

Matador, Are You Able to Seduce Me?

Mathilde BRANTHOMME

Université de Montréal

Fut-il un temps, Willie, où je pouvais séduire? Fut-il jamais un temps où je pouvais séduire? Ne te méprends pas sur ma question, Willie, je ne te demande pas si tu as été séduit, là-dessus nous sommes fixés, je te demande si à ton avis je pouvais séduire - à un moment donné.

Beckett

Is there an act of seduction in a bullfight? An art form full of murder, blood and wounds seems far removed from the delicate seduction of Byron's *Don Juan*. However, the most famous bullfighters have always had a strong reputation of seducers, affecting both men and women with various qualities such as elegance, virility, beauty, strength, audacity, and bravery. Indeed, the virility of the *matador* exerts a strong attraction but I would rather focus on the conceptual persona of the seducer and the aesthetic figure of the *matador*, following Deleuze and Guattari's theory. I will first define the conceptual persona and the aesthetical figure. I will then establish a comparison between seduction and bullfights. Why can one speak about seduction in a bullfight? Is the attraction and the fascination of the *matador* powerful enough to suggest new ways to think about seduction?

The conceptual persona cannot be defined fully, I will approach this notion by describing its effects in the process of creation. This work will not present a concise definition but will instead draw an outline of the subject by approaching it from different sides. In *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?*, Deleuze and Guattari present the conceptual persona and the aesthetical figure. The conceptual persona is linked to the philosophical plane of immanence. By putting forward this notion, the authors question philosophical creation and the power to think that can be raised by the conceptual persona. It allows us to "believe in this world" and to think in spite of the absurdity, the difficulties and the pitfalls of our world. Thinking with the conceptual persona is an action in movement. The persona is nothing definitely established, it moves and changes, it covers the plane of immanence and evolves with it, it questions the inertia of a fixed definition. By keeping a shadowy shape, the conceptual persona is a figure of creation. Speaking about the conceptual persona, Deleuze and Guattari say :

Il y a effectivement autre chose, un peu mystérieux, qui apparaît par moments, ou qui transparait, et qui semble avoir une existence floue, intermédiaire entre le concept et le plan pré-conceptuel, allant de l'un à l'autre. (Deleuze and Guattari 1991 : 60)

From the beginning, Deleuze and Guattari reject an exhaustive definition and present the vagueness of the conceptual persona. What is vagueness? Indecision, uncertainty... One guesses something and it is only by guessing that one can approach the conceptual persona. The reader has to follow the text carefully. He has to be actively searching for subtle hints, the whispers embedded in the text. Philosophy is therefore an effort of thought, an idea that leaps off the page, moving to and fro. A non-exhaustive definition forces the reader to build his own conceptual persona, to fill in the gaps, to guess what was not said, to perceive without saying the exact words.

The conceptual persona presents the act of thinking philosophically. Confronting it is confronting others. Others who always stay as strangers, incomprehensible. The reader has to separate himself from the clear discourse of truth to enter a more tortuous route thus acquiring an uncertain knowledge.

The conceptual persona is a desiring force. Opening the door to the conceptual persona is opening the door to the love triangle, the relationship between the lover, the object of desire and the rival described by Deleuze and Guattari (Deleuze and Guattari 1991 : 10). Seduction is a struggle, a fight where nothing is clear and limpid, where attraction and fascination play an essential role. Struggle and dialogue follow one another. The conceptual persona seduces because it allows one to see something while creating a dialogue, a struggle. It does not give a definite knowledge, an eternal truth. It is the rival of ready-made concepts; it deconstructs clichés while stimulating the creation of new concepts. In philosophy, one has to leave the rigorous logic of scientific proposals to enter with fluidity the *chaosmos* (a chaos-cosmos). Concepts vibrate together, interfere, question one another. The conceptual persona covers the plane of consistency, moves around the concepts, assembling them. It sheds some light on the philosophical problem and creates new shapes. It can even exceed reason and join the unconscious, showing unknown places to the reader. It gives a concrete body to philosophical problems. Philosophical thinking becomes a matter of intimate relationships, internal connections. Figures are not merely representing thoughts; they are an essential part of the act of thinking. The philosopher becomes a jumping dog, he becomes an animal :

Et si la pensée cherche, c'est moins à la manière d'un homme qui disposerait d'une méthode que d'un chien dont on dirait qu'il fait des bonds désordonnés. . . (Deleuze and Guattari 1991 : 55)

Taking a thought to its limits implies that one confronts the extremes, extremes of violence, extremes of chaos, extremes of life and death. Chaos is a space where no laws reign. A space where nobody is doing anything, a space of obscurity and blinding light. By opposing the philosopher to the wise man, by defining the plane of immanence as “une coupe du chaos” (Deleuze et Guattari 1991 : 44), Deleuze and Guattari ask for violence inside philosophy itself. It is not relevant to be wise, one has to leave the divine high ground to confront reality. Wisdom is a state of mind where one pretends to give up the extremes, being wise is being right in the middle, the happy medium. Wisdom of the apathetic or wisdom coming above, that teaches the oblivion of the body and the privilege of the soul. The philosopher, with Deleuze and Guattari, flees from this wisdom. That is why he needs the conceptual personae that struggle within him, they are not peaceful figures obeying the movements of the thoughts. The philosopher as a jumping dog reminds me of a poem by Antonin Artaud :

Avec moi dieu-le-chien

Avec moi dieu-le-chien, et sa langue
qui comme un trait perce la croûte
de la double calotte en voûte
de la terre qui le démange.

Et voici le triangle d'eau
qui marche d'un pas de punaise,
mais qui sous la punaise en braise
se retourne en coup de couteau.

Sous les seins de la terre hideuse
Dieu-la chienne s'est retirée,

des seins de terre et d'eau gelée
qui pourrissent sa langue creuse.

Et voici la Vierge-au marteau,
pour broyer les caves de terre,
dont le crâne du chien stellaire
sent monter l'horrible niveau.
(Artaud 1970 : 65)

The philosopher hopes to find “la langue qui perce la croûte”, find a way to bring chaos to reason.

The conceptual persona gives colors and tones to thoughts; it brings back the restless wandering of thinking. It draws thinking. The reader listens to the sound of the universe created by the conceptual persona. It is the philosopher's mouth. “*Les personnages conceptuels ont ce rôle, manifester les territoires, déterritorialisations et reterritorialisations absolues de la pensée*” (Deleuze and Guattari 1991 : 67). The conceptual persona is not making a map, he allows the philosopher to penetrate a territory, to get out of it, to create new territories. With the conceptual persona, the philosopher delves in the chaos to create new concepts and trace new territories. With the aesthetic figure, the artist delves in the chaos to create affects and percepts, blocks of sensation.

What if instead of saying what seduction is, instead of explaining that seduction is to draw aside, we delve into the hidden violence of seduction? What if instead of reasoning about seduction, we start following Johannes, the conceptual persona of the seducer in Kierkegaard's *The Seducer's Diary*? We start a philosophical thought by being fascinated by a figure, the seducer, not a simple character but a figure that draws on many kierkegaardian concepts. This figure presents both seduction and sacrifice in seduction. The charming Cordelia seems to be used entirely for the benefit of the seducer. He creates his own existence through seduction, through the creation and recreation of seduction. Is there a symbolic murder in *The Seducer's Diary*, is Johannes killing Cordelia by seducing her? I would like to superpose this couple, the seducer and the seduced, with another couple, the bull and the matador. To me it seems that the violence of a bullfight, intrinsically linked to eroticism, helps us understand the limits of seduction. The power of this aesthetic figure allows us to understand the becoming-animal of the seducer.

The figure of the matador and the figure of the seducer bring up many questions and concepts; seduction, subjectivity, figure, interiority, secret, thought, sacredness. All these concepts keep interfering with one another in the figures of the matador and of the seducer. How can I think about seduction, related to all these concepts, without losing the intensity and the power of these figures? How can one not lose oneself in this obscure forest? Figures allow an oscillation between the loss, the detour and the trace. The crumbs that one leaves on his way become stones, solid concepts, never eternal but linked to that promise, for one moment, to stay there, to not disappear. Figures offer an effective way of analyzing and opening up the space of sensations inside reflection. They invade us, they obsess us, they make us cry and scream. They flourish within the intensity of life.

The conceptual persona resembles to a theoretical fiction, a fiction drawn between the lines. It occupies the fictional interstices of thinking. It says something that reason cannot. It invents something beyond representation, a block of concepts occupying a certain territory. Following a figure allows us to start with the *musement* before applying our categories to the object we wish to analyze. Bertrand Gervais describes *musement* in the following manner:

La figure apparaît souvent comme un coup de foudre. D'abord, il n'y a rien. Puis, soudainement, quelque chose surgit qui change tout. C'est une révélation, moment inouï où une présence nous apparaît, où une vérité s'impose subitement et dicte sa loi. (Gervais 2007 : 15)

Gervais adds that this revelation is always incomplete, its meaning is never definitive, the figure remains an enigma, it does not give us a complete explanation and that is why one can muse on a figure. I start thinking, I lose myself in my thoughts. I feel that they all go together, they are all linked, but I cannot touch them, join them. I hesitate, it is this or that, but not exactly this or that. Then, between all these thoughts, a form takes shape, something that carries over all these indecisions, that allows interstices and intervals while enlightening my thoughts. The conceptual persona, as a figure, goes beyond subjectivity without becoming absolutely objective. A figure invades the subject contemplating it. One can describe it, but it is always an incomplete description. When a specialist claims to tell the truth about a figure, to describe it from head to toe, he is speaking about a dead object, a figure that does not have any intensity, any depth.

The seducer and the *matador* evolve between the conceptual persona and the aesthetic figure. By presenting essential concepts of Kierkegaard's philosophy, Don Juan and Johannes the seducer can be described as conceptual persona. For Kierkegaard, Don Giovanni by Mozart offers an immediate seducer, Don Juan. He seduces because he desires life, his pleasure is to enjoy each aesthetic instant of seduction. He does not plan anything, he seduces quite naturally, women fall into his arms, there is nothing he can do about it. Johannes, in *The Seducer's Diary*, is a reflexive seducer, a dandy trying to create perfect poetry through seduction. The object of seduction, a young girl named Cordelia, evolves in a world of appearances; one could name her a ghost, a slave, a fantasy, the perfect incarnation of beauty and irony. She has the freshness of innocence and through seduction, she discovers herself as a young ironic woman. Johannes remains the master in this process and that is why I am interested in comparing this process of seduction with bullfights. I am interested in portraying seduction not only as a relation between a master and a slave, between the person sacrificing and the sacrificed subject but also as an actual fight, not a balanced fight, but a fight where the seduced can become the seducer, when the risks of the game imply death. Seduction could be a way of recycling violence, and bullfights can help us understand that.

To qualify the *matador* as a conceptual persona would be presumptuous; one would need new revolutionary concepts and a new plane of immanence. However, the *matador* is an aesthetical figure in many artworks. The *matador*, the man who kills the bull in a bullfight, provides a special incarnation of seduction. He shapes and destroys the figure of the seducer. Through the figure of the *matador*, through musement, the person reflecting on seduction can explore new territories. With the *matador*, one can delve into the chaos of seduction, into its violence. In *The Seducer's Diary*, one can approach this almost perfect figure of a conceptual seduction. The seducer represents the aesthetic stage in Kierkegaard's thinking; he creates his own existence as a work of art. Seduction appears to be a demiurgic act, where the seducer becomes God. Beneath this process of a perfect seduction, the reader can perceive anguish and despair, the *aporia* of a man that wishes to achieve infinity in a moment of ideal seduction, the *aporia* of a man who recognizes the other only as a part of his own seduction, as a creation of his seduction. Bullfighting shares this *aporia* with seduction, it shares the erotic sacrifice and brings it to an end.

Pedro Almodóvar virtuously painted the continuity between seduction, passion and bullfight, *taurromaquia*. In his movie *Matador*, he portrays an ex-matador, Diego Montes, and a

lawyer fascinated by bullfights and Diego Montes, María Cardenal. They are perverted; to achieve sexual pleasure, they need to kill their partner during intercourse. It is an art for them. They find each other, seduce each other, fall in love and kill themselves while making love. Their perversion leads them to death, seduction leads them to passion. Diego, being a matador, is not a neutral or innocent reference. Bullfights have been used by many artists, writers, film directors as a reference to the absolute linked to violence and passion. Seduction is not always a game. In Kierkegaard's works, it is much more than a game, it is a relation to the absolute, a way of achieving perfect poetry beyond rationality. In *Matador*, seduction allows Diego Montes and María Cardenal to create their own space, to protect their intimate relationship from the eyes of the others. In *The Seducer's Diary*, Johannes keeps his life secret by seducing everybody, and not only the young girl Cordelia. He seduces her old aunt by entertaining her with agricultural discussion, he seduces Edward, a young man in love with Cordelia, by advising him about women. Therefore, seduction can be a way of protecting interiority, a way of allowing people to live an absolute experience that could not be lived in the midst of the world.

The aesthetical figure of the *matador*, vaguer than the conceptual persona of the seducer in Kierkegaard's works, allows me to think about seduction in different ways. While contemplating Goya's etchings, *La Tauromaquia*, we can notice different affects and percepts. They portray the violence and the craziness of bullfights, especially at the beginning of the nineteenth century, when the rules of bullfights were not totally defined, when the mob could enter the ring and fight with the bullfighters. Some etchings isolate the bullfighter and the bull, portraying a lying body, the matador being killed, alone in front of the bull. Contemplating the etching *La desgraciada muerte de Pepe Illo en la plaza de Madrid*, one can perhaps probe pain and violence. The etching *El mismo Ceballos montando sobre un toro quiebra rejones en la plaza de Madrid* exposes a man who seems to become a bull, a man becoming animal, showing a new ferocity, perhaps the ferocity at stake in *Matador* by Almodóvar, an incredible violence that makes the human being merges with the bulls, that takes place in a ritual of sacrifice. Barbaric violence tends to be polished in the rite of bullfighting. As in the process of a kierkegaardian seduction, the murder (actual or symbolic) is framed by aesthetics.

The figure of the matador is definitely able to seduce me, he has been seducing many thinkers and writers (Goya, Leiris, Lorca, Picasso, Bergamin and others) that are both attracted and disgusted by it. When the seduced tends to become the slave of the seducer, when the seducer presents himself as an absolute master, seduction seems to be as brutal, as primal as the bullfight. At the same time, through seduction, one can protect their intimacy, one can invent their existence and establish with another person a sacred relation. A painting by Zuloaga, *Torerillos de pueblo* (village bullfighters) ironically evokes the artificiality of bullfights, it plays with clichés, with suits of lights and attitude, the desire of virility, the capacity of smoking a cigar with elegance. *Torerillos* means small bullfighters, bullfighters that did not achieve any recognition. It portrays another aspect of seduction, the narcissistic desire for domination, strength and beauty, the will of finding the epic image of a hero in the eyes of the seduced.

The conceptual persona of the seducer and the aesthetic figure of the *matador* lead us to passion, an explosion of passion through seduction. For Wahl, Kierkegaard shows that "La passion transporte l'existant à une telle profondeur d'existence qu'il se trouve dans une union du fini et de l'infini qui dépasse l'existence" (Wahl 1998 : 124). As many bullfighters say, bullfighting is a possibility to be oneself at one's maximum (Mendes 1986 : 102); passion in bullfights can achieve its climax with a moment of *duende*, moments of fascination for the spectators, of

subconscious inspiration for the bullfighters who achieve the perfect mixture of techniques and art. This Spanish word does not have a definite translation, Federico Garcia Lorca explores it in *Juego y Teoría del duende* [Play and Theory of the Duende] :

Estos sonidos negros son el misterio, las raíces que se clavan en el limo que todos conocemos, que todos ignoramos, pero de donde nos llega lo que es substancial en el arte. Sonidos negros, dijo el hombre popular de España, y coincidió con Goethe, que hace la definición del duende al hablar de Paganini, diciendo: "Poder misterioso que todos sienten y que ningún filósofo explica".

Así, pues, el duende es un poder y no un obrar, es un luchar y no un pensar. Yo he oído decir a un viejo maestro guitarrista: "El duende no está en la garganta; el duende sube por dentro, desde la planta de los pies". Es decir, no es cuestión de facultad, sino de verdadero estilo vivo; es decir, de sangre; es decir, de viejísima cultura, y, a la vez, de creación en acto. (Lorca 1984 91-92)

[These "black sounds" are the mystery, the roots fastened in the mire that we all know and all ignore, the fertile silt that gives us the very substance of art. "Black sounds", said that man of the Spanish people, concurring with Gœthe, who defined the duende while speaking of Paganini: "A mysterious power which everyone senses and no philosopher explains.

The duende, then, is a power, not a work. It is a struggle, not a thought. I have heard an old maestro of the guitar say, "The duende is not in the throat, the duende climbs up inside you, from the soles of the feet." Meaning this: it is not a question of ability, but of a true, living style, of blood, of the most ancient culture, of spontaneous creation. (Lorca 1998 49)]

Do Diego Montes and María Cardenal achieve *duende* in the final scene of *Matador*? Does *duende* tell us something about seduction? It tells us something about an ephemeral experience of the absolute, it tells us something about the responsibility at stake in seduction and bullfights. Bullfighters describe a moment of *duende* as a perfect erotic harmony between the bull and the bullfighter, when the bull is absolutely fascinated by the moves of the bullfighter, when both seem to be accomplishing a perfect choreography, ending in death.

The figure of the matador enlightens certain aspects of seduction and casts a shadow on others. I wanted to follow this figure to reflect on the seducing power of a figure, its effectiveness and explore seduction through a new perspective. The conceptual persona of the seducer - by allowing us to explore the concept of seduction - and the aesthetical figure - by making us delve into the passion of seduction and bullfights - allow me to approach seduction through affects, percepts and thoughts, denoting what is at stake in seduction. Seduction can be a way of creating a sacred and private space in our contemporary world but to understand its consequences, we need to think the extremes of seduction, we need to feel where seduction could take us and for that, we need figures that convey more than pure reason.

Works cited

ARTAUD, Antonin. *Œuvres complètes*. Paris : Gallimard, 1970

DELEUZE, Gilles and Félix GUATTARI. *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie ?* Paris : Les Éditions de Minuit, 1991.

GERVAIS, Bertrand. *Figures, lectures. Logiques de l'imaginaire. Tome I*, Montréal : Le Quartanier, coll. « Erres Essais » 2007.

KIERKEGAARD, Søren. « Le Journal du Séducteur », *Ou bien... ou bien*, Paris : Éditions Gallimard, 1943, 235-346.

LORCA, Federico García. *Conferencias, Juego y teoría del duende*, Madrid : Alianza Editorial, 1984.

_____. “Play and Theory of the Duende”. *In Search of Duende*. Trans. Christopher Maurer. New York : New Directions Publishing, 1998, 48-62.

PELLETIER, Claude and Victor MENDES. *Tu comprends ?* Bayonne : S. Sordes, 1986.

WAHL, Jean. *Kierkegaard, L'Un devant l'Autre*. Paris : Hachette Littératures, 1998.