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# The Seduction of Alban Berg's *Lulu*: A Baudrillardian Perspective

**ABSTRACT** Alban Berg's *Lulu* is often seen as the tale of a femme fatale whose erotic power brings ruin through manipulation. This article reconsiders that view by reading the opera through Jean Baudrillard's theory of seduction. Drawing on five key themes from *Seduction*, it argues that Lulu is less a destroyer of men than a disruptor of the logical systems seeking to define her. Through examples from the opera's narrative and music, *Lulu* emerges not as a reflection of social paradigms but as resistance to fixed meaning, transparency and truth.

**KEYWORDS** Alban Berg, *Lulu*, Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, social theory, feminine strategy, opera studies

**ABSTRAKT** O uwodzeniu *Lulu* Albana Berga: perspektywa Baudrillardowska. *Lulu* Albana Berga jest często postrzegana jako opowieść o *femme fatale*, której erotyczna siła prowadzi do zguby poprzez manipulację. Niniejszy artykuł proponuje rewizję tego ujęcia, odczytując operę przez pryzmat teorii uwodzenia Jeana Baudrillarda. Odwołując się do pięciu kluczowych wątków z książki *O uwodzeniu*, autor dowodzi, że Lulu jest nie tyle niszczycielką mężczyzn, ile raczej siłą zakłócającą logiczne systemy, które usiłują ją zdefiniować. Na podstawie przykładów zaczerpniętych z narracji i warstwy muzycznej opery Lulu jawi się nie jako odzwierciedlenie społecznych paradygmatów, lecz jako forma oporu wobec stałego znaczenia, przejrzystości i prawdy.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE** Alban Berg, *Lulu*, Jean Baudrillard, *O uwodzeniu*, teoria społeczna, strategia kobieca, badania nad operą

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Since its earliest stagings, Alban Berg's *Lulu* has been broadly seen as the story of a femme fatale – a beguiling and dangerous woman whose alluring charm traps men in a web of their own desire, only to corrupt and destroy them. Scholars and audiences have long focused on Lulu as the personification of destructive eroticism, whose elusive and impenetrable character creates instability and chaos for everyone around her.[1] The historical tradition of this view presents Lulu as a complex persona who is often seen as a symbolic figure of fatal femininity at the centre of a narrative that focuses on seduction, manipulation and inescapable male downfall.

Jean Baudrillard (1929–2007) was a French sociologist, philosopher and cultural theorist who wrote provocatively on contemporary society, simulation and media. His book *Seduction* (originally published in 1979 as *De la séduction*) offers a treatise that is concerned with the ambiguous, reversible and symbolic play of appearances, where the signs of realism that seek to denote meaning and truth are challenged by an illusion that evades transparency through seduction. In Baudrillard's theory, seduction is a force of resistance against the production of rationality, which he views as a logic of modern thought that reduces and oppresses through a dogmatic search for meaning and truth in everything. In other words, production reduces modern societies to a modality of calculated predictability and precise symbols that most of all stifle desire and diminish the erotic to a clear efficiency. Seduction aims to reinstate mystery, appearance and a symbolic exchange that stands against the signs which endorse explicit and precise outcomes.

There are palpable symmetries between Baudrillard's theories of seduction and Berg's *Lulu*. Both are concerned with surface, illusion, reversibility and the destabilization of meaning – particularly as they pertain to femininity, power and desire. The purpose of the present article is to view *Lulu* through the lens of *Seduction*, which facilitates an interpretation of Lulu not only as a protagonist or aggressor, but also – where she becomes a sort of fatal sign – as a seductress, in Baudrillard's symbolic sense: a figure who dismantles the systems around her by playing with the very signs they depend on. The primary research question then becomes: how does Lulu reflect key tenets of Baudrillard's seduction in Berg's libretto and narrative, as well as the music?

The appropriateness of framing *Lulu* using the theories of seduction notwithstanding, it is helpful to present a short context for Baudrillard's book. To begin, he derives the term seduction from its eighteenth-century connotation of an aristocratic persuasion that existed to promote valour and honour, which was supplanted later

1 For sources that analyze qualities of Lulu's femme fatale status and overall womanhood, see Karen Pegley, "Femme Fatale and Lesbian Representation in Alban Berg's *Lulu*", in: *Encrypted Messages in Alban Berg's Music*, ed. Siglind Bruhn, New York 2011, pp. 249–77; Judy Lochhead, "Lulu's Feminine Performance", in: *The Cambridge Companion to Berg*, ed. Anthony Pople, Cambridge 1997, pp. 227–44.

by bourgeois production, suppressing this earlier reference of seduction.[2] The nostalgic context of seduction in this sense has caused controversy for Baudrillard's book from feminist circles that blame him for endorsing sexual stereotypes and misogyny.[3] Moreover, A. Keith Goshorn states that the key criticism of *Seduction* is how Baudrillard creates metaphors of femininity in a way that objectifies women as "other-ness".[4] Later on, Goshorn adds that a further problem for feminists is Baudrillard's conception of the male gaze in relation to women, which is connected to fetishized objectification.[5] Goshorn presents a rather non-committal statement on how to interpret this controversy by suggesting that Baudrillard should not be viewed as either a friend or an enemy of feminism, but as someone who has at times engaged with common feminist positions, while expressing his own views of feminism and women.[6] The reception of *Seduction* is not germane to my use of it as a filter for *Lulu*, but this brief inclusion serves, again, to contextualize *Seduction* within the framework of concerns of its wider readership. Regardless of its interpretations from feminists,[7] what is central to my article is that Baudrillard presents a corresponding lens of the male gaze to the one in Berg's opera, which is one of several complementary expressions between his book and *Lulu* that serves my comparative designs.

Additionally, while Baudrillard's theories were written to reflect socio-cultural representations of erotic desire from semiotic perspectives, I am applying his theories and reality-derived observations as a perspective through which to judge similar paradigms in a work of art for the sake of expanding the understanding of that work by creating new contexts in which to view and judge it. The musicological value in undertaking such a comparative analysis stems from a desire to delve deeper into the symbolic makeup of *Lulu*, where Lulu herself is often deemed as an agent of destructive femininity, within a structure that problematizes her presence. This new reading, conversely, aims to present her as a force that does not destroy explicitly, but which disrupts forms of logic that desire to define and control her. In this context, the opera is seen less as a critique of fixtures within culture, and more as a critique of the modern need to produce rigid systems of meaning, transparency and truth.

2 Jean Baudrillard, *Seduction*, trans. Brian Singer, New York 1990, p. 1.

3 Rex Butler, *Jean Baudrillard: The Defense of the Real*, London 1999, pp. 71–72.

4 A. Keith Goshorn, "Valorizing 'The Feminine' While Rejecting Feminism? – Baudrillard's Feminist Provocations", in: *Baudrillard: A Critical Reader*, ed. Douglas Kellner, Oxford 1994, p. 258.

5 Ibid., p. 265.

6 Ibid., p. 260.

7 For a source that pinpoints the root of Baudrillard's position against feminism, see Sadie Plant, "Baudrillard's Woman: The Eve of Seduction", in: *Forget Baudrillard?*, eds. Chris Rojek and Bryan S. Turner, London 1993, pp. 88–106. In this chapter, Plant argues that Baudrillard's antipathy for feminism is not grounded in misogyny, but stems from his belief that feminism rationalizes womanhood in a way that compromises the symbolic power of the feminine. In other words, feminism subverts the power of the feminine as seduction because it is too determined to stimulate visibility, clear identity and equality – produced phenomena that seduction via the feminine aims to dismantle, not embrace.

While the present study takes a theoretical vantage point through Baudrillard, it is equally necessary to situate *Lulu* within its broader scholarly and historical framework. Research on *Lulu* has expanded the interpretive field beyond the traditional notion of the femme fatale to see her also as a cultural symbol of modernity and artistic reflexivity. Insight into *Lulu* has significantly evolved from the older tendency to interpret her as a destructive femme fatale toward understanding her as a more complex cultural construct of modernity. Kordula Knaus has been instrumental in repositioning *Lulu* as a paradigmatic figure of the "new woman" of the early twentieth century – a point of convergence where literary ambition, operatic convention and the concept of absolute music intersect in Berg's setting of Wedekind's plays. Knaus's work reconstructs the aesthetic, social and philosophical constellation surrounding around Berg's *Lulu*, showing that she embodies the conflicting impulses of her time: the emancipatory potential of female modernity and its simultaneous reduction to spectacle.[8] From this perspective, *Lulu* is not simply a product of patriarchal fantasy but also a reflection of the modernist tension between autonomy and representation. This framework directly refines the Baudrillardian reading of *Lulu* presented here. When seen through Knaus's historical and cultural lens, the idea of seduction aligns with the symbolic instability of the "new woman" as both subject and sign. Baudrillard's play of appearances and Knaus's reconstruction of *Lulu*'s cultural position converge in revealing how *Lulu*'s identity is anchored not in essence but in performance: she exists as an oscillating sign within competing systems of meaning. Knaus expresses this when she writes how "Lulu is thus both the pinnacle and culmination of the 'enigmatic woman' of the turn of the century, transforming her character – as if she were a chameleon changing its color – and uniting the various imaginations within herself. At the same time, however, nothing remains of her but an empty shell that seems capable of being filled at will".[9]

Similarly, Silvio J. dos Santos has extended this discourse by framing *Lulu*'s identity within the dynamics of narrative construction and self-reflexivity. His analysis situates the opera's fragmented subjectivity within modernism's preoccupation with the instability of representation, arguing that *Lulu*'s multiple identities are mediated by an aesthetic of repetition and disguise.[10] Indeed, this mirrors Knaus's labelling of Lulu as a chameleon, where Santos writes that "Lulu's self is forged largely as a result of social pressure".[11] In light of Santos's work, Baudrillard's theory of seduction can be seen as a further step: it situates *Lulu*'s identity not only within a modernist crisis of meaning but within a symbolic economy that thrives on illusion, reversibility and

8 See Kordula Knaus, *Gezähmte Lulu: Alban Bergs Wedekind-Vertonung im Spannungsfeld von literarischer Ambition, Opernkonvention und "absoluter Music"*, Freiburg im Breisgau 2004 (= Rombach Wissenschaften; Reihe Cultura 38), pp. 153–63.

9 Ibid., p. 154.

10 See Silvio J. dos Santos, *Narratives of Identity in Alban Berg's "Lulu"*, Rochester 2014 (= Eastman Studies in Music), pp. 79–116.

11 Ibid., p. 101.

the disappearance of truth. Integrating these perspectives thus constructs a broader scholarly picture surrounding Berg's *Lulu* as a site where historical modernity, feminine representation and the symbolic logic of seduction intersect. The resulting synthesis not only situates Baudrillard's theory within a broader interpretive field but also anchors the argument in recent *Lulu* scholarship that bridges the aesthetic, social and philosophical dimensions of her character.

In pursuit of these goals, the present article pinpoints five themes in *Seduction* with their mirrored representations in Berg's opera. These isolated themes of seduction are: seduction versus production; the influence of the sign; the position against truth and meaning; the feminine strategy; the challenge to power. Once these connections are established between seduction and its counterparts in the narrative and libretto of *Lulu*, the subsequent section looks at Berg's music in his opera, and how circular forms and motifs also reflect Baudrillard's ideas of seduction. It must be made clear, however, that this is a study on *Lulu* and is not meant to be seen as a contribution to Baudrillard studies. *Seduction* is used to promote a new way of thinking about Berg's opera and should not be viewed as a thorough use of Baudrillard's theory as it appears in his other texts.[12]

## FIVE POINTS OF SEDUCTION IN THE OPERATIC NARRATIVE OF *LULU*

The first and most decisive point about defining seduction is the relationship of seduction versus production. Production implies how objects establish meaning through exterior signs that reveal the truth of something.[13] Seduction is the opposite of this and stands against material meaning. Instead, seduction is an "artifice – never to the order of energy, but that of signs and rituals. Seduction continues to appear to all orthodoxies as malefice and artifice, a black magic for the deviation of all truths, an exaltation of the malicious use of signs, a conspiracy of signs".[14] As such, seduction reverses the meaning of signs. In the context of the gender binary, seduction threatens the hegemonic power of masculinity by reversing this typical role with the feminine, resulting in seduction and femininity challenging the order of signs by removing their ability to produce clear, explicit meaning. On this point, Baudrillard writes that "seduction and femininity are ineluctable as the reverse side of sex, mean-

12 For other books by Baudrillard concerning notions that either include or are related to seduction, see: Jean Baudrillard, *Symbolic Exchange and Death*, trans. Iain Hamilton Grant, London 1993; J. Baudrillard, *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, trans. Chris Turner, London 1998; J. Baudrillard, *Fatal Strategies*, trans. Philip Beitchman and W.G.J. Niesluchowski, New York 1990; J. Baudrillard, *In the Shadow of the Silent Majorities or The End of the Social*, trans. Paul Foss et al., New York 2007; J. Baudrillard, *Simulacra and Simulation*, trans. Sheila Faria Glaser, Ann Arbor 1994.

13 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 1.

14 Ibid., p. 2.

ing, and power".[15] This, then, is how seduction destabilizes production by rendering meaning more illusory through the manipulation of appearance. Graham Harman characterizes this withdrawal of meaning "when the real/causal underpinnings of an object are suspended, so that it becomes a pure fatality, or event without depth".[16] Since power asserts itself through the production of truth, seduction undermines this masculine imperative to control and make clear by subverting it through the reversibility of non-truths, illusions and weakening tactics that divert the meaning of signs.

Furthermore, femininity as seduction has the ability to thwart production, Baudrillard believes, because "it is femininity that is gripping, in the present and fatal situation of sex's hyper reality – as it was yesterday, but in direct contrast, in irony and seduction".[17] In essence, Baudrillard argues that femininity still has power in a culture where sex is hyper real and devoid of seduction. It is gripping because it challenges the over-production of sex through the irony and mystery of seduction, which references a symbolic structure of the past ("yesterday").

In addition, Baudrillard defines seduction throughout his book, which aids in the understanding of the idea's multi-faceted meaning. A crucial tenet of the ideology is seduction as standing against production via a form of feminism, "where the feminine is not what opposes the masculine, but what seduces the masculine".[18] In other words, seduction subverts masculinity without conquering it; the feminine challenges masculine truth through illusion and ambiguity. This concept will be exemplified further in point four. The emphasis here is that feminine seduction resists produced meaning. Baudrillard continues by stating that "seduction represents mastery over the symbolic universe, while power represents only mastery of the real universe".[19] As such, power exists in the real, material world (of masculinity and production), where it strives for visibility and control over people. Seduction, by contrast, operates less directly by distorting the signs and mechanisms of that power. In doing so, it disrupts reality by embracing the symbolic qualities of subversion mentioned above – illusion and ambiguity. Later on, in the context of feminine sexuality undermining the domination of male sexuality, Baudrillard calls seduction "an ironic, alternative form, one that breaks the referentiality of sex and provides a space, not of desire, but of play and defiance".[20] Once again, we see seduction as a dismantling force of hegemonic production against masculine paradigms of power. Moreover, "seduction is stronger than production. It is a circular, reversible process of challenges, one-upmanship and death". This notion of circularity combats the linear, produced outcomes of clear

15 Ibid.
16 Graham Harman, "Object-Oriented Seduction: Baudrillard Reconsidered", in: *The War of Appearances*, ed. Joke Brouwer et al., Rotterdam 2016, p. 133.
17 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 6.
18 Ibid., p. 7.
19 Ibid., p. 8.
20 Ibid., p. 21.

meaning by instead focusing on inverting and looping signs and gestures. This phenomenon results in the reversal of the signs' meaning by characterizing a reversal of logic that unmasks the fundamental artificiality of their production. For Baudrillard, seduction is achieved through a form of deception that lacks clarity:

> seduction does not consist of a simple appearance, nor a pure absence, but the eclipse of a presence. Its sole strategy is to be-there/not-there, and thereby produce a sort of flickering, a hypnotic mechanism that crystallizes attention outside all concern with meaning. Absence here seduces presence.[21]

In this regard, there is nothing straightforward with the appearance of seduction other than an intentional ambiguity that neither makes itself known, nor is entirely invisible. It is in an in-between of "being there/not being there", which unsettles reality by residing in the symbolic, only partially revealing itself in an effort to further destabilize meaning. Nicholas Gane concurs with this point, arguing that seduction purports not to separate reality from appearance, but to invoke a widespread return to appearance alone.[22] This global view of seduction helps to isolate Gane's view of its purpose, which he claims "embraces immediate appearances rather than reason, with the aim of restoring the world to an infinitely complex but intelligent puzzle".[23] Baudrillard's seduction favours illusion over truth through a symbolic exchange. Gane's expression reinforces this with the above passage by suggesting that, through its play with appearances, seduction restores a sense of mystery that defies reason and clarity.

The manner in which seduction reverses the nature of production bears similarities to Lulu's role in Berg's opera. Indeed, she is the embodiment of seduction, because she does not produce meaning in a conventional sense. She is evasive – adjusting identities from model, mistress, wife, prisoner and prostitute – but never resolves to maintain just one role. This reflects Baudrillard's notion of seduction as a phenomenon that refuses to conform to a solitary, coherent meaning. Lulu's identity never expresses a "true self", and for that reason it denotes a circularity of signs that truly play with appearances. The function of this circularity serves to destabilize the men around her.

A key scene in the opera exemplifying these traits is the opening scene of the first act, where Lulu is engaging with the painter as he paints her portrait. The dichotomy of seduction versus production is palpably on display in the values and exchange between the two characters. The painter is the quintessential male producer who projects onto Lulu his male gaze of feminine subservience. He does not even call Lulu by her real name, but by a contrived sense of his assigned identity for her. In what

21 Ibid., p. 85.
22 Nicholas Gane, *Max Weber and Postmodern Theory: Realization versus Re-enchantment*, New York 2004, p. 145.
23 Ibid., p. 147.

ensues, the painter asks Lulu a series of probing questions related to her beliefs, values and emotions – all of which she answers with the same response: "I do not know" ("Ich weiß es nicht"). In this instance, Lulu is playing with the signs by denying their meaning. The production of the questions seeks to reveal elements of her nature, but by negating the questions, Lulu is working an angle of seduction via concealment. While frustrating the painter, it ultimately does not deter him; as a result, he and Lulu are married in the next scene. In every regard, Lulu never expresses a self-determining modicum of individuality, but rather mirrors all of the painter's desires back onto him. This not only subverts his search for truth and meaning, but eventually takes all of his agency by removing his power to establish reality, using symbolic deferral to undermine him at every turn. Furthermore, Lulu is, as Baudrillard suggests, simultaneously there and not there as an eclipse of the presence, which confounds the painter because he no longer has a grasp of reality and truth, as he imagined them. Lulu's lack of proper presence is more than he can bear, and the seduction that he experiences eventually compels him to commit suicide, thus encapsulating seduction's violent dismantling of production.

The second point of seduction is the influence of the sign, and how seduction is a challenge to the order of signs. Whereas production seeks to add depth and meaning to signs, seduction plays with superficial imitation, emphasizing that signs can exist without coherent meaning. The symbolic nature of seduction negates the semiotic truth of signs. Baudrillard writes that "the deep play of fantasies controls the superficial play of signs – this transubstantiation of sex into signs that is the secret of all seduction".[24] The symbolism of this idealized appearance is at the heart of *Lulu* through the projection of the male gaze onto Lulu, which she exploits by reversing the produced meaning of male dominance, thereby leading the male characters to their downfall. This last point regarding Lulu will be explored further in the fifth point, but the meaning in the context of the above passage in regard to Berg's opera posits how the seducer (Lulu) does not employ explicit gestures. Instead, she works within the superficial play of signs by taking advantage of the imagined fantasies. This action of seduction symbolically transforms desire, where the signs of sex are now beyond actual sex. Lulu's lack of a real, pervasive identity throughout the opera shapes her as an agent of seduction without meaning due to her surface ability to embrace what is projected upon her. Therefore, from one perspective, she is a sign of sex rather than sex itself, because she only evokes desire and is, as Baudrillard suggests, beyond sex. This transformation into a symbolic sign of desire allows her to manipulate the men around her. She plays with superficial fantasies, thereby reversing the meaning and power of sex.

Later in his book, Baudrillard applies the concept of the *trompe-l'oeil* effect as a metaphor for seduction, because it creates the appearance of a mirror form, resulting in ar-

24 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 13.

tifice that rejects reality. The trick of this effect, though, does not destroy reality; rather, like seduction, it undermines perception and creates a reversal of truth.[25] This phenomenon that challenges the order of the sign bears direct association with Lulu's portrait, which equally plays with illusion, truth and meaning as a conduit of seduction outside the realm of reality. Berg's operatic characters project their allure and submissiveness onto the portrait, which has no authenticity through its play of appearances. In other words, its symbolic scope is so pronounced that the only real, authentic element about it is its physical space. The seduction of the portrait is palpable within every scene of the opera, as it continuously traps all who behold it into a realm of idealized fiction that allows the real Lulu to control the perspective of this undermined production of truth. This action further perpetuates the feminine strategy of Baudrillard's principle that seduction has the power to destabilize the male desire to control and create meaning and truth via transparency. The seduction of Lulu's portrait – as a symbolic sign – reverses these aims, negating patriarchal power in the process.

Musically speaking, Berg instigates his seductive reversals through the use of palindromic forms, which are circular patterns, found in all of Berg's mature works, that denote repetition. Berg does this by reaching an arrival point in the musical texture, after which a mirror image is initiated, usually with large-scale repetitions that turn back on themselves, resulting in the end point leading back to the beginning in a constant loop. However, the movement backwards is not an exact repetition, so the subsequent material is not an identical repetition, but rather a reminiscent variation.[26] The palindromes are perceived as negating symbols, facilitating an erasure of progressive time.[27] The strategic use of these devices in *Lulu* allows Berg to influence the interpretation of events throughout the opera in non-linear ways. This is most evident in the pivotal Film Music Interlude (FMI), for how it reverses the power paradigms (including Lulu's) in the first half of the opera with its inverse in the second half, following the FMI, to instigate a rise-and-fall scenario that plays with these reversed mirror forms that Baudrillard associates with the illusion, simulation and reversal of signs. These are all tenets that seduction employs to subvert production. Baudrillard describes the feeling that this instils in a description that captures the precise essence of being for Berg's characters at the end of *Lulu*: "They [observers of the *trompe-l'oeil*] also seek, by virtue of a diabolical nostalgia, to lose themselves in appearances, in the seduction of their image".[28] In the final scene of the opera, when the characters are at their lowest point, they mentally retreat into the seductive illusion of their nostalgia by collectively beholding Lulu's portrait and reminiscing about better times in the past.

25 Ibid., pp. 63–64.

26 Robert P. Morgan, "The Eternal Return: Retrograde and Circular Form in Berg", in: *Alban Berg: Historical and Analytical Perspectives*, eds. David Gable and Robert P. Morgan, Oxford 1991, p. 123.

27 Ibid., 146.

28 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 67.

The third point of seduction streamlines a main principle behind the separation of seduction from production, which is the position against truth and meaning. Truth in this context is seen as an oppressive dogma that dictates perception through the lens of contriving total authenticity. Seduction undermines these aims through concealment and appearances, which Baudrillard explains as

> the capacity immanent to seduction to deny things their truth and turn it into a game, the pure play of appearances, and thereby foil all systems of power and meaning with a mere turn of the hand. The ability to turn appearances in on themselves, to play on the body's appearances, rather than with the depths of desire. Now all appearances are reversible, [and] with a simple play of the *strategy of appearances*, it turns them upside down.[29]

Many of these truth-denying points of seduction were employed by Lulu when, as mentioned earlier, she rebutted all of the painter's questions probing the truth of her identity by answering that she did not know. In addition, one of the most disturbing moments in the opera is when Lulu is seducing Alwa, the son of her late husband, whom Lulu murdered. She manipulates Alwa by suspending the truth of her murderous act, using her body as a mirror of Alwa's desires in order to subvert his power. After she brings Alwa to the brink of sexual hysteria, knowing that she has him, Lulu detachedly asks: "is this not the sofa on which your father bled to death?"[30] This is the quintessential Baudrillardian "turn of the hand" to reverse the meaning of signs through seduction and, as a result, to overturn the power of meaning (and with it male agency), all to her advantage. The extent of this dynamic is exemplified by Alwa's complete rejection of truth in the face of his idealized projection that enslaves his senses and denies him the ability to resist Lulu's game of appearances.

Lulu's absurd seduction of Alwa bears association with Baudrillard's description that:

> the seductress does not attach any meaning to what she does, nor suffer the weight of desire. Even if she speaks of reasons or motives, be they guilty or cynical, it is a trap. And her ultimate trap is to ask: "Tell me who I am" – when she is indifferent to what she is, when she is a blank, with neither age nor history.[31]

This is a rather poetic encapsulation that is applicable to Berg's seductress, who is presented in the opera as both ageless and without personal history. These elements dehumanize Lulu and remove from her all semblance of independent identity. Being blank, as Baudrillard says, has the same underlying function of a mirror, because

29 Ibid., p. 8.

30 Alban Berg, *Lulu: Opera in 3 acts (7 scenes) after "Erdgeist" and "Büchse Der Pandora" by Frank Wedekind, English/German Libretto*, trans. Arthur Jacobs, Vienna, 1978, p. 77: "...Ist das noch der Diwan -- auf dem sich -- dein Vater -- verblutet hat?"

31 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 87.

it is the other individual who must give meaning where there is none. Once Lulu knows what meaning others wish to bestow, she reverses what she is given and turns it upside down, as Baudrillard also emphasizes. This process almost renders seduction a self-propelling enterprise, because the seducer is only working to corrupt what she is given to work with. Certainly, the masks, games and appearances act as bait, but she cannot overturn truth and meaning if she is not made aware of what these are to any given individual who enters into this exchange with her.

This manner of manipulating truth evolves in the fourth point of seduction, which concerns the feminine strategy. Here we enter into more conventional gender binary tropes, where these feminine distinctions are not necessarily connected to women, but are labelled as feminine to denote the opposite of the male impulse to dominate and reveal authenticity. The illusion of the feminine unmasks the power of what is real, rendering seduction an appearance of resistance. The strategy involved implies that this opposition to the masculine is not a direct confrontation, but, again, works through reversal and symbolic implementation. Regarding this, Baudrillard states that "there is an alternative to sex and power: this alternative is undoubtedly of the order of the feminine, understood outside the opposition masculine/feminine, [where] this strength of the feminine is that of seduction".[32] This suggests that the exterior production of the masculine/feminine binary is a power that is undone by the seduction of the feminine, which reverses the meaning of this dichotomous sign.

As the strategy of the feminine unfolds, Baudrillard presents a theoretical blueprint for the seductress:

> now woman is but appearance. And it is the feminine as appearance that thwarts masculine depth. Instead of rising up against such "insulting" counsel, women would do well to let themselves be seduced by its truth, for here lies the secret of their strength, which they are in the process of losing by erecting a contrary, feminine depth.[33]

The seduction of the feminine strategy is most evident when Lulu works to seduce her greatest target: her third and final husband, Dr Schön. In the third scene of the first act, Lulu enacts the feminine strategy of seduction through appearance, where she reverses her power dynamic with Dr Schön through surface play and illusion. Dr Schön begins his encounter with Lulu in her dressing room at the theatre where she is dancing as a man determined to assert his masculine control over the situation by dictating the terms of his final break from her. He has at his disposal a production of truth and meaning, and demands that Lulu accept these outcomes. Lulu does not succumb, but rather reverses the situation by playing on Dr Schön's latent desires for her and inability to control his possessive inclinations towards her. She does not

32 Ibid., p. 7.
33 Ibid., p. 10.

resist his proclamations by confronting him, but rather by enacting a play of signs, claiming that another suitor will take her away to Africa to possess her at a significant distance from Dr Schön. The prospect of Lulu being out of his orbit of control is more than he can bear, prompting him to completely yield to Lulu's demands. By mirroring his own desires back at him in a way that implied that he could not have her, Lulu dismantled the masculine propensity for power by engaging with a play of presence and absence. All of the men who try to control her – the painter, Alwa, Dr Schön – are undone not by direct resistance, but by the reversal of their own projections back onto them, which Lulu's lack of identity facilitates. She does not seek to negate matters by presenting her own contrary interests, but rather shows each man what it is that they cannot live without, causing them to self-destruct rather than destroying them outright. Lulu does not plead with these men, but, as Baudrillard notes, creates a contrary feminine depth that remains outside the realm of truth and reality, and firmly fixed within the play of seduction.

However, the symbolic dynamics of seduction in *Lulu* are not exclusively confined to male–female exchanges. One character in particular introduces a necessary complication to this binary framework. An important qualification to the dualistic polarity of masculine production and feminine seduction is the role of Countess Geschwitz. Her presence complicates the strictly oppositional structure between the producer and the seductress that Baudrillard envisions. Geschwitz's love for Lulu resists the mechanisms of the male gaze, for her desire does not attempt to define, possess or produce meaning from Lulu; instead, it gestures toward a form of desire detached from domination. While Lulu's relationships with men end in destruction through the reversibility of seduction, Geschwitz embodies an alternative – an ethics of attachment that is not grounded in power.

This confounds Baudrillard's dualism. If Lulu represents the fatal sign of seduction that dismantles male systems of production, then Geschwitz represents the remainder that resists incorporation into this symbolic economy. Her devotion at the opera's end, culminating in her death beside Lulu, can be read as the only genuine act of love in a world otherwise defined by reversibility and illusion. Baudrillard's theory, when extended to Geschwitz, reveals its own limits: seduction's reversibility falters before a love that is not strategic but sacrificial. Geschwitz therefore introduces a destabilizing counter-current to Baudrillard's binary logic – an element of non-seductive fidelity that exposes the human cost of symbolic play.

Lulu's feminine strategy of seducing Dr Schön can be seen as a prelude to the fifth and final point of seduction, which is its challenge to power – to defer and reverse its meaning, and to completely erode male-derived production. To begin, "the irony proper to the constitution of woman as idol or sex object: in her closed perfection, she puts an end to sex play and refers man, the lord and master of sexual

*reality*, to his transparency as on *imaginary* subject".[34] From this, we infer how the male gaze produces the imagined woman where sexual "play" is suspended due to her becoming a static symbol. This, in turn, destabilizes the male perspective, because the imagined woman he has created does not embody the created identity, but rather reflects back the man's production and is a construct of his making. This becomes apparent when Baudrillard writes that "all masculine power is a power to produce".[35] Feminine seduction reverses male production through illusion and play with signs that undermine the power of the male production. Indeed, Baudrillard writes, "the only, and irresistible, power of femininity is the inverse power of seduction. In itself it is null, seduction has no power of its own, only that of annulling the power of production".[36]

Lulu, as the quintessential femme fatale, is the produced result of the men around her, where her identity, which reflects this femme fatale notion, is assigned to her in the opera's prologue by the animal tamer, who states: "She as the root of all evil was created; to snare us, to mislead us she was fated, and to murder, with no clue left on the spot. My sweetest beast, please don't be what you're not! You have no right to seem a gentler creature, distorting what is true in woman's nature".[37] This is the definition of the male gaze; therefore, when Dr Schön tries to resist the very essence of his production, he dooms himself by allowing Lulu to reverse his power back onto him – the "inverse power of seduction", as Baudrillard previously wrote. As a result, Dr Schön's desire to control Lulu leads to his own death – not because she murders him as an act of revenge, but because she turns his power back on itself. More specifically, once Lulu marries Dr Schön, he attempts to domesticate her as the perfect reflection of male production and order. Lulu implicitly rebels by being true to her nature, as the animal tamer desired for her, and accepts male admirers into Dr Schön's home when he pretends to exit but secretly hides to observe the ensuing events. Lulu is an agent of seduction, not male production, which prompts Dr Schön to abandon his control and succumb to anger and jealousy, ultimately handing Lulu the gun with which she shoots him. From a certain perspective, Dr Schön's death was assured not when he gave Lulu his gun, but already before that, when his own authority crumbled under the pressure of the inner conflict that prohibited him from both possessing Lulu and retaining his power. That is why Lulu's seduction leads to self-destruction: she does not overpower Dr Schön, but reflects his possessiveness and need to control back onto himself until it destroys him. Baudrillard comments

34 Ibid., p. 15.
35 Ibid.
36 Ibid.
37 A. Berg, *Lulu* libretto, p. 3. "Sie ward geschaffen, Unheil anzustiften, zu locken, zu verführen, zu vergiften. Und zu morden, ohne daß es einer spürt. Mein süßes Tier, sei ja nicht geziert! Du hast kein Recht, uns durch Miaun und Pfauchen die Urgestalt des Weibes zu verstauchen".

on this balance, as seen in the example of Lulu and Dr Schön, by writing that "seduction is stronger than power because it is reversible and mortal, while power, like value, seeks to be irreversible, cumulative, and immortal".[38] This implies that the production of power is weak because it wishes to make real what is an illusion, while seduction is always an illusion and has the ability to reverse power's reality because it does not operate by force. Dr Schön attempted to acquire cumulative modes of production (a wife and subsequent control over her), but Lulu, through seduction, reverses those modes for Dr Schön, uncovering the illusion of power's permanence. In a sense, this is somewhat paradoxical. Production wishes to be based on truth and reality, while seduction exists in the realm of illusion. Yet, the production of power's perceived immortality is a type of irrational hubris – an idealized illusion that seduction dismantles, just like Lulu dismantled the masculine prerogative by proving that what Dr Schön believed to be real and permanent was in fact fictitious and extremely mortal. These dynamics within *Lulu* are perfectly contextualized by Baudrillard, who notes that "the seductress turns desire itself into an illusion or trap. For her there is no more truth to desire – or to the body – than to anything else".[39]

## BERG'S MUSIC AS BAUDRILLARDIAN SEDUCTION

One of Baudrillard's principal tenets of seduction is its inherent circularity. He writes: "Because seduction never stops at the truth of signs, but operates by deception and secrecy, it inaugurates a mode of circulation that is itself secretive and ritualistic, a sort of immediate initiation that plays by its own rules".[40] The repetitive nature of seduction's circularity is most aptly mirrored in *Lulu* through Berg's music. Berg's use of palindromes was previously mentioned as a formal mechanism of circularity, but this section will expand on that point and consider some motivic and circular patterns in the music that can be seen as equally reflective of Baudrillard's ideas of seduction.

We begin with Berg's treatment of tone rows, and specifically Lulu's, to determine how Berg crafted it to allow multiple derivations that constitute the tone rows of other characters in the opera. George Perle writes that "the basic series pervades the opera as a whole and may be said to represent Lulu's universe in a general sense, as opposed to the special sets identified with her role as temptress, with her portrait, and with the abstract qualities of enchantment and fatality embodied in her person".[41] Perle notes that Lulu's series is first heard in the opera when the animal tamer presents Lulu as the snake and issues his proclamation of her femme fatale identity. By presenting Lulu's series with the definition of her main function in the opera, Berg presents the first mu-

38 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 46.
39 Ibid., p. 85.
40 Ibid., p. 81.
41 George Perle, *The Operas of Alban Berg*, vol. 2, *Lulu*, Berkeley 1985, p. 93.

sical reflection of his protagonist alongside the Baudrillardian production of the male gaze, and all its associated allusions to objective meaning and truth.

Elsewhere, Perle gives an example of a leitmotif derived from Lulu's basic series, which is the "tiger's leap" that depicts Dr Schön's anger and need to control Lulu, as in the first scene of the second act, when they are married and he tries to domesticate her.[42] The last instance of this motif occurs in the final scene of the opera with Jack the Ripper's entrance, which creates a thematic association between Jack and Dr Schön through motivic circularity.[43] Like so many other motifs, the tiger's leap is first heard in the prologue in a figure in the cellos that contains an upward chromatic movement of a double stop leading to two slurred notes just prior to a glissando leap from a low A♭ in the bass clef up two octaves to a notated natural harmonic B♭.[44] These exact same notes, again in the cellos, are presented in the same motion, with the same dynamics, but in a slightly different rhythm, containing the same glissando interval up to the natural harmonic, at Jack's entrance.[45] The return of this musical figure clearly signifies an ominous foreshadowing for Lulu with the announcement of the coming of the second tiger, who is brought back by Berg to rectify the mistakes of the first. Berg also formulated other subtle connections between Dr Schön and Jack. A textual symmetry is presented first, where, following his murder of both Lulu and Geschwitz, Jack states: "That was a good bit of work" ("Das war ein Stück Arbeit"), which was the exact phrase that Dr Schön spoke in the second scene of act one.[46] Jack's next text reads: "I'm such a lucky guy" ("Ich bin doch ein verdammter Glückspilz"), which contains the exact same six spelled notes, in a similar rhythmic contour, but different order, to the spelled notes and contour of Dr Schön's text from the first scene of act two, which reads: "These are my twilight years" ("Das mein Lebensabend").[47] These musical mirror images are also scored nearly identically with the only active instrumental line accompanying the two texts, being that of the bassoon, which also has the same spelled notes in both cases, and in the same general rhythmic structure, but in different registers.

Although not every character row in *Lulu* was derived from Lulu's series, it is important to note that Berg did elevate the importance of Lulu's row because he took every second, third, fifth and seventh note of her series to produce the sets associated with the athlete, the schoolboy, Countess Geschwitz and Alwa, respectively.[48]

42 This scene description is meant to refer to an example of Dr Schön's anger and embodiment of a tiger rather than a specific place where the tiger's leap motif occurs.

43 G. Perle, *Lulu*, p. 129.

44 Alban Berg, *Lulu Partitur (I. und II. Akt)*, Vienna 1963, p. 6.

45 Alban Berg, *Lulu Partitur (3. Akt)*, Vienna 1985, p. 964.

46 Douglas Jarman, *Alban Berg: "Lulu"*, Cambridge 1991(= Cambridge Opera Handbooks), pp. 89–90.

47 Ibid., p. 90.

48 Douglas Jarman, *The Music of Alban Berg*, Berkeley 1979, p. 124. A detailed theoretical explanation of this derivation process can be found in Dave Headlam, *The Music of Alban Berg*, New Haven 1996 (= Composers of the Twentieth Century Series), pp. 305–8.

In addition, Schigolch's trope is also extracted from Lulu's series.[49] This practice of creating musical motifs of characters from Lulu's series exemplifies Baudrillard's seducer to the extent that Lulu becomes what each character desires, reflecting back their projections onto them and seducing them in the process. The symmetry of the tone rows reflects Lulu's malleability of identity through her play of signs and symbolic exchanges that reverse the meaning of production. By deriving other characters' rows from Lulu's, Berg musically signifies Lulu's shifting ability that never stabilizes into a single persona or a true self. The illusion of her character is mirrored in the reproduction of her row into other rows.

The circularity of Lulu's series, while depicting recognizable motifs, is also reminiscent of seduction in that those motifs do not fulfil a clear meaning, but defer it through the play of signs, as they are always returning and shifting. This is a symbolic system of reversibility that undermines the production of signs and truths because it misleads: Lulu's series denotes her assigned identity, but it is always changing in an elusive manner through its permutation into other series. This emphasizes a refusal to reflect a fixed meaning, which underscores the type of subversive tendency that is indicative of seduction.

The greatest formal expression of circularity in *Lulu*, after the FMI, constitutes the final scene of the opera, which Jarman cites as a recapitulation of musical materials presented earlier in the opera.[50] Symbolically, this is clearest from Berg's invention of bringing back Lulu's dead husbands in the guise of her prostitute clients. Berg was keenly cognizant of the circularity that he wanted to establish with this (and the FMI), expressing his desire in a letter to Arnold Schoenberg dated 7 August 1930:

> The orchestral interlude [FMI], which in my version bridges the gap between the last act of *Erdgeist* and the first of *Büchse der Pandora* [the two Wedekind plays Berg combined in his libretto], is also the focal point for the whole tragedy and – after the ascent of the opening acts (or scenes) – the descent in the following scenes marks the beginning of the retrograde. (Incidentally: the 4 men who visit Lulu in her attic room are to be portrayed in the opera by the same singers who fall victim to her in the first half of the opera. In reverse order, however.)[51]

Lulu's last client, the aforementioned Jack the Ripper, is, as noted earlier, the musical and symbolic doppelgänger of Dr Schön. After Jack murders Lulu and Geschwitz, Schigolch is left as the final character to elude death, which Jarman sees as a representation of the opera's intention to repeat in a loop of events.[52] From Baudrillard's perspective, the circular repetition of the opera is plausible, because through Lulu's murder, Berg does not allow closure. Instead, we are exposed to mu-

49 D. Jarman, *The Music of Alban Berg*, p. 123.
50 Ibid., p. 198.
51 *The Berg-Schoenberg Correspondence: Selected Letters*, ed. Juliane Brand et al., New York 1987, p. 406.
52 D. Jarman, *The Music of Alban Berg*, p. 237.

sic and characters from earlier scenes, which creates the strong impression that we are experiencing a circular repetition of the narrative. By treating death as a possible prelude to a return, Berg is reflecting Baudrillard's notion that death is not an ending but a reversal, as the final play in the game of appearances. Lulu's death is a mirror of her beginning, because death as seduction constitutes circularity rather than closure. Baudrillard addresses this matter when he writes:

> Death is not a brute event, but *only occurs through seduction*, that is, by way of an instantaneous, indecipherable complicity, by a sign or signs that will not be deciphered in time. Death is a rendezvous, not an objective destiny. Death cannot fail to go since he is this rendezvous, that is, the allusive conjunction of signs and rules which make up the game.[53]

From this, we can see that Baudrillard does not view death as a conclusion because its seductive aspect results rather in a symbolic disappearance, where the meaning of it is not evident in time. Lulu and circularity figure into this argument due to the recapitulating features in the music, presented earlier between Dr Schön and Jack, as well as the music directly following Lulu's murder until the end of the opera. This music brings back passages from the Prologue, as well as harmonies associated with Dr Schön, Alwa and Geschwitz, which are seen as fatalistic reflections of the three characters most directly affected by Lulu.[54] These musical elements reflect Baudrillard's concept of a rendezvous that is not an objective destiny. Lulu's fate is not a demarcated ending but a return to the unstable collection of signs that constitute her various identities. These identities are filtered back into symbolic circulation, since Baudrillardian death lacks a definitive ending; seduction merely disappears, before reappearing in the game of signs. Berg's construction of his opera's final scene enhances the feasibility of this interpretation.

## CONCLUSION

A central motivation for the present article has been to take the historical premise of Lulu as a quintessential femme fatale and expand the scope of her abilities as a temptress by filtering her role in Berg's opera through the theoretical lens of Baudrillard's concept of seduction. The primary research question asked how the narrative and musical components of *Lulu*, viewed through five specific tenets of seduction, reflect Lulu's persona. Lulu's ability to confound, manipulate and reverse meaning is a character trait that directly mirrors Baudrillard's ideas of a seducer who aims to destabilize the signs of production through a play of appearances. While the five isolated points of seduction present symmetries between plot points in the opera

53 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 73.
54 D. Jarman, *Alban Berg*, p. 90.

and each theory, it is perhaps most intriguing to reiterate a Baudrillardian view of Lulu not as a pathological agent of seduction and corruption, but as an ideal that looks to undermine entire systems of production which in this case are firmly associated with the male gaze and the masculine impulse to impose a kind of tyrannical truth, domination and transparency. Lulu's femininity and ability to reverse these power paradigms allowed her not to destroy, but to facilitate self-destruction, as we saw most clearly with the downfall of Dr Schön. Berg's music reflected Baudrillard's concepts of circularity and reversibility through its formal structures, thematic returns and subtle character inflections by means of role doublings. These are the types of reimagined scenarios that deepen our scope for understanding this complex and enigmatic opera.

Baudrillard opened the door for new pathways to interpreting Lulu's character, but let us briefly consider the relatability of this endeavour from the perspective of Berg, and how his perception allowed for this association with *Seduction* in the first place. Although Berg did not live long enough to write reflective texts on his second opera, compelling arguments can be made regarding what he felt about his nefarious protagonist. Berg was first introduced to the world of Lulu through the performance of one of the original plays, which he saw in 1905 at the behest of the Viennese satirist and critic Karl Kraus. Berg was a lifelong devotee of Kraus and his ideas, and was greatly influenced by the lecture on the *Lulu* plays that Kraus delivered before the performance began.[55] Indeed, Berg's former student and biographer, Willi Reich, wrote that "Berg identified himself completely with the conception of the *Lulu* tragedy contained in Kraus's speech".[56] This admission allows us to confidently consider Berg's views as identical to those expressed by Kraus in his speech.

If we next isolate a few passages from Kraus's speech on Lulu's character, we can detect ideals surrounding her femininity, seductive capabilities and relation to men. Kraus writes:

> The play depicts a woman running the gauntlet: a woman not intended by her Creator to serve the egotism of her possessor, who can only rise to achieve her true worth if allowed her freedom […]. A man may dream about having a free female companion; but reality will force her to belong to him as wife or mistress, because his need for social respectability will always take precedence over his dreams. Thus even the man who wishes to have a polyandrous wife wants her for himself. This simple desire must be regarded as the basis of all love tragedies: the man's desire to be chosen without allowing the woman the right to choose.[57]

55 For a study on the overall influence that Kraus's writings and lectures exerted on Berg, see Susanne Rode, *Alban Berg und Karl Kraus: Zur geistigen Biographie des Komponisten der "Lulu"*, Frankfurt am Main 1988. See also David P. Schroeder, "Opera, Apocalypse, and the Dance of Death: Berg's Indebtedness to Kraus", *Mosaic: A Journal for the Interdisciplinary Study of Literature* 25 (1992) no. 1, pp. 91–105.

56 Willi Reich, *Alban Berg*, trans. Cornelius Cardew, New York 1965, p. 156.

57 Karl Kraus, "Pandora's Box", in: D. Jarman, *Alban Berg*, p. 104.

> In Lulu we see the depiction of a woman whom men think they are "having" while in fact they are being "had" by her, a woman who is something different for each of them, who shows each a different face and is more seldom unfaithful, more virginal, than the average domestic doll. In her, I see the perfect vindication of immorality, in the depiction of a complete women who has the inspired ability not to be able to remember, a woman who lives without inhibitions but also without the dangers of constant mental conception, and who swills away every experience into oblivion.[58]

From this passage, we clearly see the male gaze that strives for a domesticated production that places a woman within controlled and authentic parameters of the man's design. This is the realm of reality that Lulu turns upside down because she does not abide by the reality imposed upon her. Kraus's description underscores a future Baudrillardian aesthetic in the way that the former depicts Lulu as living without identity, as someone who does not remember (like when she negated the painter's attempts at forging truths in her) and, most importantly, brings experiences to ruin. Kraus and, by extension, Berg saw Lulu as Baudrillard saw his seducers: as mirrors with no identity of their own, who reflect back what is shown to them in order to reverse its meaning and power and cause the onlooker to implode by turning it all back onto them. We simultaneously see reality-defying illusion and circularity at play in these ideas, which were the most central and effective ploys that Berg engaged in his narrative and musical constructions in *Lulu*.

Berg's opera is pure seduction, as the entire work revolves around symbolic play, where the music and Lulu herself vanish in a game of appearances, because her death is not an ending, but a mirror of her beginning. There are no concluding truths, only the essence of reversibility through the endless play of signs. As such, the most apt signification of the opera through the lens of seduction reflects Baudrillard's poetic sentiment: "to seduce is to die as reality and reconstitute oneself as illusion".[59]

Finally, Baudrillard's reflections on seduction extend beyond theoretical propositions and enter into a historical argument concerning the fate of seduction in the modern world. This dimension adds a temporal resonance to Berg's *Lulu*, allowing us to consider its position within a shifting cultural order. Baudrillard's *Seduction* also carries a historical argument: that the modern world is moving away from seduction toward production, transparency and communication. From this vantage point, Berg's *Lulu* may be understood as an artifact of transition – a work situated at the threshold between the symbolic age of seduction and the modern age of production. The opera's obsessive circularity and self-reflexive musical design capture this historical oscillation.

58 Ibid., p. 111.
59 J. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, p. 69.

If *Lulu* represents the peak of seduction, it is because she manifests the last full expression of an aesthetic and erotic logic based on illusion and ritual. The symbolic economy of *Lulu* still depends on mystery, surface and reversibility, all of which are eroded in later modern culture by the imperatives of transparency and communication. Yet *Lulu* may also be seen as a symptom of the end of seduction: her death and the circular return of motifs suggest that the cycle of symbolic play has exhausted itself, giving way to repetition without renewal. Berg's opera thus occupies an ambivalent position within Baudrillard's historical narrative. It both celebrates seduction's potency and mourns its disappearance. In this sense, *Lulu* becomes the emblem of seduction's terminal beauty – a final, dazzling reflection before the advent of the modern order of production. The circular structure of the opera, with its mirrored scenes and recursive music, enacts this paradox by staging seduction's last performance as its own vanishing act.

Lastly, there are wider applications to consider using the example of *Lulu* and *Seduction*. Baudrillard's multi-faceted theory can be applied to other operas as well that are centred around female protagonists who exemplify mystery and operate within reality-defying Baudrillardian symbolisms of seduction. Three such operas are Richard Strauss's *Salome*, Claude Debussy's *Pelléas et Mélisande* and Francis Poulenc's *La Voix humaine*. The notion of a surface play of appearances abounds in all three works, which gravitate around feminine simulations that destabilize realistic expressions of intimacy, all of which can find fertile symmetry with Baudrillard's theory. Expanding the conceptual scope like this can benefit opera studies more broadly by focusing on operatic characters as symbolic exponents rather than expressive agents. In this light, operas can be seen as networks of signs and surfaces instead of allegories of socio-cultural events or moments in time. Baudrillard unlocks the capability of going beyond narrative representation, where meaning is supplanted by style.

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O UWODZENIU *LULU* ALBANA BERGA: PERSPEKTYWA BAUDRILLARDOWSKA

Artykuł proponuje reinterpretację *Lulu* Albana Berga przez pryzmat filozoficznej koncepcji uwodzenia Jeana Baudrillarda, ukazując operę jako rozważanie o iluzji, odwracalności i załamaniu się sensu. Zamiast postrzegać Lulu jako drapieżną postać, która niszczy mężczyzn za pomocą erotycznej manipulacji, autor ujmuje ją jako figurę symboliczną, obnażającą i podważającą systemy racjonalności oraz kontroli, próbujące ją zdefiniować. W świetle Baudrillardowskiej dialektyki uwodzenia i produkcji Lulu staje się nie tyle podmiotem moralnym, ile znakiem – pozorem, który narusza granice prawdy, władzy i tożsamości.

Wywód rozwija się wokół pięciu powiązanych ze sobą zasad zaczerpniętych z *O uwodzeniu* Baudrillarda: napięcia między uwodzeniem a produkcją, niestabilności znaków, sprzeciwu wobec prawdy i przejrzystości, kobiecej strategii jako gry i skrywania oraz zakwestionowania władzy. Każda z nich znajduje odzwierciedlenie w dramaturgii i konstrukcji muzycznej dzieła Berga. W narracji opery zmienne tożsamości Lulu – modelki, żony, więźniarki, prostytutki – ucieleśniają właściwą uwodzeniu odmowę ustalenia jednego sensu. Jej relacje z malarzem, doktorem Schönem i Alwą pokazują, w jaki sposób obraca męskie pożądanie przeciwko niemu samemu, popychając swoich wielbicieli ku samozagładzie. Partytura Berga wzmacnia te odwrócenia za pomocą struktur palindromicznych i kołowych, które rozmywają linearny czas, kierunek muzyczny i psychologiczną przyczynowość. Filmowe interludium, lustrzane sobowtóry postaci oraz rekurencyjne sieci motywiczne przekształcają operę w dźwiękowy labirynt pozorów – audialny odpowiednik Baudrillardowskiej odwracalności symbolicznej.

Ostatecznie *Lulu* zostaje odczytana jako estetyczne urzeczywistnienie fatalnego piękna uwodzenia: świata, w którym władza rozpływa się w iluzji, a dążenie do prawdy załamuje się we własnym odbiciu. Kolista struktura muzyki Berga i nieuchwytna tożsamość Lulu splatają się tu w wizji wiecznego powrotu, gdzie znikanie staje się aktem tworzenia, a śmierć oznacza odnowę. W tym ujęciu *Lulu* jawi się nie jako odzwierciedlenie rzeczywistości moralnej czy społecznej, lecz jako poetycki opór wobec niej – jako ostatnia inscenizacja uwodzenia, zanim nowoczesny imperatyw produkcji i przejrzystości przesłoni jego tajemnicę.

*Przekł. Bartłomiej Gembicki*

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