

Griffith University

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Andy Warhol Ate My Baby

Recently, on the day of the Jim Rose Circus, I attended a christening and a mass. A tortured Christ crucified above the altar dominated the church. His pose was painful, pride-less, messages from the Scripture dancing on a waxy banner beneath his nailed feet. I couldn't understand the characters.

Once I dreamed I was a tattooed lady. Earlier that evening I'd watched a program on SBS where the skins of Samurai were stripped of sinew and pinned to museum walls like faded parchment dragons. In the dream every tattoo writhed and refused to lie still.

I observe the world in a fragmented way, collating a larger picture into which experiences can be inserted and thus rendered meaningful. But what if, as Baudrillard suggests in his essay 'After the Orgy', we have passed the point of picture puzzle unity, bypassed utopias and entered into an existence that is fractal rather than fractured? What implications might a self-simulating world have for notions of identity and the expression of such in writing?

As a way to explore identity construction I first enlisted the use of postcards as a shortcut into notions of textuality, fragmentation, relation (or communication) and concealment. In its simplest terms I find the fragment (alongside the postcard) as self-contained while simultaneously incomplete. It is complex but not comprehensive: it is coded. The postcard takes the aspect of an icon or idol used to frame meanings on the wall. A unified acceptance of what these fragments represent suggests singularity while constantly denying it:

- double sided nature;
- existing as part of a larger system (the postal network, the tourism industry);
- private communication in a public space.

The written text on a postcard is fragmentary primarily because of its length. There is simply not space to go into great detail so shorthand must suffice. Other conditions imposed by this particular mode of writing also contribute to its fragmentation: unlike the letter, the postcard is privy to the eyes of a thousand strangers and is worded so that certain information makes sense only to the intended recipient. This kind of coding often plays a part in the choice of image also - and the images in turn are incomplete in so far as they are framed representations of reality: landscape slides sliced from their surrounds, paintings without texture.

The postage stamps found on postcards are not produced in isolation, but in sheets, or rolls. Thus any stamp, while self-contained, has been fragmented from the 'whole' of which it was once a part. Postmarks are generally incomplete through sheer illegibility, however they are also fragments in the sense that (alongside stamps) they refer to an economic system that is not part of the communication itself. The postmark becomes more important when we realise it is an imposition on the card that fixes it neither at the point of inception nor reception, but rather at the point of transit.

Lined up alongside, the address might be anonymous also, alluding to the intended without encompassing them. The form is repetitive, a combination of numbers and names. (At this point I would like to hypothesise that such haphazard repetition is a common feature of fragmentation). Fractals on the other hand feature not repetition but replication: the element of division is missing. Folds and flow take the place of fragmentation's inherent dichotomies. To make the postcard fractal it is necessary to disrupt the system within which it exists without actually shattering it; for example, sending endless variants of the same design (as Derrida demonstrates in *The Post Card*).

Posted while on holiday or (more broadly) when time and space are condensed, postcards - like writers and travellers - are very voyeuristic. They offer sealed windows that form both bridge and barrier to other places, mapping schizophrenic moments of nostalgia that have been displaced from time and space. Baudrillard, in an interview with John Johnston, has described the written fragment as "disruptive, indifferent to its beginning and its end... it allows an instantaneous conversion of points of view, of humours and passions". Like sands through the hourglass, so too are the fragments of our words. I throw the hourglass at the wall and it shatters, but time still passes. It makes no difference to time if I measure it - just as it's not unknown for people to arrive home before their postcards do.

Setting aside fractals for the time as a place that I cannot avoid returning to, I propose a brief relocation to the beginning of this century in order to continue a little longer with fragmentation. Perhaps the most far-reaching case of fragmentation taking place at this time was Freud's splitting of the psyche. The paradox of being conscious of the

unconscious appealed to, and impacted on, the arts, most famously in the form of Surrealism and its political counterpart Dada. Both of these movements produced fragmented work: surrealist montage postcards and Tristan Tzara's Dada poems, for example. Fractalisation was present also, and can be found within the fragments of Antonin Artaud's lunatic writing:

I do not worship my ego but the flesh, the word flesh in its sensed meaning. Things concern me only in so far as they affect my flesh and coincide with it at the very point they arouse it, but not beyond it. (Artaud 83)

Fragmentary practice was not restricted to Dada and Surrealism. Modernist Walter Benjamin used fragments in his writing; as did Bohemian Anais Nin who took the whole thing a bit too seriously, became a psychoanalyst (briefly), had affairs with her analyst, her father, drunken writers and revolutionaries, then fused and fractured it all as grist for novels and safe-bound journals. But hey, no problem, she was a flirt, an inventor, a subject in her own fictions. And subjectivity always flirts with identity. It's no surprise that people send postcards to posit an image of themselves whilst they are on holiday, a transitory time when the last thing a person is expected to be is their usual self. Instead there is a piecemeal presentation of personality, tailored for a mass audience. To the locals a tourist, a stranger: to the self an agent, an adventurer: ultimately a character in an unwritten play (or postcard).

Postcards transpose scenery and character from one place to another, holding an element of direct dislocation (enhanced by visual qualities) that is not to be found in the letter. Whereas a letter seeks to reinforce the persona of the sender, a postcard might be intriguingly out of character. A letter puts the writer in the room; a postcard reminds you how far away they are. Do fragments actually amplify the divide between writer and receiver? Certainly the postcard is less concerned than the letter with implicit meaning. The fragment is deliberately ambiguous, even ambivalent. (Wish you were here?) But the element of code cannot be dismissed, and it is code that serves here as bond between writer and reader: decipher it and there is unification in understanding if not in meaning. Fragmentation is both alienating and embracing. When something cracks, when the code is resolved so that nonsense makes sense, the mystery is over.

I have mentioned cases of fragmentation in literature that coincided with the first wave of psychoanalysis; one that coincided with the second, Lacan's, is J.G. Ballard's novel *The Atrocity Exhibition*, which continually rewrites the repetitive psychosis of its central character, Traven. Bodies become landscape, landscape becomes embodied, and slowly the concepts of time, space and truth are rendered meaningless. Solid identity is similarly redundant, with Traven's name shape-shifting as easily as his mental projections.

In the annotated version of *The Atrocity Exhibition* Ballard explains that free association played a large part in the writing of the text. This merging of personal unconscious with fictional psychosis results in a bewildering (and seemingly endless) series of disturbingly accurate postcards from a place where reason can no longer be named the supreme god, a world where everything is "as unreal as the war the film companies had restarted in Vietnam." (Ballard 3) This particular quote presages Baudrillard's theory that the 1992 Gulf War never really happened, where simulation is seen to have overtaken any object or end and become a rule in itself. Everything is staged. No longer is one event inherently more real than another: the real (and the perfect) has been bypassed by perfect imitation. Or as Dr Nathan, *The Atrocity Exhibition's* ultimately ineffectual voice of reason, puts it: "In the post-Warhol era a single gesture such as uncrossing one's legs will have more significance than all the pages in *War and Peace*." (Ballard 25)

Chris Hall notes in his Internet document *Extreme Metaphor* that

The key to understanding Ballard's work is in the fusion or overlapping of internal and external worlds." In an interview with Lukas Barr, Ballard expands on this statement: "The thing is, we take external reality, our everyday external reality very much for granted: the room that we sit in, the streets around us, the virtual space of billboards, and movies and TV, all the rest of it, highway networks-we take all this for granted. But in fact it is, literally speaking, an illusion generated by our central nervous system. It's as much a virtual reality as the one the cyber people are working on. I've tried to decode this everyday space. What happens in our minds when we look at a billboard advertising a movie starring Marilyn Monroe, or Demi Moore? What happens when we see presidents or prime ministers Ronald Reagan or Margaret Thatcher or whoever on television? Within our minds all these different planes of spatial reality are intersecting.

If Ballard is attempting to decode rather than code his writing it no longer fits my definition of the fragment. So perhaps it is something else. Which leads me (again or at last) to the fractal. After all, *The Atrocity Exhibition* is intimately tied to Baudrillard's hyper real, is more real than real, and its multiple segments are more closely aligned to mathematical equations with constants and variables than to jigsaw puzzles with interlocking pieces. Order is arbitrary, and not only does the text dismiss the concepts of beginning, middle and end (which is nothing new), but it also disregards bedrock literary notions such as climax and tension. Yes, the book is frustrating - but also it is fascinating. Yes, the book is boring - but also it is hypnotic. Fractal fiction is formulaic, but only in relation to itself.

You can now buy computer programs that will reformat a script into various Hollywood styles, adjusting locations, scene length and number of characters according to the preference of studios. These are not fractal; they are farmed. And I mean that in the present day sense, where tomatoes are engineered with fish genes. Sure it won't be quite the story you intended, but it stands a better chance of being read.

So there's all these free range authors roaming out the back of my auntie's place, cheeky buggers, started coming up onto the veranda: they all look pretty much the same so she thought at first there was just one, but turns out there's a whole bloody paddock full. Broody little bastards, but kind of beautiful. Going round and round in contingent circles, kicking through the dirt and dropping delicate bundles in the most difficult of places. Always after a free lunch. I've said a million times she should put a bulldozer through, lay some concrete slabs and be rid of the bother once and for all. She says what about my fluffy omelettes on a Saturday morning?

Baudrillard writes in 'After the Orgy':

Nothing (not even God) now disappears by coming to an end, by dying. Instead things disappear through proliferation or contamination, by becoming saturated or transparent...
(Baudrillard 4)

The reference to religion points us toward the idea that Baudrillard is speaking here not only of objects - or even subjects - but also of identity itself. The writer can no longer hide their presence behind traditional narrative (too easy to deconstruct) or the code of fragmentation (too easy to decipher). We have seen the death of the author then witnessed a resurrection; and the avenue this opens up is fractal, sparking like a catherine wheel between faith and control.

Fractalisation is one method in a myriad of experiencing text: it lays claim not to 'truth' but simply to the fact of its own existence. The conflation of surface and depth, the arbitrary (dis)location of origin and destination, and a continual state of emergence or becoming characterise the fractalisation of identity within writing, as well as writing which itself is fractal in composition. Text, like identity, can be set in motion by craft but must be shaped by coincidence. Fragmentation has already placed pressure on literature to move away from the imaginary confines of time and space, fractalisation and hypertext offer the opportunity to further restructure the limits of storytelling.

Whispers. Mata Hari,
JFK,
Jesus Christ,
Van Gogh.
JFK: tongue in her ear; hear here; he stares at Christ:
LOVE.
Secrets. JFK's secrets.
Mata Hari's lies.
Vincent's piercing Christ with paint tubes
and you
gotta LOVE the gunshot that she's hearing,
gotta LOVE the lines of his face,
gotta LOVE the whispers:
EAT ME.

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