

Theorizing Fatal Strategies: A New Leftist Vocabulary of Jean Baudrillard

Shanyi Yang *

The University of Hong Kong, Pokfulam, Hong Kong SAR, China

* Corresponding Author Email: u3597402@connect.hku.hk

Abstract. This essay explores Jean Baudrillard's "fatal strategies" outlined in his seminal work, *Fatal Strategies*. It also explores their relevance to contemporary postmodern capitalist culture. Baudrillard's writing style mirrors the ecstatic nature of the society he critiques, employing symbolic exchange to intensify its logic to the point of collapse. The essay further examines Baudrillard's possible leftist vocabulary rooted in critical theory, poststructuralism, and anti-capitalist critique. Baudrillard's leftist gesture rejects Enlightenment humanist presumptions, particularly the notion of "the social." He argues that modern technology exposes humans' predictability and heteronomy, rendering the Enlightenment ideals obsolete yet still haunting the postmodern "desert of the real." Baudrillard's work becomes an exorcism, banishing these specters by asserting that responsible collective subjects and genuine social projects never truly existed. Instead, he highlights "figures of the transpolitical," such as the obese, hostages, and the obscene, as more indicative of contemporary reality. Moreover, Baudrillard challenges the historical privilege of the subject over the object, exploring the "fatal strategy" of the object "taking revenge" on the subject. His intellectual work, though unsystematic, consistently concerns the system of signs of ideology and the role of media and technology in shaping leftist identities. This essay thus sheds light on Baudrillard's distinct perspective within the leftist cultural critique, providing insights into the postmodern condition and methodological prospects.

Keywords: Fatal Strategies; ironic strategies; figures of the transpolitical; postmodernism; post-Marxism.

1. Introduction

This essay will focus on the "fatal strategies" outlined in Jean Baudrillard's seminal work *Fatal Strategies*, showcase their relevancy in contemporary culture, and, à la early Baudrillard, provide a philosophical update of a "leftist" vocabulary.

Fatal Strategies, first published in French in 1983, was a turning point of Baudrillard's intellectual career. Following his 1976 work *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, which was still responding to Georges Bataille's notion of a "general economy," *Fatal Strategies* gallantly takes a "pataphysical" turn. (Pataphysics: the "science of imaginary solutions [1]", as opposed to metaphysics, the science of actual causes.) His writing style and proposed methodology, like the society he was describing—postmodern capitalism in the 80s, can be only described as "ecstatic," conforming to pure symbolic exchange to the point of a "revolutionary" (or, in his word, "devolutionary") collapse or revert. Following *Fatal Strategies* was *The Ecstasy of Communication*, a development of the motifs established in *Fatal Strategies* (ecstasy, inertia, symbolic exchange, the order of objects, a form of semiological idealism and determinism, etc.). This, then, set the ground of Baudrillard's turning away from theory and instead embracing a "pataphysical journalism," with his 1991 book *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*.

Baudrillard's "theory" in *Fatal Strategies* (or, as he called it, "pataphysics") is arguably one of leftism. It falls within the "postmodern" tradition of critical theory: poststructuralism and deconstruction [2], subversion of modernist thought, and critique of capitalism [3]. Here, leftism is defined (ironically) from the Marxist point of view: the critique of cultural hegemony. As a consequence, Baudrillardian vocabulary is an asset for leftist cultural critique as it contextualizes postmodern conditions consistently and extrapolatably.

A major leftist gesture in Baudrillard would be a rejection of a constellation of the Enlightenment humanist presumptions, one example of which is “the social.” The logic of “the social” follows its origin in Thomas Hobbes’ social contract theory—a contractual, “responsible” relationship between the state apparatus (to borrow the terms of Louis Althusser [4]) and the people. Marxism is another contractual relationship between the bourgeoisie and the proletariat that develops from this theory of the social. Popular liberalism is a contemporary mainstream counterpart, a society of free-choice subjects making informed decisions socially and politically in the best interest of each individual or group. It is based on the idea that the social is self-sustaining, that there is a natural balance between the individual and the system, and that ideal individual agency and subjectivity are inherent. The social is humanist in nature.

These figures which typified the Enlightenment thought would theoretically be exposed as false by the all-revealing modern technology through which humans’ predictability and heteronomy are plainly observed. However, as specters, these outdated ontologies of society “haunt” (in the sense of hauntology [5]) the postmodern “desert of the real.” Baudrillard’s work is therefore one of exorcism, the banishment of these specters. For this purpose, Baudrillard claimed that “there has never been [...] a responsible collective subject,” and no social project [...] has ever really existed.” Instead, the “figures of the transpolitical” are more indicative of reality. These figures are: 1) the obese, an informational overflow that perpetuates its own logic; 2) the hostage, whose fate is aleatorily decided beyond their control; 3) the obscene, by whom every “secret” is exposed to be nonexistent. Though these figures are distinctly substantiated in *Fatal Strategies*, their corresponding ideologies and methodologies (which could be used for both left-wing and right-wing causes) are lacking. Another Enlightenment ideal Baudrillard opposed was the historical privilege of the subject over the object. An object’s “fatal strategy” of “taking revenge” on the subject is worthy of another ideology.

Leftist identities are today conditioned by the media and the larger system of objects, predetermined and lacking in objectivity as Baudrillard would propose. This critique of leftism and ideology at large is far from disparaging. Nevertheless, those attracted to Baudrillard’s work by a leftist identity will likely be put off by Baudrillard’s lack of a systematic approach. With awareness of the irony inherent in this approach, *Fatal Strategies*’ concepts, subsequent methodology, and general “life attitude” will be verbalized as signifiers of ideology.

2. Addressing Irony

A problem arises with respect to theorization and subsequent methodology, as Baudrillard, a self-proclaimed “nihilist [6],” shies away from both lucidly. According to Baudrillard, the system of symbolic exchange is too hegemonic and malleable that any opposition would be incorporated into it. In other words, by theorization, one merely contributes to the system of signs, not making a difference to its workings. In fact, a fatal strategy is “not really strategy [1].” Calling it so was only Baudrillard’s “play on words to dramatize the total passage from the subject to the object.” One would understandably frown upon any attempt to systematize or theorize the works of Baudrillard, as any attempt would betray Baudrillard’s disillusionment of theories.

However, one shall caution against dismissing Baudrillard as a nihilist, as nihilism is ambiguous. While Friedrich Nietzsche prided himself as “the first nihilist in Europe,” his ideas of “transvaluation of values,” the “Übermensch,” “master morality,” etc., is hopeful insofar a new canvas of meaning can be built upon his existential nihilism. Following the lineage of Nietzsche, Baudrillard’s writings reveals an extension of such hope: it is liberating to accept the real—that society is neither comprised of freely choosing agents or one collective consciousness but “the debauchery of signs [1]” and the ecstasy of communication. Moreover, it is liberating to explore the “revolutionary” methods more realistic than that of previous social projects (Marxism, anarchism, etc.), with a lucid understanding of the nonexistence of the social. His very act of writing sets himself apart from the “ideal” nihilist, who perhaps would not bother to write at all.

Furthermore, *Fatal Strategies* provides “theory” a new meaning, a “fatal” one. A “theorization” of Baudrillard thus ought to be ironic, setting the “theorist” apart from subjectivity and the error of “banal theory.” Instead, a fatal strategy is instead promoted.

Thus, a Baudrillardian leftism would be one not based on the “illusion” of the social but reversibility, revenge, exorcism, and challenge. There is hope, even in Baudrillard’s own terms, for a “reversal” of the semiolinguistic hegemony of capitalism, indicated by, for example, his advocacy for “seduction.”

3. The pitfalls of leftism

There could not be a more apt example of the banal strategy than the Marxist tradition of theory. This tradition seeks to explain, in a humanist manner, the needs and desires of the masses. It assumes, theoretically, the alienation of the masses from themselves, their labor, etc. This has demonstrably created a schism between the theorist and the masses, culminating in dictatorships such as Stalinism and Maoism. Both regimes leveraged heavily on the “fascinating” effect of the image—propaganda—to initiate and sustain itself. Baudrillard says, Revolution “has to seduce us [1].”

In continuation of the complications of the Marxist tradition, the failure of May 68, which Baudrillard responded to [1], is another example of the triumph of the image and the disappearance of the social. The Communists opted for lawful elections instead of a revolution to seize power. With 800,000 marching nationalist supporters, the Gaullists emerged triumphant even after the president’s shameful escape. Baudrillard believed that these failures of grand social projects were an indication that the object had triumphed, an aftermath worthy of celebration for its disillusioning effects, even though they were a shame to Neomarxist situationists.

The contemporary leftist discourse is far from innocent of such humanist bias. The Baudrillardian system of sign exchange governs the digital sphere. This can be seen in the leftist discourse in popular culture, as demonstrated by “leftist YouTube.” It is no secret that YouTube influences the ideological ideation of a substantial portion of its viewers [7]. YouTube has been accused of being a breeding ground for alt-right extremist content and “radicalization” [8-10], with right-wing ideologues like Jordan Peterson, Ben Shapiro, and the hydraulic fracturing-funded channel PragerU [9]. In response, left-wing video essayists and personalities on YouTube opted for the strategy of “reaction,” one that specializes in providing counterarguments to the right-wing counterparts of ideologues and personalities. This phenomenon of “debunking” has played a central role in online left-wing discourse in terms of popularity. The following describes some of the most popular video essayists on YouTube (table 1).

Table 1. The “Debunking” Tradition of Notable Leftist YouTube Channels.

Channel Name	Content Description (items not exclusive to each other)	Approximate Subscriber Count (as of July 2023)	Relevant Most Viewed Left-Leaning Video Essay(s) (separated by semicolon)	Ranking by Views in Respective Channel
Philosophy Tube	A wide range of topics including but not limited to philosophy, gender, transgenderism, identity politics, feminism, and ethics	1420,000	Jordan Peterson’s Ideology Philosophy Tube	1st
ContraPoints	A wide range of topics including but not limited to social justice, gender, transgenderism ethics, identity politics, race, feminism, and philosophy	1710,000	J.K. Rowling ContraPoints	1st
hbomburguy	Film, television, video games, general leftism, and debunking conspiracy theories and responding to right-wing and antifeminist arguments [9]	1250,000	Vaccines and Autism: A Measured Response	7th
Shaun	Social justice, critique against neoliberalism, anti-feminism, and the alt-right [11]	646,000	How PragerU Lies to You; Sargon of Akkad Can’t Read	3rd, 6th
Big Joel	Social justice, critique against anti-abortion content, Christian films, and the YouTube channel PragerU [12]	638,000	The Nonsense Politics of PragerU Big Joel	1st
Hakim	Marxist-Leninism, anti-capitalism, anti-imperialism	228,000	Jordan Peterson Is Not Profound, and Here’s Why	2nd

These left-wing contents are “effective” insofar as they “fascinate” [1]—they provide the viewer with a sense of intellectual superiority and complacency; they invite the viewer to sacrifice their subjectivity by responding as expected by the algorithm and reducing the self to a simulacrum of political ideology defined by its opposition; they are seductive as objects. However, they are far from effective in the sense that they are more “factual,” “reasonable,” or “correct”—more humanist biases inherited from Enlightenment thoughts.

For example, Abigail Thorn, British actress and host of Philosophy Tube, publishes content in accordance with the postmodern logic of symbolic exchange. Since Thorn’s first upload ten years ago, her channel had centered around rudimentary philosophical concepts, yet failed to provide a professional, educational understanding (for example, in her video titled “Beginner’s Guide to Kant’s Metaphysics & Epistemology | Philosophy Tube,” she used the words “transcendental” and “transcendent” interchangeably, used the phrase “synthetic a priori concepts” while it should have been “synthetic a priori judgments,” and so on [13]. These are decidedly beginner’s mistakes with respect to Kantian philosophy). Since four years ago, Thorn has been incorporating props, costumes, detailed set designs, and other theatrical elements into his video essays. This theatric production culminated in her transgender coming-out video, where she ironically proclaimed to “drop the act” as she presented herself as a transgender woman, props and costumes in place. Admittedly, any YouTube content is an objectified sign of personalities to be witnessed and circulated, but Thorn stands out for her salient irony. Her channel is not, judging by the intellectual quality of her content, meant for education but for profile curation.

Leftist YouTube content like that of Thorn’s creators lack “self-awareness” insofar as, knowingly or unknowingly, their content is inextricably complicit in the logic of late capitalism: interpellation (a la Althusser [4]), or, the explicit objectification, or “symbolic murder” of the self, the profile curation in conformity with the morals of her audience (which is ironically the passé notion of authenticity, explained by Marshall McLuhan’s rear-view mirror [14]). The logic of responding and antagonizing her ideological opposition by which the self is defined can similarly be explained by a poststructuralist cultural critique (which will be further explained later).

Although Baudrillard advocated for the perpetuation and acceleration of the symbolic exchange system’s logic (or standing idly by, if taken literally: “any strategy will be a good one [1]”), his very ironic act of authorship means a lack of self-awareness is not favorable even on Baudrillard’s terms—an aversion to the illusions that haunt the masses. For example, should Thorn acknowledge the logic she has been perpetuating and educate her audience of that, the logic itself would, by dint of her identity, attain a fascinating tinge, leading a discussion of the obscene, the bare reality. It is of the author’s opinion that this strategy is more desirable if by no other reason than more excitingly subversive. To conclude, a leftist understanding of the self-irony is beneficial.

4. Neologisms

It is of the perfect irony to coin more words to feed into the “monstrous [1],” “ecstatic [1]” system of sign exchange. In truth, the act of writing itself in postmodernity is ironic [1] insofar as language itself is the “antisocial [1]” medium on which the hegemony is built. Operating within the system never abolishes it. To quote Nietzsche, “I fear we shall never be rid of God, so long as we still believe in grammar [15].” However, the irony here is not to be avoided but celebrated. The aim is to accelerate the disappearance of things, to reveal the secret that there is no secret, to destroy the self-serious, authoritative narrative. For this purpose, it is hopefully of future commentators and influencers’ liberty to promote the thoughts of Baudrillard, which would necessitate a catchy, witty, and eye-catching neological language.

Nevertheless, a descriptivist view of language is not guaranteed. This essay will not provide “clear” definition (which, ironically, is itself a metaphor, therefore “unclear”) or any one of the analytic tradition (a necessary-sufficient definition, for example), acknowledging the developments of philosophy of language in the early 20th century. Instead, definitions will be intentionally vague and

“poetic” (as is also proposed by Baudrillard [16]), with examples of “Chan culture” to illustrate relevancy.

4.1. Figures of the Transpolitical

The figures of the transpolitical are evidently neutral when presented through Baudrillard’s antimetaphoric methods, rather than strictly “left-wing” or “right-wing.” Furthermore, these figures arguably disavow any distinction between bipartisan politics, as both sides retain a humanist belief in human will and agency. Instead, these figures belong to the “transpolitical”—the transparency and obscenity of the deconstructed political [1]. Nonetheless, these figures are essential to an understanding of postmodern sociopolitical conditions.

4.1.1. Obesism: the Principle of Taking Up Space

It is important to note that “the obese” in *Fatal Strategies* is more a neology than a metaphor, a semantic extension of “obese.” Baudrillard draws a parallel between media consumption and overeating, but this does not make the term pejorative. “The obese” are not only positive attributes of the postmodern culture as a whole or of individuals immersed in it, but also sometimes desirable objectives, as they reveal the bare truth (the obscene) and hasten the collapse of the system. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize the stereotype that is often associated with medical obesity in culture and avoid using the term when necessary.

“Obesism,” the principle of the obese, is here defined as “taking up space.” Referencing psychoanalysis, the obese must presuppose the disappearance of the ego ideal [17]. In Lacanian psychoanalysis, for example, the ego ideal is the subject obeying the authority of the other, while “displeasing” itself for this obedience [17]. As a result of this displeasure, the subject becomes “neurotic,” resulting in the formation of a narcissistic self-image associated with the mirror stage—the ideal “I.” The mirror stage is when the subject, “caught up in the lure of spatial identification,” realizes themselves as “a form of its totality,” separate from the other, i.e., the “outside world” [18]. The obese, however, distinguish themselves from the neurotic: they no longer possess a special identification, separateness from the world, or a sense of totality; they simply occupy space incessantly since that is the only alternative to activity. In other words, the obese are free of subjectivity—they are pure objects.

Since the obese have no subjectivity, they cannot be seduced. It operates solely on its own complacent system, disregarding incoherency, alienation, or obscenity. On a cultural scale, this is the antithesis of the analogy of body politic. This is a tradition that attracts considerable significance in political discourse since typified by Plato’s *Allegory of the Chariot*. The postmodern world, however, exposes the illusory notion of a “rightly ordered society,” with technologically mediated information exchange serving no purpose nor end. The obese body of politics—the disappearance of the social, the societal ideal—is a result of the excess of space, information, and “a dizzying overmultiplication of formal qualities [1].”

The desire of the obese is to only assimilate and reproduce, spreading its own techniques. They reduplicate the local system of images at an exponential rate of ecstasy. As such, “space” means the basis on which boundaries are drawn; “taking up space” thus means the passive, cancer-like disappearance of boundaries and the indiscriminate, incontinent intake of information. This oversaturation of information makes the obese immune to alienation. To convince the obese that they are alienated, one needs to dismantle an infinite amount of data without any kernel of essence.

This neologism, “obesism,” would be a convenient way to describe the individuals and machines that saliently follow these aforementioned principles—or the inextricability of these tendencies.

4.1.2. Hostagism: the Principle of Blackmailing

“The hostage” is the second figure of the transpolitical. It was arguably the Munich massacre that Baudrillard responded to. However, it is critical to remember that, similar to “the obese,” “hostage” and “terror” are another pair of antimetaphors. The distinction between “anomic” and “anomalous” here is crucial—in his own words, “violence is anomic, and terror is anomalous [1].” Violence is

antisocial in that it emerges from within the societal system but acts against it. Moreover, society and culture, namely the capitalist ones, adapt to it, incorporate it, explain it away, and often aestheticize it in a surreptitious “recuperation” [19]. “Terror,” on the other hand, comes randomly from elsewhere. It is not recapitulated by the system, is not necessarily publishable, and forces the system into a response. This is a response that orchestrates the disappearance of scenes, of illusions. Simply put, “terror” differs from deterrence—the latter is “do not do such and such,” and the former is “if you do such and such...” [1]. Terror is blackmail.

The theory of the hostage differs from both the social contract theory and the Marxist theory of state apparatus. Instead of “freedom” (see, for example, Hegel) “general will” (see, for example, Rousseau), or a worldwide process of “self-consciousness” (referring to Marxism), “society” as people understand it has no purpose but the phenomenon of “blackmailing.” Moreover, this blackmail is more than a threat from state apparatuses to the people—people simply hold *each other* hostage.

Under a culture of hostageism, the masses are a generalized non-subjectivity with no say in their fate—“an absolute form of human convertibility.” Humans are reduced—or rather, have always been reduced—to the bargaining chips of the blackmailer, who is also the hostage. Note that Baudrillard resists dialectics—there is no hostage-terrorist dichotomy or dialectic. Everyone is responsible for terror, which means everyone functions as a terrorist; at the same time, everyone is held hostage by terror.

It is in contemporary society that the responsibility for creating a “toxic online environment” is often diffused as a collective among netizens. People are told to seek out those who are irresponsible—taking responsibility for others’ irresponsibility, and, in this way, everyone is an anonymous functionary of power. Such is the basis of “cancel culture,” a culture of retributivism and a hostage situation of every member in its grasp. In short, people under hostageism are all responsible for systematic ailments, as well as seeking out where the general responsibility should fall and holding people accountable. “Terror,” however, cannot be punished by “cancel culture.” Terror is “aleatory [1],” which means randomness. The terrorist, who is also a hostage, has no responsibility for their fate.

Furthermore, as in postmodern capitalist cultures where personal data has become transparent, the State has also become the leading terrorist. It dictates a “perverse new social contract [1]” to hold its “subjects” hostage. The State would need to be “more” terrorist than the terrorists to maintain control, meaning: “terrorism is still a lesser evil than a police state capable of ending it [1].” This neologism, “hostageism,” would be a convenient way to describe the individuals and machines that saliently follows these aforementioned principles—or the inextricability of these tendencies.

There is a mention of “Baudrillardian terrorism [20],” which attempts to extort a response from the target system, be it the State or a cultural hegemon, to expose its illusory scenes. In such a case, if a counterexample terrorizes the self-pretentious subject, it would take its target hostage, forcing it to “show its hands”—revealing the dirty secret underneath—there is no secret. For example, the inequitable partisan ostracism of a popular progressive politician forces neoliberalism to denounce by action its prided scenes—“free society,” “choose your own government,” “democracy,” etc.—and instead perform its “terrorist counterterrorism” as an oligarchic corporatocracy.

4.1.3. Obscenism: the Principle of the Disappearance of Scenes

“For something to be meaningful, there has to be a scene [1].” “Scene” could therefore be defined as the prerequisite space of meaning, or, alternatively in psychoanalysis, the oedipal theatrics, the invisible “Big other,” the hidden “unconscious,” “object of desire,” and so on. Historically, some of the scenes are God, Reason, Truth, the political, the social, and so on—meaning or purpose is conceived by them. Obscenity, etymologically, is that which is “against” the “scene”—obscurity is the postmodern condition that strains scenes’ credulity. In Baudrillardian language, a bijection between the basic ideas of the scene and the obscene is summarized in the following table 2:

Table 2. Notable Scene-Obscene Relations.

Scene	Obscene
Events	Information
Space	Network
The social	Masses-as-objects
Politics	Terror
Body form	The obese/the clone [1]
History/representation	Image
Love/romance	Pornography
The ideal use-value	Exchange-value/sign-value

This neologism, “obscenism,” would be a convenient way to describe the individuals and machines (systems of information processing which interpret and remake the world according to their particular logics [21]) that saliently follows these aforementioned principles—or the inextricability of these tendencies.

4.2. Case Study: “Chan Culture”

“Chan culture” is a cultural phenomenon of anonymity and a lack of moderation. It originated from the websites of 4chan and 8chan, which both prided themselves of these promises. Since its advent, 4chan alone has been seen as responsible for alt-right violent extremism [22], including but not limited to threats of violence [23], cyber-attacks [24], and at least one mass shooting [25].

The generic user on 4chan display the following attributes of obesism: they are highly opinionated, yet avoid having consistent, coherent opinions in fear of being ridiculed for them; they put high premium on consensus, yet intensely distrustful of groupthink [26]. These are the ironies of obesism. Having occupied so much space—absorbed so much information, the obese people on 4chan would not settle with an ideology of choice as their sincere identity. Instead, they *bullshit* (which is not humbug nor lying [27])—they possess opinions that, while sincere, are always subjected to change, even to the diametrical opposite in due course, for a “Stanislavskian” (the concurrence of malleability and sincerity of roles [28]) theatric effect of “snobbishness [1]”. There is no longer spatial delineation of the ideal ego; there is only the perpetuation of the obese system’s own logic and occupation of space.

Likewise, the phenomenon of Chan culture is also one of terrorism and hostagism. Due to anonymity and lack of moderation, perpetrators of overt violence such as death threats and mass shooting incitement would face no systemic or social repercussions in a postmodern digital space like 4chan. Not to mention “dubious SEO” (search engine optimization for dubious purposes, basically data manipulation) attacks. Clickbait [29], Google bombing [30], and data voids [31], are some examples. These attacks comprise “stochastic terrorism [32]” which feeds on feedback loops of mantric arguments and fear validation. The user would only blackmail—within the sign exchange system, they assign the inflammatory and disparaging signifiers to their opposition (who justify their own existence), take the opposition hostage as an oversimplified strawman object, and hold it responsible for all that is wrong in the world. Obesism and hostagism objectify the subject by eluting it with antisocial signs and leaving it with only one mission, one assigned by itself—a “lone wolf” action [33].

Finally, 4chan is the quintessential obscene. The so-called “radicalization” of media, typified by 4chan and the like, is no more than one axiom: “To simulation we reply by simulation; we have become systems of simulation [1].” The simulation is “the generation by models of a real without origin or reality [6],” such origin usually being sincerity, rationality, identity, etc. The typical 4chan user has none of the above as the core which all meaning emanates from, except for those that are already simulations. On the contrary, the constant campaigns of “debunking” and lamenting the loss of the social stand no chance against the stochastic reactionary trends, as these “left-wing”

methodologies refuse to acknowledge the obscene that is the ecstatic sign exchange which is already devoid of rationality.

4.3. Objecto-vendettism: the Principle of the Object Taking Revenge Against the Subject

“Vendettism” is derived from the root word “vendetta.” Historically, the subject had held a philosophical and ontological supremacy. Whether it is the individual subject (the rationalist position, in lineage of Descartes and Kant), the collective subject (see, for example, Rousseau and Marx), or the world-as-subject (see Hegel), the subject “makes history,” and “totalizes the world,” while the object is shamed, passive, prostituted, obscene, alienated, slave-like, whose only glory is its day of becoming the subject. This would be the tradition of “subject-supremacy.”

Objecto-vendettism, however, is closely tied to “the supremacy of the object.” As is revealed by modern technologies, the traditionally scorned-at objects such as information takes hold of the human’s destiny. As culture spirals upwards into the society of control, “each individual is forced into the undivided coherence of statistics” [1, 34]. In the age of total transparency, the object triumphs, since there is no God and His secular manifestations—historicism, scientism, economism, etc.—could conceive of the subject anymore. To quote Baudrillard, “behind the subjectivity of appearances there is always an occulted objectivity [1].”

Objecto-vendettism is therefore the ideology of the restoration of the object’s rightful, supreme place. Practically, it is the realization that only the pure object is sovereign. The pure object disappears with respect to the subject, and this disappearance “envelopes the subject in its fatal strategy,” depriving the subject any right of desire. All is left is the object’s counterpart of desire—seduction. It is paradoxical that the object, in a language traditionally belonged to the subject, to “take revenge,” but such expression could be a fascinating (and therefore useful) dramatization of the change. More dramatically, objecto-vendettism is the “silent revolution”—one not “symbolic, dazzling, and subjective, but obscure and ironic [1].”

5. Conclusion

Baudrillardianism is, ironically, prophetic—taking inspiration from the polls, the TV, and the radio from the 1980s, Baudrillard was able to formulate theories that, arguably, could not be more opportune in today’s culture of late capitalism. Baudrillardian analysis of Chan culture exemplifies the possibility of extrapolating Baudrillardism to its numerous cultural and political examples—but an exhaustive enumeration would be beyond the scope of this essay. To reiterate, by proffering a theoretical basis that might prove fascinating to readers in the future, this essay hopes to inspire further symbolic exchanges of Baudrillard’s thoughts.

These neologisms are made for the ecstasy of sign exchanges. They are designed to fascinate—as objects, their seductive power shall be honored. For this purpose, they could serve as an introduction to postmodern thought for as wide an audience as possible. This methodology is, of course, obesism, hostageism, and obscenism combined—taking up digital space as the currency of attention economy, terrorizing and taking hostage of the hegemonic ideals of the social and the political, and acknowledging the obscene as a groundwork for illusion exposés. From Baudrillard’s perspective, perhaps even Abigail Thorn’s profile curation and showmanship is “all that precedes or follows [Marxism] is more radical than it is” because of its bourgeois, humanist, naïveté of the social. Yet, Abigail Thorn is too sincere to effectuate the ironic strategy, and so is every self-serious subject.

An ethic of perpetuating the system’s logic does not mean that whichever follows it is ethical. However, a lucid, Baudrillardian understanding of the disappearance of the social and ecstatic reality of symbolic exchange would be a first step in combating the localized malaise within the system of objects. In any case, nihilism is not the same as pessimism, and Baudrillard’s work addresses postmodern nihilism with a tinge of hope. Like Nietzsche’s, Baudrillard’s nihilism shall blossom into an aspiring overcoming of nihilism. If one recognizes that all there is left is to play the game, would they have any reason not to enjoy it?

From a Baudrillardian perspective, as ironic as it is, theorization serves as a prolegomenon of an updated outlook on symbolic exchange. Besides, it is meaningful for no reason except it is a more interesting discourse than “debunking” and critiquing that which feeds on attention. With these neologisms, there is new hope for continuing the “game” of signs, redefining leftism within the desert of the real.

References

- [1] BAUDRILLARD J. Fatal strategies. Trans. by Fleming Jim. Los Angeles, CA: Semiotext(e), 2008: 15, 21, 25, 29, 45, 52, 55, 57, 64, 69, 90, 99, 100, 102, 107, 115, 118, 124, 127, 142, 145, 189.
- [2] TRIFONAS P P. Barthes and the Empire of signs. Cambridge: Icon, 2001.
- [3] BAUDRILLARD J. The system of objects. Trans. by Benedict James. London: Verso, 2020.
- [4] ALTHUSSER L. Ideology & ideological state apparatuses: Notes towards an investigation. Trans. by Brewster Ben. New Delhi: Critical Quest, 2012.
- [5] DERRIDA J. Specters of Marx: The State of the debt, the work of mourning, and the New International. New York: Routledge, 2011.
- [6] BAUDRILLARD J. Simulacra and simulation. The University of Michigan Press, 1994: 1,
- [7] BASU T. YouTube’s algorithm seems to be funneling people to alt-right videos. MIT Technology Review, MIT Technology Review, 2022-03-22. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.technologyreview.com/2020/01/29/276000/a-study-of-youtube-comments-shows-how-its-turning-people-onto-the-alt-right/>.
- [8] CHEN A Y, NYHAN B, REIFLER J. Exposure to alternative & extremist content on YouTube. ADL, 2021-05-02. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.adl.org/resources/report/exposure-alternative-extremist-content-youtube>.
- [9] HALPER E, WRITER S. How a Los Angeles-based conservative became one of the internet’s biggest sensations. Los Angeles Times, 2019-08-23. [2023-07-30]. <https://web.archive.org/web/20191201141534/https://www.latimes.com/politics/story/2019-08-22/dennis-prager-university-conservative-internet-sensation>.
- [10] HAWKING T. How a 57-hour Donkey Kong game struck a blow against online toxicity|Tom Hawking. The Guardian, Guardian News and Media, 2019-01-22. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.theguardian.com/games/2019/jan/22/how-a-57-hour-donkey-kong-twitch-stream-struck-a-blow-against-gamergate>.
- [11] PANITCH L, ALBO G. beyond Digital capitalism: New ways of living. The Merlin Press, 2020.
- [12] JACKSON G. The Gravel Institute is trying to make Prageru, but good. VICE, 2020-10-01. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.vice.com/en/article/n7wawb/the-gravel-institute-is-trying-to-make-prageru-but-good>.
- [13] THORN, A. *Beginner’s Guide to Kant’s Moral Philosophy*. YouTube, 2016-6-10. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mQ2fvTvtzBM>
- [14] THEALL D F, MCLUHAN M. The medium is the rear view mirror: Understanding McLuhan. McGill-Queen’s University Press, 1969.
- [15] NIETZSCHE F W. Twilight of the idols, or, how to philosophize with a Hammer. OXFORD University Press, 2009.
- [16] BAUDRILLARD J. The illusion of the end. Trans. by Turner Chris. Cambridge: Polity Press, 1995: 120.
- [17] LACAN J. Écrits. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999: 671.
- [18] LACAN J, BOWIE M. Écrits: A selection. Trans. by Sheridan Alan. London: Routledge, 2008: 3.
- [19] CANJUERS P, DEBORD G. Préliminaires pour une définition de l’unité du programme révolutionnaire. Paris: Réédition Sens & Tonka, 1960.
- [20] BAUDRILLARD J. The spirit of terrorism: And other essays. Trans. by Turner Chris. Verso, 2012.
- [21] DELEUZE G, GUATTARI F, and FOUCAULT M. Anti-oedipus: Capitalism and schizophrenia. Trans. by Hurley Robert, Seem Mark, & Lane Helen. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2019.
- [22] CRAWFORD B. Chan culture and violent extremism. GNET, 2019-12-31. [2023-07-30]. <https://gnet-research.org/2019/12/31/chan-culture-and-violent-extremism-past-present-and-future>

- [23] MARK R. Man charged in internet bomb threats. Internet News, 2021-07-16. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.internetnews.com/it-management/man-charged-in-internet-bomb-threats/>.
- [24] CHA A E. 4chan users seize internet's power for mass disruptions. The Washington Post, WP Company, 2010-08-10. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2010/08/09/AR2010080906102.html?hpid=topnews>.
- [25] COLLINS B. Buffalo shooting suspect: Alleged manifesto cited "Great replacement" theory. NB CNews.com, NBCUniversal News Group, 2022-05-15. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/buffalo-supermarket-shooting-suspect-posted-apparent-manifesto-repeate-rcna28889>.
- [26] STAFF G. David Roberts explains postmodern conservatism in 36 tweets. Grist, 2021-04-01. [2023-07-30]. <https://grist.org/politics/david-roberts-explains-postmodern-conservatism-in-36-tweets/>.
- [27] FRANKFURT H. On Bullshit. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005.
- [28] MAGARSHACK D. Stanislavsky: A life. London: Faber and Faber, 2010: 375.
- [29] GIOMELAKIS D, VEGLIS A. Investigating search engine optimization factors in media websites. Digital Journalism, 2015, 4(3): 379–400.
- [30] ZELLER T. A new campaign tactic: Manipulating Google Data. The New York Times, the New York Times, 2006-10-26. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/10/26/us/politics/26googlebomb.html>.
- [31] BOYD D, GOLEBIEWSKI M. Data voids. Data & Society, Data & Society Research Institute, 2019-10-29. [2023-07-30]. <https://datasociety.net/library/data-voids/>.
- [32] IOANES E. An atmosphere of violence: Stochastic terror in American politics. Vox, 2022-11-05. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.vox.com/2022/11/5/23441858/violence-stochastic-terror-american-politics-trump-pelosi>.
- [33] HAMM M. Lone Wolf Terrorism in America. Lone Wolf Terrorism in America | Office of Justice Programs, 2013. [2023-07-30]. <https://www.ojp.gov/ncjrs/virtual-library/abstracts/lone-wolf-terrorism-america>.
- [34] DELEUZE G. Postscript on the societies of control. October, 1992, 59: 3–7.