



## Picture and Concept

by

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When we look back upon our life, it appears for us in the form of pictures. We see ourselves in a landscape and in certain situations together with other people. We see ourselves in embarrassing moments and inspiring festivals, in never-ending exhaustion and in liberating celebrations. Everywhere we find changing atmospheres. If we take away the atmosphere, the pictures are no longer the same. This is comparable to a black and white copy of a color photograph; we can use it to recall memories but at its best, it leaves us wanting to see the original picture with the lively moods of the situation.

Do we understand our life, if we observe it in colorful, mood-shifting pictures? No, certainly not. At least not at first.

If we want to get to know ourselves, we cannot remain stuck with these moody pictures as they appear directly in our memory. Should we enquire diligently about each situation and ask what is important, we discover that every picture in our memory is impure, a combination of an important core together with totally irrelevant moments that cover over the facts. There can also be personal reasons for the false representations in our memory.

Friedrich Nietzsche formulated it this way: “My experience tells me that I did it. My pride tells me that I did not do it. Slowly my pride conquers. Now I remember clearly that I did not do it.”

But pictures in our memory are not only misrepresented and falsified to the unrecognizable because of personal soul qualities. To a large extent

the memory pictures are falsified not only due to laziness and sluggish attention, but from the multiple influences of civilization's monotonous, grey, habitual thinking that forces all dramatic realities in every life situation down into the "underconscious" sphere of being.

If one wants to reach the true picture of his own life, it is completely inadequate to merely correct his memory pictures with schematic judgments of true or false. At the most, this can serve as a necessary introduction to the work of cleaning out the falsified pictures. Many important sides, probably the most important sides of our lives are temporarily covered over and may be brought into consciousness through energetic efforts. And what appears then? Is it a concept? A concept that may be defined in a few sentences? Sharp, clearly formulated concepts may possibly help our orientation within the multiple pictures in our memory. But the core of life does not allow itself to be reduced to a concept that may be defined and written down. What we bring into consciousness are purified pictures in which the unimportant and foreign images are removed, allowing the situation to come forth clearly. The picture is now transparent in its entire structure without losing its living quality. In reality it is also identical with the core of a concept that appears in thinking when we work our way into clarity. But it does not hold onto a certain limited definition. If we try that, we soon notice that the definition is not well enough defined. We must define it further. And this continues *ad infinitum*. The reality we are dealing with becomes pulverized and what remains are annihilated, leftover pieces. To use a picture, we have an annihilated snail shell with no living snail inside.

We could say the phrase "to use a picture" with every sentence and for every word we speak. Language is full of pictures. It lives within the power of pictures. Thousands of years of pictures lie hidden in each sound, the form of the word and in the interaction between words. We say, "Strong as a bear." But that is totally inaccurate. He is not as strong as a bear. Yet, this word-picture-expression strikes the core: It gives the impression of being solid and overwhelmingly strong. Or words have a certain meaning in a certain context: The knife has a large "blade," though the blade is not a green and living blade of grass.

Or the word has a picture within that lost its reality a long time ago and the word remains without a new meaning, for example: a "miserable"

person was originally a person who could not live in his own country, but such a person was not necessarily “miserable.”

The more we examine language, the more we discover lots of pictures in every sentence and in every word. In our daily life this quality of language is reduced to practical purposes. Every sentence has a rational meaning. Yet we would not have these totally abstract, pale, precise and useful thoughts if not for thousands of years of language that weave as pictures in the human being’s mental images.

What happens when a picture is created? It is a living entity, i.e., a finalized experience that appears. Yet the picture can change, grow and even depart. But it cannot be analyzed without losing its life, fading, and dying. This is what has happened throughout history as thoughts appeared from within the misty life of pictures.

In the centuries preceding the glorious age of ancient Hellas, mankind comprehended the world in huge, mystical pictures. These pictures were considered both realities in nature, as well as inner soul qualities. As long as people had a fully resonating, lucious, colorful experience of the world in pictures, there was no sharp division between “outer” nature and “inner” soul experiences. Both were understood as two sides of the same thing. Most importantly they realized these pictures were supersensible beings. For example: Zeus engaged in lightning; he colored the clouds. And it is Zeus who allowed the soul expressions to appear in clear thoughts. At the next level Zeus is a “principle,” an activity in the air, alongside other principles and activities, such as Poseidon in the water’s waves, oceans and rivers, in steam and mist. Or such as Chronos, the principle of flames, warmth, fire and all-consuming time. Then we are one short step away from the concepts “air,” “water” and “warmth.”

When pictures pale and become universally valid, they become concepts. This is philosophy’s moment of birth. The extravagant, exuberant life is lost. And what is won? A sharpened clarity and simultaneously the individual awakens to a new understanding of himself. Individualism is irreversibly connected to the birth of concepts and philosophy. From there the path leads to trials and real danger: Gradually the “inner” becomes increasingly cut off from the “outer.” The sharper the abstraction in the creation of concepts, the stronger becomes our consciousness of our own “Self” or “I.” The sharper the abstraction in the

creation of concepts, the stronger nature is considered a foreign object and experienced as dead. This is our starting point. It is the core problem in our times.

The same development from picture to concept can be followed in multiple ways within the individual's life from childhood to adulthood. If you speak with a child and express yourself abstractly and rationally in adult concepts, you stand in crass contrast to the child's soft, rich life. As a rule what you say is also incomprehensible to the child. Or due to admiration for the adult, the child strives to give a mirror image of something with which she cannot connect. She may speak like an adult to make the adult feel better. But if you speak with the child in such a way that one picture follows the next in a coherent, unfolding and weaving language, then the child opens her eyes, her face shines and she understands everything very well.

The developing child is brought to the point where abstract concepts appear. Without this we cannot be mature in our civilized world. We need it as a basis to freely move into clarity and with enough consciousness of our Self and other people as Selves. Yet it is of immeasurable importance how this development takes place. And it is of immeasurable importance how the child's unreflected pictures live further in transformed fashion. The picture-forming ability exists in all thinking. Without the power of picture forming we would never see the whole totality of an issue or object. Strictly speaking, it is not possible to grasp any content at all in thinking without this ability. We can progress very far within the opposite, analytical tendency. We can chop everything into restricted, special meanings. If we choose, we can go even further with more precise definitions and continue to demand the meaning of each word or expression.

When we drive this analytical activity to its most one-sided extreme, the meaning of the picture-forming ability appears. If we merely analyze, we pulverize everything and soon we have nothing more to analyze. Analysis is made by the grace of the picture-forming ability. For analysis must first be presented with something it cannot create on its own. With what do we drive the dissection activity in our analysis? Obviously it is I: I assess myself and strengthen my self-consciousness by chopping to pieces and controlling the foreign, powerful element that is not fully my own within the world of pictures.

In the last two centuries this tendency to divide everything into pieces has been taken so far that an increasing need has arisen for the opposite side, i.e. the world of pictures. But the change in needs does not automatically lead to healthy harmony.

If we do not discover ourselves within the tendency to analyze and dissect, but allow ourselves to merely flow in the stream of civilization, the opposite appears as a caricature in an inhuman, disharmonic form that drives us to a higher level of extreme.

Today there are many caricatures that appear within the vacuum of picture-creating activities and in the corresponding desire for more experiences in pictures. Behind the media's rapid development lies a lust for moving pictures, action. But they do not awaken the individual's own ability to create pictures, and we are thrown into a maelstrom, because we will not yet find the picture-creating activity in our inner life. Media becomes a massive surrogate. If we ignore the large percentage of less dignified content that is presented in films and television, we can focus on the important principles involved, as well as the purely unlimited massive use of the media. Or notice the purely "magic" attraction of comics, especially if there is little text. Film, television and comics satisfy a "picture desire" as surrogates that clearly make people passive in their ability to experience life and the world, themselves and other people in a lively context of real pictures.

There is another important caricature of mankind's picture-ability that appeared toward the end of the 20th century in every case where pictures arise from the "under-consciousness" with their own magical, suggestive activity. These pictures can arise from the chaotic pictures during normal dreams and begin to affect daily actions. In their non-transparent quality they work as a foreign, possessed power in relation to mankind's awakened, reflected Self consciousness. Then the human being's peaceful, free judgment is shut down. Certain things "shall" be done. These possessed pictures command us.

Precisely when the analytical, pulverized intellect reaches a high point in its activity, we are attacked from within and from the outside by a storming flood of pictures that do not increase our picture creating ability. This is where the fight for the human being takes place. Will we awaken to freedom so that the structure of clear, transparent, conceptual thinking can unite with the full-blown life of pictures?

In every single sensory impression, in all colors and sounds, we meet something “foreign” that we want to connect with. Usually we walk on without giving ourselves the time to truly connect with the foreign element. Usually we do not give ourselves time to allow the “picture” to grow forth in an active meeting with our sensory impressions. The same is true of our meetings with other people. We assume we know them in and out from before. Or we think we have nothing to do with them. We hurry on and therefore no meeting takes place. Perhaps we do not know them so well, even if we have met them a thousand times before. We may have something to do with them though they do not belong to our nearest circle of friends. This demands a bit of self-transformation in order to have sufficient attention, devotion and respect for the people we meet. Is it possible to experience how others experience the world? Can it happen without the help of pictures?

Let us use an example to illustrate this situation in multiple directions. At first this example may look like a curiosity, but it will come closer to reality than you think. During his expeditions into the ancient forests of Africa, Henry Stanley gathered his African companions around the bonfire and asked them to tell their own stories. The following story of the creation is from Matageza, from the Basoko tribe who lived along the Aruwimi River where it flows into the Congo River. It took a long time to convince him to speak, and here is a shortened version of what he shared:

In ancient times this land and the entire earth were covered by water. Eventually the water receded in some places and grass and flowers and trees and bushes grew. On the shore an extremely big turtle lived. It rolled in the mud and spat far across the water. And in the sky the moon shone mildly.

The moon said to the turtle: “I will create human beings so they can live on the earth.”

“No,” replied the turtle, “I will create them. You belong in heaven and I belong on earth. As long as I can make them look like me, they will fit on the earth.”

The moon countered, “In truth, if you create them, they will look like you. They will have short and bad lives. But I will create them to completion just like my light that shines in the heavens and they shall be immortal.”

“Do not even try,” said the turtle. “They will not fit on the earth. It would be an airy life where they will fly in heaven. No, I will create human beings. I already know how I will do it. It is swelling up in me.” The turtle blew itself up and hopped across the shore and spat at the moon.

Then the moon threatened the turtle and said that it would not tolerate that human beings should be the descendants of the turtle. But the turtle did not care and continued his efforts. Both of them wanted to create human beings, but the turtle was the first to do so. While the moon was peacefully preparing to make the first human beings as light-filled forms in heavenly completion, both turtle creations were already hopping around the shore, a male and a female, two huge turtles that were supposedly already human beings.

When the moon saw this, he became very angry. “Terrible,” he shouted. “What have you done?”

“Be patient, moon,” answered the turtle. “I have merely done what is right. The earth is mine. You can stay there in heaven. All human beings that shall live on the earth shall descend from me. I have created them and so shall it be.”

“You are very arrogant,” said the moon. “I was supposed to create the human beings. And now you have tried to measure yourself with me. But you are inferior to me and just as inferior are the turtle people compared with the human beings I will create. Your turtle people are merely animals that can neither talk nor think rationally. You deserve to be destroyed so the earth will not have to endure such creatures. But I feel so sorry for you that I will not kill them. I would rather prepare them as well as possible. They may not receive as much of the clear light of thinking as I originally intended. That is not possible with such terrible creatures. But they may have a little. And I will help them through life by sharing my light. They may not be as complete as I had thought. Life will be difficult and sad. And everything is your fault, you huge, ugly turtle. Therefore I want to get rid of you.”

The moon was very angry. With a raging face it approached the turtle and burned it to ash. Only small amounts remained and from this ash came many small turtles and other creatures. But the



moon sank down into the water to cool off, to release the fire of anger. The water became so hot it boiled. The moon remained in the water until the bubbles stopped.

Then the moon rose from the water and sought out the turtle people. When he found them, he called them together. But they were afraid and hid. When the moon saw this, he smiled tolerantly as he does on beautiful evenings. "Pathetic, small creatures," the moon said, "The great turtle has left a lot for me to do. You are missing quite a lot before you can become real human beings." As the moon said this, he guided them down to the water. He carefully dunked them under the water and slowly brought them up again. They became so soft that he could transform them. He patted them here and there as a potter does with his pots. He lifted the front part so they no longer needed four legs to crawl upon, as the turtle had created them. Now they could stand and walk on their own two feet. Their arms would be free. And their head could not stay in the turtle shape. The moon patted the heads and rounded them so they looked more like himself, a round heavenly sphere. Gradually the creatures looked like human beings as we know them.

Then the moon taught them everything and showed them how to live. From these beings all human beings are now descended. Therefore human beings, although closely related to turtles, are different than had they been direct descendents. The light of the moon influenced them and transformed them. Human beings have participated in the light of heaven, the heavenly perfection and the heavenly immortality.

As Matageza finished speaking and everyone rose to go to their huts, many words were exchanged about how terrible it was that human beings have so much of the great turtle in them.

There are many ways to relate to such a story. We can reject it as a ridiculous, mythological picture, for example: "A turtle and the moon cannot speak," or "the moon cannot cool off in the water," and so on. From a naturalistic, rationalistic perspective we can readily ignore such a story. But if we do so, we may as well stay away from all mythological pictures, including the Old and New Testaments of the Bible. We may just



as well ignore all forms of serious art that cannot be manifest without the life of pictures. If we do not want to understand the pictures, we must also reject all art as having any meaning.

Yet there are many other ways to relate. We can research other stories of creation from other cultures, find the common themes and show how some mythological pictures have traveled from culture to culture and time to time.

If we consider the pictures only half seriously, we will remain with something superficial, something indifferent. We do not enter the quality of the pictures. Nor do we ask what lives in them. But we can also think about the pictures until we find an acceptable structure. Then we can rationalize the entire picture: What is a turtle? What is the moon?

People come to a point in their lives when they feel a very strong disconnection. Often the disharmony is exposed in a family crisis or by problems at work. But the disharmony is revealed not only in the outer world; the problem lies in the human being. Sometimes it is so strong that there is a split: On one side everything runs its course instinctively. On the other side there is the desire to act in relation to clear, reflected motives. In every difficult life situation these two sides are in conflict. Something presses, something must be done, and something is not understood. But you cannot wait. Your instincts press so hard that you have to do something. Then you realize later that your actions were wrong, incomplete and dishonorable. So you try to repair the damage—perhaps after the first temper explosion where you would rather destroy everything. You see the “turtle” instincts and the “moon” reflections. In other words you have found an acceptable, rational explanation for the mystical pictures. And you no longer need to be upset that the “turtle” and the “moon” speak with each other. For both of these principles in mankind stand in direct relation to each other. And “speaking” is the picture of this relationship. You do not need to be upset that the moon turns fire red with anger and must cool off before it can improve things. Anger must always be reduced before reflection can create something new.

In this way we can rationalize the entire story to a conceptual structure. With the pride of finding such a conceptual structure, you may consider pictures unnecessary. They can be replaced with concepts. But do not believe that. In the very moment the picture disappears and you remain

with only a reflected concept, you must ask: What do we mean with “reflections,” with “instinctive,” with “relationships,” and so forth? Once again you have only a cold, precise analysis. And if it is consequent—for you should be consequent—the work does not stop, since everything, absolutely everything is completely pulverized.

This process can be put into picture form: The picture is like a living horse. The rationalized conceptual structure compares with the horse’s skeleton. (It is anatomically correct but it is not alive.) The analytical precision does not end before the bones in the skeleton are smashed to powder. If you have ever experienced this, there is no reason to discount the skeleton or the bone powder, but there is a keen desire to also bring back the living horse.

The true human condition is much more blood-filled and alive, enlightening and even cruel than the relationship between the instinctive and reflective principles. It is the human being’s privilege not to be locked in a situation with rigid reactions to every impression and to have the most extreme opposites living openly, where the possibilities for freedom may appear. But what do human beings do in this free room? Is the tension so unbearably powerful that he throws himself into an extreme, human-animal condition? So he becomes a total marionette determined by forces outside himself? Or does he awaken to a new, strengthened expression of the genuine human being where the fullness of the picture-creating ability awakens in a clear, pure form enlightened by the clarity of conceptual thinking?

In all areas of our culture this will be fought out: in the artistic, the scientific and the religious. Especially important will be the battles for this human quality that we take on while raising and educating our children.