

**Sudden Light:
A 'Pataphysical Animation of
Post-Modern Theory As Graphic Novel**

**by
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Declaration of Committee

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Post-Modern Theory As Graphic Novel**

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Abstract

This essay explores the ongoing creation of a sci-fi graphic novel titled *Sudden Light*. Here is illustrated an outline of the established plot and projections for its future – a kind of artist’s statement. The major underlying theories that inform and influence the content and form of this project are presented and connected back to the graphic novel, as well as compared and contrasted to other works of science fiction.

Keywords: ‘Pataphysics; Graphic Novel; Science Fiction; Jean Baudrillard; Sudden Light

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Introduction

True Science Fiction, [...], would not be fiction in expansion, with all the freedom and “naivete” which gave it a certain charm of discovery. It would, rather, evolve implacably, in the same way as our image of the universe. It would seek to revitalize, to reactualize, to rebanalize fragments of simulation – fragments of this universal simulation which our presumed “real” world has now become for us.

– Jean Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Science Fiction*, 1991

What first started at Langara College as an exercise in comic book page layout has been evolving since 2017 into what will one day become a published graphic novel. After enrolling in the Graduate Liberal Studies program at SFU in 2018, I began drafting short chapters each semester as a project that pertains to the themes of the coursework. Since entering the self-directed portion of the GLS program with SFU’s Dr. John Maxwell as advisor, I’ve been studying to produce much lengthier chapters in depth. The graphic novel is not yet complete; there are plans for future chapters, one of which will be discussed for the purposes of this essay although it hasn’t been drafted. The title of this science fiction graphic novel work in progress is *Sudden Light*. I’ve been using it as a vehicle to explore subjects I found fascinating during my time at SFU, although it also involves straying from the content of the curriculum. The approximately 76 pages of drafts I’ve written and illustrated follows a narrative arc that explores a series of hypothetical situations involving a group of post-Soviet scientists and military personnel who possess a machine that can print matter out of nothing, like magic, known as “For The Love Of God,” or FTLOG, which the characters pronounce as “Fitlog.” Some of these chapters were produced over the span of a few days, others required entire months. My goal has been to write and illustrate a complete graphic novel founded on and in conversation with some theories, ideas, and themes I will curate and expand on in this essay.

The world in which these various subjects are involved can be described as a form of *uchronia*; a fiction that reimagines established historical events going in different directions to create an alternative imaginary history. It takes place in 1990 during the fall of the Soviet Union, when a disaffected group of ex-Soviets hijack a secret science project, escape to Antarctica, establish a facility with the FTLOG, then begin enlisting and/or kidnapping strategically positioned people from around the world. Once settled,

they offer their services to those excluded from the prevailing new global hegemony, starting with Cuba with whom they build a super stadium for the 1991 Pan American games. This provokes a reaction from the US similar to that of the original Cuban missile crisis, thus establishing themselves as a kind of force to be reckoned with, setting the stage for future episodes. This trajectory may be a novel historical re-imagining, but it also contains an element of history repeating. Much of the content and themes can be viewed in exaggerated relation and commentary on some topical subjects increasingly encountered today. To quote my primary source, Jean Baudrillard, in reference to Marx's famous axiom in reference to Hegel; "History that repeats itself turns to farce. Farce that repeats itself turns to history." (Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*)

‘Pataphysics

This brings me to subject of the authors and ideas that influence this project, starting with the science of imaginary solutions known as ‘pataphysics. ‘Pataphysics is the idea par excellence that ties together every element of this entire project, from the methodology of its writing to much of its content and themes. ‘Pataphysics is inherent in all science fiction; it’s the kind of fiction that aims to realize the fantasies that underlie and inform science, it’s a meta-metaphysics. Asger Jorn, a founder of the Situationist International known for taking the absurd seriously, wrote in *Pataphysics: A Religion in the Making* about how ‘pataphysics could be the foundation for a new kind of religion, yet paradoxically the moment one tries to administer or declare exactly what constitutes this religion is the moment one betrays ‘pataphysics. It’s useful to know that the apostrophe at the beginning of the term ‘pataphysics is meant to signify as a kind of joke that the word itself is unpronounceable, it’s also read as half a dozen puns in French such as “pas-ta-physiques,” or “not-your-physics.” It’s also been informally suggested by a facilitator of SFU’s Lacan Salon that psychoanalysis is itself a kind of ‘pataphysics; it’s a clinical (others say cultlike) discipline whose success hinges heavily on its capacity to treat nonsense as sense, with it being definitively impossible to put the mystical experience of analysis itself into words. It’s easy to denounce ‘pataphysicists as charlatans but it’s also impossible to deny the real influence ‘pataphysics has had in art and theory; one can argue that our world is permeated by its effects now more than ever, inherent to what Jean Baudrillard called “Integral Reality,” which will be covered later.

The inventor of ‘pataphysics, 19th century French writer Alfred Jarry, had a method of writing some of his books that relates to my own. He was known for writing what first appear as serious books chock-full of quotes and citations from various official sources on serious subjects - all the same he would haphazardly misattribute or even outright make up the quotes and information. The point was to create a seamless and plausibly sensible experience that could pass as authentic based on what would otherwise be condemned by formal academia as irresponsible nonsense. This method isn’t meant to invalidate its alleged sources and topics but to expand their validity. If there is any critique going on, it’s to challenge the formal exclusivity of the subjects being dealt with, to put them in new, surprising, and extreme contexts not possible under normal

circumstances, and to expand the imagining of things previously thought to be settled, or unthinkable. Jean Baudrillard, a self-proclaimed 'pataphysicist and follower of Jarry who attributed one of his most famous quotes to a passage in Ecclesiastes that doesn't exist, says of the method; "It is not ridicule. It's an inflation." (Pataphysics, 2002)

How this relates to my own writing in the graphic novel is that a very significant amount of the 'spontaneous' dialogue spoken by the various characters are either exact quotes or simplified references to several authors, primarily Baudrillard but also Frank Herbert, Slavoj Zizek, Ludwig Wittgenstein, and Jacques Lacan. In putting various authors' ideas in dialogue with each other through the characters, the theory becomes 'animated' in a special context previously unimagined in ways that may allow for new dimensions to be experienced. For example, reading a paragraph about the difference between evil and misfortune might be interesting, but reading the same paragraph as spoken dialogue from a character who plays with a deadly spider while tensely engaged in an awkward armed standoff for spying on their leaders during a secret mission in the Cuban jungle might be said to add something special. The drama of the environments and characters themselves, some of whom explicitly conceptually embody specific aspects and conflicts of various theories, adds a new, sometimes meta, and immediately seamless dimension to experiencing the original sources. While knowledge of their original context is not necessary, footnotes and references will be included in the published version. Perhaps it's misappropriation, but I think it also seeks, like the true science fiction mentioned earlier, "to revitalize, to reactualize, to rebanalize fragments of simulation..."

However, this affirmation of Baudrillard's that 'pataphysics is an "inflation" of things is not in contradiction to the statement "True Science Fiction, [...], would not be fiction in expansion, with all the freedom and 'naivete' which gave it a certain charm of discovery." On how "[True Science Fiction] would, rather, evolve implosively, in the same way as our image of the universe," 'Pataphysics treats all phenomena as equally wonderful. This frees us from the problems of deciding if something is or isn't officially "authentic" for whatever reason. To elucidate this idea performatively, Jarry's first play, *Ubu Roi* (1896), starred a viciously insane but playfully childlike character endowed with godlike qualities named Ubu, who would, among other things, fart reality into existence. The first word of the play was an exuberant "Shit!" (The play was an immediate flop with walkouts and formal imputations of obscenity, however, it achieved moderate success when adapted to a puppet show for young adults shortly after). The sentiment of these marvelous farts

is echoed by Baudrillard claiming “For Pataphysics, all phenomena are absolutely gaseous.” (Pataphysics, 2002)

This idea of the FTLOG having the capacity to print matter and a divine delinquent who farts reality into existence on a whim I think shares some dramatic affinity with each other along with the Sorcerer’s Apprentice in terms of moral apprehensions of each “magic’s” application - however with ‘pataphysics, even morality is “totally gaseous.” The apprehension found in each of these examples is in how things can “get ahead” of us. Where humans formerly used to be the supposed reason of things, things can take on their own reasons, the power relationship between puppeteer and puppet become confused. When a system inflates or ‘explodes’ up to and beyond its limits (which is the goal of ‘pataphysics), a kind of reversal or equal ‘implosion’ occurs simultaneously – something similar occurs in Sudden Light, which will be explored via the idea of readymade later on. This unsettling reversion of the “natural order” is part of what Baudrillard described in The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact as “[...] ‘the supremacy of the object,’ a recognition that it is not the subject and its desire, but the object and its seduction that orders the world.” This challenges our subjectivity, some say fatally – the more looming sinister possibilities presented by runaway AI implementation provide easy examples of this. Speaking of these morally apprehensive effects and on the ongoing real-world blurring of science and fiction, a subject I’ll return to, a relevant theory called the Breit-Wheeler effect was proven and demonstrated in 2021. It’s a theoretical sub-atomic process claiming the equation $E=mc^2$ is reversible, that light is matter and matter is light, so perhaps my project will be more than ‘pataphysical entertainment sooner than expected (but hopefully not). (J. Adam, American Physical Society)

Jean Baudrillard's Influence

My primary inspiration and source of material in *Sudden Light* is the self-proclaimed 'pataphysicist and 'terrorist and nihilist in theory,' Jean Baudrillard. As a philosopher and cultural analyst, he was writing about the spooky extreme phenomena associated with the rapid proliferation of technology before it was cool, inspiring sci-fi authors such as William Gibson. Being a 'pataphysicist and theorist, his writing is not just critical theory but also a kind of art; it's meant to be read on his own terms as he's not always known to methodically explain how he comes to some of his conclusions like structuralists do. He's also known to oscillate between complete and passive modes of nihilism which sometimes makes his work unsettling or unclear as to whether the light at the end of the tunnel is really just an oncoming train (to give intimation to the esoteric title *Sudden Light*). Unlike other philosophers of the left, he offers no coherent political strategy aside from what he calls "fatal strategies," with respect to alleviating the human condition. An example of a fatal strategy is to come to an understanding that we very much are experiencing 'Utopia Realized' - this is it, we did it! However, as Žižek states in his documentary *The Pervert's Guide to Cinema*, the name for a fantasy "realized" is "nightmare." It's the same with this and all Utopias; disappointing. However, he insists this realized Utopia isn't evil (though misfortune is often mistaken for evil), rather it's the result of its collapse into the real, a hyperreality whose flows we need to adjust to – things have taken on their own reasons. Nonetheless, he does write that accidents and unforeseen events still pose the hopeful possibility for the only solution, of rendering what he calls "the gift of death," or "counter-gift" required for an annulation of "the system" that many on the left and right are both repulsed by and proven powerless to subvert or break free from satisfactorily.

... the worst error, the one committed by all our revolutionary strategists, is to think they can put an end to the system on the real plane: that is ... the imaginary the system itself imposes on them, a system that lives and survives only by getting those who attack it to fight on the terrain of reality, a ground that is always its own.

– Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*

I will elaborate on how the themes of reversibility and the gift of death play into my graphic novel's themes and content below. Baudrillard's other theories about simulation and hyperreality fit perfectly with the idea of a matter-printing machine capable of the

endless proliferation and circulation of authentic copies without origin, informational and material, while also providing enough depth for my characters to grapple with being in such an anxiety-inducing and precarious relationship to said technology, and by extension, all technology.

Science Fiction

Throughout history, many of the challenges and possibilities technology represents were at one point considered science fiction – these science fiction fantasies then might become “realized,” as with perhaps the more advanced application of the Breit – Wheeler effect one day. However, there may be a limit to our capacity to imagine new transcendent fantasies going forward if not already. Baudrillard claimed that both traditional science fiction and theory are destined for the same fate, that they are coming to an end as specific genres. The distance that allows the separation that permits a space for ideal or critical projection is closing. Where classic sci-fi added by multiplying the world’s possibilities, now it’s imploding into an era of models, models that no longer imagine the real, but models that apprehend the real with no room for fictional extrapolation. An example of this is what makes the dystopic TV show *Dark Mirror* so distressing; much of it is plausible if not in direct or thinly veiled reference to things that have already happened. Yes, it’s ‘fiction’ but the imaginary distance is gone, the subjects they depict can usually be said to be immanent, past theory and past fiction – they’re happening right now for real.

According to Baudrillard in his brief 1991 essay *Simulacra and Science Fiction*, there are three orders of simulacra and science fiction. What I’ve been describing so far pertains primarily to the transition from the second to the third order which can be seen in *Sudden Light*.

- (1) Natural, naturalistic simulacra: based on image, imitation and counterfeiting. They are harmonious, optimistic, and aim at the reconstruction, or the ideal institution, of a nature in God’s image.
- (2) Productive, productionist simulacra: based on energy and force, materialized by the machine and the entire system of production. Their aim is Promethean: world-wide application, continuous expansion, liberation of indeterminate energy (desire is part of the utopias belonging to this order of simulacra).
- (3) Simulation simulacra: based on information, the model, cybernetic play. Their aim is maximum operationality, hyperreality, total control.

Between the operative (the theatrical status, fantastic machinery, the “grand Opera” of technology), which corresponds to the first order, the operative (the industrial status, production and execution of power and energy), which corresponds to the second order, and the operational (the cybernetic

status, uncertainty, the flux of the “meta-technological”), which corresponds to the third order, all kinds of interferences can be produced today within the Science Fiction genre. But only the last order should be of any genuine interest to us.

– Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Science Fiction*

Why the last order should be the only one of genuine interest for Baudrillard is because he's interested in the kind of world that produces and is reflected in this sci-fi, one experiencing the full effects of as well as full integration into the experience or 'realization' of hyperreality. To him, the third order is the most 'pataphysical, most extreme, most interesting, and the most real, though paradoxically it also entails the implosion of not just reality, but imagination as well.

Sudden Light contains elements from all three orders, however where the characters find themselves plot-wise thematically is more grounded in the second order while being pushed into confronting the dilemmas of the third. The first 'operatic' order corresponds to the imaginary of the utopia, where imagination can run free. What defines the imaginary in psychoanalysis is wholeness, synthesis, autonomy, duality and similarity. The FTLOG is certainly unique and because of its novelty there is still a distance from its relationship to reality, this distance allows the space required for imagination. The only other similar example that I know of is the food replicator from the Original Series Star Trek, but there it is treated as a mundane domestic appliance of the first order of simulacra, not something they're existentially concerned about getting out of control. In Sudden Light, the leader of the FTLOG crew, Dr. Semyonova, or Dr. S, gives a few monologues in idealistic favour of its marvelous capacity, though often met with less starry-eyed enthusiasm. However, it's unclear if he totally believes his more utopian rhetoric after the fight between the computer scientist Dr. Willard and interrogator Specialist Dessler. Overall, he tries to establish a sentiment that it's possible to use the FTLOG to 'reconstruct' a more 'harmonious' situation, if not an 'ideal institution,' then one that is better – even if it's a benevolent lie. Despite this, he provides no coherent positive form to imagine, he only insinuates that the one that exists is negative – the point of this rhetoric is to present a scenario to the readers to imagine their own take on the possibilities of the FTLOG entering this open field of space without getting bogged down in the technical red tape of real consequences.

When I ask the typical person what they'd make if they had a magic machine that prints matter most will reply "money" (just wait till the CRA catches up!). Occasionally, I get some wild and unexpected responses – although these exceptions are mostly senseless if not outright trolling, they can still be fun to think about if not practical. I think my experience in receiving answers to this question also reinforces how our collective imaginations might be 'imploding' as the level of thought invested in this question has led to zero examples to adapt seriously, though maybe that's because my own imagination is lacking. To this effect, my own late grandmother uniquely replied to the question, "That thing sounds awful, I'd destroy the machine!" (perhaps a very wise choice given the second and third orders), although one person abstractly replied "happiness" which fits perfectly with the sentiment of first order of simulacra and sci-fi. On further consideration, is the abstract quality of happiness not really what is being unconsciously desired for as synonymous with the 'concrete' demand for money? "Naturalistic simulacra: based on image, imitation and counterfeiting" ... "of a nature in God's image." In terms of achieving the first order being "harmonious, optimistic, and aim[s] at the reconstruction, or the ideal institution," it seems money is the most spontaneously popular object by which to achieve this, who could seriously imagine otherwise? At this early stage, not even my characters can! In the graphic novel, despite some Utopian projection for imagination's sake, money so far remains the one universal dimension that basically every human subject must acknowledge and hold fast to as real. It might be the primary thing that mediates the distance necessary for imagination, from what I've gathered most people do not imagine anything without it being in the equation first.

As for the second or 'operative' order of science fiction and simulacra, to practical effect this is the order that the FTLOG and Sudden Light fits best; it is also the very definition of sci-fi in the strict sense. The Cuban 1991 Pan Am Games super stadium project as spectacle fits well here, how the FTLOG works, and the second order corresponds directly to production and the "Promethean: world-wide application, continuous expansion, liberation of indeterminate energy." There is theoretically virtually nothing beyond the FTLOG's ability to produce in a material sense, although plot-wise the machine is currently in a more 'primitive' state, but it's mentioned they're developing it to acquire more sophisticated productive capabilities. So, upon full realization, anything that can be imagined (within certain material limits) can also be (re)produced (and banalized) with relative ease. But so what? Surely, if simply giving others what they lack

and desire, like money, is the goal then why not just 'fitlog' enough of it for everyone in need? This proposition is similar to the second most common response to my query being "food for everyone," nice! However, we already produce enough food for more than 10 billion people, so this is missing the heart of the problem. The second order exists within a kind of vacuum of predictability, the means and metrics of success are often crystal clear, but the ends are much more complicated once things are released into the real world, all kinds of unforeseen blowback are bound to occur.

All liberation affects Good and Evil equally. The liberation of morals and minds entails crimes and catastrophes. The liberation of law and pleasure leads inevitably to the liberation of crime.

– Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*

This is where the FTLOG crew run up against the third, 'operational' order, the hyperreality induced by Integral Reality. Integral Reality is effectively the map that covers all the territory, making everything transparently open to view and accessible – the space from which one imagines closes as reality implodes into this explosion of immanent models that simulate reality. Baudrillard doubted that there is any imaginary domain that corresponds with this order at all, whatever separated the imaginary from the real is absorbed into the model alone as each subsequent order absorbs the preceding one. Like with the explosive production from the pre-industrial era into the implosive cybernetic one dominated by models today, these models no longer constitute an imaginary domain with reference to the real, they are an apprehension of the real with no room for fictional extrapolation, no room for transcendence, like with *Black Mirror*, and possibly with theory itself. In these circumstances the best-case scenario is usually survival as the third order is defined by total uncertainty in paradoxical proportion to the complete mapping of all the territory and total control.

Reality was able to surpass fiction, the surest sign that the imaginary has possibly been outpaced. But the real could never surpass the model, for the real is only a pretext of the model.

– Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Science Fiction*

The era of hyperreality is upon us when the answer to "is it real or not?" is overall "yes" like with the typical Phillip K. Dick novel. For Baudrillard, the real is anything that can be Xeroxed, simulated, or copied. The contrast between the second and third order can be related to the difference between an obvious and simply servile robot vs the cunning

human-like secret cyborg with questionable schemes. There can certainly be overlap or 'cross contamination' between the orders as well, as with how Sudden Light does not fit into any of the three orders entirely. Although the FTLOG makes perfect, even unique copies, it cannot be said that the characters are in total immersion of this hyperreal third order, a world without secrets or depth. There is still a distance between the real and imaginary. Nonetheless, some of the characters are aware they are standing on the precipice of this totalizing possibility and have the power to implement it to varying degrees and in conflicting ways, creating drama as mentioned earlier. Here the dynamic between Dr. Willard and Spc. Dessler is interesting. Spc. Dessler, via her psychopathic ability to spontaneously read people, already inhabits a kind of world without secrets or depth yet fights to preserve said secrets, while Dr. Willard, by virtue of being autistic, has difficulty with spontaneously reading others and just so happens to push for making everything open to view via technology – they both want what they lack.

Since the world is on a delusional course, we must adopt a delusional standpoint towards the world. Better to die from extremes than starting from the extremities.

– Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*

Dr. S represents a kind of uncertain middle ground in understanding that the extremes of either position is unbearable – he stands opposed to hegemonic Integral Reality yet is wary that they might become something worse if they oppose it directly. On that note, my characters only claim to be “communists” insofar as they betray the term, they are also not interested in forming or managing any governments. The only solution is:

To challenge the system with a gift to which it cannot reply – except by its own death and collapse.

– Baudrillard, quoted in *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*, p4

The Gift of Death

A white elephant, as it were. The FTLOG is capable of providing this in certain circumstances, the erection of the super stadium being just a symbolic indication of having this capacity. Today, the rapid advancement of AI has a similar symbolic capacity – it's framed as a desirable gift to humankind yet has unimaginably disruptive potential. Nonetheless, from the majority of those who are and will be affected, there has been little to no effective reply in rejecting this gift thus far. The big challenge for me and for the FTLOG crew is not to imagine the death and collapse of "the system," but what to propose replacing it with exactly – not even Baudrillard could do this confidently, the sentiment that it's possible to actualize an ideal scenario is the level of first order simulacra, an abstraction. Perhaps for the sake of continuing this story, it might not be necessary to pull a sublime Hail Mary within the Sudden Light world but continue to ruminate in an entertaining way over its possibilities and limits for the sake of stimulating the readers to imagine and relate to things occurring today from new perspectives. In this vein of proceeding, it can be said to be an exercise in what Baudrillard described as 'speaking evil.'

To speak evil is to describe the growing hegemony of the powers of good and, at the same time, their inner faltering, their suicidal crumbling, their reversion, their outgrowth and separation into parallel universes once the dividing line of the Universal has been crossed.

– Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

The Future Possible Directions of Sudden Light

So how will the story end? In terms of the plot's direction going forward, overall, I've arrived at four options.

- 1) The machine is destroyed somehow; this is boring, though it might make an interesting moral exercise.
- 2) The FTLOG crew continue to act in their 'terroristic' mode of strange, provocative and symbolically seductive interventions and dealing with the consequences. This would make for a fairly reliable source of drama, however seduction is impossible to master so these "spontaneous" outcomes on my end would have to be essentially fabricated, simulated, a fiction rather than anything approximating real. I can't guarantee that the USA would react to the super stadium like it does in the story, but this scenario is fun to imagine and particularly plausible.
- 3) Due to some kind of unexpected threat to the FTLOG crew or the world, they are forced to reluctantly implement their own form of hyperreal Integral Reality: total control. This plot, unlike a utopia, could work like Frank Herbert's God Emperor of Dune in that the systems of control are made so unbearable that they provoke rebellion so much so, as secretly orchestrated by the FTLOG crew, to force an explosive exodus so radical that no total control over humanity would ever be possible to achieve again. This feels like a turtles all the way down kind of approach to power. It would also probably require space travel which I'm not a big fan of - Baudrillard wrote that space conquest promotes either the de-realizing of human space or the reversion of it into a simulated hyperreality.
- 4) Multiple FTLOGs occur, some of them end up in the hands of others not in cooperation with the FTLOG crew. A kind of creative arms race ensues, things get incredibly desperate and unpredictable. I like this prospect the best, it can incorporate elements from all three preceding options which gives it more flexibility, more opportunity for drama and bizarre situations to encounter. This would also eliminate the need to seriously consider and simulate more 'realistic' situations that go along with works of historic reimagining. There could be unrestricted potlach, a sudden superabundance of gifts and counter gifts, more extreme phenomena, greater moral ambiguity and drama.

The Readymade, Simulation, Hyperreality And The Theoretical Effects Of Fitlogging A Super Stadium For The 1991 PanAm Games In Cuba

Regarding the radical “explosive/implosive” possibilities of production presented by a matter-printing machine, I think the historic concept of the “readymade” has significant relevance. The term was coined by Marcel Duchamp who was also a member of Jarry’s College de ‘Pataphysique. For Duchamp, these readymades needed to be selected in a state of indifference and total absence of good or bad taste, of which his Fountain-piece, signed ‘by R. Mutt’ is exemplary. It’s also not coincidental that the super stadium created for the Cuban 1991 Pan Am Games in Sudden Light resembles it, theoretically and physically. Both the stadium and the Fountain, during their time, elicit strong reactions and crisis in terms of what had been viewed as the accepted traditional struggles and modes of production and consumption which they both circumvent entirely.

The end of this history saw the banality of art merge with the banality of the real world – Duchamp’s act, with its automatic transference of the object, being the inaugural (an ironic) gesture in this process. The transference of all reality into aesthetics, which has become one of the dimensions of generalized exchange... All this under the banner of a simultaneous liberation of art and the real world.

– Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

The explosion of readymades simultaneously signified an implosion in the value of art’s capacity for transcendent meaning, and ironically, to dismiss its function as art necessitates one having already (tacitly) thought of it as art in the positive before coming to this ‘negative’ conclusion. On this point of irony, when the lack of something is made known, it can be registered as a presence in the affirmative. Therefore the readymade, like ‘pataphysics, frees us from the formal conundrums of deciding and measuring how authentic art is. This indifference in treating banal/profane things “as if” they were authentic/sacred art (and vice versa) has become a widely accepted norm, particularly in advanced neoliberal western-style democracies. I chose the form of a stadium because of its obvious association with spectacles, but in a meta sense this particular stadium is itself “the spectacle.” In Sudden Light, this event provokes a reaction from the US on par to the original Cuban missile crisis’s threat of atomic oblivion, therefore demonstrating that this innocent stadium is not merely a spectacle, or “opium of the masses.”

[...] To Baudrillard [Guy] Debord's analysis is already obsolete because we are no longer an audience to a spectacle but instead we are a part of simulation.

– Dr. Jason Royce Lindsey, Baudrillard's Simulated Politics and Debord's Agents of Detournement

A simulation is the replacement of the world with a kind of substitute universe, a counter-world of signs. Often, it's even better than the real thing – this was part of the thrust of Baudrillard's argument when he agreed to cover the Gulf War as a journalist by controversially staying at home in Paris and watching it unfold on CNN. The technical reality was the same as all wars but seeing the poetry of the American technological superiority televised night after night with exciting blow by blow commentary and instant replays on loops like popular sporting events, Baudrillard claims these curated images constitute where the actual war was taking place, where it mattered most. Many of the soldiers who participated in the war reported having very little idea of what was going on around them despite being there 'for real' until they got home and watched the tapes where it all made sense. The techniques used were a great improvement over the ones used for the Vietnam war; here Baudrillard claims a turning point occurs in that the Gulf War was not a conventional war but a war on reality, now not even war can be said to be real, it's become hyperreal. The FTLOG can do in material reality what CNN and others do to the reality of images; endless production in any possible variation – the things they produce are not 'real,' they're hyperreal. This super stadium, like the readymade and groundbreaking CNN coverage of the Gulf War, is a symbol that spells banal "obsolescence" in vibrantly ominous vapourwavy neon by breaking with the established political and technical struggles formerly associated with production and consumption, in a sense, pulling the rug out from under whatever was at that time considered technical reality by the prevalent hegemonies and presenting a seductive substitute universe that replaces it.

[...] it is enough to elevate any object to uselessness to turn it into a work of art. This is precisely what the 'ready-made' does, when it simply withdraws an object from its function, without changing it in any way, and thereby turns it into a gallery piece. It is enough to turn the real itself into a useless function to make it an art object, prey to the devouring aesthetic of banality.

– Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact, p 111

The stadium as readymade does not withdraw its function as a stadium (having many similarities to a gallery), for that it functions perfectly. What is withdrawn is the former technical relationship to production which theoretically implies, for the most part, a withdrawal or erasure of former human relationships to production, now obsolete. Marx accounted for this with his theory on the relationship between use value, market value and exchange value however Baudrillard provided a fourth value that the others do not account for fully; sign value – it's irrational but redoubtable, 'pataphysical even. Obsolescence happens all the time throughout history, however, the potential operational implications of the FTLOG intersect deeply into almost every discipline of human experience and values all at once. These withdrawal effects ripple out into anthropology, consumption, and metaphysics - everything associated with these prior modes of production. The human (and corporate) subjectivity is rendered a passive object "elevated" to uselessness, to art, as the stadium does not need to be used like an actual stadium to fulfil its symbolically nullifying/reversing purpose. This nullifying, and therefore implosive, symbolic quality is something that has a viral effect on reality, the FTLOG would not only change our material world, but our symbolic relationship to the world and each other in ways that transcend not only space, but also time and what it means to be human. What a generous gift!

Similarly, old objects, being obsolete and hence useless, automatically acquire an aesthetic aura. Their being distant from us in time is the equivalent of Duchamp's artistic act; they too become "ready-mades," nostalgic vestiges resuscitated in our museum universe.

We might extrapolate this aesthetic transfiguration to the whole of material production. As soon as it reaches a threshold where it is no longer exchanged in terms of social wealth, it becomes something like a giant Surrealist object, in the grip of a devouring aesthetic, and everywhere takes its place in a kind of virtual museum. And so we have the museification, like a 'ready-made', of the whole technical environment in the form of industrial wasteland.

– Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*

This "industrial wasteland" and museification isn't limited to non-organic (re)production either, it extends even to our bodies – the FTLOG crew grimly joke about cloning and the ridiculous extremes of possible genetic alteration. The human body can be a kind of readymade.

Seduction, Provocation, Intelligence And Stupidity

On the characters' motives in relation to the significance of this super stadium, I wish to leave it ambiguous as they never really explain why they 'fitlog' it other than to "seduce;" subtler than provocation, without the blackmail or declaration of intent. Seduction is when a topological cut is made in the established symbolic discourse to begin a new unexpected one. It's interesting to note that this is only seduction in the context of suspended disbelief in this fiction as fantasy, whereas in the context of my writing about it is more of a provocation; I'm declaring my intent and, in a way, am "blackmailed" by and "blackmailing" my readers insofar as there are certain mutual parameters and expectations we desire to be fulfilled. Provocation is structured as; "I know you want to be seduced so let me seduce you" – which is basically the opposite of what the FTLOG crew wish to communicate publicly through the super stadium, hence the mysteriousness and secrecy of their overall plan so far.

The reactions of my friends upon describing the event of this super stadium to others range from incredulity, "of all the amazing things they could make, a stadium seems very silly, even immoral" (provocation) to more vaguely positive sentiment in that the idea is indeed very clever, but in a way difficult to put into words (seduction?). To both responses, sure, it was meant to provoke by being stupid and in bad taste, but in doing so is this not in perfect accord with what is demanded of us by not only contemporary art but virtually all popular media today? 'Pataphysics - It's not ridicule, it's an inflation!

Given the (theoretical) power that the FTLOG and their crew have, I can imagine their future "interventions" being equally wacky. They don't need to develop some kind of coherent intelligent strategy to follow, as that would probably necessitate the self-destruction of the FTLOG which ends the story rather early. However, this lack of "intelligence" doesn't subtract from its power in the least – I have Dr. S speak the words of Baudrillard in relation to the future challenges facing the characters –

Power itself must be abolished – and not solely because of a refusal to be dominated, which is at the heart of all traditional struggles – but also, just as violently, in the refusal to dominate. Intelligence cannot, can never be in power because intelligence consists of this double refusal.

– Baudrillard, The Agony of Power

This “provocation” acts as a challenge that aims to make the provoked act in a way that is equally ridiculous, essentially, with their rejection paradoxically being a kind of strange affirmation. Baudrillard defines power as a presence being synonymous with reality insofar as they are at each other’s mercy, power is at odds with simulation but can still grasp simulation “as if” it was reality to control it; power is a kind a speech that cannot be replied to. Baudrillard shifted his view of this from initially being in line with Nietzsche, in that this is simply the way things are, to it being unbearable. Power allows no contradictions, a total power or perfect reality is described by Baudrillard not as the “Kingdom of Heaven” but as “Hell,” a phantom reality we experience like a phantom pain. A total kind of power, like Integral Reality, can no longer bring itself into play, except against itself, by all kinds of internal failures.

At the height of its mastery, it can now only lose face. This is, literally, the “Hell of Power”.

– Jean Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

This would hold true even if the FTLOG crew acted in the most sincere and morally benevolent ways imaginable, the “cursed share” of power cannot be neutralized, any attempt to do so is described by Baudrillard as signing one’s own death warrant via a kind of cannibalization by one’s own immune system.

It is against this world become entirely operational, objective and without alternative that the denial of reality, the disavowal of reality, develops.

If the world is to be taken en bloc, then it is at that point we reject it en bloc. There is no other solution. This is a rejection similar to the biological rejection of a foreign body.

– Jean Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

So, if intelligence cannot be in power, then how about stupidity?

When the hypothesis of intelligence ceases to be sovereign and becomes dominant, then it is the hypothesis of stupidity that becomes sovereign. A stupidity that might be said to be a sort of higher intelligence, on the verge of radical thought – that is to say, beyond truth.

– Jean Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

To clarify, Baudrillard wrote that one makes a contract with intelligence, but a pact with stupidity. A pact is distinct from a contract in that it is not something of visibility, whether it be legal or moral, but a matter of secrecy and collusion. To quote myself as specialist Dessler; "Intelligence is overrated" – her successful methods in two chapters are difficult to reason with given the accepted norms and undergone with some secret intent which others end up colluding with to her advantage despite their intelligent resistance. This is like how the FTLOG crew will operate publicly on the world stage, starting with the super stadium. Although they proceed in vague opposition to a totalizing Integral Reality (though they use words like hegemony, or world order), Integral Reality can itself be said to operate in a way that the FTLOG crew can similarly achieve, but much more quickly.

Integral Reality

What I call Integral Reality is the perpetrating on the world of an unlimited operational project whereby everything becomes real, everything becomes visible and transparent, everything is 'liberated', everything comes to fruition and has a meaning (whereas it is in the nature of meaning that not everything has it).

Whereby there is no longer anything on which there is nothing to say.

– Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

Integral Reality is the complete networking, categorizing, recognizing, policing, and optimizing of all things, the full realization of which is what Baudrillard describes as “The Perfect Crime.” Fortunately, it’s impossible to achieve in totality, regardless there also seems to be an irresistible drive for its advancement and realization. It, like ‘pataphysics, generates the necessary precursor environment for hyperreality, taking things to casual extremes up to and beyond their limits that can only be understood and interacted with on its own terms. Anything outside its frame of reference, that doesn’t compute or play along with its “infinite” interface, is treated like it doesn’t really exist. I think the key differences between those who practice ‘pataphysics and Integral Reality is the level of self-awareness, of irony vs weightiness, secret distance vs immediate identification – an awareness of the negative vs over-positivity. Integral Reality promises to make all things relatable, translatable, accessible, even the capacity to see through each other’s eyes clearly - a subject the film *Minority Report* dealt with. For those who participate, it promises to “explode” maximized happiness, freedom, safety, and productivity though simultaneously it “implodes” into maximized victim mentality, Stockholm syndrome, terrorism, and waste. This is part of what Baudrillard described as his “one great thought,” that of “reversibility,” which can extend to virtually all phenomena when subjected to extremes.

The FTLOG crew overall have ambivalent feelings towards the subject of Integral Reality, some are enthusiastically for its full implementation, like Dr. Willard, others are opposed to it (at least in theory), like Spc. Dessler, and others are warily anxious but pragmatic about it, like Dr. S, though he has more sympathy for Dessler’s opposition. It’s what they could be said to be overall politically opposed to in a popular sense (“The Soviets are back to undermine and take over the world order!”) but they are also in the

best technical position to implement it on a level previously unimaginable, especially for the 1990s on the eve of rapid cybernetic development. Why there is conflict amongst the crew is because of subjects pertaining to said reversibility with either extreme being ultimately unbearable - Spc. Dessler and Dr. Willard both accuse each other of unleashing terror on the world for implementing an Integral Reality with the FTLOG or by withholding it, and they're both right in different ways.

Wherever exchange is impossible, what we encounter is terror. Any radical otherness at all is thus the epicentre of a terror: the terror that such otherness holds, by virtue of its very existence, for the normal world. And the terror that this world exercises upon that otherness in order to annihilate it.

– Baudrillard, *The Transparency of Evil*

Every easy solution, pushed to its extreme – Integral Reality, integral freedom, integral happiness, integral information [...] – finds a response in a violent abreaction: [...] all the forms of secret repulsion in respect of this ideal normalization of existence. Which proves that there still exists everywhere, in each of us, resisting the universal beatification, an intelligence of evil.

– Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*

An unnerving vision of a “total” Integral Reality might be recognized in the exaggerated form of the 1999 film, *The Matrix*. The film references Baudrillardian ideas directly when Morpheus says, “Welcome to the Desert of the Real,” which is when the map becomes more real than what it represents, as well as using one of Baudrillard’s books as a prop in homage to his ideas being a primary inspiration. However, the oversimplified framework of the red pill = reality vs blue pill = fantasy was thoroughly rejected and criticized by Baudrillard - “The Matrix is surely the kind of film about the Matrix that the Matrix would have been able to produce.” (Baudrillard, 2004). Žižek proposed a third pill for the film to accommodate a paradoxical position in his 2006 documentary *The Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* – what Baudrillard describes as the Intelligence of Evil cannot be cured with a pill, like how simply leaving Plato’s cave doesn’t guarantee access to a privileged form of reality and freedom from illusion. Yes, *The Matrix* is a machine that generates fictions, but if you remove the symbolic fictions that structure our reality you lose reality itself.

Hope, if we were still to have it, would be hope for intelligence of – for insight into – good. Now, what we have left is intelligence of evil, that is to say, intelligence not of a critical reality, but of a reality that has become unreal by dint of positivity, that has become speculative by dint of simulation.

The greater the positivity, the more violent is the – possibly silent – denial.

– Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

The more intense this hegemonic process of forced integration and integral reality is, the more singularities will rise against it.

– Baudrillard, The Agony of Power

I wanted to explore in some depth the relationship between the idea of Integral Reality and the inevitable blowback it provokes because of this intelligence of evil in chapter 7 where we witness a disagreement and physical altercation between Dr. Willard and Spc. Dessler, each representing a theoretical antipode. Dr. Willard describes an objective world made totally transparent, abundant, and safe via technology, where Dessler insists on recognizing the implicit negative dimension that it cannot account for and mobilizes in equal capacity to the positive. “Some things will never fit into the network you describe.”

Because it is here to counter a void, the whole enterprise of simulation and information, this aggravation of the real and knowledge of the real, merely gives rise to an ever greater uncertainty. Its profusion and relentlessness simply spreads panic.

– Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

Integral Reality presumes everything can be exchanged in equivalence, anything that cannot simply isn't real, doesn't exist. There are many things that can be said to be impossible to exchange such as death and destiny, but the zero point of which begins with the concept of the soul, a total depth beyond morality – it's technically nothing, if not The nothing. The soul does not enter the relationship of value and equivalence, it does not acquire definite meaning, it does not signify, it can only be viewed in negative terms. This exposes the inadequacy of Integral Reality where everything is symbolized, its coherence becomes threatened and causes those invested in it to double down as a kind of shelter. The soul is responsible for the barrier to make the world meaningful in value terms, to endow it with meaning, the opposite of what Integral Reality does which cannot account for it, nor the Intelligence of Evil.

Dr. Willard uses Ludwig Wittgenstein's famous quote, "Whereof one cannot speak, thereof one must remain silent" as a kind of coup de grace to Dessler's arguments, however this quote does not mean what might be superficially understood, Dr. Willard (and initially myself) included. The Vienna Circle, an analytical logical positivist group composed of linguists, mathematicians, and statisticians who were trying to make philosophy more scientific as opposed to people like Heidegger who tried to make it more poetic, used this quote as their proverbial tip of the spear to lampoon their enemies. However, when Wittgenstein found out, he wrote them a strongly worded letter of cease and desist insisting that "whereof one cannot speak," the silent part, was the only thing worth a damn, they had misunderstood and were essentially committing a form of intellectual barbarism. The Vienna Circle ignored him. I can speculate further here in terms of Slavoj Zizek's claim that "there is no ethnic cleansing without poetry" and how Heidegger, despite his brilliant advocacy for poetics, was able to participate in Nazi affairs without ever writing about a philosophical contradiction, to how Dessler casually uses violence to illustrate the point that overall, the extremes of either antipode are very much intolerable. It's no coincidence that Spc. Dessler's beloved occupation is that of a sadistic interrogator and poetry being described as the torture of language, of pushing meaning beyond its limits.

Though Dr. Willard and Spc. Dessler occupy opposite theoretical antipodes, it can also be said that they share the enlightened centrist position of agnosticism; despite Dessler's claim to believe in the invisible, she is not exactly a "true believer" whether or not her self-interested opportunistic ruse is sincere. It is convenient and easy to dissociate from formal religious contradictions by simply declaring oneself an atheist as an antithesis despite secular culture being saturated with all the same religious metaphysics. The name of the machine "For The Love of God" can be said to be in congruence with this theme – where Jean-Paul Sartre wrote "If there is no God, everything is permitted," Lacan said the inverse, "If there is no God, then everything is prohibited." Either way, this kind of identification concerning beliefs can be used similarly to fashion, as a field of play and uncertainty where the reality of power is reduced to signs yet can also truly be a matter of life and death, as part of the conflict between Dr. Willard and Spc. Dessler aims to illustrate.

[...] It [agnosticism] is the enlightened refusal to let oneself be caught in the trap of reality that is fetishized in its principle, a reality that is itself caught in the trap of the signs of reality.

– Baudrillard, *The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact*

In *Sudden Light*, it is shown that the underground part of their secret Antarctic facility has an exceptionally high number of skilled autistic crewmembers involved in the development of the FTLOG, including Dr. Willard. Baudrillard wrote about computer networks as having autistic characteristics, that there is even a kind of ‘autistic culture.’ Critically attributing autistic qualities to non-human subjects may be a particularly French academic predilection; where else have we heard of movements for ‘post-autistic economics’ (2000) being proposed seriously? The term means (or meant) something much more general in French, although using it as a pejorative is clearly problematic, like Spc. Dessler does (a problematic person, for drama!) – everyone else treats the autists either neutrally or with respect – Dr. S says “[...] like it or not, we need each other [...].” The French critical sentiment is supposed to refer to the reliance on the excessively self-contained, self-referential operation of information networks.

Baudrillard ends his book *The Transparency of Evil* with the sentence –

The Other is what allows me not to repeat myself for ever.

In lieu of an “Other,” something beyond understanding, these days everything is described in terms of sets of translatable differences that can be exchanged symbolically, but otherness is not the same thing as difference. Difference can be said to be what destroys otherness, a limited resource that is rapidly running out as the depths of space, the ocean, our DNA and our unconscious are currently being unraveled and mapped out in excruciating detail, hence its enormous and sought after value on the material and psychological stock exchange. Now we go sifting through the rubble of catastrophes to find it, even madness is being accounted for within the subtle toils of various science and psychology departments in the service of an Integral Reality.

Where the Other was, there has the Same come to be.

And where there is no longer anything, there the Other must come to be. We are no longer living the drama of otherness. We are living the psychodrama of otherness, [...] courtesy of analytic metadiscourses. Otherness has become socio-dramatic, semiodramatic, melodramatic. [...] For difference is itself a Utopia: [...]

– Baudrillard, The Transparency of Evil

In *Sudden Light*, Spc. Dessler questions whether Alan Turing could pass his own Turing test. Curiously, while describing the parameters in which his test should be taken in his essay *Computing Machinery and Intelligence* (1950), he emphasized that the room of the human subject(s) needed to be shielded somehow from extrasensory telepathic perception. He seemed to take it for granted that people could communicate “outside” the regulation of the computer interface, effectively as a kind of madness or magic, a variable he thought was a risk to the integrity of the test if not controlled by technical intervention. This specific precaution is of course endearingly naïve, today the evidence for ESP is dubious or marginal at best, however the spirit of his concern was perhaps not too far off in the form of an Intelligence of Evil.

As recounted in *Sudden Light*, part of what accelerated the collapse of the USSR was a reliance placed in their computers to predict and manage every aspect of the economy, including the fashion, novels, music, and movies - “we know you want to be seduced so let us seduce you.” This was a site of struggle throughout the course of the USSR – as illustrated in Adam Curtis’s 1992 BBC TV documentary series *Pandora’s Box*. In the episode titled “The Engineers’ Plot,” power oscillated between the politicians and the engineers, both promising the ideal future, both blaming each other when it didn’t materialize. The computers they used were absurdly primitive compared to what’s available today, but nonetheless at that time the engineers involved insisted they were fulfilling their intended purpose perfectly, it was the delay in their findings implementation that was the alleged problem. If only things could be carried out in ‘real time!’ – Baudrillard viewed this sentiment as the definition of Integral Reality as a Utopia, ‘real time’ doesn’t exist yet it’s still being imposed on us in many ways. The data was clear and abundant, however despite the immense investment the predictions consistently never matched reality, no matter how many variables were accounted for. It wasn’t the machines that were failing, it was the people – engineers and politicians cannot account for evil, nor the Intelligence of Evil, unpredictable existential resistance (not just corruption) emerges on all fronts in ways that insult the rational. The forces of nature and natural disasters that they contend with are not evil, evil isn’t necessarily even opposed to good, rather what they try to mitigate (ideally) is misfortune. Evil isn’t a form we can understand, it’s a form that understands us, a structural attempt to redeem a lack, which is the price we pay for language, only generates more lack. An Axis of Good that aims to

eliminate evil via frontal attack can only miss. The theoretical deadlock between Dr. Willard and Spc. Dessler will probably never be resolved completely; it's not just a senseless one-off internal conflict amongst the FTLOG crew, it's pervasive and ongoing today on a macro and interpersonal level.

Let us suppose two antagonistic trends:

Integral Reality: the irreversible movement towards the totalization of the world.

The Dual Form: the reversibility internal to the irreversible movement of the real.

It seems evolution (or involution) towards an integral universe is irresistible. But it seems, at the same time, that the dual form is indestructible.

There is no way for us to guess how this contradictory double movement will work itself out. We are faced with a confrontation between a dual form and total integration which cannot be resolved.

[...] The integral drive and the dual drive: this is the Great Game.

– Baudrillard, The Intelligence of Evil or the Lucidity Pact

Conclusion

To conclude; I feel like I've only begun to scratch the surface of all the things that have and will happen in Sudden Light, nonetheless I hope this provides a good overview or artist's statement that grasps the big picture in terms of the general subject matter being dealt with along with my own aims and ambitions for its continuation. Much work and learning are yet to be done, but thankfully I've found that with this method and great sources like Baudrillard, the content and dramas I express tend to surprisingly write themselves, literally and figuratively. The process of writing this essay has been invaluable in helping bring the theoretical scope of things into clearer focus in terms of where this story has been and where it is going, especially for myself and hopefully my readers. With this established, I can confidently say that I've firmly set foot on the ethereally vast, brand new, and mysterious but fertile continent that is Sudden Light and am aching (such agony, such power!) to continue exploring and mapping out what I discover in the creative process to share with others. To Sudden Light and beyond!

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Appendix. Graphic Novel Draft Materials

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Description:

The first draft of the graphic novel Sudden Light is available upon request at qsimpson7@gmail.com