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General editor: David Tuckett

Thinking, Feeling, and Being

Clinical reflections on the fundamental
antinomy of human beings and world

IGNACIO MATTE-BLANCO

◆ PUBLISHED IN ASSOCIATION WITH THE ◆
INSTITUTE OF PSYCHO-ANALYSIS, LONDON

Thinking, Feeling, and Being

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FUNDAMENTAL ANTINOMY OF HUMAN
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Appendix: Luciana Bon de Matte

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This book is lovingly dedicated to my family: from my past, my father, Enrique, my mother, Trinidad, and my seven brothers and sisters; my present and their future: Luciana, my wife, my seven sons and daughters, and their beloved ones.

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I.M.B.

PART ONE
The subject

An introduction to Matte-Blanco's reformulation of the Freudian unconscious and his conceptualization of the internal world

by Eric Rayner and David Tuckett

1 The Freudian unconscious

Over the past thirty years Ignacio Matte-Blanco has been developing a fundamentally new way of conceiving conscious and unconscious processes which we believe is of enormous importance to the practising psychoanalyst and to the more academic scholar of the mind and its processes. However, the particular discipline of his arguments may be strange to the psychoanalyst, just as his psychoanalysis may be new to the mere academically minded. He works with one arm, as it were, in psychoanalysis and the other in the concepts of basic mathematical logic and he is definitely not an easy read. In helping him to prepare his manuscript for publication we had the opportunity to read this book in draft and to talk to him a good deal. So in this chapter we are aiming not to give a critical survey but to help the reader unfamiliar with his thinking to appreciate his more central and elementary ideas. Most of these were addressed by Matte-Blanco in his first volume in English, *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets* (1975a). Other concepts appear for the first time in English later in this book. Our brief notes are of course no substitute for a grasp of these works.¹

Matte-Blanco's starting point is the way Freud conceived unconscious thought. That Freud's conception of the unconscious was a momentous step is widely accepted, at least among those who value the study of humanity's subjective world. But Matte-Blanco believes that both psychoanalysts and those interested in applying psychoanalysis to other aspects of thought have never truly and fully made use of its revolutionary impact. His main purpose has been to show, by reformulating some of Freud's ideas about unconscious processes by the use of quite simple mathematical logic, just how revolutionary and valuable psychoanalytic insights are.

The idea of an unconscious side to human life was not, of course, unique to Freud.² Freud's special contribution was to formulate how unconscious thinking worked and also to draw attention to the implications that it operated with a systematic structure of its own. He argued, for example, that 'The governing rules of logic carry no weight in the unconscious; it might be called the Realm of the Illogical' (SE 23:168-9) and that 'We have found that processes in the unconscious or in the Id obey different laws from those in the preconscious ego. We name these laws in their totality the primary process, in contrast to the secondary process which governs the course of events in the preconscious

in the ego' (1940 [1938a], SE 23:164).

Freud clearly drew attention to the importance he attached to his recognition of the different logic of the unconscious. He formulated this in detail in *The Interpretation of Dreams*. Of this work he wrote that it 'contains, even according to my present-day judgement, the most valuable of all the discoveries it has been my good fortune to make. Insight such as this falls to one's lot but once in a lifetime' (SE 4:xxxii). Here, it is most likely that he was referring to his ideas about the logical characteristics of the unconscious as they emerged from his formulation of the language of the dream thoughts. He wrote that

'The dream-thoughts and the dream-content are presented to us like two versions of the same subject-matter in two different languages. Or, more properly, the dream-content seems like a transcript of the dream-thoughts into another mode of expression, whose characters and syntactic laws it is our business to discover by comparing the original and the translation. The dream-thoughts are immediately comprehensible, as soon as we have learnt them. The dream-content, on the other hand, is expressed as it were in a pictographic script, the characters of which have to be transposed individually into the language of the dream-thoughts.' (SE 4:277)

The unconscious domain, which Freud formulated, is accessible through the world of our dreams and of childhood thinking. It is a world in which the ordinary concepts of cause and effect, time, and space, to mention but a few of its characteristics, are turned on their head. In our dreams, when being highly emotional, or as children, we think what is unthinkable or nonsensical in other waking or conscious life. Inconvenient as it may be, the relationship between the events and experiences of psychic reality and the material world is not that of ordinary science and logic. It is here that psychoanalysis makes a unique contribution to human understanding.

In Matte-Blanco's view neither psychoanalysts nor others that use it have really pursued Freud's fundamental discovery about the unconscious and its logic. Instead, attention has been directed too exclusively to debating or modifying Freud's 'strange' ideas about sexuality, the death instinct, or similar subjects. Or it has gone into formulating psychoanalysis in ways which tame the revolutionary characteristics of the Freudian unconscious. Many analysts have not taken seriously enough the idea that the mind works within a framework of timelessness and spacelessness. Nor have they investigated the fundamental properties which permit the processes of condensation, displacement, projection, introjection, and so on. As a result, they have not understood what the consequences of these must be for thinking processes. Analysts have tended not to consider the matter or have moved their discipline towards conventional psychology and conventional logic.

Although the logic of the unconscious is used intuitively in daily clinical work, we do not often stop to consider the fundamental and disturbing implications of the concepts employed. Timelessness, for instance, is implied in clinical work when the co-presence of adulthood and infancy in the same person is taken for granted. But the wider implications

of such an idea, as to what it might mean for a patient's thought processes in general, for instance, are not pursued.

Matte-Blanco feels that theoreticians have often moved psychoanalysis away from the unconscious. For example, the American psychoanalyst H.Hartmann did much to gain psychoanalysis a more respectable place in scientific psychology. But Freud's revolutionary discoveries about the nature of the unconscious played no real part in Hartmann's systematization of psychoanalysis as a science. He argues much the same about a recent attempt to systematize the theories of Melanie Klein. De Bianchedi *et al.* (1984), for example, discuss Klein's work in terms of positional, economic, spatial, and dramatic points of reference but in doing so seem to lose the impact of what she was saying. In their formulation Klein's work becomes too tidy, ever so rational—the same effect, some feel, Hartmann had on Freud. Matte-Blanco could find only one sentence in which the irrational Freudian unconscious is implied, and even there rather timidly and ambiguously. In it the authors say: 'Both the ego and its objects can be alternately or simultaneously spectators or protagonists of the drama' (De Bianchedi *et al.* 1984:396). He points out that if instead of writing 'or' they had put 'and' things would have been different. They would have been doing justice to the idea of the coexistence of incompatibles in the unconscious. In other ways the authors' ideas are serious and valuable, but their use of 'or' renders ordinary something which is extraordinary to conscious thought. It is in subtle ways like this that psychoanalysis loses the Freudian unconscious. In some ways it thus loses an essence of psychoanalysis itself.

Klein never says so explicitly but only a brief acquaintance with *The Psycho-Analysis of Children* (1932) makes one aware that the ideas in her book are inconceivable without Freud's conception of the unconscious. Almost every page is filled with observations about children and their thought processes which are a living testimony to this. The thoughts of the children observed by Melanie Klein are replete with the logic of the unconscious and cannot be understood without it. Matte-Blanco suggests that although she did not pay that much attention to the abstract formulation of her theories she was the most creative and original of all those who have drawn inspiration from Freud. Her famous concept of projective identification, for example, which he deals with later in this book, is inconceivable without the framework of Freud's characteristics of the unconscious.

The rationalizing process is encountered very frequently in psychoanalytical literature. It is as apparent in the 'object-relations school' as in the more traditional classical metapsychology. For these reasons Matte-Blanco believes he has been right to say that 'psychoanalysis has wandered away from itself (Matte-Blanco 1975a:10). He remembers that there is a story of a man who entered a bar and began to walk up the vertical wall, arriving at the ceiling. He walked along it, head down, then went down the opposite wall. He sat down and asked for a whisky mixed with beer. People were astonished. When he finished drinking, he paid, and repeated the same journey in the opposite direction. When he closed the door somebody observed: 'What a strange man: to drink whisky mixed with beer!' Matte-Blanco feels that his purpose is to try to recover the essentials of Freud's contribution.

Two-valued or bivalent logic

To show just how revolutionary and important Freud's formulation of the unconscious was, Matte-Blanco has examined some very obvious everyday propositions of the kind that are fundamental to ordinary, contemporary, logical, and scientific thought. He does this in order to demonstrate the existence of some hidden assumptions in ordinary thought which are often ignored.

He takes a physical proposition, Archimedes' Principle, as an example. This principle, which led him to cry out his famous 'Eureka', states that 'a body immersed in a liquid loses as much of its weight as the weight of the liquid which it has displaced' (Nelkon 1981:106). What concepts and processes are employed in order to state this principle? Archimedes certainly had to draw on those of solid body, liquid, immersion, weight, volume, and difference of weight. He then established the various very definite relations between these concepts. It would take too long a time here to isolate and describe in a precise way all the concepts implied in the principle. For our purposes you need only reflect about a few of them and verify that the following underlying concepts are all, among others, essential to the principle:

- (a) *the principle of identity*— A is identical to A ;
- (b) *the concept of two-valued or bivalent logic*—either A or not A (either proposition A is true or it is not true);
- (c) *the principle of formal contradiction*—two contradictory assertions cannot both be true at the same time;
- (d) *the principle of incompatibility*— A cannot be different from and totally equal to B ; for example, A cannot be liquid and solid at the same time and under the same conditions;
- (e) *the operation of subtraction*—if a part is subtracted from a given, positive quantity, the result is a smaller quantity.

These are selected because they will be referred to, one way or another, later. Research findings in the natural sciences normally respect these and other related rules. Put briefly, scientific knowledge is expressed in language submitting to the laws of bivalent or two-valued logic.

Likewise, psychoanalytical research and formulation have also developed largely in conformity with two-valued logic. Thus Freud's writing and argument are quite clearly structured with respect for the principles and rules of bivalent logic. This is emphasized by the construction of such a work as his *Introductory Lectures* (1916–17). In his editorial introduction to this work, Strachey (SE 15:6) makes the following comments about all of Freud's lectures: 'they almost always had a definite form—a head, body and tail—and might often give the hearer the impression of possessing an aesthetic unity'. Each subject Freud tackles in the lectures is organized in a systematic way. Concepts such as trauma, resistance, repression, development of the libido, regression, formation of symptoms, and transference are all formulated with full respect to the laws of this bivalent logic. These laws furnish the framework where the concepts develop, and without them no understanding of the concepts is possible.

However, it is not only the structure of Freud's argument which respects bivalent logic. The concepts themselves are permeated by the same approach. Take, for instance, the concept of repression. This entails an opposition, in the mind, between two incompatibles: a tendency to satisfy a wish and a psychical organization which tends to block the realization of this satisfaction. In the case of a trauma the struggle again would be between two incompatibles: between the tendency to remember the traumatic event, face it, and bring it to full light, and a tendency to keep the peace by preventing access to consciousness. This is described and formulated by Freud in terms of two-valued logic.

Matte-Blanco is thus stressing that psychoanalysis, like philosophy and the natural sciences, has been conceived and developed in the territory where respect for the principles and rules of bivalent logic is essential. But at the same time psychoanalysis can usefully be conceived as a unique undertaking. As we have mentioned, it sets out to study the special characteristics of unconscious ideas, and in doing so makes a radically new addition to scientific and logical thinking. To unfold his argument, Matte-Blanco starts by considering Freud's ideas about the characteristics of the unconscious to draw out their radical nature. We will now turn to this.

The characteristics of the unconscious

Let us begin by listing the unconscious processes Freud identified when trying to understand the language of the unconscious. In his paper 'The Unconscious' (SE 14) he sums up what he considers to be its nature in five characteristics. In *The Interpretation of Dreams* Matte-Blanco has found eight others. A more thorough survey of Freud's writings and those of other psychoanalysts might reveal still more. However, the thirteen characteristics of unconscious functioning that have been found in this way are as follows.

In 'The Unconscious':

- (1) The absence of mutual contradiction and negation (SE 14:186).
- (2) Displacement (SE 14:186).
- (3) Condensation (SE 14:186).
- (4) Timelessness (SE 14:187).
- (5) The replacement of external by internal reality (SE 14:187).

In *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

- (6) The co-presence of contradictories (SE 4:312).
- (7) The alternation between absence and presence of temporal succession (SE 4:314).
- (8) Logical connection reproduced as simultaneity in time (SE 4:314).
- (9) Causality as succession (SE 4:314–16).
- (10) Equivalence-identity and conjunction of alternatives (SE 4:316, 318).
- (11) Similarity (SE 4:319–20).
- (12) The co-presence in dreams of thinking and not-thinking (SE 4:313).
- (13) The profound disorganization of the structure of thinking (SE 4:312).

Matte-Blanco uses Freud's own writing to describe what he had in mind by each of these

processes; he then makes some general remarks.

By the *absence of mutual contradiction and negation* Freud refers to a mode of thinking which is quite foreign to what has been termed bivalent logic. He argues that 'There are in this system [the unconscious] no negation, no doubt, no degrees of certainty' (SE 14:186) and that 'The logical laws of thought do not apply in the id, and this is true above all of the law of contradiction' (SE 22:73). Elsewhere, the same point is made in the language of the drives; instinctual impulses are said to exist side by side and to be exempt from mutual contradiction.³ The revolutionary implications of such thinking are apparent when one realizes that if there is no mutual contradiction or negation one cannot distinguish, for instance, 'A is white' from 'A is not white', or from 'I am not sure whether A is white or not'. If there are no degrees of certainty, all shades of meaning disappear. Under such circumstances, perhaps all one could know is something like 'there is an idea about whiteness'.

The notions of *displacement* and *condensation* also refer to a mode of thinking quite foreign to bivalent logic. They imply an unusual spatial geometry. By *displacement* Freud refers to the way an idea's emphasis, interest, or intensity is liable to be detached from it and to become superimposed on to other ideas. By *condensation* he refers to the way several chains of association, several ideas, may be expressed through a single idea. As he himself put it: 'By the process of displacement one idea may surrender to another its whole quota of cathexis; by the process of condensation it may appropriate the whole cathexis of several other ideas' (SE 14:186).

Freud illustrates this process of condensation in *The Interpretation of Dreams*:

'They were concealed behind the dream figure of 'Irma', which was thus turned into a collective image with, it must be admitted, a number of contradictory characteristics. Irma became the representative of all these other figures which had been sacrificed to the work of condensation, since I passed over to *her*, point by point, everything that reminded me *of them*. There is another way in which a "collective figure" can be produced for purposes of dream-condensation, namely by uniting the actual features of two or more people into a single dream-image.... Dr R. in my dream about my uncle with the yellow beard...was a similar composite figure. But in his case the dream-image was constructed in yet another way. I did not combine the features of one person with those of another and in the process omit from the memory-picture certain features of each of them. What I did was to adopt the procedure by means of which Galton produced family portraits: namely by projecting two images on to a single plate, so that certain features common to both are emphasized, while those which fail to fit in with one another cancel one another out and are indistinct in the picture. In my dream about my uncle the fair beard emerged prominently from a face which belonged to two people and which was consequently blurred; incidentally, the beard further involved an allusion to my father and myself through the intermediate idea of growing grey.'

(SE 4:293)

Freud's descriptions of condensation and displacement are interesting particularly for the implications they evoke for the spatial geometry lived in the unconscious. The collective figure of Irma and that of a Galton portrait involve several different people who naturally invoke contradictory ideas but are put in the same place (space) occupied by one person. At the same time it is interesting to note that Freud reports that the result of such projection is naturally to create a contradiction which is represented by the blurring in the dream, as in the case of the face behind the fair beard. This seems to imply that some elements of two-valued logic remain in the unconscious.

The characteristic of *timelessness* in the unconscious also violates ordinary thinking. Freud insists that 'The processes of the system Ucs are timeless, i.e. they are not ordered temporally, are not altered by the passage of time; they have no reference to time at all' (SE 14:187). But, of course, by definition a process is something which normally develops in time. Yet Freud speaks of timeless processes in the unconscious. This is not, Matte-Blanco thinks, careless imprecision. As in the case of the face behind the fair beard, he is juxtaposing what he observed, in unconscious processes—both ideas which conform with two-valued logic and those that do not. His adherence to his initial observation leads him to open the door to an entirely new mental world ruled by two sets of behaviour: two-valued logic and something else. Freud was quite aware of the momentousness of his idea about timelessness in the unconscious. Only a few years before his death he wrote: 'Again and again I have had the impression that we have made too little theoretical use of this fact, established beyond any doubt, of the unalterability by time of the repressed. This seems to offer an approach to the most profound discoveries. Nor, unfortunately, have I myself made any progress here' (SE 22:74).

The idea that, in the unconscious, there is a *replacement of external by psychical reality* is equally extraordinary. It would seem that as far as the unconscious is concerned they are known only as one and the same. Freud wrote that 'The Ucs processes pay just as little regard to reality. They are subject to the pleasure principle; their fate depends only on how strong they are and on whether they fulfil the demands of the pleasure-unpleasure regulation' (SE 14:187). Again, 'Real and imaginary events appear at first sight in dreams as having equal validity; and this is so not only in dreams but also in the production of more important psychical structures.'

The next characteristic of the Freudian unconscious, that there is a *co-presence of contradictories*, is of course also a direct violation of two-valued logic. Although linked to the first characteristic of the unconscious (absence of mutual contradiction), Matte-Blanco does not think they are quite the same. Absence of mutual contradiction treats an idea and its negation as being identical. But Freud put the co-presence characteristic as follows: 'Each train of thought is almost invariably accompanied by its contradictory counterpart, linked with it by antithetical association' (SE 4:312). Matte-Blanco thinks there are a number of ways of understanding this formulation. The fact that the two contradictory ideas both appear together stresses their difference: presence of contradiction. On the other hand, it serves to stress their identity so that, when one is presented with an assertion, it is the same as being presented with its negation; there is thus also an *absence* of contradiction. What is more, it serves to show that one can be presented both with a contradiction *and* with an absence of contradiction, at the same

time. This emphasizes, as it were, the difference between the two ideas. It will be from the context in which this curious fact appears in each case that one can decide which of the three alternatives holds. The basic point is that the very existence of alternatives does not have the same meaning in the unconscious as it does in bivalent logic. In summary, this characteristic seems to be an interesting mixture in the unconscious of two-valued logic and its negation. We will return to this again in a moment.

The next characteristic, the *alternation between the absence and presence of temporal succession*, also involves a curious mixture of two-valued logic and its negation. Freud wrote:

‘While some dreams completely disregard the logical sequence of their material, others attempt to give as full an indication of it as possible. In doing so dreams depart sometimes more and sometimes less widely from the text that is at their disposal for manipulation. Incidentally dreams vary similarly in their treatment of the chronological sequence of dream-thoughts, if such a sequence has been established in the unconscious.’

(SE 4:314)

Here there seems to be a mixture of atemporality (a fundamental characteristic of the unconscious) and temporality (that is, respect for the logic of moral thinking).

As a further characteristic Freud has argued that in dreams *logical connections are reproduced as simultaneity in time*.

‘Here they are acting like the painter who, in a picture of the School of Athens or of Parnassus, represents in one group all the philosophers or all the poets. It is true that they were never in fact assembled in a single hall or on a single mountain-top; but they certainly form a group in the conceptual sense.’

(SE 4:314)

A logical connection between two thoughts or events is, therefore, expressed in dreams by putting them next to one another (a spatial relation) and in their occurring at the same time. In this characteristic spatial separation is retained, but temporal succession disappears.

Next, *causal relations are represented by putting two thoughts in succession*, i.e. as a sequence. The order (cause first, effect afterwards) is reversible. In the end, therefore, the relation cause-effect is represented in terms of contiguity in space or time, without respecting the notion of temporality which would be essential in two-valued logic. Once again the unconscious thought process respects some aspects of two-valued logic but is transformed so that it does not necessarily entail precedence in time; it is atemporalized.⁴

Summarizing this characteristic and some of the earlier ones we may say that in dreams we witness various mixtures of presence of time, space, and causal relations with a disappearance of them. There is respect for bivalent logic and its negation.

Another characteristic Freud observed, *equivalence-identity and conjunction of alternatives*, also involves a complex admixture and negation of two-valued logic. Freud observed: ‘The alternative “either-or” cannot be expressed in dreams in any way

whatever. Both of the alternatives are usually inserted in the text of the dream as though they were equally valid' (SE 4:316). 'If, however, in reproducing a dream, its narrator feels inclined to make use of an "either-or", e.g. "it was either a garden or a sitting-room", what was present in the dream-thoughts was not an alternative but an "and", a simple addition' (SE 4:317). Like the identity of psychical and external reality, this is a characteristic which indicates that the unconscious treats as equal two things which for bivalent thinking are not identical. One may say that the identity of psychical and external reality is an example of 'either/or'. Indeed we are accustomed to think ordinarily of either external (material) reality or psychical reality. As Freud put it:

'The way in which dreams treat the category of the contraries and contradictories is highly remarkable. It is simply disregarded.... They show a particular preference for combining contraries into a unity or for representing them as one and the same thing. Dreams feel themselves at liberty, moreover, to represent any element by its wishful contrary; so that there is no way of deciding at a first glance whether any element that admits of a contrary is present in the dream-thoughts as a positive or as a negative.'

(SE 4:318)

In these words Freud provides another example of what Matte-Blanco stresses; an assertion and its negation can be treated in the unconscious as identical. This corresponds exactly to the absence of contradiction and negation, violating the bivalent principle of contradiction. Indeed we can now recognize a consequence of the absence of contradiction; if two things cannot be distinguished in any way from one another, then they are normally treated as though they were identical. This is Leibniz's *identitas indiscernibilium*.

One characteristic of the unconscious, *similarity*, enjoyed, in Freud's view, a privileged relation in the process of dream formation. Similarity, consonance, or approximation—the relation of 'just as'—unlike any other characteristic, is capable of being represented in dreams in a variety of ways. Parallels or instances of 'just as' are inherent in the material of the dream thoughts. They constitute the first foundations for the construction of a dream, and no inconsiderable part of the dream work consists in creating fresh parallels where those which are already present cannot find their way into the dream owing to the censorship imposed by resistance. The representation of the relation of similarity is assisted by the tendency of the dream work towards condensation. Similarity, consonance, the possession of common attributes—all these are represented in dreams by unification, which may either be present already in the material of the dream thoughts or be freshly constructed. The first of these possibilities may be described as 'identification' and the second as 'composition'. Identification is employed where persons are concerned; composition where things are the material of the unification. Nevertheless composition may also be applied to persons; localities are often treated like persons (SE 4:319–20).

Freud's proposal that there is the *co-presence in dreams of thinking and 'not-thinking'* once again raises complex questions. On the one hand, he himself says that 'What is reproduced by the ostensible thinking in the dream is the subject-matter of the dream-

thoughts and not the mutual relations between them, the assertion of which constitutes thinking' (SE 4:313). On the other, he argues: 'Nevertheless, I will not deny that critical thought-activity which is not a mere repetition of material in the dream-thoughts does have a share in the formation of dreams' (SE 4:313). In the first quotation Freud asserts that thinking involves an establishment of relations and adds that such relations are absent in dreams. At the same time he does not deny that thinking does participate in dreams. In other words, he affirms the co-presence of 'not-thinking' and thinking.

Matte-Blanco suggests that 'thinking', as Freud has been using it, corresponds to the use of ordinary two-valued logic. The presence of 'not-thinking' corresponds to some unconscious process. So what can he have meant by 'not-thinking': which aspect of the unconscious is the problem? Recalling the principles of bivalent logic, is it absence of contradiction which defines not-thinking? Matte-Blanco thinks not, because certain relations (and, therefore, thinking) can both exist and have nothing to do with the absence of contradiction; for example: my house is white.

Is it then displacement or condensation? Again, he thinks not. Both characteristics introduce identities that are not acceptable in thinking. None the less, it is possible in many cases to be able to think without touching the question of displacement.

Is it the problem of timelessness? The question becomes more serious here. Take any relation—for instance, 'John is the father of Peter.' The relation goes from John (first or to the left) to Peter (afterwards or to the right). If you put Peter first then you change the relation: Peter is the son of John. In other words, the concept of relation has a structure similar to that of the concepts of time and place (or space); it is, one may say, isomorphic to them.

And what of the equation of psychical and external reality? If this is the only characteristic present, then thinking is likely to be restricted. But it can take place. The point is that each of the original five characteristics of the Freudian unconscious (absence of contradiction, displacement, condensation, timelessness, and the equation of psychical and external reality) can exert some influence on the possibility of being able to think in bivalent logical terms. But only timelessness by itself appears likely to be a decisive factor.

The *profound disorganization of the structure of thinking* which takes place in the unconscious, the thirteenth characteristic Matte-Blanco has recognized, has been described very clearly by Freud.

'The different portions of this complicated structure stand, of course, in the most manifold logical relations to one another. They can represent foreground and background, digressions and illustrations, conditions, chains of evidence and counter-arguments. When the whole mass of these dream-thoughts is brought under the pressure of the dream-work, and its elements are turned about, broken into fragments and jammed together—almost like pack-ice—the question arises of what happens to the logical connections which have hitherto formed its framework. What representation do dreams provide for "if", "because", "just as", "although", "either-or", and all the other conjunctions without which we cannot understand sentences or speeches?

‘In the first resort our answer must be that dreams have no means at their disposal for representing these logical relations between the dream-thoughts. For the most part dreams disregard all these conjunctions, and it is only the substantive content of the dream-thoughts that they take over and manipulate. The restoration of the connections which the dream-work has destroyed is a task which has to be performed by the interrelative process.’

(SE 4:312)

Discussion of these characteristics of the unconscious

You will be now getting the idea that Matte-Blanco is painstakingly arguing that the unconscious described by Freud is a mixture of normal thinking and what he called the characteristics of the unconscious. Primarily Matte-Blanco thinks these are the first five characteristics. These appear in various ways in the remaining eight characteristics (which are mixtures of the five) and in each other.

One trait does, however, appear to be common to all thirteen characteristics; this is that they *unite* or unify things which for ordinary thinking are distinct and separated. The *absence of contradiction* unites things which are quite distinct in ordinary thinking—when something is affirmed and something is denied. *Displacement* and *condensation* do the same in regard to spatial aspects which do not deal with contradiction. This identification-union, as we have seen, leads to blurring. *Timelessness* removes the distinction between instants. The lack of a division between *psychic and external reality* means that material reality and psychical reality become the same.

The *co-presence of contradictories* has the same effect, while the *alternation between absence and presence of temporal succession* leads to an association of temporality and timelessness. The characteristic in which *logical connections are reproduced as simultaneity in time* links the concept of time with that of logical connection. *Causality as succession* joins and identifies alternatives. *Equivalence-identity and the conjunction of alternatives* disregard the differences between contraries and those between contradictories. *Similarity* also joins things. *The co-presence in dreams of thinking and not-thinking* approaches the inconceivable. Here thinking and not-thinking would become the same. Finally, *the profound disorganization of the structure of thinking* leads, sooner or later, to the confusion of everything with everything else.

To conclude, one might say that, while thinking usually works within a framework of distinguishing things, the unconscious that Freud investigates tends to unite and fuse everything. Herein lies the radical nature of this different mode, a subject to which we shall return.

The characteristics of the unconscious and their contribution to human thought

Historically most of humanity’s formal efforts to think about, understand, and know the world have relied on the acquisition and development of what has come to be called reason. Over the years certain laws or rules of reasoning have been laboriously devised and codified in a system (which is based on propositions that are conceived as either true

or not true) which Matte-Blanco has roughly subsumed under the term ‘bivalent logic’. This was the first logic at humanity’s disposal for understanding the world. It has helped to unravel innumerable enigmas.

Yet, Matte-Blanco points out, it has always been evident to many that bivalent logic is necessary but not sufficient. In spite of the fact that much research showed that the world could often be illuminated by principles conforming to its rules—the principle of contradiction, for instance—few thinkers have considered (bivalent) logical ‘reason’ sufficient to understand everything. This conviction is eloquently expressed in Pascal’s *pensées* (1670): ‘Le coeur a ses raisons que la raison ne connaît point.’

We have just been following Freud’s argument that the unconscious does not conform to the known logical rules, notably the principle of contradiction. This unconscious mind must have its own system of rules; otherwise dreams, for instance, could never be meaningful. It must have its own mode of ‘thinking’. Throughout the twentieth century psychoanalysis has worked within this frame given by Freud. But, as we have seen, Matte-Blanco thinks it has not explored it sufficiently nor discovered its enormous potentialities.

Matte-Blanco argues that it is interesting that, roughly at the time when Freud was thinking about the unconscious, eminent mathematicians were scrutinizing the concepts of infinity and of the set. Not surprisingly neither Freud nor the mathematicians knew of each other’s work and it has taken Matte-Blanco to see possible connections. By using some elementary mathematical logical notions, which have become common knowledge since Freud’s day, he puts forward a radical reformulation of the characteristics of the system unconscious.

2 A reformulation of the Freudian unconscious

Symmetry and asymmetry

We hope you will have got some flavour, by now, of how Matte-Blanco thinks about Freud. He goes into very careful details, particularly about what he thinks most important, Freud’s ideas about the nature of unconscious processes. At the same time he delights in searching out the implications of an idea to its conclusion, no matter how odd it may sound. He tells us that his father nicknamed him ‘Hair-splitter’ by the age of five or so! This characteristic is certainly what makes him often difficult to read but, coupled with his imaginative courage, it is his great strength.

Let us turn now from his consideration of Freud to the main thrust of Matte-Blanco’s own ideas. In starting out on this it is most important to remember one thing: Matte-Blanco begins his task by using a very different conceptual framework from Freud. Freud developed his ideas, among other things, around the basic idea of the mind as *dynamic*—having impulses, instincts, drives, wishes, or desires, which could, of course, be in conflict with each other. Matte-Blanco does not in any way contradict this, but he starts, quite intentionally, from a different conceptual frame. He views the mind not only as dynamic but also as a *discriminator* and *classifier*. Mathematical *set theory* is his basic

conceptual background. Now the idea of a set is very simple. *A set is a collection of any sort*; it can contain any item or an infinite number. When we have a set of things that have an attribute or characteristic in common, we have what is called a *class* by most people. Matte-Blanco makes it plain that the human mind is, every second, carrying out classificatory activity; it forms, using the mathematical term, sets. This must go on for *recognition*, a vital activity, to occur.

So we advise you, whilst you go on reading this book: let yourself think in terms of classification and sets. It is different from the usual psychoanalytic mode of conceptualizing, but this is the very point of Matte-Blanco's task.

Matte-Blanco starts by arguing that all ordinary or 'logical' (i.e. bivalent) thinking activity is constantly dealing instantaneously with combinations of triads. The mind is always recognizing or making propositions to itself about one thing, another thing, and the *relation* between them. A vast set (potentially infinite) of such triads is the starting point from which thinking and all scientific logic are built. We now come to the most crucial concepts in Matte-Blanco's ideas: the characteristics of asymmetrical and symmetrical relations, and his distinction between them. This is so important that it must be understood before going any further.

We begin with some examples of mental propositions about *asymmetrical relations*. These abound, every second, in conscious thought:

- (i) 'I am writing this page.'
- (ii) 'John is the father of Peter.'
- (iii) 'B is smaller than, or precedes, 15'.
- (iv) 'The door is on the left side of the wall.'
- (v) 'A is part of B.'
- (vi) 'You are a member of the British Psycho-Analytic Society.'

In all these there is a relation (given by a verb) between subject and object. What is more, you find that *the converse of each relation is not identical to it*. This is why it is called asymmetrical. Thus if we turn to the first example, 'I am writing this page', we find there are two 'somethings': 'I' and 'this page'; and one relation: 'writing'. Note that the 'something' called 'I' comes first or is to the left of the sentence, and the 'something else' called 'this page' comes in the second place. If we reverse the order of the 'somethings' then the new sentence makes no sense (or a quite different sense) unless we also alter the relation. So we might say: 'This page is being written by I (me)', but not 'This page is writing me.' The other sentences are also examples of asymmetrical relationships. All have converses different from the original relation. If we alter the order of the 'somethings' in these cases then the relationships must also be changed to make sense, for example: 'Peter is the son of John'; '15 is greater than or follows 8'; 'The wall has the door on its left side'; 'B has A as a part'; 'The British Psycho-Analytic Society has you as a member.' By contrast, 'Peter is the father of John', '15 is smaller than or precedes 8', 'The wall is on the left side of the door', and 'The British Psycho-Analytic Society is a member of you', which are all the converses of the original relationships, mean something quite different or are puzzling.

There are, however, some relationships whose converse or inverse is always the *same*

as the proposed relation. These are called *symmetrical* relationships. For example, ‘*A* is identical to *B*’, ‘John is different from Peter’, ‘Sarah is married to James.’ When these relationships are inverted, the meaning stays the same. Some other relationships, such as those between siblings, are sometimes reversible and sometimes not. For example, the relation ‘Paul is the brother of John’ is reversible, but the relation ‘Paul is the brother of Kate’ is not. In general, symmetrical relationships of this kind are less frequent than asymmetrical relations. You may verify this for yourself.

Symmetrical logic and the principle of symmetry

In discussing Freud’s ideas about thinking in the unconscious, we concluded with Matte-Blanco that ordinary thinking deals only with things which are in some ways distinguishable from one another and with the relations existing between such things. This uses bivalent logic, and we can now see that it uses asymmetrical relations. Through the examination of the characteristics of the unconscious Matte-Blanco showed that Freud made it clear that thinking of this kind is *retained* in unconscious processes, but is also accompanied by something which is not thinking of this sort. In fact, in *The Unconscious as Infinite Sets* (Matte-Blanco 1975a:93–4) he put forward the idea that Freud’s fundamental discovery was not the characteristics of the unconscious as such but a *symmetrical form of logic*. Freud did not state the principles of symmetrical logic directly of course, but it is Matte-Blanco’s belief that his arguments were based on some implicit notion of its kind. In any case, Matte-Blanco sets out to demonstrate that, along with bivalent logic, symmetry provides a set of unifying principles which conceptualizes the forms of thinking and not-thinking which are fundamental to the characteristics of the unconscious.

Symmetrical logic is a loose general description used by Matte-Blanco to refer to a logical operation governed in part by what he calls the *principle of symmetry (PS)*. This principle states that *whenever somebody or something—let us call him or her or it ‘A’—has a given relation to somebody or something else, then this latter (we may call him or her or it ‘B’) must also have or be treated as having the same relation to ‘A’*. It has been mentioned that, in ordinary logical thinking, symmetrical relations are usually thought to apply to a limited number of defined situations, such as the relationship between two brothers. But here we are concerned with applying the principle of symmetry to *any* relationship that we might have in mind. In this case things are quite different. Take, for example, the statement ‘Rose is the mother of Mary.’ If the principle of symmetry (PS) is operating, then this is the same as ‘Mary is the mother of Rose.’ In these circumstances, like Alice in Wonderland, we find ourselves in very unfamiliar territory. Matte-Blanco thinks this is precisely the territory inhabited by the unconscious.

Matte-Blanco examines some important corollaries of the principle of symmetry (PS). From this he unfolds his main contention that the operation of a logic based on PS is indeed a defining characteristic of the unconscious as Freud has formulated it. To start with, PS is incompatible with the concepts of time, space, and movement. This is because PS is incompatible with what mathematicians refer to as the concept of *total order*.⁵ Put another way, we can say that *the unconscious, in using symmetrical logic, often treats the*

converse of any relation as identical to it; it treats asymmetrical relations as symmetrical.

The way the unconscious can deal with asymmetrical relations is the keystone of Matte-Blanco's work. It is, therefore, worth while to exercise ourselves and become thoroughly familiar with what is meant by a process of symmetrization. The first attempts we shall make may seem distinctly odd. There may be a temptation to dismiss the whole idea as ridiculous or to feel one is being driven mad. But if the argument is followed to the realm of *emotional* relations we hope it will become clear that Matte-Blanco has illuminated something very important.

Take a general example. Let us make a proposition using an asymmetrical relation, say, 'A is giving something good to B.' This involves an asymmetrical relation whose converse 'is being given' is not the same as 'is giving' (the original relation). But if, after the initial discrimination, we were to slip into symmetrizing, we would think: 'A is giving something good to B, and B is giving something good to A.' Ordinarily this is faulty logic, but emotional experiences like this are common. For instance, a patient can readily feel to himself, 'My analyst is giving me something good; I must be a good patient (giving him something good).' The same is often observed about a child who feels, 'My mother loves me, and I love her.' It is implicit in the phrase 'a loved child is a loving one'. This symmetrization is just as applicable with negative feelings. 'He hates me; I hate him.'

Let us now extend the argument by some further exercises—for example, to the idea that, if PS is applied to the concept of time, then it collapses. If an instant *A* precedes an instant *B* and PS holds, then *B* precedes *A*. As the conception of time is that of an order (a total order) called sequence of instants, in which each instant either precedes or follows any other given instant (an asymmetrical relation), then if PS holds we cannot construct the sequence of time. We are confronted with timelessness.

The principle of symmetry is also incompatible with the concept of space. If a point *A* in space precedes a point *B* and PS holds, then *B* also precedes *A*. As in the case of time, in such a case, space, which requires the concept of a sequence of points, disappears: spacelessness. Moreover, if space and time disappear when PS holds, then movement, because it is a displacement which occurs in time, must disappear too. Still more radically, under the principle of symmetry, awareness of *any process* at all must disappear.

There is another corollary to the operation of the principle of symmetry. When PS holds, *apart* of something is equal to *the whole* and is therefore indistinguishable from it. Expressed formally, if *a* is a part of *A* and PS holds, then *A* is a part of *a*. (In bivalent logic this conclusion is true only when the part is a so-called improper part, i.e. a part which is defined as identical to the whole.) Matte-Blanco thinks that this second corollary of PS is most important because the equation—that is, the symmetrization of the relationship—between the part and the whole of any object is frequently observed in clinical practice and ordinary life, as a few examples will show!

It is usual, in conscious logic, to recognize that the penis is a part of the body in a certain location. But in dreams and psychosis it is quite common to experience that penis, whole body, and self are undifferentiated. In muted form it is common, of course, in a

neurosis; for example, when a patient feels when talking that he 'is ejaculating prematurely'. Part-whole equation is also noticeable in slang and swearing—for instance, 'Oh he's just a big prick.'

Next consider with Matte-Blanco the set of all human mothers, past, present, and future, and consider in a logical way a given mother, say Mrs Mary Higgins. She can be called an element or (more loosely, in order to avoid longer explanations) a part of this set. If PS holds in this set, then the set is an element or part of Mrs Mary Higgins. However, as we have just argued, with this symmetrization, the set and the elements or parts are identical to one another. As this identity must also hold for any other mother, and considering that two things identical to a third are, even in bivalent logic, identical to one another, it follows that, where PS holds, any mother is identical to any other mother and to the whole set of mothers. Thus, whenever we consider any of them we are considering the whole lot of them. Something like this seems to be happening when we diffusely have a feeling of 'motherliness' in a general way. Note, however, that the set of mothers is different from the set of daughters or of fathers or any other set.

The set of human mothers might be defined, in terms of bivalent logical thinking, as the set of all women who have given birth to a child. In so far as PS holds (and this need not necessarily happen) we may say that the set may become symmetrized so that all mothers are treated as identical to each other. As the elements or parts become indistinguishable from each other and from the whole set, we may also say that the set becomes *homogenized* by PS.

When such a homogenization is taking place in the mind, then, to the experiencer, every mother becomes the same as every other mother and the same as the whole class. As we have noted, under these circumstances perhaps all that is known is the vague feeling of motherliness. In such a case, Matte-Blanco believes we have a new type of *mixed* logic. The *set itself* is defined in terms of *bivalent logic*, as just mentioned; but the characteristics of the 'inside' of the set, i.e. all the elements contained in it, are, instead, *ruled by PS*. So here we have a curious combination of normal logic and PS, which acts to dissolve-unify-identify all concepts. As we have seen, Matte-Blanco called this mixture by the name of *symmetrical logic*. Later, as we shall see in this and subsequent chapters, Matte-Blanco investigated this mixing of asymmetrical logic and symmetrization in some detail. He calls the mixture *bi-logic*. We could say that when the conscious (asymmetrical) mind 'expects' a bivalently logical sequence, but symmetrization has been 'inserted', then we have a bi-logical structure.

It appears that a modicum of symmetry plays a part in *any* discrimination of a set or, in other words, in any normal classificatory act by the mind. To recognize, to see a similarity, and so on, is to classify; this is to register that two or more elements are equivalent (or the same) with regard to the defining characteristic of the class. Now equivalence, sameness, and similarity are all symmetrical relations. So the principle of symmetry functions in ordinary conscious logical activity. It is thus a (hidden) aspect of normal bivalent logic. It is when symmetrization *breaks the bounds*, as it were, of asymmetrical bivalent logic that we slip into bi-logic or, in Freudian terms, into the unconscious.

The concept of *symmetrization* is so important in Matte-Blanco's thinking that, even at

the risk of repeating the last paragraph, we will stress its meaning again. When there is symmetrization within a particular category or equivalence class, the individual 'things' or elements collected together by some thought (propositional function), which regards them as sharing something in common, *become the same in every and all respects*. Ordinary asymmetrical thinking means that we regularly and normally form equivalence classes—rich, poor, tall, angry, dangerous—to categorize people or things. With symmetrization the differences within the class—more or less rich, and so on—are abolished. Anyone belonging to the same class becomes represented as the same. You will notice that we shall use the terms 'set' and 'class' as well as 'category' more or less interchangeably in what follows. Remember, we are always referring to a collection of 'things' formed by a thought (formally termed a propositional function) which 'sees' some similarity between them.

Matte-Blanco is clear that psychoanalysis has envisaged symmetrization similar to the kind described from its very beginning, only not explicitly. He takes one of the more recent examples. It is common to speak of a patient envying the breast. However, when we do this, we are not referring specifically to the envy, say, of the right or left breast of Mrs Mary Higgins or of any other woman, but to envy of all breasts of all women: envy of THE BREAST. Individuals have disappeared, and the only thing that remains is *breastness*—and not only physical breastness but psychological breastness as well. Matte-Blanco would describe the replacement of a specific, tangible breast by the concept of breastness (as comprising and being equal to all breasts) as a typical symmetrization. Matte-Blanco argues that, if there is greater clarity about this type of conceptualization by using his logical formulation, then much is gained in understanding and hence in the possibility of helping patients.

We have just said that the breast we consider in psychoanalysis is not a concrete breast but 'breastness'. In more general terms, symmetrization of any set entails the disappearance of the separate elements of the set and their replacement by the concept itself (in logic termed the prepositional function). This concept becomes 'incarnated' in the elements of the set: motherhood, fatherhood, goodness, badness, beauty, 'dooriness', 'chairness', intelligence, etc. Again this is an idea which is constantly implicit rather than explicit in psychoanalysis. But this is not the whole story. The establishment of concepts of 'breastness', goodness, badness, etc. does not, as we have already noted, necessarily violate the laws of scientific or bivalent logic. But another aspect is the identification of the individual with the whole set and hence with all the other elements of it, so that each mother, for instance, can be felt as not only herself but also any and all mothers and, indeed, motherhood. This derivative of symmetrical logic is constantly employed in psychoanalysis, but in a non-explicit and rather muddled way, which can lead to much confused thinking.

*Freud's characteristics of the unconscious in the light of symmetry and
asymmetry*

Let us take each of Freud's characteristics of the unconscious in turn. We will start with and spend most time upon the first five given at the beginning of the chapter. These are

the characteristics Freud considered to be the most fundamental in his paper 'The Unconscious' (1915b). We will be more summary with the other eight. (In this we have used both Matte-Blanco and a previous article by one of us: Rayner 1981).

(1) *The absence of mutual contradiction and of negation.* You will recall that Freud treats these as similar but probably not quite the same. Matte-Blanco discusses the issue in great detail (1975a:43–53). By absence of contradiction Freud refers to wishes which are distinct, to the ordinary logical mind of consciousness, but which strangely do not contradict each other unconsciously. In its simplest form take the experience of two wishes; for them to be known as contradictory they must be consciously felt as in a relation where one *opposes* the other. Thus one wish will be different from the other, hence the converse of the relation between the two wishes is non-identical. This is essentially asymmetrical. But, when symmetrization intervenes, only that which is the same between the wishes is known. Asymmetry disappears, so the knowledge of contradiction must disappear also.

Such experiences are well enough known in dreams—as when, for instance, a dreamer is glad or well satisfied that a relative is both long dead and yet alive; as when one enjoys a dream of being a child again and yet at the same time is being adult.

Absence of negation can likewise be seen as a function of symmetrization. For the act of negation essentially is the discrimination of a converse to a relation which is not the same as the original. This defines symmetry.

(2) *Displacement.* This characteristic is crucial since it lies at the basis of symbolization, transference, projection, introjection, sublimation, and probably condensation also.

Freud, of course, envisaged displacement in terms of the transfer of investment of mental energy from one object to another. Matte-Blanco is concerned about how the ordinary, discriminating mind, as it were, allows such transfers to happen, and frequently at that.

In displacement a person is seen by an outside observer to be shifting feelings and ideas from a primary object to a less primary one. But to the experienced unconscious both objects are identical. To him or her, they are registered as belonging to the same class and then, with symmetrization, they are conceived as identical. Defence (repression, denial, etc.) may come into play so that the idea or feeling is not recognized in consciousness as belonging to the primary object.

Here are a couple of examples with explanation by Matte-Blanco.

'If he feels his chief to be a dangerous father it is because he considers both to have the same characteristic, dangerousness. If we express this in terms of symbolic logic we may say that in his unconscious he treats both as elements of a class; it may also happen that he treats one as an element of another class, but in this case both classes are always subclasses of a more general class. For example, a mother who feeds belongs, let us say, to the class of women who feed materially; a professor who teaches belongs to the class who feeds mentally. When, on account of a process of displacement, an individual feels the professor as a mother who feeds he is, first of all, treating both classes as

subclasses of a more general class, that of those who feed, either materially or mentally.’

(Matte-Blanco 1975a:42)

These symmetrizations within the class are obvious here. These are just the first steps in displacement; Matte-Blanco goes on to define further functions involved in various defence mechanisms, but this will suffice us here. You will find more of this later in the volume.

(3) *Condensation*. It is possible that condensation and displacement have very similar mechanisms, for condensation does seem to involve displacements. As we saw earlier, here ideas derived from different times and different object relations are experienced as belonging to one object or idea.

This can readily be seen as a consequence of symmetrizations where, in specific ways, awareness of space and time disappears. Both of these are, as we have seen, dependent upon asymmetrical relations. Matte-Blanco makes plain, as we described when considering condensation early in this chapter, that symmetrization is *never* complete even in the unconscious. Symmetrizations are always local, as it were, mixed with ordinary asymmetrical relations and logic.

(4) *Timelessness*. This has already been considered. Time involves awareness of an ordered sequence. With symmetrization, order, which is by its essence asymmetrical, disappears, and so will awareness of time.

(5) *Replacement of external by internal reality*. The awareness of external reality involves the conception of space and boundary, of inside and outside. Both space and boundary involve asymmetrical relations; with symmetrization these can disappear, so that inside and outside become identical to the experiencer. However, to another person, an observer, the difference is still evident, so to him or her the experiencer seems to be replacing external by internal reality.

Now briefly, the eight further characteristics. They are dealt with more fully later by Matte-Blanco himself.

Co-presence of contradictories. This seems to be an extension of absence of contradiction, which has already been discussed.

Alternation between absence and presence of temporal succession. Here symmetrization alternates with the continuing presence of awareness of asymmetrical relations. It is a clear example of the working of bi-logic—of which, more later.

Logical connection reproduced as simultaneity and causality as succession. Here again, bi-logic can be seen working. In the first of these two characteristics, time seems to be symmetrized, while space remains intact. In the second, space is symmetrized, and time remains intact.

Equivalence-identity and conjunction of alternatives. Here too can be seen a mixture occurring between awareness of asymmetrical relations and symmetrization.

Similarity: the privileged relation. In this Freud saw how important recognition is in everyday life. It does not necessarily involve gross symmetrization. But in so far as it involves the everyday registration of ‘sameness’ it might be said to be the essential ‘normal’ functioning of symmetry within well-defined asymmetrical limits.

Co-presence of thinking and not-thinking. As we have seen, thinking necessitates asymmetrical functioning. With symmetrizations, ‘not-thinking’ necessarily intrudes.

Profound disorganization of the structure of thinking. Here, Matte-Blanco considers that symmetrization is in the ascendant; as symmetrization increases, thinking and consciousness disappear.

3 The internal world

The bi-logical stratified structure

Our examination of Freud’s characteristics of the unconscious has stressed that there is often a mixture of respect for bivalent thinking with its negation. We have seen that this makes it clear that bivalent and symmetrical logic can exist in various types of relationship with one another. This is therefore a process which submits, not to one logic—so far as does, for instance, all reasoning of arithmetic and science—but to two. As we noted earlier, this has been called *bi-logical reasoning* by Matte-Blanco.

All processes of thinking have a certain structure. They are sets endowed with various relations between their components. Bi-logical structures of thinking may be compared by considering how they differ in the way bivalent and symmetrical logics intertwine with one another. Moreover, Matte-Blanco suggests that our everyday ideas, thoughts, and feelings about people, things, and their relationships mean different things to us at what may be considered deeper and deeper zones or *strata* in our minds, conceptually differentiated according to the degree of symmetrization routinely present at that level. He suggests that at the deepest levels (in our unconscious) we all experience a unity, between ourselves and everybody and everything else. There is no asymmetrical thinking, and there are no distinctions. However, this is not incompatible with recognizing differences at less deep, more conscious, or more superficial levels. In these terms human experience can be conceived as structured by the existence of up to an infinite series of strata in which our capacity to recognize differences declines as the amount of symmetrization increases. At the limit, the deepest levels, is what Matte-Blanco calls the indivisible mode.

Putting the idea of stratification in formal terms, Matte-Blanco suggests that

‘behind every individual or relationship—as perceived or given in a certain manner at a given moment—the self “sees” an infinite series (sequence) of individuals; all these satisfy the same prepositional function (which may be a complex one, i.e. consisting of several sub-statements) under the light of which the individual or the relationship in question is perceived or seen or lived at this moment. If the attention of the observer remains focused on the first level, that of consciousness, then he will only be aware of the concrete individual; and if he lets himself be permeated by the underlying levels, this infinity will unfold itself before him, though in an unconscious manner. Embracing this infinite series (sequence) there is one unity: the class or the set. This, in its turn, is lived