



Only the subject desires; only the object seduces.  
Jean Baudrillard, *The Fatal Strategies*

The ultimate aim of the seducer is world domination. Valmont, Valentino, Cleopatra, Casanova, Don Juan and their aliases, in their fictional selves or real living forms, aspire to conquer all the men and women within their reach, however married, devout or prude. The logic behind the selection of their objectives is very simple: seducers go for what they can't or shouldn't have. In a completist fashion, they will do anything to get hold of the missing trophy in their collection. They carefully research their preys to find weaknesses – usually a desire for pleasure – design complex strategies using any available resource to attain their goals and review progress assiduously, fine-tuning their approach to ensure that, one after the other, their targets become their victims. This is what seduction is: a form of power that leads astray from right behaviour. The first seducer was the devil and since the Garden of Eden's episode, his methods have been adopted and adapted by many, including military masterminds, bored aristocrats or marketing geniuses. Yet, in this capitalist and distrustful world we live in, seducers, as in flesh and blood people, have an almost impossible task ahead of them.

Objects have supplanted the processes, techniques and symbols of religious belief and, with them, those of seduction. In the last 20 years, the electronic revolution has meant a shift in desire: from 'bigger and faster' to 'smaller and more powerful'. If we imagine God like an old bearded man dressed in white

while the devil is a black and red creature, the iPod, in its classic version or the new U2, is designed to attract us all, however pious or heretic, Mac or PC users. Today, the iPod, a cigarette packet size MP3 player enabling instant and constant access to one's whole CD collection, is the most desired article. There is no excuse not to have this uber-gizmo: more modest salaries or record collections can choose between the 4 colours of the iPod mini; to those with no interest in music, the iPod photo will playback their favourite images; the new iPod shuffle will surprise those who listen to music constantly.

No object is more ubiquitous. The smoothness of its design, its unblemished whiteness and, particularly, the touch of its controls – a sophisticated steering wheel that guides through the many thousands of songs and playlists it can hold – contribute to its triumph far more than its actual function. The proof is the market availability of better MP3 players (better meaning more memory for money) and their lack of prominence. Like the Walkman's victory over personal stereos, the iPod will soon take over the word 'MP3 player' to become its sole signifier. But this is a case of design over product; it is not just playing music, but the importance of that through which music is played.

The fact that the iPod is created by Apple Computer inc., cannot be underestimated. Its name, with the lower case 'i' trademark – i as in me, as in mine – followed by a capital letter, immediately relates it to an ample family of iMac computers and iLive applications that enhance the iPod's creative possibilities to the nth degree. Apart from showing an interest in cultural matters (through listening to music while walking) and a certain acquisitive power, an MP3 player instantly indicates that the user is technologically educated, resourceful and probably knows how to problem solve. The Apple kudos adds fashionable taste and creativity. Mac computers are the industry standard for designer, artists and musicians. Even though the iPod is not a tool to produce work – yet –, loading one's CD collection through iTunes and deciding the constitution of the playlists still requires more artistry than inserting a tape in a walkman.

What is seductive to us can, nevertheless, also be seductive to others with less money and worse intentions. At first glance, iPod users can be divided into 2 subgroups. The first one comprises those users that proudly sport the distinctively white award-winning designer headphones that come with the device, very visibly announcing that they are attached to a £400, most wanted object tucked in their jacket pocket. The second group is made of those who immediately change them for a £10 pair and use equally visible furtive techniques to change songs and settings. Both are equally appealing to the petty (but highly inconvenient) criminal. In order to discourage theft, Apple incorporated an engravable back into the designs. The U2 special edition iPod also allows etching one's name next to the signatures of Bono, The Edge, Adam Clayton and Larry Mullen Jr. Even if this strategy is ineffective to prevent crime, the sufferings of having an iPod stolen can be palliated by the fact that the felon will either have difficulties in selling it in the black market or will have to use and live the rest of his life with an iPod bearing the evidence of his misdemeanour.

But, if seducing is leading astray, where is it taking us from and where are we headed? In 2004, Jonathan Ive, designer of the iPod, was voted UK's most influential cultural icon. Arguably, the device can be considered a form of techno-creative power, one of Apple's weapons in their crusade towards world domination, – the last one being the Mac Mini, a £339 processing unit, to which any USB keyboard, mouse and DVI/VGA monitor, particularly coming from PCs, can be attached. What certainly has happened is that the iPod and the iTunes Store have changed the way we buy, listen and relate to music. Moreover, they have already started to be used for other purposes. As an experiment, 1600 students from an American university received iPods engraved with the university logo in order to be able to listen to missed lectures while commuting. As they can also function as hard drives and have calendars and address books, those students will have no need to take or photocopy notes. With a simple cable, anything can be downloaded, shared, swaped. The iPod, if anything, is leading us to a culturally and technologically fluent society where, what was geeky not so long ago, is now trendy.

Laura Gonzalez

**[Back to Features](#)**

---