

Eros of “Leader-fullness” The Seductive Nature of Leadership and Global Reality

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Abstract: Driven by rhetoric and persuasion, the Euro-American culture continues to influence our theories and practices of leadership. In the ever-changing world of global socio-cultural challenges, there is need for a different approach to leading and serving others. In this global reality, the disguise *leader-fullness* is a subtle quality that transcends the notion of power in initiating and leading purposeful change. This paper explores how leaders create a different approach to working with followers who are culturally different in mutually sustainable long-term relationships. It makes a case that the most important quality in leading others is the presence of *seductive Eros* as a prerequisite for, and as a manifestation of leader-fullness that can be transported across cultural boundaries.

Introduction

For sometime, I have wondered about visionary leaders who have made significant global changes. Leaders like Moses, Akhenaton, Cleopatra, and the late Mahatma Ghandi, Martin Luther King, the Dalai Lama, and Nelson Mandela among many others have touched the heart of our humanity. Beyond the obvious skills and competencies of these leaders, there seems to be a distinctive quality embedded in their characters. This fascinating quality is best represented in this paper as *leader-fullness*. My purpose of using this connotation of leader-fullness is to go beyond the conventional term of leadership and its uses and abuses into a higher plain that embodies a whole range of human development. So much has been written and spoken about the nature of leadership and the competent skills needed for its effective practices. Nevertheless, this discourse seems to trigger more questions than answers, more quandary than clarity; and, in many ways, it derails leaders' attention of serving others toward self-referential and self-indulgence of rhetoric and persuasion as evident in the recent political arena.

The theme of this conference provided the perfect opportunity for my sense of wonder about what has become the 21st century buzzword, “leadership.” The questions concerning how leaders in our new global reality broaden their influence, how they design a different approach to working with followers in enchanted long-term sustainable and magical relationships are thought provoking. Considering the current international conflicts and global predicaments, it is becoming more evident that for leaders to broaden their influence, they must transcend the prevailing strategy of rhetoric and persuasion into the appreciation and practice of genuine *seduction*. Whether leaders are on many paths and one journey, or they are on one path and many journeys, seduction seems to be a *destiny* for leaders and followers.

The paper is organized in three main parts. The first part discusses the limitation of rhetoric and persuasion in practicing leadership. The second part, by drawing from mythologies, languages, and historical evidences, attempts to reveal the truth about the notion of seduction, liberates Eros, and establishes connections between seduction, Eros and leadership. And the third part makes a case for practicing the art of seduction in this new global leadership, and offers some characteristics of seductive nature of Eros and leader-fullness.

The Limit of Rhetoric and Persuasion

The current state of world political, economical and social forces has materialized as an object of mastery based on the master-slave dialectic, rhetoric and persuasion (Baudrillard 1979). In this panoptic epoch, leaders who adhere to rhetoric, which is based on rational argument and debate, are limited and ineffective. And leaders with a knack for persuasion, with its rational convincing, are, at best, manipulative masters of needs and desires.

Moreover, driven by rhetoric and persuasion, the Euro-American culture continues to influence our theories and practices of leadership. Generally speaking, there are two Euro-American approaches to leadership. The two diametrically contrasting approaches of leadership and their related roles are the top-down (i.e. charismatic and command-and-control), and the bottom-up (i.e. democratic form of majority rule). Ironically, the traditional top-down or the emerging bottom-up approaches not only rely on rhetoric and persuasion, they are also, basically, a hierarchical domination. In our emerging global reality, I suspect, these approaches will rapidly shrivel as they have a short lifespan.

Despite the growing literature on quality leadership, leadership competency, and “servant-leadership,” there is a tendency to focus on leadership as an authoritative *post* or position, and not as a serving *role*. Even with the strong efforts of the feminine movement in the last 30 years toward a nurturing and subtle leadership, there is still a persistent narrow understanding and practice — implicitly or explicitly conveyed — that the act of leading is to be the authoritarian raconteur marching in front of everyone else.

Granted many writers have provided valuable insights into the connection between love and leadership (i.e. Denning, 2000; Heifetz, 1994; Hillman, 1992, 1995; Hoyle, 2001; Wheatly, 2005). However, I believe there is an entire distinctive frontier awaiting our exploration. Ironically, this frontier lays beneath the very nature of our existence. I am unaware of any major work that has made a direct connection between effective leadership and *Eros*, let alone leadership and *seduction*. It seems that our global reality requires a profound socio-cultural change, a different epistemological and ontological orientation toward the nature of seduction and the practice of leadership. In this ever-changing and increasingly complex world with its cultural diversity and socioeconomic challenges, there is need for a fundamental humane approach to leading and serving others beyond the infatuated tendency of rhetoric and persuasion.

Revealing Seduction and Liberating the Nature of Eros

In a technocratic and rational world, it is difficult to speak about Eros and seduction. To speak of love, let alone seduction, we face the consequence of being ridiculed and trivialized. Only in the most romantic and erotic sense do we engage in such conversation. Freud and his followers abolished seduction and arresting its nature in mechanical and physical interpretations of sexual repression (Baudrillard 1979). In fact, seduction inherited an evil rap and twisted a connotation long ago that is extremely challenging to change our mental model of it. This mindset emerged as a consequence of making an untenable relationship between seduction and Eros.

The urged desire to seduce for the purpose of engaging in an erotic love has, unjustifiably, overshadowed other deeper meaning between love and seduction. And in the long run, as Rollo May asserts, “we fly to the sensation of sex in order to avoid the passion of Eros.” (May, 1969, p. 65) This objective functional sensation is undoubtedly one of the artifacts of the current panoptic age I described above; and inevitably, rendered sexuality as an ubiquitous apparent discourse. Jean Baudrillard argues that, in fact, this sexual tendency turns around to bite itself. He writes:

Sexuality itself arose within this universe as one of its objective functions, and now tends to overdetermine all the others, substituting itself as an alternative finality for those that are disappearing or already defunct. Everything is sexualized and thereby acquires something of a terrain for adventure and play. Everywhere the id speaks. Every discourse [appears] as an eternal commentary on sex and desire. In this sense, one might say that they have all become discourses of seduction, discourses that register an explicit demand for seduction, but a soft seduction, whose weakened condition has become synonymous with so much else in this society — the ambience, the manipulation, the persuasion, the gratification, the strategies of desire, the mystique of personal relations, the libidinal economy and its smoothed over relations of transference which relays the competitive economy and its relations of force (Baudrillard, 1979, pp. 177-178).

One can infer from Baudrillard’s statement that while seduction has been misinterpreted, it has been and forever will be a symbolic phenomenon, which is intimately connected with Eros beyond the narrow sense of erotic and erotica. Seduction, as Nachmanovitch (1990) emphasizes, is a “call,” a sense of vocational wisdom, “art for love’s sake.” Indeed, this makes seduction a significant practice of high-quality leaders.

The seductive nature of Eros is the creative energy in all of us surging from our deepest evolutionary roots to create new life ((Nachmanovitch, 1990). That is why love, driven by the power of Eros, is generative and immortal. The Greeks beheld this un-neurotic passion of humans, animals and gods as a vital energy that animated all things, and connected the sacred and the profane, the heaven and the earth (Ackerman, 1995; May, 1969). The early Greek mythology describes how Eros creates life on earth by piercing the phallic arrows into the barren and lifeless bosom of the Earth. The Greeks were aware

that there will always be a tendency to reduce Eros to sexual desire or lust (May, 1969). And in their focus on human potential and heroism, the Greek civilization set the course for Western thoughts and feelings to view Eros in an erotic sense that limits its primordial meaning as divine insemination for creation.

Even erotic love got the wrong end of the stick. In the vein of Yin and Yang in Chinese wisdom tradition, the seducer and the seduced are engaged in an erotic relationship that brings their own centers of gravity into balance; a simple idea that seems to be intellectually and emotionally missed by the separation fallacy of *powerful* leaders and *powerless* followers.

The idea of “love” in ancient Egypt means “a long desire,” an ongoing mutual seduction between two entities, which certainly implies a relationship that is sustainable and unselfish. Eros has also been depicted as a “Serpent” (or Satan in Judeo-Christian tradition). The Serpent transformed in Greco-Egyptian Deity into “Serapis.” In the Egyptian myth of creation, Serapis is the divine power that transforms the universe into beautiful order. Serapis combines the attributes of “Osiris,” Isis’ lover. An interesting connection between “Serpent” and “Eros” is in the realm of celestial or cosmic phenomena, where Serpent is depicted as a constellation consisting of two separate parts, the head and the tail, and where Eros is shown as an asteroid, or a cosmic egg. The arousal energy of Eros or Serapis is triggered by the art of seduction. The challenge for us, however, is that for so long we have been programmed that seduction tempts us to wrongdoing and being disloyal, and leads us astray from our paths. In the larger sense, this is far from the truth.

Eros is not a kind of love. Eros is the *trigger* of all kinds of love: amour (personal and romantic love); libido (lust or sexual love); philia (friendship, or brotherly-sisterly love); and agape (altruistic love devoted to the welfare of others, or the love of God for humans). In a symbolic order, seduction is the primary strength of Eros; and in this sense, as Baudrillard (1979) argues, sex becomes visible only as an “addendum.” James Hillman (1995) challenges the tendency of Western societies to marginalize Eros, dalliance, frivolity, sweetness, sensuality, seduction, charm, flirtation, and arrest them in the context of singles bars so that we can *professionally* manage organizations. Interestingly, however, the absence of seduction masqueraded sexually as an act of desire becomes sexual harassment in the workplace seeking the power of domination. The powerful desire of human beings “is not for sex per se but for relationship, intimacy, acceptance, and affirmation” (May, 1969, p.311).

Leadership and the Seductive Nature of Eros

I have tried to free the notion of “seduction” from its conventional limited meaning and sexual connotation. But what is the link between leadership and seduction? To begin, the word “seduce” (Latin *seducere*) has the same roots as the word “lead” (Latin *se-ducere*). In the wider sense, seduce is to *lead* astray in conduct or belief. It is also to engage, or take part in, to perform a *joyful dance* (The Oxford English Dictionary). Interestingly, the German word for “leader” is *fuehrer*, and “leadership” is *fuehrung*. By adding the prefix

ver to *fuehren* it becomes *verfuehren*, which means to “seduce.” Not only does this link between seduction and leadership expand our understanding of the leader-followers relationship, it also provides new insights into how we approach global leadership. But global leadership can never be fully realized until it is widely practiced. Its practice depends on the very nature and characteristics of seduction. It is helpful then to briefly identify some of these characteristics or attributes of the seductive nature of Eros and leader-fullness. These are not an exhaustive list; rather they are included here as a springboard for further inquiry:

1. Holding the creative container: Creative process is a “philomorphic” (Grudin, 1990), a form-loving process. In the broader sense of the word, form here is beyond the shape and structure of things or physical objects. Sincere seductive-leaders co-create with their followers the purposeful *container* (or crucible) for a philomorphic process. The container is an empty incubator for creative and innovative processes to materialize. Not only is this container conceptually significant, it is pragmatically necessary for limiting space and time. Leaders then have to be attentive to their seductive strengths, and have to hold the space of “full emptiness” with their followers to allow the insemination of Eros.

2. Creation and imagination: Imagination is necessary for envisioning the future. By holding seductively the empty container, leaders and followers make the impregnation of the imaginable possible. The act of creation is intimately interrelated to imagination through love. As Hillman reminds us, “when we fall in love, we begin to imagine: and when we begin to imagine, we fall in love” (1992, p. 9). Surprisingly, the word “lead” as to guide, and the same spelling word “lead” as a metal are allegorically related. The role of the seductive leader is to trigger the imagination of his/her followers turning the quandary of not knowing into insightful wisdom. Like the alchemist who is able to turn lead into gold, the seductive leader engages with followers allowing Eros to inseminate, leading to the emergence of that which is *not-yet-to-be*.

3. Expecting the unexpected: “A thing constructed is a product of mere consciousness; we see all of it.” In creation, however, we are pulling and being pulled in by the seductive energy of Eros that emanates from unconsciousness. “We cannot see our unborn creation, we cannot know it, but we know it is there and we love it; and that love drives us to realize it” (Nachmanovitch, 1990, p. 167). Therefore, in their commitment to the creative act, seductive leaders are not intimidated or overwhelmed by the unknown and unknowable. Not only does seduction make leaders and followers feel comfortable with uncertainty and ambiguity that are associated with creative design challenges, it also raises self-confidence in leaders and followers to expecting the unexpected.

4. The reversibility of seduction: In a sexually oriented society, the seducer typically perceives himself or herself as the active party enticing the passive party. But in a genuine seduction there is no place for active or passive mode, Baudrillard (1990) argues that seduction plays on both sides, and no boundaries separating them. Therefore, seduction is immediately reversible, and its reversibility is what introduces distinctive dynamics between leaders and followers, no more dominator and dominated, no more victim and executioner. This subtle seductive discourse is essential in leading and

following. In fact, this mutually coexisting relationship between leaders and followers reveals another insight. Good leaders must practice the art of following, must know how to be good followers before becoming leaders. This insight has far reaching ramifications on individual, national and international levels. Where leaders practice genuine seduction they are in a different relationship, an act of a *joyful dance*, that can be characterized as nonhierarchical order, neither top-down nor bottom-up — a whole new order.

5. *Honoring weakness and vulnerability:* To seduce is to show weakness and vulnerability. Paradoxically, “we seduce with our weakness,” Baudrillard (1990. P. 83) says, “never with strong signs or powers.” In seduction, we endorse this weakness, and “this is what gives seduction its strength,” the appearance of disarming weakness (Greene, 2003). Seduction is the antithesis of power. Because of the reversibility of seduction, both leaders and followers confront being weak and vulnerable. This sentiment is not new; it echoes, in fact, the mystic tradition and wisdom of Buddhism, Hinduism and Sufism that have permeated over many centuries as well as supports the recently uncovered feminine principles of leadership.

6. *Seducing and conspiring:* According to the Oxford English Dictionary, seduction is intimately connected with the notion of “conspiracy.” Seducing an assembly, community, or group is an act of conspiracy. To conspire (Latin word *conspirare*) is to breathe together, to harmonize, or to unite in a purpose. Because conspiracy implies thinking, talking, and imagining together, it is particularly significant for the leader-follower relationship. The notion of conspiracy, breathing together, describes the very essence of communication between leaders and followers. Conspiracy as an intimate dialogue between leader and his/her followers is utterly nonhierarchical and collaborative par excellence.

7. *Strength vs. power:* The notion of strength is, in fact, underpinning and consequential to all the characteristics of seduction mentioned above. Power is a skillful Western construct where rhetoric and persuasion are its explicit forms. Not power, but seduction that is primordial subtle human strength. Strength cannot be taken away; its nature relies on perseverance in spite of all odds. In contrast, power hangs on resistance and, in doing so, it always attracts persistence. This means that resistance and persistence are the two desperate forces of power that ultimately cancel each other. That is why power can always be taken away. And because of its domination, power cannot tolerate the tension of paradoxes. Seduction as strength strives on the creative tension of paradoxes. Strength is a good character of genuine seductive leadership.

Leader-fullness and the New Global Reality

Near the conclusion of his stimulating book, *Kinds of Power*, psychologist James Hillman made a revealing statement. He writes, “We feel in our hearts that the world can’t really be so vicious and violent, and that love, which does not show its hand as does power, nonetheless steers all things from within and behind in small invisible ways. Power may parade and bluster and imprison, but love makes values endure” (Hillman, 1995, 245). This is particularly significant for our understanding of Eros and leadership. Though

Hillman describes twenty different kinds of power, from control to subtle, it is only the subtle ideas of power that draws connections to feminism and mysticism. One can only infer from that subtle power that it is the closest interpretation of strength.

While the connection between love and leadership is not a new idea, the seductive nature of Eros and the quality of leadership, *leader-fullness*, is a fresh approach to engaging both followers and leaders in a purposeful conspiracy. The disguise *leader-fullness* is a subtle quality that transcends the rhetorical and persuasive power in initiating and leading purposeful change. The new global leadership is not about control, fearsomeness, authority, manipulation, or charisma. This is how leaders are able to work with followers who are culturally different in mutually sustainable long-term relationships.

Conclusion

Seduction is not only a prerequisite for good leaders, but it also a manifestation of the quality of leader-fullness. But what is the purpose of leader-fullness in this new global reality? Nothing exists in life autonomously for its own sake, it exists for the sake of the whole (Gebser, 1986); it also exists to relentlessly seek to be in a larger whole. It seems that the ultimate purpose of life is to seek whole and to be nested in a larger whole. This nesting phenomenon of life, which I call *wholophilia*, is the seductive passion to constantly engage in a co-evolutionary process seeking a larger whole. In this sense, the love for wholeness governs both the affinity to create a microcosmic whole and to seek its expansion into an evolving macrocosmic whole. If this is the purpose of life, which I believe it is, then the purpose of the seductive leader in this new global reality is to seduce his/her followers mobilizing them toward the open-ended process of wholeness.

Raising this consciousness of the primordial interrelationship between loving and leading, of which seduction is at its core, the practice of leadership of one culture can, in fact, be transported across cultural and ethnic boundaries. Eros of leader-fullness would shift our perception and awareness from both power-over and power-with to the strength and magic of seduction, from helping to serving; and would open up the possibility for a more humane and mutually compassionate global leadership.

It may only be in an ideal world in which we could practice the art of seduction in global leadership, but such genuine practices, or even our attempt to practice, could render the ideal real. I may have been seduced to reveal the concealed truth. But perhaps, as Baudrillard (1979, p. 181) declares, “we wish to uncover the truth because it is so difficult to imagine it naked.” To lead is to seduce.

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