

Matte Blanco, level 4 thinking, and Seth

By Jenny Wiltshire – May 2018

From having been a committed atheist, much inspired by Richard Dawkins, Anthony Grayling and Christopher Hitchens, Matte Blanco's work was instrumental in chipping away at that hard line position, I became interested in a kind of Buddhist pantheism: moving from nothing is God, to everything, via emptiness, is God. This was through an understanding of what Matte Blanco was getting at with level 5 thinking: All is one. This resonated with an odd anomalous experience I had had in my 20s, which I had hidden away in what I call a 'psychic box': it was a feeling of profound unification, wherein joy and sorrow were the same. But I had no context for this, no way of understanding it at the time and ignored it, happily continuing on my atheistic path. Matte Blanco offered a schema wherein this made sense, if all is one, including emotions. To find a narrative, a way of making sense of an anomalous experience, was satisfying, both emotionally and intellectually.

Perhaps it may be useful here to recap Matte Blanco's version of the levels in the unconscious. At one end, level I, we are embedded in the external world around us, having to remember to feed the dog, catch a bus, cook a lasagne, read the IKEA instructions etc. Things are measurable, weighed, distinct, separate. Peter, for example, is uniquely himself in level 1 thinking. In level 2, emotion begins to thread in as we understand that Peter is in the category of friend, an artistic young man I like. We like the lasagne but hate trying to follow IKEA instruction. The categories, or sets become larger: Peter is a white Christian man, and not at all like the dark skinned Islamic young men I see coming out of the local mosque. Foreign food is tasty, but all furniture assembly instructions are incomprehensible. In losing distinction, we see groups, identified by one or two characteristics: skin colour, race, gender. This is level 3 thinking, and may be behind many of our conflicts. Emotional matters take us deeper into level 4: we understand that all young men are part of humanity, an over-arching idea which blots out the distinctions. Nutrition sustains us. Literacy is communication. Here, black and white are conflated to the extent that the differences don't matter. This is the area I want to examine in the rest of this paper. Time is largely irrelevant in Level four, place is indistinct too. Ideas of love, truth and justice flourish, as do their personification in archetypes, as pointed out by Jung: the Wise Woman, the loving father, the trickster, the eternal mother. For level 5 (the deepest level) is not open to investigation, really, for the vast

set opens out into encompass everything, and there are no words or time in which to describe this. All is one, including time, including emotion.

To return to my story: roughly a year ago, something very strange happened to a family member involving a psychic healer and I have found myself, somewhat unwillingly, investigating the world of spiritualism, mediums and psychics, to try and make sense of what happened.

Putting a toe into this water opens up an ocean of information. These are some initial thoughts as I negotiate the vast quantities of experience in books and on the Internet and in person. The deeper I went, the more I saw concurrences with Matte Blanco's thinking about the the levels in the unconscious and the activities of those many who claim to be spiritual and/or psychic.

These various individuals all seem to be very much on the same page about what happens after we die, reincarnation being the order of the day, with the attendant implications of morality through the workings of karma. But the dilemma is always to discern whether the 'voices from the other side' are fraudulent, or discarnate entities (the spirits of the dead), or whether they are projections from our unconscious. And is this then a 'collective unconscious' as understood by Jung, a shared knowledge of archetypes and their significances, or perhaps Matte Blanco's fourth level, full of dreams and insights, poets and schizophrenics? The connections, the symmetrisation of this level can, of course, be diverted towards the 'Scylla and Charybdis' (RB 1999 P 39.) of psychosis or catatonia, as the cognitive mind's grip on daily life is left behind. This is what I encountered professionally, people projecting massively and even suffering from dissociative personality disorder, the Jekyll and Hyde phenomenon of multiple personalities all seeming to inhabit the same body. The mind fragments under stress and may even become psychotic, which could be defined as the boundaries, the sets, being confused.

Amongst my investigations I came across a series of extremely well written and interesting books by Jane Roberts, who 'channeled' a supposedly discarnate being called Seth. I wish to examine a little of this material because it shows some remarkable concurrencies with the thinking of Matte Blanco.

I have at the time of writing this read only four of the eight books written by Seth/Jane Roberts. There are other works recording informal sessions with Seth. Jane and her husband Robert Butts encouraged psychologists, psychiatrists and anyone else who was interested to attend these sessions. To begin with, with no history or ideas of life after death, Jane and Robert both thought that it must be Jane's unconscious at work.

There is a very useful paper by Paul Cunningham, a psychologist at Rivière College, (to be found in the external links on Jane Roberts' wiki page). This paper, called : The Problem of Seth's Origin: A Case Study of the Trance-Possession Mediumship of Jane Roberts, looks at this mass of evidence through eight challenges to its authenticity. The abstract of this paper follows: *Jane Roberts channeled the purported discarnate entity called "Seth" from 1963 through 1984. The purposes of this paper are to (a) discuss the question of whether the content of a mediumistic communication can aid in determining the source of that communication, (b) address a gap in the literature by presenting an outer history of the trance-possession mediumship of Jane Roberts, and (c) examine eight explanations for Seth's origin in light of the published evidence of the case, including fraud, cryptomnesia, hypnotic self-suggestion, incipient schizophrenia and dissociative identity disorder, high creativity, psi functioning, basic source aspect, and energy personality essence. Either Seth is or is not a production of Jane Roberts' psyche. In either case, we are led to the possibility that human personality may have a greater reality and greater awareness than is generally supposed.*

I will return later to the question of Seth's identity. But here I'd like to give an overview of Seth's work, with a focus on the aspects which seem to offer another perspective on the work of Matte Blanco.

Seth, via Jane Roberts, states that we are eternal. The subtitle to 'Seth Speaks' (the first book, published in 1972), is 'The Eternal Validity of the Soul'. He says we are formed by consciousness and not the other way round, that consciousness emerges from form. These lives, and the others we experience via reincarnation, are brief episodes in the existence of a multidimensional being which exists without time or spatial boundaries as we understand them. While this position, of no time or space, has much in common with Matte Blanco's fifth level, Seth says we retain the feeling of personality and memories across many lives. It is part, as are we here in this life, of All That Is, the vitally creative essence in everything which is continually unfolding. This can be explored another way via quantum physics,

which I do not propose to examine in detail. Briefly, physicist David Bohm too talks of the ‘unfolding, implicate order’ of the universe. There is no beginning or end to this creative force, because it exists differently, beyond spacio-temporal boundaries, in Level 5, I suggest.

We are thus engaged in this creative unfolding but not at a conscious level. Seth says explicitly that ‘To some extent, I serve as a communicator from one level of your selves to other levels of yourselves for I remind you of what you are.’ Like Freud, he aims to help us render the unconscious conscious. Freud too knew the energy of this unfolding: he called this creative force libido and it was generally pathologised as he was dealing with people who were disturbed and often very repressed. The Hindus call it ‘prana’: the energy that moves our breath, and this is behind the practice of yoga and meditation.

Seth claims that we experience the nature of All That Is all the time, and especially at night, in the ‘most protected’ part of our sleep, deep sleep, not REM. This is a state without symbols, time, or objects of any kind: it is essentially pure energy and creativity. In the REM periods are the dreams which we can sometimes remember and they seem to refer to aspects of the multidimensional self, in other times, other places, in inconceivable states of existence. This accords very much with Matte Blanco’s thinking, that dreams are mysterious and difficult to understand because so much material is compressed into something our waking mind can handle. (M B 1976 P 418) Seth characterises how this can work, especially as our world is caught in time and space. ‘Most dreams are like animated postcards brought back from a journey you have returned from and largely forgotten....’ The images within the dreams are highly coded and are signals for underlying events that are basically not decipherable. (Seth, p 248). When interpreting dreams for my patients, however, I find that characterising every personage in the dream as part of themselves is a useful therapeutic tool. But of course, if we are everyone in our dream, we are approaching a kind of interconnectedness which may possibly reference the All Is One position.

Because there is no time in the deep unconscious, says Seth, our reincarnated lives are ever present, not sequential. They occur now, as in a country around us: this is a delightful Seth image, describing our current life as one pathway, while our other lives lie behind us and in front of us, to the side, over, around and above, always existent. They are shrouded in mist ahead of us, and behind us....we can look back and get glimpses of what happened. We have ‘funny feelings’ sometimes, about places, objects and people, even though they have nothing

to do with us, and can sometimes be understood only through dreams and visions of other lives.

In fact, in dreaming we may be actually experiencing those lives, which appear to be in our historical past, or future, and also lives spent on other planets, in other inconceivable dimensions. This is why our dreams are so mysterious to us; as they surface through the levels of our mind the symbols become more and more inadequate, and the emotional significance becomes prime. We are left with Seth's 'animated postcard', a few thoughts referring to multitudinous lives of different sexes, in different countries, in different times, but with the feelings we experienced, filtered down the layers of consciousness. (MB 1976 pp. 418-419)

Seth speaks all the time about levels in our unconscious, like Matte Blanco, but in addition to depth, these levels have horizontal aspects, which he elucidates. His writing is always clear and logical and seems rational, humorous and profound. Here he talks of tracing the emotion of joy, through various levels: (Seth p. 255); the numbers in brackets are mine, and correspond to Matte Blanco's five levels of consciousness.

'In normal consciousness, the immediate environment will be perceived in a far different manner than it would be, say, if the individual were in a state of depression. The feeling of joy changes the objects themselves, in that the perceiver sees them in a far brighter light, he creates the objects far more vividly and with greater clarity.....What he sees is still physical, the objects of the material world (1). Pretend now that he begins to daydream and falls into a reverie. Into his mind come pictures and symbols of material objects, people or events, from perhaps the past as well as the present ... the joy now being expressed with greater freedom mentally, but with symbols (2) ... now imagine that the individual from his reverie falls either into a trance state or into a deep sleep. He may see objects that are highly symbolic to him of joy or exuberance. Logically there may be little connection between them, but intuitively the connections are clear ... he is still dealing with physically oriented symbols, however ... an exuberance may be translated into images of playing animals, flying people ... or landscapes of great beauty (3) ... the feelings of joy may now lead to images of Christ, Buddha or the prophets (4) ... beyond this are states in which the symbols themselves begin to fade away, become indistinct, distant. ... representations blink on and off and finally disappear. Consciousness is less and less physically orientated. In this stage the soul finds

itself alone with its own feelings, stripped of symbolism and representations, and begins to perceive the gigantic reality of its own knowing ... it feels direct experience' (5)

These do not, of course, fit exactly into set theory, but there is a feeling of greater emotionality leading through playful idealisation, (3), to the great archetypes (4), through to All There Is (5), All Is One, Buddhistic emptiness or 'O' in Bion's schema. I have here given a most inadequate précis of a small part of a work that extends over 400 pages, of profound, disciplined, rational writing of a metaphysical nature.

It is not only the great archetypes that exist at level 4, and possibly the Jungian ideas of the collective unconscious, and Rupert Sheldrake's ideas of morphic resonance, but Matte Blanco as mentioned before, also puts the poets and schizophrenics there. I suggest that the mystics, mediums and psychics also spend much of their time here. If the distinctions of number and word (all symbols) are gradually lost, we are also losing the boundaries of time and space. And what mediums seem to do is work outside the boundaries of time (death is not final), and space (OB experiences, astral travel, remote viewing, psychic healing). The genuine mediums sometimes make mistakes, and this is probably due to the difficulty of translating feelings/vibrations (the nearly non-symbolic) into words: moving from level 4 to 3 perhaps. (Might this be why we so venerate the poets who draw the strangest connections, like T S Eliot and Hopkins, because they are closer to being in touch with level 5, the source, All is One, the unfolding creator?)

I return now to questions of Seth's identity and that of other channeled voices. One aspect that Paul Cunningham does not consider is the terrible childhood that Jane Roberts endured, not only deeply impoverished but also with a suicidal mother who made numerous attempts, often threatening to take her daughter with her. And I have found, on asking the mediums, the OBE people, the ones who see angels and ghosts and use tarot cards and crystals, that nearly all have inadequate if not actually traumatic childhoods. If the childhood was not traumatic, these abilities invariably ran in families, with the mother or grandfather being 'psychic'. As it seems that most people who have these psychic experiences are spending more of their time in Level 4 thinking than the rest of us, the lack of good enough attunement to the mother may I suggest compromise the development of the frontal lobes, which are much involved in our social thinking, the ways in which we adjust to our complicated, materialistic society. This could be a genetically inherited trait too. The lack of boundaries

is of course an element in the symptoms of schizophrenia, but I am not here suggesting that mediums and psychics are insane. On the contrary, the individuals I have assessed are handling life well, married, working, with children, just like everyone else. If I'm going to generalise at all, on the whole they seem to be gentle and kindly people. They are however in touch with levels in their unconscious of which many of us are ignorant, and this may be easier for them because of neural structures that are not highly correlated to this materialistic, 3D world.

I conclude this very brief collection of ideas with four quotes: here is Cunningham's conclusion:

'The published record of Jane Robert's trance-possession mediumship suggests that fraud and cryptomnesia are highly improbable explanations. The duration of the phenomena, the intelligibility and rationality of its content, and the phenomenological processes underlying Jane Roberts' communication with Seth all argue against the hypothesis that Seth is a production of incipient schizophrenia and dissociative identity disorder. To emphasise and expect fraud and trickery, cryptomnesia, or psychopathology in cases of mediumship is to raise what is essentially a misleading, though culturally expectable, response to an uncanny encounter (Braude, 1988; Hughes, 1992; Richeport, 1992). Hypnotic self-suggestion may account for the production of the Seth-trance, but would not by itself account for the content of the Seth material. High creativity and psi functioning provide plausible explanations for the quality of the content of Seth's communications, but do not satisfactorily account for all aspects of the phenomenon considered in toto. A more adequate account would have to include Jane Roberts' understanding and judgment of her own experience and Seth's explanation of himself.

Here is Jane Roberts in the introduction to 'Seth Speaks':

'Seth may be as much of a creation as his book is. If so, this is an excellent instance of multidimensional art, done with such a rich level of consciousness that the "artist" is unaware of her own work and is as much intrigued by it as anyone else.....you can say that Seth is a dramatisation of the unconscious, or an independent personality. Personally, I don't see why the statements have to be contradictory.' (p. Xv)

Here is Seth himself:

‘you are no more of a physical being than I am, and I have donned and discarded more bodies than I care to tell.... It is only because you are so busily concerned with daily matters that you do not realise that there is a portion of you who knows that it's own powers are far superior to those shown by the ordinary self.....if you firmly believe that your consciousness is locked up somewhere inside your skull and is powerless to escape, if you feel that your consciousness ends at the boundary of your body, then you sell yourself short, and you will think that I am a delusion. I am no more a delusion than you are, and that may be a loaded sentence.’

This is an American psychiatrist J O Beahrs in 1982:

Roberts' Seth books are all readily available for anyone to study and attempt to explain and the Seth phenomenon and its content are in the domain of world experience -- but far beyond explanation. I am inclined to take a cautious position approaching expansive phenomena of this type, merely wanting to emphasise that we can and should no longer wish them away. As with psychiatric systems, any world view may have its own limits of relevance. Ours is now being challenged (Beahrs, 1982, p. 172).

Addendum

Since writing this I have become interested in past life hypnosis and between lives hypnosis, via the work of Michael Newton, an American doctor and hypnotist. I have twice experienced this and can vouch for the huge, overwhelming emotions of love and joy as I deliberately accessed deep layers of unconsciousness. Nothing in these two sessions revealed any historical references that I did not already know, nothing except perhaps one word, but the feelings were quite unlike anything else I have ever experienced, approaching, I imagine the near death experiences catalogued by Raymond Moody in the '70s. Either our unconscious is enduring, multidimensional and divine, and we can realise through it our part in the loving creation of All That Is, or an extraordinary cocktail of chemicals, generated in my unconscious brain, happily gave me and the thousands of others who go down this route, visionary, transformative and beautiful experiences. A small proportion of people do not

have these experiences when hypnotised, and generally these are people who have had very difficult lives, particularly early on, when the unconscious is so active.

Another interest has been investigating other people who channel distinct personalities. I am interviewing one woman who produces words of extraordinary wisdom in another voice, and also heals while singing wordless chants from a group of shamans, she claims.

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