

## Accidents, Evocative Objects and Art:

### Meanderings of the Mind in the Work of Christopher Bollas and Gabriel Orozco

*“It was no longer the exterior form of things which interested me but rather what I felt in my own life... I didn’t want to create a figure which looked realistic on the outside, but wanted to experience life and to create only those forms that really affected me, or that I desired”.<sup>1</sup>*

#### Introduction

This study offers an introduction to Christopher Bollas’s theoretical approach to thinking and the creative process, both within and outside of the psychoanalytic encounter. It also looks at selected works by the artist and sculptor Gabriel Orozco which help to illuminate Bollas’s thinking and underscore concepts related to self which are of interest not just to psychoanalysis and art, but to a much wider audience.

In the chapter on creativity and psychoanalysis in his book *The Mystery of Things* (1999, pp.167-180), Bollas asks whether “what takes place in analysis shadows some of the more radical representational expressions in the worlds of poetry, painting and music” (p.170). In this study I will offer a positive response by juxtaposing Bollas’s elaboration of the ‘true self’, his theory of reception and his view of the aleatory object with Orozco’s descriptions of the making process, of working in a state of unknowing, finding “accidents” and being open to surprises that are found in everyday events and objects. In these respects, Orozco’s art and Bollas’s psychoanalytic theories are inter-animating and mutually reinforcing: the former offers a visual and the latter a discursive presentation of the creative process.

Bollas explores the connection between psychic life and art, and gives us examples of how the process of thinking thoughts and expressing feelings is reflected in the process of creating art. In his description of “cracking-up” – or deconstructing – his own everyday thoughts and feelings he experiences, he takes us on a journey outside of the consulting room and into the world of his own everyday reality, complete with memories, dreams and desires. In a similar fashion, Orozco describes the process of disavowing the studio and the

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<sup>1</sup> Alberto Giacometti, letter to Pierre Matisse, 1947, quoted in G. Brett (2002), p.58.

conventional materials of art-making and turning instead to a process of finding evocative objects in his everyday world: on the beach, in the streets, at home.

Bollas and Orozco embrace a similar attitude towards understanding the self and one's place in the world; both use the mundane, the everyday, in their quest for authenticity. Orozco's objects of choice may be a simple breath remaining momentarily on a piano's shiny surface, or a rubber tyre remoulded; he is as interested in the object's intrinsic nature as he is in the ways he can re-make its form. Bollas uses the reverberations of objects encountered (or sought) in the everyday, which he sees as the containers of dream material and desire. Both seek to capture something that is real in the sense of being true but not-yet-articulated.

The artist and the psychoanalyst highlight the fact that we communicate through our choice of objects. That is, objects in the sense of inanimate things that fill our work and leisure spaces, as well as in the psychoanalytical sense of events, places, ideas and concepts, and the 'other' not-me selves – colleagues, family, friends – who inhabit our world. All these evoke feelings which are emotionally-charged to a greater or lesser extent and which, in their impact, both define and are used by the individual to communicate something of one's self to others. Evocative objects are at the core of my study of Bollas and Orozco.

Objects, according to Bollas, affect us sensorially, structurally, conceptually, symbolically, mnemically and projectively (Bollas, 1992, pp.34-36). Once used, the evocative object acts on the self in a play of inner states, becoming a lexicon that expresses different parts of the self; thus, for example, going to the theatre, joining a political party or playing tennis evoke different 'me's' and say different things about the subject. The school of object-relations in psychoanalysis has developed the individual's inner-world use of objects extensively and, particularly in the British School, object-usage has specific impact on the transference relations with the analyst. Bollas extends our understanding of object-relations by examining the structural integrity of the object which is always both an accumulation of an individual's projective mechanisms *and* itself in its own right. Psychoanalysis tends to pay more attention to the object as container for our projections; Bollas turns our attention to the impact of an object's effect on the self to understand what part of 'me' is expressed by a

specific poem, game or event; and he asks questions about object-usage that consider the forms we choose to express the “psychic texture of the self”.

Orozco’s work clearly expresses the structural integrity of the objects he selects, as well as the way in which he uses or makes or re-forms them to express his own idiom as artist. Orozco’s messages to the art-viewing public are multi-faceted and touch on issues ranging from immigration, otherness and movement, to questions about the function of art today. Orozco aims to create something new and evocative from his everyday reality; artist and art are mutually constituted and understanding the use of the object leads the viewer to an understanding of the artist himself. In Guy Brett’s words: “Orozco’s objects represent a search for the self in the ‘thing’” (1998, p.52).

The creative process requires the composer, artist, poet to make as well as to think; an analogy with the psychoanalyst is in the making of interpretations which will turn the analysand’s attention in a new direction and help her to see things anew. But both making and thinking also require a space, a place where not-knowing can occur and psychoanalyst – or artist – can ‘play’. In the space of the analytic encounter, Bollas follows Freud and Winnicott in requiring the analyst to tolerate the state of not-knowing in order to engage fully in unconscious communication with the analysand. Orozco emphasizes the value of art that takes place in the gaps where there is space to think outside convention, beyond the confines of the gallery or museum where viewers come with a set of expectations about what art is, and what they are supposed to think of it.

The work of psychoanalysis is often a grappling with the ineffable – a struggle to describe and understand feelings and dreams and their impact on everyday life. There is an inherent tension between the quest to know the desires of the unconscious self, and the unknowability of the unconscious as discussed, among others, by Jacqueline Rose (2002, pp.108-9) and Arne Jemstedt (2002, p.39). Bollas himself says: “The other in his ultimate unknowability – I cannot know his inner self experience – constitutes a psychic presence in all our lives” (Bollas, 1999, p.13). This tension permeates the work of Christopher Bollas. In one sense, the unconscious is a site of meaning and a source for understanding the self; and yet, it is also an ‘other’ who is also always someone else.

Similarly, the art critic Benjamin Buchloh says that there is an unknowability about the artist Orozco: for example, many of his sculptural objects appear to resonate with references to ancient Mexico, yet the work also “consistently denies these references as explicitly as it seems to suggest them” (Buchloh, 1993, p.13). In this juxtaposition of artist and psychoanalyst, unknowability is pervasive, yet the endeavor to know persists, like the work of the Freudian pair, as each struggles to understand the as-yet un-articulated that must be thought about and re-formed in order to reveal the true self’s desire.

Just as Bollas sees the creation of meaning as emanating from the use of evocative objects, so too Orozco, whose use of objects aims to elicit an understanding in the viewer about the artist as well as about art and the viewing public. In other words, the experience of viewing Orozco’s work turns the viewer’s attention back to herself as an individual participating in the creation of an object of desire.

My aim in juxtaposing the work of this artist and this psychoanalyst is not to locate pathology in the art or the artist, but rather to highlight questions about living and thinking creatively; about the self, our place in the world and the relationships we engender through our objects-of-choice. As this study will show, both Bollas and Orozco are involved in giving form to the inner world, prompted by the need to articulate “radical representational expressions” of desire.

### **Part I: Christopher Bollas and the work of the unconscious**

Christopher Bollas was born in 1943 in Washington DC to a French father and American mother. His father had travelled from France to South America and then to England before settling in the United States; his mother had been a classical pianist and aspiring actress before she had her children. When Bollas was eight, the family moved to Laguna Beach in California, site of an artists’ colony and a place that Arne Jemstedt says “...features prominently in his writings and clearly influenced his sense of the environment’s evocative play upon self-experiencing” (*Bollas Reader*, 2011, p.00). Bollas studied political theory, law and American history and was involved in the civil rights movement. His wide-ranging interests led to a Master’s degree in social work (which licensed him to practice in the US) and a PhD in English literature. His studies in psychoanalysis began after a “life-changing”

experience of undergoing psychotherapy himself at Berkeley. At the Austen Riggs Center he met Erik Erikson, his mentor and a continuing influence on Bollas's thinking. In an interview with Anthony Molino, Bollas mentions living in the US during the rise of Erikson's work, "...when the taking of the history and the giving of the history were very important" (Molino, 2002, p. 187). In the same interview he suggests that "...whatever the story, its telling is always a pleasure... The wish is to represent" (ibid). This may underpin Bollas's insistence on locating free association at the centre of the psychoanalytic process.

Readers of any extended biography (eg. Jemstedt, in Bollas & Jemstedt, 2011, pp.xii-xxv) will recognise the synergy between Bollas's wide-ranging interests and his discussions of psychoanalytic processes which are imbued with references to literature, painting and music; indeed, his literary background and knowledge are reflected in the style of his psychoanalytical writing. Jemstedt describes Bollas's writing as having a "versatile *musicality*, conveying rhythm and resonance" which interact with the content of his text and communicate the "aesthetic intelligence of the unconscious" (Jemstedt, 2002, p.41). Since 1988, Bollas has devoted much time to painting and some of his work appears on the covers of his latest publications; he has also written three novels in the last 15 years.

The importance of form (aesthetic intelligence) as well as content of the unconscious is central to Bollas's theories. It may derive in part from his reading of Schiller, as he explains in his early publication *Cracking Up* (1995, pp.41-42). According to Schiller, personality exists in a "mutuality of influence" with lived experience and with the environment. In order to come into being, one must "externalise all that is within him, and give form to all that is outside him". The *form drive* is the urge to give form to the experiences in one's life or, as Bollas, explains, "the ego's desire to express the intelligent process of living". This links with the taking and giving of history and the wish to represent. But the form drive is not just an endless representing or retelling; Bollas's subject is not an ancient mariner doomed simply to repeat his story. Rather it allows for a re-staging of events that shifts the way we see the content of the story or, as we shall see in the works of Orozco, the form drive produces a re-making of the object which transforms it anew.

Bollas implies a criticism of Freud for overlooking the writing of Schiller – which he had surely read – thereby neglecting the aesthetic of the ego and failing to distinguish between

repressed contents and the process of repression in the unconscious. He states that the ego that Freud identified as a “third Ucs.” in *The Ego and the Id* (Freud, 1923, p.18), was in fact a confusion on Freud’s part of content with process (Bollas 2007, pp.29-30).

This criticism notwithstanding, Bollas’s theories are inspired by and persistently bring us back to Freud. Bollas states that Freud proposed a “*profound* concept of how we think” in his understanding that our thoughts about people or events are always linked to a group of ideas. Bollas claims that it is the movement of these groups of ideas that characterizes how we think, and he posits a theory of reception in contra-distinction to the mechanics of repression:

... if the aim of repression is to avoid the censoring or persecutory judgments of consciousness, the aim of reception is to allow unconscious development without the intrusive effect of consciousness (Bollas & Jemstedt, 2011, p.62).

The unconscious, for Bollas, is a profoundly intelligent force with receptive areas that draw on objects from the subject’s internal and external worlds, creating networks of images and ideas which are all linked. The scientist and the artist “play” with ideas and images in the unconscious, forming *psychic genera* or collections of new ideas that, in turn, arouse new questions, ideas and thoughts that will eventually transform the individual’s outlook. This is the work of reception and, as most analysts will confirm, it may involve many hours of effort, questioning, uncertainty and confusion before the achievement of a psychic discovery.

Jacqueline Rose points to Bollas’s profound appreciation of the unconscious, stating that she knows of no other psychoanalyst writing in English who expresses the “ungraspable unconsciousness of the unconscious, and the endless, unstoppable, play of its work” (Rose, 2002, p.108). Bollas’s theory of genera and the receptive unconscious illuminate the centrality and function of the unconscious within the creative process:

Thus with reception the ego understands that unconscious work is necessary to develop a part of the personality, to elaborate a phantasy, to allow for the evolution of a nascent emotional experience, and ideas or feelings and words are sent to the system unconscious, not to be

banished but to be given a mental space for development which is not possible in consciousness (Bollas & Jemstedt, 2011, p.62).

Drawing on Winnicott, Bollas describes unconscious thinking as a withdrawal from the immediate environment that comes about through the activity of a “simple self” lost in a moment of experience. In this state of being out of touch with oneself, the subject is able to endow objects with meaning. The moment of withdrawal creates latent thoughts which return in dreams, or remain unconscious. The subject’s dreaming contains ideas, or a chain of associative ideas, which must be deconstructed in order to discover their referents (Bollas, 1995, p.9-29). This deconstruction is achieved through free associating to the image(s) in the dream as the free associative process “cracks up” the image into components parts – or strings of signifiers – that are available to the conscious. Whereas Freud saw displacement, particularly in dreams, as having a defensive function (Freud, 1900, pp.307-9), Bollas reframes Freudian displacement as “dissemination” which he considers to be part of thinking. Following Lacan, Bollas reminds us that each signifier has a life of its own; the links may be obviously sequential, or there may be apparent gaps which require a free associative process to unravel and clarify. Thus, for example, a love of jazz, fear of skiing, commitment to the local church community, and so on, are seen by Bollas as expressions of a collection of meanings we have unconsciously accrued around a significant object or activity or event in our lives.

Thus, in the dream world, the unconscious is free to seek its truths in the union (condensation) of disparate ideas, and in the breaking apart of those ideas through free association in the analytic session. Bollas makes what may be seen as a radical return to Freud in his re-location of the process of free association as central and essential to the analytic encounter: it is precisely in the dynamic of unconscious-to-unconscious communication between the Freudian pair that the analysand can use the analyst as object to articulate her or his particular idiom, recalling states of being and experiences which have their experiential origins in the pre-symbolic realm of maternal care.

This recalls Ogden’s “analytic third” – a transitional space where “the intersubjective and the individually subjective each create, negate and preserve the other” (Ogden, 1994, p.4). Ogden emphasises the fact that within the environment of the analytic third, the thoughts

and feelings of both analyst and analysand shift and change; even memories from the past may be transformed – or re-formed – by an experience in the space created by the interplay of subjectivity and intersubjectivity. Ogden frames the process of finding meaning in the dialectic between subjectivity and intersubjectivity, and in the discovery of new thoughts, feelings and sensations which transform inner objects and create new meaning.

In this transitional space where transformation is possible, Bollas describes the creation of psychic genera as the extent to which a subject can articulate his idiom and enjoy “the psychic freedom of object representation and the liberty of object choice” (Bollas, 1992, p. 68). Where free association is prioritised over interpretation, the “freedom of mood, of thought, of feeling” – the freedom to play – releases the analysand’s idiom for expression and the creation of meaning where it did not exist before. This is essential for the expression of the *destiny*

*drive* – described by Bollas as “the very particular urge to develop the form of one’s private idiom through the articulating and elaborating experiences of object usage” (Bollas, 1992, p.71). This stands in opposition to trauma which, linked to the death instinct, seeks to reduce distress and maintain an unvarying state. The destiny drive seeks excitation and novelty, and aligns with the life instincts to “seek the procreative combings of self with object” (ibid).

Bollas laments the disappearance from contemporary analytic practice of free association, which he sees as a signal element of classical psychoanalysis indicating “the presence of the true self in a session” (Molino, 1997, p.23). Both the dream and free association permit a transubstantiation of the individual’s psychic life that can give form to what was previously unthought – the “unthought known” (Bollas, 1992, p.49).

Following Winnicott, Bollas posits the mother as the first transformational object in an individual’s life, and claims it as undeniable that “... as the infant’s ‘other’ self, the mother continually *transforms* the infant’s internal and external environment” (Bollas, 1979, p.97). The mother is experienced as a continual process of physical, affective and instinctual experience-alteration. Thus the object-relation is based on the child’s identification of the mother with a “recurrent experience of being”. Mother is not an object as such, but a total

environment for the infant, experienced as a continuous process of transformation. The subsequent creation of transitional objects results in a displacement of the transformational process from the mother-environment into myriad subjective objects. That is to say, the creation of the first transitional object is an act of creativity which enables the child to experiment with his own omnipotence, venting his ruthlessness without fear of losing the mother-environment. The transitional object is designated transformational by Bollas because it is *object as process*: a site of ego integration and burgeoning subjectivity which generates an experience of transformation. Later in life, hope for change may be invested in a new job, a political party or winning a competition, each being an object with which the subject has an ongoing relation that refers back to a pre-verbal ego memory. These mnemonic objects speak their own language in the service of desire; they contain experiences of the projectively-identified self which, having “psychically signified” them, then uses them to express aspects of the personal idiom, for example by listening to music to gain a sense of calm, or engaging in extreme sports to feel alive. Or they may arise purely by chance, as aleatory objects, by means of which the subject is played upon, or used, underscoring the fact that we do not select a chance object in order to express our own personal idiom of self:

Instead, we are played upon by the inspiring arrival of the unselected... In such moments we can say that objects use us, in respect of that inevitable two-way interplay between self and object world and between desire and surprise (Bollas, 1992, p. 37).

As well as using objects as containers of our projections, we may also use an object for its own intrinsic qualities. Bollas refers to the “processional potential” of different objects, each of which has different impact and involves the self in different transformations. Thus, deciding to lunch with mother is a choice that will impact differently to playing football; each being an object which gives its own form to “the psychic texture of the self” (Bollas, 1992, p.4).

In his article titled ‘Love is where it finds you’, Grotstein eloquently describes the appearance of the aleatory object in terms of finding a mate:

...that not only finds *us* when we do not realize that we are looking for him or her, but whom we believe we find as if by destiny – as if we have finally located our lost second self (Grotstein, 2002, p.81).

Grotstein offers several examples which involve falling in love to emphasise the importance of the element of surprise, ie. the aleatory factor. Grotstein tells us that human beings both love and fear surprises – they bring relief from the stultification of routine life, on the one hand; but they may also arouse that sense of openness, chaos or boundarylessness against which the individual vigorously defends himself. Encounters with the aleatory object force us to “evaluate our capacity to bear the impact” of its affect on our inner world. The healthier the individual, says Grotstein, the more open s/he is to receiving the aleatory object (Grotstein, 2002, p.83).

The decision to use an object is an act of aesthetic intelligence which deconstructs the original contents of desire and finds new forms for pleasure; Bollas sees in this a “mental freedom” which supplants the desires of instinctual life (Bollas, 1995, p.63). This freedom of the unconscious to use an object in this way precludes the danger of being forever imprisoned in the (aleatory) evocative object (Beck, 2002, p.22).

The “aesthetic moment” for Bollas is the point at which the individual experiences that sense of uncanny fusion with an object which contains the memory of something “never cognitively apprehended, but existentially known, the memory of the ontogenetic process”, which is neither thought nor fantasy as these occur only after the establishment of the self (Bollas, 1979, p.99). This is often referred to as *déjà vu* – an unexpected surfacing of an object experienced as mysterious or strange-yet-familiar.

This is not mere affection for, or interest in, an object. It is a reverence for the “total psychosomatic sense of fusion” in which transformation occurred in infancy; and even though the same level of transformation does not occur in adulthood, it is the *anticipation* of transformation that lends the object the reverence with which it is perceived. This object evokes the memory of a deeply affective experience of fusion – recalling Freud’s oceanic feeling – in which, perhaps, everything is possible because transformation seems possible, and *was* in fact achieved.

The creative process, according to Bollas, is a transubstantiation of psychic reality into a new realm; the self is not only expressed but re-invented, or re-formed. Thus:

...that order of thinking that is painting, or composing, is the structure of transformation that transubstantiates internal objects from the deep solitude of an internal world into altered external actuality (Bollas, 1999, p.174).

Just as the analysand re-creates herself in the presence of the analyst through the associative process, so the artist's productions – the author's prose or the composer's music – are transubstantiations of their psychic objects; and these transubstantiations seek presentation, not representation, as these creations have never before existed.

Thus, in Bollas's psychoanalysis the individual is helped to pursue the destiny drive rather than accede to the dictates of fate; to engage in an elaboration of the true self, revealed through a process of exploring the unconscious, which leads to a lived future created by the subject on the basis of choice through self-knowledge. A lived life stands in opposition to an existence based on submission and compliance. By contrast to being truly alive, the fated individual is deprived of a future based on choice through self-knowledge and is, in Nina Coltart's words, "doomed to a damaged here-and-now" (Coltart, 1991, p.129).

There are shades of Lacan in the imperative to forgo a life based on the other's expectations and to quest for the true self, and the Lacanian imaginary order is reflected in Bollas's evocative object. As an accumulation of projective mechanisms – both of our subject *and* of the other – the object is also mis-recognised as it plays on the self and assumes the form of his/her desire. In Bollas and Lacan the object must be deconstructed, or cracked up, in order to properly recognise its significance for the subject. Bollas diverges from the Lacanian model as his subject is not predicated upon lack, or on the symbolic order which dominated Lacan's later work.

Winnicott, who introduced the terms "true self" and "false self" into psychoanalysis, made the connection between a true self and creativity, proposing that only the true self could be truly creative and feel real (Winnicott, 1960, pp.148-149). For Bollas the concept of true self

(and personal idiom) are central and form a major part of his first three books. Arne Jemstedt comments on this and highlights the importance of these terms in psychoanalysis:

Why are these concepts important, and why are Bollas's elaborations of them valuable? Because they refer to a *quality* of a person's being and mode of relating which 'ordinary' psychoanalytic concepts do not capture.... [They] capture the experience of, for example, being or not being in one's body. True self/idiom also underline the uniqueness of each individual, which colours his/her appearance, thought processes, emotional life, ways of being ill, and they carry with them a respect for the *enigma* at the core of each person (Jemstedt, 2002, p.45).

Jemstedt underscores the fact that the terms introduced by Winnicott and elaborated by Bollas describe unconscious processes of communication and "inner movements and transitions" which are at once both very real but also hard to articulate; indeed many writers avoid the attempt.

Bollas's concept of the true self was eventually replaced by "idiom", partly in order to avoid over-usage of the term which would empty it of meaning, but also in order to further develop the concept of "intelligence of form". Jemstedt again:

He views one's idiom as being articulated through one's choice and use of objects, both in the transitional sense (where inner and outer reality overlap, and where the question as to what comes from inside and from outside is kept suspended) and in the 'objective' sense, where one encounters the object's quality of being fundamentally itself, outside the sphere of projective mechanisms, what Bollas calls the integrity of the object (Jemstedt, 2002, p.47).

Lacanian echoes of the 'imaginary' and the 'symbolic' persist: in Lacanian terms, the false self is a subversion of the individual subject and a mis-recognition of the fact that the individual's very existence is dependent upon the other and upon the symbolic systems of his/her culture.

In Part II, I will examine several works created by Gabriel Orozco and show how, as an artist, Orozco presents us with a visual presentation of transforming not-knowing into knowing; how he creates meaning where there was none before, and offers us not only a new work

but also a new way of seeing 'art' as a whole. I will compare Bollas's understanding of the process of creative transformation with the expressions of Orozco's idiom as artist.

## **Part II - Gabriel Orozco: cracking up the art world**

Gabriel Orozco was born in Mexico in 1962 and studied at the Escuela Nacional de Artes Plásticas in Mexico. If asked about his links to the Mexican tradition, he refers to the muralists – leftwing painters who took their art to the streets and painted in open spaces beyond the galleries and museums. His father, Mario Orozco Rivera, worked with David Alfaro Siqueiros and shared the same social commitment to leftist politics, so Gabriel grew up surrounded by this art and these politics, though his education was certainly not limited to the Mexican tradition. After leaving Mexico, he continued his studies at the Circulo de Bellas Artes in Madrid from 1986-87, and since 1991, has divided his time between Paris, New York and Mexico City. So, like Bollas, Orozco has lived and studied across continents and cultures and, perhaps not surprisingly, the themes of travel and migration recur throughout his work.

Studying in Spain in the 1980s, he was treated as a Mexican immigrant and, as such, found himself confronting his own Mexican culture from a distance created by displacement and 'othering'. In Orozco's own words:

I was displaced and in a country where the relationship with Latin America is conflicted. I came from a background that was very progressive. And then to travel to Spain and confront a very conservative society that also wanted to be very avant-garde in the 1980s, but treated me as an immigrant, was shocking. That feeling of vulnerability was really important for developing my work. I think a lot of my work has to do with that type of exposure, to expose vulnerability and make that your strength... to really emphasise that you are the Other, you are a foreigner, you are an immigrant (Morgan, 2011, p.9).

By seeing himself and his Mexican heritage re-framed through the eyes of the denigrating 'other', Orozco manages to transform the experience into something creative, making his otherness his strength. This strength is particularly evident in works such as *Crazy Tourist* (Fig 2, below) which both echo Mexico and the Mexican tradition, yet resist them as well. I

would suggest that it is this process of re-framing his view of himself that frees Orozco to pursue his creative “true self”.

Orozco’s response to the anticipations of his contemporaries in the art world was to resist all expectations that he would produce work in a particular style or tradition. He sought something broader than a specific trend engendered by his history or the place of his birth; something which he calls “reality – the real”, which he sought in the streets around his home:

The most important step for an artist... is to re-establish, or at least to develop contacts, or bridges, in our relationship with reality – the real, whatever it is. That thing that is outside of us, that thing we need to know, that we want to explore in order to understand the world, ourselves and the time we are living in (*Ibid*, p.16).

From the start, almost immediately after he had completed his studies, Orozco abandoned the techniques he had been taught at the academy, then he quit his studio and started working in the streets. Ann Temkin (2009, p.14) tells us that “Orozco wished to be empty-handed” – as accessible and as open as possible to the objects of play with which he made his art. This corresponds to the trend in the 1990s that saw many western artists move away from the fixed place of the studio into a fluid space more akin to the venues of contemporary arts/music festivals which use the streets and public spaces as their stage (*ibid*, p.11). Orozco also dispensed with conventional artist’s materials – items usually sold at high prices in art shops – with objects he found “by accident”, like a ball of child’s plasticine, or bits of vulcanised rubber found in the road, or a lump of clay used to make bricks. Orozco again:

What I had learned in art school was inadequate when I began to take an interest in what was all around me, walking down the street, experimenting with objects I would find, as well as picking things up and taking them into the studio to transform them (Orozco, 2001, p.85).

Orozco’s reality is defined by the events and objects that he encounters in his everyday life. He refuses to comply with the dictates of the art establishment, and adheres to a process whereby his self and his art are mutually constituted: Orozco as creative artist chooses

authenticity, rather than accepting and delivering the expectations of others. This corresponds with Bollas's assertion that the creative process is a re-invention, or re-forming, of objects selected so that the psychic reality of the artist's self is transubstantiated into a new reality. Just as the psychoanalyst sees the process of an individual 're-making' himself, so Orozco the artist wants the viewer to see the process of making art, for this is what helps us to understand both the work itself and the artist:

I also think that's important in my work, that when you see the object, you can see the process of its making...the concept of the making of the work is always represented in the final product... the making made the pieces (Morgan, 2011, p.23).

Like Bollas's subject who looks for his dream material in the objects encountered in the everyday stuff of life, Orozco distances himself from the expectations people have of his Mexican tradition and history, and from the conventional studio and materials with all their attendant limitations. Thus withdrawn from the immediate environment (both physical and cultural), he is free to seek out his dream objects as a "simple self" exploring his reality in state of reverie, allowing his attention to be drawn to this and that:

I deliberately didn't bring anything with me in order to participate in the reality I found in local places.

...I am interested in carrying my indecision around with me, or being in the middle of a decision, until the last minute, because I believe that places me in a situation ... where apparently there is nothing going on (Orozco, 2009, p. 98).

He describes an interesting parallel to the encounter between the Freudian pair:

...we are dealing with an encounter between two empty recipients: the viewer and the object... I believe the best way of establishing contact with my work is when those two poles meet in the void between them, to be filled by the experience in real time, precisely at that moment (*Ibid*, p.103).

Bollas echoes this in the value he ascribes to the psychoanalyst's experience of not knowing what psychoanalysis is as an "accomplishment", because it precedes the creation of the inner space where the analyst's own idiom can be experienced and understood (Bollas,

1989, p.62-64). The two “empty recipients” are engaged in unconscious communications, not orchestrated by the rationalising ego, but exploring the potentially transformative space of the analytic setting, dislocated from the everyday, where analyst and artist are free to dream.

Thus, like the analyst, the artist is an agent of transformation, and his work acts as an evocative object which must be found by the viewer. Orozco disrupts the familiar art scene and creates surprise and confusion among his viewers: he "cracks up" the familiar crowd, shattering them as a “mass of believers” and transforming them into individuals who must each think for herself (Orozco, 2001, p.88). I quote from Orozco’s notebooks:

Reality and realization: the maker [*realista*] who wishes for the accident. The object that arises in the world as a result of an unpredictable phenomenon and accident, but only when there is an act of consciousness – consciousness that is elicited by the reality of the body ready to receive it. The recipients: the surprise of the maker and the subsequent surprise of the realizer: he who activates the reality as a recipient of its future, he who realizes what is happening to him in the world... Not expecting anything, not being spectators, but realizers of accidents, in which reality, when nothing is expected of it, gives us its gifts (Orozco, 2001, p.89).

Here self and object are intertwined in an interplay of psychic intensity as the artist experiences the impact of evocative objects. The act of consciousness is embodied in the artist’s selection of this object over that, in his understanding of the object’s history and function and in his own function as an artist. The creative process begins with the selection of an accident and culminates in the jouissance of both artist and viewer upon discovery of the surprise engendered by the new creation.

The self of the artist is as much a part of the making process as the objects he uses:

The artist is first and foremost a consumer. The materials he consumes and the way in which he consumes them influence the development of his work and the subsequent implications. This consumption system is the first technique the artist has to define. Having abandoned my studio... I became a consumer of anything at hand and a producer of what already exists (Orozco, 2001, p.94).

Encounters with the materials he uses are encounters with the social baggage of those materials; there is no purity and everything leads to another thing. Orozco develops relationships with objects based on what he knows of their history and how he uses them today.



Figure 1: GABRIEL OROZCO

*Yielding Stone*, 1992

Plasticine

Approx. 14 x 17 x 17 in. / 35.6 X 43.8 X 43.2 cm. (Inv.#3870)

*Yielding Stone* (fig. 1) is a ball of made from child's plasticine; an imperfect sphere which, when rolled in the street, collects the detritus that lies in its path and becomes imprinted with it. The soft, greasy surface of *Yielding Stone* keeps accumulating dust and dirt, even when it is re-situated in the museum space, and thus it is continually changing. One version of *Yielding Stone* was made to the same weight as Orozco, thus reinforcing the connection between artist and object. Its shape and condition suggest movement and an ephemerality which recalls Orozco's own unfixed location in the world. It is made of material more commonly used for child's play and it brings dirt and detritus into the carefully-guarded cleanliness of the museum space; it is 'other' in this pristine space, questioning what belongs inside and what should be left out, and posing questions about why it is there at all. It functions as a transitional object, creating a space for thinking about what art is. It arouses surprise and desire – its otherness surprises us, yet it is instantly familiar, recognised. Notably, however, in the space it provides for questions, it resolutely refuses to give answers and remains a ball of plasticine, true to itself as much as the artist is true to his.

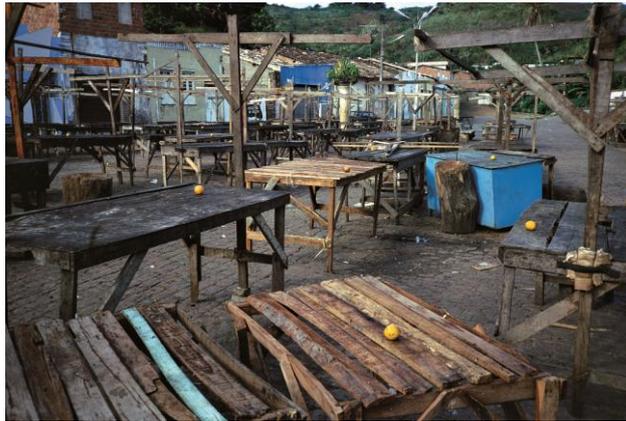


Figure 2: GABRIEL OROZCO  
Crazy Tourist, 1992  
Chromogenic color print  
16 x 20 in. / 40.6 x 50.8 cm. (Inv.#3853)

*Crazy Tourist* (fig. 2) shows an empty market in Cachoeira, Brazil. Location plays a key role in this installation where Orozco transferred rotting oranges he found on the ground onto the bare tables of the market. Thus re-arranged, the fruit we are used to seeing stacked in attractive piles of plenitude ready to be sold for consumption, is displayed in naked singularity and evokes poverty and lack. The market is a place where plentiful displays of food often belie the poverty of the people who come to buy. Orozco cracks up and transforms our view of the place by simply re-arranging the traces of daily market activity.

The artist's self is revealed in different ways in Orozco's work, but he is always a part of the creative process as well as the end result.





Figure 3: GABRIEL OROZCO

My Hands Are my Heart, 1991

Two silver dye bleach prints

Each: 9-1/8 x 12-1/2 in. / 23.2 x 31.8 cm. (Inv.#3894)

*My Hands are My Heart* (fig. 3) is a work in two parts showing Orozco's fingers pressing into clay against his own naked torso. Orozco states that "...there is always language around an object" (Morgan, 2011, p.16) and in this case we are told that the clay of this heart is the same as that used for making bricks in Cholula, Mexico. We are also told that the work came about as a sort of "accident" during the filming of a documentary about new art in Mexico (Morgan, 2011, p.16), and was not the product of a carefully staged act of art-making.

Recalling the form drive, this work gives form to something internal – in this case a vital organ – made from material which recalls the artist's Mexican heritage. The artist's head remains outside our view and he is represented here only by his naked torso and his hands. The diptych divides the process into two parts – the making of the heart and the proffering of it as a gift to the viewer, ensuring that the latter is also a part of the work.

Recalling the destiny drive, this work comes from within, from the heart, from the artist's feelings and desires as opposed to the rationalizing ego which would more likely be depicted by the head, which remains out of view. The work shows the artist in his nakedness adding to the notion of an unadorned self, a "true self". The proffering hands remind us that this heart is the result of a making process, and understanding that process will guide the viewer to new questions about the artwork, the artist and about art in general. The title further reinforces the message that the artist is mutually constituted with the art that he makes.

Freud reminds us that the ego is a body-ego (Freud, 1923) and the emphasis on the body in this work can be understood as a link between the body of the initial facilitating mother-environment (which might be Mexico, or the artist as creator of his work) with the rationalizing ego of the artist offering his gift.

The gift of one's heart is deeply intimate: held in this manner by its creator, the work also recalls the Winnicottian baby who, if held by a "good enough" mother, is able to use objects freely and think creatively as a true self. Thus the heart is treated in a manner which resists its (unfeeling) clay substance, and transcends its origins (Mexico). Just as the analyst "holds" the analysand to facilitate the process of new insights into the self, so Orozco as artist holds his heart to the viewer to ask questions about what art is, what we are seeing and what we are thinking as we ponder the work.

The role of the physical body in Orozco's work is taken up by Jean Fisher who suggests that his art appeals to the senses and is not immediately available to the demands of language. She claims Orozco's works are intended as a representation of the space occupied by the physical body and the limits of any extension of that body:

The body... is no more than a trace, yet it is precisely this that gives a sense of continuity to the self in the place of its absence... Orozco's work may best be described as a profound meditation on the act of making and the psychic impulses that generate it: a vigilance to the processes by which the benthic pulsations of desire, an inchoate mental representation, an act of the imagination, find a tangible form (Fisher, 2009, p.20).

The "psychic impulses" that push the artist to make recall the destiny drive, and "an act of the imagination" which results in tangible form brings to mind the form drive. In a similar vein, Rye Dag Holmboe describes Orozco's work as an "aesthetic of the trace" (Holmboe, *White Review*): the physicality of the body leaves traces of itself in its wake – its own impress – an index of a life lived. As the artist of trace, Orozco gives us impressions of life, memories of being in a place, but the traces are ephemeral. In today's world of mass-produced objects, what is real is lost in simulacra of simulacra (reminiscent of Baudrillard) and all that remains are the traces.



Figure 4: GABRIEL OROZCO  
Extension of Reflection, 1992  
Chromogenic color print  
16 x 20 in. / 40.6 x 50.8 cm. (Inv.#3895)

Similarly, Orozco offers a photo of the tyre tracks made by riding his bicycle through a puddle several times (fig. 4). He describes the puddle as “something to be avoided, a disorder, an accumulation of time”, but also as a transitional space “where something marvellous may happen” (Orozco, 2001, p.89). Photographing the results provides a trace of something that was real: the experience the artist had of joyously riding his bicycle round and around. All the viewer is left with, however, are traces of his activity (the game played) and an evocation of *jouissance* from life *lived* – the life of the true self.

Orozco also claims the empty space as a recipient in his work. Linked again to the theme of transportation, migration and the practicalities of being an immigrant transporting his artworks, Orozco sees his objects as recipients of “‘interested’ human attention” (Morgan, 2011, p.26).



Figure 5: GABRIEL OROZCO

Empty Shoe Box, 1993  
Silver dye bleach print  
16 x 20 in. / 40.6 x 50.8 cm. (Inv.#3891)

In this regard, *Empty Shoebox* (fig. 5) is a space waiting to be filled. Orozco used shoeboxes as containers for the photographs he took during his explorations. Thus the simple box becomes a receptacle for all the images that caught the artist's eye, and which he collected for use at some point in the future. When invited to exhibit at the Venice Biennale in 1993, he chose to display the shoebox. On the one hand, the Biennale, which took place in Italy, allowed *Empty Shoebox* to create a link to *arte povera* (literally meaning 'poor art'), a movement initiated in that country as an attack on the conventional values of government, industry, and culture. On the other hand, it served as an empty space which provoked questions but provided no answers as to what it was to be filled with; indeed it left many asking whether it was even a bonafide exhibit. It gets kicked about like a piece of garbage because it is just a shoebox, but it also functions as the aleatory object evoking pleasure and fear. *Empty Shoebox* is a void, the nothingness of cracked up art. It evokes the initial not-knowing that recalls Bollas's claim that the psychoanalytical session must start with a blank screen (Bollas, 1995, p.119). Orozco tells us that *Empty Shoebox* continues to maintain the awkwardness today that it evoked over twenty years ago: it continues to function as a transitional object, evoking surprise and confusion, and he continues to exhibit it.

Orozco's works can be understood in different ways: as social commentary (*Crazy Tourist*), or as cracking up the art world (*Empty Shoebox*), or as an indication of artistic authenticity and the true self. *Yielding Stone* and *Empty Shoebox*, among many other works by Orozco, at first mystify and remain mute. They are what they are – a ball of plasticine and an empty shoebox – yet in the context in which Orozco places them, they are also 'other', like objects in the dream world, simultaneously familiar and strange, ultimately unknowable and yet containers of desire.

I would propose that all the different ways of understanding Orozco's work are valid as ways of seeing, rather than as definitions of intent. In his artworks cracking up the art world segues into social commentary, especially when the comment is directed at the world of art itself, as in *Empty Shoebox*. In other works, the statement is rather more comical as in 1995

when Orozco turned the Galerie Micheline Szwajcer in Antwerp into a car park because the gallery owner always parked her large car on double lines in the small street outside. Thus, for the duration of Orozco's exhibition, Ms Szwajcer was transformed into "a good neighbour, giving a service to the people and no longer parking on double lines" (Morgan, 2011, p.33).

Orozco's work is prolific and wide-ranging, and is by no means fully represented in this paper. But it is always transforming; in Jessica Morgan's words: "This is not the private development of a personal language that can be gradually unpacked or decoded... rather this is the purposeful use of a shared vocabulary of the 'everyday altered'" (Ibid, p.119).

Like the psychoanalyst, Orozco is concerned with transformative experiences. Found situations, accidents and surprises engage him in a process which cannot be predicted, but can be understood and lead to new (creative) thinking and ways of seeing. Orozco as artist succeeds if the work of art continues long after the doors have closed forever on an exhibition and what he creates has impact:

The idea circulates through the individual and his words and his relationship to the new reality observed through a new awareness. Thus the post facto controversy unleashed by a work is one possible measure of how that work was successful, how it transformed the viewers, and, in turn, public expectations (Orozco, 2001, p.92).

#### **End Note**

Bollas makes a crucial point when he says that the path from pre-natal solitude to the (Winnicottian) capacity to be alone bears witness to the experience of the idiom of true self (1989, p.21). The true self for Bollas is an inherited potential, an idiom of being, in-formed by the enabling mother and father, and expressed in the individual's life choices, and in the ways she uses the events, people and things with which she populates her world. One of the tasks of Bollas's psychoanalysis is to assist in the progressive articulation of the true self which cannot be discovered and defined; it can only be glimpsed and better understood.

Orozco's art can be understood as a potential experience between object and viewer - an evocative object which engenders new thinking and new understanding about the object

itself, about the viewer who “plays” in the potential space created, and about the true self of the artist whose work is an expression of his own idiom of being.

In this context, the artist’s job is to ensure that the art-viewing public is not caught in a set of expectations which belong to another time and place; rather, viewers should be engaged with where they *are*, in a potentially transformative experience, relevant to each individual’s everyday reality, because only there can life be truly lived. Similarly, it is the psychoanalyst’s task to free the individual from being trapped in someone else’s dream, and liberate him from compliance with the dictates of those who would navigate his life choices and aspirations. In Adam Phillips’ words, “The core catastrophe... is of being trapped in someone else’s (usually the parents’) dream or view of the world; psychically paralysed for self-protection in a place without the freedom of perspectives” (Phillips, 2002, p.56).

Bollas and Orozco view the self as being expressed through object choice and usage. Self and object are mutually reinforcing, mutually constituted. However, unlike the objects through which it is expressed, the true self is fleeting and only momentarily glimpsed. Like the traces of the bicycle tyre in the puddle, it does not last, it is not replicable; one cannot be one's true self all of the time.

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