
PHILOSOPHY

Seduction, Communication and Leadership

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*“We live in the moment
of disconnected, minimal,
post romantic seduction.”
(Gilles Lipovetsky)*

Eroticism, Theology and Seduction

THE TERM seduction can be received either in an ethically negative light or in a neutral one. Analyzing seduction in a close relation with communication and leadership, we must keep in mind to approach seduction as a morally neutral instrument. But, in general, when we use the word seduction, we cannot overlook the negative charge the term has accumulated both in the symbolic context of the original seduction from the bible story, but also in the context of erotic relations, often marked by the idea of luring accompanied by various degrees of violence. In every instance, seduction is negatively perceived, in a register of absence of morals or of a violence exercised onto the ethical relation. It is envisaged as a type of attraction having a special power, irresistible, which annuls the will of the seductee in front of the seducer and that leads us somewhere in the area of luring, of deception and erotic madness.

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An entire genre of erotic literature and countless love stories bring us to the image of the seducer shrouded in the mystery enhanced by the erotic and the mystery of love in the most varied ways. It is interesting to note Pascal Bruckner's affirmation that "seduction maintains a climate of convenience between men and women, it privileges connection between people and not separation, attraction and not lack of communication."¹ Seduction implies the ambiguity of a presupposed secret understanding, based on a form of reciprocity of desire and pleasure.

There are also situations where seduction can have a negative juristic charge. But usually, when it is detached from the register of transgression, we notice that within the erotic play of seduction "there are beings so distressed by other's desire of themselves that they give in not so much due to attraction, but to address the homage brought before them."² There is a lot of suffering and a lot of pleasure and fascination in erotic seduction. But it is not within this area of sensual and spiritual pleasure that I wish to place seduction as a communication tool.

We can't ignore the fact that this tradition of the negative perception of seduction is an old one and it is primarily a theological one. We need to remember that in the Genesis story, the seducer, revealed as a snake, introduces a distortion in human existence using seduction as an instrument of breaking the paradisiacal law in relation to the tree in the middle of the garden. The involvement of the primordial human in breaking the paradisiacal interdiction is associated not only with breaking the divine law, but also with overturning free will and revolting against divinity—and all this comes with human responsibility and a punishment. A certain type of violence accompanies the biblical perception of seduction. Comparatively analyzing modern law and biblical Jewish law, Paul Hager notices that seduction has always been tied to acts of transgression, even if there wasn't always considered to be a violent side directly associated with rape as referring to sexual seduction.³ Until today, the violent content is preserved in the common language pertaining to sexual seduction and the effects of seduction by diminishing the autonomy of the person, by altering moral relations or annulling the property of subject of the human being. From the perspective of a philosophy of seduction as a communication tool, as is the one featured in the present text, once postmodern thought emerged, with the explanations that fall out of the area of influence of theological interpretation of seduction, seduction is removed from the strict register of sin and eroticism and acquires a cultural dimension.

We should also emphasize the fact that the negative charge of the term seduction has been maintained even in some philosophical texts. Jean Baudrillard has some useful analyses on this topic. The philosopher notices that "For religion seduction was a strategy of the devil, whether in the guise of witchcraft or love.

It is always the seduction of evil—or of the world. It is the very artifice of the world. Its malediction has been unchanged in ethics and philosophy, and today it is maintained in psychoanalysis and the ‘liberation of desire’.⁷⁴ He does not ignore the negative connotation the term seduction is loaded with in the western language tributary to theological meanings. But he overturns this negativity in a different reading of philosophical address. A way out of the captivity of this negativity is offered by Baudrillard when he relates seduction to production in order to explain the dynamic of the strategies involved by seduction. Thus, what is essential is “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 . . . only at the level of appearances are systems fragile and vulnerable . . . meaning is vulnerable only to enchantment.”⁷⁵ Therefore, while production implies bringing to reality things as values, seduction pushes things towards the area of appearances, hijacks them from their own identity “in order to destine them the game of appearances, the symbolic exchange between them.”⁷⁶

The importance of Baudrillard’s interpretations can be emphasized by the critical reception coming from various areas of cultural reflection.⁷⁷ Among the best in generating new meanings are the philosophy and the seduction analyses of Michelle Ballif. An important observation is: “But within seduction, there is no victor nor is there vanquished; no player can be greater than the challenge. There is no seducer, no seductee, in seduction.”⁷⁸ Another relevant interpretation tells: “Seduction, as all other metaphysical constructs, has been constituted heretofore across the passive/active binary. That which is active is the will; the passive is the will-less. To seduce, then, is to impose one’s will on others by means of artifice and deceit—to unload a sham, a pretense, or an illusion—that is, to merely appear, rather than to be.”⁷⁹ Therefore we are faced with a phenomenon addressed at length by Baudrillard: in seduction, both the seducer and the seductee are reduced to objects. Seduction is based on a sham, and the sham leads us away from the reality of the subject. Simultaneously—and we might even say paradoxically—seduction is denounced as a way to exercise violence in the masculine/feminine relation. But in the world of appearances, seduction perpetuates the rapports of dominance, discrimination and power.

Firstly, we must note the fact that in his reflections on seduction, Pascal Bruckner notices that in the life of the postmodern human, most often seduction is associated with love, therefore we notice that “the voluptuousness of loves make is that you no longer belong to yourself, the voluptuousness of the ego makes it that you can never abandon yourself . . . Any lover therefore speaks two

languages, that of fatal attachment and that of free detachment.”²¹⁰ Thus, seduction is paradoxical in itself: positive and negative at the same time. Seduction works on a market of desire similar to an exchange market, without assuming power and subordination rapports.

Secondly, regarding the two premises brought up by Michelle Ballif, we must note the fact that in postmodern culture seduction does not require an annulment of a partner’s will, but a compromise, an abandon, the seductee abandons oneself, entering, through subtle emotional, mental and existential mechanisms, into the game of the seducer. The seduction game is one that always involves reciprocity between the seducer and the seductee. Even if a confrontational atmosphere is maintained in gender relations, the prevailing tendency is towards a culture of difference—which opens the premises to a continuous reduction of the types of violence we might be witness to. Regarding the perpetuation of the dominance of masculine power, Baudrillard seems to contradict this idea. He is more inclined to think that: “else the triumph of a soft seduction, a white, diffuse feminization and eroticization of all relations in an enervated social universe.”²¹¹ I will not linger on this aspect, but I would like to mention that an original analysis of the feminization of the western postmodern world can be found in the research on love by the philosopher Aurel Codoban.¹²

Without taking into account the rejection of the theological significations of seduction, in the present text we will bear in mind a philosophical perspective where we are offered a management of desire, of pleasure and of building the reality that reveals the function of seduction as a communication tool. Without currently being interested in the possible power-based relations that could be triggered in interpersonal relations or as relations of dominance in society, we wish to reveal the positive aspects that seduction can provide for personal development and leadership. We want to move seduction from the area of domination and violence to the area of creativity. In the process of personal development, seduction is a communication tool that may emphasize the leader’s creativity. It can play the role of a transformative principle that acts as an attraction towards participating in developing common values. And when it is associated with a charismatic dimension, creativity is an instrument of fascination and transformation¹³ within a philosophy of life based on seeking authenticity.

The Philosophy of Seduction and the Seduction of Philosophy

SEDUCTION IS a communication tool that can be used in a strategy of existential structure. Seduction generates the suitable medium of a subtle, almost ineffable, encounter within the register of empathy, emotion and existential ambiguity. It is a way to try to bring together and launch the invitation to participate in a common vision of the world. It implies a minimal philosophy of communication and a paradoxical way to relate to others.

We must remind the fact that Gilles Lipovetsky reveals that in postmodernity seduction lacks emphasis, that “we live in the moment of disconnected, minimal, post romantic seduction.”¹⁴ If we are to work with such a cultural concept of seduction, then it becomes a communication tool and one to structure reality liberated of the negative ethical contents. Postmodernity makes room for a representation of seduction freed from violence, a type of minimal seduction. Although it is a neutral instrument, seduction may be used to set in motion either positive or negative contents. One of the particular qualities—found in those with a predisposition to become leaders—is the capacity to use seduction as a tool to achieve positive structures. As a communication tool in the hands of the leader, seduction is not merely sending messages; it requires a continuous participation to establishing meaning.

An innovative aspect in understanding the instrumentalization of seduction is highlighted by Aurel Codoban when he states that seduction is built within communication and pertains to the nature of communication. It implies a plurality of worlds brought together. This complementarity can be achieved as a way to come out of loneliness. The philosopher states: “We do not communicate, when we communicate we do not transmit anything to others, we live in a profound loneliness and, in fact, when we communicate with each other, we merely indicate where on the map of our mind’s world the other must search to find what is there. But the maps are similar, not identical.”¹⁵ This loneliness, but also this mutual search, is not possible on the model of love—as an endeavor to realize the myth of the androgynous,¹⁶ to achieve a primordial unity, because in the case of seduction we must factor in the element of the crowd. The individual is no longer isolated, she/he experience their loneliness within the crowd. The leader is distinguished from the crowd. Aurel Codoban emphasizes a context of communication where “there are no longer acceptable vertical leaders, there is no longer an ontological vertical, there is only the horizontal of knowledge or communication. Modernity has imposed equality from birth that produces the mass individual. We are all born equal. That’s what the mass is. There are no hie-

rarchies. Therefore, for the mass, the leader is the one that can offer a reflective image, not the superior man of old elites. But an exponent: one who focuses all aspirations, all adhesions.”¹⁷ In this context, what comes up is the very difficult task of philosophy that “addresses not only locally exposed ideas and persuasion, but also image, manipulation and seduction.”¹⁸ However, the philosopher is not the seductor described by Søren Kierkegaard.¹⁹ She/he is more the one that carries a philosophy of communication where “the message reveals and justifies rationally the existential option, as well as the image of the world.”²⁰ The leader uses seduction as a communication tool in the process of transforming one’s own life philosophy into a vision shared with others.

Taking into account the fact that, from the perspective of communication, there is a market of seduction that we must take into account, Christopher A. Howard shows the dynamic relation between the dimension of fascination of seduction and the destructive side of the act of consummating the act of seduction. He gives the example of traveling to far away lands, such as Himalayan journeys, that are fueled by a need to discover the authenticity that the westerner experiences as the seduction of diversity. The negative effect of this desire for authenticity is visible in the fact that an increased consumption of authenticity generates a decrease in the seduction of the different and a leveling of the values that are searched for, turned banal by the continuous consumption and excessive promotion of this type of experience based on a new perception of time and life.²¹ Most often, this escape is structured as a journey where the individual is seduced by the fullness of meaning, of the significance that can be brought about by living in this life all that paradise promises. It is an initiatory endeavor, an encounter with the sacred that refuses integration into any theology of paradise. Often, “seduction is based on the promise of happiness or pleasure . . . Seduction promises something that it cannot give: an entire, total happiness, without discontinuity and tiredness.”²²

This nostalgia of authenticity is experienced not as a retrieval of the past, built as a projection in an imminent future that comes close to restoring the human being and a new ethical foundation for it. Moreover, we notice in recent research that—acting as minimal ethics—postmodern ethics has, among its main coordinates, a dimension as such.²³

The paradoxical situation of the negative and positive effects that we find in the process of marketing seduction is something very common in the communication associated with consumerism. The situation of advertising is very illustrative. Often, advertising language will use rhetorical figures or religious or mythological structures as tools of seduction, with positive effects regarding the persuasive capacity of the messages sent or in building brands, but at the same time these tools are accompanied by a negative dimension or they can be

perceived in themselves as elements that provoke negative feelings, discomfort and even discrimination, encouraging gender stereotypes or perpetuating inadequate ways to relate to the object of desire.²⁴ Theoreticians explain the presence of stereotypes with the existence of a more pronounced cultural modeling of communication, more precisely, commercial communication.

The influence of religious or cultural factors, just like the dimension of gender, is visible in political advertising as well, in building the image of political leaders. In a comparative research on the way in which the image of political leaders in France and Norway is built, researchers Anne Krogstad and Aagot E. Storvik have revealed that while French communicators have a tendency to use seduction mechanisms likely to set the politician above the masses, in Norwegian political communication and image building communicators insist on modesty, unaffectedness and an adherence to common values.²⁵

When we say that various aspects of communication and seduction are culturally influenced, we don't mean a broad sense of culture. We have in mind the basis of a philosophy of life that implies a general perspective on existence. It is characterized by specific ways to live according to the requirements imposed by such a comprehensive image on life. The leader has the merit of transforming this philosophy of life into a vision. Hence the fascination this generates in the acts of communication due to seduction, especially in political communication.²⁶ However, just like anything else pertaining to human action and choice, this fascination can also have negative effects. We already have the negative example of the means to use the mechanisms of seduction in totalitarian ideology and propaganda²⁷ or the seduction generated by populist strategies²⁸ in today's western world. These manifestations should not keep us from seeing the role seduction has in developing a communication strategy.

The Practices of Seduction Require a Philosophy of Life

THE PHILOSOPHY of communication has limited means to bring philosophical problems in the public space. Philosophical communication cannot act, for example, according to the model of media communication. It is well known from theories regarding agenda setting that mass media has a limited capacity to directly influence opinions and attitudes. However, it can have an overwhelming role in setting the debate themes in the space of communication and in the general public space. It has a major influence by establishing what is proprietary and meaningful from the perspective of public communication and public interest.²⁹ The philosophy of communication cannot directly influence the establishment of the general framework deployed by communica-

tion. Although it cannot claim a role in establishing the public agenda, it can however become important through the contents it puts forward.

Arthur Schopenhauer states that “starting with Socrates, the problem of philosophy was connecting the *force* that produces the universal phenomenon and therefore determines the nature of the world with the *morality* of the attitude, to demonstrate that the moral order of the world is the basis of the physical one.”³⁰ On this backdrop, philosophy may be conceived as “a way of life and of moral conversion of personality.”³¹ Schopenhauer’s affirmation can be brought in the area of personal development and studies on leadership. We need something to set in motion that which represents the basis of existence that manifests itself in the assumed shapes of values, and among the values that govern the life of the western person, the ethical values prove to be the background for manifesting all other values. There is an anteriority of the ethical in relation with the physical, meaning that for the human “becoming” the ethical plays a role similar to that of an essential metaphysical principle. In the actual world, leadership programs must use this capacity of philosophy to morally fulfill existence.³² Ethical leadership is the privileged method through which applied philosophy pervades into the field of organizational ethics, social responsibility or that of economic efficiency.

Set at the basis of personal development, of cultivating leadership qualities, “the practice of philosophy does not consist of a mere lecture, or even a demonstration. It is interpretation, interrogation, meditation: it wants to make the great works to say what they want to say or what they might want to say, in the unfathomable Truth they contain, or, more likely, they indicate, silently ‘pointing’ to it.”³³ What we must gather here is the importance that the instrumentalization of philosophy has in this existential game where “the Word is philosophical not because it strives to answer with words, with a system, clear as a phantom, the question raised by desire, but because it knows that, just like all words, it is conquered even in the moment it mostly wants to conquer.”³⁴ For Lyotard, the game of presence and absence, the dynamic of desire and seduction are what makes us philosophize. Philosophy does not give a definite answer, logos is always rephrased. It doesn’t aim for an abstract instantiation of the word, but it is the logos present within each of us, it is the word uttered by each of us in a process where communication manifests as an act of seduction. Philosophy reunites us as in a language of seduction that we build together in communication. Philosophy makes possible this commercialization of desire, of seduction, of love.

In developing discourses on leadership, philosophy contributes by talking about the comprehensive perspective on existence. It takes us out of the area of the fragmentation that we so cherish as beings pertaining to postmodern culture. One of the most influential leadership masters, John C. Maxwell, notices

that an exercise leaders constantly engage in is the development of their thinking about the comprehensive dimension. He motivates this culture of ruling over the comprehensive by saying: “Comprehensive thinking implies maturity and integrity, in exchange offering a general perspective of the world.”³⁵ Then, we know that we can easily retrace our steps from the general to the particular, depending on personal development needs or the need to address the interests and solving our peers’ problems. This general perspective offers the possibility to see things from an angle that isn’t limited to one’s own consciousness. It brings about the issue of the relational subject and of the philosophical practices related to showcasing its value.

When the leadership master tells us we cannot be leaders without this ability to generalize, he is not excluding the other way of looking within things, that is to say, fixating, focusing on what seems important at a certain time and what must be prioritized. We will not insist on the need for pointed focus, but it serves at least to mention Daniel Goleman’s work,³⁶ *Focus*. Although strategic focus on issues is very important, the need to develop a way of thinking that involves a general perspective on existence is of utmost importance to us in this context. Even if the relative and the fragmentation pertain to the essence of postmodernity, escaping this fragmentation and reconstructing on authenticity are ways to give consistence to postmodern existence.

In the process of appropriating a philosophy of life, we are not merely talking about a simple instrumentalization of desire or of love, but about setting in motion a special energy emanated by leaders and experience by those attending. It is part of the mechanisms of seduction that are required in the leadership activity. In searching for unity, the leader has the ability to turn one’s own philosophy of life into a horizon where one develops together with the others. This action of communal growth, beside the personal benefits, has as its final purpose developing a community spirit, the feeling of belonging to a group or a collective or a profession. Encouraging informal leadership is beneficial for organizations, including multinational companies, because this individual spirit may bring major transformations in growing efficiency and improving organizational life. Then, it has a positive impact on various public categories of the organization, due to the specific mechanisms of the influence of ethical and responsible organizational communication.

Of course, this is what could be called, in the shadow of Lyotard’s reflections, a philosophy in search of logos, therefore, of meaning. This meaning doesn’t only refer to searching for the ultimate meaning of one’s own life or the general meaning of life. It is also important to find a common meaning and to share what can be meaningful for a certain group or a community built on professional criteria. The leader is a guide that holds the secret of the path that must be taken and keeps us on the path. Those who participate in the search for

unity discovered early on that unity is never complete, unity is realized in multiplicity, therefore in desire, or, more precisely, in the journey between desire and love. We don't want to turn love into an emotional manner of relating between people working in multinational companies, economic organizations or even charitable organizations. It is more than anything a philosophical concept that we might understand if we look at it in the interference between existence, communication and living. It can become part of human existence by taking on the values, in particular the ethical values that the leader brings into the professional space through personal example and through the leader's acts of ethical and efficient communication. Leadership programs manage to turn love into an asset by associating love with the necessary sacrifice to succeed. "There is no success without sacrifice—this is the truth that people who become leaders get to know. To get to the top of the pyramid, you have to bow down to the idea of sacrifice,"³⁷ says John C. Maxwell, encouraging us to practice a philosophy of sacrifice, which means a philosophy of love integrated in the actions that require solving our everyday problems.

On this level, the appeal to philosophy is a privileged means to make meaningful life possible, to experience the joy of being, of living, of doing something about one's own growth, about another's development, and of improving the way life unfolds. The instrumentalization of seduction in the field of such a philosophy is the most firm basis upon which to build inner communication, communication with the other, including nature regarded as the reality of radical exteriority.

Instead of Conclusions

BERT OLIVER reveals in a critical manner the particular way Baudrillard places postmodernity under the sign of a logic of seduction, associating it with the reality of the simulacrum and an artificial construction of reality, of a superficial experience of life.³⁸ His work has the merit of emphasizing that a characteristic dimension of the postmodern era is given by the fact that seduction becomes an instrument of interpreting reality, even if this reality is visible only in the minimal shapes seduction and communication take.³⁹

This is a good opportunity to reveal that philosophy may offer an authentic language of communication, of experiencing the ultimate meanings and of framing it in daily life. The various means of investigating philosophy have in common the fact that they set into motion a type of seduction of philosophy. The result is that every time the desire to escape daily banality will supersede our tendency to place borders in relation to the various ways of becoming aware of the need for authenticity that we feel as human beings.

Starting from Socrates' affirmation that "the unexamined life is not worth living," Lou Marinoff says that "examining one's own life from a philosophical perspective is not only possible, but advisable."⁴⁰ Moreover, when Aurel Codoban states that "Seduction lives from communication and in communication, and its reality is only a communicational one,"⁴¹ or when Jean Baudrillard says that "the basic dynamic of the world is seduction,"⁴² they reveal the meaning of philosophy as testing, provoking, as fascination with the values and the beauty of an existence experienced by bringing them in our personal lives. Personal development may benefit from the seduction of philosophy as irresistible attraction, as attraction towards accomplishing something on a higher ontological level.

Bearing in mind a minimal form of seduction, the way in which we speak and the existence of a minimal ethics, the seduction of the leader can be especially noticed in the way she/he assumes a vision according to which she/he organizes her/his professional life and daily existence. She/he has a philosophy of life that can be offered as an alternative to the life lived without the awareness of its value, as an alternative to the life lived without strategies connected to the meaning of the actions undertaken, as an alternative to the life lived without a clear plan of development and personal and professional fulfillment. A life lived with the knowledge of the possibility to accomplish the real potential that is offered is the life of the leader that needs to surface within each person that assumes the role of a leader—manifesting one's influence in other people's lives. □

Notes

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9. *Ibid.*, 81.
10. Bruckner, 30–31.

11. Baudrillard, *Seduction*, 3.
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17. Codoban, "Manipulare, seducție și ideologie ostensivă," 134.
18. *Ibid.*, 138.
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22. Aurel Codoban, "From Persuasion to Manipulation and Seduction (A Very Short History of Global Communication)," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 5, 14 (2006): 155.
23. Iulia Grad and Sandu Frunză, "Postmodern Ethics and the Reconstruction of Authenticity in Communication-Based Society," *Revista de cercetare și intervenție socială* 53 (2016): 326–336. See also Cristian Iftode, "Postmodern Ethics, Multiple Selves, and the Future of Democracy," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 14, 42 (Winter 2015): 3–26.
24. Mihaela Frunză, "Advertising, Gender Stereotypes and Religion: A Perspective from the Philosophy of Communication," *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies* 14, 40 (Spring 2015): 72–91; A. van Niekerk and E. Lubbe, "Rhetorical figures as intellectual play in advertising communication," *Tydskrif Vir Geesteswetenskappe* 54, 3 (2014): 446–461.
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41. Codoban, “From Persuasion to Manipulation and Seduction,” 155.
42. Jean Baudrillard, *Celălalt prin sine însuși*, translated by Ciprian Mihali (Cluj: Casa Cărții de Știință, 1997), 45.

Abstract

Seduction, Communication and Leadership

In the present text, seduction is released from the pressure of negative significations that accompany the theological and erotic registers. Viewed from the perspective of a theory of communication, seduction works as an instrument to build interpersonal communication and public communication. Starting with the idea of a philosophy of seduction and the seduction of philosophy, we are talking about a minimal seduction that works within personal development strategies and leadership. The premise is that the marketing of seduction implies having a life philosophy, revealing the need for a philosophy to participate in building a meaning and to open towards the existential meanings of valuing the subject as a relational subject in a vision that is essential for the leader to organize her/his professional and daily life around.

Keywords

communication, public communication, philosophy of seduction, seduction of philosophy