

### ***Empathic questioning***

Try to enter into the subjective world of the subject during the empathic understanding of the picture. The key concept is the empathic immersion into the world of the patient's subjective experience, a "vicarious introspection", in an attempt to understand the patient from within his emotional world. In the Kohutian theory, this is the only avenue to understand the representations of the self and the self-object.

In the process of acquiring an empathic understanding of a picture, the examiner puts himself into the motif's place and views the surroundings from that perspective. How does the subject feel about himself? How does he perceive the world that the picture depicts?

The method is applicable not only to human figure drawings, but also animal drawings and even tree drawings and other themes.

In practice it is easier to apply Sehringer's method of empathic understanding. This involves directed questions the examiner asks himself in relation to the picture, performing a sort of internal dialogue. The number of possible diagnostic questions are infinite, but the ones occur frequently are:

*In human figure drawings, we note the appearance of the figure. Does the figure come off as strong?  
 Is it an energetic or weak character?  
 Is it lost or uncertain?  
 Does it give off a general lovable impression?  
 Does the human figure control its emotions or is it controlled by its emotions?  
 How does it relate to others?  
 How does it "get on" with people important to it?  
 What kind of figure would be the empathic opposite of the figure drawn?*

*Overall powerful impression of the drawing as an empathic quality*

The basic interpretations of power as an empathic quality are health, dominance tendencies, inadequacy feelings with compensation of a weakness. A strong energetic figure is often the expression of spontaneity if it is accompanied by a short reaction time, a happy cheerful or playful emotional-affective tone, firm, unhesitating, quickly drawn strokes. In female figures drawn by female subjects, it is often expression of assertiveness. In configuration it can also be interpreted as indicating an active-aggressive social attitude, a need to demonstrate masculinity, body-narcissism or manic state.

#### *The weakness of the drawing as an empathic quality*

It is the opposite of the previous one: human figure is seen as weak, powerless and childish. This empathic quality should be distinguished from the quality of being lost and uncertain, which has additional interpretations. General interpretations include reduced ego strength, feeling of inadequacy, childish or infantile traits, ego constriction, experience of the external world as a source of danger, general lack of confidence or productivity, feeling of inferiority, helplessness syndrome or depressive mood or risk for depression.

#### *The figure being lost or uncertain as an empathic quality*

The overall impression of being uncertain and undecided appears formally in the drawings as well. The drawings are prepared using hesitant, powerless, slow, shaky, tremorous, uncertain and hazy lines with weak pressure. Basic interpretations of this reaction are inhibitions, inhibited personality, helplessness syndrome. In other cases this sign may indicate anxiety, dependency need, a desire to be cared for, defensiveness or a depressive mood or risk for depression.

#### *The overall loveliness of the figure as an empathic quality*

The human figure appears to be pleasant, cheerful, warm and lovable to the viewer. This empathic quality usually characterizes the pictures made by healthy people. Its basic interpretations are the need for contact or in a less positive way: increased dependency need, exaggerated need for contact, effort to conform to the demands of others.

#### *The overall impression that the figure is in control of its emotions*

This empathic quality is only recorded if it is present very clearly in the drawing. Mainly it is the sign of conscious effort to maintain ego control or health.

#### *The overall impression that the figure is in control of its emotions*

This empathic quality occurs more frequently and is also easier to recognize than the previous one. Basic interpretation is emotion-driven behavior, but in configuration it may represent the difficulty in controlling basic drives or impulses, oppositional behavior.

### ***Single-sentence description***

In this phase of the analysis , an attempt is made to summarize intuitive impressions and select the most important one. If you had to describe the picture in a single sentence, what would you say? What is the most important to say about it? Which short sentence says the most about the picture and describes its most characteristic or most important aspect?

The single sentence formulated in this early stage of analysis is not the same as the short summary obtained at the end of the seven-phase process called the essence of the picture. At this point we give a description, while later (at the last step) we formulate an interpretation.

## 5. Global analysis

In the phase of global analysis the picture assessed as a whole (as a gestalt). The qualities of the gestalt differ from those of its parts, its isolated components: according to the well known principle, the whole is more than the sum of it's parts. In this phase, we attempt to discern characteristics of the picture that are ascribed to the picture as a whole.

In the SSCA method the following global features are evaluated:

- The emotional effective tone
- The individual style of depiction
- Integration
- Harmony
- Spontaneity
- Individuality
- Personality levels (in the human figure and animal drawings)
- Space, form and movement aspects
- The use of colors

## 6. Item analysis

In this step we are analyzing the following formal-structural factors in the picture:

View and perspective  
 Size and proportion  
 Symmetry  
 Placement  
 Line quality  
 Shading  
 Detailing

Perseveration and repetition  
Closure and openness  
Transparencies  
Distortions and omissions  
Graphemes

Item analysis is the ultimate step of SSCA. The essence of item analysis is the listing and identification of all the individual items (features) that may be interpreted in relation to the theme concerned. However, individual pictorial phenomena should only be interpreted in the form of configurations. In other words, psychological interpretations are attributed in the context of

- Case history
- The present condition of the subject
- Observed test behavior
- The post drawing interview, including the subject's own interpretation
- Other items present and previous pictures by the subject

Item analysis only considers pictorial items (phenomena) that are

- Objectively present (see phenomenological analysis)
- Clearly manifested
- Exist in a configuration

On the other hand, those pictorial phenomena get disregarded that are

- Subjective or have any possibility of being the examiner's own projections
- Uncertain or ambivalent in their classification or identification
- Only present to a minor degree
- Isolated items, which do not fit to any configuration

Items that are unusual in their manifestation (exceptional, striking, strange) or in their intensity (expressive, excessive) need special attention.

In this step we are helped with the enactive, iconic and symbolic level analysis methods.

### ***Enactive analysis***

During enactive analysis we analyse the movement patterns, i.e. the traces of the subject's expressive movements on paper. Items include broken or fluent nature of movements and psychomotor tempo. The use of motor empathy as described at intuitive analysis step, may assist enactive understanding. In this method we do not assess the subject of the picture, nor its realism. The content of the depiction is not considered: expressive movement is the exclusive focus of attention. During enactive analysis, the individual parts of the picture must also be compared to assess whether they differ as regards the degree of control of the expressive movements and the type of lines.



### *Iconic analysis*

Iconic (icon: a sign denoting the signified based on a pictorial relationship) analysis concerns the way in which the pictures presented the observable shape and the details of the object depicted. The level of iconic analysis examines the realistic, mirrored or transformed, distorted or undistorted character of a picture. With the exception of abstract pictures and scribbles, all pictures have iconic significance. Iconic analysis is aimed at discovering the subjective reality and the individual experiential world of the subject. The individual manner of tracking reality reveals the world-view of the person. The following guiding questions help us in this step:

- How does the subject see people and objects?
- What is the composition of his personal world?
- What types of interactions does he notice or does he initiate with his physical and social environment?
- How does the subject's experiential world differ from objective reality?
- What does he include that would not be significant for others?
- What does he omit that others would find important?

The ways of 'recolouring' the world subjectively include the omission of parts, the changing of proportions and enlargement. Other ways of creating an individual depiction of reality include the choice of an unusual viewpoint. Creativity can also be present at iconic level, for instance, in the originality of the choice of the theme, in the choice of viewpoint, in the merging of lines or in the expressive transformation of contours. Creativity, however, can also be expressed at the enactive level or at symbolic level.

### *Symbolic analysis*

Symbolic analysis is performed from two perspectives: unconscious symbolism and conscious symbols are both examined.

The first approach involves the psychoanalytic interpretation of projective content based primarily on the work of Freud and Jung. The second approach is aimed at examining the content of pictures from the perspective of communication theory, which includes the interpretation of conventional signs, conventional symbols, pictograms, pictorial signs, emblems and labels.

Pictures are revealing at the enactive, iconic and symbolic levels to varying degrees. During the analysis of the various levels, the significance of the enactive, iconic and symbolic levels is considered separately, then the subject's preference for any particular level is taken into account along with any similarities or discrepancies between the information quantity of the individual levels.

The shared characteristic of the two approaches is that symbolic analysis looks for “concealed content”. Similarly to colors, symbols have archetypal, cultural and individual significance. A more authentic result can be achieved by discussing the unique, individual meaning of the symbol with the subject and by the method of free associations. (for example the methods of Game of Colors, Metanoia Mentoring and Color Keys apply a special visual association technique, called connotation keys, which provides a better way of disclosing the individual meanings of colors.

Two fundamental types of Item analysis is formal structural and content analysis. Both item analysis of formal-structural aspects and the item analysis of content are performed. The two approaches are complementary.

## **7. Finding the essence**

The last step is the identification of the essence of the picture. The objective is to discover the most important psychological meaning of the drawing or painting through integrating all the information gathered so far. The concept of ‘essence’ arose as a result of the computer analysis of the information quantity of pictures, which showed 80% of all the information in a picture is contained in 20% of its items, so the psychological essence of pictures can be formulated on the basis only a few, outstandingly important pictorial phenomena. The remaining graphic indicators of the picture only repeat and refine the psychological message of the fundamentally important ones.

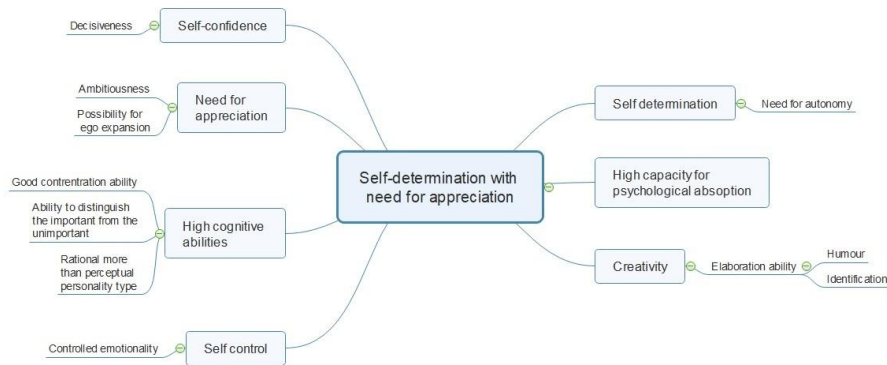
The essence of pictures can even be summarized in a single, short sentence. (The psychological essence should not be confused with the title of a picture.) The essence expresses a deeper and more significant content than a title, and it does so in a condensed form. Written down, it may even appear clumsy at times, unlike the title, which, instead of being deep and condensed, is often only apt or catchy. Success of a picture’s comprehension is indicated by whether the examiner is able to summarise the essence in a concise and clear manner. Task should be considered as a verification; if one is uncertain when it comes to formulating the single sentence, work on the picture should be continued.

### **The semantic map**

The psychological essence of a picture is indicated by a short sentence at the centre of the phenomenological map. The essence is elaborated in greater detail in a second-level map, which is called semantic map. It consists of three parts:

1. The short essence, at the centre
2. Interpretations
3. Links, with or without labels

It never includes observations or external facts in contrast with the phenomenological map.



## Extensions towards photography

SSCA describes in detail how it is possible to reach the psychological content of an expressive pictorial product. The foundation of the method also can be used for any visual product (i.e. any visual art piece, even object design can be 'read' with it).



Photography has a very special place in our nowadays, but the process of the creation of a photographical visual product hardly differs from the hand drawings and paintings, so does the aspects we have to examine.

Taking a photo happens in the heat of the moment or is it the result of the series of decisions? What we are photographing? When do we do that? Where it is 'done'? What and to whom for we are producing photographs?

These questions can be answered every time, but to do so with the last photo we took we can realize, that the process of photography mostly is an unconscious activity.

Compared to the detailed steps in SSCA we have to disclose the following aspects as context analysis prior to examining the photographs:

- qualification and previous experience with photography
- genesis of the photograph
- technical parameters
- previous photographs
- situation the picture was taken
- motivation of the subject

To understand the motivation behind the action is essential. We identified five main motivational sources: memory creation, sharing, framing, innovation or play, relation to certain realities,

**Memory creation** – the motivation is simply to create a visual documentation of a life event, a feeling or emotion. It is not excluded, but the main motivation is not about sharing with others.



**For sharing** – the main purpose of taking a picture is to share it with others, possibly instantly. Mainly selfie or other depictive photographs can be created for this reason. Today this is the most common 'type' of motivation at first glance. But why we are sharing?

Do we want to send a message about ourselves? What does this picture say about us? Do we want to show something that other might willing to see about us? What is the real need behind it?



***Dealing with a trauma (framing)*** – in this case the motivation is to process something that is traumatic or overwhelming emotionally. Since repetition in subjects, personal photographic style can mislead us we have to focus the real and expressed motivation behind the act of photographing. (Jo Spence's work is one of the first documented use of photography to cope with trauma.)



***Innovation and play*** – the motivation behind those pictures are clearly playful and represent some kind of search for innovation, new ways of seeing or representation.



***Definition of the relation to certain realities*** – the expressed motivation creating a picture is to define one's own personal relation to something that important for the creator (of course this happens in each photograph, but in a different manner, those relation definitions mostly hidden from the viewer and a creator too) .





Genre analysis is based on examining the creative process not on the subject or the visual structure of the photographs. **Memory photos** (private photography) usually depicts animals, family events, travel, life events, **applied use of photography** covers event photography, advertisement, fashion, marketing etc., while **creative photography** can be conceptual photography, experimental photography, stage photography. Creative photography as a genre in our case is not the privilege of the art scena, but the closest summary of the creative process behind the photograph.



In order to gain more information on the psychological meaning of a photograph we should analyze the act of creation or 'creative behavior' in relation to the visual content. The 'creative behavior' can



extend from completely spontaneous to fully controlled and managed, while the visual content can be unidentifiable visual element (see photograms, which may not depict its subject as a mirror) or as the opposite it can contain very high formal and even verbal content (see conceptual photography).



A photograph (just as drawings and paintings) represents an affective-emotional charge, but more importantly the process of creation can have a special dynamic which can give a more deeper insight. This dynamic might change and can be very different throughout the whole process from picking a photographical task through preparation, the moment of taking the picture, post processing till the moment of sharing.

Emphatic analysis is the closest to the Intuitive analysis step of SSCA. The similar methods can be carried out, answering the following questions: How does it feel to be in the place of the photographer? What qualities does the connection of the photographer and its subject carries? How does it feel to step into the space of the photograph?



A formal-structural analysis in photography is based on its special medium. Examiner should look for light-shadow, crop, composition, format, use of colors, dimensionality. As the last step the examiner collects information on post production, analyzing the process that happened to the 'raw' image. Was it part of a series? Was it picked from it? How was it modified during the post process?

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