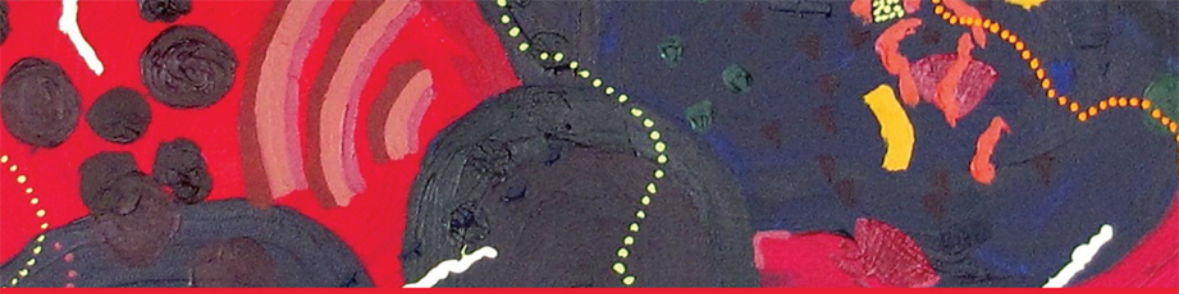

The **Christopher Bollas** Reader

Introduction by **Arne Jemstedt**
Foreword by **Adam Phillips**

The Christopher Bollas Reader

This reader brings together a selection of seminal papers by Christopher Bollas.

Essays such as 'The Fascist state of mind', 'The structure of evil' and 'The functions of history' have established his position as one of the most significant cultural critics of our time. Also included are examples of his psychoanalytical writings, such as 'The transformational object' and 'Psychic genera', that deepen and renew interest in unconscious creative processes. Two recent essays, 'Character and interformality' and 'The wisdom of the dream' extend his work on aesthetics and the role of form in everyday life.

This is a collection of papers that will appeal to anyone interested in human experience and subjectivity.

Christopher Bollas PhD is a Member of the British Psychoanalytical Society, the Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies, and Honorary Member of the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research (IPTAR) in New York.

Arne Jemstedt MD is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Stockholm. He is a member and training analyst of the Swedish Psychoanalytical Association and its current President.

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About the authors

Arne Jemstedt MD is a psychoanalyst in private practice in Stockholm. He is a member and training analyst of the Swedish Psychoanalytical Association and its current President. He edited the Swedish translation of Christopher Bollas's book *Being a Character* and has published articles and chapters on Bollas's work in Swedish and international psychoanalytic journals and books. He is a member of the International Editorial Panel for the *Complete Works of D. W. Winnicott* and editor of Swedish translations of Winnicott's work. He is a member of the 'nomenclature group' for the Swedish translation of Freud's *Standard Edition*.

Christopher Bollas PhD is a Member of the British Psychoanalytical Society and of the Los Angeles Institute and Society for Psychoanalytic Studies, and Honorary Member of the Institute for Psychoanalytic Training and Research (IPTAR) in New York.

Foreword

Adam Phillips

How can psychoanalysis stop itself becoming a version of the very thing it seeks to cure? How can it avoid being a narrowing of the mind, a simplifying of the self, when each of the psychoanalytic schools has an essentialist story to tell about what a person is, and what a person should be? Psychoanalysis is 'about' the unconscious, and yet psychoanalysts themselves seem to be all too conscious of what they are supposed to be doing. The cost of such knowingness has been what Christopher Bollas called in an interview 'the devastating failure' of psychoanalysis, 'the failure to comprehend the unconscious creativity of the analysand'. This is the predicament addressed in these inspired and inspiring essays.

Once Freud encouraged people to freely associate he was so daunted by the prospects opening up – by what people were able to say, by the glimpses he was getting of what people were alive to, by the sheer complexity of psychic life – that a great deal of theoretical containment was mobilised both in himself and his followers. Over time the inevitable uncertainties of the treatment were apparently resolved in the stated aims and the militant competence of the respective schools ('the worse your art is', the poet John Ashbury said in an interview, 'the easier it is to talk about'). But psychoanalysis, as an account of how and why modern people were divided against themselves, was itself excessively divisive. In its brief history, outsiders have always been sceptical or dismissive, insiders have always been territorial. Psychoanalysis, it seems, began as a panic from which no one has been able to recover.

We have to consider the possibility, as Christopher Bollas intimates, that it was not 'infantile sexuality', or the idea of the death drive, that was so explosive (or implausible) about psychoanalysis; it was the idea of people being encouraged to speak freely. The essentialisms of psychoanalysis – the concepts of cure, the accounts of human nature, the developmental theories – have been an attempted self-cure for what the 'method' of free association keeps revealing: our unfathomable unconsciousness of ourselves – what Bollas refers to, alluding to King Lear in one of his many winning titles, as the mystery of things. To speak freely, with someone freely listening, is a radical act, at once historically unprecedented and uncanny, and by definition unpredictable (when it comes to the unconscious, one might say, outcome studies are unpromising). As Freud discovered and resisted

acknowledging, free association – 'free' as an adjective and a verb – was the eye of the storm.

So it is not exactly a return to Freud that Christopher Bollas proposes in these extraordinary papers – though in virtually every one he has written something original and often slightly startling about Freud – but a return to free association. That is, to the unfolding unconsciousness of the psychoanalytic opportunity, to what he calls 'the fact of living as an unconscious being'. And this involves, in Bollas's view, all of the available psychoanalytic approaches, as points of view, perspectives, ways of seeing. It is only a more inclusive vision – not, it should be said, an eclectic one – that can do justice, so to speak, to the unconscious (the unconscious refers to all possible language-games). But writing in 'the American Grain', rooted in the ordinary and the everyday – in the tradition of Emerson, Melville and Whitman – Bollas never takes refuge in earnestness, in the mandarin or the dogmatic; nor, indeed, in the portentous moralism that psychoanalytic writing is prone to. It is what he has called 'the surprisingly widespread disinterest on the part of therapists and analysts about what the analysand is actually saying' that has absorbed him. And kept him humorous.

The last thing analysts have wanted to think about, Bollas suggests in his unusually eloquent and evocative writing, is the unconsciousness of the psychoanalytic process itself; that, as he puts it, 'the greater part of psychic change occurs unconsciously, and need not enter consciousness, either in the analyst or in the analysand'. Ironically, analysts have gone on wanting to know too much what they are doing, when it is precisely this knowledge that pre-empts the possibilities of psychoanalysis. Bollas's work shows us that when it comes to psychoanalysis there may be other things to want. 'We hate', Keats wrote in a famous letter, 'poetry that has a palpable design upon us.' After reading Bollas it is clear why a psychoanalysis that has a palpable design on us is a contradiction in terms. And why we might hate it.

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As Chapters 1–14 are taken from previous works, which were published by a variety of publishers, every effort has been made to include a comprehensive Reference listing in this Reader. In a small number of instances it has not been possible to locate accurate Reference data for the listing for this Reader and in those cases the text citations are published exactly as they appeared in the original works.

Introduction

Arne Jemstedt

This book contains a selection from the work of Christopher Bollas, one of the most creative and inspiring writers in the history of psychoanalysis. He is the author of eleven psychoanalytic books, three novels, five plays and numerous essays.

Surprisingly, Bollas says[1] that until well into his thirties he never thought of himself as a writer: 'I wrote an essay on Plath with Murray Schwartz, one on *Bartleby*, one on character but I never felt any need to write.' What happened? J.-B. Pontalis invited him to write for the *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, a scintillating literary psychoanalytic journal, which prompted Bollas to write. These essays, published in French, have not all been translated into English, but they inspired him to embark on what has been a notably rich and prolific career as an author.

After his paper 'The Transformational Object' received wide acclaim when it was published in the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* in 1978, he settled at first for writing one essay every year or so. Publication of his first book, *The Shadow of the Object*, in 1987, was not his idea but that of a friend and colleague who suggested he collect his essays from the previous decade, add a few more, and submit them to Free Associations Books. When the book was celebrated inside and outside the psychoanalytic world, Bollas finally turned seriously towards writing.

Why such a long gestation period?

Bollas says that working ten-hour days with patients in five times a week analysis left him with no time to write, apart from his notebooks which were not intended for publication. He also felt throughout the 1970s that what he was learning from his analysands and the mutual experience of psychoanalysis still seemed deeply unconscious and inaccessible.

'I wrote in my notebooks to find out what I thought', he says. The notebooks are composed of brief entries – a page, maybe two – that are dated and given a title. An idea would pop into his mind, he would add other entries over the years,

1 These comments and some others in this Introduction derive from conversations with Christopher Bollas.

and then if it formed a gestalt in his mind he might proceed to write an essay. 'I had been developing the concept of "the transformational object" in my notebooks since 1975. I came to a point where I felt ready to write it, not because I had reached a final conclusion, but because I knew that if I wrote it over the course of one day, then what I had been thinking over the years would come into its own unity and it felt the right moment to do this.'

His readers often feel they have been given a deep and compelling access to his mentality, one by which they feel moved and inspired. Bollas's work is a form of inner disclosure – a paradoxical act – because although these are publications, they seem private musings into which the reader is invited.

The range of his interests is impressive. His deep knowledge of psychoanalysis, literature and other art forms enriches his texts, and he extends his thinking to wider issues of culture and society. One of the central threads is his appreciation, and defence, of the complexity of the human mind, especially the creativity and intelligence of the unconscious and how this richness can potentially be nurtured or obstructed, both in the individual and in the group.

It has not been easy to select the chapters for this collection, and inevitably many important and innovative essays have had to be left out. This selection is aimed at all those who are interested in the complexities of inner life. It is not assumed that readers will necessarily be well acquainted with psychoanalytic literature in general, and most of Bollas's more specifically technical texts have not been included. Nevertheless, in several chapters the reader will find him discussing central psychoanalytic issues, often illustrated with clinical examples from his work with patients.

After a brief biography, I shall give an overview of the chronological development of Bollas's theoretical contribution, followed by a more detailed introduction to some of his key ideas.

Biography

Christopher Bollas was born in Washington, DC in 1943. His father, Sacha Lucien Bollas, was French and raised in Paris until his early adolescence when the family moved to Argentina and later to England. He emigrated in his mid-twenties to the United States.

His mother, Celeste Wilde, a native Californian, was a classical pianist and an aspiring actress before she married at 21 and became the classic 1950s housewife. Two brothers were born after Christopher. Until he was 4 years old the family lived in Glendora, a small rural town in the foothills of the San Gabriel Mountains south of Los Angeles. They moved first to South Pasadena and then, when Christopher was 8, to Laguna Beach, an artists' colony on the Californian coast.

Laguna Beach figures prominently in his writings and clearly influenced his sense of the environment's evocative play upon self-experiencing. To get to his high school, he walked two miles along the beach, from cove to cove, gazing at the remarkable universes of small tide pools full of hidden life. He loved free diving

and exploring the reefs and kelp beds. He was an outstanding baseball player, and for a time he thought his future might be in sport and not in the academic world.

He graduated from high school in 1962 and went to the University of Virginia, where he studied political theory and constitutional law and became involved in the civil rights movement. In 1964 he transferred to the University of California at Berkeley where he majored in American History.

During this time he began psychotherapy with a psychoanalyst at Berkeley, an experience he describes as life-changing. He took courses on 'Anthropology and Psychoanalysis' (with Alan Dundes) and 'Psychoanalysis and Literature' (with Frederick Crews), and he was gripped by Carl Schorscke's lectures on 'Intellectual History' which were informed by a psychoanalytic vision of the history of Western ideas.

From 1967 to 1969 he worked at The East Bay Activity Center for autistic and schizophrenic children. At the same time, while working in a bookstore in San Francisco, he read a review of Guntrip's book *Schizoid Phenomena, Object Relations and The Self*, and he went on to read Guntrip, Winnicott, Fairbairn and Klein who between them opened up entirely new ways of thinking about the children with whom he was working. He decided that he wanted to train as a psychoanalyst, but he did not want to study medicine or psychology to get there. Instead, he decided to study for a doctorate in English literature at the University of Buffalo, concentrating on 'psychoanalysis and literature'.[2]

Buffalo's English Department was renowned for its tradition in phenomenology and psychoanalysis, and it was staffed by some of the most interesting writers and critics of the day, including Rene Girard, Michel Foucault, John Barth, Robert Hass, Robert Creeley, Angus Fletcher and Charles Altieri.

At the same time as studying for a PhD in the middle novels of Herman Melville (*Moby Dick* and *Pierre*), Bollas trained in adult psychotherapy and co-founded with Lloyd Clarke MD a training programme in psychotherapy and the humanities that was in the process of being approved for a PhD in psychotherapy. Unfortunately the state of New York then froze all new PhD programs, and Bollas spent a year at Smith College earning an MSW so that he could be licensed to practise in the United States. However, his sights were set on training at the Institute of Psychoanalysis in London. He was accepted there in 1972, and he left for England in September 1973.

Relieved to leave the Nixon-era America behind, he looked forward to Europe as a potential space. He was struck initially by the differences he perceived between British and American analysts. 'The English analysts were', he says, 'by comparison highly spontaneous, imaginative, freewheeling interpreters, and decidedly eccentric.'

2 The program in psychoanalysis and literature was chaired by Norman Holland and included prominent psychoanalytic critics: Murray Schwartz, James Swann, Robert Rogers, Mel Faber, Leslie Fiedler, and visiting scholars such as Kenneth Burke.

He began a training analysis with Masud Khan which lasted from 1973 to 1976. Khan was a highly gifted and complex analyst who by the end of the 1970s was deteriorating, both physically and psychically. Although Bollas's work with Khan was complicated, it reached him on a deep level and led to important inner changes. In the late 1970s he began a third analysis, with Adam Limentani who was then the president of the International Psychoanalytical Association.

From 1974, he took seminars with Betty Joseph, Donald Meltzer, Eric Brenman, Joseph Sandler, Nina Coltart, Herbert Rosenfeld, Hannah Segal, Harold Stewart and the incandescently inspiring Henry Rey, as well as other well-known British analysts. Having been so impressed at first by the free-thinking writings of British analysts, he was surprised by the lack of tolerance he encountered for differences of opinion, especially among Kleinian analysts. Overall, however, he found the training very rewarding, and he remembers with particular appreciation his supervisors Paula Heimann and Marion Milner. Milner and Bollas would become life-long friends.

He qualified from the Institute of Psychoanalysis in 1977, after which he worked as a full-time analyst in private practice in London, apart from his stay at the Austen Riggs Center in Massachusetts, where he was Director of Education from 1985 to 1987. He was also Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts from 1983 to 1987.

It was Paula Heimann who recommended that he develop his analytic career outside the British Society in order to avoid the impact of Kleinian orthodoxies, which she thought would hamper his creativity. In the mid-1970s he was, as mentioned above, asked by J.-B. Pontalis to contribute to the *Nouvelle Revue de Psychanalyse*, which led to many trips to Paris where he would visit with J.-B. Pontalis and André Green and discover a new world of psychoanalytic thinking that he regards as transformative.

At this time he was also invited by the Italian psychoanalyst Adriano Giannotti to become Visiting Professor of Psychoanalysis at the University of Rome, a post that Bollas fulfilled for the next twenty years. His early papers were first delivered to the staff and students of the Istituto Neuropsichiatria Infantile of the University of Rome, and it was, therefore, to an Italian 'other' that he first presented his ideas. In 1983 he began a life-long affiliation with psychoanalysis in Sweden, which continues to this day with a small annual conference, and from 1993 until 2009 he led workshops in Chicago that met three times a year for intensive study of the psychoanalytic process. He was part of the formation of the European Study Group on Unconscious Thought (ESGUT) which met several times a year in either Zurich, Tubingen or Stockholm for ten years.[3]

Bollas has a special talent as a lecturer and supervisor. His capacity to engage his audience is obvious and remarkable, and he is frequently invited to speak and

3 The ESGUT met in groups of 15 analysts from Sweden, Germany and Switzerland to study highly detailed process notes of individual sessions, with the original aim to gain a better understanding of how analysands think free associatively.

teach at psychoanalytic institutes and other institutions all over Europe, North and South America, Australia and Asia. His books have been published in French, German, Italian, Danish, Swedish, Hebrew, Portuguese, Spanish, Japanese, Korean, Romanian and Greek.

In his spare time Bollas devotes himself to painting, something that he began out of the blue in 1998. Some of his paintings may be seen on the covers of his last three publications. His wife, Suzanne, is an English architect, and they have three children.

Overview

Bollas's first book, *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known* (1987), is a collection of essays most of which had been written in the 1970s. Proclaimed by the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis* as 'one of the most important books of the last decade', it introduces the readership to his concepts of 'the transformational object' and 'the unthought known', terms that have now become widely disseminated and used by psychoanalysts, academics and artists.

Forces of Destiny: Psychoanalysis and Human Idiom followed in 1989, when his post at the Austen Riggs Center allowed Bollas two years in which to focus on writing. In this volume he introduces his concept of 'idiom', which grew out of Winnicott's theory of the 'true self'. He also considers the ways in which the analysand uses the differing elements of the analyst's personality, and he explores the idea that people live their lives governed either by 'fate', in reaction to an environment that fundamentally determines them, or by 'destiny', the free articulation of the self's idiom through the creative use of objects.

In *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (1992), Bollas presents a series of remarkable free-standing essays. As well as developing threads from the earlier works, he returns to Freud, considering certain crucial ideas that were implied in Freud's writings but not explicitly explored by him. In offering a new theory of unconscious perception, creativity and communication, Bollas's prior immersions – in existential psychoanalysis, ego psychology and object relations theory – come together to form a new Freudian-based exploration of self-experience. His concepts of 'the evocative object' and 'psychic genera' are linked to a revised theory of free association and to his model of 'the receptive unconscious'.

In *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience* (1995), Bollas extends Freud's radical notion of free association as a process that takes place between patient and psychoanalyst – something that has, he argues, been repressed by the psychoanalytic world. In addition, he further evolves his theory of the unconscious, of how our internal world is composed of evocative as well as endogenous objects, and of ways in which we communicate unconsciously.

The present volume includes several papers from the early books in which Bollas uses psychoanalytic ideas to explore non-clinical subjects that should

appeal to anyone interested in human experience and human mind. 'The Fascist State of Mind' (Chapter 6) delineates the structure of 'intellectual genocide', and 'Why Oedipus?' (Chapter 7) argues that mental life can exceed our ability to bear it and that we find a cure in group psychology. 'The Functions of History' (Chapter 8) proposes a new theory of historiography – that it transforms the dead facts of the past into new life; and 'The Structure of Evil' (Chapter 10) argues that evil is a serial process that exposes a horrifying logic.

Also published in 1995, *The New Informants*, co-authored with lawyer David Sundelson, is a coruscating critique of the abandonment of patient confidentiality by psychoanalysis and psychotherapy, at a time when clinicians were increasingly finding themselves pressurised into handing over clinical notes to insurance companies, lawyers and courts. It proposes a way through this ethical morass and was hailed by law reviews, medical journals and the *New York Times* as a seminal work in the field. Bollas and Sundelson go as far as to advocate civil disobedience, if necessary as a last resort, in order to protect patient–analyst privilege.

Next, Bollas produced *The Mystery of Things* (1999) and *Hysteria* (2000). Like his earlier volumes, the first of these consists of individual essays that further develop his view of various aspects of unconscious life. Two of these are included in the present volume: 'Mental Interference' (Chapter 11) and 'Creativity and Psychoanalysis' (Chapter 12). *Hysteria* was the first of his books to be presented as a through-composed entity. It is certainly one of the most important contributions to the topic since Freud's and Breuer's *Studies on Hysteria* (Freud, 1895).

After a condensed and thought-provoking monograph on *Free Association*, published in 2002, Bollas turned to fiction. Over a period of three years he produced a series of three novels – *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* (2004), *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing* (2005) and *Mayhem* (2006a) – and a volume of five plays, *Theraplay* (2006b). He creates a psychoanalyst as the hero (or anti-hero) of his novels, and by placing him in various absurd situations Bollas skilfully explores aspects of the psychoanalytic world.

It is clear that these novels are predicated on the idea that psychoanalysis is a form of contemporary theatre. On the private stage of the analytic consulting room are to be found all the character types and bizarre issues that have plagued humankind from the beginning of time. In these dire, sometimes tragic, and hair-raising experiences Bollas finds a dark and compelling existential humour. His five plays – 'Theraplay', 'Old Friends', 'Apply Within', 'Your Object or Mine?' and 'Piecemeal' – clearly hark back to the Theatre of the Absurd as the characters are presented with meaningless encounters and the precious themes of our lifetimes are presented on stage like mental props.

Included in the present book are two papers from his more recent theoretical publications: 'What Is Theory?' (Chapter 14) from *The Freudian Moment* (2007), and 'Architecture and the Unconscious' (Chapter 13) from *The Evocative Object World* (2009a).

Throughout his work, Bollas includes clinical vignettes that give intriguing glimpses of the way he works in the consulting room. However, in *The Infinite Question* (2009b) he provides for the first time an extensive demonstration of his searching use of all aspects of the technique of free association. Through extensive clinical material and detailed commentaries, Bollas illustrates the deep unconscious work that takes place in the ordinary analytic session.

Also included here are two new essays, not previously published: 'Character and Interformality' (Chapter 15) and 'The Wisdom of the Dream' (Chapter 16).

Bollas is currently completing *China on the Mind*, a book on how psychoanalysis bridges the Eastern and Western mind, and *Catch Them Before They Fall*, an account of his work with analysands in mental breakdown. He is also midway through a book on character analysis, and he is transcribing his notebooks, which now consist of twenty-four volumes spanning the period 1973 to the present.

Key ideas

Idiom

The work of the British psychoanalyst D. W. Winnicott has been a major source of inspiration for Bollas. Obvious especially in his early works, it is also there as an undercurrent in his later writings. A central and elusive idea in Winnicott's theories is that of the 'true self'. He writes:

> At the earliest stage the True Self is the theoretical position from which come the spontaneous gesture and the personal idea. . . . Only the True Self can be creative and only the True Self can feel real. . . . The True Self comes from the aliveness of the body tissues and the working of body-functions. . . . It is closely linked with the idea of the Primary Process, and is, at the beginning, essentially not reactive to external stimuli, but primary. . . . It is important to note that . . . the concept of an individual inner reality of objects applies to a stage later than does the concept of what is being termed the True Self.
>
> (Winnicott, 1960: 148–9)

In *Forces of Destiny* and in *Being a Character*, Bollas develops and refines his own thoughts on the true self, for which he gradually substitutes the term 'idiom'. He does this partly because he feels that 'overusage of a term . . . [leads to loss of] meaningfulness through incantatory solicitation, devaluing any word's unthought potential' (Bollas, 1992: 64), but also, I think, because he wishes to find his own way in this elusive area.

In his paper 'The Psychoanalyst's Multiple Function' (*Forces of Destiny*, 1989), he writes:

> The true self cannot be fully described. It is less like the articulation of meaning through words which allow one to isolate a unit of meaning as in the

> location of a signifier, and more akin to the movement of symphonic music. . . . Each individual is unique, and the true self is an idiom of organization that seeks its personal world through the use of an object . . . the fashioning of life is something like an aesthetic: a form revealed through one's way of being.
>
> (1989: 109–10)

In 'The Transformational Object', the early seminal paper that forms Chapter 1 of the present volume, Bollas explores the beginnings of the infant's elaboration of this individual aesthetic, something that is fundamentally dependent on a facilitating early environment. If the mother does not respond sensitively to the infant's spontaneous gesture, his/her early idiomatic expressions will be blocked and replaced by false adaptations. But if she is attuned with the infant's emerging self she will have the capacity, through subtle conscious and unconscious interactions with her baby, to transform his/her inner state. Bollas suggests that the 'mother is less significant and identifiable as an object than as a process' and he adds that 'not yet fully identified as an other, the mother is experienced as a process of transformation, and this feature of early existence lives on in certain forms of object-seeking in adult life, when the object is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation'.

In *Forces of Destiny* Bollas formulates a crucial difference between 'fate' and 'destiny'. He links fate to the concept of the false self and reactive living and destiny to the fulfilling of one's own inner potential. In 'The Destiny Drive' (Chapter 4, this volume), he writes: 'I believe that this sense of destiny is the natural course of the true self through the many types of object relations, and that the destiny drive emerges, if it does, out of the infant's experience of the mother's facilitation of true self movement.'

As we go through life, our idiom continues to be articulated through our choice and use of objects. Bollas writes:

> If idiom is, then, the it with which we are born, and if its pleasure is to elaborate itself through the choice of objects, one that is an intelligence of form rather than an expression of inner content, its work collides with the structure of the objects that transform it, through which it gains its precise inner contents. This collisional dialectic between the human's form and the object's structure is, in the best of times, a joy of living, as one is nourished by the encounter.
>
> (1992: 59–60)

The evocative object

In ordinary language the word 'object' usually denotes an inanimate thing, a physical article in the external world. Psychoanalysis sometimes uses it in this way, but more often it employs the word to refer to an 'other' – a person who is 'not-me' – with whom the subject exists in some kind of emotionally charged relationship. The separate, objective quality of this object is complicated by the

subject's projections, which will colour the subject's experience of the object. Through these intricate projective and introjective mechanisms the individual builds a complex inner world of diverse relationships to many kinds of object. The British Object Relations School of psychoanalysis has developed very creatively the idea of this inner world of object relations, and the influence of projective mechanisms has been well understood by many theorists, especially in relation to the transference relationship to the analyst.

Bollas expands the psychoanalytic understanding of object relations, contributing in particular an appreciation of what he calls 'the integrity of the object'. By this he means the object's intrinsic quality of being fundamentally itself, outside the sphere of projective mechanisms.

There is an echo here of Winnicott's seminal paper 'The Use of an Object' in which he describes the child's joyful discovery of the object's authentic realness, outside the realm of the child's omnipotence, as a result of the object's survival of 'maximum destructiveness (object not protected)' (1969: 91).

In the introduction to *Being a Character*, Bollas writes:

> Thus I have found it rather surprising that in 'object relations theory' very little thought is really given to the distinct structure of the object, which is usually seen as a container of the individual's projections. Certainly objects bear us. But ironically enough, it is precisely *because* they hold our projections that the structural feature of any one object becomes even more important, because we also put ourselves into a container that upon re-experiencing will process us according to its natural integrity.
>
> (1992: 4)

In the same volume, he first elaborates in detail what he terms 'the evocative object', the object with 'high psychic value' (to use Freud's term) that touches us on a deep level and sets inner creative processes in motion. The evocative object might be a person, a landscape, a poem, a piece of music, or something else that we encounter significantly in our everyday lives. We may consciously search out such objects, but often we seek them intuitively, led by some unconscious idea or wish, and sometimes they arrive by chance. The evocative object might, of course, also come from our inner world, a memory or feeling that surfaces from deep inside us, maybe in the course of the psychoanalytic process. Such objects 'release the self into being' (1992: 42) and facilitate the articulation of our idiom.

Psychic genera

In 'Psychic Genera' (Chapter 5), Bollas develops an original theory about the formation of new psychic structures. He describes receptive areas in the unconscious that attract processes and phenomena, both from the internal world and from the self's encounter with external reality. These develop into matrices that in turn generate a further search for evocative objects.

In Bollas's theory of genera there is a deep appreciation of the intelligence of the unconscious, of creative processes that – unknown to the conscious mind – select items and events from the outer and inner world to form networks of ideas and images linked to each other in complex ways. These networks may become dense enough to precipitate into a dream or, after a period of condensation, to create a new perspective on oneself and on life.

With a kind of inherent wisdom, the unconscious will steer away from premature intrusion by the logic of consciousness in order that these creative matrices may have space to grow and develop. With words such as 'proto-nucleations', 'generative chaos' and 'psychic gravity', Bollas conveys a picture of an unconscious, dynamic *cosmos*.

He writes:

> In many respects the theory of genera is inspired by the theory of repression. . . . But the theory of repression points only to the banishment of the unwanted, and I am convinced that other types of ideas are invited into the unconscious. To complement the theory of repression, we need a *theory of reception*, which designates some ideas as the received rather than repressed, although both the repressed and the received need the protective barrier provided by the anticathexes of preconsciousness.
>
> (this volume: 61–2)

The psychoanalytic situation, with its open-ended and non-directive conscious and unconscious communication between analysand and analyst, enables the formation of new psychic genera. For this to happen, both participants need to be able to respond intuitively, to perceive subtle inner shifts and unexpected links in the flow of associations. It is significant that Bollas frequently compares these psychoanalytic processes with descriptions given by both artists and scientists of their experiences of creativity.

Bollas contrasts the concepts of 'genera' and 'trauma' in ways that connect with Freud's theory of the life and death instincts. The inner freedom and creativity needed for the formation of genera is initially founded on the parents' sensitive receptiveness to the child's unique personality and his/her spontaneous expressions. 'Children', he writes, 'whose parents are impinging or acutely traumatizing collect such trauma into an internal psychic area which is intended to bind and limit the damage of the self . . . and the subject who contains such anguishing complexes will usually not seek to symbolically elaborate them.' Thus, genera are the outcome of symbolic elaborations, while the effects of trauma are symbolic repetition and stagnation.

Dreaming

Each night we are immersed in the mysteriously creative process of dreaming. We feel that our lives are enriched if we have conscious contact with our dream life

– it gives us a sense of depth, resonance and communication with inner sources. For Freud, the dream was crucial to the task of getting in touch with processes and structures in the unconscious, and he found that the technique of associating freely to the manifest elements in the dream allowed the emergence of latent dream-thoughts – ideas and feelings that, because of their anxiety-laden quality, had previously been repressed from consciousness.

Freud's ground-breaking book *The Interpretation of Dreams*, published in 1900, was a fundamental contribution to modern Western culture. Bollas is deeply appreciative of its genius, and he works with, and elaborates, Freud's dream theory in many of his texts. What he emphasises continually is the *creativity* of the dream, which involves the *aesthetic intelligence* of the unconscious.

In *Being a Character* Bollas writes that 'the capacity to be the dream work of one's life, to devolve consciousness to the creative fragmentations of unconscious work, is evidence of a basic trust in the reliable relation between such dreaming and the consciousness that results in our reflections' (1992: 53). A main thread in his paper 'The Wisdom of the Dream' (Chapter 16) is that dreaming, together with the experience of recollecting, recounting and exploring dreams in analysis, increases and deepens the communication between conscious and unconscious selves. Bollas claims that it fulfils a 'phylogenetic need', one that is of increasing importance in these days when superficial and focused effectiveness dominates the social and psychological fields. He writes:

> Everyone dreams. And people often think about their dreams. But psychoanalysis establishes a partnership (the Freudian Pair) that extends the dream and communicates with it. The ego now grasps that it has a partner, and we discover another pairing: between the ego that offers the matrix of its own creativity in the form of the dream and the analysand who transforms the material into a new form of unconsciously worked-upon meaning. Over time, the Freudian Pair becomes structuralised and sets up a new paradigm within the ego that proceeds to generate more sophisticated forms of unconscious work. . . .
>
> . . . [T]he structuralisation of the Freudian Pair creates a tension between the curiosity of consciousness and the creativity of the unconscious. It concerns not so much the psychopathology of everyday life as the *psycho-creativity* of everyday life.
>
> (this volume: 257, 258)

The Freudian Pair

Bollas begins the last chapter of his book *The Mystery of Things* with the following words:

> Theories of mental life and human behaviour will come and go much as they have since the beginning of psychoanalysis. Only the passing of time will

> determine the value of any particular theory and some models which seemed assured of perpetuity . . . will be abandoned, even by their most avid supporters. What will not change is the deeply evocative effect of the psychoanalytic situation and its method.
>
> (1999: 181)

In 'Two Encyclopaedia Articles', written in 1923, Freud issues instructions to both participants in what Bollas terms 'the Freudian Pair'. Freud describes the task of the analysand thus:

> The treatment is begun by the patient being required to put himself in the position of an attentive and dispassionate self-observer, merely to read off all the time the surface of his consciousness, and on the one hand to make a duty of the most complete honesty while on the other not to hold back any idea from communication, even if (1) he feels that it is too disagreeable or if (2) he judges that it is nonsensical or (3) too unimportant or (4) irrelevant to what is being looked for. It is uniformly found that precisely those ideas which provoke these last-mentioned reactions are of particular value in discovering the forgotten material.
>
> (1923: 238)

It should be noted here that it is ideas that seem to be unimportant or irrelevant that turn out to be of particular value. If the analysand talks freely and spontaneously in this way – articulating the events from the previous day, remembrances from childhood, associations to a dream, thoughts and feelings towards the analyst – patterns will emerge that give a new perspective on emotionally important issues in his life. In 'Creativity and Psychoanalysis' (Chapter 12), Bollas states that '[it] may be a measure of Freud's genius that this discovery [of free association] which would have been sufficient for many people, was only the first of many. For me, however, this is his greatest accomplishment. In a few years of work with his patients . . . he settles on free association and in that moment Western culture is changed forever.'

'It is strange', an analysand told me many years ago, 'that so much can happen just because you lie down on a couch and talk.'

After his explanation of free association, Freud continues with advice for the clinician:

> Experience soon showed that the attitude which the analytic physician could most advantageously adopt was to surrender himself to his own unconscious mental activity, in a state of *evenly suspended attention*, to avoid so far as possible reflection and the construction of conscious expectations, not to try to fix anything he heard particularly in his memory, and by these means to catch the drift of the patient's unconscious with his own unconscious.
>
> (1923: 239)

This fundamental state of mind in the analyst has been discussed by many theorists, most notably Wilfred Bion who uses the term 'reverie' to capture its essence. Elusive and difficult to put into words, Bollas explores and elaborates this meditative state in a way that illuminates the complex and non-logical inner processes that it facilitates. In 'Psychic Genera' (Chapter 5), he emphasises its intuitive nature: 'Perhaps', Bollas writes, 'the sense of intuition is our preconscious experience of the ego's intelligent work, leading us to consciously authorise certain forms of investigation in thought which are not consciously logical but which may be unconsciously productive.' He adds, however, that 'the fact that intuition seems to be an immediate knowing should not obscure the fact that it is the outcome of sustained concentration of many types of unconscious and conscious thinking'. This point is illustrated with a statement by Stravinsky, quoted by Bollas in 'Creativity and Psychoanalysis' (Chapter 12):

> This foretaste of the creative act accompanies the intuitive grasp of an unknown entity already possessed but not yet intelligible, an entity that will not take definite shape except by the action of a constantly vigilant technique.
> (this volume: 198)

Bollas develops this theme elsewhere. In a paper from *Cracking Up* entitled 'What Is This Thing Called Self?', he writes:

> As analyst and patient shape one another . . . the analyst's self works with an inner, intuitional ear . . . the analyst's perception may enable him to learn something at a deeply unconscious level about the nature of the other's forming intelligence, and just as the aesthetics of literature or music have much to do with timing, pausing, and punctuational breathing, it may well be that he, too, works technically – knowing when to make a comment, what diction texture to choose, when to remain silent, what image to pick up at what moment, when to use his feelings as the basis of an interpretation, or when to scrutinise a word presentation. These decisions are aesthetic choices, and should be in tune with the analysand's self – namely, his aesthetic presence and its articulation. Such 'technical decisions' involve work at the level of self to self, of the analyst's self sensing the patient's self. . . . There is a feeling there of one's being, of something there, but not a something we can either touch or know; only sense and it is the most important sensed phenomenon in our life.
> (1995: 171–2)

In these dense lines Bollas captures qualities of intuitive perception and subtle inner processes that characterise the interaction between the two participants in the Freudian Pair. There is an echo here of Freud's crucial statement in his paper 'The Unconscious': 'It is a very remarkable thing that the *Ucs.* of one human being can react upon that of another, without passing through the *Cs*. This deserves closer investigation . . . but, descriptively speaking, the fact is incontestable' (1915: 194).

Listenings

The analyst listens to the analysand from many different perspectives, and these lead to different kinds of activities on the analyst's part. Two perspectives in particular can be seen to contribute complementary elements to the clinical situation.

In the first, the analyst *receives* the analysand's chains of associations, not knowing where they might lead, listening to them with dreamlike attentiveness. He may remain silent for a long time until something in the analysand's communications alerts him: a word with a special ring, maybe, or a link to a dream from yesterday or from several months ago. The analyst does not have to be overly explicit: he may simply repeat the word (what Bollas calls the 'Freudian echo') or point to the link in order to facilitate the process.

A second and different way of listening focuses more directly on the relationship between analysand and analyst. The analyst listens with an ear tuned especially towards conscious and unconscious references to him/herself in the analysand's narrative. In other words, he pays particular attention to transference material. The analysand's problems and pains are linked to inner object relations derived partly from early experiences, and the analysand will often project these into the relationship with the analyst. The task for the psychoanalyst will then be to catch and analyse these transferential processes as they appear, providing what are often referred to as 'here-and-now interpretations'. This is a technique that has been developed very extensively by the British School of Psychoanalysis, stemming from the work of Melanie Klein.

These different ways of listening are both invaluable to psychoanalytic work. One or the other may predominate with different analysands, and the analyst will also oscillate between them at different moments with the same analysand. 'It would be a sad misconception indeed to see these differences as incompatible in the conduct of an analysis', writes Bollas in *The Mystery of Things* (1999: 189).

What concerns him, though – and more and more so during the last ten years – is that the object relational way of listening with the focus on the transference has come to dominate the scene in many psychoanalytic quarters at the expense of a 'Freudian way of listening'. The constant attention to the transference and 'here-and-now interpretations', Bollas claims, diminishes the openness of the psychoanalytic situation and forecloses the flow of free association. Bollas has developed his arguments on this issue in various texts, and most vigorously in 'On Transference Interpretation as a Resistance to Free Association' from *The Freudian Moment* (2007).

Anti-life

So far I have concentrated predominantly on Bollas's writings on creative, life-promoting processes. This is certainly not without reason: through his theories of psychic genera, destiny drive, and evocative objects he has decisively deepened

our understanding of and perspective on such processes. However, both explicitly and implicitly in these texts Bollas also considers the internal and external obstacles to such progressive and expansive psychic movements, and there are other papers in which he focuses specifically on destructive processes and phenomena, both on an individual and on a social level. Several of these are included in the present volume.

At the beginning of 'Normotic Illness' (Chapter 3), Bollas writes: 'I believe we are witness . . . to the emergence of a new emphasis within personal illness . . . [that is] a particular drive to be normal, one that is typified by the numbing and eventual erasure of subjectivity in favour of a self that is conceived as a material object among other man-made products in the object world.' This tendency is perhaps even greater today than when Bollas wrote this chapter in the 1980s.

He continues: '[the] presence in contemporary literature and film of the human who is revealed to be a robot is a recognition of this personality type emerging in our culture. Such representations are less descriptive of the future of robots than they are accurate prognostications of a personality disorder that is already with us.' This state of mind is characterised by a deadening of the complexity of inner life and a flight to material objects in the external world. It is akin to the workings of the death instinct in Freud's original sense: the drive to rid the psyche of tension and to undo psychically meaningful connections. Bollas ends this chapter on the normotic personality thus: 'Such a person suggests that mind itself, in particular the unconscious, is an archaism, a thing to be abandoned in the interest of human progress.'

Again in 'The Fascist State of Mind' (Chapter 6) there is in the background an echo of Freud's theory of the death instinct. In this chapter Bollas explores the driving forces behind totalitarian movements of various kinds and the horrifying atrocities for which they are accountable. He states that a fundamental feature of the Fascist state of mind is 'a special act of *binding* as doubts and counter-views are expelled, and the mind ceases to be complex, achieving a simplicity held together initially by the bindings around the signs of the ideology'. The totalitarian ideology 'freezes up the symbolic order' (in the Lacanian sense) and '. . . the elimination of the symbolic, or polysemousness, is the first murder committed by this order, as the symbolic is the true subversion of ideology'. The denial of complexity and doubt and the blind striving after certainty create a moral void: 'at this point the subject must find a victim to contain that void, and now a state of mind becomes an act of violence. On the verge of its own moral vacuum, the mind splits off this dead core self and projects it into a victim . . . [and] the Fascist mind transforms a human other into a disposable nonentity.'

At the beginning of this chapter Bollas warns us that: 'there is a Fascist in all of us and that there is indeed a highly identifiable psychic profile for this personal state' and at the end he describes 'the genocide of everyday life', where subtle distortions, caricature and denigration of opponents, groups or people might pave the way for Fascist movements.

Form and content

It is clear, I think, that in Bollas's writings 'form' is, in a sense, as important as 'content'. 'How' is as important as 'what', and he frequently emphasises the 'intelligence of form' in human articulation and communication. When discussing the elusive essence of idiom he states that 'a person's idiom is . . . an implicit logic of form', and when examining psychoanalytic technique he asserts that: 'inevitably we must turn to the aesthetics of form – the particular way something is conveyed – as an important feature of unconscious communication' (1995: 41).

This appreciation of the importance of form is also embodied in his style of writing. Bollas's style is more literary than that of most psychoanalytic writers, not only because of his knowledge of and references to poets, painters, composers, but because there is a sort of idiomatic musicality to his words and phrases, with simple statements of high density interspersed with meandering trains of thoughtful associations, subtle cadences and rich underlying resonances.

One thing that has always impressed me about his work – and this has to do with content rather than form – is his capacity to penetrate into diverse fields of thought and experience, as it were writing himself into them in order to develop and extract intriguing ideas and conclusions. In the essay 'Why Oedipus?' (Chapter 7), Bollas immerses himself in a close and intelligent re-reading of Sophocles' drama *Oedipus the King*, discerning hidden themes and patterns that provide a challenging new perspective on Freud's theory of the Oedipus Complex.

'The Structure of Evil' (Chapter 10) is another – and very different – example of this. In this chapter Bollas rigorously examines the *process* of evil, using biographies of serial killers, sadomasochistic interactions, political tyranny and Othello's murder of Desdemona to distinguish a common pattern. This involves the presentation to the other of a perverted form of good, the creation of a false potential space and the victim's catastrophic shock when this is reversed into evil. Bollas suggests that underlying this there is a drive in the perpetrator to master his own psychic death.

Bollas's works are not textbooks; he does not set out to teach. Instead he invites the reader to take part in a fascinating exploration of the mind, of the complexities of our interaction with the world around us, and of what it means to be a human being. In this sense his essays are themselves 'evocative objects' that allow us to create our own links with ideas that are truly mind expanding.

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Chapter 1

The transformational object

We know that because of the considerable prematurity of human birth the infant depends on the mother for survival. By serving as a supplementary ego (Heimann, 1956) or a facilitating environment (Winnicott, 1963a) she both sustains the baby's life and transmits to the infant, through her own particular idiom of mothering, an aesthetic of being that becomes a feature of the infant's self. The mother's way of holding the infant, of responding to his gestures, of selecting objects, and of perceiving the infant's internal needs, constitutes her contribution to the infant–mother culture. In a private discourse that can only be developed by mother and child, the language of this relation is the idiom of gesture, gaze and intersubjective utterance.

In his work on the mother–child relation, Winnicott stresses what we might call its stillness: the mother provides a continuity of being, she 'holds' the infant in an environment of her making that facilitates his growth. And yet, against this reciprocally enhancing stillness, mother and child continuously negotiate intersubjective experience that coheres around the rituals of psychosomatic need: feeding, diapering, soothing, playing and sleeping. It is undeniable, I think, that as the infant's 'other' self, the mother transforms the baby's internal and external environment. Edith Jacobson suggests that

> when a mother turns the infant on his belly, takes him out of his crib, diapers him, sits him up in her arms and on her lap, rocks him, strokes him, kisses him, feeds him, smiles at him, talks and sings to him, she offers him not only all kinds of libidinal gratifications but simultaneously stimulates and prepares the child's sitting, standing, crawling, walking, talking, and on and on, i.e., the development of functional ego activity.
>
> (1965: 37)

Winnicott (1963b) terms this comprehensive mother the 'environment' mother because, for the infant, she is the total environment. To this I would add that the mother is less significant and identifiable as an object than as a process that is identified with cumulative internal and external transformations. I wish to identify the infant's first subjective experience of the object as a transformational object,

and this chapter will address the trace in adult life of this early relationship. A transformational object is experientially identified by the infant with processes that alter self experience. It is an identification that emerges from symbiotic relating, where the first object is 'known' not so much by putting it into an object representation, but as a recurrent experience of being – a more existential as opposed to representational knowing. As the mother helps to integrate the infant's being (instinctual, cognitive, affective, environmental), the rhythms of this process – from unintegration(s) to integration(s) – inform the nature of this 'object' relation rather than the qualities of the object as object.

Not yet fully identified as an other, the mother is experienced as a process of transformation, and this feature of early existence lives on in certain forms of object-seeking in adult life, when the object is sought for its function as a signifier of transformation. Thus, in adult life, the quest is not to possess the object; rather the object is pursued in order to surrender to it as a medium that alters the self, where the subject-as-supplicant now feels himself to be the recipient of enviro-somatic caring, identified with metamorphoses of the self. Since it is an identification that begins before the mother is mentally represented as an other, it is an object relation that emerges not from desire, but from a perceptual identification of the object with its function: the object as enviro-somatic transformer of the subject. The memory of this early object relation manifests itself in the person's search for an object (a person, place, event, ideology) that promises to transform the self.

This conception of the mother being experienced as transformation is supported in several respects. In the first place, she assumes the function of the transformational object, for she constantly alters the infant's environment to meet his needs. There is no delusion operating in the infant's identification of the mother with transformation of being through his symbiotic knowing; it is a fact, for she actually transforms his world. In the second place, the infant's own emergent ego capacities – of motility, perception, and integration – also transform his world. The acquisition of language is perhaps the most significant transformation, but learning to handle and to differentiate between objects, and to remember objects that are not present, are transformative achievements as they result in ego change which alters the nature of the infant's internal world. It is not surprising that the infant identifies these ego achievements with the presence of an object, as the failure of the mother to maintain provision of the facilitating environment, through prolonged absence or bad handling, can evoke ego collapse and precipitate psychic pain.

With the infant's creation of the transitional object, the transformational process is displaced from the mother-environment (where it originated) into countless subjective-objects, so that the transitional phase is heir to the transformational period, as the infant evolves from experience of the process to articulation of the experience. With the transitional object, the infant can play with the illusion of his own omnipotence (lessening the loss of the environment-mother with generative and phasic delusions of self-and-other creation); he can entertain the idea of the object being got rid of, yet surviving his ruthlessness; and he can find in this

transitional experience the freedom of metaphor. What was an actual process can be displaced into symbolic equations which, if supported by the mother, mitigate the loss of the original environment-mother. In a sense, the use of a transitional object is the infant's first creative act, an event that does not merely display an ego capacity – such as grasping – but which indicates the infant's subjective experience of such capacities.

The search for the transformational object in adult life

I think we have failed to take notice of the phenomenon in adult life of the wide-ranging collective search for an object that is identified with the metamorphosis of the self. In many religious faiths, for example, when the subject believes in the deity's actual potential to transform the total environment, he sustains the terms of the earliest object tie within a mythic structure. Such knowledge remains symbiotic (that is, it reflects the wisdom of faith) and coexists alongside other forms of knowing. In secular worlds, we see how hope invested in various objects (a new job, a move to another country, a vacation, a change of relationship) may both represent a request for a transformational experience and, at the same time, continue the 'relationship' to an object that signifies the experience of transformation. We know that the advertising world makes its living on the trace of this object: the advertised product usually promises to alter the subject's external environment and hence change internal mood.

The search for such an experience may generate hope, even a sense of confidence and vision, but although it seems to be grounded in the future tense, in finding something in the future to transform the present, it is an object-seeking that recurrently enacts a pre-verbal ego memory. It is usually on the occasion of an aesthetic moment, that an individual feels a deep subjective rapport with an object (a painting, a poem, an aria or symphony, or a natural landscape) and experiences an uncanny fusion with the object, an event that re-evokes an ego state that prevailed during early psychic life. However, such occasions, meaningful as they might be, are less noteworthy as transformational accomplishments than they are for their uncanny quality, the sense of being reminded of something never cognitively apprehended but existentially known, the memory of the ontogenetic process rather than thought or phantasies that occur once the self is established. Such aesthetic moments do not sponsor memories of a specific event or relationship, but evoke a psychosomatic sense of fusion that is the subject's recollection of the transformational object. This anticipation of being transformed by an object – itself an ego memory of the ontogenetic process – inspires the subject with a reverential attitude towards it, so that even though the transformation of the self will not take place on the scale it reached during early life, the adult subject tends to nominate such objects as sacred.

Although my emphasis here is on the positive aesthetic experience, it is well to remember that a person may seek a negative aesthetic experience, for such an occasion 'prints' his early ego experiences and registers the structure of the