Chapter 8
Seduction in Works of Art

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ABSTRACT
What is it about certain things that occupy our thought until we get hold of them, until we somehow possess them? Why is it that we hopelessly, predictably, inevitably fall for certain works of art? What is it about certain objects that seduce us? This chapter seeks to study the seductiveness of objects, something that also preoccupied Jean Baudrillard and is found at the core of his thinking. The work studies a very particular kind of object: the work of art, although consumption and captology, designed objects and other types of objecthood are also used as examples. The perspective adopted here, however, is not related to the historical or economic contexts of the objects. The truth about seduction will not be sought (it would deceive, anyway); or, indeed, an interpretation for the purposes of academic knowledge, which would kill it; or, again, its representation, which would be a flawed and false undertaking, if not impossible.

SEDUCTION AND BAUDRILLARD’S CRITIQUE OF PSYCHOANALYSIS

This chapter is concerned with the practice of seduction and with the subjective aspects of the relation, which will be examined through the study of its manifestation in the practices of art, in surrealist works such as Meret Oppenheim’s Breakfast in Furs and Man Ray’s Cadeau, as well as contemporary pieces such as Seducor (Seducer) by Naia del Castillo. Psychoanalysis, through Sigmund Freud and Jacques

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Lacan, and Jean Baudrillard’s critical monograph will be the intellectual territory of the analysis. It may seem strange to join these two approaches, as many of Baudrillard’s writings, including *The Ecstasy of Communication* (1988), *Seduction* (1990), and *Fatal Strategies* (1999), critique psychoanalysis. This thorny relationship is explored through seduction itself, bringing the two positions closer and developing a strategy to consider seduction in works of art.

Seduction is a phenomenon; it is also a process, a strategy, or a principle. The idea of seduction as principle integrates conceptions that consider it to be an instinct and behaviour. Seduction is understood as a principle that regulates relations in the world. Authors that adhere to this perspective see the relationship between seducer and seducee as primordial and all acts are acts of seduction. Seduction as process incorporates seduction as mechanics, system, and art. The seducer, through an act of seduction, entices the seducee. The emphasis is placed in the characteristics and qualities of the act. Seduction as phenomenon assimilates seduction as experience and as event. This category is concerned with the context in which the seducer commits the act of seduction that captivates the seducee, and with the nature of each of these elements. This chapter, however, is concerned with a fourth conception, seduction as practice, Giacomo Casanova and Valmont’s practice in Choderlos de Laclos’ epistolary novel *Les Liaisons Dangereuses*, for example. This idea combines discussions around libertinage. Studies focusing on this aspect are concerned with, and place emphasis on whom or what the seducer is and does. Baudrillard’s understanding of seduction is polymorphous, true to the term’s slippery connotations. He understands it as an overriding principle: ‘everything is seduction and nothing but seduction’ (Baudrillard, 1990: 83). In *The Ecstasy of Communication*, Baudrillard provides us with a reasonably accurate definition. He writes: ‘seduction is what seduces, and that’s that’ (1988: 57). The phenomenon’s understanding is arrived at through an engagement with its process. He offers a few more pointers in his book *Seduction* (1990: 81): ‘… a mode of circulation that is itself secretive and ritualistic, a sort of immediate initiation that plays by its own rules…’. He also writes: ‘to seduce is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion’ (1990: 69). Through reversible, challenging, dual techniques, seduction encourages a change of direction and leads one astray from what can be considered ‘right behaviour’—in Baudrillard’s case, what he may define as ‘truth’ or ‘meaning’. But it is Rex Butler’s masterly paraphrase of Baudrillard, that offers the most complete definition: seduction is ‘the getting of another to do what we want, not by force or coercion, but by an exercise of their own, though often mistaken or misguided, free will’ (Butler, 1999: 71). If Baudrillard’s idea that seduction is a ruling principle is accepted, locating and isolating certain contexts in which its *modus operandi* is self-evident becomes a possibility. This will facilitate the exploration of how seduction operates. The gallery space and the psychoanalytic room in particular fulfill this characteristic. Whereas Baudrillard is
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