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THE STAR-WAVE-TEST AT THE PRESCHOOL STAGE AS A QUANTITATIVE AND QUALITATIVE DIAGNOSTIC INSTRUMENT

Ursula Avé-Lallemant

Translation by Christiane Clemm

ABSTRACT: Ursula Avé-Lallemant developed the Star-Wave-Test from handwriting as a central cultural achievement, reducing the concept to the basic elements of form (stars) and movement (waves) in relation to space (stars *over* waves). This achieves its effective simplicity. Then, this core content was enhanced with a mythical image: “the starry sky over ocean waves” which reflects the drawer’s subconscious, his direct experience and the ensuing imagery as in a dream. This test enables preschool children to be evaluated for maturity, achievement and possible emotional disturbances. It helps educators to understand each child’s uniqueness and provide early intervention and assistance when needed.

The Star-Wave-Test (SWT) is based on the idea that the main components of handwriting — graphic creation and movement, and later on the relation to space — can appear separate from one another. In the beginning, when diagnosing children of preschool age, I used a test form on which the beginning of a row of stars as well as a zig-zag and a wavy line were to be continued. Out of this grew the idea that these elements, which were here purely formal, could be included in a total graphic test which demanded drawing a sky with stars as an area of mainly graphic creation and ocean waves as an area basically of motion. In this concept the moments of creation and movement were included in the more spontaneously understandable complex of a drawing as well as the relationship to space. In addition, the task of drawing offered a richer possibility for the phenomena of expression, especially a greater differentiation of pencil strokes. It also made possible the appearance of projections whose diversity in special aspects could only show itself in the course of the implementation of the test. The realm of the starry sky and that of the water with the movement of the waves was now brought into correlation with the realm of the mind and of life.¹

In its new form, the SWT quickly proved itself to be a valuable supplement to handwriting and other drawing tests which I had used at the time in order to diagnose school children as well as preschool children, foreign children frequently among them as well. The test is easily applied and has a transcultural nature, stars and waves being the same all over the world and known to us all from early childhood on. This brought about the idea that the SWT could be used with children of a preschool age, that is, in the earliest years of life in which graphological analysis is not yet possible.

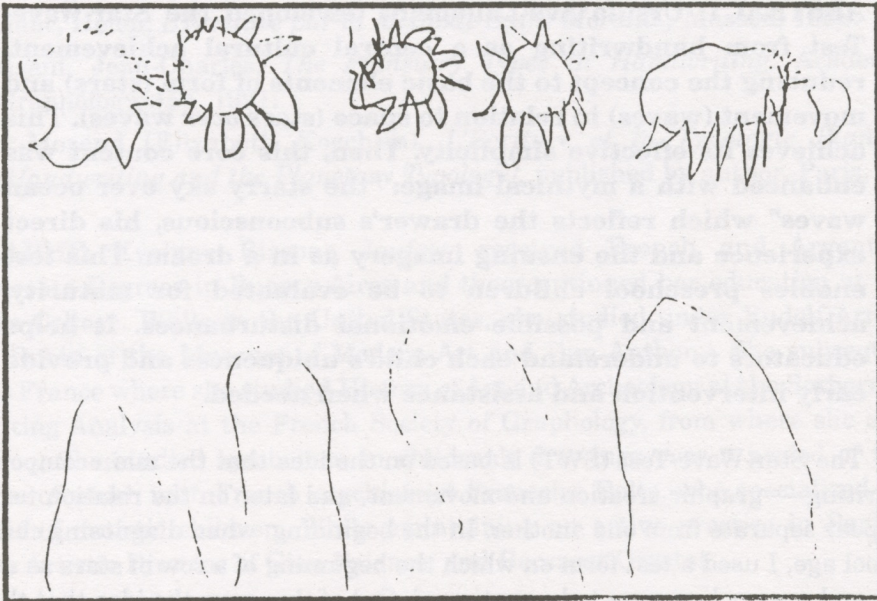


Figure 1: Star-Wave-Test (male, 5 years 1 month) Original size 15cm x 10.5cm

Due to its elementary topic, very young children respond to it and enjoy the drawing (Figure 1), Thus, it is possible to graphologically investigate, so to speak, the years before children are capable of writing, showing early individual characteristics of each child and even possible disturbances. But in addition to all this, the SWT is also an important achievement test, especially during these early childhood years.

Herein lies its first exhaustive function for the preschool period and then especially for the time when schooling begins.

In carrying out the test assignment of drawing a starry sky over waves within the given framework of the standardized test form, first of all an achievement along formal lines is demanded, whose prerequisites slowly mature from the most rudimentary ability to scribble to reaching full ability, usually around the age of five in

the case of German children. (Figures 2a, 2b, and 2c). The three primary mental functions that have to come together to completely fulfill the set task are: the understanding of the task, the imagining of the required picture, and the representation of the theme. In fulfilling the task, six stages of solution can be discerned until a complete maturity of the abilities is reached.

SWT-AL



Zeichnen Sie, möglichst mit Bleistift, einen
STERNENHIMMEL ÜBER MEERESWELLEN

Vor- und Zuname:

Beruf: 54 9484

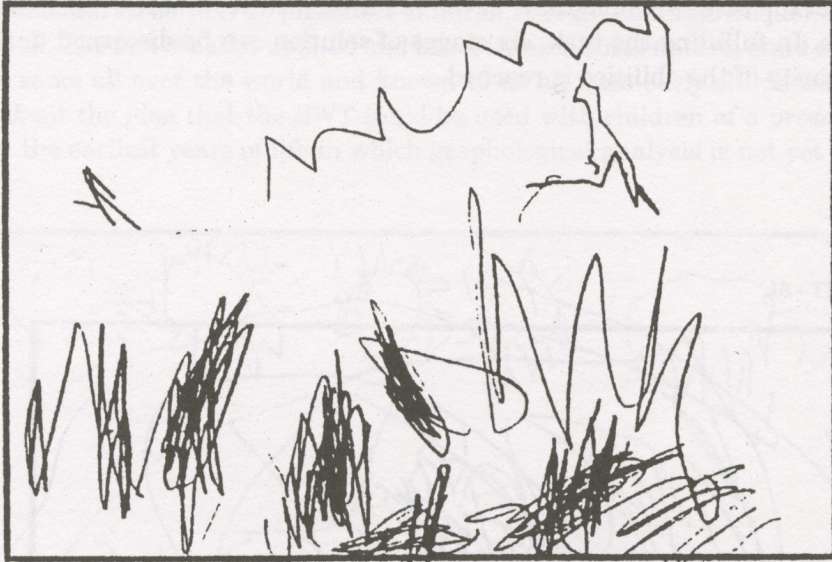
Geburtsdatum:

5-7.78

3.2

Figure 2a: male, 3 years 2 months

SWT-AL



Alan

6.78

Zeichnen Sie, möglichst mit Bleistift, einen

Vor- und Zuname:

Alan

9654

STERNENDRUCK ÜBER LICHTSCHWELLEN

710

Figure 2b: male, 3 years 8 months

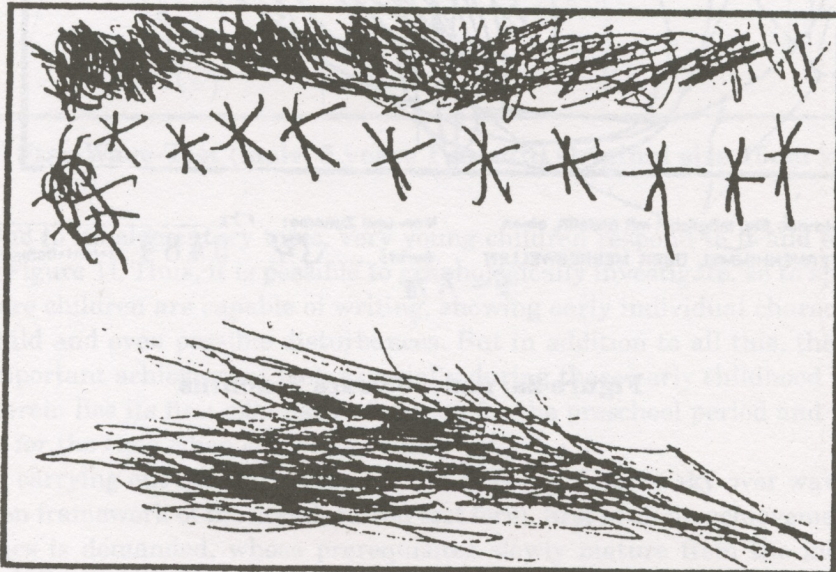


Figure 2c: male, 4 years 2 months

SOLUTIONS

Solution 1:

The test form is returned empty, child not capable or unwilling.

Solution 2:

Wrong solution, the child lacks understanding or concentration.

Solutions 3 and 4:

Only waves or stars are drawn, child is either not capable of drawing both or is fascinated by one of the themes.

Solution 5:

Stars and waves intermingle, separation of imagination and rational thinking is still insecure.

Solution 6:

Stars above waves; instructions are clearly understood and carried out.

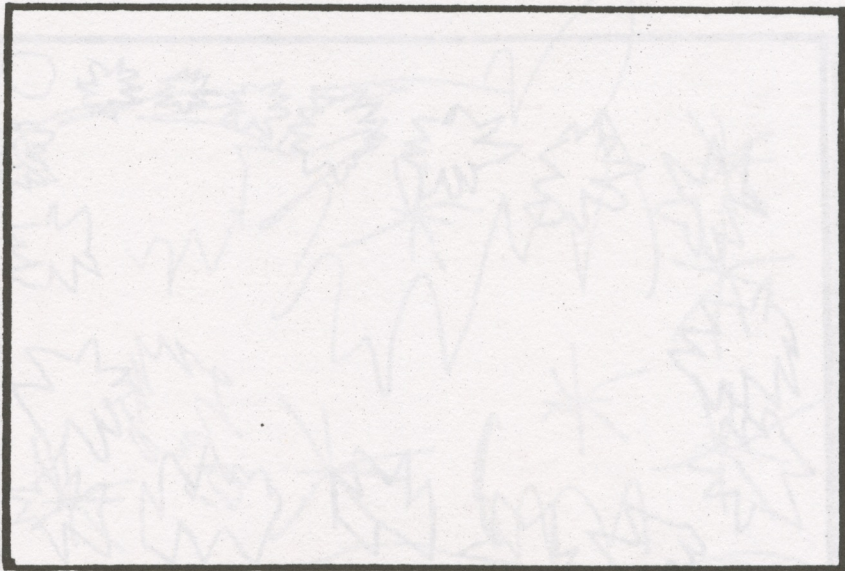


Figure 3a: Solution 1

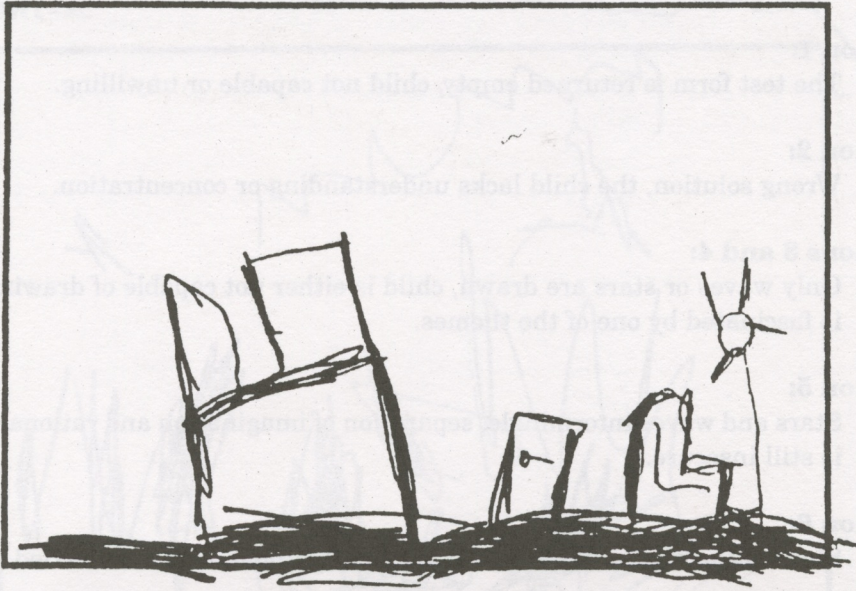


Figure 3b: Solution 2



Figure 3c: Solution 3

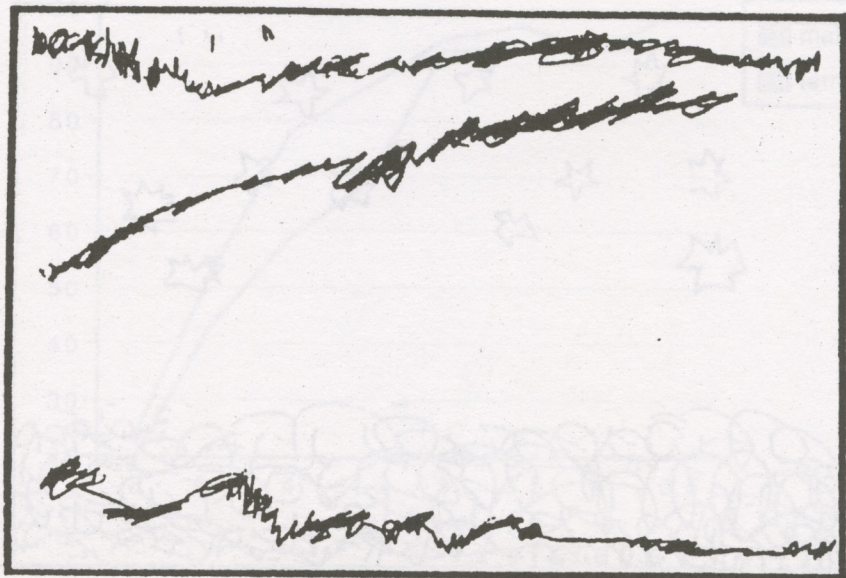


Figure 3d: Solution 4



Figure 3e: Solution 5



Figure 3f: Solution 6

Observations and statistical investigations of the SWT with kindergarten-children have proven that these possibilities can appear differently between the ages two and a half and five. The graph (Figure 4a) shows the main curve (corresponding to both Solutions 5 and 6), as well as the percentage which corresponds just to Solution 5 (Figure 4b). In the first curve the primary discrepancy of the sexes is remarkable, with significant differences between the ages of three and four. Notable as well, is the evident interweaving of stars and waves climaxing at three and a half years with girls and four years with boys. In this type of drawing, imagination still dominates rational thinking, as is the case during the so-called fairy tale age. When it appears at a later stage, let us say in a six year-old, such a diffusion in orientation could lead to scholastic difficulties and should be observed accordingly, since reality and fantasy cannot be sufficiently controlled by the child him or herself. As can be deduced from the main curve, the SWT is satisfactorily completed by the five-year-olds with minimal exceptions. One can suppose that in these few cases the deviation from the age norm indicates that the child ought to receive special attention.

In its role as a possible function test, the SWT proves itself to be an easily applicable instrument for showing us if the basic functions are sufficiently developed for entering school. This allows the SWT to ascertain lack of maturity at the time of entering school. When applied in this fashion, it can be considered as a "school matu-

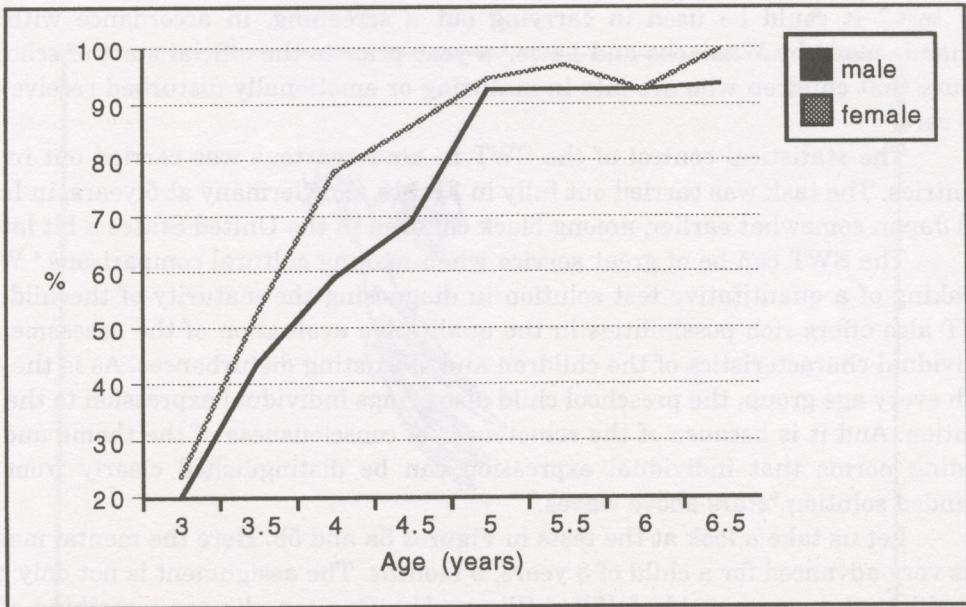


Figure 4a: Percentage of Star-Wave-Tests that corresponded to Solutions 5&6, drawn by children between 3 and 6 1/2 years of age (Germany, Federal Republic).

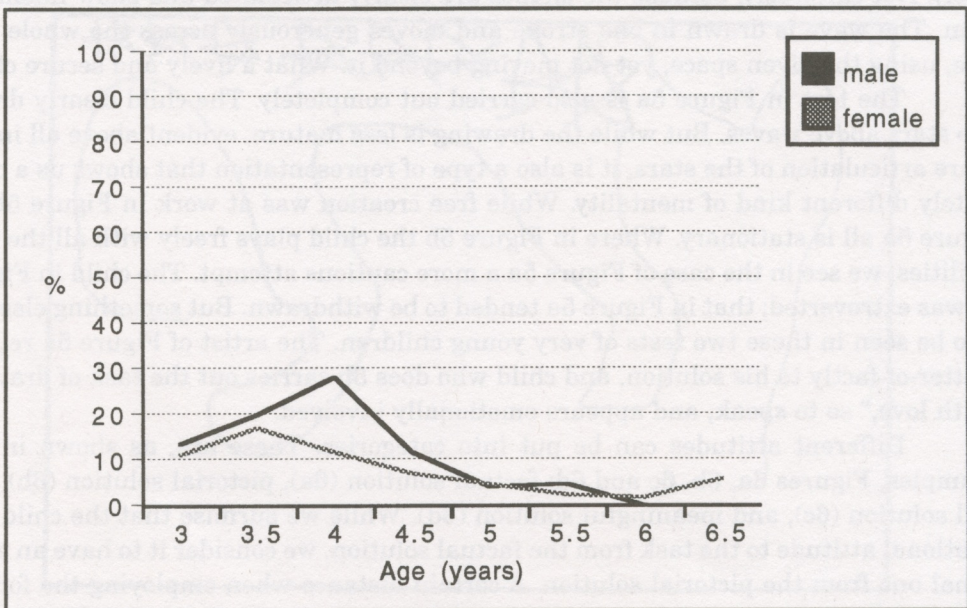


Figure 4b: Percentage of Star-Wave-Tests that correspond to Solution 5, drawn by children between 3 and 6 1/2 years of age (Germany, Federal Republic).

urity test." It could be used in carrying out a screening, in accordance with the demands made by Witzlacks and Löwe,² a year prior to the official start of school to ensure that children who are late in maturing or emotionally disturbed receive special care.

The statistical control of the SWT in kindergartens was carried out in five countries. The task was carried out fully in France and Germany at 5 years, in Israel and Japan somewhat earlier, among black children in the United States a bit later.³

The SWT can be of great service when making cultural comparisons.⁴ While speaking of a quantitative test solution in diagnosing the maturity of the child, the SWT also offers rich possibilities in the qualitative evaluation of the assessment of individual characteristics of the children and of existing disturbances. As is the case with every age group, the preschool child also brings individual expression to the test solution. And it is because of the remoteness of consciousness of the theme and the binding norms that individual expression can be distinguished clearly from the intended solution "stars above waves."

Let us take a look at the tests in Figures 5a and 5b. Here the mental maturity is very advanced for a child of 3 years, 9 months. The assignment is not only completed but also very capably fulfilled (Figure 5b). One can glimpse something of the individual behavior when looking at the representation of the row of stars. The child begins gently and correctly, and then continues more and more courageously and freely. Not carelessly, because the shapes are clearly articulated and show fidelity of form. The wave is drawn in one stroke and moves generously across the whole surface, using the given space, yet not moving beyond it. What a lively and secure child.

The test in Figure 5a is also carried out completely. The child clearly draws two stars above waves. But while the drawing is less mature, evident above all in the spare articulation of the stars, it is also a type of representation that shows us a completely different kind of mentality. While free creation was at work in Figure 5b, in Figure 5a all is stationary. Where in Figure 5b the child plays freely with all the possibilities, we see in the case of Figure 5a a more cautious attempt. The child in Figure 5b was extroverted; that in Figure 5a tended to be withdrawn. But something else can also be seen in these two tests of very young children. The artist of Figure 5a relates matter-of-factly to his solution, and child who does 5b carries out the task of drawing "with love," so to speak, and appears emotionally involved.

Different attitudes can be put into categories. These are, as shown in the examples, Figures 6a, 6b, 6c and 6d: factual solution (6a), pictorial solution (6b), formal solution (6c), and meaningful solution (6d). While we surmise that the child has a rational attitude to the task from the factual solution, we consider it to have an emotional one from the pictorial solution. A certain distance when employing the formal solution, a certain "purpose" is evident here, the spontaneity interrupted. This can be due to wishes concerning the representation or also due to self-portrayal. It can also

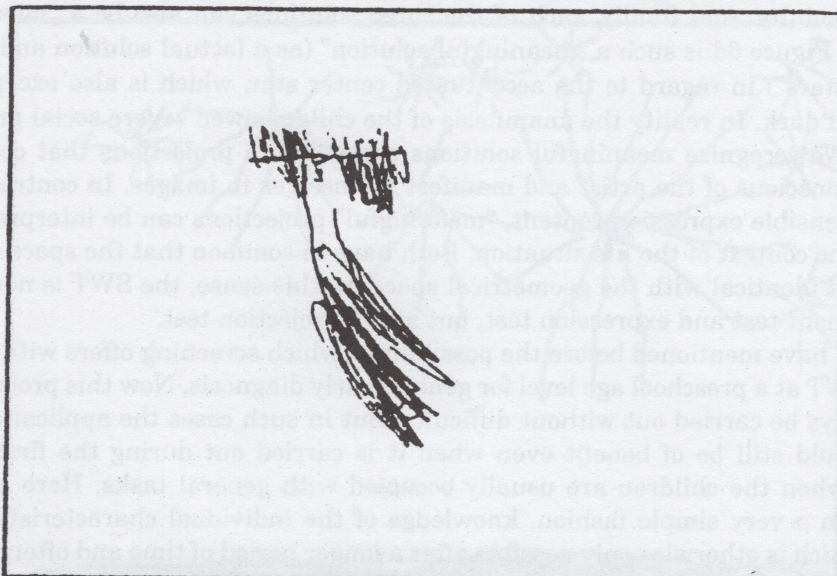


Figure 5a: male, 4 years 7 months

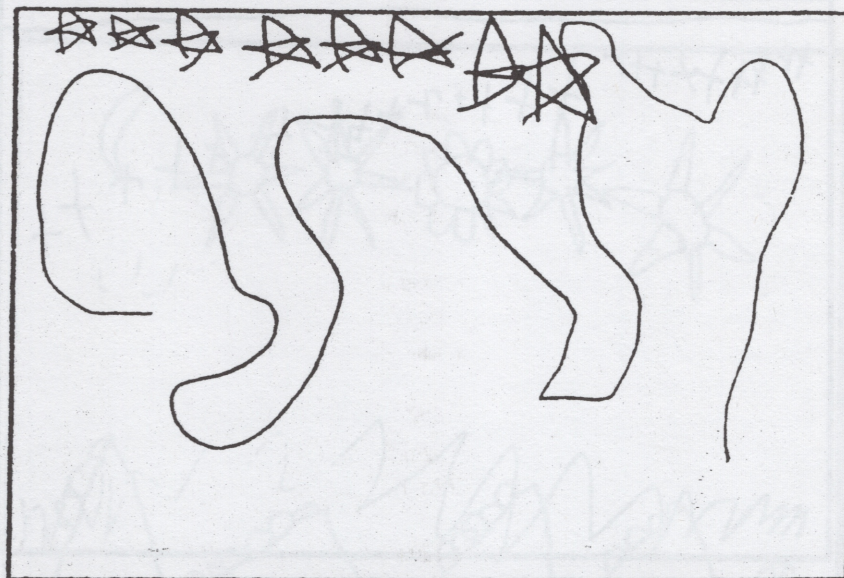


Figure 5b: female, 3 years 9 months

be seen as an expression of defense or suppression, as is often the case with adolescents or adults. And finally, each of the three solutions can also be a "meaningful" solution. Figure 6d is such a "meaningful solution" (as a factual solution and on level 3 "only stars") in regard to the accentuated center star, which is also exceptionally large and dark. In reality the anamnesis of the child showed severe social pressure.

We recognize meaningful solutions especially in projections that come from the subconscious of the artist and manifest themselves in images. In contrast to the comprehensible expression content, "meaningful" projections can be interpreted only within the context of the life situation. Both have in common that the space of meaning is not identical with the geometrical space. In this sense, the SWT is not only an achievement test and expression test, but also a projection test.

I have mentioned before the possibilities which screening offers with the help of the SWT at a preschool age level for general early diagnosis. Now this probably cannot always be carried out without difficulty. But in such cases the application of the SWT would still be of benefit even when it is carried out during the first days of school, when the children are usually occupied with general tasks. Here one could obtain, in a very simple fashion, knowledge of the individual characteristics of the child, which is otherwise only possible after a longer period of time and often after sad experiences.

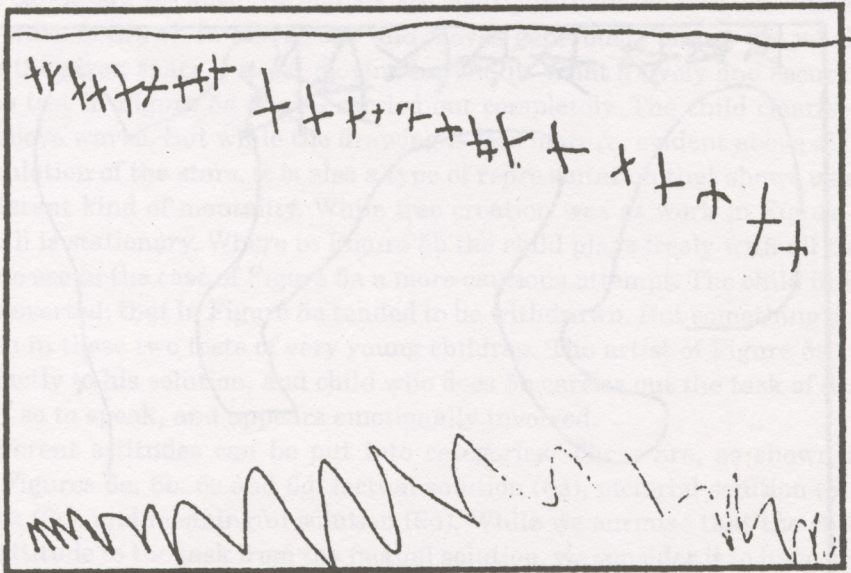


Figure 6a: male, 4 years 2 months



Figure 6b: female, 4 years 1 month

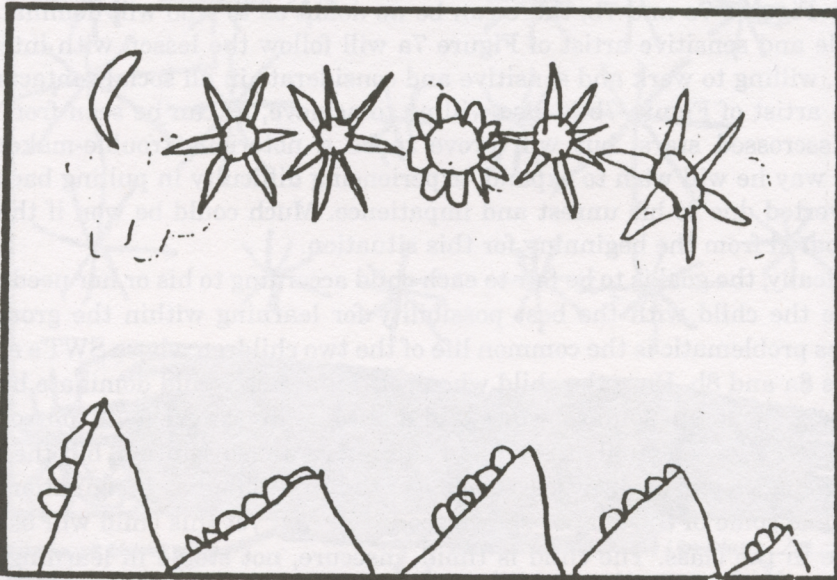


Figure 6c: male, 6 years 7 months

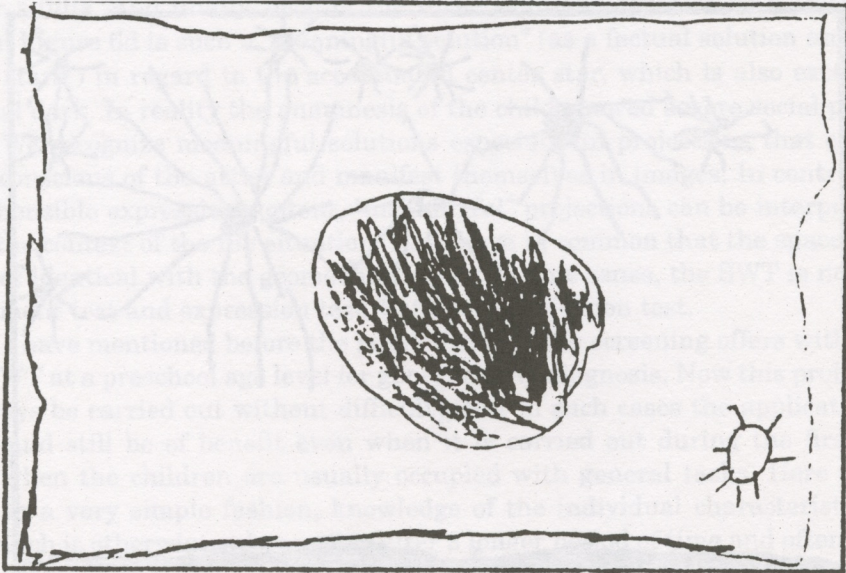


Figure 6d: male, 4 years 10 months

For example, if two children sit side by side, who are similar to the children who drew Figures 7a and 7b, there can be no doubt as to who will dominate whom. The gentle and sensitive artist of Figure 7a will follow the lesson with interest and attention, willing to work and sensitive and considerate in all social contacts. In contrast, the artist of Figure 7b is also willing to achieve, as can be seen from the correctly crisscrossed stars, but will prove to be a notorious trouble-maker. In his emphatic way he will wish to expand, experiencing difficulty in pulling back, and be easily diverted due to his unrest and impatience. Much could be won if the teacher were prepared from the beginning for this situation.

Ideally, the goal is to be fair to each child according to his or her needs in order to provide the child with the best possibility for learning within the group. By no means less problematic is the common life of the two children whose SWT's are shown in Figures 8a and 8b. Here the child who drew Figure 8b would dominate based on a true superiority due to self-assurance and discipline in achievement control. Hereby test Figure 8a shows not only a complete star above waves solution, but the diversity of the star shapes lets us draw the conclusion that the child has imagination, and the gentleness of some of the shapes shows goodness. And yet this child will be at a disadvantage in the class. The child is timid, insecure, not stable in learning, scatter-brained. What a worthwhile challenge it would be for the teacher to concern himself adequately with this child and help the child to develop his possibilities.

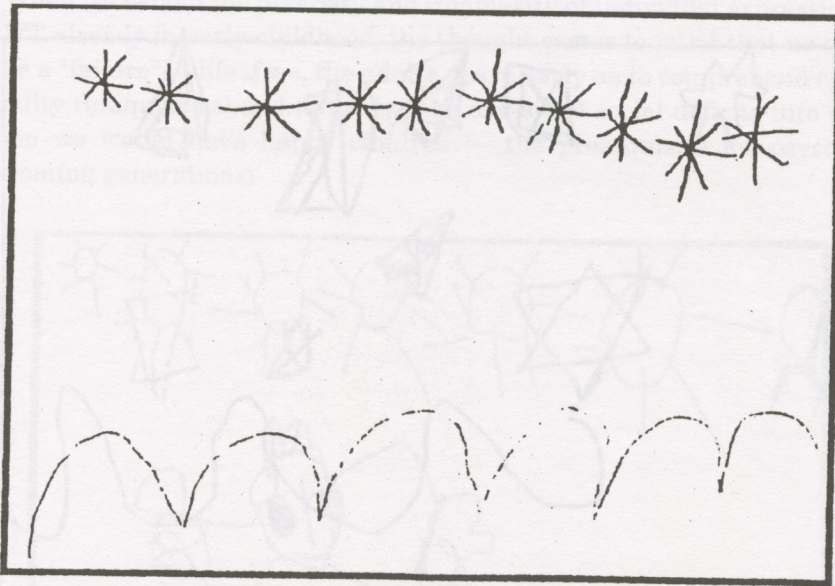
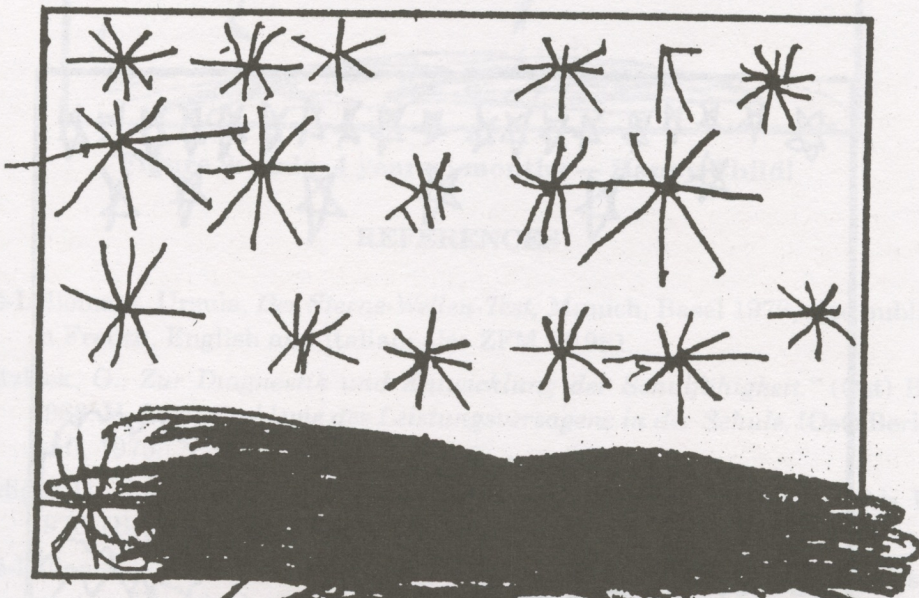


Figure 7a: female, 6 years 4 months



Zeichne mit Bleistift einen Sternhimmel mit Wellen (ja) / feminin (f)
STERNENHIMMEL OBER MEERESWELLEN Alter in Jahren und Monaten: 6, 4

Figure 7b: male, 6 years 4 months

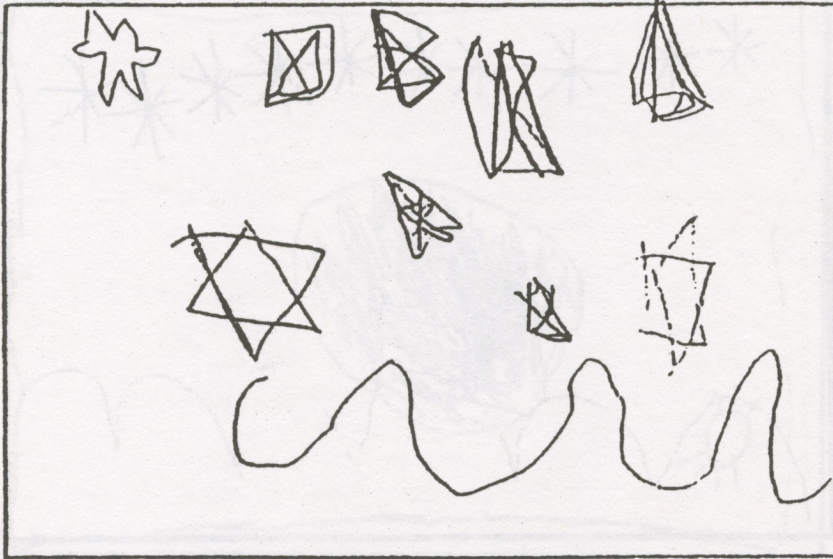


Figure 8a: male, 6 years



Figure 8b: male, 6 years

When we behold the diversity and complexity of individual expression content of the SWT already in early childhood, the thought comes to mind that no one should have to be a "failure" in life if we, the adults, learn early on to comprehend each child's individuality (uniqueness) and not only take one-sided social deficits into consideration. Then we would have happy children — the prerequisite for psychologically healthy coming generations!

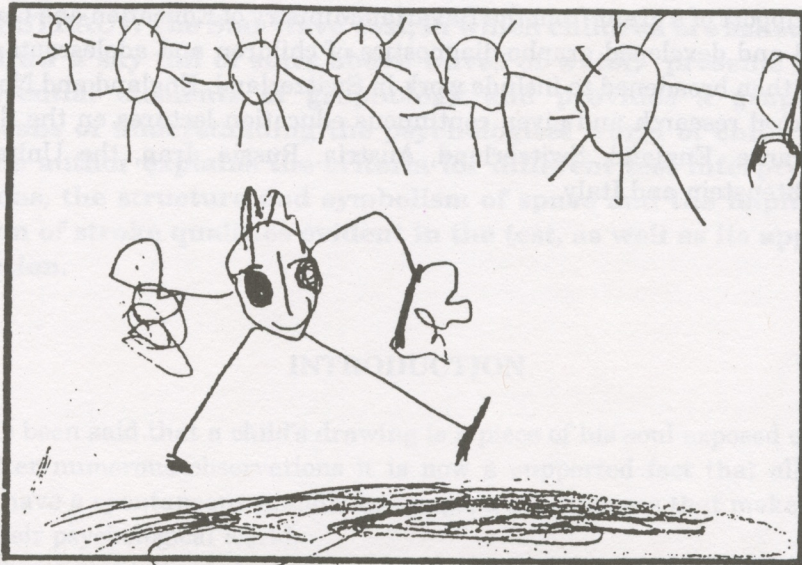


Figure 9: male, 4 years 5 months — Happy Child!

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BIOGRAPHY: Ursula Avé-Lallemant is the author of ten books and sixty articles on graphic diagnostics, including *The Star-Wave-Test* which is published in three languages. She studied psychology, graphology and philosophy in Berlin, Hamburg and Munich, and later received her "Dozentin" degree in graphic diagnostics at the Academy for Pediatrics (Akademie für Kinderärzte) in psycho-therapeutic training. A consultant for parents and adolescents, she also worked with boarding schools for many years and has conducted professional seminars for psychologists and educators. With the support of a grant from the Bavarian Ministry of Education and Culture, she researched and developed grapho-diagnostics of children and adolescents, a project which was then broadened to include work in Switzerland, England and Norway. She has conducted research and given continuous education lectures on the Star-Wave-Test in France, England, Switzerland, Austria, Russia, Iran, the United States, Israel, Lichtenstein and Italy.