

## Unconscious and Consciousness: Two Words in Search of an Author.

by Franco Lancia\*

If thinking follows its law of motion unconsciously,  
it turns against its own meaning.  
(Theodor Adorno, 1966, p. 149)

'Unconscious' and 'Consciousness' (or 'Conscious') are key words present in the vocabulary of many social sciences, both used for describing empirical findings and theoretical models; however it sometimes happens that one or the other is assumed to correspond to a 'reality' to be systematically investigated and – in most cases - the model of such a reality leads the researchers to hypostatize the reality of their model. Such a phenomenon, which becomes 'visible' through the comparison of opposite theories and their respective programs of research—namely those sustaining that (a) *Mind = Unconscious* or that (b) *Mind = Consciousness*—is particularly interesting because it reveals basic problems concerning the epistemology of human sciences and their 'archaeological level' (Foucault, 1966). So, by studying such a cultural phenomenon, we can better understand that neither of the two words in question corresponds to a distinct 'reality', rather both are used in language games (Wittgenstein, 1953) through which social sciences build their borders, as well as their professional practices and the 'objects' they are dealing with.

In my view the programs of research which correspond to the two equivalences mentioned above (respectively 'a' and 'b') can be considered as 'ideal types' (Weber, 1904)<sup>1</sup>, the development of which usually follows the trajectories illustrated in the semiotic square below (Figure 1). In fact, when the scientific focus is on the Unconscious, the Conscious (or Consciousness) is usually conceived as something Non-Unconscious ('a' below) and it ends up being conceived as a subset of the Unconscious 'reality'; conversely, when the scientific focus is on the Conscious (or Consciousness), the Unconscious is usually conceived as something corresponding to Non-Conscious ('b' below) and it becomes a potential element of the Conscious 'reality'. So, in logical and semiotic terms, in both cases the contrary opposition (Conscious vs. Unconscious) available in our language and in our culture is treated as a contradictory opposition (Conscious vs. Non-Conscious; Unconscious vs. Non-Unconscious) simply because it is assumed that only one of two terms has a specific ontological status (i.e. a proper 'reality').

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<sup>1</sup> According to Weber's definition, 'an ideal type is formed by the one-sided *accentuation* of one or more points of view' according to which '*concrete individual* phenomena ... are arranged into a unified analytical construct'; in its purely fictional nature, it is a methodological 'utopia [that] cannot be found empirically anywhere in reality' (1904, p. 90).

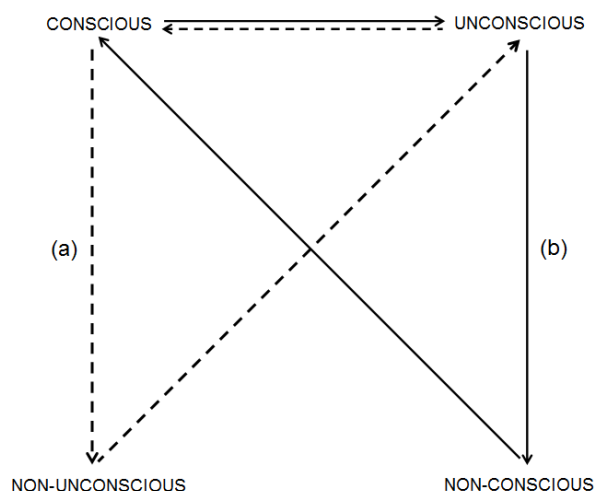


Figure N. 1

Actually these 'ideal types' correspond to specific paths followed by several researchers, two of whom I consider paradigmatic examples of the cultural phenomenon which I refer to:

a) the Chilean<sup>2</sup> psychoanalyst Ignacio Matte Blanco, who proposed a new frame of reference for the Freudian psychoanalysis according to which a 'mode' of our mind—usually called 'unconscious' or 'emotional'<sup>3</sup>—follows a specific logic which uses symmetrical relations and deals with infinite sets<sup>4</sup> (Matte Blanco, 1975a), whereas another 'mode'—usually called 'conscious' and 'rational'—follows the 'classical logic'<sup>5</sup> and the principle of non-contradiction. So, by naming the two modes respectively 'symmetrical' and 'asymmetrical', he has proposed a principle according to which all psychical manifestations originate from the bi-modal activity of the mind (1975a, p. 352; 1988, p. 94) and such a bi-modality plays an important role in social life, making us feel 'united' (symmetry) and 'distinct' (asymmetry) individuals at the same time (1975a, p. 318).

b) the American<sup>6</sup> philosopher John R. Searle, who proposed a theory of the Mind according to which: (i) Consciousness<sup>7</sup> is a higher-level feature of the brain in the 'utterly harmless sense' in

<sup>2</sup> Matte Blanco was born in Santiago (Chile) in 1908. In 1966 he moved to Italy, where died in 1995.

<sup>3</sup> According to Matte Blanco, 'emotion and the unconscious are basically the same thing' (1975a, p. 274).

<sup>4</sup> Following Dedekind, Matte Blanco gave the following definition of infinite set:

*'A set is infinite when and only when it can be put in bi-univocal correspondence with a proper part of it.'* (1975a, p 33).

Example: the set of all *natural* numbers (1,2,3,4..., etc.) can be put in bi-univocal correspondence with a proper part of it corresponding to the sub-set of the *odd* number (e.g.. 1-1, 2-3, 3-5, 4-7, 5-9 etc.). According to his theory, the Unconscious deals with infinite sets because it follows the principle of symmetry, i.e. it 'treats the converse of any relations as identical with the relation', so that 'it treats relations as if they were symmetrical' (Matte Blanco, 1959, p. 2). *Formula*:  $x R y = y R x$ . In this formula 'R' is the relation, whilst 'x' and 'y' – as variables – can be replaced by any 'object' (i.e. thing, individual, event, etc.). *Examples*: 'John is Colin's son = Colin is John's son'; 'this room is part of my apartment = my apartment is part of this room'; 'a child eats a chicken = a chicken eats a child; etc..

When applied to relations like 'x is a part of y', a consequence of such a principle is that 'the part is identical with the whole, from which it follows logically that it is also identical with any other part' (Matte Blanco, 1959, p. 3).

<sup>5</sup> According to Matte Blanco (1975a, p. 56) the 'classical logic' (or Aristotelian logic) corresponds to the 'bivalent' logic which follows the principle of contradiction (i.e. if a proposition is *true*, then its negation is *false* and vice versa).

<sup>6</sup> John Searle was born in Denver (Colorado) in 1932. At the present time (2011) he teaches philosophy at Berkeley University.

<sup>7</sup> According to Searle (1997, p. 5) Consciousness 'refers to those states of sentience and awareness that typically begin when we awake from a dreamless sleep and continue until we go to sleep again, or fall into a

which liquidity is a higher-level feature of water and H<sub>2</sub>O molecules (Searle, 1992, p. 14)<sup>8</sup>; (ii) the actual ontology of mental states is a first-person ontology in the sense that they are realized in one's psyche and are always *somebody's* beliefs, desires, thoughts etc. (ibid., p. 16); (iii) what makes a mental state an 'intentional'<sup>9</sup> state is not its ontological category but rather its logical properties (1979, p. 81), i.e. the fact that it implies a relation between a 'psychological mode' (e.g. belief, hope, fear, desire etc.) and a 'representative content' (e.g. what it is 'about'); (iv) the 'logic' of intentional mental states, by means of speech acts, allow us to build 'social reality' and 'institutional facts' like marriages, governments and so on (Searle, 1995; 2010).

The first one ('a' above) conceived Consciousness as being 'like a limited group of functions (emerging) from the infinite sets of symmetrical being'(ibid., p. 103) and assumed that such a 'being' corresponded to 'what Freud meant when he said that the unconscious is the true psychical reality' (ibid.)<sup>10</sup>. The second one ('b' above) conceived<sup>11</sup> all 'genuinely' mental activity to be 'either conscious or potentially so' (Searle, 1991, p. 65); then he assumed that the notion of an unconscious mental state makes sense only when referring to 'a possible content of consciousness' (ibid., p. 51) and claimed that 'the ontology of the unconscious is strictly the ontology of neurophysiology capable of generating the conscious' (ibid., p. 64). In other words, according to Matte Blanco the 'ontology' (or 'reality') of the mind corresponds to that of the 'symmetrical being', whereas Consciousness—which is simply a phenomenon without a specific *noumenon* 'behind it' (ibid. 102)—can be compared to a light which illuminates something mental which was already 'there' (ibid. p. 109). Instead, according to Searle the proper ontology of the mind corresponds to the Consciousness, in the specific sense that its subjective 'appearance' corresponds to its 'reality' (ibid. p. 122); whereas what we call Unconscious is simply something happening in the neurophysiology of the brain.

Certainly we could argue that these two theories of the *Mind* are not comparable and, perhaps, incommensurable (Kuhn, 1962) not least because, according to a commonsensical view, one is 'scientific' (Matte Blanco) and the other one is 'philosophical' (Searle)<sup>12</sup>. However, for the purpose of this argument, let's try to suspend the commonsensical use of our vocabularies and introduce some issues that will be discussed later. In actual fact the intentionalist theory of Searle, being more taxonomic than explicative, simply allowed him to establish what conscious 'mental states' are and what they are not, as well as what their 'psychological mode' and their 'representative content' are; whereas the 'causation' of such states, which – according to the author - involves both the brain (Searle, 1992) and the 'rule functioning' social Background (Searle, 1995), is just a general assumption. On the other hand, the bi-logic theory of Matte Blanco, by combining 'classical logic' with the principle of symmetry and the notion of infinite sets, allowed him to unfold the 'meaning' of both 'normal' and 'abnormal' psychical manifestations as in the cases of a student who related to his teacher as his mother (Matte Blanco, 1975a, p. 42) and a schizophrenic who,

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coma or die or otherwise become unconscious'. Moreover he claimed that 'Dreams are also a form of consciousness, though in many respects they are quite unlike normal waking states' (Searle, 1998, p. 1936).

<sup>8</sup> According to Searle (1998), 'the fact that there is a causal relation between brain process and conscious states does not imply a dualism of brain and consciousness any more than the fact that the causal relation between molecule movements and solidity imply a dualism of molecules and solidity' (ibid., p. 1940).

<sup>9</sup> In Searle's theory 'intentional' and 'intentionality' are technical terms which do not imply 'volition'. Actually for him 'intentionality' is just 'the capacity of the mind by which it is directed at, or about, objects and states of affairs in the world' (Searle, 2010, p. 25)

<sup>10</sup> Actually, according to Freud, 'The unconscious is the larger sphere, which includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious' (1900, p. 612), whereas in his opinion 'There is no need to characterise what we call 'conscious': is the same consciousness of philosophers and of everyday opinion' (Freud, 1938, p. 159).

<sup>11</sup> Unlike Matte Blanco who died in 1995, Searle is still alive. However, my use of verb tenses doesn't make reference to their status of existence, rather to their published works.

<sup>12</sup> According to Searle's questionable view, 'science is systematic knowledge; philosophy is in part an attempt to reach the point where we can have systematic knowledge. This is why science is always 'right' and philosophy is always 'wrong': as soon as we think we really know something we stop calling it philosophy and start calling it science' (1988. p. 1936)

after being bitten by a dog, went to a dentist (ibid., p. 317). So, at first glance, we could say that the two theories in question are respectively 'what oriented' (Searle) and 'why oriented' (Matte Blanco); but certainly not because one is 'philosophical' and the other is 'scientific'. In fact the supposed scientist has also proposed a sort of hybrid resulting from the logic of Aristotle and the metaphysics of Parmenides (Matte Blanco, 2006), whereas the other one is well anchored to the findings of neurosciences (Searle, 1984).

A very interesting coincidence is that, with the distance of a couple of decades between their respective statements and, probably, without being familiar with their respective works, the two researchers in question approached a similar topic in a very different manner: the first (Matte Blanco) to point out a sort of 'anomaly' concerning psychoanalysis, the second one (Searle) to lay the foundations of his program of research. Here are their words:

When Freud began his research, the Unconscious appeared as a vast, unexplored and difficult world. With his brilliant insights, especially with his definition of the characteristics of the Unconscious system, he has given us the opportunity to enter this world, and today it seems possible to define it with conceptual precision in terms of a logic which uses the principle of symmetry, that is implicit in the same description of the characteristics of the Unconscious System. Meanwhile, *the phenomenon we call Consciousness, has not been enlightened by anyone and has remained so obscure, that, paradoxically, it has come to be more opaque to our understanding than the same Unconscious System.* (Matte Blanco, 1968a, pp. 25-26; My italics and my translation).

Earlier generations—prior to twentieth century, roughly speaking—found the notion of consciousness unproblematic and the notion of the unconscious mind puzzling, perhaps even self-contradictory. We have reversed the roles. After Freud, we routinely invoke unconscious mental phenomena to explain human being, and we find the notion of consciousness puzzling and perhaps even unscientific. (...) The general theme is that unconscious mental processes are more important than conscious one (...) I believe that in spite of our complacency in using the concept of the unconscious, we don't have a clear notion of unconscious mental states (...) *The notion of an unconscious mental states implies accessibility to consciousness.* We have no notion of the unconscious except as that which is potentially conscious (Searle, 1992, p. 151; Author's italics).

In actual fact, the 'adversary' that Searle addressed wasn't just the Freudian unconscious, but rather the 'unconscious' rules of universal grammar proposed by Chomsky (1986) and the computational model of the Mind<sup>13</sup>. However his recurrent phrase 'unconscious *mental states*' reveals a borderline case between epistemology and ontology which is quite interesting. To put it in a few words, the 'analytic' mind of Searle followed a logic of this nature: the 'facts' are 'brute physical' or 'mental', the mental facts (or mental states) are 'intentional' or 'nonintentional', 'conscious' or 'unconscious' and so on (Searle, 1995, p. 121). But the 'fact' is that such 'mental states' really do not exist, and not because the only 'facts' are neuro-physiological ones. Rather I argue that, even assuming that the mind is a higher-level feature of the brain it does not follow that the flow of mental events is 'in itself' composed of different states<sup>14</sup>; rather such 'states' are the result of the application of an epistemic grid according to which the texture of mental events is analysed as though it were a set of 'speech acts' which Searle studied at the beginning of his career (Searle, 1969). To be more specific, when someone says 'I see the Empire State Building' (or 'The Empire State Building is so beautiful'), his experience usually happens in a holistic way (i.e. not as separate and cumulative mental states) and within a specific context; moreover – following Matte Blanco's line of thought – we could argue that such an 'extracted' sentence (or 'mental state') can have a 'conscious' representative content and, *at the same time*, an 'unconscious' meaning.

The possible connection between intentionality and unconscious meanings will be discussed later. At this stage I would like to point out a symmetric borderline case between epistemology and

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<sup>13</sup> Just remember the famous 'thought experiment' (i.e. the 'Chinese Room' argument) which Searle proposed in the paper 'Mind, Brains, and Programs' (1980).

<sup>14</sup> According to Searle (2010), in order to function each mental/intentional state requires a Network, that is a 'complex set of other interrelated intentional states' (ibid., p.31).

ontology which, in my opinion, got Matte Blanco into trouble and in some way risks obscuring the scientific relevance of his bi-logic theory. A passage which is particularly revealing is the following:

We do not come across symmetrical or asymmetrical *being* directly: we only come across 'symmetrical thinking' and 'asymmetrical thinking'<sup>15</sup>, or indirect manifestations of both (...) But what of the reality of the modes themselves? (...) But can phenomena exist without some reality, some noumena behind it? The very idea appears absurd (Matte Blanco, 1975a, p. 102. Author's italics).

As a matter of fact his shift from the interaction of the two logics (both present in the experiences of 'feeling' and 'thinking') to the ontology of 'homogeneous indivisible reality' (Matte Blanco, 1975a, p. 363) which should correspond to the 'ineffable reality of symmetrical *being*' (ibid., p. 348) led him to a mystical vision similar to Zen Buddhism (Rayner, 1995, p. 78) and led him to state that the 'fundamental antinomy'<sup>16</sup> of human being is present in the structure of matter too (Matte Blanco, 1988). So, following Searle (1995) we could say that 'behind' mental phenomena there is nothing other than other phenomena, either neuro-physiological or social. Moreover we could add that the symmetrical mode, as opposed to the asymmetrical mode, is the more isomorphic one to the neuro-physiological 'logic' of the brain, the electrical and chemical connections of which do not distinguish between induced laboratory (i.e. either electrodes or drugs) and natural rewards (e.g. food, water and copulation). In other words, both brain neuro-physiology and symmetric logic are independent from the so called 'reality testing'.

#### *Category confusion and the 'non-identity' principle*

In my opinion, when talking about mental phenomena, i.e. 'mental states' (Searle's phrase) or 'psychical manifestations' (Matte Blanco's phrase), and borderline cases then emerge between ontology and epistemology, the knowing subject (i.e. the researcher) is in actual fact involved in a difficult subject-object dialectics<sup>17</sup> which can't be 'resolved' once and for all simply because such a dialectics is historical and social and not 'in' the *Ego cogitans*. So such borderline cases reveal something concerning the relationships between mind theories and their cultural contexts. However, as Searle seems to be a philosopher well equipped in managing the relationships between ontology and epistemology, let's try to follow his arguments first.

In one of his books (Searle, 1995, pp. 8-13) he proposed a sort of grid according to which any 'entities' we may be talking about can be 'ontologically objective' (i.e. 'their mode of existence is independent of any perceiver or any mental states'; for example Mount Everest) or 'ontological subjective' (e.g. my pains), whereas the 'statements' with which we talk about such entities can be 'epistemically objective' or 'epistemically subjective'. So, according to such a grid, we can talk about both objective and subjective entities (e.g. the mental states<sup>18</sup>) in an epistemically objective or epistemically subjective way, where 'epistemically objective' statements refer to 'facts in the world that make them true or false independent(ly) of anybody's attitudes or feeling about them' (ibid. p. 8). Moreover Searle distinguished between 'features' of the world that 'exist independently of us' (i.e. 'features that we might call *intrinsic* to nature') and 'features' of the world that 'are dependent on us for their existence' in the sense that they are 'observer relative'. For example, a screwdriver can have both 'intrinsic' and 'observer-relative' features (e.g. intrinsic = its material; observer-relative = its function).

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<sup>15</sup> According to Matte Blanco, the 'asymmetrical' logic refers to the principle of non-contradiction.

<sup>16</sup> According to Matte Blanco, 'it can be affirmed that there is in the very structure of humans a fundamental antinomy resulting from the co-presence of two modes of being which are incompatible with one another' (1988, p. 70) and such an this antinomy concerns both the human being and the world (2006, p. 722).

<sup>17</sup> See Adorno (1966) and Ricoeur (1990).

<sup>18</sup> According Searle, all mental states have a first-person ontology (Searle, 1992, p. 16) and they exist 'in the heads of individuals' (Searle, 1995, p. 55).

Without making reference to any strange 'entities' which may not fit Searle's distinction (e.g. the triangle, the unicorn and all the so called Meinongian objects<sup>19</sup>), we could observe that the above distinction between the ontological and the epistemic levels can't be taken for granted. For example, we could argue that such a distinction is a typical product of a knowing subject whose ontology and epistemic models are both dependent on his culture and his historical context, therefore the difference between 'entities' would not be in the *ordo essendi* (i.e. it is not in a realm which exist independently of the knowing subject). Thus, when talking/thinking about such issues we can get confused about the very use of our concepts and categories, just as we can cast doubt on what is 'real' and what it is not. But if we, both by feeling and thinking, try to stay in such a state of category confusion we can better understand what is 'really' at stake when talking/thinking about the dichotomy Consciousness vs. Unconscious which, not by accident, is a typical product of our culture and of our thinking.

In my opinion, both Matte Blanco and Searle were aware of such problems (i.e. the implications of category confusion), but – even in different ways – they simply proposed a 'way out' which was to have been valid once and for all. To put it in a few words, here are their solutions:

a) 'killing the principle of non-contradiction' in such a way that 'a more serene bi-modal attitude would perhaps see that the paradoxes of the infinite reality are (logico-bivalent) antinomies...and would serenely accept bi-logic' (Matte Blanco, 1981, p. 489);

b) to recognize that 'external realism' (i.e. the assumption according to which 'the world (or alternatively, reality or the universe) exists independently of our representation of it'; Searle, 1995, p. 150) 'is not a thesis about how the world is in fact' (ibid., p. 155) rather it is a 'condition of intelligibility' (ibid. p. 182) and a 'Background presupposition' (ibid., p. 185) which is 'prior to having beliefs' (ibid, p. 195) and allows us to relate to each other and construct social reality.

So the 'paladin' of the Unconscious seems to address 'single individuals' by inviting them to make peace with their bi-logic nature, whereas the 'paladin' of Consciousness is concerned about 'social' issues. By the way I point out that, in this case, such a bi-polarity (i.e. individual vs. society) is not simply 'symptomatic' but really amazing. In fact, paradoxically, according to Matte Blanco 'the symmetrical mode of being (i.e. the unconscious) is the root of sociability' (1975a, p. 318), whereas according to Searle Consciousness has a first-person ontology (Searle, 1992, p. 16) and 'the only intentionality that can exist is in the heads of individuals' (Searle, 1995, p. 55). Thus, in order to clarify the use of our two main key-words (i.e. 'Consciousness' and 'Unconscious'), let's try to comment on the theoretical proposals of our two authors first.

Being a man of science, Matte Blanco (1959) made an outstanding second-order discovery. In fact he was able to 'see' (i.e. abduction) and 'demonstrate' (i.e. deduction) that the five characteristics of the Unconscious system described by Freud can be traced back to two logical principles<sup>20</sup>. The five characteristics in question are the following: (1) Absence of mutual contradiction between the presentations of the various impulses, (2) Displacement, (3) Condensation, (4) Absence of time, (5) Substitution of psychic for external reality. The two logical principles which Matte Blanco refers to are respectively named (I) *principle of generalization*<sup>21</sup> (or abstraction) and (II) *principle of symmetry*<sup>22</sup>: the first one is common to 'classical logic', the second one specific to the unconscious

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<sup>19</sup> See Albertazzi, Jacqueline & Poli, 2001.

<sup>20</sup> Later Matte Blanco argued that the 'specific' logical principle of the Unconscious is only one: that of symmetry which cancels any difference (Matte Blanco, 1986, p. 338; 1988, p. 86;)

<sup>21</sup> Matte Blanco formulated the principle of generalization as follows: '*The thinking of the system Ucs treats an individual thing (person, object, concept) as if it were a member or element of a class which contains other members; it treats this class a subclass of a more general class, and this more general class as a subclass of a still more general class, and so on.*' (1959, p. 2; note: here Ucs stands for Unconscious).

<sup>22</sup> For a definition of the principle of symmetry see above endnote n. 4.

logic. With regards to his 'demonstration'<sup>23</sup> we have to recognize that it fits the so-called 'covering law model' (Popper, 1934; Hempel & Oppenheim, 1948). Even so such a model, when applied in psychology, can not be used for predictions. In fact, according to Matte Blanco 'our postulations will account in a satisfactory way (granted all the limitations of a developing knowledge) *for what we see*, even though we may not be able *to foresee* what a patient will necessarily do or say in certain given circumstances' (1975a, p. 317).

Subsequently, by re-thinking the empirical findings and the theoretical models of Freudian psychoanalysis, Matte Blanco ended up proposing a bi-logic theory according to which our mind works in a bi-modal way and 'all forms of human psychical manifestation can be considered as various forms of bi-modality' (1988, p. 94; Author's italics). Thus we could say that 'psychical manifestations' phrase refers to phenomena and that the 'bi-modal' term refers both to the structure of such phenomena and to the processes which organize them, both 'in' the mind of a hypothetical patient and 'in' the mind of his psychoanalyst, both 'in' our mind and 'in' the mind of people we relate to. So social relations should be regarded as bi-modal too.

Personally I agree with Matte Blanco's claim according to which Freud should be regarded as the founder of a new epistemology (Matte Blanco, 1986). In fact the real 'a priori' conditions of our knowledge processes (including the scientific ones) are not only the Kantian space and time (Kant, 1797), but also the symmetrical 'logic' of our emotions. To be more specific I share the assumption according to which no psychical manifestation is 'in itself' asymmetrical or symmetrical, including the mathematical 'activity' of an individual mind. Rather mathematical propositions (or mathematical 'products') considered 'in themselves' (e.g. like they are printed in a book) can be just asymmetrical (Matte Blanco, 1975a, p. 163). In other words I argue that even when 'thinking' about the principle of contradiction (which 'in itself' is asymmetrical) we can not avoid 'feeling' something about it. However, I note that the borderline cases between ontology and epistemology got our author into a situation where the same 'new epistemology' risks being misinterpreted.

To make my point clear, I shall refer to the so called 'structural model' of the mind (or 'mental apparatus') proposed by Matte Blanco which—being a sort of metaphor for his ontological assumptions—in my opinion reveals the misleading path of his thoughts. In actual fact, according to such a model we can distinguish five 'strata'; however for the purpose of my argument I will comment on the 'descriptions' of the first (i.e. the more 'superficial') and of the fifth (i.e. the 'deepest') only. Here are their descriptions:

A first conscious level of this stratum is that of the conception or perception of a concrete and well-delimited thing - a person, a material object, a well-defined thought referring to a concrete fact ('the temperature is rising'), or an abstract concept, such as the concept of freedom of the will.

*This would be the level of delimited and quite asymmetrical thinking or perception.* (1988, p. 52. Author's italics)

The deepest strata – their mathematical limit: indivisibility (...) The conceptual end is the pure invisible mode, where everything is everything else, and where the relations between things are all theoretically contained in

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<sup>23</sup> For example, in the 'displacement' case, his demonstration works as follows: the *explanandum* (i.e. something that needs to be explained) is clinical evidence, just as that - mentioned by the author himself (Matte Blanco, 1959, p. 3) - a student can 'feel' his teacher like his mother, whereas the *explanans* (i.e. propositions used to explain something) implies the two above mentioned principles. In detail: (I - principle of generalization) mother and teacher are treated as members of the class obtained by the propositional function 'x gives nourishment', whether material (e.g. mother who gives milk) and spiritual (e.g. teacher who gives the bread of knowledge); (II - principle of symmetry) the two members of the same class (i.e. mother and teacher) are treated as identical. Therefore (*logical conclusion*) a teacher and a mother can be felt (i.e. represented, treated, etc.) as the *same* thing; in fact the Unconscious – as the author points out repeatedly - does not treat the members of a class as having features in common (i.e. as *similar* things), 'but in fact it treats them as identical' (ibid.).

any single thing which the intellect can grasp. The endless number of things tend to become, mysteriously, only one thing. (ibid. p. 54).

The reasons why, in my opinion, such descriptions are misleading are respectively the following:

a) According to the main hypothesis that all psychological manifestations are bi-modal (i.e. asymmetrical and symmetrical), neither a 'perception of a well-delimited thing', nor an 'abstract concept' such as the 'freedom of will' can be regarded as involving only 'asymmetrical thinking'. In fact both are 'psychical manifestations' and neither mental phenomena happens without involving the activity of symmetrical mode. In other words, I argue that, when perceiving a 'delimited thing' or when referring to a 'concrete fact', we are also feeling 'something' about it; furthermore this feeling is related to the context in which the experience takes place. So the 'reality' of the first stratum is just the product of a mental 'abstraction' which hypostatizes the logic of the asymmetrical thinking.

b) Equally, to 'infer' that the 'indivisible mode' of being really exists is just the product of our bi-logic mind and of a knowing subject which doesn't consider the contextual dialectics of subject-object when thinking about himself. In other words, in my opinion, when assuming the 'real' existence of a 'indivisible mode of being' we hypostatize the logic of symmetrical thinking and such an ideological inference serves just to support the 'parochial' point of view shared by lots of psycho-analysts according to whom the Unconscious - as 'the true psychical reality' - is like God (Bomford, 1999) or like the 'being' of subject-oriented philosophies, like idealism and Heideggerian existentialism, as well as neoplatonist revival and new age.

Instead, in relation to Matte Blanco's view concerning the principle of non-contradiction, I argue that, like many scientists and philosophers, he didn't make a clear distinction between: (i) the logical formulation of such a principle and its use in the 'language games' of logic; (ii) the various thinking processes required for elaborating feedback and consequently for survival. In fact, according to Piaget (1970), the roots of logical and mathematical structures (including the principle of non-contradiction) must be taken back to the coordination of actions and so to a dialectics subject/object which above all is biological. On the other hand, when Wittgenstein (1969) was thinking about the 'language games' of logic and remembered the Goethian motto 'In the beginning was the deed' (ibid., § 402) he was just trying to suggest that logic has social roots. To be more specific, I think that when—in various social contexts—we ask for confirmations (e.g. 'Yes or No?', 'Right or Wrong?') we are not simply 'applying' (or 'following') the principle of non contradiction, just as when saying something like 'I am not You' (or 'You are not me') we are not simply making a logical operation or when saying '*This* cat is not a cat' we are not 'violating' the principle of non contradiction. Rather, I argue that in all the above cases we are trying to apply a different principle which is not logical and probably expresses something concerning the psycho-social foundations of the same logic. In my opinion, such a principle – that I call *non-identity principle* - is in some way related to Searle's assumption that 'external realism' is a sort of 'Background presupposition', but it *is not* the same thing, also because Searle's presupposition is 'given' and everywhere present, whereas the principle to which I refer is the most difficult to apply.

Let's give an example. When Matte Blanco ended up saying that Consciousness '*has come to be more opaque to our understanding than the same Unconscious System*' (Matte Blanco, 1968a, p. 26), as a matter of fact he was exploring the difference between a 'concrete' (or 'real') individual and our representation of it. Actually, in the same article and a few paragraphs before the above quotation, he wrote:



The real individual fragments and dissolves into propositional functions<sup>24</sup>, which are somewhat abstract, just as happens in the case of matter, this solid and palpable matter, which is conceived in terms of energy or waves, which once again is something abstract.

Maybe this is just an epistemological problem (...) Nowadays it's easier to understand that a real human being is a point of intersection of a number of propositional functions rather than understand him as a concrete living being (ibid., My translation).

The first time I read this passage, by connecting it to the entire context of Matte Blanco's argument, I made a comment such as follows: 'No, absolutely *not*. it is not just an epistemological problem. In order to remember its social and historical roots, and also in memory of Theodor Adorno, I could say just a single word: *Auschwitz*. Perhaps the millions of individuals murdered were just 'waves'? Actually, in this case Matte Blanco and I have had a very different issue with our so-called Consciousness. In fact, in my opinion, to realize that a 'concrete' living being *is not* a 'point of intersection of a number of propositional functions' (or 'the element of a one-element class formed by the intersection of a certain number of classes'; Matte Blanco, 1975a, p. 371) doesn't come about by 'applying' any principle of logic or any theory of the mind, rather it requires a suspension of the 'language game' we are playing. In fact, when playing such a game, its outcome is always determined by a 'first move' based on an *abstraction* through which we have chosen to transform the real dialectics Subject / Object, just as the context in which it takes place, in a set of relationships between two or more terms (e.g. *triads* formed by 'something, something else e relation'; Matte Blanco, ibid. p. 357) which are just in our mind. So if we do not suspend such a game, in one way or another we end up supporting a pseudo-truth that is already implicit in our *naive* acceptance of the same game rules, that is - by analyzing just the logic of our mental processes - we come to argue that the *world is nothing but our representation of it*. Thus the *non-identity principle* is not a statement and can not be encapsulated in a statement; rather, by involving both 'feeling' and 'thinking' (i.e. bi-modality), it seems to evoke the relationship between 'negation' and 'reality-testing' which Freud referred to (1915). Or, in philosophical terms, we could say that such a principle refers to the 'negative' dialectics of Theodor Adorno (1966). In fact such a dialectics, through the cognition of the non-identical (which is not just a thought) and by revealing the necessary insufficiency of any method (which necessarily uses concepts and representations) allows us to evoke the 'uniqueness' of each living being, to think that our relations with the 'external' world are not just mental events and so to recognize the limits of any logical (or scientific) model.

Now let's comment on Searle's way out of the categorical confusion, i.e. his presupposition of 'external realism'. First of all I have to confess that I wondered why he decided to spend about fifty pages of his book *The Construction of Social Reality* (Searle, 1995) simply arguing about the question 'Does the Real World Exist?' In fact, if—as he claimed—the assumption of 'external realism' is a sort of shared 'Background presupposition' we shouldn't need to discuss such an issue. Moreover, just as Moore failed in trying to 'demonstrate' the existence of the external world<sup>25</sup>, it seems to me that the implicit assumption of Searle, according to which we can not but share that 'the world exists independently of our representations of it' is a misleading counterpart of the 'Cogito ergo sum' (i.e. 'I think, therefore I am'). To be more specific I argue that both the 'rationalist' Descartes and the 'realist' Searle seem to imagine a sort of 'ground zero' of the processes of thinking (Descartes) and of communicating (Searle). Moreover, both seem to share the assumption that philosophy is a sort of brick-by-brick process (e.g. 'a' comes first, thus we can deduct 'b', 'c' and so on). But the real fact is that when thinking neither the Subject (e.g. the 'Ego') nor the Object (e.g. the 'World') comes first; rather we could argue that, in order to think and to 'have' a Consciousness we need to be born first. One must also remember that both *the* 'Ego' and *the*

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<sup>24</sup> In logic a 'propositional function' is a generic statement (e.g. 'x is an Italian city') which can be 'true' or 'false' only when replacing the variable (i.e. 'x') with specific values (e.g. Rome, Milan, Naples etc.) in such a way that the same values can be considered elements of the same class or sets.

<sup>25</sup> As is commonly known, some decades ago the philosopher G. E. Moore proposed a 'Proof of an External World' (1939) to which Wittgenstein replied with illuminating notes 'On Certainty' (1969).

'World' are simply concepts, whereas each 'unique' living being is really not identical to my representations of it, furthermore the way it really changes is not-identical to the logic (or bi-logic) of my representations of such changes.

In my view, one of the reasons why Searle spent so much time on commenting on 'external realism' is that, in his opinion (1995, p. 157), lots of thinkers (e.g. Nelson Goodman, Thomas Kuhn, Paul Feyerabend, Richard Rorty, Jacques Derrida, Humberto Maturana, etc.) and lots of interpreters of their works seem to share the assumption that 'we' make the world and that 'we' make reality. So, in order to clarify such a problem, in an honest way Searle proposed to distinguish the Background presupposition of external realism from the correspondence theory of truth. However, the very strange and symptomatic 'fact' is that, in his work concerning the construction of social reality, he proposed an interesting theory concerning the social and institutional facts without dedicating a single word to define which kind of 'facts' are the social practices which we call 'sciences'<sup>26</sup>. Perhaps they are simply the inhabitants of the 'third world' theorized by Popper (1968)<sup>27</sup>? Or, rather, by trying to reclaim the 'land' of knowledge Searle tried to keep the enterprise in which is so involved out of the 'danger' of the so called relativity of knowledge? According to him 'We need not so much a philosophy of the social sciences of the present and the past as we need a philosophy for the social sciences of the future and, indeed, for anyone who wants a deeper understanding of social phenomena' (Searle, 2010, p. 5; Author's italics). But on which grounds can he establish what is that social sciences really 'need'? In my opinion, by referring to 'our three-hundred-year *obsession* with epistemology and skepticism' (ibid. 6; My italics) Searle reveals an attitude such the following: I know what the 'real' disease of western philosophy is and I have a good medicine for it. Its name is 'ontology of human social institutional reality'. To be more specific, I think that Searle is right in reminding us of the 'social issues' in which philosophy is involved, but I think that he is mistaken in his attempt to 'resolve' problems through an engineering like mode of thinking. Moreover I think that his assumptions that 'society has a logical (conceptual, propositional) structure' (Searle, 2010, p. 6) and that the 'basic structure' of institutional facts works like the DNA in genetics (ibid., p. 7) are ideological.

Now, in order to also clarify some issues concerning the 'social construction of reality', let's try to apply the Searlian grid to determine which kind of 'facts' are the social practices that we call sciences. In my opinion such practices fit perfectly within the definition of 'institutional facts' which Searle (1995) refers to. Actually, as in the case of chess, marriage and property they exist only by 'human agreement' (ibid., p. 46) and require 'continued collective acceptance' (ibid., p. 45); equally they are 'language-dependent' (ibid., p. 61), involve 'collective intentionality' (ibid., p. 13), 'create reasons for action' (ibid., p. 70) and 'symbolize something beyond themselves' (ibid., p. 66). So, like all the 'institutional facts' theorized by Searle, the basic structure of such practices requires 'declarations'<sup>28</sup> and constitutive rules like 'X counts as Y in the context C' (ibid., p. 28).

Personally I do not have any problem when a group of psychoanalysts, in order to do their work in a 'context C' decide that for them the label Unconscious ('X') counts as 'the true psychological reality' ('Y'), just as I do not have any problem when a group of neuroscientists discussing within a 'context

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<sup>26</sup> In one of his most recent books (Searle, 2010), while listing some 'types of (nonlinguistic) institutional reality', he just wrote 'General forms of human activity that are not themselves institutions but which contain institutions: science, religion, recreation, literature, sex, eating.' (ibid. p. 92).

<sup>27</sup> In a famous essay, K. Popper (1968) proposed to distinguish three worlds or universes: 1- 'the world of physical objects or of physical states'; 2- 'the world of states of consciousness, or of mental states, or perhaps of behavioural dispositions to act'; 3- 'the world of objective contents of thoughts, especially of scientific and poetic thoughts and of works of arts'.

<sup>28</sup> According Searle, 'there are five, and only five, possible types of speech acts' (2010, p. 69). Of these types, the Declaration is peculiar in that it creates the very reality that it represents (ibid. p. 16) by imposing functions on objects and people (e.g. 'Let this be a boundary!', 'Let there be a corporation'; ibid. 100). So, as he claimed, 'all of institutional reality is created by Declarations and is maintained in its continued existence by representations (thoughts as well as speech acts) that function like Declarations' (ibid. 110).

C' decide to agree with Searle's claim that Consciousness ('X') counts as a 'higher-level feature of the brain' ('Y'). But the fact is that when 'really' doing science we actually move from one context to another and it can not be assumed that the definition of various contexts ('C'), as well as the respective definitions of 'X' and 'Y' can be determined once and for all. Moreover we can not but recognize that any real 'justification' of a scientific statement requires a social process of agreement, furthermore we can not but recognize that any theory of the mind is simply a 'social construction'. So, following Wittgenstein (1969), we could say:

If someone asked us 'but is that *true?*' we might say 'yes' to him; and if he demanded grounds we might say 'I can't give you any grounds, but if you learn more you too will think the same'.  
If this didn't come about, that would mean that he couldn't for example learn history' (ibid., § 206).

But, if when scientists and philosophers are talking about their 'objects', they are at the same time talking about their 'representations' of 'their' science and 'their' philosophy, how can we then avoid such self-referentiality? One again: there isn't a once and for all solution. In other words: we can not but negotiate our 'X counts as Y in the context C'. Personally I don't know if this is a proper 'relativist' statement. However, following Adorno (1993), I think that both 'absolutism' and (absolute) 'relativism' are ways out of the difficult process of knowing which 'in reality' requires the participation in the endless dialectics between 'individual' and 'society'. Furthermore I think that we are more 'relativist' when talking about science than when doing science, simply because when talking about science we are in actual fact facing the non-identity relation with other people and we can not take our assumptions and the assumptions of the 'community of practitioners' (Kuhn, 1962) which we belong to for granted.

*The Context well lost<sup>29</sup>, that is to say the traps of 'brick by brick thinking'*

In the first section of this paper, by stating that the 'mental states' which Searle refers to really do not exist, I made a very strong claim. So, in order to make my thought explicit, I shall try to point out how—in my opinion—both Matte Blanco and Searle laid the foundations of their theories of the mind. On the basis of what I have been able to understand, the first conceptual 'brick' they both used has a very similar nature; in fact, in both cases we have to deal with a relationship between an undefined term used as a 'primitive notion' and a 'basic structure' used for analysing and for interpreting mental phenomena. The following table summarizes such a situation:

Primitive notion	Basic Structure	Reference
'psychical manifestation' (Matte Blanco)	<b>x R y</b>  Where 'x' marks 'something', 'R' marks 'relation' and 'y' marks 'something else'	Formal Logic Psychoanalysis
'mental state' (Searle)	<b>S(r)</b>  Where 'S' marks the psychological mode (e.g. desire, hope, belief, etc.) and 'r' marks the representative content (i.e. what it is about).	Theory of Intentionality Speech Acts Theory

An accurate comment of the above table would require more than a few pages; so, for the purpose of my argument, I will make just a few points:

<sup>29</sup> This phrase echoes the title of a famous article of R. Rorty: 'The world well lost' (1972)

1 In both the above cases the 'primitive notion' presupposes something which is taken for granted, that is the unsegmented 'flow' of mental events. Moreover, in both cases, such a 'flow' becomes analysable only by means of specific 'conscious' thoughts which, by necessity, require the use of the 'basic structure'. So the relationship between 'primitive notion' and 'basic structure' expresses something concerning the 'construction' of the 'phenomena' and of the 'objects' to be studied. In other words, as Matte Blanco pointed out: researchers 'are never describing *facts in themselves*' (1975a, p. 6; Author's italics). For this purpose we could also discuss the epistemological implications of the 'myth of the given' (Sellars, 1956); but in actual fact no learned researcher denies that when 'referring' to some phenomena we are—at the same time—'inferring' something about them. So simply remember that neither 'psychical manifestations' nor 'mental states' are simply *given*.

2- Even though Matte Blanco used phrases like 'psycho-pathological manifestations' (1975a, p. 185), 'emotional manifestations' (*ibid.*, p. 217) and so on, he never defined the 'concept' of psychical manifestation nor did he attempt to propose a taxonomy of mental events. In my opinion he didn't need to do so simply because, in the 'context' in which he was working and thinking (i.e. above all the psychoanalytic setting and the psychotherapy sessions) 'psychical manifestations' refer to both what the patient is saying and doing on the one hand and what the psychoanalyst is feeling and thinking on the other. Moreover I point out that, from the psychoanalytical point of view, everything involving human beings (e.g. art, society, science etc.) can become a 'psychical manifestation' to be studied, often forgetting that both the 'contexts' and the 'products' of such manifestations follow a 'logic' which is quite different from that of the psychotherapy process.

3- Searle has often given 'descriptive' definitions of mental states by enumerating their types (e.g. pains, believes, desires etc.) and by referring them to *somebody's* experience and brain. Nevertheless he was able to give a precise definition (i.e. by genus and difference) of 'intentional' mental states (Searle, 1979) simply because in this case he could refer to his 'basic structure' (see the above table). As a matter of fact, in my opinion the fundamental distinction that Searle has proposed is that of the 'neurophysiological states' on the one hand and the 'intentional mental states' on the other, both referring to the brain and to the mind of a specific person (Searle, 1992); whereas, beyond the differences between the various speech acts, his complex taxonomy of mental states is just the result of 'brick by brick' thinking which follows the logic of a tree diagram.

4- A noteworthy 'fact' is that the 'mental states' of Searle always refer to a single person and consequently to his brain, whereas the 'psychical manifestations' of Matte Blanco seem to be assumed to be 'objects' without any necessary relation to a fixed 'subject' and his unique 'mind'. Moreover we could add that the two primitive notions they used carry two different connotations, respectively 'static' ('mental state') and 'dynamic' ('psychical manifestation') also because usually the psychoanalyst interpret *sequences* of speech acts. However, in both cases, when referring to mental events they are just 'extracting' something from a 'context' which is not simply the 'liquidity' of the neurophysiological processes (Searle), nor the 'reality' of symmetrical being (Matte Blanco); rather it is the 'flow' of mental events which happens in a 'real' social-historical context in which both are feeling, thinking and working. In other words, I am suggesting that the 'basic structure' of their findings is as follows:

$$K \rightarrow (\text{data} \leftrightarrow \text{interpretation})$$

Where 'K' stands for the 'real' and 'dynamic' context in which the researcher is involved and to which he is making reference when saying 'this is a mental phenomenon and it works so and so'.

Having said that, I would like to return to the 'vocabulary' issues and try to demonstrate why, when working on their theories, both Matte Blanco and Searle didn't find a proper 'place' for Consciousness and for the Unconscious respectively. My general assumption is that such an issue reveals certain problems concerning the contextual dialectics subject/object which is not just an

epistemological issue<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, in my view, the way our thinkers were just 'following' the logic of the architecture that they were building can be regarded as *'the'* epistemological obstacle which prevented them from thinking something concerning their 'real' relation to the context and so to access a contextual theory of the mind.

Starting with Searle, I think that his repeated statement 'Where there is no accessibility to consciousness, at least in principle, there are not mental states' (1995, p. 228) must be taken very seriously. But the issue is: how to define the conditions for such 'accessibility'? Perhaps I am mistaken, but—on the basis of what I have been able to understand—Searle's arguments 'against' the unconscious mental 'states' have all the same constraint, that is in order to be accessible to consciousness a mental state must be 'intentional' and so respect the 'basic structure'. To be more specific, in one of his last works Searle (2010) stated that 'the distinction between consciousness and unconsciousness and the distinction between intentional and non intentional cut across each other in such a way so as to give us four logically possible forms' (ibid., p. 26). These four possible forms, which all correspond to mental 'states', are the following:

- 1 – conscious intentional (e.g. 'I now want to eat a good meal at a local restaurant'; 1992, p. 176);
- 2 – unconscious intentional (e.g. 'I believe that George Washington was the first U.S. president even when I am not thinking about it, indeed, even when I am asleep'; Searle, 2010, p. 26);
- 3 – conscious nonintentional (e.g. pains and states of indirect anxiety; Searle, 2010, p. 17. Where 'indirect anxiety' refers to 'a state of anxiety or nervousness where I do not know what I am anxious or nervous about and may not be anxious or nervous *about* anything'; ibid. p. 26);
- 4 - unconscious nonintentional (Searle's words: 'I am not sure there are any examples', 2010, p. 26).

In order to comment on the above cases, we have to remember that according to Searle (2010), 'intentional states are always *about*, or *refer to* something' (ibid, p. 25): so the reason why 'pains and states of indirect anxiety' are catalogued as 'nonintentional' states is that—in his opinion—they are not 'about' (or do not 'refer' to) anything. On this subject, probably a Matte Blanco follower could point out that both such states (see '3' above) deal with emotions and so their 'aboutness' corresponds to an infinite set of possible meaning that consciousness can not contain. So, perhaps, Searle's grid doesn't cover emotions? Actually it seems that this is not the case. In fact, by modifying his basic structure, he wrote 'one can be in love with Sally or hate Bill or admire Thomas Jefferson, where the intentional state does not contain a whole propositional content but contains a representation of an *object*. We can represent this as S(n), as in 'Love(Sally)', 'Hate(Bill)' or 'Admire(Jefferson)' (ibid., p. 27). But, still again, a Matte Blanco follower could point out that, according to the symmetrical logic of emotions, a feeling of 'Love' doesn't exclude a simultaneous feeling of 'Hate' about the same person, just as—according the same logic—'Sally' may not refer just to 'Sally' but to an infinite set of possible 'things' (e.g. my mother, my teacher, my previous wife and so on).

Being a sensitive man, I do not think that Searle could deny such peculiar implications of the human mind and feelings; rather I believe that the very 'logic' of his model prevented him from thinking that (unconscious) emotions are 'intentional' (i.e. they are about 'something') and that—at *same time*—they *do not* follow the principle of contradiction. In fact, according to his model (Searle, 1979), an 'intentional' mental state must have a specific psychological mode, a specific representative content and a 'direction of fit' which determines its 'conditions of satisfaction' (i.e.

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<sup>30</sup> In my view, epistemology tries to clarify the logic of the 'triangulation' between the knowledge of our own minds, the knowledge of other minds and the knowledge of the shared environment (Davidson, 2001); whereas, through the subject/object dialectics, we deal with the use of such a 'triangulation' in real life and social practices.

the conditions under which it is true or false, right or wrong). But, how can we manage a 'condition of satisfaction' without resorting to the principle of contradiction?<sup>31</sup>

The fact is that, by assuming that there are 'two ways in which the world is reflected in man' (Matte Blanco, 1975a, p. 359), the Background presupposition of 'external realism' which Searle refers to can not be taken for granted. On the other hand we have to remember that—for him—'intentionality' is just 'the capacity of the mind by which it is directed at, or about, *objects and states of affairs in the world*' (Searle, 2010, p. 25; My italics). Yet, does recognize that the 'world' is not just the 'external' one means that one is against 'realism'? Personally I think that, also considering the 'logic' of 'institutional facts' studied by Searle, the assumption according to which there are 'two ways in which the world is reflected in man' seems the most 'realistic', especially because it helps to understand the so called 'irrational' behaviours and to manage the 'symbolic representations' which our author refers to (Searle, 2010, p. 16).

So, taking those thoughts one step further, when thinking about the relationships between 'reality' and emotions, how can we interpret Searle's repeated statements according to which the structure of both speech acts and mental states is so 'elegant' (Searle, 2010, pp. 16, 35, 38, 39)? Perhaps both the structure of the intentionality and its 'elegance' are *states of affairs* in the 'external' world? As a matter of fact, Searle's philosophical 'system' seems to be a sort of opposite altar of the philosophical path followed by Rorty in his book *Philosophy and the Mirror of Nature* (1979). In fact, both Searle's systematic 'realism' and the 'edifying' heideggerian philosophy which Rorty found shelter in seem to me two 'solutions' in which the real dialectics subject/object and so the real historical context in which we think and work is *well lost*. More specifically I think that Searle has proposed a sort of primacy of the 'object' and Rorty ended up 'confusing' the two different terms of the dialectical relation. So, by keeping to the point, we can better understand why Matte Blanco got in trouble when thinking about '*the phenomenon we call Consciousness*' (Matte Blanco, 1968a, p.26); in fact his vision of the 'homogeneous indivisible reality' is not so different from the 'edifying' heideggerian philosophy which Rorty referred to.

To be more specific, I think that the assumption that the symmetrical *being* is the 'true psychical *reality*' prevented Matte Blanco from understanding that the so called 'Consciousness' can establish a non-identity relation between mental processes (i.e. feeling and thinking) on the one hand and the 'reality' of the world<sup>32</sup> on the other. Moreover I think that he often contradicted himself simply because he never resolved the difference between the bi-modality of the Mind (i.e. asymmetrical and symmetrical thinking) and the Consciousness vs. Unconscious duality. In other words, I think that the so called Freud 'first topic', in which the duality Conscious vs. Unconscious is interpreted in spatial terms, just as 'The unconscious is the larger sphere, which includes within it

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<sup>31</sup> According to Searle, 'the loving relationship only exists within a Network of other intentional states. The beliefs and desires within the Network are in large part constitutive of loving relationship. An those elements of the Network do have a directions of fit with conditions of satisfaction' (2010, p. 32).

<sup>32</sup> According to Matte Blanco, it is the 'symmetrical mode' which 'which convinces us of the reality of the world beyond pure (logical) relations'. In fact he wrote: 'But there is another mode of being in man, apart from the intellect-logic or asymmetrical mode. (...) And this results in our feeling that the world is 'compact,' 'substantial,' something that can be touched, something in which one is immersed.

Perhaps it is here that we find the way towards the solution of the age-old dispute between idealism and realism. *Pure intellect-logic seems to lead necessarily to idealism (objective idealism)* (...) On the other hand, there is another aspect in us - our symmetrical mode - which convinces us of the reality of the world beyond pure relations. 1975a, pp. 389-390). That is to say that, according to our author, the real difference between 'inner world' and 'external world', just like the dialectics of their relationships, would be set up by the same logic of symmetrical thinking which, as we recall, results in the cancellation of all diversity. Moreover, by remembering that according to Matte Blanco 'our unconscious operates or thinks in a space of higher number of dimensions than that of our perceptions and our conscious thinking' (Matte Blanco, 1988, p. 105.), we could argue that for him the unconscious 'vision' is more 'realistic' than the conscious one for the very same reason that movies in 3D seem to be more 'realistic' than those in 2D.

the smaller sphere of the conscious' (Freud, 1900, p. 612), implies ontological assumptions that the bi-logical 'processes' seems to contradict. In particular, with regard to the '*the phenomenon we call Consciousness*', Matte Blanco's theory implies three different assumptions which can coexist just by 'killing' both the principle of contradiction and the non-identity principle:

- 1 – Conscious 'psychical manifestations' are always bi-modal;
- 2 – Consciousness is pure asymmetrical thinking<sup>33</sup>;
- 3 – Consciousness is part of the symmetrical being<sup>34</sup>.

In my opinion, the intrinsic contradiction within the above statements became patent when he tried to explain the '*reflectivity of consciousness upon itself*'. In fact, just after having reminded us that 'the activity of consciousness is asymmetrical activity', he argued that the 'reflectivity of thoughts, which establishes the difference between thoughts as objects of consciousness and thoughts as consciousness, point toward a mysterious indivisible unity', just as the same consciousness is symmetrical and the 'the infinite reflectibility of consciousness upon itself is a case of infinite set' (1975a; p. 228). So, by applying both the principle of symmetry and the logic of infinite sets, his reasoning would lead to the paradoxical conclusion that 'reflection on reflection' (i.e. thinking about thinking) is simply an Unconscious (i.e. symmetrical) process of our mind which – by definition - equate everything with everything else.

Since this point is extremely relevant to the understanding of how the Subject/Object dialectics can be blurred and to how the 'real' *context* of thinking can be 'well lost', in order to make my arguments clear I will refer to the basic structure which Matte Blanco refers to, that is the *triad* 'x R y' which in his opinion is the starting point of any logic and any thought (1975a, p. 357). So, following logic, let's try to analyse key statements like 'Consciousness (Subject) *thinks about* Consciousness (Object)' or 'Consciousness *reflects upon* Consciousness'. Then let's attempt to demonstrate why these statements do not refer to symmetrical relations, i.e. they refer to relations the converse of which *are not identical* to them and, above all, that such relations do not happen in a pure mental space. In fact we have to remember that 'reflection on reflection', as a 'psychical manifestation' and therefore as experience of a 'real' human being, is always bi-modal (i.e. it involves both thinking and feeling) and always happens in specific contexts.

Given that, commenting on symmetrical relations, the concept of 'relation' could be interpreted as referring either to the 'R' or to all three elements of Matte Blanco's basic structure (i.e. 'x R y') let's analyse these two cases one after the other.

*First case:* the concept of 'relation' refers to 'R' only.

By rights, because Matte Blanco himself (1975a, p. 31) makes reference to the definition below proposed by Whitehead and Russell (1950), this should be the more appropriate case.

'If *R* is any relation, the converse of *R* is the relation which holds between *y* and *x* whenever *R* holds between *x* and *y*. Thus *greater* is the converse of *less*, *before* of *after*, *cause* of *effect*, *husband* of *wife*, etc.' (ibid., p. 33)

So, for example:

'*x is before y*' has the converse '*y is after x*';

'*x is eating y*' has the converse '*y is eaten by x*'.

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<sup>33</sup> According to Matte Blanco 'the essence of consciousness is to distinguish and to differentiate' (1975a, p. 96) and 'the activity of consciousness is asymmetrical activity' (ibid., p. 228).

<sup>34</sup> According to Matte Blanco 'Symmetrical being is the normal state of man. It is the colossal base from which consciousness or asymmetrical being emerges' (1975a, p. 101).

Similarly:

'x *thinks about* y' has the converse 'y *is thought by* x';

'x *reflects upon* y' has the converse 'y *is the object upon which* x *is reflecting*'.

As a matter of fact, when I'm thinking about (or I'm reflecting upon) my projects, my projects are not symmetrically thinking about me (or they are not reflecting upon me). So, from this logic point of view, statements like 'Consciousness *thinks about* Consciousness' do not refer to any symmetrical relation.

*Second case:* the concept of 'relation' refers to the triad 'x R y'.

This case deserves special attention only because Matte Blanco, while commenting on the metaphor of 'two parallel mirrors' (1975a; p. 228)<sup>35</sup>, argued that Consciousness is – at the same time - the Subject (i.e. 'x') and the Object (i.e. 'y') of its reflections (i.e. 'R'), in such a way that in this case all three elements of his basic structure are Consciousness '*thoughts*'.

I have some reasonable doubts about the fact that the recursive reflectivity of 'Consciousness' to which he refers is 'real' and, above all, I doubt that it would correspond to some infinite set. But the real issue is another: *reflection of Consciousness upon itself is not a kind of symmetrical relation*, even though - under certain circumstances – it could also become such or it could be symbolized as such.

From my point of view, the conditions under which we could reasonably state that the relation in question (i.e. 'x R y') is a symmetrical one (i.e. 'x R y = y R x') may be two, obviously one as an alternative to the other:

a) to interpret the two occurrences of the term 'Consciousness' (i.e. 'x' and 'y') as *signs* which do not refer to any thinking *subject*, but to an abstract entity (e.g. the *notion* or the *concept* of Consciousness) which in both cases is the same; in which case, following the principle of symmetry - that is swapping the reciprocal positions of 'x' and 'y' – we could rightly conclude that 'x = y'<sup>36</sup>. As a consequence, the first reflectivity of Consciousness would be a mere tautology (like 'A is A') and all further 'reflection on reflection' would be equally and necessarily tautological.

b) to interpret the two occurrences of the term 'Consciousness' (i.e. 'x' and 'y') as both referring to the same ontological subject (e.g. '*I*', '*myself*', '*the individual so and so*', '*us*', '*they*', "*the Being*"), in which case, to ensure the applicability of the principle of symmetry, namely to ensure the mutual interchangeability of 'x' and 'y', the same subject should remain fixed and unchanged over time, that is without any variation of his states of consciousness. Which, although in different ways, brings us once again to a tautology: 'A' is 'A'.

As can be seen, in both the above cases the principle of symmetry is respected only because their premises refer to identity relations (i.e. 'Consciousness *is identical to* Consciousness' or 'x = y') which, by definition, are symmetrical; so, for that very reason, the reflection of 'Consciousness upon itself' can be interpreted as a tautology which does not produce any new knowledge.

Now let's try interpreting 'Consciousness *reflects upon* Consciousness' as a sentence referring to a mental event or, more simply, to some human being's thoughts. In this case, also according to Matte Blanco, we must remember that 'thinking is a process, an event or series of events, it is something that *happens*' (1975a, p. 234) and that the logic of every thought involves 'the triad of something, something else and relation' (1975a, p. 324). So, if we want avoid falling into tautology,

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<sup>35</sup> 'Consciousness can be compared to a pair of parallel mirrors standing in front each other. If no object is reflected in them, then one mirror reflects the other and the other the first (...) and so till infinity' (Matte Blanco, 1975a, p. 238).

<sup>36</sup> In this case the conclusion is already implicit in the premise.



we must admit that between the Consciousness which is the subject of reflection (i.e. our 'x') and the Consciousness which is the object of same reflection (i.e. our 'y') there is a non-identity relation. More specifically, we must 'think' that - in both cases - the *context* 'K' (internal and/or external) to which 'x' refers on one side and that to which 'y' refers on the other are not identical. In fact, in one case the context is that in which Consciousness is *now* thinking ('x') and in the other case the context is that in which Consciousness was thinking *before* ('y'). Thus, treating this 'x – y' relation as symmetrical - that is equalizing and exchanging the states and the positions of 'x' and 'y' – would mean denying both differences in time and in context, the effect therefore being the application of the logic of symmetrical Unconscious. That the latter situation is a real risk for any 'reflection on reflection' attempt has been proven by numerous writings of philosophers and psychologists, including those of Matte Blanco; but the history of culture also demonstrates that recognizing this risk does not necessarily mean falling into the logic of symmetrical thinking and its tautological form.

Having said that, how can we rethink the supposed '*infinite reflectibility of consciousness upon itself*'? Following the argument developed so far, we should be able to agree on the fact that – as an *event* - each *act* of reflection is different and that - in each act - subject and object vary according to the contexts. This means that, by considering subsequent acts, both subject and object do not remain identical to themselves; therefore, they are not interchangeable. Consequently, the levels of 'reflection on reflection' can not be multiplied and *every act* of 'reflection on reflection' is always *unique* and *different* from others. In other words, the '*infinite reflectibility of consciousness upon itself*' is just a 'fiction' created by mental operations that treats 'subjects', 'objects' and 'acts' as logical operators ('x', 'R', 'y') on which – if we like – it is possible to exercise a sort of tightrope thinking. Moreover, if we consider the fact that, unlike the non-stop activity of our thinking, we can - at any time and under certain circumstances - 'activate' or 'suspend' a 'reflection on reflection' process, we come to the conclusion that this process is the more fleeting and therefore the more finite of our mind.

In conclusion, it is my belief that, by reifying the structure of their logical models, even sustaining different ontological assumptions concerning the 'reality' of the Unconscious on the one hand and of Consciousness on the other, both Matte Blanco and Searle mixed ontology and spatial metaphors in order to account for the *dynamics* of the Mind. In particular I think that the main reason why Matte Blanco continued to use the spatial (and so 'topical') duality Consciousness vs. Unconscious was that his logical models did not allow him to account for mental *changes*, in the specific sense that logical models can describe the 'structure' of mental events but not their 'dynamics' and their relations to the context. On the contrary, spatial metaphors, including the various geometric transformations which he proposed (Matte Blanco, 1975a, pp. 408-414) allow us to discuss about mental phenomena like 'become conscious', 'enter consciousness', 'level of consciousness' and so on. But one must tread carefully because 'spatial' metaphors can also play against the bi-modality of the mind. For example, as Searle argued, we can not think of unconscious states 'as being like submerged fish or like furniture in the dark attic of the mind'; in fact, in his opinion 'these pictures are inadequate in principle because they are based on the idea of a reality which appears and then disappears. But in the case of consciousness, the only reality is the appearance. The submerged belief, unlike the submerged fish, can't keep its conscious shape even when unconscious; for the only reality of that shape is the shape of conscious thoughts. To repeat, *the ontology of the unconscious is strictly the ontology of a neurophysiology capable of generating conscious.*' (Searle, 1963, pp. 63-64; Author's italics).

So, as in both cases the mental 'reality' is supposed to be just one (i.e. the 'Consciousness' for Searle and the 'Unconscious' or 'symmetrical being' for Matte Blanco), we could argue that the dynamics of 'becoming conscious'—which express something concerning the relation of the mind to the context—in Searle's case is represented as a sort of ontological change (i.e. from the 'neurophysiological' to the 'mental' ontology) whereas in Matte Blanco's case it turns out to be a sort of 'mysterious meeting of the symmetrical and asymmetrical modes' (1975a, p. 390) simply

because in his opinion the symmetrical and 'indivisible' *being* 'doesn't happen, but just *is*' (1975a, p. 101).

### *Conclusion*

In specific contexts, when thinking about the dichotomy Consciousness vs. Unconscious we often risk losing the thread of our reasoning, i.e. we experience a 'mental phenomenon' which, according to scientific commonsense, should be explained by the same theories of the Mind. But the fact is that no 'general theory' of the Mind can explain such a phenomenon.

To put it in metaphorical language, try to replace 'Time' with 'Mind' in the following passage by J.L. Borges (1946, p. 290):

Time is a river that sweeps me along, but I am the river; it is a tiger that mangles me, but I am the tiger; it is a fire that consumes me, but I am the fire. The world, unfortunately, is real; I, unfortunately, am Borges.

In my opinion such an outstanding insight ends up with a 'realistic' statement only because Borges was aware of the fact that the real dialectics in which—as human beings—we are involved is not simply 'internal' to our mind or between its conscious and unconscious states (or between its asymmetrical and symmetrical thoughts).

To make this point clear, I refer to Searle's assumption according to which Mind is a higher-level feature of our brain in the 'utterly harmless sense' in which liquidity is a higher-level of water and H<sub>2</sub>O molecules (Searle, 1992, p. 14). Thus, let's imagine Mind to be the liquidity of the sea. The question is: does it make sense to think that waves (i.e. mental phenomena) are simply following the 'logic' of the sea? So, what about cliffs, winds, earthquakes, pollution and other contextual effects? Indeed we can study the dynamics of waves and the biological phenomena which happen in the sea (i.e. the brain). Equally, following Matte Blanco we could observe that each wave is different from the others (i.e. asymmetrical thinking) and, at the same time, each wave *is* the sea (i.e. symmetrical thinking). But the fact is that each of us is simply a sort of fisherman who, in order to do his work, needs (and has) a 'theory' of fishing in specific seas, but do not need a general and acontextual theory of the sea. Out the metaphor, the only theories we really need are those which help us to manage our social practises and to negotiate our declarations like 'X counts Y in the Context C'; not least because social sciences are social practices too and 'practice has a logic which is not that of the logician' (Bourdieu, 1980, p. 86). In fact any practice involves contextual relations which are not just thoughts of any logical or bi-logical mind and 'scientific construction cannot grasp the principles of practical logic without forcibly changing their nature' (ibid. p. 90).

So, if required, we can certainly continue to use the dichotomy Conscious vs. Unconscious within specific contexts. Equally we can continue playing with the infinite number of web connections that such a dichotomy evokes in our language and our culture (e.g. rationality vs. irrationality, individual vs. society, order vs. chaos, normal vs. abnormal, Yang vs. Yin, Platonist vs. Aristotelian and so on); but I propose that we stop thinking that one of the two terms corresponds to a specific 'reality' or that one of them corresponds to the 'known' and the other one to the 'unknown'. Actually, neither the Consciousness nor the Unconscious are 'real', in the sense that neither of them has a specific ontological status nor corresponds to a distinct phenomenon; rather their dialectics express something which is beyond themselves. In other words I am suggesting that the real dialectics is between 'mental' and 'non-mental' phenomena, between us and the other 'real' beings in specific and historical contexts. So, for this very reason, when thinking 'ontologically' and 'systematically' about the Mind we risk coming back to our baseline. For example, by commenting the semiotic square presented in the first section of this paper, we could observe that not by accident both the paths followed by Matte Blanco and Searle come back to their starting point. That is to say that, in philosophical terms, both of them ended up dealing with a sort of

'subjectivized' Object (or 'objectivated' Subject) whose names are respectively 'Unconscious' and 'Consciousness'.

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