

The unconscious in Ignacio Matte Blanco's thought

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Introduction

Think about the manifold, variegated and elusive fate of Sigmund Freud's greatest discovery, the unconscious system. In putting forward his proposed theory, Freud was already presenting two separate modes of considering the unconscious. In the *first topology* he considers it as the real psychical reality, and bases it on the five now familiar characteristics¹: condensation; displacement; absence of mutual contradiction between the presentation of the various impulses, absence of negation; absence of time; replacement of external by psychical reality. In the *second topology*, however, he proposes a structural conception of the mind, where the unconscious system is "materialized" in a "deep" component or *Id*, which is opposed by the *Super Ego* and the *Ego* as links with reality: an internalized reality that is controlling and punitive, the *Super Ego*; a reality with which to establish an adaptive relationship, through the functions of the *Ego*.

It is interesting to consider the success of Freud's second proposal, if compared to the first. With the structural conception of the mind, there is a sort of reification of the psychoanalytic theory: there is a "deep place" of impelling drives aiming to make a sensual assault, or rather, to sensualize every aspect of reality; the pressure of these drives (single or double, in the various phases of elaboration) clashes with the needs of reality. It is a reality that is culturally influenced and characterized by impelling moralistic demands, as has often been said about the cultural system in which Sigmund Freud worked and put forward his psychoanalytic theory. Hence, repression, in the sense of an operation with which the subject tries to keep in his unconscious the representations (thoughts, images, memories) linked to a drive. Repression comes into play in cases where the satisfaction of a drive – in itself prone to procure pleasure – risks causing displeasure in view of other needs (Laplanche & Pontalis, 1967).

Hence the need to "come to terms" with the (cultural) reality. To this end two components of the mind were proposed: the *Ego* as the mediator between drives and reality; the *Super Ego* as controller, deriving from the interiorization of parental or authority figures from early childhood. This *punch and judy show* made up of mental components struggling dialectically with each other, appears to be simultaneously easy and fascinating in the description of the affairs of the human mind. How often, in language that has crossed over from the strictly psychoanalytical field and is now rampant in the mass media, have we heard about the demands of the *Super Ego*, of shameful drives closely connected to sexuality, of the *Ego's* defences, of the weak or fragile *Ego*, as well as the inflexible, overpowering *Super Ego*! The structural topology provides a model that seems to us to be more narrative than dynamic. This model clearly shows what is normal and what is not; neurosis makes its sticking appearance in the psychoanalytical conception of the mind and the "functioning" of the *Ego*, the "force" of the *Super Ego*, the excessive unchecked power of "deep drives" become elements that describe the gap between normality and pathology. Pathology is therefore "objectivized", losing its "subjective" value to enter the diagnosis which becomes medicalized, and sanctions the model and the divergence from the model. The question of "unconscious fantasies", of their transgressive force, which is disturbing because it is related to sexuality or to aggressive violence, predominates in the second topology. These dimensions guide man's individual behaviour and are manifested when there is a collapse of the inhibitions that allow people to live together without being subjected to the problematic expression of drives, of unconscious fantasies, i.e. of "deep" demands. In contrast, on the basis of Matte Blanco's thought, we intend to look at the emotional symbolic way in which the objects of the contextual reality are collusively elaborated.

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¹ We use the five features as they are found in Matte Blanco (1975).

We also intend to consider how feasible it is to think about collusive emotional symbolization so as to give meaning to the symbolization itself, reducing its polysemy and making it a constructive element that enables development and social product to be constructed. The implications of the two Freudian models are clearly very different. In the second topology we are forced into a specific irreducible individualistic choice, where drives and unconscious fantasies are typical of the single individual and can only find a collective manifestation in the crowd, in social contexts where inhibitions have little influence. The latter, deriving from the demands of reality or from internalized norms, are supposedly the only factors able to hinder the devastating expression of unconscious fantasies; civilization, coexistence, ways of organizing the product and knowledge, are the results of these hindrances to devastating unconscious fantasies. It is a very different conception of the unconscious that we embrace, based on Freud's first proposal. Here, the unconscious, in the sense of the emotional elaboration of the contextual and primarily social reality, shared in a process that, as we have just said, we call collusion, is the constructor of man's productivity in his social relations. Just a small historical footnote: in an old revision of the concept of the unconscious (Jervis, 1967) – from the mid-1960s – all trace of the first topology had already vanished. The focus is only on the second, the future mother of the new – cognitive – unconscious. The Freudian unconscious is summed up by Jervis in terms of psychic activity unknown to consciousness, and whose roots are found not in psychology but in philosophy and in the psychiatry that existed before the discovery of psychoanalysis. It is psychic activity unknown to consciousness, more unruly than the cognitive unconscious: it is obscure, instinctual, rejected and therefore repressed. As far as the first topology is concerned today, it is found infrequently, often in a pallid form and with no acknowledgment of its ancestry, having lost the emotional and polysemic wealth and the model that grounded it in the narrative logic – as opposed to scientific logic – of an area of cultural psychology.

Currently the unconscious is being rediscovered, but in a guise that leaves us at a loss. What has prevailed, in fact, is the tendency to equate the idea of the unconscious to that of “not conscious”. In Oliverio (1998) the term “unconscious” appears in this sense, as a forgotten experience. Cognitivism and constructivism direct attention to inner regulating mechanisms that govern the search for, the elaboration and generation of information; these are non-conscious mechanisms. The unconscious can finally be legitimated as the object of scientific enquiry. Castelfranchi (1997) says that, differentiating itself from simple stimulus-response and from the black box of behaviorism, cognitivism started firstly from the very idea that these learning and association models are not enough to account for thought and language or other higher human cognitive activities. How are these higher activities defined? Consciousness is put aside. The processes of elaborating information are not conscious. It is therefore supposed that we are not capable of knowing the rules governing the way we elaborate incoming information, in our knowledge-getting system. Most cognitive processes are of an unconscious kind, that is, they are “silent or tacit” processes. This kind of self-regulation, based on processes that are largely unconscious and that tend to be natural and universal, takes the place of reflection, of emotional thought. Just one more brief comment on the cognitivist unconscious, thanks to Legrenzi (2002). This author identifies Chomsky as the founding father of the new unconscious. Why Chomsky? Because he puts forward the rules underlying language; rules not known by the speaker. Having acknowledged the limits of human rationality, which does not have the assumptions of scientific rationality, we explain its adaptational working by referring to evolution that removed intellectual limits, producing automatic, unconscious processes, with neurophysiological underpinnings. This is why man should not be studied in a historical context, but in a natural one. Culture or education are not relevant, since they act, according to the author, on a plane that is more precisely emotional. In short, what is sought are rules, not motivations. The mind is organized by rules, of which the user knows very little; and it seems that it is those rules that count. The first topology is more complex, in that it sees the unconscious as the “real psychic reality” and develops a specific logic for it. This logic is visible in the language of dreams, in psychotic thought as well as in the psychopathology of daily life.

1975 was an important year in the history of psychoanalysis. Two books came out that were of interest due to the “transgressive” theory they proposed. Both were written by psychoanalysts working in Italy. Franco Fornari published, “Genitalità e cultura” [Genitality and Culture] for Feltrinelli; Ignacio Matte Blanco's “The Unconscious as Infinite Sets” would reach Italy in 1981, published by Einaudi.

With these two books, psychoanalytical theorization returns to the first topology, highlighting its psychological connotations. This sort of “transgression” was perhaps made possible by the cultural climate of contestation of static knowledge and militant orthodoxy in social systems; the student movement had brought this contestation to the fore in European culture from '68 onwards. Fornari and Matte Blanco put forward a theory of the mind, rejecting the narration of the historically dated ups and downs of drives in models taken from the culture of the outside world. This theory of the mind places crucial importance on the unconscious system, described in its working and its principles, so as to configure a real general psychology of the mind's unconscious mode of being. The roads taken by the two authors are different: Matte Blanco examines the logic of the unconscious system, while Fornari focuses on the “few things the unconscious talks about” which he calls “coinemes”. Both of them lay the foundations for a notion of the unconscious that follows its own laws, unlike those of “scientific” thought which is based on principles of identity and of non-contradiction. Matte Blanco's thought is therefore in the domain of Freud's first topology. It is interesting to see that in the first topology, Freud separated his clinical contribution, tied to the classical cases, from his theoretical work which set out to define and identify the features of the unconscious system. The unconscious system did not characterize “illness” as opposed to “normality”, but intended to define a specific, highly important area of mental functioning. The first topology, as we have said, can be seen as a “general psychology” proposal designed to define the functioning of an area of the mind with its specific characteristics, markedly different from the mode of the “conscious” mind, or rather, from scientific thought. As has often been said, the unconscious feature has nothing to do with the thinking individual's absence of consciousness. *The unconscious is not opposed to consciousness, but to the “unthinkable” aspect of a mental process that by its very nature eludes the conscious organization of thought.* The unconscious, may we reiterate, since this aspect of the Freudian idea is not always clear, does not mean “beyond consciousness”; it in fact indicates mental dimensions that are extremely difficult to translate into scientific thought, being outside its rules and the language used to communicate them. This is the “clinical” diversity between the first and the second topology: the first offers a mental system complete unto itself, with its own logic and its own language which corresponds to the language of the emotions; the second, on the other hand, envisages a series of mental components with their own content and their own process. In the first topology the normal and the pathological are adjoining without a clear division; in the second the parameters of normality and pathology are defined, introducing the “medicalization” of psychoanalysis.

Matte Blanco revived the first topology in a historical period, the mid-Seventies, when, thanks to a long process of scientific legitimation of the treatment, psychoanalysis was pursuing a prestigious place in the area of medical intervention for the care of mental illnesses. We can still remember, at the end of the Sixties, the emotion of some psychoanalysts who, at a psychoanalysis conference, presented the first Italian “professor of psychiatry” who was also a psychoanalyst. In a context of Italian psychoanalysis where the few psychoanalysts operating in the country were mainly doctors who in their youth had decided to become “deserters” from the university institutes of Psychiatry to devote themselves to a science and to a profession with little scientific credibility and with a professional position decidedly on the fringe.

In the Seventies, due in part to the presence of some psychoanalysts on the teaching staff of the first degree courses in Psychology, there was an explosion of cultural and professional demand for psychoanalysis in our country. Amidst the transmission of psychoanalytic models, this growth saw the dominance of the easier “dynamic psychology” associated with the second topology; the first topology was difficult and tricky to understand, being erroneously classified as the sectorial “economic” topology (in contrast to the “structural” or “dynamic” topology) and seen as being a left-over from the theoretical offering that was gradually taking shape from the original Freudian proposal.

Matte Blanco changed everything, and not only in Italy. The reactions to his proposal were admittedly of a theoretical, conceptual kind, designed to cast doubt on what he was proposing about the “logic of the infinite” as a metaphor and/or model of the unconscious system, but they were also incredulous reactions, in some respects scandalized by the profound criticism made by Matte Blanco's thought as regards the clinical model based on the second topology, in the obvious, highly meaningful clinical component that his proposal entailed. One of us recalls long years of analysis during the Seventies and early Eighties, with the Chilean psychoanalyst. In this analysis one

experienced *in corpore vili* the profound clinical power of Matte Blanco's thought. Let us look at some aspects of it.

The clinical power of Matte Blanco's proposal

An understanding of the events of the treatment comes firstly from the emotions felt by the psychoanalyst in the psychoanalytical relationship. What the psychoanalyst "understands" of the analytical relationship, can only be "experienced" by his mind's unconscious mode of being. It might be objected that this statement applies to any theoretical option underpinning psychoanalytical practice. We think that this is true "on paper", not in the pragmatic reality of many psychoanalysts oriented towards the second topology. The mechanicalism of the structural approach can get the upper hand and the observation of structural processes can actually represent the only category for interpreting the patient's story. The psychoanalyst who "observes" the inner dynamics of the Ego, the Superego and Id in the patient, may lose sight of his own emotions and the relationship that is generated by the emotional interaction; he may transform the interest in the relationship and in the affective experiences it arouses into a narration of the other's intrapsychic story. What loses out in this case is the importance of the relationship as the central critical element of psychoanalytic theory and practice. It is the importance of the *relationship* in its emotional, in other words collusive, dimension. It should be underlined here that the specific meaning attached to the term "relationship" is that of the symbolic affective sharing of all the features of a social relationship. This is quite different from the many other meanings of the term: for instance, those concerning the relational mind, in the sense that psychopathology, as well as normal functioning, are explained as the result of a construction, starting from the major affective experiences in childhood, of "operative models" or cognitive-affective-behavioral patterns that act at the unconscious level as motivational programs, guiding the adult's behavior according to expectations, motivations, behavioral reactions etc., actually deriving from the interpersonal relations of the past (Dazzi & De Coro, 2007).

In the perspective of this quotation, as in many other psychoanalytical viewpoints, the relationship is not seen in the *hic et nunc* of relating so much as in how relationships from childhood or from the past influence the single individual, "the behaviors of the adult person" considered from an irreducibly individualistic angle. Such individualistic positions are legitimate; but they are not to be confused with the relational perspective, where the focus is on the emotional dynamic underpinning and constructing the psychoanalyst-patient relationship, as well as all relations within social experience.

Freud's first topology makes a direct, central reference to the relationship between psychoanalyst and patient, but it does so in an absolutely peculiar way: a modality that passes through the emotional experience and the characteristics taken on by this experience in the light of the clinical implications of the mind's unconscious mode of being. Notice that it is the mind's unconscious mode of being in the patient and in the psychoanalyst. While in the second topology the assumption of the "normal" situation of the psychoanalyst's mind can be confirmed, therefore sanctioning the making of a "diagnosis" of what is happening in the patient's inner world, in the first topology this assumption of normality has no sense².

² In the "assumption of normality" of the psychoanalyst or of the clinical psychologist, one assumes as "true" the idea that clinical psychology must deal with problematic people, and therefore with people that depend on the psychologist and on the defining knowledge, often incorrectly called diagnostic knowledge, which he may have of the problematic other. Assuming that the other person is problematic and goes to the psychologist, *the latter, by definition, thanks to his capacity to know and at the same time in order to legitimate this competence in knowing and classifying the other, must be free of problems*. This is specific to this view of psychology, as it is to psychiatry, but not to surgery, orthopaedics or paediatrics. Let us illustrate this: a surgeon who operates on a gastric tumor must possess a good operating technique, but he is not required to be free of tumors, and in particular, of gastric tumors. An orthopaedic specialist who treats scoliosis certainly does not need to prove that he himself has a healthy spinal column without scoliosis. But a clinical psychologist who treats people affected by panic attack disorders "cannot" be affected by the same disorder, or by other problems cited in the Diagnostic and statistical manual of mental disorders (DSM). In a sense the clinical psychologist, as well as the psychiatrist, is presumed to be "normal". This *presumption of normality* must be guaranteed by long years of study, by personal experience of psychotherapy, by the supervision of clinical cases treated in the initial phase

The principle of *symmetry* and that of *generalization*, proposed by Matte Blanco following the Freudian hypothesis on the unconscious, have the power to destructure any relationship between cognitive objects, within what is experienced in the mind's unconscious mode of being. If the two principles worked without interference by the cognitive system and by heterogenic-dividing thinking, our mind would plunge into a terrible state of anguish, which the Chilean psychoanalyst calls a state of "non existence".

We will try to clarify this point with the example of a patient's short dream. This was a man of about forty, married with no children, a successful professional in a large town in Lazio. This person came to analysis because he felt there were problems in his affective life: though deeply in love with his wife with whom he shares the family and professional life, he has not sex with her for some years. For him this is not important, since affection and love have not disappeared with the absence of sex; in fact, he feels they have been strengthened. His wife, however, shows signs of impatience; it seems that she has fallen in love with another person, she wants a separation, while continuing to work together professionally. The man is frightened by the idea of separation, although in a sense he feels it is inevitable. He comes to analysis to face up to this confused and painful situation. After a few months of analysis he has the following dream:

I'm out in the street, I see a very beautiful woman and I feel a sexual attraction for her; the woman is indefinite, with no face. While I'm realizing my attraction, I see my wife passes close by me, staring into space; I hope she looks at me, but my wife passes by my side without showing signs of recognizing me and disappears into the distance.

Matte Blanco talks about the mind's unconscious mode of being as a "homogeneous and indivisible" modality, which is consistent with the principles of *generalization and symmetry* used by the unconscious mind to deal with elements of reality. At the same time, he talks about a "heterogenic-dividing" modality³ as regards the mind that generates scientific thought, where the function of the mind is principally that of establishing relations between aspects of reality.

of professional experience; in short, by lengthy training. The future clinical psychologist who wants to practise psychotherapy must submit to and accept long years of training, often very long due to the periodic repetition of training, in order to gain some recognition as a member of a society. It is this membership that acts as the guarantee of normality, and therefore as the guarantee of being free from the disorders that would cast doubt on his knowledge-getting and therapeutic intervention with the person who is "ill". Not enough attention has been given, perhaps, to this presumption of normality in the clinical psychologist, necessary when the individualistic perspective is adopted and when psychotherapy or the psychological intervention are defined as treatments for people who are disturbed, ill, suffering, affected by psychic distress, mental disorders or other definitions of this kind. This presumption of normality associated to the knowledge of the other entailed in the psychodiagnosis, however it is understood and defined, structures a specific relationship of 'enacted power'. This 'enacted power' envisages that the person who "is sick" is dependent on whoever works to make him well, therefore to bring him back to the norm. Etymologically, *normal* refers to he who adheres to the norm; in Latin, *norma* means "square" as a measuring tool; normal therefore refers to "he who is made according to the square, who is at right angles"; hence having rectitude or the expectation of normality. In short, the adjective 'normal' applies to the person who conforms, who stays within the lines foreseen by pre-established expectations; *the closeness of normality and conformity is very clear*. This presumption of normality is not only in the expectations and in the identity of the clinical psychologist, the psychotherapist or the psychiatrist. It is also the fundamental component of the social system's expectations of those who have to or who can deal with psychic suffering. Society's expectation of normality seems to be the price the clinical psychologist has to pay, in view of the great power entrusted to him with the client's assumption of dependence on him, necessary on the part of the person who wants to be treated. This presumption of normality (or, if you like, of conformity) is, in our view, one of the main factors in the creation of the process of *deformation* in clinical training in psychology, if it is oriented to the individualist paradigm. Arrogance, emotional detachment, false modesty, omnipotent behavior, tendency to behave like an oracle, affected approachableness and serenity, falsely benevolent smile always present in the facial expression, disturbing calmness, all this and other things as well, characterize our clinical psychologist ready to take care of the sick "other", from the starting point of his own competent "normality".

³ It has been pointed out various times that the two expressions used by Matte Blanco are intrinsically different: in the "heterogenic-dividing" modality what is indicated is an action and a process modulated in time: there is an act of division, of differentiation, which gives rise to heterogeneity among the elements of reality

Let us look at the dream. It should be remembered however that our *written version* of the dream in this article and the patient's *narration* of the dream come about with the mediation of language. It is a language expressed in a narrative sense, and therefore in a heterogenic-dividing modality. This is the first problem, from the clinical point of view. Not from the theoretical modellistic point of view. It is in fact established and accepted that, in order to talk about the theory of the unconscious, one uses scientific thinking, which underpins relationships and establishes dividing bonds between the various aspects of the theory. It is thus agreed to talk about the unconscious in a symbolic universe that does not belong to the unconscious, and which "thinks about" what happens in the unconscious dynamic. It is agreed, therefore, to establish a relation between what happens in the unconscious system and what we say "about the unconscious", starting from heterogenic-dividing thought. But let us get back to the clinical aspect: the clinic of the unconscious. Admittedly, it is not possible to talk about the dream, to interpret it and to use the interpretation in the practice of psychoanalysis, without using language. This is the paradoxical problem, at least on the surface: one can use "unconscious" clinical material, domesticating⁴ it into a language made to establish relations within the practice of interpretation, based on the relationship between patient and psychoanalyst. This is possible if however some directions are followed, taken from the theory of the unconscious. One solution may be not to treat the dream as a "story", that is, as an organized narration with a meaning deriving from its insertion in time and space. Instead, the dream can be looked at by using the dense words⁵ that occur throughout it. We therefore have a sequence of the type: woman – street – beautiful – indefinite – sexual attraction. And also: close by – wife – pass by – staring into space – non recognition – distance.

We could think of the contrast between the "street woman" who attracts and the "wife" who passes, and disappears in the distance perhaps she passes into another life. Another contrast is that between the woman-that-attracts as in "life" and the wife-that-disappears into the distance as in "death".

Let us consider the word "indefinite", used to describe the alluring woman: *finis* is the boundary, the limit, with the reinforcement of *de*; the negation of what is definite, of what has a limit, a boundary, involves the lack of a precise figure or a face with a recognizable shape. This recalls the impossibility of defining, or of giving a face to the woman that attracts, and therefore of being attracted to a precise woman, endowed with an identity that allows a relationship of attraction, or if you like, a sexual relationship. But the converse is also true: due to the principle of symmetry, the

that will later be placed in relation to each other. In the "homogeneous and indivisible" modality, on the other hand, what is indicated is a state without a process of becoming; this modality, like quicksand, seems to attract and swallow up whatever comes into contact with it.

⁴ We are again using the terms of Matte Blanco. Remember that "domesticate" derives from *domestico*, from the Latin *domus* (house). To domesticate therefore means bringing into the house of what is usual and known, that which is foreign (*forestiero* in Italian) (from the Latin *foris*, meaning outside, outside the house). On this see the interesting work by Padiglione (1994) where the wild pig is symbolically contrasted to the domestic pig.

⁵ On this see Carli & Panicia (2002). Dense words are the components of a text (written or spoken) with maximum polysemy and minimum ambiguity. We know that words are divided into two broad categories, when seen from the clinical psychology point of view: dense words (*high polysemy and low ambiguity*) and non-dense words (*low polysemy and high ambiguity*). The latter acquire meaning in the linguistic context so they evoke a low "emotional symbolisation". An example is the word "go": go home, go well, go for a walk, go and not come back. The word acquires meanings that are symbolically different, if it appears in different language contexts. It is an ambiguous word which gets meaning only from the language context it is part of so it is a word that taken alone has low polysemy: what it evokes emotionally is closely connected to the language context. If on the other hand we consider the words "go away", as a single specific language expression, then this evokes a great, dense emotionality. This applies, consistent with the "density" of the expression "go away", which can be evoked and experienced in an involving way, independent of the language context where the expression is found. Let us now think of the word "bomb": the emotional dynamic evoked is again very strong and tends to be univocal in its affective sense (evoking destruction, sudden explosion, desertification of a place, disaster, death, things and people torn apart ...and so on ad infinitum), again independent of the language context of which it is part.

We have called these polysemic words or expressions, "dense" words. Dense, with reference to the intense emotional symbolization, tendentially infinite, that they can evoke in those who utter them, hear them or read them in a text.

man who is attracted to an indefinite woman, is also the indefinite woman that is attracted by the dreaming man. While attraction means “be brought towards” from the Latin *ad trahere*, the indefinite blocks the direction of ‘being brought’: the indefiniteness makes attraction fail, it makes it impossible. The woman in the street, on the other hand, is indefinite and makes attraction impossible: think of the illusion of a relationship with a prostitute, a woman one cannot possess and who does not give herself unless it is in the situation of prostitution, with no participation, no reciprocity, without responding with any possible attraction. In the symmetrical, the woman is attracted by the man, but in this case it is the man that does not give himself, who cannot reciprocate the attraction, who does not know how to have a sexual relationship based on reciprocity. In both situations, of the impossible woman and the impossible self, the man cannot have a relationship outside the relationship with his wife, that is, outside, “in the street”. He can, however, hope for an exchange of glances with his wife “who passes by” and disappears into the distance. This means a wife who has passed into another life as far as sex is concerned. She can reciprocate the gaze of one who does not come up to her, but at the same time she is already close, being tied to him by the bond of marriage.

Let us look at the term “without recognising me”: the non recognition. Re-cognise (from the Latin *re-cognosco*) means knowing a second time, and implies meta knowledge; if you like, a reciprocity as the outcome of second order knowledge in a relationship. The dead woman, therefore, is dead because there is no possibility of recognising, and therefore of reciprocating, the man’s emotions and affects. But according to the principle of symmetry, the converse is also true: it is the man that does not recognise his wife, he does not let her live sexually and emotionally.

In sum, the man seems to be split between the *two female figures of impotence*: impotence towards a woman who is attractive because she is indefinite, towards the wife because she is dead, in relationships where there is no possibility of reciprocity. At the same time, he communicates that his sexual desire has been revived, albeit for the woman in the street, the woman who is indefinite and therefore impossible.

It can be seen that the dream has endless meanings, if by ‘meaning’ we are referring to the translation of the emotional dream message into communicable common parlance. This is the great teaching of Matte Blanco and of his proposed “logical” systematisation of the mind’s unconscious mode of being. In the domain of clinical practice, dream production and free associations can be considered a “goldmine” of data in which all we can do is dig. While by *data mining* we usually refer to the extraction of useful data with the use of mathematical analysis applied to a data set of great size, here the data base is not “great” in terms of the quantity of data but in terms of its *infinite connotations*. Dense words mediate between the mind’s unconscious mode of being and what we can know of this mode of being, accepting its domestication through the language used to express it. Language, as the expression of the heterogenic-dividing world, has its grammatical, syntactic and pragmatic expressions that can be analysed psychoanalytically, through the symbolic dimensions expressed. On this, the analysis made by Franco Fornari on the fable of the Slav peasant woman has become famous: this peasant was complaining that her husband no longer loved her, in fact he hadn’t beaten her for a few weeks. Fornari’s interpretation revolved around the symbolic dimension equating the stick to the penis, and thus translating the fable as a complaint by the peasant woman about her husband’s sexual neglect. Here, moreover, the symbolic correspondence enables the fable to be translated in a non polysemic way. This impoverishes the polysemy of a dense word like “stick”. It also ignores another aspect of the fable, such as that of *complaining* as a neo-emotional⁶ expression of possession in a relationship where exchange is not envisaged.

What is proposed, in accordance with Matte Blanco’s teaching, is more complex: it involves deconstructing the dream “story”, identifying the polysemic nuclei present in the dense words of the verbalized dream, extracting the sense from among the infinite possible translations of the polysemy, and strategically choosing, within the dynamics of the historically situated psychoanalytical treatment, the meaning that is closest to the possible development of the patient

⁶ The concept of neo-emotion was proposed by R. Carli and R.M. Panizza (2002, 2003, 2005) to indicate emotional dimensions designed to construct collusive social relations, namely modes of relating that are shared within a social context, being based on common ways of affectively symbolizing the context itself. The neo-emotions are: *obliging, expecting, controlling, distrusting, provoking, complaining, and worrying*. They are emotional processes that do not belong to the individual, and to his intrapsychic world, like the emotions of anger, joy, fear, but are always related to social relations.

and of the relationship with him. When seen in this historical perspective, the dream enables the patient to be offered his desire to escape from the impasse of the death of sexuality, experienced in his relationship with his wife, and the attempt to communicate to the analyst a *living* part of himself, which is however impossible to put into practice due to the impracticability of a relationship with a prostitute, symbolized as the demeaned degradation of love. It is important to underline that this “interpretation” can be offered to the patient as a hypothesis on which to work in the analysis relationship (for instance, by verifying whether the transference component involves the experience of a moralistic analyst who disapproves of the possible relation with a prostitute), knowing at the same time that there are endless other “analyses” of the dream, and that during the treatment it will be possible to return to the dream to make use of its other possible meanings. It is also important to recognise that the work of extracting meaning from a dream is part of a long-term process, both for the patient and for the analyst. It is therefore fundamental, for the analyst, to let the polysemic elements of the dream settle and to find other possible meanings as the analyst’s knowledge grows and with the possible weakening of resistance in the minds of both the analyst and the patient.

Let us now return to the clinical value of what Matte Blanco proposes. The unconscious, as a way of being characterized by generalization and symmetry, does not tell us anything about the state of health or of illness-distress-problematicity of the person in psychoanalysis. It provides us with an interpretative key for unconscious language, knowing that what is expressed in dreams, Freudian slips, the progress of the patient-analyst relationship, is mediated by communication, and therefore by relating: language, as the tool for relating, cannot but establish relations. It is up to the analyst to seek signs of the mind’s unconscious mode of being in everything that is communicated via language. Think, for instance, of the principle of generalization: in our dream there is a “beautiful woman” seen in the street, therefore a “beautiful-woman-of-the-street”. That woman is also all the beautiful women of the street. Therefore: “all beautiful women are women of the street” or, if you like, “all women of the street are beautiful”. Here a relation is established which in the mind’s unconscious mode of being is not possible. An “identification” is made, however, of beautiful women with women of the street, a sort of intrinsic spoiling of female beauty; “woman-ness”, as a bag of symmetry, is opposed to “wife-ness” (another bag of symmetry), and the latter is connected to death. One can love one’s wife because she is not a figure of woman, otherwise she would be a prostitute. This is an explanation that establishes relations. But for the unconscious system the matter is very different. It could be said that “woman-ness” is split into a “beautiful and spoiled woman-ness” and a “dead wife-ness without beauty, without reciprocity”. For the “beautiful and spoiled woman-ness” it is possible to feel attraction, but there can be no reciprocity because the woman is indefinite. With the “dead wife-ness without beauty” reciprocity is not possible because death prevents gazes from being exchanged reciprocally. In short, *the dream highlights the lack of reciprocity in the relations with “femininity”* (woman-ness and wife-ness gathered into the larger bag of symmetry) experienced and communicated by the patient.

In its explicit form, dream language uses terms of common language; here the language context makes the sense of the words clear and makes each single word assume a meaning that is not ambiguous or polysemic. In unconscious language, which is present in the dream in its narrated form, the single words reassume a polysemic value.

We are using the term *polysemy* in the emotional sense. Etymologically the word means: “having many meanings”, from the Greek *polùs* (much, numerous) and *semà* (sign). It indicates the capacity, typical of a word, to carry different meanings: an example can be found in the Latin word *liber*, which in ancient times meant bark, and later book. With the word in question, on the other hand, we want to refer to the characteristic that a word, an object, an event, assumes if it is considered in the emotional symbolic dynamic, if it is seen with the logic of the mind’s unconscious mode of being. In talking about this characteristic assumed by objects in the unconscious, various attempts have been made to define it. Let us remember the notion of *surdetermination* in Freud:⁷ whether it be a symptom or a dream, it refers to a plurality of determining factors. The numerous unconscious elements can be organized in different meaningful sequences, of which each one, at a certain level of interpretation, has its own coherence. The surdetermination is closely related to the unconscious characteristic of condensation (Laplanche, & Pontalis, op. cit): a single representation that combines various associative chains of which it is the point of intersection. Condensation is in operation in the

⁷A formation of the unconscious; on this, see Laplanche & Pontalis (op. cit).

symptom and, more generally, in the various formations of the unconscious; it has been highlighted above all in dreams. Condensation is not a summary (we would say it is not a narration) of the dream. Each manifest element in the dream is determined by several latent meanings, and conversely each of these meanings can be found in several elements; moreover, the manifest element does not represent, in the same relation, each of the meanings from which it derives and therefore it does not encapsulate them, as a concept would. In his theorization of *bi-logic*, Matte Blanco talks about *bags of symmetry*. Let us recall one of his examples, cited by Rayner & Tuckett (1988) in the introduction to the Chilean psychoanalyst's last work. According to the authors Matte Blanco is convinced that psychoanalysis has, right from the start, highlighted though not explicitly, a symmetrization. To this end he gives one of the most recent examples. We are used to talking about a patient who suffers from breast envy. In doing this, no specific reference is made to envy of the right or the left breast of Mrs Mary Higgins, or of any other woman, but to envy of all the breasts of all women: envy of the BREAST. The individuals have disappeared and the only thing left is breast-ness – and not only physical, but also psychological, breast-ness. Matte Blanco describes the substitution of a specific, tangible breast by the concept of breast-ness (which includes and is the same for all breasts) as a typical symmetrisation.

Breast-ness recalls Barthes (1957) who uses the same process of transformation of a word into its abstract dimension, to indicate myth: the little Basque house in Paris stands for *Basque-ness*. The instability of the myth, says Barthes, forces the mythologist to search for a suitable terminology, which is often a neologism. The idea of China, in the mind of a French petit-bourgeois at the beginning of the century, was a special mixture of little bells, sedan chairs, and opium dens that the author proposes calling *China-ness*. Barthes, who refers to Freud in his formulation of a general theory of myth, also says that the knowledge contained in the myth concept is a confused knowledge formed of uncertain, indefinite associations. The myth concept has an open nature; it is a shapeless, unstable, nebulous *condensation* (sic!), whose unity and coherence depend above all on the function.

In the work on Emotional Textual Analysis we proposed using *dense words* to indicate the emotionally symbolised words that lend themselves to this affective surdetermination. Evidently metaphorical allusion dominates in the attempt to define something that, as Matte Blanco would say, we cannot define with our language based on establishing relations, and on the discriminating, classifying mind. Dense words, bags of symmetry, surdetermination, condensation, breast-ness, China-ness, are metaphors of objects transformed by emotional symbolizations; objects that assume that indefiniteness of meaning, that pluriformity that Matte Blanco theorised as the unity of the individual and the class, with the consequent loss of the ties that construct heterogenic-dividing thought.

Collusion and perception

Just as perception configures differences in the states of the world, so collusion emotionally organizes and differentiates them. Perception and collusion, in different ways and in different areas of psychic functioning, set up the relation between the individual and the context, enabling it to be organized in definite dimensions, consistent with the person's perceptive and emotional - and therefore mental - competences. Both of them, moreover, if working together, define the social dimension of the relationship with reality. Like perception, collusion undergoes an increase in competence, which can be described as a more and more efficient and effective emotional articulation of reality. This comes about with parameters that it would be helpful to identify, both for perception and for collusion.

We think that the two extremes of this increased competence in dealing with the context, from the point of view of the collusive dynamic, can be defined by polysemy on the one hand, and by the establishment of relations between objects, on the other. Polysemy confuses and homogenizes, being based on the principles of generalization and symmetry put forward by Matte Blanco. Establishing relations between objects, however, enables the different elements of reality to be differentiated and distinguished: taller or shorter; being inside or out; running towards or away from; passing through or avoiding. Still in the domain of collusion, it can be seen that the underlying symbolic dynamic can change, one might say develop, from highly polysemic symbolizations like the

friend-enemy, tall-short category, etc., to more organized, differentiated categorisations, such as the neo-emotions (expecting, controlling, distrusting, provoking, obliging, complaining, worrying). More evolved forms of collusion are local cultures: collusive modalities that characterize the emotional symbolisation of those who share and work within specific contexts. This always comes about through the progressive integration of polysemy and the establishment of relations. In this sense, colluding means transforming the basic emotional polysemy into differentiated emotions; in other words, ones that in manifesting themselves are capable of expressing primitive or more evolved relations between the objects of reality. This brings to mind a patient who could be called borderline since his psychoanalytic therapy is marked by violent emotions that are difficult to think about and to transform into any relation between objects. At the beginning of a session, the psychoanalyst is a couple of minutes late in arriving in the analysis room. When the analyst enters, the patient, already lying on the couch, has an explosion of anger expressed in words; the patient says: "I think my analysis has finished, I don't think I will come back to you again". Here the verbal form of the polysemic emotion of interruption and separation, rejection, destruction of the relationship and of anger, is presented as establishing a relation between "I" and a formal "you", a relation that is characterized by "I will no longer come to you". Well, this verbal expression of the emotion of anger, this emotional "systematisation" within the constraints of language, therefore within a tool necessarily constructed as the relation between objects, was enough to make the patient utter another phrase, where the establishing of relations is more thought out, albeit emotionally saturated: "Admittedly, if I don't come any more. I will be losing something very precious to me". In this example one can see how the collusive dynamic creates a need in the patient, one could say the expectation of seeing his need for the analyst's total and unquestioned presence to be respected and satisfied, as an object totally at his disposal; this expectation has the aim of keeping his angry emotionality under control, ready to invest the analyst with distrust and the consequent rejection. This expectation is sometimes not fulfilled and the patient is swept up in a fantasy of destruction of the analyst and of the bond with him. Emotionality, felt in a moment of extreme rage, plunges the patient into a state of non existence, of loss of the connection with the analyst's reality, of himself in analysis, of the degree of lateness, of evaluation of the event in terms of reality. What emerges is a destructive polysemic emotion that would like to pass over the relationship and the experience of analysis like a tidal wave, razing everything to the ground. The patient could act out this emotion by getting up and walking out, as he has threatened to do many times and as he has even done, at the beginning of the therapy, though returning for the next session. Instead he uses language to express his emotion. Therefore he necessarily finds himself establishing a relation between himself and the analyst, being able in this way to think about the emotion which is not acted out but verbalized. Establishing this relation makes the collusive dynamic evolve towards a feeling of loss, of mourning and of reparation in the acknowledgment of the value that the analytical relationship has for him. This is an example of a collusive process that, overcoming the acting out of the fantasy evoked by the frustrating event, manages to express the emotion with language, a powerful tool for reducing polysemy. This reduction enables the loss entailed in the interruption to be thought about; it therefore enables a reparatory fantasy to be verbally expressed. The anger evoked by the lateness is decidedly polysemic; expressing it greatly reduces the polysemy; the reparatory thought about the loss is clearly located at the extreme of the construction of relations between objects. It can also be seen that in evolving towards the establishment of relations, the collusive symbolizations not only reduce the affective polysemy within them, but at the same time increase the productive relation with reality.

In other words, collusion always *has functions of adaptation to reality*. This comes about with the development of the collusive relation towards products requiring the intervention of more and more specific competences. In this case, one can see an evolution of the collusive process that takes on more complex connotations in object relations. Let us clarify this: in the mother-child relationship it may be useful to represent the collusive dynamic in terms of the friend-enemy relationship; based on this collusive process, objects that cause reactions of alarm in the child can be excluded from the relationship, as if one were dealing with an enemy. The enemy can mainly be seen in the absence of the mother; this absence is transformed into a persecutory presence which causes the child's angry crying and calls for the mother's presence. It is important to include the angry crying in the collusive mother-child relationship: without this communication function, one would not understand the defensive sense concerning absence expressed by the crying. Equally, one would not understand its

capacity to evoke an intense symbolic-affective response. If we think, however, of a university lecture, we see the teacher symbolized as the “knowing adult”, an adult who, as it were, “breaks the bread of science” for the students. The latter are seen as children waiting for the adult’s knowledge. The relationship entailed in the teaching-learning process at university is characterized on the other hand by more complex symbolic-affective dynamics: think of the students’ identificational expectations directed at the teacher, seen as a professional model for their future, think of the affective symbolization of the comprehensibility of what is learnt, of the practical backwash of what is studied, of the relation between the different things learnt in the various disciplines, of the teacher’s fame, etc. In the teacher-student relationship at university, the reduction of polysemy is contextualized and the neo-emotional dynamic is summed up in cultural repertoires, always with a collusive basis. For instance, obligation can be translated into a duty-based culture; expectation, into the belief that, with the acquisition of the role of technical expertise demanding dependence, it can be exercised over the non-expert, thus contributing to the creation of the specific local culture of that university.

In sum, the progressive reduction of polysemy in collusive symbolizations, and the consequent differentiation of the elements of reality in relation to the production process, characterize the evolution of relations in the social context. It is however possible for there to be sudden violent regressions, when specific situations of the context require it: think of the aggression that a person, a group or a social organization can suffer at the hands of a robber, a gang of criminals or of a country that wants to wage war on another country. In the case of sudden relations with violence, the collusive symbolization can return to primitive dimensions such as fear, attack on the adversary, or flight, enabling defence reactions to respond to the danger inherent to a context where the only possible collusive symbolization is that of friend/enemy.

Let us consider the same problem using the terms proposed by Matte Blanco.

The mother who withholds her breast and the analyst are the same thing and make up a sub-class of rejecting mothers, who withdraw from the roles of caring and feeding. But there is also another sub-class, that of the mother-analyst who represents something valuable for the patient. If we analyse the patient’s symptomatology more specifically, we will find that also other people present in his life are connected to this class of symmetry made up of all the mother-individuals who reject the patient, escaping from him, or who represent the sub-class of the ‘precious things-mother’.

Matte Blanco (1975) states that the most accurate way of describing what happened to him and his emotional state would be to say that individual, subclasses, the general class, and the prepositional function defining the class were all one and the same thing. This is a typical case of identification of the individual with the class or the prepositional function defining it, which is characteristic of symmetrical thinking, as seen in emotion or in deep unconscious manifestations. The generalizing quality of symmetry is obvious in this case (Matte Blanco, 1975).

In the case of the patient who “feels abandoned” by the analyst as described by Matte Blanco concerning the class of *rejecting mothers*, and as in many other clinical cases that could be considered in this logical analysis perspective, there is no explanation of the patient’s preference for one sub-class rather than another and rather than the general class. A preference that for Matte Blanco is the demonstration of a *degree of asymmetry that has insinuated itself into the application of the principle of symmetry*. On the other hand, this amount of asymmetry is understandable if the need and desires expressed by the patient are connected to the particular fundamental, and directly biological, instinct of which they are the indirect manifestation, elaborated and camouflaged, as Matte Blanco would say. For him, instincts are characterized by a very high degree of asymmetry, given that they are less susceptible to symbolic gratification, in which case there is the substitution of the equivalent object. For this reason the author talks about the *lateral insertion of instinct in the mind*. And although they can be highly symmetrized when expressed in a symbolic way, original needs or instincts retain their supremacy for a lifetime, thus orienting the individual’s preferences for those sub-classes, within the broader symmetrical classes, that represent the fundamental concept of instinct more directly. According to this theory, therefore, what characterizes asymmetrical choice in an individual mode of manifesting the symptom, dream or neurosis, is linked to the relation between desire and instinct, or in other words, to the fact that the sexual fantasy gets support from the self-preservation drive.

As we have seen, the author underlines that the basic themes of instinct play a primitive, fundamental role in mental life, allowing a relative asymmetry in emotional experience. For this reason some emotional sub-classes are separate from others and can play a constructive role in preferences in the mind of each person. In this sense if the therapy is seen from the point of view of unfolding⁸, i.e. of establishing relations and therefore of facilitating asymmetrical thought, it can be based on these “traces” of asymmetry characterizing the unconscious system and that in turn derive from the original asymmetry of instinctive mental representations. One of these distinctions, perhaps the most important for the individual's survival, is the friend-enemy pattern which underlies the primitive emotional identification of the object, essential for survival. Continuing with this line of thought, it can be said that man possesses a discriminating function, the asymmetrical mode of being, the kind of thinking that is by its very nature dividing and distinguishing, that is, it discovers and creates heterogeneity; and a homogenous and indivisible mode of being, which tends to combine all the different aspects of reality in a unity. The function of the first mode of being, which psychotherapy and the clinical psychology intervention aim to develop and enrich, should be based on the asymmetry that is already in existence in the mind and that is determined by the asymmetrical modality of unfolding of instincts. Emotion is therefore the source of thought since it offers infinite possibilities for development; but this occurs through the mediation of instinctuality. It is the latter that organizes the unconscious as a *collection* of infinite sets and not as a single finite set. It is the asymmetrical relations between the infinite sets of the unconscious that act as “barriers” so as to construct bags of symmetry, which: “carry symmetrical being from its deep unconscious nature into some sort of representation into consciousness (the surface). Asymmetrical relations would then be something that pushes the unconscious towards consciousness, in a never-ending process” (Matte Blanco, 1975, p. 302). The problem is therefore that of establishing how to organize these bags, these walls of a container that make possible the work of translation and therefore give the contents of the unconscious access to consciousness. In this regard, it is important to consider the genesis of the emotions that, in clinical findings, appear as areas or bags of symmetry separate from each other: to the extent that one can be conscious of the difference between loving, hating, being afraid, being sad, and feeling anger.

We consider the *coinemes* that Fornari talks about, to be the few things the unconscious deals with. Fornari divides them into *erotemes* (breast, penis, anus, nude body, milk, faeces...) and *parentemes* (mother, father, brother, sister...) and into the pragmatic dimensions of *birth* and *death*. Gli erotemes may refer to the transmigration of the child's emotional interest in the various parts of the body, favoured in their biological function; it can thus be seen that they are anchored to the fact that the libido rests on self-preservation drives and on objects asymmetrically structured by these drives. Here it would seem that the lateral insertion of instinct that Matte Blanco talks about is in operation, since the “erotemic” emotions can be considered, in their differentiation, as originating from the asymmetry of instinct and from the distinction between instincts. In the case of parentemes, however, the basic dichotomy is based on asymmetrical juxtapositions connected to relations between the body and the context (tall-short; inside-outside; in front-behind); juxtapositions that emerge from the emotional awareness of a relation and that are based on the discriminating function of thought, not on functions oriented by instinct. It could be pointed out, moreover, that erotemes, too, have a mental counterpart in the contrast between *inside* (having a breast) and *outside* (lack of a breast); or, if you like, the contrast between *being with* and *being abandoned by*. The parentemes, in turn, can indicate contrasts between *belonging* and *being excluded*, that may also connect to ‘being with’, ‘being abandoned by’. Parentemes, as well as erotemes, therefore seem to have a clear cultural derivation, based on the emotional connotations of the relation. This has a specific

⁸ For Matte Blanco, the asymmetrical thought that he sees in being symmetrical has an infinite number of discrete potentialities in every class. In a concrete image, the class unfolds thanks to the analysis of asymmetrical thought. Hence the function of translation-unfolding. The author is very cautious, almost to the point of scepticism, about this possible function of translation-unfolding as concerns the unconscious which, by its very nature, can never become conscious. One can attempt a sort of “imitation” of the unconscious: the metaphor of “disorder” can be used to describe the unconscious; but this does not help greatly in translating the mind's symmetrical mode of being, since the very notion of order-disorder is based on asymmetrical thinking, requiring the establishment of (for example, ordered) relations.

consequence that in our view affects the function of interpretation-unfolding in clinical practice. We regard this function as the extraction of relations and therefore of asymmetry from symmetrical being: when we are dealing with emotions that depend on instinct, then the asymmetry proposed in the interpretation cannot avoid referring to the original asymmetry of instinct. If on the other hand we are dealing with emotions that originate from the impact with the relational reality, and therefore from the contextual culture, then the establishment of relations cannot be connected to a sort of line pre-established by instinct. It is interesting to see that while instincts, according to Matte Blanco's vision, are originally asymmetrical, this *does not happen with relations*. At an unconscious level, symmetry reigns in relations; on this Matte Blanco says: "Man does not have relations with his fellow-beings but is his fellow-beings" (1975, p. 300).

This involves some effects which we will try to present. The relationship with food, in the example taken from Matte Blanco, is originally oriented to the object that can satisfy the need: the breast-nipple or a few other objects (baby bottle) that serve this function, essential for survival. Here there can be no process of symbolization underlying the constitution of an indivisible homogeneous class, in the sense of a class of equivalence where all the objects responding to the definition are identical. That is why the relationship with this object is compared to that of ethological imprinting, and has a fundamental importance in the individual's cognitive development (Money-Kyrle, 1968)⁹. The relationship with parents, or rather with their relationship, is not however *given* on an instinctual basis; this is because originally there is no distinction and therefore no relation between the self and others. For symmetrical being, there is no distinction between the self and others, and therefore there is no individuality either, nor differentiating identity. If this is considered from an asymmetrical point of view, it can be experienced as annulment, or a plunging into non-existence. This is why Matte Blanco seems to identify mental pathology as an incursion of symmetry into the relational modality, destructuring the symmetrical thought underlying the distinction between the self and others. For the author, we reiterate, it is in the relationship with people and not with the primitive objects of self-preservation that mental pathology sets in. This seems to be due to the fact that relationships have a lower resistance to the incursion of symmetry. Here we find one of the major problems in Matte Blanco's thought. It is a problem that concerns safeguarding from the sudden entry of symmetry, in the emotional experience of social relations. The relationship, not protected by the original asymmetry, would be constantly liable to plunge into non-existence. Years ago, one of the authors of the present article proposed the construct of *collusion*¹⁰ in the sense of a process of emotional symbolization shared by whoever participates in the same context. The construct of collusion allows for relationships to contain an asymmetry, which can organize the construction of specific modes of relating oriented to the target. The collusive process is presented as the intermediate dimension between the symmetry of the relationship that mixes the self and the other in an absence of identity, and the capacity to exchange with the other person in a relationship designed to achieve shared aims.

On this point, a clinical example may be useful:

a sixty-year-old woman brings to the session an affective experience that greatly disturbs her and that is always present in her relationship with her husband: every time the husband tells her he is going away soon, her heart suffers a jolt, a feeling of loss that used to last a few days and that now just lasts for a moment. The woman has recently discovered her husband's "double life": for twenty years the man has continuously been having brief relationships with the most varied kinds of women. He has always hidden these experiences from his wife. The woman wonders how she never noticed anything. She describes her husband as despotic, closed in himself, incapable of emotionally sharing any experience with her. She describes a man *incapable of collusive relations*. Or rather, incapable of sharing any emotional symbolization of the context in which he lives out his marriage. When the woman finally realises her husband's "other" affective affairs, his response is indifference and at the same time stubborn denial of what his wife has discovered about him. In therapy, the

⁹ Cited by Matte Blanco (1975).

¹⁰ On this, see: Carli (1987); Carli (1992); Carli (1993); Carli (1994a); Carli (1994b); Carli (1997); Carli, Guerra, Lancia, & Paniccchia (1984); Carli & Paniccchia (1981); Guerra & Paniccchia (1987); Carli & Paniccchia (2002); Carli & Paniccchia (2003); Carli & Paniccchia (2005).

woman reports that her husband continues to “keep up the appearance” of a united family, although he often leaves home to have his extra-marital adventures.

The “jolt to the heart” can be a clear example of the feeling of “plunging into non-existence”, as a result of the lack of collusive, and therefore reciprocal, experience. The husband that goes away is, for the woman, a non-elaborated absence in the collusive process that transforms absence into collusive emotional presence. It is therefore an absence that plunges into non-existence. It can be seen, in these brief clinical notes, that the woman describes her husband as being “incapable of experiencing collusive dynamics”, that is, incapable of emotionally sharing anything with anyone. This creates in the woman a specific experience: the emotions evoked by her husband, not being reciprocated in collusion, can be felt only in the presence of the husband himself; his absence does not allow shared emotions to endure, and the announcement of an absence plunges the woman into a state of non-existence. We would like to underline that this form of deep anguish represents a “relational pathology”, that cannot be attributed to the emotional features of one or the other, even though it derives from the husband’s emotional characteristics and from the relationship that the wife wants to maintain with him. The “mental pathology” that Matte Blanco talks about sets in in those relational experiences where the *dynamics of the collusive process fail*. A collusive process involves emotional reciprocity in the sharing of a context. Collusion, in other words, can be seen as a defence against the experience of the other’s absence, felt to be a bewildering incursion of symmetry that entails the dissolving of one’s own identity and of the boundaries between Self and Other. This opens up the problem of the elaboration of psychoanalytical models that can make sense of the social relationship, thus emerging from the narrow individualistic vision that psychoanalysis seems to set up. The construct of collusion has tried to respond to this need.

Coming back to Matte Blanco, we can see that the elaboration of an absence of the breast-object is possible thanks to processes of automatization that are produced by the systematic return of the object. One therefore passes from the persecutory phase (the object is bad to me, unless by being present, it shows that it is good) to a phase of trust (the object is good to me, unless it shows with its aggression, that it is bad). The trusting phase enables the provisional, reversible absence of the object to be tolerated. But this establishment of relations has a different dynamic if the object is not the breast-nipple but the *feeding-mother*. It will be remembered that, in Bion’s theory, the absence of the breast enables the “notion of breast” to be formed; without this absence, the breast would correspond to the original asymmetry of instinct which does not envisage collusive categorizations of reality, but merely experiences gratified by the presence of the breast. Thought, says Bion (1962), springs from the joining of an idea or preconception with the absence of the real breast, therefore from frustration. It can therefore be seen that the notion of breast is a notion of an object defined in its function of instinctual gratification, and is therefore asymmetrical and consequently has zero degrees of freedom. Thought springs from the encounter with a person, the mother who can go away; therefore endowed with a minimum degree of freedom in her presence-absence. Here the object, on the one hand, is clearly differentiated from the relationship, on the other. The instinctual object is by definition a fact: it has an emotional connotation of zero degrees of freedom. It is with the object at zero degrees of freedom that the original asymmetry that Matte Blanco connects to instinct, is configured. It is a dead object. In fact Bion talks about the child that cannot tolerate the frustration of the absence of the breast-mother as a particularly serious case: “the only thing that would make him survive would be a breast that feeds constantly, which is not possible, if only because he would lose his appetite” (1962, from Ital.trans. p. 75). The present-absent object, with various degrees of freedom, is personalized by the feeding-mother and takes on a polysemic value: it represents an aspect of the self and the other person that loves and hates and that can be emotionally experienced as good and/or bad, that can phantasmically represent friend or enemy. The asymmetrical uniqueness of the instinctual object is replaced by the polysemy of the collusive object.

Hence the possibility of revising the sense of the translation-unfolding in therapy, from the Matte Blanco perspective. Let us go back to the definition of this function attributed to clinical work: “consciousness is put to work and succeeds in singling out some asymmetrical relations which are a translation or an unfolding of some of the potentialities implicit in the unconscious or symmetrical mode of being” (1975, p. 296). These potentialities are actually emotions. And emotions are not given, unless it is in a relationship. Hence the importance of the reference to the relationship as a

place in which asymmetrical dimensions can be extracted. But extracting asymmetry means thinking. Thinking about the emotions in a relationship means transforming emotional polysemy into an emotionally definite dimension of the relationship itself. It is in relational emotion that symmetrical being is expressed, albeit in various degrees of combination with asymmetry. Relational emotion can be considered as the first activity of differentiation, and therefore of categorization of reality as separate from the Self. Think of the most primitive modes of human knowledge, connected to the relational emotions aroused by the friend object and by the enemy. These are relational emotions that are presented in the human being's prolonged period of neoteny before perception can differentiate stimuli that evoke such emotions, since they arise due to the emotional articulation of the mother's presence-absence, within the mother-child relationship. Moreover, in its component of symmetrical thinking, emotion is not tied to the individual but to classes that respond to specific dispositional functions, seen as infinite sets. Emotion is therefore an extremely flexible modality of knowing and relating, infinitely polysemic about its objects, provided they fulfil the propositional role that defines them. In this vision of Matte Blanco's, emotions are bags of symmetry designed to explore the world of objects and to allow multiple, endless symbolizations consistent with the propositional function. This shift from symmetry to asymmetry, which serves for thinking about relational emotions, is a peculiar adaptation function of the human species. If man only knew the given asymmetry in relations with the instinctual object, he would be condemned to an existence based on imprinting on the one hand, and on the required sexual reproductivity on the other. His perception would be able to develop in a very finely differentiated way, but it would serve only to perceive, not to know what one perceives, that is to have consciousness of one's own knowledge. Remember that with Matte Blanco, establishing relations does not weaken 'symmetrical being', and does not reduce its infinite potentialities. The emotional knowledge that emerges from the function of translation-unfolding is based on classes of knowledge, not on single objects, and can therefore reorient knowledge, increasing the number of relations available to consciousness. The clinical function of Matte Blanco's model, with its opening to the relationship and to relational emotions, therefore makes it possible to reorganise the emotional confusion that may be aroused by our adaptation, differentiating the dispositional functions that organise social relations. Ambiguity, or rather, what corresponds emotionally to what we call ambiguity, is the original modality through which the mind's unconscious mode experiences the relationship. Friend and enemy, outside and inside, powerful and weak, present and absent, on the other hand, are descriptive categories that help us to talk, albeit in an approximate way, about emotional events that we are "forced" to communicate - in this article too - through language. They are definitions, already organised and emotionally oriented, of what is experienced in the "logic of the emotions", a long way from the logic that organises language and 'gives it intention'. Original ambiguity can induce anxiety. It justifies the desire to "resolve", one way or the other, the ambiguous and non emotionally defined relationship with objects. Emotional acting out serves the purpose: when emotions are acted out, the object to which the acting out is directed becomes univocally "friend" or "enemy", if the original ambivalence concerns this primitive symbolization "pattern". Resolving the ambiguity and acting out emotions are temporally synchronic: there is no resolution of ambiguity without emotional acting out; emotional acting out always entails resolving the ambiguity inherent in the symbolization of the object to which the acting out is directed. If, however, emotionally ambiguous symbolization is "thought", then it is possible to elaborate the original ambiguity, capture its motivations, unravel its contradictions, construe a "dividing" thought that establishes relations between the various aspects of the originally ambiguous object.

Following these brief comments, it can be said that the mind's unconscious mode is manifested through emotional ambiguity, in the sense of a contradictory, indefinite emotional configuration of the *objects one relates to*. It is what is acted out, on the one hand, and the thought that organises and preludes to action, on the other, that lead to the emotional definition of the objects and therefore to an organised relationship with them. It should also be kept in mind that original ambiguity is a resource for our knowledge of objective reality, for a non-stereotyped adaptation that can relate to the object that is ambiguous, and therefore extraneous. The resolution of ambiguity entails the transformation of the object into an emotionally definite interlocutor, but the price for this is the loss

of the possibility of exchange with the extraneous. Resolving the ambiguity entails transforming the extraneous into an object that can be possessed, therefore shifting from exchange to possession¹¹. It is difficult to tolerate original ambiguity, associated to the objects in the relationship. It involves the non-resolution of the object's emotional indefiniteness, and it therefore involves the capacity to establish relations with objects that are not defined from the emotional point of view as "good" or "bad", "friends" or "enemies". The ritual components of the culture can be seen as ways of giving ambiguity a reassuring resolution, channelled into the usual lines of relations, for instance of the friend relationship. The difficulty of tolerating ambiguity is well known in psychoanalytically oriented psychotherapy relationships, where the silence of the analyst may be hard to tolerate for the patient, who wants to configure the psychotherapist, right from the start of the relationship, in the friend-enemy pattern. The eroticization of the relationship, for instance, can be a way of giving an emotional resolution to the ambiguity of the object in psychotherapy. In a reading that uses the categories under study, psychotherapy can be seen as the story of the various resolutions of ambiguity, acted out within the analytical relationship. But also the everyday experience of each of us in social relations can be interpreted using the categorisations of the various resolutions of emotional ambiguity encountered in our normal relationships. The rules of the game in relating, social roles, power configurations in relationships, categories of knowledge of the other person are all ways of reaching a stable enough resolution of emotional ambiguity, inevitable in all relational experiences. If, for instance, the ambiguity is resolved with a friend-enemy interpretation, then one can relate to the other, the extraneous source of ambiguity, using modalities of attack-flight, dependence, or coupling, to follow the basic assumptions proposed by Bion. If, however, the original ambiguity in the other is tolerated, one can have an experience of exchange where the resolution of ambiguity will, little by little, be the outcome elaborated in the exchange itself.

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¹¹ On this see Carli & Paniccchia (2003).

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