

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

psychological change – an increased inner freedom, greater psychic flexibility (perhaps the key to creativity and psychological health), a stronger sense of personal identity. This book tells us about the hows and whys of such therapeutic change.

Four case studies form the core of the book. These are constructed by the author from the personal narratives, written and spoken words, of four former students. But the reader is also introduced to some of the creative autobiographical exercises the students themselves would have done – of which, more later. The picture is further filled out with detailed discussions of the theoretical background – most notably the work of psychoanalyst Karen Horney – that the author uses as a tool both for theorizing the therapeutic potential of creative writing, and for analysing her own and her students' narratives.

A crucial issue for aspiring writers is the quest to find their own writing voice – a style of expression that contains the writer's own sense of self, a connection between the inner life and the words she puts on the page. Essentially, finding one's writing voice is about liberating one's unconscious processes. The reader, rather unexpectedly, embarks on a creative journey of her own, pulled into the frame simply by reading about the various exercises that are used to assist in identifying the authorial voice. The temptation to stop reading and start writing is enormous.

Hence, I read the book in fits and starts – my reading punctuated by sojourns into creative autobiography, as I tentatively tried the exercises, anxious to see whether they would have any immediate therapeutic effect. I stopped reading frequently, too, to take off my glasses, and stare into the middle distance, reflecting on the little gems of insights that shine out from these pages. The idea, for example, that it is better, and much more convincing, to *show* rather than to *tell* what a character is feeling. Or the point that you can sit down and write even if you have no idea at all what you are going to write about. You find out what you have to say in the act of writing. That means it is as easy as anything to write through an apparent 'block'. I really liked that one.

Now, I think it is fair to say that this book is not a straightforward read. It is about personal change, and change to old patterns and habits certainly does not come easily. There is, for example, the tricky issue of how we should manage the (possibly difficult) feelings that bubble to the surface as we do the exercises designed to put us better in touch with hitherto concealed parts of our inner selves. Doing this in the privacy of your own home, when you were not expecting it, can be a precarious business. The guidance around, for example, doing

freewriting, or getting in touch with spontaneous images that arise from the unconscious, or exploring fragments of early memory, do not do much to prepare the unsuspecting reader for the personal crisis intervention that they might be called upon to do. So tread carefully through the section on exercises. These are not for the faint hearted, and are probably best done in trusted groups, with a trained facilitator who can contain the anxieties that inevitably emerge.

This book has made me think long and hard about the tensions between writing as art and writing as therapy, and about the further complications that are possible when that tension is played out in an educational setting. As the author makes clear, creating a safe holding environment for teaching is crucial. This book also made me think again about the problems of using psychoanalytic ideas in research settings. These are difficult and complicated issues that need to be openly debated. I must confess to being a little disappointed that they did not feature more prominently in this book.

Perhaps the source of our ambivalence about confronting these conundrums head-on lies in the nature of the task – bringing together pedagogy, creativity, therapy, all of which potentially pull in different directions. The picture is further complicated by the ambiguous status of the research participants – they are both students and research subjects, and we discover at the very end of the book that at least one of them is pretty uncomfortable about the blurring of those boundaries.

This book raises some really crucial questions for anyone involved in writing and researching auto/biography, and I would have liked more detailed discussion of the issues raised by the blurring of boundaries among art/education/therapy/research to have featured more centrally in the text. It is only in her reflections that the author mentions the potential risks associated with making psychoanalytically informed interpretations in the absence of the kinds of safeguards that are routinely built into therapeutic relationships, but she leaves the reader to ponder that crucial question. Questions about the ethics of auto/biography, about where life ends and art begins, about the blurry lines between education and therapy, questions about how we, as writers and researchers, use and abuse the lives and words of others – these are the really fascinating questions that arose out of this research. It is frustrating that the author leaves us scratching our heads in this respect. But maybe, as they say, that is another story. . .

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