

Book review

The Uncollected Baudrillard

Edited by Gary Genosko. Sage Publications, London, 2001, £19.99 pb, 160 pp. ISBN 0-7619-6531-9.

What is the point of this *Uncollected Baudrillard*, this self-styled '(un)collection'? Not, so the editor tells us, to produce 'a new picture of Baudrillard', not to reassemble, to re-member long forgotten works; rather, the collection is a 'wish list' of mostly early pieces, many of which have been previously unavailable in English. One of the problems with such a wish list of writings is that the desire to see them republished is really all that they have in common. So we have several early (very early, dating from 'before Baudrillard was *Baudrillard*') book reviews, a poem (!), political discussion, aesthetic critique and assorted marginalia. Barely a book, then, more of an archive, a (re)source, and herein lies the problem, as, with one or two exceptions, this collection is likely to appeal only to scholars of Baudrillard in search of that elusive and previously untranslated editorial statement from a 1967 edition of the journal *Utopie*, or a 'preface of sorts' to an obscure edited book from 1963.

But what of the exceptions? Is there anything here to interest the philosophically minded nurse? There are, perhaps, two pieces that might warrant a seeking-out of this text, each to be found in the section entitled 'Critique of Mass-Mediated Life'.

The first, *Technique as social practice*, was originally published in a French language journal in 1969. This paper is almost Foucauldian in its discussion of

the knowledge/power binary and its archaeological exploration of 'technique'. Where it resonates slightly with the world of nursing is in its discussion of 'the tactical doubling of the imaginary', where 'Higher Technique, cut off as it is from daily technical practice and muddled up with Science, can come to serve as the imaginary of the banal technique of consumption . . .'. Thus, the worship of Technique, of Research and Science (all capitalized) is expressed through domestic gadgets, the space rocket (this was written in 1969, remember) is celebrated through the car, the latter serving as 'fixed and idealized avant-garde signs' for the former. And so, perhaps with nursing, where the worship of Science is (arguably) expressed through the fetishization of quantitative research and 'gold standards'. As Baudrillard concludes, 'We need to finally get out from the Technique of the Spectacle of Technique, and the myth that surrounds it . . . if we want to really get rid of all the magic trickery'.

The other, *Mass (Sociology of)*, originally published as an entry in a French encyclopaedia, is concerned mainly with the semiotics of advertising. But, of course, it is concerned with far more: with language, with logic, and with the nature of truth, all in 2000 words. We are introduced here to 'unidirectional signs' that allow for no feedback, to 'operational' languages that aim to redirect the behaviour of the receiver, and ultimately to the transcendence of truth and falsity, to seduction and to the self-fulfilling prophesy. The language of advertising is a neo-language, a language that flaunts all the rules of traditional Aristotelian logic in a way that is at once

recognized and yet accepted by the receiver: 'Advertisers are thus mythic operators, but not liars . . . all their art consists in the invention of persuasive displays that are neither true nor false'.

There are pre-echoes in this piece of Baudrillard's later work, particularly his *Simulacra and Simulation* of 6 years later and his notorious *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* of 1995. This latter piece has perhaps taken on a new significance since the destruction of the World Trade Centre, although there is much in *Mass (Sociology of)* that throws an interesting light on events since September 11. Indeed, the very phrase 'war against terror' echoes Baudrillard's examples here of 'clean bomb' and 'harmless fallout'. Quoting Freud, he describes how 'Thoughts which are mutually contradictory make no attempt to do away with each other, but persist side by side. They often combine to form condensations, just as though there were no contradiction between them, or arrive at compromises such as our conscious thoughts would never tolerate but as such are often admitted in our actions'. For Baudrillard, then, the contradictions inherent in such 'jingles' as 'war against terror' are at once

recognized and accepted as part of a language that 'effaces, or radically displaces, the very conditions of truth or falsehood'. We could perhaps say the same of a collection of Baudrillard's work entitled *The Uncollected Baudrillard*.

And nursing? Well, you might wish to seek out your own examples of contradictory pronouncements that are at once recognized as such but still accepted. My own favourite is the paper by David Sackett *et al.* that urged the reader to practice evidence-based medicine but freely admitted that there was no evidence to support such practice. Still, no one seemed to mind . . .

So what of this book? If you are looking for a basic introduction to Baudrillard, then this is not it, as much of the content is covered with far more style and aplomb in *Simulacra and Simulation*. As it says on the back cover, this book is strictly for serious scholars of Baudrillard, and even they might prefer to borrow it from the library.

Gary Rolfe
University of Portsmouth