

#llobo : Reflections

A Self Portrait

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Prologue

This is a self-portrait - it is all about me, although I hope you get to learn something of yourself by looking at it. It's a series of reflections based on the people that I have met, stayed with, worked with, played with over the last four months on the road. I left my flat at the end of its lease in June 2011. I then wandered wherever I was needed or wanted, using my online social network to get word out that I was moving on or in need of something else to do. I tried to relinquish as much as possible any control over the choice of where to go, but sometimes you just have to choose.

The process I went through to write this piece was to make a list of all the people and then to reflect on what it was that I saw in them of myself. Then I mixed them all up to avoid people playing the tempting game of trying to identify which reflection belongs to which person. It's sounds like a good game, but would be fruitless even if you could do it. It would be to mistake the reflection for the reality, the map for the terrain, the finger that points to the moon for the moon itself.

If you think you have identified someone from their reflection, have a little think before you start shouting about it. What does this connection you've made say about you?

Why do you want to probe in and analyse and find some hidden truth. There is no hidden truth, it is all here in plain sight. This is not about them. At all. It's all about me.

This particularly applies if you're one of the people that I've spent time with lately. This really isn't about you. It's about me. Please forgive me for bringing it up. Thank you for helping me to see it. I love you.

I can't pretend that it's a comprehensive catalogue of who I am, I have my share of blind-spots. Perhaps there will be another volume. That depends on who else I meet and what I see as a result.

All of them are true. And some contradict others. That's life, I guess. The contradictions may never be fully resolved, but the attempt to do so is delicious.

Reflections

I'm a control freak.

I hate it when people don't behave the way that I want them to, I hate it when people touch my stuff without asking. I can't believe that people behave the way that they do, that they take such liberties, that they do things that I would never dream of doing. I don't understand the world, it doesn't function the way that I think it should, it's like I've got the instruction manual for something and it just doesn't do what it's supposed to. I don't understand.

Sometimes, I have doubts. I think that perhaps it's me, that I'm wrong and the problem. But that doesn't last long because other people are very good at showing that they really are the problem.

I am very good at what I do.

I have perfected my craft over many years although I still have some reservations about my personal abilities, but who doesn't?

I have a deep and abiding faith in the process of Life.

I believe that we are all part of this whole, this Life, Love, the Universe, the thing that some people call God. And so I love everyone and everything around me. I see all of it as an amazingly complex system of stuff that makes up our sense of being.

There are people in my life who are sent to try me, who are really difficult to understand and be with, but through whom, I know I am growing and learning about myself. I don't always understand the bigger picture, but I want to live as well as I can and through daily practice, I believe that I am gradually seeing more and more clearly.

My family life is not perfect.

I do my best, I make sacrifices for them and they for me. I love those closest to me most deeply, perhaps too deeply. Sometimes I can find myself interfering in

their lives in order to help them, but then I realise that I'm not helping.

Each encounter strengthens my faith. I know that religious texts hold a fantastic resource of spiritual wisdom that can help me every day. They speak to me directly. God speaks to me directly through these ancient words, because although we all think we're really modern and different and superior to those that have gone before, there's actually still a great deal that we have in common.

I miss my home.

I see it all around me in even the most unlikely environments. The light, some aspect of architecture, the way that I see people interacting with each other.

Sometimes it's just a word or a glimpse, but it's always there. It isn't the particular town or place that I grew up in that I long for, more the sense of belonging and familiarity.

I see strict organisation as the key to success and happiness. If everyone knows what their role is and what is expected of them, and there are processes in place to make sure that they do the right thing, then it's very difficult to go wrong.

I use this power of organisation to make very ambitious things work well. I'm amazed when I look back at the things that I've done, that I've achieved with others, often starting with nothing at all.

I like to stay in the shadows, in the background.

I like to be quiet in social situations, let others do the talking. I get people to do things that way, subtly - some would say manipulatively, but it's not that, it's that I help people to see what it is that is the next right thing to do and then I give them the space to do it. I like playing games. I really like it. I think everyone should spend more of their time in playfulness.

People misunderstand, they think that it's about avoiding work, but in fact it's some of the most

important work we can do. It's how we learn - I hear it said that children don't distinguish between work, learning and play that their work is to learn through play. I agree, but I also think that we do ourselves a dis-service by thinking that it only applies to children. What if that wasn't something that we had to jettison when we left the nursery?

I'm a wanderer.

I just can't stay put in one place for very long. I love nothing more than being on an open road with a huge sky in front of me and endless possibilities stretching out ahead. I do what I need to do to get by. I have some talents that others find valuable because I can do some things easily that most people find very difficult. I can work very hard when it's required, but I don't look like your regular workaholic. I try not to take anything too seriously.

I know that there are people who love and care for me but I don't feel bound to spend all my time with them, neither do I imagine that we will be part of each other's

lives for ever. We may be, but it doesn't take up much space in my head.

I feel stuck.

I made decisions and bargains a long time ago that I'm having to keep my side of long after I think I should have to because I made those bargains when I was a different person.

I have difficulty enough taking care of myself and making sure that I'm OK let alone anyone else. I'm confused because to everyone else it all seems so straightforward. I'm also frustrated because I try so very hard to do the right thing and in lots of ways my life is a resounding success, but it still feels very hollow.

On the other hand I am amazed that simply being creative is so rewarding to me. How can that be? Should I feel guilty? Is this right? If it is right, why does it feel so wrong? I still have many, many questions.

I can see where I want to be very clearly but I have difficulty moving towards it as quickly as I'd like.

I also find some of the people in my life quite exasperating. I hate hypocrisy and double standards. I want to do the right thing. I'm not what you think. I actually passionately believe in the work that I do, even though I know that most people don't get it. I'm quite convinced of its value, even if I find it difficult to articulate succinctly.

I love to tell stories.

I have no problem telling the same tale over and over again. It's how I learn, it's how I think everyone learns really. I don't understand those people who say they don't want to hear the story, they just want the facts. How can you understand the facts if you don't have the context?

I'm an outsider, a dreamer, I live on the edge.

Right there on the very very very teetering edge of existence. I believe that if I could, I would just find a patch of field and build myself a shelter and live there on my own. I ignore the fact that I really know nothing of building or survival in the wild.

I think the earth should come first. I don't matter. I'm not important in the great scheme of things. So I only heat water when I need it, I turn off lights everywhere. I live on the absolute minimum amount of cash that I can get by on and I rely on the kindness of others and on bartering to get the things that I need. The most important thing to me is the thing that I have lost, the thing that I dare not speak about because it hurts too much. Everything is about making amends for that.

I find it very difficult to say no to anything that anyone asks me to do.

If I've said no to you about something, don't think that it came easy. My needs come way down the pecking

order - one day, I'll manage to get some time to myself and I'll be able to ask other people for help but until then I have to keep soldiering on.

Once I've got all of this done, then I'll be able to relax and take it easy. I need peace and equilibrium, I'm very easily disturbed.

I really don't want to hear anyone's point of view if it's at all different to mine.

I've tried so hard to do the right thing and be the best that I can be. That has sometimes alienated others because they're on the wrong track, they just don't understand. It's really important, for me, for you, for the rest of the world to get things right in this life now, not to wait until something else happens.

This world is going to end soon and it will be painful for us all. I don't know how to balance getting my own needs met and the work of making the world a better place. I also think I deserve something better after all this time and all the good things I've done. Wasn't this

the deal? Be a good boy and help other people and you'll get your reward? I don't see any rewards. People do try hard to do the right thing, but they often fail at the last hurdle, not many people are prepared to go to any lengths.

I'm very at ease with myself.

I strongly believe in personal liberty and freedom, but I find other people's habits and idiosyncracies difficult to integrate into my world. I understand that other people find me difficult, but that really is their problem. I'm still a bit puzzled by life, it wasn't supposed to be like this. I miss the way it used to be, but I realise that I didn't like it much at the time.

I don't like having to clean up, especially after other people, that takes a lot of effort. I can tolerate quite a lot of mess and dirt. I know that others would be horrified by my messiness and ease with sitting in a dirty, untidy space. They seem to think it's hugely important. They don't realise that it's not a question of right or wrong, just of different priorities.

I can spend a lot of time on my own and in my own head. I'm very comfortable there. I am also very comfortable in the company of others. However, I know that I do find the transition between the two quite difficult sometimes.

I'm a wild man.

I belong in the woods and the fields. I love the smell of woodsmoke and can sit for hours of meditation before a few smouldering logs. I feel squashed in the city. I need to see the sky and plenty of it. I need to sing loudly, at the campfire, in my shelter, when I walk across the meadow. I need to see the hills around me to be able to see where the landscape rises and falls. I sleep whenever and wherever I wish and with whomever I wish. Nothing and nobody can tie me down. I will be your friend forever, but don't build your life around needing me to be there when you wake up. I'll tell you a tale or sing you a song whenever you want, all you have to do is ask.

I need variety but I fall easily into routine.

I hate too much variety, too many things going on, a confusing mess of everything, demanding my attention, wanting to be experienced: nothing ever fully realised or completed, everything making way for something else for the sake of variety. I also hate routine, the same time to wake, the same train, the same coffee, the same office, the same work, the same people, the same lunches, the same dinners, the same family, the same TV, the same bed.

Is a variety of routines an answer? Or a routine that includes variety?

I jump from thing to thing in a way that makes perfect sense to me, but which infuriates everyone around me.

Then I try to win them over by making fun of myself. Sometimes I get it wrong and end up making fun of them. That rarely wins them over. I'm confused, I don't know which thing to do next. I know that there's

stuff sitting waiting to be done, but how am I to do it all. I have so many things to choose from and everything's such a mess.

I know that there's one last hurdle to overcome, but I'd rather run around in this field first, pretending it just isn't there, pretending that I'm doing something just as worthwhile, something that is practically equivalent, just easier, softer.

I'm angry much of the time.

I rage against so much. There is so much to rage against. What have you got? I long for the days when I could get away with punching and kicking people. I should launch myself at you with my fists flying, you will feel my fury and you will be sorry.

You will all be sorry for all of the sniggers and sly looks, the muttering, the whispers, the taunting and teasing. I will be avenged.

What?

What's funny about that? I really don't see it. Why do you persist in making fun of me? You've brought me to this state of fury and now you pour more derision and ridicule on me. You really want to die, don't you? You really want to be hurt. You're pathetic. You can't even look after yourself and yet you seem to think that you have something that is of value to me. Get out of my sight. But please, don't ever leave me.

I don't like to go where there are too many people, too many strangers.

There's too much out there, too much that is outside my control. Anything can happen. It's best not to. It's best to stay here, stay warm and safe with familiar things around me. My chair, my desk, my bed, my things, my food, my clothes. I wonder what it's like out there?

I feel let down by those who said they'd help me feel warm and safe wherever I am. It's all their fault.

I listen patiently to other people's stories, but they don't know that I have already done all the things that they talk about.

I know what they mean, they can't teach me anything. I actually know more about this than anyone. They're all just upstarts, trying to impress with their way-out meanderings, but none of it is new - we were all doing this before they were born. I notice things without them seeing. They do not have to say anything, but what they do say can and will be taken down and used as evidence against them.

Look, yes, OK, I'm envious of them. I don't know why they should be able to get away with all of this. I don't understand how I got here, how I got to be the one who stands still while the younger generation moves on. Am I old? What does that mean? How can they not see that we're just the same really?

I've made a huge mistake.

I'm having to deal with the long-term consequences on a daily basis. I don't want any of this either, but I have no choice. I mean I have choices, obviously but, well, you know, some of them are too difficult to actually contemplate taking.

I don't want to admit that I've made another mistake. I thought that I'd learnt all my lessons, that I'd completed the course, that I'd graduated in life. Please don't tell me that there are more mistakes to be made, that I'm still making mistakes today.

I am a man.

That seems to mean playing a particular role in a particular space. Being different, having different needs, thinking differently. Being wrong.

Having to hide it all away: hidden desires. Glimpses through the keyhole or the bathroom window. A bedroom door slams, laughter is hushed. Dirty

knickers in the laundry basket, rumpled sheets on the bed.

It's all such a drama, everything at top volume, everything loud and noisy and chaotic. Is she there? Is she looking? What did that look mean? You should be ashamed of yourself. I am.

I'm just an ordinary guy.

I'm not like you, I had humble beginnings, a simple childhood, nothing special. Course it all comes down to common sense, although that sense doesn't seem very common any more. I couldn't be anywhere else and be comfortable.

I like it here, but I wish it was still how I remember it. There's so much we could do, if only people would help.

Of course what you need to know is that twenty years ago all of this was different. The same, yes, but different too. I could tell you some stories about that.

Up the back of there, round the corner in an alleyway. Oh and the night of my thirtieth birthday.... ha ha ha we knew how to have fun in them days.

I haven't time for this.

I'm thinking. And if I'm not thinking I'm doing something more important. So yeah that has to be last on the list. And every now and then it gets so totally stupidly, disastrously, dangerously imperative that it has to be fixed, but then it's OK and we can leave it for a little bit longer.

I believe in the I Ching or the Tarot just as much as I believe in Newton's Third Law and Special Relativity.

My secret project that I will do one day when I have the time and you are not all making unreasonable demands on me is that I'd really like to take up all the floorboards and clear out all of the junk and guck and fluff and lego and old 5p's that are sitting down there and know that under the floor is all lovely and clean, no

matter what goes on up here above. These are the things that everybody else takes no notice of, but they're really important.

I'm never really sure what you're saying.

I don't know whether I agree or not. I'm looking desperately to other people to let me know what to think.

Someone else can take the risk. I'm fed up with taking risks. I don't want to have to do that again. Not again, not all over again. Haven't I earned the right to rest?

I am scared most of the time.

I'm scared of people. I don't like meeting my neighbours in the communal areas where I live. I fear getting caught and being punished. I think I'm going to be found out because I've done something really bad and although I've managed to get away with it so far, it can't be long before they'll find me and then it will all be over. And not in a good way.

So I'm scared. I'm often too scared to even open my mouth and when I do, I'm not really sure of anything that comes out of it. I'm scared of living in a nice place but I'm scared of people knowing that I live somewhere grotty.

Every now and then I will have a wild moment of daring where I will walk in the sunshine regardless of my fear. I will walk tall and proud and outwardly you would know nothing but of course inside I'm still thinking that pride comes before a fall and that the ground is about to open up and devour me when I least expect it.

Life is much more interesting when you turn everything into a puzzle to be solved.

The corollary of that is that life is much too boring on its own. It needs jazzing up. It needs complicating and what fun it is to make everything into a game. So don't expect me to spoon feed you with instructions for how to do this - it's much better for you to work it out for

yourself. No, I don't care if you're tired and bored and actually really haven't got time to engage with this now.

Sorry. No, I'm genuinely sorry for holding you up when you're in a hurry - of course I can show you a short cut, it's really quite obvious when you see it. I wish you could see what fun it is. Sorry.

Left to my own devices, I do not trust the rest of the world.

And so, yes, that means that I don't automatically trust you, although you're very dear to me. I don't feel safe most of the time. I have a number of ritual places, routines, charms and talismans that help me feel safer. I'm not distraught without these things. I'm learning to be able to function without them. I know that I need to be able to feel safe no matter what, and I have experienced that feeling, but I'm not there all of the time yet.

Life is a big disappointment.

All of those things that I thought would bring me happiness have turned out to be empty and pointless. I keep trying. I really do, and I do get pleasure from many aspects of my life, but still it's not quite what I wanted. But it's hard work and no matter how much I hear you say that I don't have to do it all myself, the fact is that other people let you down. They make so many glittering promises and then fail to live up to them.

I know I should have lower expectations. I know that we're all human. But I also know that we're capable of so much more, there's so much potential. It breaks my heart.

It really is astonishing to me what people don't know.

I mean, what were they all doing in school? I heard it. I sat and listened to what was said and we all read the same books and we watched the same TV programmes

and I have managed to retain this knowledge. So why haven't they?

And why can't they remember something that I said to them only a few hours ago. They seemed to be listening. They seemed to understand the importance of it. And yet here they are again, asking me to repeat myself. It's exhausting.

My controlling nature comes out in different ways.

At times it can be quite well hidden, but deep down it's there. A few people have scratched the surface and seen a little of it, but not many. I really, really, really want you to like me. I'm really, really, really afraid that if I give up that control I will be hurt, used, abandoned, taken advantage of, manipulated in some way that is detrimental to me.

I'm a very poor collaborator.

I don't want to let go of any of my ideas and I want you to fall in with my way of seeing things. I don't really want collaborators, I want slaves and admirers. I want someone to do the bits that I can't do or find boring and tedious. I'm not a good judge of what I can or can't do myself. I'm also not very good at working out whether something that's boring and tedious really should be done by somebody else or whether I need to push through the resistance and just get on with it.

I have great physical stamina and I'm relatively strong.

There are times when I can work methodically through a list of tasks. If I take it slowly and don't get caught up in thinking too much about it, then I can achieve a great deal.

I generally undervalue my achievements.

I don't know anyone who values my achievements lower than I do. If I think of someone who I think might value my achievements lower than me, then I'm probably making it up, projecting my own undervaluing onto someone else.

I find it very difficult to talk about my work. I don't understand it a great deal of the time. I'm a wandering, blundering, naive buffoon who doesn't know what he's doing. I invite ridicule in order to be pleasantly surprised when none comes or to get some form of attention no matter how negative or to manipulate people into actually saying something nice. I yearn to be sophisticated, clever, intricate and yet when I'm at my most naive that's when people notice and praise me most.

At times I listen too much to the two-year-old who lives in my head.

When I do that I get lost. If you literally listened to a two-year-old for directions then you'd probably get lost too. He wouldn't know the way home and even though you have a good sense of where things are and how things work, his simple certainty that he's right can sometimes be overwhelming.

I've always struggled with doing my homework.

It just seemed wrong to have to do the same thing that we'd done in class over and over again. I found this especially galling at one point in my education when the stuff we were doing in class was stuff that I'd done before. So I knew the material, I had to sit through an hour of watching other people get it to varying extents, always knowing the answer, sometimes knowing what the next question was. And then I had to go through the whole thing again in a stilted, abstract set of exercises that robbed me of my precious free time in

which I could have been watching Tomorrow People or something.

Please don't watch me when I'm walking.

The sadistic PE teacher of my middle childhood once wrote on my school report that I lacked confidence and co-ordination. I still don't really know what that means, which is probably the point and shows just how serious the problem is. I can grope my way to understanding what lacking physical confidence means. I think it's probably a consequence of lacking co-ordination. But to me it implies that I walk around like the Elephant Man or something and really should stay indoors.

Being ignored makes me feel sad.

But being noticed makes me feel scared.

Which do I go for? Is it better to sit being sad than to potentially put myself in danger of what ever it is that I'm scared of. Even if what I'm scared of is fantasy, a

cloud, a reflection, a shadow of just something else I don't know what.

The last time I saw Raymond it was at the 100 Club for something or other. He asked me over the din whether I was still singing. I told him "No, I haven't been out for quite a while". He looked me in the eye for a moment.

"What a fucking waste." he said and walked away.

I regularly worry that I'm missing out on the best bits.

I'm on the edge of things. I'm in the most happening place in the world, but somehow I don't get to be part of the most happening bits of the most happening happening. Because I was looking the other way? I didn't know I was supposed to look there, how could I have? I chose to stay at home instead. "Oh you should really have been there, you'd have enjoyed it, you'd have got so much from it"

I have a deep sadness that my life has not turned out in the way that I intended.

It's not supposed to be like this. It should be different. The sun should be shining. But not that brightly. The leaves should be green on the trees, but isn't it lovely when they turn to gold? I should be standing on top of that castle, looking out over the fields and mountains, the wind rushing around me and then come down for a cup of tea from a Thermos.

I want to run and run and shout into the wind. I want to roll down the hills till my head spins. I have important work to do damming a stream, changing the way that the water flows, watching it trickle and gush. This is home. I've run away from it all of my life, but it has repeatedly called to me, gently, patiently. It will always be here, waiting, slightly puzzled that I'm only here for another visit when it's clear that it's here that my bones belong.

Epilogue

Having invited you to stare hard at me for a while, it's difficult to say any more but I'd like to hear what you think. Please do e-mail me

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