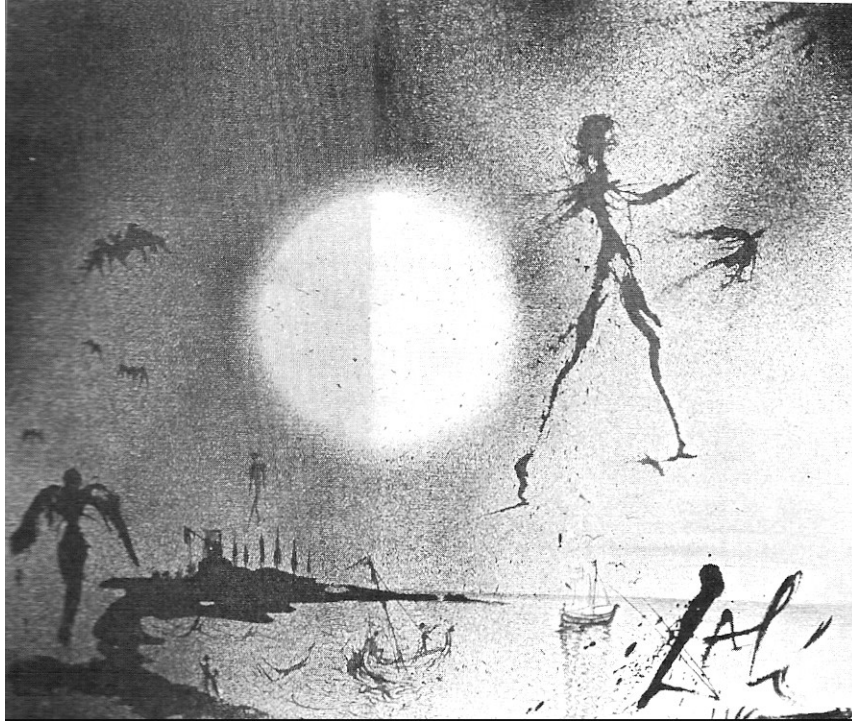


Maxwell Maltz: Psycho-Cybernetics (1960)

Your Brain as a Self-Image Guided Missile!



Watercolour of *Psycho-Cybernetics* by Salvador Dalí.

The self-image in the sky heads toward the daylight, guiding the small ship below.

What is Psycho-Cybernetics?

Maxwell Maltz was a highly successful plastic surgeon based in New York. He found that though he could change his patients' faces, often they would still feel bad about their appearance for psychological reasons; they were in need of a "psychological facelift." Maltz popularised the term "self-image" to describe this inner face.

In 1960 he published *Psycho-Cybernetics* in which he introduced his analogy of the brain as a cybernetic "servo-mechanism", like the computer on a guided missile, designed to automatically find a path to the target (self-image) it is programmed with. His book was highly innovative at the time and became one of the most influential texts on the subject of self-image psychology and goal visualisation.

Cybernetics. Control processes in electrical, mechanical or biological systems, notably including the negative-feedback-to-positive-results loop. Evolved in large part from guided missile technology. (Maltz)

Servo-Mechanism. Refers to the "inner computer" combining memory search and retrieval, creative thinking, problem solving, providing self-confidence, and many other functions. Performs as directed through conscious, rational thought, deliberate use of imagination, and automatic repetition of learned behaviour in congruence with/controlled by the self-image. (Maltz) [= The brain as "serving" the self-image.]

Foundation Website: www.Psycho-Cybernetics.com

Key Practical Points

- 1) Understand the basic psychology of mental imagery first.
- 2) You get what you put in; don't be a dabbler. Put your heart into what you picture and work systematically and with self-discipline and focus.
- 3) Work on your self-image as often as you can; ideally, at least 10 min. per day for 2 weeks.
- 4) Verbalisation greatly enhances visualisation. Discuss your image with others, write down the details each day in a journal, mentally describe it as you meditate on the details.
- 5) Everyone can do it. Worry is negative mental rehearsal. If you can worry you can goal visualise. Turn the problem-focus into solution-focus, the negative into a positive.
- 6) If you are a beginner, persevere. It gets far, far easier to visualise after the first few stages of your practice.

Self-Image = Goal-Image

Your self-image fundamentally provides your brain with direction. If it is based on the past, or what you are trying to get away from, you are feeding yourself a viciously circular programme. Your self-image provides the co-ordinates for your unconscious "servo-mechanism", the part of your mind that pursues targeted goals. Hence, the self-image is virtually identical to the goal-image, the image of your desired future self. Your future goal represents the expression of your present desires, or if you prefer, it shows your present potential being actualised. The image of your desired future makes *explicit* what is *implicit* in your present situation.

Failure to accurately picture the realisation of one's goals is a form of avoidance behaviour, i.e., denial. Without consciously conceived goals, desires are consigned to atrophy in the shadows of the unconscious mind.

"I can't Visualise!"

Basically, everyone can visualise good enough already. We do it all the time. Most people who claim that they can't visualise really just mean that, at first, they are unable to picture clearly. Unfortunately, people who feel like this often give up without ever making a serious attempt.

The Opposite of Worry

Everyone can have a positive vision of their goals. Just do what you do when you worry, but substitute a positive image for a negative one. Maltz: "anti-worry." If you can worry, you can goal visualise. If you couldn't visualise positive images, you wouldn't be able to worry about the negative ones. Everyone can do it.

Relaxation aids Visualisation

When people become tense, stressed, or anxious they struggle to picture positive images. When people fall asleep they are very relaxed, and yet even the person who believes themselves to be the world's worst visualiser will dream, and hence picture things so clearly they take them for reality while they sleep. The more you relax and stop "trying too hard" the more easily you will picture your goal images.

The Ease of Non-Effort

In order for you to feel you can picture images without force or effort you must assume that it is easy. Keep it simple. Tell yourself that what you are doing is simple, natural, and easy and it will be so.

Building Belief in your Goal

1) "Just suppose..."

Begin simply by exploring the idea of your goal. Refining it's implications and consequences. Define what you *want* to happen.

2) "It's possible this could happen."

Remind yourself that it is possible, continually reinforce your focus on the fact that it *could* happen, feeling that it is a realistic possibility.

3) Picture goal "as if" it is happening now.

Picture your goal as happening right now, picture it over and over again, strengthening it, and adding more detail. Build belief by telling yourself that it *will* happen.

Words build Pictures

Very important: Verbalisation is the key to strong visual imagery! Share your dreams, tell others about your vision of the future. Write down the details in your journal. Describe your goals to yourself as you simultaneously picture them. This helps enormously in focusing the attention, and also makes it much easier to draw out the details and add breadth and depth to the content of an image.

Sub-Modalities for Super-Vision

It is useful to remember the different formal qualities, or "sub-modalities", of an image which can be changed independently of the content. These include: scale, colour, brightness, contrast, perspective, depth, distance, direction and speed of visual movement, and the borders of the image. For example, it makes a considerable difference if I picture something in big bright colours, up close, panoramic and real life size, or if I make it a small black and white image, flat and framed like a photograph.

Associated vs. Dissociated Imagery

Maltz does not discuss this point, however, it is very important. There are two fundamental modes of self-imagery. *Associated* imagery is where you picture what you would see having achieved your goals, from a first person perspective, i.e., through your own eyes. *Dissociated* imagery, by contrast is where you picture yourself as seen from the outside, a third-person perspective. Associated imagery is good for connecting with positive feelings. Dissociated imagery is good for increasing self-awareness and evaluating the implications of behaviour.

Frequency of Practice.

If you really put your heart into it, picturing your aim just once can make all the difference. However, for most people, especially at the beginning, it is more realistic to set out a programme of practice. A normal goal visualisation programme would be 10-20 min. per day for roughly 2 weeks.

At the other end of the scale, if you really want to achieve a goal you might decide to throw yourself wholesale into the process and picture your goal with all your heart in every spare waking moment for as long as it takes to get there. You will get back more or less what you put in.

Depression vs. Visualisation.

It is my personal belief, based on eight years of clinical observation, that depressed clients typically find it difficult to picture their goals. There are close links between depression and lack of personal vision. It is difficult to be depressed when you are mentally absorbed in a realistic vision of the things you truly desire and value. Equally, it is difficult to feel enthusiastic or motivated about life if you have a big black cloud hovering where your vision of the future should be. (As there are different forms of clinical depression, there are exceptions to this general rule of thumb.)

Freedom is Vision.

People often exhibit the fear, conscious or unconscious, that if they picture their goals and make them specific they will somehow be tied down and lose their freedom to live freely moment to moment. This is hogwash of the highest order. In fact, it is only through personal vision that man can attain psychological freedom in any meaningful sense of the word! We have goals and motives whether we choose to face them or not. By picturing our goals we confront the truth of our desires in a way that makes obvious, and allows us to deal with, their contradictions. If I have no vision I am driven by contradictory and unconscious motives. If I have a vision I have the freedom to resolve these conflicts and to refine, modify and improve my goals. No vision means no control.

Picasso-Vision

A woman, courage bolstered by a few drinks too many, accosted Picasso at a function. "Mr. Picasso," she barked, "could I ask you a question?" Picasso humoured her. "Why don't you paint people properly?" she exclaimed. Picasso looked quizzical, "What ever do you mean, madam?" The woman rummaged through her handbag and produced a black and white photo of her husband. Thrusting it under Picasso's nose she continued, "Like this! Like this! This is how real people look, not like your awful paintings of them, with the eyes all over the place, and the ears on top of the head! This is my husband, you see?" Picasso took the picture from her and inspected it casually. He paused, and returned the photograph to her sniffing, "He's very small and flat then, madam, isn't he?" First lesson of modern art: not everyone visualises things in the same way. Do not try to force your inner pictures to become "photographic."

The Internal Confusion of Tongues

The emotions respond more directly to images, voice tonality and simple emotive words, than to abstract concepts or argumentation. Images are the language of the emotions. Likewise, the unconscious mind is the dreaming mind, it works with imagery. When people are distressed in order to resolve inner turmoil they typically revert to the same behaviour that they have learned from dealing with others: *verbal argie bargie*. People have learned to try to argue themselves out of distress. I say "try" because this virtually never works, and often just feeds the problem more. You might as well argue with a baby or with a Labrador, the emotional brain doesn't speak the language of verbal debate. Realising that you are speaking the wrong language when you communicate with yourself is the first step in changing negative behaviour and improving your internal rapport, your relationship with yourself.

Problem vs. Solution Focus

People are motivated either by pain or by pleasure, aversion or desire. We either focus on the pain of what we are trying to get away from, or on the pleasure of what we are trying to get to. For example, if I lose my business and suffer financially and psychologically my "away from" image is that of being poor and depressed, the pain of that negative, problem-focused image causes me to want to get away from it. On the other hand, my "toward" image is that of building a new business and regaining my self-esteem and financial security, the appeal of that positive, solution-focused image draws me toward it. People tend to become fixated on problem-focus when they are distressed, and to lack solution-focus. Unfortunately, when we focus on negative images, we tend to feel weaker and more distressed, this prevents us from taking action to resolve the situation. Turn the negative into a positive, turn the problem-focus into solution-focus. Problem-focus breeds despair, solution-focus provides hope and energy, even in the most challenging situations. Remember: you don't need to know what the solution is in order to focus on the search for it. Where there's a will, there's a way.

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