

# Seduction Against Production: A Playful Way of Creating Knowledge

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Fig. 1. screenshot from *Mot de passe*, un film de Pierre Bourgeois et Leslie F. Grunberg, ©Montparnasse Productions, 1999.

Baudrillard Seducer is conceived of as an embodied collage that illuminates the contemporary resonance of Baudrillard's thought by drawing on *bricolage* aesthetics and poetics. It puts Baudrillard's theory of "seduction against production" in discussion with multiple sites of

production of knowledge such as scientific discourse, documentary, fiction, and popular culture. It does so by intertwining Baudrillard interview from *Mot de passe* with a broad range of archival visual materials, found footage, and movies. In what follows, I provide the rationale underpinning the making of the video and discuss Baudrillard's dialectical thinking in relation to Seduction. This video is ultimately an invitation to think *with* Baudrillard about the filmic writings of queer and heterosexual sexuality, seduction, and desire.

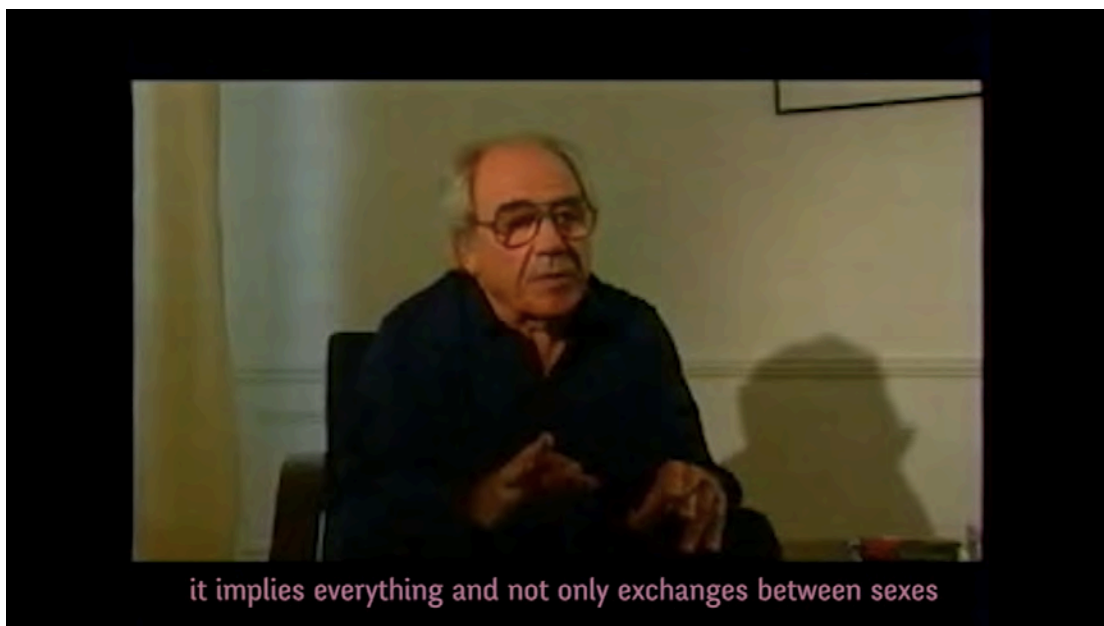


Fig. 2. Screenshot from *Mot de passe*, un film de Pierre Bourgeois et Leslie F. Grunberg, ©Montparnasse Productions, 1999.

My video stems from an artistic inquiry that “engages in a creative process of data collection, analysis and presentation” (166) in order to offer a playful way to bring to life Baudrillard’s thinking. This practice-based inquiry builds on what Gioa Chilton and Victoria Scotti have described as “a process that uses the expressive qualities to convey meaning” (163). This method of inquiry builds on the intertwining of “layers of knowledge” (66). I

completed this project by ordering extracts from various kinds of movies (movies, art videos, experimental films, documentary, soap opera, YouTube videos) about sexuality or seduction that engage with Baudrillard's core ideas about seduction as radical alterity as explained by David Tech, "radical alterity implies we resist the empiricist urge to render everything in communicable forms of knowledge" (177). The outcome, which is best understood as an embodied collage or a symbolic kaleidoscope, builds an original dialectical relationship with Baudrillard's theory.

As an artist and a film programmer, I am used to working with archives and to researching and editing found footage movies. My editing and artistic work has long posited videos as part of myths and representations that shape our views on society and social and cultural issues. This project, along with the rest of my work, posits and explores culture as "an inherited legacy of works, thought and tradition" (134) as Baudrillard puts it in *The Consumer Society*.

I did this research and editing work while building on the Baudrillardian notion of culture defined by Richard Lane as "generated by creation and use of meanings" (44). This process was also framed by a very Baudrillardian question: can editing be an escape from the tyranny of meaning?

According to me, all these sequences could embody various meanings of seduction and "synthetized new learning" (166) and embrace some properties of collage. The device of collage allows us to think anew the meaning of each image through the concept of seduction. The common principle of my editing method is a reversal of Baudrillard's speech and juxtaposes it with visual footage in order to create new associations. Following Baudrillard's tendency to reversion, this approach is also a way to beat Baudrillard at his own game.

I claim to adopt a non-fetishist posture. In my work I love to deflect, reroute and distort videos, mixing up what already existed in order to change its primary meaning. Images, sequences, thoughts and ideas would be confronted to expose what could be seen as myth in Roland Barthes's view: "what must be firmly established at the start is that myth is a system of communication, that it is a message" (107).



Fig. 3. Screenshot from *Sexualities*, ©Les froufrous de Lilith, 2017.

### **Seduction Against Production**

Roland Barthes wrote *Mythologies* and defined "myth" by reading gossip magazines such as *Paris Match* and by watching TV. I, on the other hand, tried to imagine what Baudrillard could have seen, the images he could have been or was being exposed to when he was developing his theory of seduction. As I gathered a corpus of videos from various sources, I embraced his insight that there is "no scale of measure in the symbolic chain. No species is inferior to any

other. Nor is any human being. All that counts is the symbolic sequence” (131). We could use this terminology of symbolic chain and apply it to these video fragments whose common denominator is that they all convey a certain representation of the notion of seduction. Regardless of the site of knowledge it stems from, none of the footage is superior since, through their intertwining with Baudrillard’s interview, they all integrate a symbolic chain; they all convey a dialogical encounter that can create happy coincidences in the meaning they create.

Thus, with this video there is an effort produced to seduce the audience as “to produce is to materialize by force what belongs to another order, that of the secret and of seduction. Seduction is, at all times and in all places, opposed to production. Seduction removes something from the order of the visible, while production constructs everything in full view, be it an object, a number or concept” (34).



Fig. 4. Screenshot from *Sexualities*, ©Les froufrous de Lilith, 2017.

## Seduction Reversibility

Reversibility is the key concept in all of Baudrillard's thoughts. Through this video, I took the counterfeet of Jean Baudrillard's concept of seduction, being sometimes literal with its discourses and sometimes opening a gap of doubt. I wanted to convey a game of appearances that plays with all the sequences connected with sexuality. As Baudrillard writes in *Seduction*: "modern unreality no longer implies the imaginary, it engages more reference, more truth, more exactitude - it consists in having everything pass into the absolute evidence of the real" (34).

This video aims to create a way of escaping this "absolute evidence of the real" which here would be to dismiss an authority figure, not abiding by usual hierarchies of epistemological knowledge (i.e. science over soap movie). Abolishing the distinction between something patrimonial and something trivial is not only a way of curating it and creating a new gesture in the meaning of each image. It is also a way of creating a suspension in the audience's perception of these images. It is meant to create a surplus of interpretation, an experiential and embodied knowledge, a performance of *bricolage* unmoored from epistemological hierarchies, "this defamiliarization process highlights the power of the confrontation with difference to expand the researcher's interpretative horizons" (687).

Then this work draws a question about pure enjoyment: can we appreciate images for their own sake? Can they be independent from any transcendence or ultimate meaning? As Baudrillard puts it "there is a kind of anthropological joy in images, a kind of brute fascination unencumbered by aesthetic, moral, social or political judgements" (28). Only signs without referents, empty, senseless, absurd and elliptical signs, absorb us. It leads nowhere other than astray.

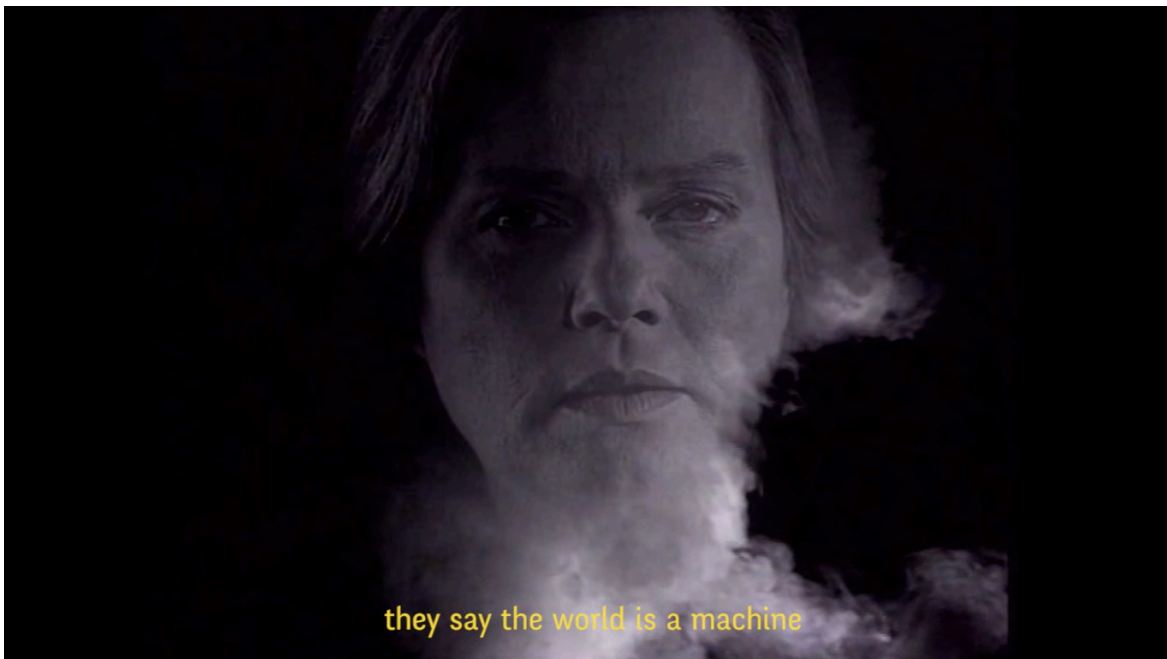


Fig. 5. Screenshot from *Réflexions sur la puissance motrice de l'amour*, un film de Pierre Trividic, ©Ex Nihilo, Canal +, 1989.

### The Game of Otherness

I'd like the idea to play with those videos exactly as seduction is a *game of otherness* while editing videos around one theme and trying to create *une mise en abîme*. Seduction out of images does not come entirely from the content itself, but it also comes from the chain of thoughts led by the order of the videos; that happy coincidence. It sets a dialogue with the viewer who takes part in creating an interpretation of the meanings conveyed through juxtaposition, what Roland Barthes would qualify in "The Rhetoric of the Image" as "surprises of meaning" (35).

This is why "seduction is that which is everywhere and always opposed to production; seduction withdraws something from the visible order and so runs counter to production, whose project is to set everything up in clear view" (34).



Fig. 6. Screenshot from *Mot de passe*, un film de Pierre Bourgeois et Leslie F. Grunberg, ©Montparnasse Productions, 1999.

Then, seduction remains part of the invisible, it belongs to the sphere of the secret. And Baudrillard's thought keeps demonstrating that the world is disappearing because it is given too much signification, it is made significant, therefore seduction is an operation to subtract, to escape from this hypersemiotics that production would embody.

Seduction is "an ironic, alternative form" (*Mot de passe*) that "provides a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance" (*Mot de passe*), just as this *bricolage*, if we try to decontextualize the ideology behind it and turn it into anthropological joy. Nicolas Mirzoeff explains it "in finding a way out of the culture labyrinth, visual culture develops the idea of culture as expressed by Stuart Hall: Cultural practice then becomes a realm where one engages with and elaborates a politics. Politics does not refer to party politics but to a sense that culture is where people define their identity and that it changes in accord with the needs of individuals



and communities to express that identity” (72).



Fig. 7. Screenshot from *Réflexions sur la puissance motrice de l'amour*, un film de Pierre Trividic, ©Ex Nihilo, Canal +, 1989.

The video plays with the imagination as a social practice where all these media are part of the constructed landscape of collective aspirations reproduced by curating choices. Thus, the image and the editing aim to articulate a new discourse around a theme as it realizes “a symbolical exchange of appearances” (mot de passe). We want to seduce images by turning them away from their identity. Curating films is in this case an operation of seduction as the association of sequences offers a new reading on one topic, a dialectical encounter of various cultural prisms, collective aspirations and social practices.

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