

illustrates how it is possible to foreground the flesh in a manner, which does not make it a simple appendage of some theory or other.

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ANTI-SYSTEM, ANTI-TOTALITY

Fragments: conversations with François L'Yvonnet. Jean Baudrillard, 2004. London: Routledge; ISBN 0-4153-0548-9, 119 pp., £13.99.

From the mid-1960s through to the present day, Jean Baudrillard has touched on just about everything to do with contemporary social theory and philosophy. He looks for meaning everywhere, bringing his perverse wit to bear on an array of subjects. Amongst contemporary culture and thought that he has already made his trademark (virtual reality, television, capitalism) he has addressed the more unusual and specific topics such as Holocaust revisionism, children's rights, Aids, geneticism, BSE, the Gulf War and the Rushdie fatwa. His work today cuts across many genres, so that there is something for everyone. However, it is only during the last decade or so that Baudrillard's work has appeared in English translation; the timing could not have been better given the virtual take that now colours our society. *Fragments* is an excellent starting point for anyone who is trying to get to grips with Baudrillard for the first time.

Fragments presents a set of intriguing interviews with Baudrillard, whose work today occupies centre stage in the analysis of consumerism, terrorism, and contemporary culture. In these discussions with François L'Yvonnet, Baudrillard reveals for the first time in detail the thinkers who have been the dominant influences on his work during his career. Instead of examining his work as a project of intellectual accumulation, he challenges all the major interpretations of his work by suggesting he has always adopted an anti-system, anti-totality strategy. Even globalization is accompanied in his view by a Western culture that itself is no longer a well-founded, confident universalism. The system of Western culture is subject to radical uncertainty and chaos. Such fractalization can be opposed, in Baudrillard's view, by letting the thesis and the antithesis live, and by not trying to move to a goal in the synthesis.

In his fractured take on the world, Baudrillard discusses his life's work in relationship to his contemporaries – Bataille, Barthes, Lyotard and Deleuze, to name a few – and explores his position as an outsider in the field of French philosophy. Since the world has

long stood on its philosophic head (Hegel/Marx), we can find comfort in being 'Other'. The presence of an 'other' in autobiographical and biographical texts means that they are always written with at least a double perspective in mind: the author's and the other's. It is within the area of this double perspective where individuals cross social boundaries. Baudrillard has a gift for picking the smallest nuance of reality and exploring it as a means towards whatever is larger, as he tests and defines boundaries through their deconstruction, but he returns again and again to moments of fading and finality. He speaks of the ends of things. And, in true Hegelian fashion, since we are at the end of languages, styles, meanings, subjects and objects, we are at the beginning of them as well. It is in this dialectical balance between the fading and the emerging that the defiant, artistic act of self-creation intervenes, thus creating a 'negative' synthesis or space: 'The fragment is indeed closely related to the fracture. Something happens in the crack of things, in the breach, and hence in their appearance' (p. 34).

In *Fragments*, Baudrillard's use of the textual convention of dialogue does not merely raise technical or methodological issues, because it has also moral consequences – it invites judgement as our sense of the social and moral is underpinned by what we read. Dialogue is used as an oblique, non-committal way of expressing a point of view, whilst at the same time, allowing disassociation from it and, as often as not, subverting it by proceeding to express the opposite point of view. The dialogic nature of *Fragments* enables the writer to 'expose', so that readers can search for meaning themselves. The investigation of truth by discussion, whereby a process of question and answer gradually eliminates error and moves towards truth is reflected in Hegel's pattern of reality, where history is seen as an inevitable dialectic, as Baudrillard acknowledges, but he takes it one step further: 'We're in a culture in which everything is going better and better and. At the same time, from bad to worse – simultaneously in two directions at once, like time's double arrow' (p. 60).

He projects a vision of a world that was created by God 'who perhaps wasn't quite up to the job' (p. 60); a high-tech society where people are caught up in a play of images, aphorisms, adverts, simulacra, where people have less and less of a relationship to an external reality, to such an extent that the very concepts of the social, political, or even reality no longer have any meaning. *Fragments* reads as an attempt to think through the implications of this new situation – this antithesis – and, if possible, find a way out – a synthesis: 'Whatever the dysfunctions, the pollution, the corruption, there's always the

intention to find the ideal, technical version of things, an absolute reparation for this world, which is such a mess' (p. 61).

Of course, Baudrillard does not find a way out. In his postmodern mediascape, Baudrillard collapses the distinctions between reality and the word, images and objects, language and the world, the signifier and the signified, so that the universe is inflected with no stable structures in which to anchor theories or policies: 'They are networked fragments. It's no longer possible today to establish some form of continuity, wholeness or totalization, because it will be immediately obliterated by the system itself. You have to set against it something that apparently plays by the same rules, but stands opposed to it formally' (p. 26).

On this point, this translation of *D'un Fragment l'autre* presupposes that he is right, that we are in something like a postmodern condition, that we have left modernity behind and are in a qualitatively new society where the old categories and old distinctions no longer hold. For a man who says that he has obliterated his own footsteps, *Fragments* holds together very well. It just needs an index.

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LIBERATING ONE'S UNCONSCIOUS PROCESSES

Therapeutic dimensions of autobiography in creative writing. Celia Hunt, 2003. London: Jessica Kingsley; ISBN 1-85302-747-2 (paper) 208 pp., £15.95.

As anyone who has ever kept a journal knows, autobiographical writing can be, and often is, therapeutic. This book explores the therapeutic dimensions of creative autobiographical writing, drawing on the author's own experiences of tutoring a writing course and facilitating writing groups, and on her research into her students' experiences. The book is broadly about borderlands – life and art, psychology and writing, education and therapy. So if, at the end of the day, it is an ambivalent book, perhaps that is not surprising.

It was the author's own experience of fictional autobiography – writing that draws on personal memories and that seeks to convey the essences of the subject's feelings, using the techniques of fiction – that led Celia Hunt serendipitously to appreciate that such writing could be therapeutic. She noticed, for example, and this was subsequently echoed in many of her students' experiences, a beneficial