

THE POWER OF **INNER PICTURES**

How Imagination Can Maintain
Physical and Mental Health



Thomas Kretschmar | Martin Tzschaschel

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Mental Health

*Thomas Kretschmar and
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ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Thomas Kretschmar, born 1963, is the managing director of Mind Institute SE Berlin, where he uses inner pictures and the imagination to treat patients and coaching clients. He is also a researcher and trainer in the field of imaginative interventions. Prior to this, Thomas worked as a founder and CEO of the SDAX company Hypoport, a professor for organisational studies, and as business consultant with a psychological focus. He has training in several psychological intervention methods and is licensed for psychotherapy in Germany. Thomas studied business administration in Gottingen and psychology with a psychoanalytic focus in Berlin.

Martin Tzschaschel, born 1954, is a journalist and has been the editor of *P.M.*, a popular German scientific journal, since 1981. In addition, he has written three books, of which a book about a new version of knowledge we learn in school is now in its fifth edition. Martin is devoted to making complicated scientific findings understandable for the public. Prior to this, Martin studied social pedagogy in Munich and worked as a journalist for several journals. He lives in Hamburg, Germany.



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Introduction: to whom is this book addressed?

This book is not only addressed to medical doctors, practitioners, clinical social workers, psychologists, and physiotherapists, but also to everyone interested in discovering more about the imagination and its possible uses.

The focus is directed towards the work of inner pictures in therapeutic practice. Deliberately exploring inner pictures in a state of relaxation can yield remarkable improvements for various mental disturbances. The results show such variation that even therapists experienced in imaginative therapy will discover new ideas as they read.

Readers who are unfamiliar with the topic of inner pictures in therapeutic practice will also benefit from the concepts that are introduced. Depression, eating disorders, or even cancer, are not the only conditions that can lead to overwhelming situations that the people who are affected struggle to cope with. Often, negative feelings are simply the consequence of problems in relationships—problems that cannot just be solved with one simple solution.

The book offers instructions for imagination methods that, when applied during professional therapy, will activate healing powers that are effective against various disorders and emotional sufferings.

Useful methods for daily self-practice are also offered for those who wish to gain access to their own inner powers.

The following section shows an example of a brief journey.

*Daily imagination: the unfortunate event
of the Sunday breakfast*

I had been looking forward to the breakfast invitation, where I would meet friends that I had not seen in a while. However, as is often the case, events took an unexpected turn. Instead of conversing in a light atmosphere, everyone got carried away into an argumentative discussion of politics, Europe, and the Euro. Emotions went awry, sentences were interrupted, and, by the end, all had left feeling dissatisfied.

I could not shake off the feeling of discontent until the end of the day. I was mostly upset with myself about it, since I, too, had been involved in the discussion and had probably not remained entirely fact-bound. The next morning, I woke up early and the breakfast came straight to mind. Somehow, while still half asleep, I remembered my imaginings from the therapy and I began to rethink those thoughts. My eyes were closed the entire time.

I watched myself sitting at that table. This time, I saw a small palm tree in the middle; this was different to the real situation the day before. Its trunk was big enough for me to climb, which I did with ease. Then I was able to see. Everyone was visible to me from high up, including myself, and I felt as if I was finally at a distance from which I could see clearly. Our discussion, the entire situation, suddenly all seemed so small and meaningless. As I watched, sitting at the top of my tree, I grinned, wondering what the problem had been in the first place.

With this feeling, I fell back to sleep for a while until the alarm went off. I got up and I noticed that the apprehension, which I could not shake off the day before, had now dissolved into thin air.

Applied imagination: the unconscious in alliance

Before the turn of the past millennium, it was common for the therapist to solve inner conflicts by examining the client's childhood, in

search of dysfunctional developments that had resulted in the client's negative conditions, anxieties, or fears in the present. Nowadays, the aim is to find obtainable solutions, rather than just problem-orientated observations. The clients are encouraged to remember positive memories and experiences, an idea that has gained recognition by an increasing number of medical doctors and psychologists. This idea has already proved more effective for establishing ways to look at the client's aspirations and, thus, allows them to utilise these on their journey to a better, happier future.

Therapy using the imagination supports this construct, without disregarding the conflicts of the past. The reprocessing of past events evolves slowly and through hidden symbols, rather than through direct confrontation. Once the client's representations become inner pictures that seem disconnected to the client's issues, or yet, appear to lack in sense entirely, this can give rise to irritation. When observed by a third party, however, the meaning of those pictures can be explained. These processes consist of something that cannot be connected to rationale, ability, or intelligence; it is, rather, an occurrence from the client's unconscious, recovered through deliberate questions from the therapist. Examples of such occurrences will be provided in the following pages.



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CHAPTER ONE

The surprising power of representations

In this chapter, you will learn the role that internal pictures play in our everyday lives: for example, in recollections, in dreams during sleep, and daydreams. Other topics include visualisations, applicable in sports and in a working context, as well as the effects of suggestions. In addition, we will reflect on questions regarding the origins of inner pictures.

Inner pictures: our daily companions

What a rather unusual evening: two couples who are friends are seated in a restaurant, unable to see what they are eating. Everything is completely dark. *Soft chunks*—do they taste like carrots? Or are they potatoes? “No, I believe they’re soft-boiled pears”, a woman speaks out into the pitch-black, her voice muffled by the food inside her mouth. She sounds uncertain.

If everyone could see the servings on her plate, their doubts would vanish, but the friends are dining in a darkened restaurant, astonished by the defeat of their gustatory senses.

A simple example, yet it demonstrates just how dominant the visual system is. About eighty per cent of all information perceived by us in an average given situation is delivered through our eyes. The nerve cells bundle up, forming the optic nerve, which sends electrical impulses along the back of the head, through into the areas specialised to perceive visual information. Forms, colours, brightness, movements, and the distances of objects each have their own “department” in the rear range of the cerebrum. If all of these departments work together harmoniously, our vision functions smoothly, and we remain unaware of the physiological processes involved. Thus, we see.

If we think about it, the fact that our brains create images from electrical signals is nothing short of a miracle. How complicated the process of seeing actually is becomes apparent through the stories of patients who were born blind and had undergone reparative intra-ocular surgery only at a later point in adulthood. Instead of relief, they experienced an unusual world full of impressions in confusing forms and colours. Their brains had yet to comprehend the information that the nerve cells were receiving.

Only those who have lived and sensed varying external environments in colours and from an early age are able to experience internal pictures in similar ways. Pictures are mental representations, which are shared by all sighted people and instantly revivable through imagining a simple concept such as “wedding dress”, or “elephant”. To hear the word and not think of the image is hardly possible. We are permanently susceptible to our impressions. Moreover, inner pictures that we associate with attraction, grace, and beauty are especially appealing.

In 2001, the American psychologist Nancy Etcoff, wrote in her book, *Survival of the Prettiest. The Science of Beauty*,

We can create a big bonfire with every issue of Vogue, GQ and Details, every image of Kate Moss, Naomi Campbell, and Cindy Crawford, and still, images of youthful perfect bodies would take shape in our heads and create a desire to have them. No one is immune. (Etcoff, 2001, p. 6)

Names of models and magazines may be volatile, but the desire to resemble our inner picture of an attractive model is timeless.

Inner pictures remain important to us even in moments where we hear rather than see. If an orator wants to receive our affirmation, he

must speak in a way that is both accessible and *imaginative*; otherwise he will not reach out to us: that is, we would not get the *picture*. In rhetoric, some people have an idealised self-image and portray themselves as a living illustration of virtue and tolerance, even though their image of the world might be rigid and their attitude comes across as hostile. Perhaps they follow a different model of thought altogether. In any case, no one lives in a world entirely without inner pictures. This is also true of our language and its use of figurative speech.

Without inner pictures, the world would stand still and wither. Proof: every new idea, every invention, every discovery, once started out as a vivid imagination. When Christopher Columbus discovered a new continent, he imagined its location in accordance to his picture of the earth and India—his original travel destination. When the first engine was built, the designer had already pictured the way the piston would be moving inside the barrel.

Great discoveries and inventions aside, we all experience our own short day-to-day pictures, fantasies, desires, and imaginings. Within us, inner pictures can come to life and broaden our horizon. They are able to limit our perceptions, too: for example, in the selection of a partner.

More often than not, our minds have already formed a certain picture of our future companions. Not only should he or she be honest, funny, and faithful, but also must fulfil our expectations regarding certain physical attributes, be a cat person, and share our taste in music. “Acceptance becomes possible, only when I let go of the pictures I set up inside my head and which I keep comparing my partner’s image to”, the life consultant and Christian author Anselm Grün warns (Grün, 2011, p. 56, translated for this edition).

Katy M had always been certain that her future husband may be short or tall, large or thin, but there was one thing he certainly would not be—bearded. Then, during an internship, she met a colleague of similar age and to whom she found herself talking more and more. She knew he was friendly but considered him completely unattractive, since he had a beard. Until, one day, their boss sent both of them on a business trip, where they would spend an intense amount of time together and learn more about each other. “Suddenly, it just hit me”, Katy remembers. The two became a couple. “And now, I love his beard just as much as the rest of him.”