Preface

Seduction is usually regarded as a natural part of the male/female process, and it is associated with the idea of deceit. This concept has a wide range of figurations and applications but the main goal here will be to expand the natural understanding of this thematic concept, showing its multiple range and variety of approaches in the political, philosophical, psychological and artistic perspectives. The book *Seduction in Popular Culture, Psychology, and Philosophy* presents a collection of academic essays that cover different areas and forms of access to the topic, in the attempt to show the strength, as well as the complexity, of a concept that is part of everyone’s daily life. This book looks to discuss this vast notion in three main different perspectives. How was this concept addressed in the history of philosophy? This means addressing different authors and fields of investigation. Is there a more vital impact of the concept in Rhetoric than in Political Philosophy? Or is it mainly a moral concept? Is there a vital ethical polarity in seduction regarding temptation? Or is seduction a different form of thinking power? Within the history of ideas there is a wide platform of reflection from Politics to Science, or advertising and consumption. Seduction, and more specifically seduction intended as manipulation and enticement, plays a crucial role in rhetoric and ethics. What is the boundary between persuasion and manipulation? What counts as deceit and what is a legitimate and acceptable persuasion process? Ethical and logical issues are involved in defining this subtle and often tricky line. History is full of seducers. Some are more evident than others. The challenge is also to question art, departing form the concept of seduction. All the possible interpretations, its amplitude and connections, will allow to enlighten the concept, as seduction itself could be interpreted as a form of art. We aim here to go beyond the strict interpretation that would be directly related to sex, relationships, or in the extreme related to Psychosis, trauma and desire. The focus of the book is much wider, as it addresses the psychological mechanisms triggered by manipulation, advertising, emotions and decision. This means to question the borders of rationality and emotion and the role of seduction in this process.
The concept of Seduction is something of daily use but has not been addressed in terms of its multiplicity in the academic field. It’s a general concept that has multiple access doors that we intend to present in a systematic and condensed proposal that could be a referential title for those who wish to study this concept. This means to build a reference anchor, that would constitute a valid starting point of study. From Philosophy to Politics and Cinema, the general goal would be to give the readers a broader perspective of the topic and a solid doorway, hopefully a gate. Since there is nothing published that one could compare to, this book could constitute a multidisciplinary entrance with both academic range and general interest for a broader scope of readers. Although seduction is an invisible, but operative, concept in the construction of our present societies, it’s expected that this range of articles can build a possible key of interpretation for the outcome of the XXI Century. And why, or how, can this be true? Because the present time is obsessed with the new and the novelty. In a certain sense, those notions are the heart of the seduction process. We could also interpret it in the perfect opposite way: there is a certain boredom that needs to constantly refreshed by the new. The seduction is by this state of affairs a condition, simultaneously cause and effect, of the general state of boredom. It goes without saying that this is generally true regarding our western societies. More specifically, boredom means the need of people to feel alive. Has the proverbial humor says: and now for something completely different. It’s a sort of civilizational trilogy: enter, delete and refresh. Even when the old becomes new. An infernal cycle of boredom. No way out? Delete and refresh. The new is an obsession also towards age, or even better, aging. With all the death figures away from sight, it’s the image that becomes central. And a specific image: Youth. That is an exact conceptual correspondent of the new. We begin this new Century with a war inside our borders: old against new or vice-verse. The main role of the Media shows exactly this problem: the old and new generation war is a war of images. Sex sells such as violence, but let’s make it new. New wars, new sex, new everything. A new world is at your disposal. With this image, of course, comes selling the image. Seduction becomes desire. A new face, a new body, a new soul? Maybe someday. The desire to be someone else, to be somewhere else. Plastic surgery is obviously the top of the iceberg, reflecting this desire to be new, and to belong to a new world that doesn’t have wrinkles. One could say that there is nothing wrong with this new age, it’s just how things are. An old argument in a new world. But, is there really a problematic state of things to be questioned? First of all, let’s consider the implications, that ironically affects the youngest of the young: children. The overload of the new has a direct impact on the attention and focus of the children. This factor is widely studied by science and has a particular interest in the studies of Stiegler. What is at stake here is that the overload of the image, advertising and other phenomena, causes a deficit of attention and concentration. I would risk a
more radical interpretation: it causes desensitization. Not be sensible to yourself and to others. And even more radically, the dehumanization. This could mean a latent desire for a general war that would become a rupture in the present way of life. Because boredom, as we know, is, beyond a certain point, unbearable. Recovering the new transfigured in youth, we witness a certain capture of this new generations, not only in desire and seduction, but specifically in consumption. People aren’t just young, they are new consumers. This is a profound problem for the interpretation of Youth in general biological human terms. We are young; are you free? I believe this is not an alarmist perspective but, on the contrary, a merely observation of the facts. The surface as become our paradigm of the present. The surface of screens, skin, phones, computers, planet, etc. What, or, are there any consequences to this new paradigm? The death of the deep is one of them. The exclusion of others is also obvious. Other things and other people. The dehumanization is the isolation. There are a lot of beautiful and important things that need time, patience to see and listen. These things are the most important in the world: friendship, love, children, nature. The list is long. And they aren’t on the surface. But, there simply isn’t enough time for this. It’s just a Softwar. With a specific software: be quick, no time for it.

Beyond the negativity of seduction, in general terms, remains the critical effort of this book in a proposal of reflection about a concept that, submerged in oblivion, is still very active and alive in its practice. Its overexposed and paradoxically hidden. The lightness of the softwar deceives the gravity of the war. It’s always hard to separate seduction from manipulation. Maybe the answer is in this book. Maybe you, the reader, can discover important things in this book. If you have the time for it. Maybe it can seduce you to read more.

This is a book about seduction. About the many ways seduction can be understood, either as a social and individual practice, a psychological trait or a schema for manipulation. This is a book about the many forms the concept can assume in popular culture, and the many ways psychological and philosophical thought have dwelt with it. This is a book about the ways seduction is embodied in many of our contemporary artistic forms, from cinematic expressions to literary horror pieces. But this is also a book about the implications the concept of seduction has at the more varied levels, ranging from moral and cognitive terrains to the societal construction of processes of individual media consumption or exposition to media messages.

The book starting point is clearly the assumption that it is not possible to understand the works of seduction unless one understands why so many are seduced. Seduced by other. Seduced by images and works of art. Seduced by themselves or their imagined selves. This is why the book different chapters are in some cases more focused towards the epistemological exploitation of the concept, while others assume that is not possible to accurately define the term without previously study its different manifestations.
The different authors present in this book approach the concept in various manners that, considered as a whole, clearly contribute to a better understanding of the concept and call for further research on it. One could not expect anything else when we are talking of a concept that, although well engraved in our culture, has taken so many forms and allows for so many variable formulations. The organization of the book and the sequence of the chapters, does not imply any prior definitive formulation of the concept, neither is that our intention. We have tried to group the different chapters in accordance to their thematic unity in order to facilitate the exploration of this volume and its different chapters.

The first group consists of more foundational chapters that seek to frame the concept and its underlying categories. This section is named “Foundations” and the first chapter in this section - “The Seduction of Science: How Paradigms Can Lead One Astray” - is centered on the understanding of the concept of seduction via an analogy with the function of science’s paradigms as defined in the Kuhnian conception. This is applied at three levels: the metaphysical, psychological and social, in order to support the argument that such as paradigms interpret the world for us, they also get to say what is meaningful to consider as ‘science’ or a likely candidate for explanation, evidence or theory, that might get us closer to the ‘truth’. The work of science would then be that of seduction, the need to persuade or lure that also implies a deceit. The chapter explores different dimensions of ‘Seduction’ as a metaphor, a concept that has many aspects, from the phenomenology of seduction to its literary and moral counterparts. This initial chapter sets the terrain for further discussion of this understanding of the concept of seduction has something that belongs to the realm of artifice, trickery, and deception, and that can be explored along these different dimensions in accordance to variable paths, from artistic creation, to social and communicative actions. The second chapter in this section - “Seduction 3.0: seduction, rationality and will power” - explores the relation between seduction and cognitive behavior, namely when moral problems are at stake. The chapter starts by proposing a philosophically definition of what the author call “actions of seduction”, a particular type of individual and collective actions related to some forms of manipulation. The author then proceeds by investigating whether some action of seduction may be wrong because it interferes with deliberative capacities and with conscious cognitive processing, and ends by arguing that the ethical focus should be on willpower capacities, whose depletion – even partial – would be morally problematic. The chapter then concludes by summarizing a general framework to evaluate the morality of a given action of seduction, though contributing to an original accounting of seduction in relation with moral deliberation and the relation this has with individual cognitive performance. The third and final chapter in this section – “On Seduction: a romantic conversation” seeks to explore seduction as a metaphor in popular culture and, via a set of varied examples either in the fields of cinema, photography or other artistic practices, describe what seduction is.
The second section integrates a group of reflections on the different ways seduction is depicted and imagined in popular culture. This section is entitled “Seduction imagined in popular culture” and starts with the chapter “Everybody’s got a hungry heart: Kierkegaard and Hitchcock”, a discussion on the seducer as a form of life departing from the work of Kierkegaard and the manifestation of the seducer in Hitchcock’s *Vertigo*. The different forms and manifestations of seduction in popular culture, in particular in the context of different art forms such as cinema or literature, is also the object of “Seduction and Mutually Assured Destruction: The Modern Femme Fatale In ‘Gone Girl’”, that discusses the figure of the femme fatale as an illustration of the use of seduction as a stylistic figure in contemporary cinema. On “Horror’s seduction through art: Death Representation”, the author reflects on the role horror has as an instrument of seduction in different artistic practices and objects, a frame for the simultaneous use of repulsion and attraction in art. A final chapter in this section – “Postmodern Cinema of Seduction: Subaltern/folk-inspired Hindi film song and dance, and the art of deferral and play” is dedicated to the cinematic manifestations of seduction, the emergence of the topic and the role it has for a very particular type of non-western cinematic production: Indian Musicals.

The third and final section is entitled “Uses of seduction” concerns the practices of seduction and what they entail from a psychoanalytical, psychological and communicational point of view. The first chapter in this section – “Seduction in Works of Art” discusses the uses of seduction in works of art as embodied in a set of practices that can be better understood in the light of psychoanalytical reflection. Here, seduction is understood simultaneously as a phenomenon; a process, a strategy, and a principle, either a trait of human instinct or subjective behavior. This focus on the relation between the seducer and the seduced one, further explores seduction as a phenomenon that encompasses a subjective experiential dimension but also a social one directly related to its emergence as an event associated to specific social settings. The chapter on “Seduction and Surprise: Discovering Invisible Emotions for Commitments” also deals with the practices of seduction, but in this case by peeking on the ways surprise is integrated into practices of seduction in order to reinforce its emotional impact. The underlying suggestion of the chapter is that the connection between how seduction surprises us by unfolding different levels of emotional depth and how it enables the establishment of commitment, lies at the heart of every emotional situation, seduction though assuming itself as a core social and psychological trait of behavior. The next two chapters in this section both deal with the used of seduction in the context of media and advertising messages consumption. In “Social Psychology, the seduction of consumers” the author investigates the uses of seduction in advertising as a way to understand contemporary social traces of consumerism. The processes of persuasion, and the role the media have in society, but also advertising, as practices of seduction that reflect the ever
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growing dependence between processes of social cohesion and individual acts of media consumption, is also the object of “Rhetoric of seduction: From an iconoclastic advertising to a tautological culture”, a discussion on the role of advertising in contemporary society and its relation to the power of the visual in our culture. One final chapter in this section – “Skepticism and Seduction” is dedicated to the uses of seduction in philosophical and political thought and in particular the uses of seduction by the skeptic. In this final chapter we once again return to the ambiguous but prolific nature of the concept and the broader theoretical exploration it allows.

Altogether, the different chapters in this book contribute to a deeper understanding of the concept of seduction but, more importantly, depict the theoretical and conceptual potential the concept has in opening new avenues of reflection and discussion in many parallel areas, from philosophy to psychology, from political science to communication studies, though evidencing the relevance interdisciplinary grounded critical and scientific endeavors have nowadays.

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