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object-oriented seduction
baudrillard reconsidered

The late Jean Baudrillard is viewed in some quarters as the most frivolous author in recent French philosophy. Some of this can be ascribed to his style, which relies heavily on flash: on a speed of unmediated connection that often has the aroma of the arbitrary. Consider the following passage, chosen at random:

> Pompeii is thus a kind of *trompe-l'oeil* or primal scene: the same vertigo of a missing dimension, that of time, the same hallucination of an added dimension, that of the transparency of the slightest details, like that precise vision of submerged trees living at the bottom of an artificial lake over which you pass while swimming.[1]

Even when read in context, such passages often defy interpretation. His authorial voice tends to build a case less by developing successive pieces of evidence than by producing aphoristic paragraphs that count on the accuracy of their wit to produce agreement. Another example reinforces the point: "The obese somehow escape sexuality and sexual division by the indivisibility of the full body. They resolve the void of sex by absorption of the surrounding space."[2] These stylistic peculiarities are one of two main reasons that some people are simply unwilling to give Baudrillard a hearing.

But despite the continued low status of realism among continentally trained philosophers, Baudrillard's extreme form of antirealism is even more repellent to some than his style. After all, he is remembered for holding the series of related opinions that reality is nothing but a simulation, that America is merely a hologram, and that the 1991 Gulf War – however high its casualty total – did not take place.[3] At first hearing, this sounds like just a hip cultural-studies version of full-blown metaphysical idealism. And thus it might be asked how a philosophical realist like me could possibly find anything of value in the rakishly antirealist Baudrillard. Yet to ask this question would be to forget fully half of what object-oriented ontology (OOO) teaches. While critical discussion of OOO focuses almost solely on the withdrawal or withholding of real objects from their relations, this philosophical current also has much to say about what does not withdraw: namely, *sensual* objects.

Since the source of this concept is the phenomenology of Edmund Husserl (who calls them *intentional* objects), it is worth reminding readers briefly of his contribution to OOO. We know that Husserl's renegade disciple Martin Heidegger loves to speak of withdrawal, veiling, concealing, hiding, sheltering, and preserving, all of them terms for something reasonably comparable to Immanuel Kant's unknowable thing-in-itself. For Heidegger, it is inconceivable that there could be a direct access to reality in its own right; human *Dasein* is locked in a hermeneutic circle and thus never comes face-to-face with some naked, ahistorical truth. In Husserl's case, the opposite is true: he tells us that it would be absurd to imagine an object that could not, in principle, be the target of an intentional act.[4] The world is a perfect correlate of the intentional acts of consciousness, and thus it is quite possible for us to intuit the essence of any given thing, as long as suitable phenomenological procedures are followed. Though it should be quite obvious that this equation between objects and intentional acts gives us the most unabashed form of idealism, time is often wasted sifting through claims by Husserl's followers that he is somehow "beyond" the realism/idealism dispute. In saying this, they mix together two entirely different topics. The first question is whether anything in reality exceeds its relation to us; in Husserl's case, we have a clear answer in the negative, and thus a frank idealism. The second question, not unrelated to the first, is whether a philosophy regards objects as just bundles of qualities (à la David Hume) or whether there is something in the object that exceeds a mere assembly of qualities. Please note: it is only with the *second* question that Husserl becomes one of the intellectual heroes of OOO. For despite his complete inability to address the real objects that lie in a subterranean realm inaccessible to direct mental acts, Husserl is deeply sensitive to the tense interplay between objects and qualities *within* the sensual realm. Though this realm is not "real" in the sense of withdrawn reality, it is nonetheless something of which philosophy must give an account.

In terms of his ontology, Baudrillard belongs in roughly the same camp as Husserl. With his career-long emphasis on simulation and simulacra, Baudrillard is the very opposite of a traditional realist, and he closes off the realm of withdrawn substance at least as much as Husserl does. But also like Husserl, Baudrillard realizes that there are important things to be said about these simulated objects that we have called sensual. Even so, there is a difference in the favored emphases of these two thinkers. Husserl focuses on the strife between the sensual object and its two separate kinds of qualities: the sensual qualities that show up in every "adumbration" or profile of the thing and the real qualities that belong to the *eidos* of the sensual object and cannot be either swept aside or viewed with the senses

in the way that its sensual qualities can.[5] By contrast, Baudrillard shows little concern for this anti-Humean theme of objects preceding their properties. Yet he draws our attention to something equally important: the specific relation between the sensual object and the beholder who is engrossed by it. Baudrillard's name for this relation between observer and object is *seduction*, which strikes me as a perfectly good technical term despite its hint of empty hipsterism. Seduction is Baudrillard's proposed counterweight to the subject-centered concept of *desire*, thus paving the way for replacing the exhausted modern tradition of the subject with an object-oriented theory that Baudrillard treats as the only alternative path. Closely linked with this concept of seduction is what Baudrillard, anticipating Alain Badiou's reworking of Kierkegaard, calls the *wager*.[6] For Baudrillard, to give in to the seductive power of a given object is to wager our lives on its importance in a manner that, contra Badiou, *cannot* be rationally demonstrated. Let's take a look at where these Baudrillardian concepts (seduction, wager, and their kin) might lead us. Though there are numerous publications in which Baudrillard brushes against such themes in connection with the object, I have always found one in particular to be the most helpful: the lengthy fourth chapter of his 1983 book *Fatal Strategies*, entitled "The Object and its Destiny."[7]

reversal of subject and object

Baudrillard is correct that modern philosophy "has always lived off the splendor of the subject and the poverty of the object."[8] The object has been treated as dead matter occupying some specific set of spatial-temporal coordinates, while all hope of novelty has seemed to lie on the side of the human subject, with all its hallowed features: perception, rationality, cunning, dignity, autonomy. By contrast, the object is "pure alienation."[9] It is commodity fetishism. It serves as a warning for how humans *should not* be treated, since humans alone are taken to be ends in themselves. No one in modern Western philosophy is ever quite sure whether animals are to be treated as subjects or objects, but almost no one wants to treat them as full-blown subjects, and thus they are either reduced to the status of dead objective matter (Descartes) or assigned to some vague third term such as "world-poverty" (Heidegger) that is never really clarified.[10] To aspire to be fully human entails aspiring to be more of a free, dignified subject and less of a base, mechanistically determined object.

The concept of seduction is what Baudrillard proposes as the best means of overthrowing the reign of the subject: "everything is inverted if one passes on to the thought of seduction. There, it's no longer the subject which desires, it's the object which seduces. Everything comes from the object and everything returns to it, just as everything started with seduction, not with desire."[11] Using his favorite metaphor for this shifting of power towards the object, Baudrillard says that "the crystal takes revenge."[12] Now, what is going on here, in the terms of OOO? We will see that there is not just a reversal but a passage to a higher level.

Let's begin with what Baudrillard calls the "object." As mentioned earlier, Baudrillard, the champion of simulacra, is speaking not of withdrawn real objects but fully visible sensual ones. His favorite way of indicating this is to empty the object of all depth, intention, meaning, or causation and turn it into pure surface. Using the first person plural to refer to himself, Baudrillard notes "the profound objection we entertain towards normal causality, towards the derisory pretention of assigning a cause to each event and each event to its cause. Any effect is sublime if not reduced to its cause. Furthermore, only the effect is necessary; the cause is accidental."[13] Roses, mirrors, moonlight, neon: they all become "sublime" when reduced to pure appearance. By suspending all causal reference to the *real* roses, mirrors, moonlight, or neon hiding behind the sensual facades, we get simulacra, and these simulacra are what seduce. To repeat an earlier point, Baudrillard, unlike Husserl, is not concerned with the duel between these simulations and their constantly shifting features, only with their relation to the subject who is fatefully seduced by them.

What about the "subject"? More important than the fact that the subject is human is the fact that it is *real*. It is true that I will never *know* my own depths as a subject, as Baudrillard later makes clear in his remarks on psychoanalysis. Nonetheless, the life in which I, as a subject, am seduced by a waterfall, a song, or a glass of Burgundy is *really* my life, not just a simulation of it. Yet for Baudrillard, the subject does not demand recognition of its autonomous dignity but wishes above all to be a seductive object and nothing more. For "the only desire is to be the destiny of the other, to become for him the event that exceeds all subjectivity, that absolves the subject of its ends, its presence, and of all responsibility to itself and to the world, in a passion that is – finally, definitively – objective."[14] When we think of the seducer, we generally envision a devious manipulator who lures and abandons some weak innocent. "The vulgar seducer has understood nothing at all. He thinks of himself as subject, of the other as victim of his strategy. A naïve psychology, as much as that of the 'beautiful souls' who take the role of

victim: neither realizes that all initiative and power are on the other side, the side of the object."[15] Baudrillard even cites Jean-Paul Sartre saying much the same thing: that I do not wish to be a disembodied subject dominating my victim as object but to become a fascinating object in my own right.[16] This entails the wish to be taken for a fascinating appearance, for something that in fact I am not. But for the most part, this remains a mere desire. What I actually am qua subject is a *real* object, fascinated by something that is not entirely real.

In passing, it should be mentioned that this is not quite the OOO view of the situation. Baudrillard seems to hold that seduction occurs when the real/causal underpinnings of an object are suspended, so that it becomes a pure fatality, or event without depth. The reason for this is precisely Baudrillard's lack of interest in Husserl's distinction between the sensual object and its sensual qualities. For OOO, the aesthetic or seductive moment occurs through an *overt split* between the object and its qualities, and in this way the real depths of an image come into play as part of its being. If we consider the familiar metaphor of the sun as a sower of seed, we can see what Baudrillard misses with his model of the seductive object as mere depthless surface. The sun in everyday experience is scarcely distinguished from its qualities at all, though the distinction is already tacitly there. But if we hear the metaphor that "the sun is a sower," assuming that this is still fresh and novel to us rather than an old cliché that merely provokes annoyance, the strife between object and qualities comes to the forefront. First, note that the metaphor is "the sun is a sower" and not "the sower is a sun." Metaphors are never symmetrical but place one term in the subject position and the other in the predicate position.[17] Here, the sun becomes a problematic object and thus a real one, withdrawing into a questionable absence, leaving behind nothing but a halo of sower qualities. In this way, OOO's concept of seduction requires the *absence* of what seduces, whereas for Baudrillard the seductive object functions through the meaningless nullity of its sheer presence.

But let's return to the main track of the argument. If the seductive entity is roughly equivalent to OOO's sensual object and the seduced subject is actually a real object, one that really lives out its life in being seduced by the object before it now, we seem to have nothing more than what speculative realism denounces as "correlationism."[18] That is to say, seduction appears to consist neither in the seductive object nor in the seduced subject but only in a primordial correlation or rapport between these two elements. This would hardly trouble Baudrillard, who has no commitment whatsoever to philosophical realism and would be perfectly happy to treat seduction as a realm more important than any supposed real. But

for the speculative realist philosophies, which are deeply committed to a reality outside the play of surface effects, it may seem a bit puzzling to know how to handle the relation between subject and object without becoming derailed. But those who claim that realism can never overcome the correlate of subject and object forget something very important: namely, the correlation between these two terms (especially in the case of seduction) *becomes itself a new real object*. That is to say, the bored attorney who becomes an impassioned priest is not just a correlate made up of a formerly bored subject on one side and the regalia and lore of the Catholic clergy on the other. Instead, the subject is now a priestly object, just as hydrogen and oxygen combined form not a mere correlate between these two entities but a new compound or combinatorial object in its own right. This is what was meant earlier in the reference to a passage to a higher level.

Epistemology seeks the real in the form of the true: a direct access to what temporarily hides behind the appearance of things until knowledge conquers hiddenness and brings reality to light. But for OOO, the inwardness of things can never be brought to light, and thus the reality to be had is not the unattainable one hidden behind the sensual waterfall or rose but the new compound reality of the beholder seduced by these objects plus the objects themselves. This is Baudrillard's concept of the *wager*, which he unsurprisingly traces back to Pascal: "No one escapes from this experience of investing an object, as an object, with all the occulted force of objectivity. This is also a part of the absurd wagers we make, as was the case for Pascal's famous wager on the existence of God."[19] The name of Kierkegaard obviously cannot be avoided here either. For who has shown better than he that the weight of the evidence will never be able to settle definitely on one horn of a dilemma or the other, and thus that we cannot hope to *uncover* a reality behind appearance but only to *produce* a new reality on top of appearance by surrendering to its call?

This helps explain why Baudrillard much prefers Charles Baudelaire's account of art to that of the recently more celebrated Walter Benjamin. Introducing the topic, Baudrillard declares that "the absolute object is one that is worthless, whose quality is a matter of indifference, but which escapes objective alienation in that it has made itself more of an object than the object – this gives it a fatal quality."[20] Here again, it is "more object than object" primarily because it has been severed from any meaning or quality and is thus fatal in the sense of the *femme fatale*: a fateful woman rather than a lethal one. And what better example of something that is "more object than object" than the commodity? Denounced by Marx as a fetish and by Benjamin as the sad state of a thing stripped of its "aura," the com-

modity is praised by Baudelaire, in Baudrillard's own words, as an "escalation to the limit [and a] doubly revolutionary movement."[21] With the benefit of having Andy Warhol in his rearview mirror, Baudrillard is able to inscribe Baudelaire retroactively in a line of art critics headed towards the pure commodity:

> The work of art – a new and triumphant fetish and not a sad alienated one – should work to deconstruct its own traditional aura, its authority and power of illusion, in order to shine resplendent in the pure obscenity of the commodity. It must annihilate itself as familiar object and become monstrously foreign. But this foreignness is not the disquieting strangeness of the repressed or alienated object; this object does not shine from its being haunted, or out of some secret dispossession; it glows with a veritable seduction that comes from elsewhere, from having exceeded its own form and become pure object, pure event.[22]

If we read Benjamin as lamenting the loss of a former realism of thingly auras, and Baudrillard as prescribing a *hyperreal* that actually means a nonreality of simulacra, then OOO is more interested in the new compound real made up of the simulacrum and its admirer, who is seduced by it.

One of the interesting features of commodities is that when a vast horde of identical objects is created, our attention is focused on the shared features of those objects. A package of peanut M&M's is no longer a singular object bearing specific qualities, since there are far too many of them for that to be relevant. Instead, the well-known properties of this item (yellow bag that can be torn without much difficulty, multicolored oval-shaped hard-shelled candies inside) become what is directly relevant. The real depth of an individual bag of candies is suspended, and we are fascinated by the recurring features that render any individual exemplar completely disposable. Here we have what Baudrillard calls "the prestige of illusion."[23]

But it is hardly necessary to produce commodities by the millions to prove the point; sometimes mere doubling is enough. Baudrillard speaks of a woman he calls "S." who follows a man randomly in the street and then on a trip to Venice.[24, 25]

> She puts on makeup and disguises herself. But the pleasures of carnival do not interest her; everything is a function of shadowing him. She spends two whole weeks, at the price of incalculable effort, in

> keeping on his trail. She manages to find out about his plans, by questioning people in the shops where he goes, and about what seats he has reserved for the theatre. Even the time of his return train to Paris, where, having taken the preceding train, she will be waiting for him when he gets off, in order to take a last picture of him.[26]

The purpose of this pursuit, which is interrupted at certain points by violent reactions from the man, is not to learn anything in particular about this relatively uninteresting person. Instead, it is a sort of experiment in removing the meaning from things by doubling them: "You seduce yourself into being the destiny of the other, the double of his course, which for him has meaning, but which, duplicated, no longer has any. It's as if someone, behind him, knew that he was going nowhere."[27] In fact, the interest of this exercise would diminish rather than increase if the woman were to discover that the man was hiding some great secret, such as a double life: a second family in Venice hidden from his wife in Paris, perhaps.[28] I have often seen two dolphins in a public aquarium, perfectly mimicking each other's movements while swimming, in an activity somehow more seductive than the mere reality of either dolphin taken in isolation. For Baudrillard, this is the substanceless hyperreality that generates seduction. But for OOO, the observer combined with the fascinating dolphin movements is itself a new substance and hence the basis for a new realism built squarely on the foundations of illusion.

This point is not unrelated to Baudrillard's critique of psychoanalysis, which he rips for paying too much attention to solutions and origins internal to the subject. As he puts it: "No one holds the key to his own secret – this is the error of all psychology, including that of the unconscious."[29] Psychoanalysis hunts for origins, for early fixations and traumas and Oedipal triangles that shape the subject irreversibly:

> Psychoanalysis has privileged one aspect of our lives and hidden another. It has overestimated one of our births – the biological and genital one – and has forgotten the other – the initiatic birth. It has forgotten that if two beings are there presiding at our biological birth, it always happens that others seduce you (they may even be the same ones), and these others are in a sense our initiatic parents. This second birth redeems the first one, along with all the Oedipal conflicts so well described by psychoanalysis, but which really concern only the first birth.[30]

Now, the labors and insights of psychoanalysis have both been immense, and anyone remotely sympathetic to its achievements is likely to see in this passage nothing but a frivolous dismissal. Yet there is a real philosophical insight behind it. Modern philosophy treats the human subject as something utterly different in kind from all else that exists. In parallel with this, it also treats the human being as something sufficient in itself, and as merely tainted or weighed down by any trivial connection with objects. If one considers the way that political philosophy missed the crucial political role of inanimate objects prior to Bruno Latour's diligent work to admit them, one will see that psychoanalysis has the same tendency to treat objects too often as fetishes.[31] By contrast, what would a Baudrillardian psychoanalysis of seduction look like? It would focus less on the causal origins of the neurotic subject who currently exists and more on the future adventures and liaisons of that subject. The dream becomes an event or turning point rather than a symptom pointing backwards.[32] Psychic history will be replaced by what Baudrillard calls a psychic *destiny* – and destiny is not what occurs when we sit brooding in our room but what happens only through an encounter with someone or something.[33] As he puts it, "dreams ... charm, and are charmingly prophetic before they disappear into interpretation, where of course they take on the meaning they are supposed to. Then they are no longer seductive, nor fatal; they've become significant."[34] Or more poetically: "For Oedipus to return to Thebes and to the Oedipal is problematic ... the Sphinx has to be dead, which means an end has to be put to seduction and its vertigo, to the enigma and secret, in favor of a hidden history whose drama lies entirely in repression and whose key is in interpretation."[35]

the metaphysics of connection

Another fruitful point of contrast between Baudrillard and OOO comes on the question of causation. We have already seen that Baudrillard wishes to eliminate this topic altogether, as when he speaks of "the derisory pretention of assigning a cause to each event and each event to its cause. Any effect is sublime if not reduced to its cause. Furthermore, only the effect is necessary; the cause is accidental."[36] He continues the theme later in the chapter we are discussing. The first two sentences in the following passage are Baudrillard's sarcastic gloss of the traditional procausal view, while his own position is indicated from the third sentence onward:

> The cause *produces* the effect. Therefore, causes always have a meaning and an end. They never lead to catastrophe (they know only crisis). Catastrophe is the abolition of causes. It submerges cause beneath the effect. It hurls causal connection into the abyss, restoring for things their pure appearance or disappearance.[37]

Rather than talking of "submerging" the cause beneath its effect, it would be more accurate to say that for Baudrillard, causes are exterminated altogether. In a world stripped of all depth, the only options are to appear or disappear, whereas a Heideggerian sort of *hiding* is impossible precisely because there is nowhere to hide.

The fact that OOO recognizes objects as a surplus beyond all translation makes it problematic to understand how objects are able to make contact at all. We cannot say that objects make "partial" contact, a lazy solution often proposed by those who either hope to one-up OOO or to help make it more plausible. The reason this solution fails is that objects are wholes, and that if we were to claim to make partial contact with an object (say, with fourteen percent of its surface properties) the problem would still remain as to how the portion of the object with which we have made contact is in turn able to make contact with the object as a whole. The superficial plausibility of this "partial causation" model comes from an inability to imagine causation as more than the collision of two *physical* objects, as between two billiard balls that touch each other only at a minimal point but still succeed in moving each other as whole balls. Billiard balls are certainly able to do this, but not through touching a *partial but real* portion of each other. Rather, the part of ball A that is struck by ball B is also merely sensual, since it is no more capable of being paraphrased in terms of its relation than is the ball as a whole. For this reason, I have written about the *vicarious* causation that occurs when a real object makes contact with a sensual one.[38] This entails further that causation is *asymmetrical*, since a real billiard ball interacts with a sensual one, and even if we insist that "for every action there is an equal and opposite reaction" (Newton), the asymmetry requires that there be two separate but simultaneous causal relations: that between real ball A and sensual ball B and that between real ball B and sensual ball A. The assumption that all causation is symmetrical (as in Newton's masterwork the *Principia*) is, again, based on an exclusively physical model of causation.[39] Indeed, perhaps the physical realm is the only place where causation always occurs in both directions. In the human sphere, it is easier to identify cases where influence passes exclusively in one direction, or where one object has hegemony over another with no master-slave dialectic reversing the predicament. In *Guerrilla*

Metaphysics, I not only described causation as vicarious and asymmetrical but also as *buffered*. This term referred to the fact that real objects are almost constantly in contact with sensual ones – the only exception occurring in cases of "dormant objects"[40] – without anything happening at all. What would Baudrillard make of each of these three terms?

Vicarious causation is entirely unnecessary for a thinker like Baudrillard, given that OOO's "real objects" are shut out from his vision in the first place. The world of seduction is simply a world of depthless simulation, evacuated of any third dimension. He does recognize a certain *asymmetry* of causation, even if it does not rely on the depth of reality affirmed by OOO. After all, Baudrillard does retain a subject/object asymmetry. But rather than following the usual taxonomy of calling humans "subjects" and everything else "objects," Baudrillard sees each of us as able to flip between one position and the other. Baudrillard does tend to fix the distinction along lines of gender, with women (but even children and animals too!) generally in the position of seductive object and men in the position of seduced subject, though it should be remembered that he views subjecthood as the *weaker* of the two positions. Even so, there are sufficient indications in *Fatal Strategies* that biological males can also be "seductive" in the sense of forming a destiny for some subject.

That leaves us with buffered causation. For OOO, this is solely a local topic, concerned only with cases of real objects in contact with sensual ones, though without any consequences occurring. Since OOO also affirms a world of real objects, this contact with the sensual represents just one part of its theory. But for Baudrillard, who restricts the world to depthless simulacra, buffering becomes an all-encompassing metaphysical problem. Indeed, this issue gives us the clearest sense of how Baudrillard might have criticized OOO if only he had lived to know about it:

> Two hypotheses about chance. First: all things are called to meet each other, it is only by chance that they don't. Second: all things are scattered and indifferent to each other; it is only by chance that they meet once in a while.
>
> This last hypothesis is commonly held; the other one, paradoxically, is more interesting.[41]

OOO is perhaps the most tenacious version of the second position, the one that Baudrillard calls "common" and "less interesting." Its main reason for holding so

is the impossibility of fully translating anything from its own place to another, as if an object could ever be fully deployed in some effect elsewhere. Baudrillard is committed to the opposite intuition, since his metaphysics has nowhere to place an unexpressed reserve. Everything is a simulation, on full display in public. In defense of this view (hypothesis 1 above), Baudrillard insinuates unconvincingly that hypothesis 2 is automatically in bed with classical theism:

> Nothing is easier than for things to connect, to metamorphose one into the other. To prevent that [which Baudrillard does not want – GH] – to obtain a purely accidental world – we need to suppose an infinite will and energy. God himself would never get through with this fantastic labor of isolating every particle, of abolishing all sequence, all scattered seductions, to maintain the absolute reign of chance. What artifice is involved in chance, and how small was the probability that it could ever come to exist (as unlikely as the probability of God's existence)![42]

It is a brilliant version of the classical *occasionalist* position from which OOO has learned so much. For the French Cartesians and their Muslim predecessors in early medieval Iraq, objects are inherently isolated and unable to connect (or even to exist from one moment to the next) without the direct intervention of God. For Baudrillard, by contrast, things are so inherently connected from the start that only an almighty deity could *prevent* their affecting one another. I have already suggested that this idea requires the assumption of the perfect translatability of one object into its effects upon another; such translation is what Baudrillard seems to mean by his term "metamorphosis." But a further difficulty for Baudrillard is that he proposes no feasible mechanism of buffering to prevent everything from unleashing its forces simultaneously on everything else. Why should I metamorphose only into those flowers and ice palaces that captivate me by their proximity and not also into the universe as a whole? Baudrillard is on the verge of a hyperholism that threatens to become philosophically incoherent. And he is fully aware of the problem:

> From this angle, everything bursts with connection, seduction; nothing is isolated, nothing happens by chance – there is total correlation. The problem would be rather to brake, to arrest at certain points this total correlation of events, to stop this vertigo of seduction, of the

> linking of forms one by the other, this magic order (for some, disorder) that we see spontaneously arise in the form of linked sequences or coincidences (lucky or unlucky), or in the form of destiny, or ineluctable connection, when everything falls into order as if by miracle.[43]

It cannot be said that Baudrillard offers a satisfactory solution to the problem of "arresting at certain points this total correlation of events." He certainly cannot do it in the OOO manner of arguing that objects must always stand at a distance from one another due to the impossibility of direct translation, for this would mean an end to his idealist metaphysics of simulacra. He seems to lean instead towards the solution of Jacques Derrida, who counters the realm of immediate and exhaustive presence not by accepting the existence of a reality beyond all interplay but by holding instead that nothing is ever fixed in a single context.[44] Though Derrida is never mentioned in this context, we can deduce his influence through the specific way that Baudrillard speaks about Derrida's major structuralist forerunner:

> All of this is close to what [Claude] Lévi-Strauss called, in linguistic terms, the excess of the signifier – the idea that the signifier is there from the beginning, spread everywhere, in a profusion that happily the signified never exhausts. This overabundant order of the signifier is that of magic (and poetry). It is not an order of chance or indetermination; far from that, it is rather an arranged order, a necessity superior to the one which joins the signifier and the signified (which itself is highly arbitrary). The long work of joining signifier and signified, the work of reason, somehow brakes and absorbs this fatal profusion. The magical seduction of the world must be reduced, annulled. And it will be so the day when all signifiers receive their signifieds, when all has become meaning and reality.
>
> This would be, quite obviously, the world's end. The world will end – literally – when all seductive rapports yield to rational ones.[45]

Baudrillard can only be dismissed as a flashy prankster if we forget passages such as this one, which gives us a bold cosmic wager. Everything is fundamentally surface, and thus fundamentally connected, unless a brake can be put on seduction. But once the braking goes too far, the world will end in a final calculation of rational meaning.

We have seen the similarity between Baudrillard and Derrida in their fascination with the polysemia of the signifier, which always slips away into other possible contexts and thus cannot be pinned to the wall. As noted from the outset, this puts Baudrillard more on the side of Husserl than of Heidegger, and I am inclined to read Derrida more as a Husserlian as well; Heidegger's philosophy, with its emphasis on the withdrawal of being, simply does not contain the staunch antirealism that Derrida tries to ascribe to it. Nonetheless, I have tried to suggest in this essay that Baudrillard smuggles a new form of realism through the back door. Though the objects surrounding us are nothing but seductive simulacra, the wager we make on whatever seduces is itself a new *real* object made up of me and the simulation: one that is not just something to further amuse and seduce those who observe me but that forms the very reality of my life. Jean Baudrillard seduced by a woman is a different entity from Jean Baudrillard seduced by sociology or yachting. Rather than providing direct knowledge of a real object hiding beneath its simulation, my bond with a simulation forms a new object different from both the simulation and me. A skyscraper is built on a landfill of illusion. Our seduction by simulacra is not itself a simulation.

notes

1. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. P. Beitchman and W. G. J. Niesluchowski (New York: Semiotext(e), 1990), 23.
2. Ibid., 30.
3. Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. S. F. Glaser (Ann Arbor, Mich.: University of Michigan Press, 1994); Jean Baudrillard, *America*, trans. C. Turner (London: Verso, 2010); Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place*, trans. P. Patton (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995).
4. Edmund Husserl, *Logical Investigations*, 2 vols., trans. J. N. Findlay (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970).
5. Graham Harman, *The Quadruple Object* (Winchester, UK: Zero Books, 2011).
6. Alain Badiou, *Being and Event*, trans. O. Feltham (London: Continuum, 2005).
7. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 111–79.
8. Ibid., 111.
9. Ibid.
10. Martin Heidegger, *The Fundamental Concepts of Metaphysics: World, Finitude, Solitude*, trans. W. McNeill & N. Walker (Bloomington, Ind.: Indiana University Press, 1995).
11. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 111.
12. Ibid., 114.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid., 119.
16. Ibid., 120.

17. For my most recent discussion of this topic, see Graham Harman, *Immaterialism: Objects and Social Theory* (Cambridge, UK: Polity, 2016).
18. Quentin Meillassoux, *After Finitude: Essay on the Necessity of Contingency*, trans. R. Brassier (London: Continuum, 2008).
19. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 115.
20. Ibid., 115.
21. Ibid., 116.
22. Ibid., 118.
23. Ibid., 136.
24. Ibid., 129.
25. "S" is the French artist Sophie Calle, who followed a man (Henri B.) for her art project *Suite Vénitienne* (1979) for a two-week period.
26. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 130.
27. Ibid., 129.
28. Ibid., 131.
29. Ibid., 133.
30. Ibid., 137–8.
31. Graham Harman, *Bruno Latour: Reassembling the Political* (London: Pluto, 2014).
32. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 139.
33. Ibid., 138.
34. Ibid., 142.
35. Ibid., 140.
36. Ibid., 114.
37. Ibid., 155–6.
38. Graham Harman, *Guerrilla Metaphysics: Phenomenology and the Carpentry of Things* (Chicago: Open Court, 2005); Graham Harman, "On Vicarious Causation," *Collapse* II (2007), 171–205.
39. Isaac Newton, *The Principia: The Authoritative Translation and Guide: Principles of Natural Philosophy*, trans. I. B. Cohen and A. Whitman, assisted by J. Budenz (Oakland, Calif.: University of California Press, 2016).
40. On the notion of dormant objects, see Graham Harman, "Time, Space, Essence, and Eidos: A New Theory of Causation," *Cosmos and History*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2010), 1–7. Additionally, see Levi R. Bryant, *Onto-Cartography: An Ontology of Machines and Media* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2014).
41. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 145.
42. Ibid., 149.
43. Ibid., 150.
44. Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. G. Spivak (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1974).
45. Jean Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, 151.