

CHRISTOPHER BOLLAS AND ANNELEEN MASSCHELEIN

UNCONSCIOUS THINKING OUT OF BOUNDS

*Christopher Bollas as Thinker and Artist*

One of today's most successful and also most controversial psychoanalytic authors in the English language is Christopher Bollas. Bollas came into contact with psychoanalysis while an undergraduate at the University of California Berkeley when working on his senior thesis as an historian. He studied with Frederick Crews (before the Freud wars) and after his graduation proceeded to work with autistic and schizophrenic children at a day treatment center in Oakland. In the late 1960s, he went to Buffalo to read English literature, where he studied with Norman Holland and Murray M. Schwartz, who are to this day still actively promoting a dynamic psychoanalytic literary criticism in their books, journal, conferences and email group, *Psyart*. However, Bollas's interests always exceeded the field of literature. While preparing his Ph.D on the work of Herman Melville, he worked at the University Health Center (Department of Psychiatry) where he received a training in adult psychotherapy. He founded, along with the Director, Lloyd Clarke MD, a training program in psychoanalytic psychotherapy for graduate students in the humanities.

This double path of literary criticism and theory on the one hand, and therapy and active commitment (Bollas took part in a Labour Party Think Tank in the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century) on the other hand, has remained characteristic of his theoretical work. After graduating, he moved to England where he trained as a psychoanalyst in the British school, with analysts like Paula Heimann, Marion Milner, Masud Kahn and Adam Limentani. Bollas ended up as a practicing analyst of the independent school in London where he lived for 35 years, except for a brief interlude in the United States in the middle 1980s when he was Director of Training at the Austen Riggs Center in Stockbridge and Professor of English at the University of Massachusetts. He currently divides his time between London and North Dakota, where he lives in an isolated environment on the prairie. Bollas nowadays provides psychoanalysis via the phone and continues to write prolifically and to paint. (His paintings can be seen on the cover of his most recent publications).

Although Bollas, on his own account, started writing rather late, his books have been bestsellers ever since his first book, *The Shadow of the Object* (New York, Columbia UP, 1989). In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Bollas even became a kind of prototype for the contemporary analyst, as can be gathered from the acclaimed series *In Treatment*, where Bollas is the only author mentioned. Another prematurely aborted sitcom on contemporary psychoanalysis, *Cracking Up* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), not only borrowed its title from one of his works, but also his name for the protagonist. Recently, a *Christopher Bollas Reader* has come out with Routledge (ed. Arne Jemstedt, 2011). And yet, in spite of his voluminous oeuvre and his great readership, comparatively little has been written on his work, a Wikipedia article on Bollas appeared only in July 2011. This may have to do with an enigmatic quality of Bollas's thinking that aims to inspire and provoke more than to constitute a new school.

The best source of information on Bollas's life and trajectory is the long interview with Anthony Molino in *The Vitality of Objects*.<sup>1</sup> This volume brings together some of the most important essays on Bollas's work in various domains, by reknown authors from various fields, like Adam Phillips, Arne Jemstedt, Anthony Molino, James Grotstein, Malcolm Bowie, Jacqueline Rose, and Michael Szolozy. The collection highlights the multiple facets of Bollas's thinking that is not only of interest to psychoanalysts and literary scholars but also profoundly influences the artistic practice of painters and playwrights, as is detailed by the accounts of Greg Drasler and Kate Browne of the importance of Bollas's work on their practice. The usefulness of Bollas for artists is not surprising, given that creativity and psychic liveliness are of primary importance to Bollas, who apart from writing also paints. His work is informed by an erudition in psychoanalysis and philosophy coupled with a profound sensitivity to the arts, especially music, poetry, and painting.

The thought-provoking and yet mysterious titles of his works, e.g., *The Shadow of the Object: Psychoanalysis of the Unthought Known*, *Being a Character: Psychoanalysis and Self Experience* (London and New York: Routledge, 2003), *Cracking Up: The Work of Unconscious Experience*, or *The Infinite Question* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008) already indicate that Bollas's thinking always exceeds mere words. While trying to achieve maximum clarity and subtlety, he does not stop at creating concepts and fixing them with a definition. Rather, the concepts — the unthought known, unconscious thinking, the evocative object, the transformational object, psychic genera — are objects that come to life and keep on growing with each case study, in each interview. Bollas's writing — although very different from Lacan's — also aims to bring about in the reader the unconscious transformation and creativity that he theorizes. Very deliberately, he employs literary strategies as a means to carefully guide the readerly experience.

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1. Joseph Scalia, ed. *The Vitality of Objects. Exploring the Work of Christopher Bollas* (London and New York: Continuum, 2002) 179-222.

In the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century a marked shift occurred in Bollas's work. In rapid succession, three novels — *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* (London: Free Association, 2004), *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing* (London: Free Association, 2005) and *Mayhem* (London: Free Association, 2006) as well as a volume of plays, *Theraplay & Other Plays* (London: Free Association, 2006), appeared with Free Association Press. The three novels constitute an open-ended trilogy, set in a post-Catastrophic universe that is remarkably similar to Hampstead, Bollas's home in London. In this world, a nameless psychoanalyst goes about his business and his life, encountering different characters and letting his thoughts ruminate. Although the stories do not follow a predictable path of beginning-middle-end, they do cohere around certain questions or themes — depression, loss of the object and the meaning of life, in *Dark at the End of the Tunnel*; terrorism, fascism and depression in politics, the politics of the psychoanalytic institution in *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing*; and finally the role of art as possible transformation and transcendence of personal and communal experiences and trauma in *Mayhem* — that overlap and recur in the different texts. While Bollas's tales are not for the uninitiated, they do stand out as works of fiction, characterized by a number of original features.

The most uncanny aspect of the narratives is the universe in which the actions are set. In a seemingly ordinary, small borough of an unnamed city, characters that have known each other for a long time run into each other from time to time. What sets this world apart from the ordinary and makes it sometimes uncanny, sometimes grotesque, is the omnipresence of psychoanalysis. In every conversation, in action groups against anti-depressants and rival movements like the Funeralists, in the exhibition that preoccupies the city and the nation in *Mayhem*, psychoanalytic questions and ideas are present, affecting the characters in a very real way. Words and ideas create mayhem and temporary upheavals and transformations, to be absorbed again in the flow of ordinary life, like a pond that is seething with movement and life underneath a deceptively still surface. The effect of this omnipresence of psychoanalysis is at once comic and profound. Neither utopian nor dystopian, Bollas seems to constantly ask us to imagine: what if... psychoanalysis really were a part of our daily life? What if the unconscious really were nurtured and allowed to influence and transform our deadened surroundings and numbed thinking? Psychoanalysis cannot provide definite answers to the problems of the subject or those of the world. For that, it is too flawed as a theory and as an institution and these flaws are not hidden in the novellas. It can, however, create a new outlook on our daily existence, making our world, no matter how small and confined, vibrate with unconscious thinking, making us attentive to seeming coincidences and absurdities, endowing us with a great freedom and courage to follow our thoughts wherever they may wander. A rampant unconscious out on the street may lead to mayhem, but also to transformation and certainly to laughter and vitality.

Although Bollas's literary-theoretical background shines through in his sensitivity to the reader and to narrative strategies in all his works, he seems to have opted in his fictional work for a more radical freedom of style and creative thinking.

The sensibility to idiom, style and the ineffable and his sense of comedy and action show that the literary scholar and the playwright in Bollas always remained present, even if his intellectual life was marked by an arsonist who burned all of his possessions including twelve early plays stashed away in a storage room, some forty years before he turned to literary writing again. The following interview was taken within the context of a larger research project on “residual writing”, a term to indicate the expanding body of creative work by established intellectuals — novels, plays, poems, drama, and mixed genres that are sometimes called creative non-fiction — in various realms of theory, psychoanalysis, literary theory, philosophy and ethnography. The residue work is at the heart of the oeuvre, like the residue in a bottle of wine, but at the same time, it is intricately related to the theoretical work and it never becomes fully independent. The interview focuses on the literary work of Christopher Bollas and its eccentric position within his oeuvre and thinking, and offers valuable insight in his writing process.

AM: Could you tell us a little about how and when you started writing again? How did the publisher respond to this new type of work?

CB: Well, actually the first writing that I did was writing plays when I was at the university of California in the 1960s. I wrote twelve plays, two or three were produced as workshop productions by friends. I stored them in a storage garage that was destroyed by an arsonist. So I never wrote another play. I went on to work with autistic and schizophrenic children, studied English literature and did my dissertation on Melville and then went into psychoanalytic training. When I began as an analyst, I never did write much. Many of my friends were writing books on critical theory, on authors, I was considered someone who would not write. And I did not think that I would write, except that I kept notebooks, jotting down observations of my patients or ideas that would come to my mind about the mind or about aspects of human being. So occasionally I did write an essay, for *La Nouvelle revue de psychanalyse*, because Jean-Bertrand Pontalis, the editor, would invite me to write, but only one a year, not more than that throughout the 1970s and 1980s. And then one friend said to me that there were enough essays to make a book and that was *Shadow of the Object*. Then I wrote several books, cultural criticism one might say. I wrote them not for publication in journals, because my writing was being boycotted by the editor of the *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, for political reasons, because I was not an orthodox Kleinian. So I wrote essays over a period of five, six years and they would all be collected as a book. I returned to fiction because of a writing block. I was invited to give a paper in Milano in 2002. I had given a title, “Object or Other,” but I had no idea what to say. My typical way of approaching this is that about a year before the talk, I go through my notebooks, looking at my thoughts on this topic, object or other. Then, six months before the talk, I start to group the ideas and three months before the talk is due, I start writing, so that the paper is ready for translation about a month before the talk. But this was not happening. I was sitting in my office and I invented a psychoanalyst who had to speak about objects and others and I just wrote myself out of this crisis. I like writing fic-

tion, it was wonderfully easy for me. Writing essays had always been quite difficult so the pleasure of it was a surprise. The economy, the way in which you can present many ideas through the structure of dialogue and also through character was very enjoyable. I quite like the brevity of the essay, but fiction is even more suited to the brief presentation of ideas, without pretention. The contradictions in your thinking are also more easily deployed in fiction than in the essay. So I wrote one novel each year for three years. I also wrote plays — the fiction came first but then I went back to the plays — they were an experiment. I think it was almost forty years to the day after the burning of my papers that I actually returned to the plays. Some of them have been produced in workshop production and even in the actual theatre, but I have not really promoted them. I might return to writing plays again. At the moment though I have little time, because I work on the phone — which is unusual for a psychoanalyst — and I work 10 hours a day, 10 people a day, four days a week, sometimes more than that.

AM: Did you contact the publisher yourself or did they know that you were working on fiction? Because your fiction is published by a different, smaller press (Free Association Books) than your other work (Routledge).

CB: Yes, Free Association Books originally started out as a psychoanalytic publisher. Then another editor, Trevor Brown, came in and they started doing different things. I finished *Dark at the End of the Tunnel* and I wrote to Trevor Brown and told him that I'd written a short novel and asked whether he would be interested to see it. He read it and said 'I'll publish it', that's how it all started. Even though Karnac would also publish me in fiction, I decided I'd stay with Trevor Brown, who also published my plays.

AM: In his book on Beckett, Didier Anzieu describes how the text — a creative non-fiction as it would be called nowadays — was explicitly invited by the publisher. I'm very interested in the relationship between the author and his or her publisher. Anzieu, Jean-Bertrand Pontalis's latest work, Tobie Nathan, François Gantheret, Bruce Fink: many psychoanalysts have turned to fiction and to crossover texts or creative nonfiction. Psychoanalytic presses, like the Other Press or Karnac, and many University Presses, e.g. SUNY Press, nowadays have a special literary section in their fund. Is this a coincidence? Is there a kind of critical dialogue between author and publisher in which the oeuvre is given a direction, or is it a kind of friendship relation?

CB: It's neither for me. Usually, I don't let anyone know what I'm doing. With some exceptions, I don't even know what I'm doing or where I'm going. I keep the notebooks, there are now about 30 volumes, which I am typing up. Routledge will publish them, maybe after my death. I've always wanted to be in a place where the act of writing took me by surprise. All I'd know is that it would be on a weekend, usually on a Sunday morning. I write very quickly. I wrote each of the novels within one week, so it was very intense. Then I edit the draft, still the publisher doesn't know about it. The first thing they know is when I send it to them. Pontalis was a very

good friend of mine in the 1970s, until he stopped traveling. When his first novel came out, I was amazed. I thought I'd never be able to do something like that. So when my first novel came out, I was surprised. I'd never ever thought that I would write fiction. Of course I'm very grateful to my publishers for publishing my work. I used to manage a bookstore in San Francisco, so I know what it means to sell books. I feel an obligation to them that these books would be commercially successful, I'm very concerned about that. I'm writing a very strange book on China right now, this one Routledge knows about. I'd written it as a set of lectures to be given in South Korea, it's called *China on the Mind*. When I sent the draft to the Korean organizers, they were horrified. They said, you cannot give this here, it will offend everyone. So here I was, I'd written a small book and I had offended them. So I put it away and about a year later, I sent it to Kate Hawes, my editor at Routledge, whom I like very much. She wrote me back immediately, saying it is a wonderful book, full of strange ideas — yes we will publish it. I was astonished because I'd thought she'd say: thank you very much, but it's not for us, it's not a Routledge book. I immediately became alarmed because I didn't expect her to say yes and began to work on it very hard. I thought it'd be a few months but it's been almost seven versions now, I hope I can send in the final draft in September of 2011. Kate Hawes and I have a very good relation as publisher-writer. We don't meet socially, I've met her only a few times at book fairs, but we communicate and she absolutely believes in my writing, but so does Trevor Brown and Oliver Rathbone. Oliver asked me to write a critique of evidence-based psychoanalytic theories, which I probably won't be able to do for lack of time. To come back to the China book: I agreed to go ahead with it, but because the book probably won't be a big success I reduced my royalty fees from 7 to 5 %, because I don't want to put her at risk.

AM: How was the response to your fiction. Did you get many reviews and direct response from readers? Was it different from your other work?

CB: I did actually. The book was reviewed in some European psychoanalytic reviews, the *San Francisco Chronicle* reviewed *I Have Heard the Mermaids Singing*, which was unusual for an American newspaper reviewing a book published by an English publisher. They've been translated into Italian. Free Association is a very small press, they don't spend any money on publicity, but I gave a few book readings at bookstores, e.g., Black Oak Books in Berkeley, and I get letters from people who liked them, more so than with the other books. So they're actually better received than the non-fiction works.

AM: Why do you think that is?

CB: They're comic and people think they're amusing. Of course they are also critical of psychoanalysis, in some ways I'm a dissident writer. The idiom, the style is familiar to some people. I've been influenced by Dylan Thomas's *Under Milk Wood: a Play for Voices* (New York, New Directions, 1954) where the village is important, the characters are important, the names are important. You will have a character like a Willy Nilly Postman or Polly Garter in *Under Milk Wood*, but they are not developed

as characters. The names are just so vivid, they spring to life in the mind. I thought it was very important for the names of my characters to be vivid for that reason. They're novels, but they're more like a play. I wanted to create this universe and I think that people who read the novels feel that they live in the village too. I've written two chapters of a fourth novel about three years ago, that I plan to go back to. It's the same world, I would like to go back into that world. I like the psychoanalyst — who is not me by the way — I got so tired of speaking with my own narrative voice, that it was a relief to create another voice.

AM: There is a strong sense of rhythm in the texts. In the preface to *Dark at the End of the Tunnel*, you present the work as “essays presented through the conceit of fiction,” but as one reads the trilogy as a whole, it becomes clear that it is a universe that is unfolded according to a rhythm, that is not often found in fictional universes. Can you tell a little more about that?

CB: First of all, if I could go back, I'd take the preface out, because it is really unnecessary. I should have taken it out, or someone should have told me to take it out, but then again, I didn't show it to anyone. Sarah Nettleton is someone who line-copies my work but the work was not really circulated before publication. I think you have to live dangerously and the preface was an unnecessary precaution. Well anyway, that doesn't really answer your question. I write quickly: these books were all written in about one week each and this gives a kind of intensity to them. Everything is moving very quickly. I am in a sort of humor, a state of mind, they're very condensed. I use the choral effect — obviously the villagers are like a Greek chorus — so there is a dramatic dimension. There is a movement of beginning, middle and end, with quiet, more lyrical interludes in between the set of actions. But most importantly, I'm grateful for the style of the books.

AM: One of the things that interest me in the residue oeuvre is how critical concepts are echoed in a creative work. In your theoretical work you create a lot of concepts that are outlined, have multiple dimensions but they are not rigid. They evoke, they transform, they are never really fixed. One of the big advantages but also possible dangers of psychoanalysis at the moment is that it is a kind of freespace. Freud famously saw the creation of psychoanalysis as the creation of a new conceptual apparatus that would one day be able to match that of the natural sciences. At this point in time, however, psychoanalysis is not regarded as a science anymore. It is located in a very specific realm, that is well defined and guarded by psychoanalytic institutions, a canon of texts and protocols, but at the same time there is still this creativity that never really solidifies. So, one could say that a psychoanalytic author has in his work a big amount of freedom. When you turn to fiction, the concepts that you created come with you, there are echoes to the case studies, resonances, but do you feel that they function differently in the fictional work?

CB: Well, the way I looked upon my non-fiction writing is that I was attending to my unconscious perceptions or that my own unconscious thinking was partici-

pating in my writing. So I did not have a particular point to make about a topic. I would have my notebooks, I would review them. And when I felt ready to write I had no real idea of what I was going to say. I think that revealed itself in the idiom of my own writing that people have commented upon. The fact that to read the essays is to have an experience, they're very different one from the other. It may have to do with a certain porosity: my consciousness is porous to the unconscious processes which infiltrate my writing and guide the style of writing. It's even more so with fiction. I love the fact that I have no idea where it's going to go. When it comes to conceptualization, that means that new ideas about things are coming right out of unconscious perceptions, unconscious knowledge. Obviously, I believe in unconscious thinking. If there's one idea that I suppose I could be identified with, it's that of unconscious thinking. I'm bewildered as to why psychoanalysis would put so much emphasis on consciousness and on conscious interpretations and delegate so little attention to the creative thinking of patients. I do think Freud was understanding this with his theory of free association. But he did not take the next step, which was to see that there is unconscious perception, unconscious thinking, creativity and unconscious communication. He alluded to it now and then, but he did not ever formulate it explicitly. I think it's present in *The Interpretation of Dreams*, but after that it disappears from his work. I don't really mind, because if you read him, in my view it's not possible to conclude other than that he did have a theory of unconscious perception — what is the dream? — he did have a theory of the arrival of unconscious meanings in consciousness through association, he just didn't really say so...

AM: It may be true that the notion of the unconscious and of free association have disappeared from psychoanalytic therapy today. Do you feel that psychoanalysis in the 21<sup>st</sup> century should become more like a creative practice, a kind of "Lebenskunst", fostering the work of the unconscious, and position itself less as a therapy? How and where do you see the future of psychoanalysis if it is to survive in the 21<sup>st</sup> century?

CB: I have completed the first draft of a book on the psychoanalysis of psychotic people: schizophrenia in particular. I believe it is "the treatment" of choice for the psychoses, every bit as much as for so called neurotic personality or the character disorders. I reckon that as the psychotropic interventions fail to transform the lives of psychotic people that there will be a return to viewing the therapeutic efficacy of psychoanalysis, which may simply be another way of saying that if you just listen to a schizophrenic and take his or her ideas seriously that over time they do communicate themselves, they feel your listening, they then can begin to make sense of what until then has been a certain type of mental chaos and they emerge from deep isolation. So, I think psychoanalysis has an important future as a therapy so to speak. I also think, or I hope, that it will begin to enter cultural discourse as a continually available critical discourse so that analysts are typically involved in social discourse. Slavoj Žižek is inspiring in part because, like Adam Phillips and Darian Leader, he has broken out of the psychoanalytical ghetto and is read by people

from many professions around the world. Finally, if psychoanalysis as a training can be liberated from the two professions—psychology and psychiatry—that have a stranglehold on it, then it will be available to young people in the humanities and sciences who are still very interested in it and inspired by it. But unfortunately for now it has been appropriated by these disciplines, which ironically enough hate psychoanalysis and always have!, and it is now in most countries a requirement that one can train only if one has a PhD in psychology or an MD. I think we have to look to the Lacanians here, for political leadership, as they are the only ones—to my knowledge—who consistently challenge the institutional incarceration of psychoanalysis.

AM: The notions of character and idiom are very important in your thinking. Is a literary character something else for you? Your own literary characters, except for the psychoanalyst and his wife, are not really characters in the traditional sense.

CB: They're more allegorical presences. In the fourth novel I intend to give them more character. In comedy any character is almost like a stock character. Rarely is a comic figure fully developed. Falstaff is the first comic character who is really given depth and range. My novels are novels of ideas: they're more like existential novels that use people to ask questions. I'm not really interested in developing characters. It would become a hindrance, a burden. Mrs Stottlemeyer, Murk, ...: they're a certain kind of character. I'm relying on the reader's ability to use his or her imagination in order to grasp the vector, the idea of the character, and then see it develop in his own mind. I'm using a reflective unconscious or a reflective literary unconscious. We all have characters in our mind, so when an allusion is made, the reader can fill out the details.

AM: Is the village an emanation of the inner world of the psychoanalyst?

CB: No, it is my village, Hampstead, where I live. All the places in the novel do exist. For instance, the café Hippo's real name is Giraffe, every store has a proper name. Of course it also a dreamscape and I do use it in that way. But I would say that the ordinary rêveries of all of us, as we wander around in our villages, are going to lend that quality to the space. So there's always a meeting between the actual world and the rêverie that subjects and transforms it and then things begin to shift.

AM: One important notion seems specific for the novels and not so explicitly present in your theoretical work and that is the notion of «mayhem», which is also the title of the third book. There is always mayhem created through an event in which psychoanalysis comes up, in a conversation for instance, and then a kind of rowdiness ensues and a mass gathers. Is mayhem typical for the fictional universe and how is it linked to the Catastrophe that determines the universe? Secondly, while the novels are profoundly pessimistic about contemporary society and about the role of psychoanalysis and the state that it's in, there is also this farcical omnipresence and importance of psychoanalysis in the novels, especially in *Mayhem*, where

the exhibition “A Life” dominates social life and the media, which also seem to hold some promise of utopia.

*CB:* I think that the Catastrophe is the loss of meaning, but also the loss of the structure of the search of meaning, from which a sort of chaos, mayhem arises. I probably stopped the writing of the novels — not consciously but unconsciously — because I’m still thinking through where this is going, what is next? The book on China, which is not a novel — but it’s crazy, it’s just nuts — has a kind of fictive feel about it, is about how and in what ways the Chinese — ancient texts, Confucius, Lao Tze — have preconceived mass society. The Chinese have always been thinking in terms of the mass society, for thousands of years. They’re prepared for contemporary society in ways that the Western mind is absolutely not. There is no mayhem in China or in Japan, whereas in the West we are in chaos. It’s a chaotic universe since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, when Nietzsche made the announcement of the death of God. I would say that for me religions are theatres. The churches, temples and mosques are the great theatres of the Middle East and the West. The death of God for me means the ending of the theatre. Now, in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we are looking at the death of language. With the exception of fiction and of poetry, language is almost meaningless. When people are speaking in clinical discourses or in rational discourses, the signifiers are empty. Wittgenstein said that words that are overused have to be taken to the dry cleaners to be cleaned again in order to be fresh again. I think that’s not possible. So we cannot think anymore because all the categories have been overused. This led to genuine mental confusion in the West, like a mental breakdown of sorts, from which mayhem ensues. This will certainly show up in my future novels, but what I will be thinking about it, I can’t really say right now. I tend to stop writing when I’m in a transition. Coming to literary conferences, going back to where I came from is part of that transition. I’m obviously thinking about things, but not knowingly so.

*AM:* So the Catastrophe that you describe in your work is not directly related to 9/11? Is it something that happened before?

*CB:* Yes and no. For me, the last epoch of thought that was saying something about individual life was existential thinking, in the mid-1950s. From that point on, there is a lot of what I would call “ornamental thinking”. I respect Derrida and Badiou, but it strikes me as decorative thought, thinking that is brilliant for its own sake but also without soul, movement, without real, deep conviction. So very few of these writers can I read, because it seems like literary gamesmanship. I think it’s the end of signification. It’s hard to read, not really making sense. This means that the traditional Western mind based on the search for meaning is no longer possible. We live in market economies, it is as if the economic realm has sucked us in. Our brains have become part of market transactions. I don’t know whether we will return to thinking. People seem to be different, my patients, my colleagues, I seem

different. I don't think that there is the same belief that the search for meaning will yield arrivals of thought — it seems that the quest has disappeared.

AM: And yet, you often refer to Derrida and even used a beautiful quote from Badiou as a motto for one of your works.<sup>2</sup> In the interview with Molino you describe yourself as being close to a French sensibility. (*Vitality*, 218) Do you see yourself as a loner in the contemporary intellectual world or do you see kindred spirits? Do you believe that philosophy, psychoanalysis and art can counter or resist the market economical dominance? Take someone like Žižek, who relentlessly uses psychoanalysis and philosophy to analyze contemporary culture? Or should new alliances be fostered, like the Think Tank experiment you took part in, in order to reflect on the state of the world? And how could one regain a larger audience in doing so and really make a difference?

CB: I think we are all alone. I have many friends and consider myself “sociable” but I think being human means living within solitude for the entirety of the life span. My father was French and although French was not for the most part spoken in the home he thought very much like a French person, so the epistemic atmosphere in the home was akin to French sensibility. I have always felt more at home reading their work in translation and talking psychoanalysis with them than with colleagues in the Anglo-American universe. As to the role of psychoanalysis as antidote to the market, yes, I think if “we” can find more robust ways of being included in social discourse then we can become part of the resistance to mindless capitalism. I do not see this as necessarily taking the form of new alliances but of simply being included in the mix. But as I indicated in a previous comment, it is not that we are excluded so much as that psychoanalysis has been hijacked by psychology and psychiatry and there is little interest in these professions in taking part in social discourse.

AM: Do you notice a similar evolution in the work of Bion? Not only your thinking but also your own track invites some comparison with Bion...

CB: Perhaps Bion would say the same thing. I followed a seminar with him, I knew his daughter Parthenope quite well. Bion's pessimism was always there, but it crystallized in Los Angeles, where he was profoundly alienated by the psychoanalytic community that was living there. But I also think that he had exhausted Kleinian thinking. A man, who had been living in a tank for a large part of the First World War and who was decorated for courage, he basically lost his courage when faced with the psychoanalytic orthodoxy. He could only just reinvent himself, without ever repudiating the orthodoxies of psychoanalysis that had driven him to the point he was at. After all, psychoanalysis was meant to be a search for meaning but Kleinian thinking is circular. When all is said and done, all the cases are about the same human being: schizoid position, depressive position... Read enough of the essays and there is no difference between them, the same patient's being written

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2. “The philosophical axiom: Thought must be understandable on the basis of being. The psychoanalytic axiom: There is unconscious thought.” (*The Infinite Question*).

about again and again. It is unfortunate that dogma has replaced thinking. Bion was part of that. He left it by reinventing his style of writing, in this fantastical dialogue, *A Memoir of the Future* (London: Karnac, 1990). For me too, I grew tired of my voice as a writer. I was beginning to repeat myself and was aware that this was a problem.

AM: For you, fictional writing is a way of opening up, refreshing your mind or diverting unconscious flows in a different way, then. Can you — perhaps from your experience as a literary scholar — also say something about its effect on the mind of readers? Do you think that fiction or creative writing can constitute a genuine epistemological experience and achieve transformation in ways that essays cannot? Do you see other writers where this is the case? Going back to the presence and future of psychoanalysis one more time: should psychoanalysis give up the path to scientific recognition and procedures, and instead radically adopt a new, creative, perhaps unclassifiable position of its own, between literature, philosophy, the sciences of man and religion, like a new mythology?

CB: I would not want to write a prescription. I am not opposed to the venture or the writings of those who see psychoanalysis as a science. In the early 1970's linguists were interested in a psycholinguistics and proposed that any session could be subjected to a syntactical deconstruction which I thought was most interesting although the promise was never fulfilled. If someone sees psychoanalysis as a form of musical thought and expression I have no problem with this. I believe we should be free to pursue it and find it anywhere. This does not mean I will always agree, that is for sure, but I cannot think of any school of thought or particular venture that I opposed from the beginning. Imagine what it would have meant to psychoanalysis if Picasso had become an analyst and represented it wherever he wished. Imagine the same with Einstein, Leonard Bernstein, Nureyev, or Camus. We will never know what we have missed, but I do think there is a profound absence at the core of psychoanalysis and it is not nearly as creative a venture as it could have been.