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# Consciousness and Cognition in Kant's First Critique

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### ABSTRACT

This paper has the ambitious aim to clarify the putative different meanings of "consciousness" in Kant's *Critique*, particularly focusing on the concept of apperception. Often misinterpreted merely as the potential for self-attributions of experiences and mental states—technically, as the individual's ability to knowingly refer to himself—such readings overlook the pivot role of transcendental apperception in bridging the inherent gap between nonconceptual content of sensible intuitions and the higher-level conceptual content of propositional attitudes, essential for reasoning and the rational control of actions. In this context, "consciousness" or "self-consciousness" means cognitive accessibility (in Block's sense). But Kant's texts reveal additional meanings of consciousness. Notably, "sensation" means the raw material of intuition when it is apprehended through a synthesis of imagination without conceptual determination, capturing the subjective "what-it-is-like" phenomenal aspect of perception. Conversely, its objective correlate—the ability to discriminate and single out objects from their surroundings—embodies what can be described as "de re awareness" of a yet conceptually undetermined object of intuition.

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## Introduction

Kant's concept of transcendental apperception holds a central position within his theoretical framework, being referred to as the "highest point" and a "Radikalvermögen," which serves as the pinnacle of transcendental philosophy. It encompasses "all employment of the understanding, even the whole of logic and transcendental philosophy" (Kant, 1781/1787, B135). In the transcendental analytic, transcendental apperception plays a crucial role in the transcendental deduction of the categories; in the transcendental dialectic, it is central to the paralogisms of pure reason. This raises the following questions: first, what is apperception? Second, are there other irreducible senses of "consciousness" in Kant's work?

This paper has the ambitious aim to clarify the putative different meanings of "consciousness" in Kant's philosophy, particularly focusing on the concept of transcendental apperception. Often misinterpreted merely as the potential for empirical self-consciousness or self-attributions of experiences—technically, as the individual's ability to knowingly refer to oneself—such readings overlook the pivot role of transcendental apperception in bridging the inherent gap between nonconceptual content of sensible intuitions and the higher-level conceptual content of propositional attitudes, essential for reasoning and the rational control of actions. In this context, "consciousness" or "self-consciousness" mean cognitive access (in Block's sense). But Kant's texts reveal additional meanings of consciousness. Notably, "sensation" means the raw material of sensory intuition when it is apprehended through a synthesis of imagination without conceptual determination, capturing the subjective "what-it-is-like" or phenomenal aspect of perception. Conversely, its objective correlate—the ability to discriminate and single out objects from their surroundings—embodies what can be described as "de re awareness" of a yet conceptually undetermined object of sensory intuition.

This article is structured as follows: In Section 1, following this historical introduction, I present and critique the "language-analytic" reading of Kant's transcendental apperception. As expected, Strawson's interpretation in his seminal 1959 and 1966 books serves as the starting point. However, a prominent figure of the German Heidelberg School, Konrad Cramer, offers the finest and most detailed linguistic analyses in his papers from 1987 and 2013, inspired by Ernst Tugendhat's "language-analytic" approach" to the phenomenon of epistemic immediate self-consciousness (see Tugendhat, 1979). Additionally, in a systematic paper unrelated to Kant's scholarship, Lynne R. Baker provides the clearest account of the analytic reception of Kant's apperception (see Baker, 1998).

In Section 2, I critically examine the unique perspective of Kant's apperception in relation to both the global workspace theory of consciousness (GWT) in neuroscience and the higher-order theories of consciousness (HOT). While Kant's usage of the term "consciousness" typically aligns with "propositional consciousness," Section 3 is dedicated to showcasing the diverse and

independent interpretations of what we commonly refer to as "consciousness" in Kant. This is a novel aspect of Kant's hierarchical arrangement of representations in the *Critique* and his logical writings.

In section 4, I present and defend my reading of Kant's transcendental apperception. What Kant had in mind, distinct from the contemporary understanding of self-consciousness, is the "cognitive accessibility" of nonconceptual representations. This understanding allows us to draw a connection between Kant's transcendental apperception and global workspace theory, not as a theory of consciousness but as a theory of cognition. In the final section, 5, I reiterate: My reading provides robust additional support for the nonconceptual reading of the *Critique*, reinforcing its validity.

### 1. The potential Self-attribute of Experiences.

Strawson's interpretation of Kant's apperception fits into his "austere" analytical reconstruction of Kant's Deduction. This reconstruction is meant to show that the sense-data skeptic (as a straw figure) who challenges us to demonstrate that our experience is not limited to fleeting sense-data. While it can be disputed whether Kant's Deduction has the goal that Strawson ascribes to it, there is no question that Kant holds that our experience is about a mind-independent reality. Kant assumes that we experience objects and tries to show that the concept of object in this strong/weigh sense is presupposed by the self-ascribing of experiences. Strawson's reading is as follows:

(i) The experience contains a diversity of elements (intuitions) that must somehow be united in a single consciousness capable of judgment, capable, that is, of conceptualizing the elements so united (Strawson, 1966, 87).

(ii) This [subjective] unity requires another kind of unity or connectedness on the part of the multifarious elements of experience (Strawson, 1966, 87).

(iii) This [another kind of unity or connectedness] is required for the experience to have the character of the experience of a unified objective world and, hence, to be capable of being articulated in objective empirical judgments. [From (i) and (ii)]

Strawson conceives the transcendental apperception as follows:

Unity of the consciousness to which a series of experiences belong implies [...] the possibility of self-ascription of experiences on the part of a subject of those experiences; it implies the possibility of consciousness, on the part of the subject, of the numerical identity of that to which those different experiences are by him ascribed. (Strawson, 1966, 98)

Strawson's particular reading of transcendental apperception is closely tied to his misinterpretation of the aim and structure of the deduction. To be sure, any interpretation of transcendental apperception is connected to an interpretation of the aim and structure of the transcendental deduction. However, I want to reassure you that I will not be engaging in these debates, as they are beyond the scope of this article. While I acknowledge the connection between the interpretation of transcendental apperception and the understanding of the deduction, I will focus on the transcendental apperception and steer clear of the controversies surrounding the aim and structure of the deduction that have been ongoing since the first edition of the *Critique*.

The most thorough linguistic-analytical exposition of Strawson's interpretation of transcendental apperception originates not from the Anglo-Saxon sphere but from Germany, specifically in essays by Konrad Cramer (1987, 2014). Cramer's linguistic elaboration of Strawson's interpretation is based on Ernst Tugendhat's linguistic approach to self-consciousness (see Tugendhat, 1979)—which lays the groundwork for understanding self-consciousness but does not directly engage with Kant's particular concept of transcendental apperception. Cramer's essay focuses entirely on Kant's renowned passage in paragraph 16 of the transcendental deduction, a passage that we will reference multiple times throughout this paper. In an oracular tone, Kant says:

The *I think* must be able to accompany all my representations [Vstellungen]; for otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me. That representation that can be given prior to all thinking is called intuition. (B131/B132, original emphasis)

Regardless of the pivot role that apperception plays in the main argument of B-deduction, the passage contains a dense and obscure argument of its own:

- 1) That I think, must be able to accompany all my representations.
- 2) For otherwise something would be represented in me that could not be thought, which means just as much as:
  - 3) The representation would either be impossible,
  - 4) Or at least nothing for me.

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Therefore, the I think I must be able to accompany all my representations.

The key to the dense argument is how the "for" clause justifies the general claim 1). According to Cramer (2014), the argument may seem flawed at first glance. First, the conclusion Kant draws, namely: "Therefore, all the variety of intuitions must have a necessary relation to 'I think,' in the same subject to which this manifold appears" (B 132), is not a restatement of his thesis that intuitions without concepts are "blind," and concepts without intuitions as thoughts without

content are "empty" (A 51/B 75) (see Cramer, 2014, 26). Indeed, even if the cooperation between intuitions and concepts is necessary for the possibility of cognition of objects, that is something that Kant does not state when he claims that the "I think" must accompany all my representations.

Moreover, the simple, dense and obscure argument raises several questions: (1) How do representations qualify as "my representations?" Is the accompaniment of "I think" a necessary condition for *the ownership* of "my representations?" (2) What is the difference between *within me* and the *ownership* of my representations? According to Cramer, the claim: "this representation is mine" ("belonging-to-me," the *Meinigkeit*) is not an answer to the trivial question of what representation I have? (see Cramer 1987, 189). Finally, (3) What does "impossible" and "nothing for me" mean?

According to Cramer, representations are rather mental states that have always been considered almost definitions of the "soul" (A 19/B 33; A 22/B 37; B 67 et seq.) or "subject" (B 67; B 132 et seq.) and which "enjoy" in it (B 132). The expression "within me" is evidently related to the expressions "within my soul" and "within my mind." The phrase "to represent something within me" accordingly means "to represent something within my soul." This, in turn, according to the above definition of representation, means representing something through the determination of my soul. That is to say, the determination of my soul represents an object through its structural similarity.

There are two possible interpretations of the expression "to represent something within me" (see Cramer 1987, 181n.). Firstly, Kant could have emphasized the owner of the representation. Accordingly, Kant wanted to highlight that I represent something within myself and not within another. However, this interpretation is inappropriate or at least imprecise because the possibility of external ownership is not addressed in the context of the principle of apperception (at least from the perspective of the third person) and is, therefore, irrelevant. Cramer (1987, 181n.) himself prefers the view that "to represent something within me" designates a mental event or state.

But from this characteristic of representations, it does not follow that the soul or subject, whatever its definition, must also already be aware that representations are in it. It is here that following the Strawsonian tradition, Cramer introduces self-attribution as a way to differentiate "representation *within me*" from "representation *for me*:"

But if the subject has the consciousness of the representation in him, then he attributes these representations to himself. The self-ascription of representations has a linguistic form "I know that I  $\varphi$ " or "I  $\varphi$ ," where  $\varphi$  is a predicative variable, for which every time descriptive predicates, which are concepts by which mental states or mental events such as what Kant calls "representation" are specified. If these representations are givennesses of sensibility in the form of intuition, then I must have concepts to describe them so that I can attribute them to myself. Concepts for intuition are not intuitions; they relate to intuitions. That description of intuitions is possible only through the



use of concepts through which they are thought to be a trivial truth. Therefore, if self-ascription of intuitions contains descriptions of this intuition, then it is also true that "I think" must be that which must be able to accompany intuition. So, it all comes down to the self-ascription of representations. In judgments like "I know that I  $\phi$ ," the one who makes the judgment not only describes the representation, which is something in it, but also, through the use of the singular term "I," relates it to oneself. Thus, the singular term "I" is not only synonymous with what it refers to but also with the one who uses it through speech. Therefore, the singular term "I" itself has a semantic reference to a conceptual form of such kind that Kant - even if not so explicitly - could only speak about "the concept of thinking beings in general" (KrV, B 418), and also, about "the concept of non-self in thought" and about "the concept of I, as it arises in any thought" (KrV, A 342/B 400). (Cramer, 2014, 26)

Cramer adopts Tugendhat's linguistic analysis of self-consciousness (Tugendhat, 1979). The conscious awareness that a representation is "in me" takes the following canonical form: "I know [ich weiss] that I  $\phi$ " (where " $\phi$ " denotes a psychological predicate), such as "I know that I am bored" (Tugendhat, 1979, 13). Let me call this the "semantic interpretation." When we interpret Kant's statement, "that the I think must be able to accompany all my representations," as the potential self-attribution of psychological mental states in the form of propositional content, we have the following statement:<sup>1</sup>

➤ If some representation  $\phi$  is means something for me, then it must be possible that "I know that I  $\phi$ ."

Now we know (1) what qualifies a representation as my representation, (2) why the accompaniment of "I think" is a necessary condition for the ownership of "my representations," what the difference is between "in me" and the ownership of my representations, and (3) what "impossible" and "nothing for me" mean is the absence of self-attribution. Finally, however dense and obscure, the argument is as cogent as possible: the "I think must..., i.e., "I know [ich weiss] that I  $\phi$ ," is a condition for representing a representation in me, i.e., a mental state of myself.

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<sup>1</sup> The full statement "I know that I  $\phi$ " may sound odd in everyday language, as we usually just say "I  $\phi$ ." However, the sentence "I  $\phi$ " is implicitly understood to mean the self-ascription of a complete psychological propositional content ("I know that I  $\phi$ ") rather than just a single psychological predicate. For those who find the full statement "I know that I  $\phi$ " uncomfortable, Lynne Rudder Baker (1998) offers several examples with a similar propositional structure by substituting the verb "know" with other intentional verbs, such as "I wish I were tall," "I hope I will win," or "I am afraid that I am going to die." While she has not analyzed Kant's apperception, her examination of self-consciousness bears resemblance to Cramer's approach: self-consciousness is what she describes as a "strong first-person perspective," which refers to the self-ascription of the "weak first-person perspective" that is common to animals and infants. She defines this as follows: "The former [I am tall] *makes* a first-person reference; the latter [I wish I were tall] *attributes* first-person reference *to herself*" (Baker, 1998, 330, original emphasis).

The semantic interpretation of transcendental apperception is flawed for several reasons. First, it is flawed for pure exegetical reasons. If the given representation is a sensible nonconceptual representation, then—Cramer argues—the subject must conceptualize it, otherwise, it could not attribute it to himself as a mental state "I  $\phi$ " ("If these representations are givennesses of sensibility in the form of intuition, then I must have concepts to describe them so that I can attribute them to myself" (Cramer, 2014, 26). In these terms, Cramer puts the cart before the horse. How could the subject "conceptualize" the nonconceptual content of his sensible intuition if not by the "I think must accompany my sensible intuition?" If the usual self-attribution ["I think that I  $\phi$ ,"] relies on the conceptualization of some intuition as " $\phi$ ," we should not forget that transcendental apperception is the "vehicle" of all concepts, as Cramer recognizes, the statement "I think, must be able to accompany all my representations" cannot mean the self-attribution of mental states in the canonical form: "I  $\phi$ ." Either what Cramer calls "self-attribution" constitutes the conceptualization of the nonconceptual representation and in that case self-attribution cannot mean "I think that I  $\phi$ ," or Cramer's account runs in a vicious circle.<sup>1</sup>

Furthermore, as Cramer himself acknowledges, "Whoever uses the term 'I' uses the first-person pronoun and thereby relates to themselves as individuals, to the very person they are, therefore, to individuals are entities in space and time" (Cramer, 2014, 26). The question arises as to how Cramer reconciles this triviality with his previous remark that the singular term 'I' itself refers to "the concept of thinking beings" (Cramer, 2014, 26). On the contrary, when Kant claims that "I think" is the "vehicle" of concepts, even of transcendental ones, he denies that "I think" is a concept and, hence, cannot occur in self-ascriptive propositions (see A 341/B 399; A 348; B 406).

In the same vein, Kant rises self-consciousness to the status of "highest point" or *das Radikalvermögen*, claiming that "all employment of the understanding, even the whole of logic and transcendental philosophy" (B135). The self-attribution of experiences ("I think that I  $\phi$ ") does not play this central role. On the contrary, self-attribution of experiences ("I  $\phi$ ") relies on a range of cognitive abilities. Self-attribution of experiences typically develops between the third and fourth year of life, after the acquisition of language, the mastery of numerous concepts and the ability to attribute false beliefs to others.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By far, Cassam's book is the most ingenious reading of Kant's self-consciousness as an embodied individual who is conscious of his own experiences (see Cassam, 1997). It weaves a complex yet nuanced array of arguments supporting the idea that I am conscious of myself as a subject of experiences by being conscious of myself as a physical object among physical objects. While it remains open to debate whether Cassam has accurately captured Kant's perspective on self-consciousness, the merit of his arguments stands on their own.

<sup>2</sup> We must, therefore, concur with Longuenesse (2006). If the first personal pronoun "I" does not refer to a person but rather linguistically manifests a sentence operator, the most reasonable conclusion is that in Kant's work, the first-person pronoun "I" does not serve as a self-referring expression. Instead, in Kant's work, the "I" is ontologically committed to what Longuenesse calls "the spontaneous thinking agency" responsible for the synthesis of

## 2. The 'I Think,' the GWT and the HOT

Contemporary cognitive science, with its cutting-edge insights, offers a fresh perspective on Kant's apperception. Our novel approach is to link Kant's distinction between unconscious and conscious representations with Dehaene et al.'s distinction between subliminal and conscious representations (see Dehaene, 2006). This connection—we believe—sheds new light on Kant's ideas. The global workspace theory, a key component of our analysis, suggests that consciousness arises from integrated information that is globally available to guide actions and verbal reports (see Baars, 1988).

Dehaene has further developed Baars' original functional model. He assumes that the global working space certainly may comprise brain structures in the prefrontal cortex and the frontal areas of the brain that are frequently associated with known cognitive functions. For an object stimulus to become a "conscious" representation, it must first activate excitatory neurons that have extensive connections in the cortex. In this case, the stimulus must be able to support activity throughout the brain. Be that as it may, the neurological regions involved are not relevant to our topic here.

One of the intriguing aspects of attention and consciousness is the competition for cognitive accessibility to the global workspace. Many sensory representation objects "compete" for this access at any given time, but only some can be consciously experienced at any given time. At the neuronal level, "activated neuronal coalitions compete to initiate recurrent activity" and fight for access to the global workspace (Block, 2023, 7). According to this view, attention is a prerequisite for consciousness (see Schlicht & Newen, 2015). This perspective sparks a fascinating discussion

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representations. However, how are we to interpret positively the activities of "combining representations" and "thinking agency?"

Longuenesse proposes an intriguing modern counterpart to Kant's formal "I," suggesting that Kant's notion of transcendental apperception parallels the Freudian Ego in opposition to the Id, rather than aligning with contemporary views of self-reference. She posits that like Freud's ego ('das Ich'), which organizes mental activities to create a reliable world image conducive to life preservation, Kant's apperception synthesizes representations to enable object representation (Longuenesse, 2017, 20).

However, Longuenesse acknowledges crucial distinctions between Kant's apperception and Freud's concept of the ego. Kant emphasizes the spontaneous agency vital for object cognition, centering his critique on evaluating the cognitive claims of pure reason and addressing the question, "What can I know?" (A805/B833). Conversely, Freud's focus does not include a theory of cognition or epistemological inquiries.

But the most glaring difference is one that Longuenesse seems to overlook: Freud's second "topic"—the division of the psyche into the id, ego, and superego—focuses on impulses and sexual drives (conative states) rather than cognition. Therefore, the organizing principle in Kantian is cognitive, while in Freud, it is conative. Furthermore, although the Freudian ego is exactly a "person," it is an embodied subject (see Muller & Tillman, 2007).



on the interplay between attention and consciousness. Critics contend that the extent of attention does not constrain cognitive access (see Block, 2011), a viewpoint I concur with.<sup>1</sup>

In line with paragraph 16, one might suspect a close analogy between Kant's emergent theory of consciousness and global workspace theory (GWT). Kant claims that "something would be represented in me that could not be thought at all, which is as much as to say that the representation would either be impossible or else at least would be nothing for me" (B131/B132). In accordance with this proposal, a sensory representation (which takes place in my sensory cortex at the back of my head) without the accompaniment of "I think" would not count as a "representation with consciousness."

In the framework of Global Workspace Theory (GWT), the phrase "impossible or nothing for me" denotes a representation devoid of consciousness. The resulting understanding is as follows: The cognitive assertion "I think" must accompany sensible representations; without it, these representations would be meaningless or nothing for me—labelled "unconscious." Sensory representations require the accompaniment of an "I think" to be integrated into the global workspace, thereby becoming accessible for propositional attitudes, reasoning, and the rational control of behavior as intentional actions. This integration confirms the conscious status of these representations and their cognitive availability. Stanislas Dehaene's use of "subliminal" in Kantian terms refers to those representations that could potentially be accompanied by the "I think" but are not in reality. These are the representations that disappear without ever being integrated into the global workspace, remaining unconscious or subliminal.

It has also been argued that Kant was a precursor to what is now known as the Higher-Order Thought (HOT) theory of consciousness (Gennaro, 1996, §3.4, 48–54). Within Kant's framework, the theory suggests that "meta-psychological thoughts" are what render mental states "conscious" in the first place. The assertion that "I think" must accompany all my representations indicates a meta-representation, making a first-order representation meaningful and conscious. In addition, other passages seem to support the HOT assertion that thoughts render sensory states conscious. For instance, in a reflection from 1769, Kant asserts, "In fact, the representation of all things is the representation of our own state" (HN, Ref. 3929, Ak. 17, 351). Furthermore, he explains,

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<sup>1</sup> I believe that it is what Kant has in mind in the famous passage where there is a competition between the musician playing an improvisation and a friend talking to him:

"The same thing is true of the sensation of hearing when the musician plays a phantasy on the organ with his ten fingers and two feet while, at the same time, he is speaking to someone standing beside him. Within a few seconds, a host of ideas is awakened in his soul, and every idea requires special judgment as to its appropriateness since a single stroke of the finger, not fitted to the harmony, would immediately be heard as discord. Yet the whole comes out so well that the improvisator must often wish to have preserved in a score many a passage which he has performed in this happy fashion but which he could not have performed so well with real diligence and attention." (*Anth*, Ak, 7, 135). I will be back to this famous passage.

"consciousness is...a representation of my representations; it is a self-perception" (VM, Ak. 28, 227). Thus, Kant establishes a significant link between consciousness and self-consciousness, as discussed by Gennaro (1996, 49). The "I think" pertains to a specific thought that targets one's representations, illustrating that consciousness entails self-consciousness or HOTS.

Assuming Kant as a precursor to the Higher-Order Thought (HOT) theory, it follows that he viewed all representations, prior to being accompanied by "The I think," as nonconscious (Gennaro, 1996, 49). However, Gennaro notes the ambiguity of the term "representation" in Kant's writings, which can be interpreted either as a "mental state" or as a "conscious state" (Gennaro, 1996, 49). This ambiguity leads to significant questions: What does it mean for "the I think" to accompany a representation, and is this accompaniment a condition for consciousness? Additionally, the ambiguity prompts an inquiry into whether representations lacking "the I think" are deemed "unconscious" and whether various forms of consciousness exist.

In his analysis, however, Gennaro encounters another complication. He suggests that the phrase "I think" can be interpreted in two ways: "I think unconsciously" and "I think consciously" (Gennaro, 1996, 49). If Kant intended the latter, "I think consciously," then self-consciousness equates to introspection. Gennaro explains, "To have a conscious mental state is to be able to think consciously about that state, i.e., engage in introspection" (Gennaro, 1996, 49). He argues that Kant's conflation of the two perspectives leads to the assumption that any unconscious representation must exist within a self-conscious being. This implies that a representation must be subjected to introspection to become conscious.

The only alternative interpretation is to understand Kant's claim that "the 'I think' must be able to accompany all my representations," meaning that "having conscious mental states presupposes being able to have (unconscious) thoughts about them" (Gennaro, 1996, 51). Gennaro's critique of Kant's supposed conflation of "I think unconsciously" with "I think consciously" is significant. Gennaro argues that Kant could have supported his alternative interpretation: "The application of concepts to one's representations need not be conscious in order to become conscious" (Gennaro, 1996, 52).

It is with a sense of respectful disagreement that I approach this interpretation. Gennaro (1996, 49) offers two interpretations of the phrase "I think": "I think unconsciously" and "I think consciously." The ambiguity, however, lies in the distinction between "I think about what the sensible intuition represents" and "I think that the sensible intuition is a state of my mind." In the first case, we are dealing with a simple propositional consciousness, such as "I think that the cinnabar is red" (Kant's example: A101). In the second case, we enter the realm of introspection, as in "I think that I perceive the cinnabar as red." Here we are back to Cramer's linguistic reading: "I think that I  $\phi$ ." Kant's distinction between a transcendental and an empirical understanding of the expression "my representation" clarifies this dual interpretation. In the transcendental sense,

everything that appears is "my representation." In contrast, in the empirical sense, every manifestation is an appearance of a thing in itself in space and time outside of me.

Nevertheless, "my representations" in the transcendental sense do not constitute what we currently describe as "introspection." They are not objects of "I think" as a form of second-order representation that also serves as a first-order representation. The transcendental sense merely offers a worldview. If I intuitively perceive something as red, and this sensible intuition is accompanied by an "I think," it merely implies that I think that the cinnabar is red, that ripe apples are red, and that ripe tomatoes are red, among others.

In summary, it is highly implausible to interpret Kant's "I think" as meaning "I nonconsciously think." Equally implausible is the suggestion that Kant's "I think" is a second-order thought that takes some first-order representation as its object (a meta-representation). In this sense, transcendental apperception is more aligned with Global Workspace Theory (GWT) than with Higher-Order Thought (HOT) theory. However, as I will demonstrate in the following section, Kant should not be viewed as a precursor to both GWT and HOT. This is because neither the integration of representations into the global workspace nor a higher-order thought that takes a representation as its object qualifies as a condition for *consciousness*. In the conclusion of this paper, I will argue that integration into the global workspace makes representations *cognitively accessible*.

But let us return to Kant's argument of the paragraph 16:

- 1) That I think, must be able to accompany all my representations.
- 2) For otherwise, something would be represented in me that could not be thought, which means just as much as:
  - 3) The representation would either be impossible,
  - 4) Or at least nothing for me.

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Therefore, that I think must be able to accompany all my representations.

As we have observed, the crux of this argument hinges on how premise (2) substantiates the general assertion in premise (1). Following the Global Workspace Theory (GWST) or Higher-Order Thought (HOT) theory, premise (3), "impossible or nothing for me," refers to a *representation lacking consciousness*; thus, the argument is as cogent as possible. The argument posits that the intellectual representation "I think" (whether HOT or not) must accompany any representation; otherwise, it would be devoid of meaning in the sense of lacking consciousness. If this interpretation is correct, Cramer (1987; 2014) is accurate in asserting that § 16 is not merely a reiteration of Kant's distinction between intuitions and concepts, specifically the claim that sensible intuitions without discursive concepts are "blind" and concepts without intuitions are "empty" (A 51/B 75), because what is absent is consciousness, not merely understanding or cognition.

### 3. The 'I Think' is not a condition for Phenomenal Consciousness.

The complex question we address is whether Kant's transcendental apperception constitutes a necessary condition for (phenomenal) consciousness. Collins (1999) affirms this, stating that "conscious experience involves reflexive self-consciousness" (p. 12). More explicitly, he explains that "the overall plan of Kant's account of experience suggests that consciousness of objects is only achieved when elementary representations, of which the subject is not conscious, are suitably concatenated" (p. 79).

However, Kant's "progression" ("Stufenleiter") in the *Critique* suggests otherwise:

The genus is representation in general ("repraesentatio"). Under it stands the representation with consciousness ("perceptio"). A perception [Perception] that refers to the subject as a modification of its state is a sensation ("sensatio"); an objective perception is a cognition ["Erkenntnis"] (cognitio). The latter is either an intuition or a concept (intuitus vel conceptus). (A319-20/B376-77).

If we consider sensible intuition solely in relation to the individual—as a modification of his mind, not in terms of its objective correlation with what it represents—we arrive at what Kant terms "sensation" ("sensatio"/"Empfindung"). Kant's notion of "sensation" and "inner sense" aligns closely with what is currently referred to as "phenomenal consciousness," the subjective aspect of sensory experience. When I focus exclusively on my personal experience of seeing something red, irrespective of its actual representation, this act of seeing red takes on a distinct "what-it-is-like" phenomenal character of perception. Kant asserts that transcendental apperception is not required for sensation. However, if there are conscious representations, which Kant identifies as perceptions, there must also exist "unconscious" representations. Kant addresses this issue in his *Anthropology from a Pragmatic Point of View* by proposing that:

The field of sensuous intuitions and sensations of which we are not conscious, even though we can undoubtedly conclude that we have them; that is, *obscure* representations in the human being (and thus also in animals), is immense. *Clear* representations, on the other hand, contain only infinitely few points on this field that lie open to consciousness (*Anth*, Ak, 7, 135, emphasis added.)

A brief digression on the concept of "consciousness," as adopted by Kant from the Leibniz-Wolff tradition, is necessary here. Leibniz and Wolff fundamentally distinguish between two types of non-conscious representations. First, there are what they term "obscure ideas." Leibniz famously describes these as "perceptions without apperception" or "petites perceptions" (Leibniz, 1704, I. xxix, § 13, 242f). The essence of "obscure ideas" is that they place us in a mental state where we are completely unaware of what our mental states represent. Second, there are "confused

ideas," which are clear as opposed to obscure, allowing us to represent objects but not distinctly. Wolff claims that we are clearly conscious of something only insofar as we can differentiate it from something else (Wolff, 1751, § 729). Consequently, it is not possible to be aware of one thing in isolation without also being aware of another thing from which it is distinguished. Conscious awareness thus requires differentiation between multiple entities.

Christian August Crusius challenges Wolff's conception of consciousness as the capacity to differentiate. He contends that differentiation presupposes consciousness, not the reverse (Crusius, 1745, § 444). Crusius critiques what he perceives as Wolff's assumption that "differentiation" involves a negative categorical judgment. He notes that to make a judgment such as "A is not B," one must first be aware of both A and B (Crusius, 1747, §§ 435, 436). Crusius defines consciousness as "distinct sensation" and considers sensation as the origin of the mind's passive faculties (Crusius, 1747, § 86), (see Indregard, 2018, 175).

Kant agrees with Crusius that there is a type of subjective consciousness that is not based on "differentiations" through negative categorical propositions. This is the peculiar "what-it-is-like" aspect of sensible intuition (phenomenal consciousness), which Kant, in agreement with Crusius, calls "sensation." Unlike Crusius, however, Kant still agrees with Wolff when he claims that we are only conscious *of something* to the extent that we "differentiate" it. Suppose you are staring at a perpetually well-camouflaged moth on a tree. You are not conscious of it because you are unable to differentiate it from other things and its background. But Kant distances himself from Wolff when he makes an important distinction between two kinds of "differentiations" that Wolff overlooked:

I would go still further and say: it is one thing to differentiate [unterscheiden] things from each other, and quite another thing to recognize the difference between them [den Unterschied der Dinge zu erkennen]. The latter is only possible by means of judgments and cannot occur in the case of animals, who are not endowed with reason. The following division may be of great use. Logically differentiating means recognizing that [erkennen *daß*] a thing A is not B; it is always a negative judgment. Physically differentiating [physisch unterscheiden] means being driven to different actions by different representations. The dog differentiates the roast from the loaf. It does so because the way in which it is affected by the roast is different from the way in which it is affected by the loaf (for different things cause different sensations). The sensations caused by the roast are a ground of desire in the dog which differs from the desire caused by the loaf, according to the natural connection which exists between its drives and its representations. (*FSS.*, § 6, Ak, 2: 60; 104)



The concept is straightforward: Wolff did not acknowledge that the term "differentiate" carries two distinct meanings. The first is conceptual or logical differentiation, which invariably involves a negative categorical judgment. This form of differentiation is always "de dicto," meaning it is performed by means of a "dictum" or proposition, exemplified by the negative categorical proposition that A is not B. Conversely, the dog is "de re" aware of both the roast and the loaf as it can sensibly discriminate between them. In contrast, my "de dicto" consciousness that the roast is not the loaf manifests as I judge that what is categorized under "roast" does not fall under the category of "loaf."

Now, one may ask how Kant could align with both Crusius and Wolff in the controversy at the same time. The answer is that there are three concepts of consciousness in the debate. Both Crusius and Kant use the term "sensation" to refer to what we call today "phenomenal consciousness," denoting the peculiar subjective aspect of perception/awareness. In contrast, both Wolff and Kant utilize the term "differentiation" to signify the objective character of the same perception. It is here that the idea of "unconscious" representation makes sense: I may represent the mouth on the tree insofar as my vision is somehow affected by the presence of the mouth. Nonetheless, my representation is unconscious since I am unable to discriminate the mouth from its surroundings. Therefore, there is nothing for me that it is like to see the mouth on the tree without discrimination.

Although Kant agrees with Leibniz and Wolff about the existence of "obscure representations," i.e., representations that we possess without being aware of them, he distances himself from the Leibniz-Wolff tradition on three important points. Firstly, Kant rejects Leibniz-Wolff's contrast between obscure and clear representations. Clear representations are either distinct or indistinct. For example, suppose I see a "human [face] far away from me in a meadow" (*Anth*, Ak, 7, 135), although I am not visually aware of its eyes, nose, mouth, etc. We lack "de re" awareness, making this representation "obscure." In contrast, I have a clear "indistinct representation" when I see a human face and can distinguish single it out from the background, without being able to discriminate its features, indicating a partial "de re" awareness of the representation. Finally, when I see a human face can accurately single it out from the background and discern all its relevant features; even without any concept of a human face, I possess a clear and distinct representation: I am consciously representing (see Heidemann, 2017, 50).

Secondly, Kant decisively rejects the rationalist Leibniz-Wolff assumption that all sensible representations are "obscure." Consider again Kant's example of a savage who sees a house from a distance (*JL*. Ak., 9, 33). One could argue that the savage who perceives a house from a distance has an "obscure" sensible representation, assuming that he is able to single out something from its background and surroundings but unable to distinguish all the relevant features of the house: roof, doors, windows, etc. Kant's argument, however, is that it is a mistake to regard all sensible representations as "obscure." Suppose the savage might sensibly discriminate certain features,

such as the roof and the windows, while overlooking others, such as the doors and the balconies. In this context, the savage has an indistinct yet sensible representation of the house. There is also a possibility that the savage discriminates all of the house's important features. In such a scenario, the savage has a clear or distinct sensible representation of the house—a conscious representation—even though he lacks any concepts, including the concept of a house.<sup>1</sup> In both cases, there is something for the savage that is what it is like to see the house at a distance.

If we appropriately isolate sensible from conceptual representations, the overall picture becomes clear. When our senses are "affected," sensation arises. However, in Kantian terms, this is not already what we today call phenomenal consciousness: the what-it-is-like aspect of sensible representation. The conscious character of sensation/*Empfindungen* relies on the fact that the subject consciously represents the object by being able either to discriminate some of its features ("indistinct" representation) or most of them ("distinct" representations). If, on the other hand, we are affected but unable to even single out the object from its background and surroundings, we have an "obscure" or unconscious representation of it (the case of a camouflaged mouth). The objective counterpart of the phenomenal character of sensory perception is, therefore, the ability to single out a particular object against a background. Therefore, "perception," at the very least, as what Kant calls a conscious representation, is "de re" awareness of something conceptually indeterminate but presupposing the ability to single out particulars.

Irrespective of "the I think" of apperception, we already have sensible intuition with and without consciousness. The intriguing question is how there can be sensations with and without consciousness: "The field of sensuous intuitions and *sensations of which we are not conscious is immense*" (*Anth*, Ak, 7, 135, emphasis added). If we put Kant aside, a sensation without consciousness seems to be a contradiction in terms. After all, it seems to be an analytical proposition that to feel something is to be conscious of something. If I feel something smooth or soft, how could I not be conscious of such qualities? What I may lack are the respective concepts of smoothness or softness and, therefore, the propositional consciousness that smooth or soft is what I am sensing.

However, Kant's use of the word "sensation" does not match our common use. According to Longuenesse: "a sensation 'with consciousness,' or 'of which the representational subject is conscious,' only if it is seized upon, 'apprehended' by the active capacity of the mind, which affects inner sense with the sensory content thus seized upon" (Longuenesse, 2023, 9). Longuenesse connects Kant's view with "David Rosenthal's theory of consciousness as 'higher-order thought'" (Longuenesse, 2023, footnote 17) with two important caveats. First, the active apprehension of

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<sup>1</sup> However, as Dietmar H. Heidemann correctly notes, Kant is unfortunately not terminologically rigorous: "In his work, he frequently uses "obscure" in the broadest sense of "unconscious." Thus, he even refers to clear but indistinct representations as obscure representations" (Heidemann, 2017, 50).

sensations is not an act of thinking. Second, consciousness, in general, does not rely on a higher-order representation. I fully concur. However, according to Longuenesse's intellectualist reading, *all* synthesis of apprehension of imagination is determined by conceptual rules, at least insofar as the result is the *representation* of an object (see Longuenesse, 1998, 50).<sup>1</sup>

I am afraid I have to disagree. Considering only the representation of an object, no conceptual activity is required but just the ability to single out something as a unity from its background and its surroundings. Again, I can single out a camouflaged mouth on the tree, if it moves when I am staring it. However, this apprehension is quite independent of my possessing the relevant concept of "mouth" and from any other concepts. Concepts are required only for the cognition (*Erkenntnis*) of a represented object *as an object*, i.e., as a mind-independently or objectively existing particular.

Kant's most cited example of "nonconscious sensation" is the passage quoted above:

The same thing is true of the sensation of hearing when the musician plays a phantasy on the organ with his ten fingers and two feet while, at the same time, he is speaking to someone standing beside him. Within a few seconds, a host of ideas is awakened in his soul, and every idea requires special judgment as to its appropriateness since a single stroke of the finger, not fitted to the harmony, would immediately be heard as discord. Yet the whole comes out so well that the improvisator must often wish to have preserved in a score many a passage which he has performed in this happy fashion but which he could not have performed so well with real diligence and attention. (*Anth*, Ak, 7, 135)

The conversation with someone standing next to the musician awakened various ideas in him as he played the fantasy in the improvisation. He might have lost track of the notes he was playing on the keyboard, which resulted in his listening being devoid of "the subjective character." Under this assumption, the musician has an "unconscious sensation" because he was unable to apprehend, i.e., to discriminate one note from another while he was playing and representing them as a whole. However, this does not justify the assumption that the conceptual rules of understanding, a higher-order cognitive faculty, constrain the apprehension of the notes as a whole piece of music.

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<sup>1</sup> The passage is the following:

"But to have made a concept of body out of this conjunction is more than the expression of this merely subjective habit. My apprehension of empirically given spatial multiplicities is henceforth guided by the concept. I consider the marks contained in the concept 'body' as necessarily belonging to the given multiplicities" (Longuenesse, 1998, 50). Moreover, when Longuenesse claims that "space and time are given only if understanding determines sensibility" (1998, p. 216), she seems to suggest that Kant should rewrite his *Transcendental Aesthetic* in the second edition since Kant emphatically denies any dependence on space and time on understanding. In private conversation, she denied any suggestion to me. However, how should we make sense of her claims of 1998, 2016

Furthermore, an essential ambiguity surfaces in the ongoing debate, as delineated in Longuenesse's analysis: the distinction between "a sensation with consciousness" and "a sensation of which the representing subject is conscious" (Longuenesse, 2023, 9). Longuenesse, in relating Kant's ideas to those of Rosenthal, appears to encounter the same ambiguity highlighted by Gennaro (Longuenesse, 2023, footnote). This raises a critical question: Is introspection a necessary condition for conscious sensations? Kant describes introspective consciousness as a sophisticated cognitive process that involves apprehension through a synthesis of understanding, aligned with conceptual rules—referred to in contemporary discussions as "phenomenal concepts." Considering a practical example, if a newborn experiences pain from intestinal colic, would its pain sensations be unconscious merely because it lacks the capacity for introspection?

#### **4. The 'I think' is Access Consciousness.**

Kant differentiates himself from the Leibniz-Wolff tradition on a third significant aspect. In Kant's framework, "conscious representations" are those governed by the laws of transcendental apperception or the spontaneous activity of "the I think," which must be capable of accompanying all my representations. Specifically, the intellectual representation "I think" must accompany my representations; otherwise, they would be either (i) "impossible," which implies illogical, or (ii) "be nothing to me" (B131). Here, the term "impossible" denotes illogical. However, this essay focuses on the latter scenario: if "the I think" cannot accompany representations, they are "nothing for me." This situation implies what might be termed "unconscious representations." We return to our initial question: In what sense of "consciousness" are representations that lack the accompaniment of "the I think" considered nonconscious?

These representations are clearly not unconscious in the phenomenal sense—, i.e. they are not free from the subjective character of perception, regardless of whether they are part of a synthetic act of thought. Moreover, they are not unconscious in the sense of lacking "de re awareness," which refers to the ability to distinguish particulars. As Kant says: "The representation that can be given prior to all thinking is called intuition" (B131/B132). So, when representations are described as "nothing for me"—suggesting "unconscious representations"—they have nothing to do with either phenomenal consciousness or "de re" consciousness of particulars.<sup>1</sup>

A dog can distinguish a loaf from a roast and experiences a unique sensory quality when seeing, smelling, and tasting the roast as opposed to the loaf. However, lacking the faculty of "apperception," the dog is unable to conceptualize that loaves are not roasts and vice versa.

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<sup>1</sup> This independence is enough to reject the proposed close analogy between Kant's emergent theory of cognition and the global workspace theory (GWT) or any higher-order theory of consciousness (HOT). A representation without the accompaniment of the spontaneous "I think" would not qualify as a representation without any kind of consciousness whatsoever.

Similarly, consider a scenario where a person described as a "savage" sees a house from a distance. The object impacts his vision, providing a distinct experiential quality when viewing the house. Assume further that he can differentiate certain features of the house and distinguish it from its surroundings. In this context, he possesses "de re" awareness of the house as an object, yet it remains conceptually undetermined. Given these conditions, to what extent can his representation of the house be considered "unconscious?"

A closer look reveals that the kind of "consciousness" that is missing in the intuitions that are not accompanied by "I think" refers specifically to the "de dicto" or propositional form of consciousness. This form of consciousness involves self-conscious thoughts such as "I think about the object that I represent" or "I think that doors are features of a house." Without propositional consciousness, as in the case of someone who lacks the concept of a "house," the individual is unable to conceptualize that a roof is part of "a house" or to recognize doors and windows as features of the house.

Let us untangle the web of consciousness. The first meaning of consciousness in Kant's work is closely related to what is called "phenomenal consciousness" in the philosophy of mind. "Sensation" becomes conscious when the raw material of sensible intuition is apprehended without any conceptual determination. This apprehension is completely independent of any kind of introspection or self-knowledge. It is a blind synthesis of apprehension, a product of imagination. For example, when I perceive the notes played in an improvisation, there is "something for me that is like" to hear the improvisation, a "what-it-is-like" subjective phenomenal aspect, because I can discriminate the notes and single out the piece of music as a whole, even in the absence of any conceptual determination. The second meaning of consciousness is the objective correlate of conscious sensation, the "de re" consciousness of the conceptually undetermined object of sensible intuition. In this sense, I am "de re aware" of the improvisation since I can discern the notes and single out the piece of music as a whole, independently of my conceptual understanding. And finally, consciousness, or self-consciousness, means propositional consciousness or, more precisely, cognitive access. It is important to note that neither the subjective phenomenal aspect of consciousness nor its objective "de re consciousness" is based on propositional consciousness. Both are perceptual aspects—subjective and objective—while propositional consciousness par excellence is the form of cognition.

Though Kant states that the "manifold of intuition" has "a necessary relation to the 'I think,'" his claim is not that the "I think" *necessarily* accompanies all my intuitions. Rather, Kant uses the modal "must be able:" "The 'I think' *must be able* to accompany all my representations" (B131/B132). This implies that "I think" may not accompany certain representations, i.e., the unconscious representations. However, "I think" must be able to accompany them unless they are



"impossible" (illogical or contradictory) or meaningless to me (lacking consciousness in the propositional sense).

Since "means something for me" means propositional consciousness, the modal "must be able" can only signify what one today calls "cognitive accessibility." The "I think" must be able to accompany my representation is what Kant calls "analytical unity of consciousness." According to the major claim of transcendental deduction, this "analytical unity of consciousness" would not be possible without a synthetic unity:

The analytical unity of consciousness pertains to all common concepts; e.g., if I think of red in general, I, at this moment, represent to myself a feature that (as a mark) can be encountered in anything or that can be combined with other representations; [...] A representation that is to be thought of as common to several must be regarded as belonging to those who, in addition to it, also have something different in themselves (B133, footnote.).

Being conscious of general concepts takes place in judgment and presupposes the synthetic activity of transcendental apperception in judgments. For example, I become propositionally "conscious" of something by means of the concept of red (analytic unity of consciousness) if I am able to judge that red is the color of blood, of apples, of tomatoes etc. (synthetic unity). The "I think" that accompanies my representations, which would otherwise be "unconscious," is thus what makes these representations *available for judgment reason and guiding action* (Block's access to consciousness).<sup>1</sup>

Consequently, intuitions as sensory representations that cannot be accompanied by the propositional attitude "I think that" can still be conscious in a phenomenological sense or in the "de re awareness" of appearances, provided they are not deemed "impossible." Nevertheless, these intuitions remain "unconscious" in the sense of their cognitive "inaccessibility" to propositional thinking, reasoning, and the control of rational action. It is only through the act of "I think" that

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<sup>1</sup> In Block's words: "A perceptual state is access-conscious [...] if its content [...] can be used to control reasoning and behavior." (Block, 1995, 229.)

Again, Longuenesse appears to share a similar interpretation when she claims: "With intuition, we enter a realm in which phenomenal and what I will call, borrowing the term again from Ned Block, access consciousness (where a representation is "with consciousness" insofar as it is available for judging, reasoning and guiding action) are inseparable." (Longuenesse, 2023, 11).

However, her following remark seems incompatible with Block's famous distinction: "If intuition is a representation of which we are phenomenally conscious (there is something it is like for us to have that intuition), *it is also a representation of which we have access consciousness* (Longuenesse, 2023, 11, emphasis added). According to Block, a representation may be phenomenal consciousness without being cognitively accessible: "These conclusions have not convinced all readers, but the infant color work of Chapter 6 allows for a quite different argument for phenomenal consciousness without access-consciousness." (Block, 2023, 421, emphasis added). I believe that what Longuenesse has in mind is the global workspace theory (GWT).

representation gains access to what is referred to as the "global workspace." In Kant's framework, transcendental consciousness serves as the guiding principle for cognitive access to representations. In this context, it resembles the modern theory of the global workspace as a model of cognition rather than a theory of consciousness per se. In the Kantian sense, the global workspace does not account for consciousness but for cognitive accessibility.

We are now better equipped to elucidate the enigmatic passage in paragraph 16 of the transcendental deduction concerning "Meinigkeit" or "mineness." Kant asserts, "For the manifold representations that are given in a certain intuition would not altogether be *my* representations if they did not altogether belong to a self-consciousness" (B132, original emphasis). As argued throughout this discussion, "My representations" do not refer to my mental states, which could be described using predicates (potential self-attribution of experiences). Rather, the possessive first-person pronoun refers to all phenomena that appear to me and are cognitively accessible within the same cognitive apparatus.

Moreover, we are now in a better position to explain the metaphor of "thinking agency." Spontaneous thinking agency is the widespread activity of the mind in the global workspace. It is the thinking activity of the mind that combines sensible and conceptual representations into thoughts, judgments, and inferences, thereby transforming perceptual nonconceptual representations into cognitions ("Erkenntnis").

## 5. Concluding Remarks

Let us return to Kant's argument of the paragraph 16:

- 1) That I think, must be able to accompany all my representations.

For otherwise, something would be represented in me that could not be thought, which means just as much as:

The representation would either be impossible, Or at least nothing for me. Therefore, that I think must be able to accompany allmy representations.

If my reading is correct, then Kant is talking about "unconscious representations" in paragraph 16. These are not representations devoid of phenomenal consciousness, nor are they devoid of "de re" awareness—awareness of something that we single out from its background and discriminate its features. Rather, they are "unconscious" in the sense that they are cognitively inaccessible because they are not accompanied by the representations "I think." They contribute nothing to what Kant calls cognition ("Erkenntnis"). The second premise grounds the first in the simple argument in the sense that without the "I think" representations in me are not representations for me, i.e., cognitive accessible.

Cramer is correct in asserting that the argument extends beyond a mere rephrasing of Kant's well-known principle: "without concepts, intuitions are blind, and without intuitions, concepts are

empty." However, he seems to have overlooked the foundational role of paragraph 16 in transitioning blind intuitions into cognitively accessible representations. It is specifically through the accompaniment of "the I think" that these blind intuitions become accessible to cognition.

This reading has a crucial explanatory value for the question of whether there are nonconceptual mental contents and how this would be possible. The central claim of nonconceptualism is that there are sensory representations of objects that are conceptually indeterminate. Because the crucial distinction between nonconceptual and non-propositional perception and cognition informs all of contemporary cognitive science (see Block, 2023; Burge, 2022), this issue is of utmost importance. Kant's explanation of unconscious representation is strong support for non-conceptualism since sensory representations are conscious in both the "phenomenal" and "de re" awareness senses of "consciousness." They are "unconscious" in the propositional sense because they lack conceptual determination. Kant's example of the house illustrates my view. Whether or not the savage has the concept of a house, the idea is that he can be "de re" aware of the house without the corresponding concept determining the house.

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