

The Baudrillard Dictionary

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Acknowledgements

Introduction

Entries

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Notes on contributors

Passwords

Accursed share

Gift

Symbolic exchange

Value + Structural law of value

COOL MEMORIES

Richard J. Lane

Baudrillard does give his own paradoxical definition of the five texts (*CM*, *CM2*, *CM3*, *CM4*, *CM5*) gathered under the title of *Cool Memories*: 'They are multiple fragments of a nonexistent hypothetical continuity which can only be rediscovered beneath these notes like a watermark, after death' (*CM*, 63). Fragments, notes, journal entries, travel writing, aphorisms, insights, performance pieces, meditative musings, poetic musings – all these, and more, have been used to describe the writings that fill the five volumes. Baudrillard's own definition, paradoxes aside, points to the graphical surface that makes these books so striking: the layout, the blank spaces, the poetic stanzas of gnomic observations, even the traces of some underlying watermark, the systems-thinking that the texts both work with and resist. 'Each thought is the last' writes Baudrillard, 'each note the final touch' (*CM*, 62), but then another thought appears, another 'final' final touch is made, and so they go on, these memories that resist closure.

If the *Cool Memories* are aphorisms, why are they often written with the certainty and force of dicta? As Gary Saul Morson (2003: 416) writes, 'Unlike aphorisms, dicta see no mystery. They precisely resemble the solution to a riddle . . . The dictum announces the discovery and specifies its essential nature. Its sense is: the mystery is over'. Reading *Cool Memories* one is struck by the certainty, the insight, the solutions to the riddles of postmodern society, such as the following: 'Anamnesis, exegesis, diegesis, catachresis – a load of meaningless Greek! The wise man who wishes to know the state of his soul looks at the half-moon of his fingernails' (*CM*, 132). The certainty of the dictum is used here to undermine certainty itself, revealing the paradox that in asserting how the complexities of postmodernity can be analysed and revealed in a schematic form, a mysterious remainder baffles us further. So Baudrillard writes aphorisms with the clarity of dicta, which by their close, have usually imploded. As Morson (2003: 423) writes of the aphorism: 'They are momentary probes, or flashes that die out before we have quite made out

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what they reveal'. In the first volume of *Cool Memories*, Baudrillard does indeed do a lot of patriarchal probing, juxtaposing Nietzschean aphorisms concerning seduction and 'women' with a range of observations concerning postmodern society, place, travel and so on. How far the act of juxtaposing undermines the patriarchal comments is not always clear: does it create an ironic distance? Baudrillard's language even takes on theological overtones here: 'Seduction plunges us into discrimination as it plunges us into predestination' (CM, 62), or, 'Every man has an intense fear that he will no longer be taken in charge by some woman or female image. No one can live without the absolution of a female image' (CM, 44). What does this pseudo-theological discourse signify? Perhaps that the aphorism digs deeper into the mysteriousness of the world: Oedipus proclaims his superior knowledge in that he solved the riddle of the Sphinx only to later discover that this is hubris and that the gods always win. Baudrillard's strategy is to utilise the power of the Symbolic to deconstruct the apparently impervious surface, or continuum, of the code, or the Semiotic. The aphorism appears to assert some truth, only the more we read it, the murkier it gets; the aphorism uses the language of the gods – of mystery, paradox, transcendence and the sacred. The language of rationality, science and technology asserts and explains; the language of *Cool Memories* ultimately resists such apparent clarity: 'Science and technologies could have become extensions of our human faculties, as McLuhan wanted. Instead, they have devoured them' (CM, 110). So Baudrillard resists the production of 'metalanguages' – language that rises above the world and claims the ability to explain the world, what Baudrillard calls 'Hegemony of the commentary, the gloss, the quotation, the reference' (CM, 25). As Lyotard notes in *The Postmodern Condition* (1986), we now regard metalanguages as merely different types of narrative: stories that claim to tell the truth but use rhetorical strategies to do so. Baudrillard regards metalanguages as totalising, hegemonic and anti-democratic. Thus he favours 'the ellipsis, the fragment, the quip, the riddle, the aphorism' (CM2, 25), all examples of 'fragmentary' or 'democratic writing'. Fragmentary writing resists expressing a hierarchy of value, whereby the most banal fragment 'finds its exceptional reader. Each, in its turn, has its hour of glory' (CM3, 8). Every fragment has the potential to be logically developed in a book-length account, but Baudrillard resists this because of his notion that 'the ellipse is superior to the straight line' (CM3, 8).

The *Cool Memories* depict then not so much conventional philosophical ideas as they do situations, thought experiments, 'microscopic ideas' that originate in the intensity of 'cerebral electricity' (CM5, 8); the cool memories are ephemeral traversals of the physiological and perceptual field of consciousness and the unconscious: thus Baudrillard refers to dreams,

fantasies, desires and taboo thoughts. His aphorisms thus have an affinity with Freud's *Interpretation of Dreams*: 'Exactly like the shaft of wit, the character trait or facial features, the fragment is made up of contradictory lineaments of meaning and their happy coincidence' (CM5, 10); resisting both Lacan's mirror stage and notions of perceptual or cognitive reflection, Baudrillard argues that 'The fragment is like a broken mirror – ideas don't have the time to reflect themselves in it' (CM5, 17). And so the *Cool Memories* – affect based, resisting metaphysical and rationalist speculation – are the perfect vehicle for the intense image-based technological society of the hyper-real. Will it be Baudrillard who guides us through this new society, or the 'immortal' Claude Lévi-Strauss: 'From the depths of his academic immortality he is awaiting the return of the societies with no writing. Perhaps he does not have long to wait. For the coming society, computerised and illiterate, will also be a society without writing. It is our future primitive society' (CM4, 65).

Passwords

Anagram

Poetic resolution

Postmodernism/Postmodernity

COPPOLA, FRANCIS FORD (1939–) – see 'film + cinema' and 'image'.

CULTURE

Richard J. Lane

Consumer, postmodern, popular or mass-media culture: all these are synonyms that describe the same phenomenon, one that Baudrillard calls 'cultural consumption' (CS, 99). If culture is thought of simply as 'an inherited legacy of works, thought and tradition' (CS, 101), one which undergoes dynamic and productive self-reflective critique, cultural consumption is something quite different: it is the resurrection through caricature and parody of that which has been lost or destroyed. Culture may be defined in the traditional sense as 'the creation and use of meanings' (Tester, 1994: 128); in comparison, cultural consumption is a 'consummation' of meaning – the completion of meaning and the movement

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