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Kierkegaard's Quest: How *Not* to Stop Seducing

Finn Janning¹

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Abstract Change has traditionally been perceived as something to be avoided in favor of stability. This can be witnessed in both individual and organizational approaches to change. In this paper, change as a process of becoming is analyzed. The author relates change to seduction to introduce new perspectives to the concept. The principal idea is that the process of change is a seductive experience. This assumption highlights the positive aspects of becoming, growing, and changing. In doing so, reference is made to the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze, as well as the humanistic psychology of Carl Rogers, to analyze seduction, as presented in *The Seducer's Diary* by the philosopher Søren Kierkegaard. The qualification of this claim is based on this reading. Finally, a conclusion is offered through brief comments on the relationship between seduction, personal growth, and self-actualization.

Keywords Seduction · Personal development · Change · Awareness · Ethics

Introduction

Seduction is to lead one to do what he or she should not be doing. It is “a strategy of the devil” (Baudrillard 1991, p. 1). There is something immoral in seduction. However, such bold statement depends on what one is seduced to do, think, or feel. Furthermore, it raises the question of whether one should view seduction based solely on its objective. I believe not. Instead, I wish to put greater weight on the process itself. Hereby, I also hope to change the view of seduction as something immoral towards the view that it is something ethical, i.e., that it deals with modes of existence.

✉ Finn Janning
finnjanning@gmail.com

¹ Barcelona, Spain

The *Encyclopedia Britannica* stated that seduction is “the act of a man enticing (without the use of physical force) a previously chaste woman to consent to sexual intercourse. In broader usage, the term refers to any act of persuasion.”¹

Thus, if force is used, seduction becomes control, which is something else. In contrast, seduction, as a practice, is helping the other to expose him or herself. The exposure helps the seducer to notice the change that is always potentially there, that is simply waiting to be actualized. The effectiveness of a seducer is measured on his or her ability to create a site of learning, where the seduced can learn about him or herself. This occurs primarily because of the seducer’s attention: he or she is looking for an opening. Similarly, a seductive therapist or counselor is one who can bring the other (i.e., the client) out in the open, where one is more likely to be affected. A site of learning includes the aim of illuminating things in a different manner: it allows one to perceive what might also be possible. To be brought out in the open, therefore, means to confront (or be confronted with) one’s ignorance.

This emphasizes a crucial point regarding seduction: the process of seduction is a mix of the seducer seducing, as well as being seduced. Granting priority to either one when analyzing the process of seduction is impossible. For instance, regarding *The Seducer’s Diary*, one might ask whether it is Cordelia who seduces Johannes to seduce her, or whether it is Johannes who seduces himself to seduce Cordelia. Thus, rather than debating which of the two was first, it seems evident that both the seducer and the seduced want to change. For the same reason, what differentiates seduction as something that is positive from seduction as something that is negative is not only whether it represents the appropriate moral categories but also how one perceives change as such.

In this paper, I draw on a metaphysics of change, rather than on one of being. The postulate is that everything is constantly changing, which emphasizes that reality is becoming, i.e., that it is ceaselessly being actualized. What one finds, therefore, is a process of becoming something else, i.e., change (Deleuze and Guattari 2001).² This point of departure also concurs with seeing seduction as a game with the purpose to lead “elsewhere” (Baudrillard 1991; Serres 1997).

Still, one might ask whether “leading elsewhere” is initiated by honest or dishonest means of persuasion. Such question, of course, implies that an ideal world exists where one assumes that actions are definite before one acts. Following Schatzki (2010) and Deleuze and Guattari (1994, 2001), I understand human activity as something that is indefinite until one acts. Because a seducer, as mentioned, never uses negative reinforcement; the challenge is to let the seduced define what is necessary due to his or her potential to change (i.e., actualization).

¹ It should be obvious that men are not the only ones to seduce, even though literature in general has presented it this manner. In addition, the aim of this essay is not to focus on sexual intercourse, but solely to illustrate how seduction can be a tool for change in relation to personal development and growth.

² Deleuze and Guattari opened *Anti-Oedipus* by offering some creative metaphysical claims: “everything is a machine”; “everything is production” (2001, pp. 2–4). A machine is something that connects, e.g., a baby’s mouth and the mother’s breast. A machine produces new relations, which is a way of understanding how Deleuze and Guattari affirmed the being of becoming. Later, in *What is Philosophy?*, Deleuze and Guattari wrote the following: “Philosophy does not consist of knowing and is not inspired by truth. Rather, it is categories like Interesting, Remarkable, or Important that determine success or failure,” (1994, p. 82). There is no formula for how one should live a life worth living; it is an ongoing experiment. In, *A Thousand Plateaus*, they wrote (2000, p. 161): “Lodge yourself on a stratum, experiment with the opportunities it offers, find an advantageous place on it, find potential movements of deterritorialization, possible lines of flight, experience them, produce flow conjunctions here and there...” Furthermore, Deleuze’s philosophical project can be seen as metaphysical. However, it does not include the aim of discovering what is. Instead, it focuses on how thoughts create new principles for living, i.e., becoming (Villani 2007).

This aspect of seduction is related to the “client-centered” approach of Carl Rogers (2004), who emphasized that “it is the *client* who knows what hurts, what directions to go, what problems are crucial, what experiences have been deeply buried” (p. 11). The seduced is the one who directs the change and gives it speed. The seducer only facilitates this process by raising questions that will break down the possible defensiveness of the seduced. These questions, however, are not formed in the light of a goal. Instead, they are used to ensure that the process remains open, leading the seduced to accept the possibility of going elsewhere.

The ultimate concern in this paper is, therefore, change as a process of becoming. Such approach can help organizations to move beyond what is known, when hiring and managing people; it can encourage organizations to experiment and grow, and subsequently open for more possibilities regarding organization in the future.

I focus on two questions: how does it work? And, just as importantly, how does it *not* stop?

This paper is organized as follows. First, I very briefly outline my thesis regarding my reading of Kierkegaard’s work; subsequently, I present seduction as is described in *The Seducer’s Diary*. In this exposition, I also draw on the writings of Deleuze and Rogers. Subsequently, I briefly discuss seduction in relation to ethics, before outlining remarks on how seduction could play a positive role in relation to growth and well-being.

Thesis

The Seducer’s Diary is an example of what Kierkegaard referred to as an aesthetical stage in one’s life, a stage that might develop into an ethical stage and, perhaps, a religious stage as the ultimate stage. My reading is based on the idea that the seduced girl, Cordelia, is used to illustrate how a person might move from the aesthetical towards the ethical, whereas the seducer, Johannes, remains an aesthetical figure. This, of course, also affects, as mentioned, who should be seen as the actual seducer. To begin with, Johannes is the seducer. However, towards the end of the diary, he is no longer seductive for either Cordelia or the reader. He ends in despair. In contrast, Cordelia becomes increasingly seductive due to how she matches what occurs in her life. She shows what Deleuze called “a dignity of the event” or “*amor fati*,” which can be described as follows: “being equal to the event, or becoming the offspring of one’s own events – “my wound existed before me, I was born to embody it” (Deleuze 2004, p. 159). This “being equal to the event” or matching what happens is an ethical mode of existence.³ The point is that one cannot know whether a form of life is ethical or unethical beforehand, unless one refers to something that is obvious, such as killing or stealing. Such ethical understanding touches on Rogers’s thoughts, when he emphasized that the therapist must embody a certain attitude, i.e., “the therapist’s congruence or genuineness; unconditioned positive regard, a complete acceptance; a sensitively accurate empathetic understanding” (1990, p. 11). Rogers, as I understand him, was not leading the client to somewhere specific, nor is he claiming a full understanding. Rather, he accepted that the client is becoming. Nevertheless, what the therapist does is that he or she affirms what happens in-between the two of them. For example, Johannes helps Cordelia to acknowledge some of her potential, but

³ For Kierkegaard, the aesthetical is all about pleasure, whereas the ethical is dealing with how to act, i.e., how to become the “editor” of one’s life. Lastly, the religious is related to suffering. Deleuze’s ethical ideas are placed in-between the ethical and the religious, but transcendence is absent. Instead, there is something strenuous about trying to be worthy, not of living up to certain ideals, but of making sense of what is the midst of becoming.

he fails to affirm the being of becoming. Instead, he tries to control her according to what he wants her to be. He is a failed therapist because he stops the process. Cordelia's response is that she (at least for the reader) becomes the seducer, principally because she becomes her own therapist.

The End

Don Juan is not a seducer, Kierkegaard said. Instead, he is a beast in a hurry. He conquered 1003 Spanish women—a number that gives the “impression that the list is by no means closed, but that, on the contrary, Don Juan is in a hurry” (Kierkegaard 1962a, p. 88). The problem with Don Juan is that he does not accumulate his experience. The sum of the moments is the moment (p. 91). The result is that Don Juan does not expand his horizon, nor does he learn from any of the women that he meets (although 1003 women must possess some sort of experience). To see a woman and to love her is the same thing for him (p. 90).

Kierkegaard concluded that Don Juan is not a *reflective seducer*, because the potential of the seduced never exceeds what is already actualized. This is a crucial remark because Don Juan hinders the potential growth of the seduced. Furthermore, Kierkegaard emphasized that to see her and to love her *might* not be the same. Instead, the guiding indirect question that runs through *The Seducer's Diary* is the following: “What might be possible?” This means that one must look more carefully.

The problem for Don Juan is two-sided: he cannot liberate himself, and he cannot liberate the one whom he seduces, as well. Therefore, he does not bring the person out in the open. He needs to conquer his victims quickly to avoid any form of reflection or consciousness.

What did Kierkegaard do? He swapped Don Juan for a subtler, reflective seducer called Johannes. Unlike Don Juan, Johannes is able to liberate his target, the young Cordelia. Unfortunately, like Don Juan, he is unable to liberate himself. Johannes, therefore, is not perfect, but Kierkegaard invented him to use him, that is to say, to show how one (i.e., Cordelia) might overcome the charming pressure that life puts on all of us. Cordelia is the interesting one in the diary, because she develops a critical awareness.

The Seducer's Diary begins with the end, where the young Cordelia writes a letter to her once extremely dear seducer, Johannes:

I do not call you mine, I realize very well that you have never been mine, and I am severely enough punished that this thought once delighted my soul; and yet I call you mine; my seducer, my deceiver, my enemy, my murderer, the cause of my misery, the grave of my joy, the abyss of my destruction. (...) You have presumed to deceive a human being so that you became everything for me, so now will I find all my joy in being your slave, I am thine, thine, thine, thy curse' (1962a, p. 289).

The letter is signed ‘*Thy Cordelia.*’ The most difficult part of the process of seduction is the beginning, because the seducer must make contact, must make himself known to her. Kierkegaard mastered such beginning when he seduced his readers to go on reading this diary to discover how a young girl could withstand such strong emotions. Subsequently, he emphasized that what is interesting is Cordelia's *way of dealing with what happens* (a practice, I argue, that is ethical). It is not Johannes, the seducer, who is interesting. Her words are packed with life. She is intense. Something existential is at stake for her.

The farewell letter illustrates that seduction is separation. It is a process of ripening. To move on or to progress one must leave something behind. Something ends. However, one cannot define what is left behind before one is seduced. Human activity is an “indeterminate event,” as Schatzki put it (2010, pp. 43–44); the event is the happening where something occurs to which one might ascribe or create meaning. Cordelia’s farewell letter is the first serious cut in her life that both hurts and liberates her because of the potentially new, possible connections. In spite of how troublesome and painful it is for her, what occurs builds a new situation where Cordelia is encouraged (or forced) to produce new meaning. She needs to “experiment with the opportunities it offers,” as Deleuze and Guattari (2000, p. 162) said.

Cordelia is a girl who is becoming-woman with the ability to love, which, as I demonstrate below, is a capability that Johannes does not have. Cordelia shows both the courage and a significant imagination or fantasy to support what might become. The end resembles the beginning, in the sense that she is (and was) able to choose her own self-creation by letting her life express itself based on what had happened. She affirms the being of becoming, i.e., the element in the failed relation that actually did work: *the ability to love*. Johannes constructs a site where being able to love is possible, but when he and Cordelia actually make it possible, he does not have the courage and abilities to effectuate it. In essence, Johannes does not allow the organization of their encounters to be open-ended; he needs to close the deal. In other words, he is too idealistic or abstract in his thinking, instead of paying attention to what is actually going on.

Unlike Johannes, Cordelia is free to relate. She *makes* sense. Following Wittgenstein (2009), meaning is defined not by its referent, e.g., a God or normative ideal, but by its context, i.e., its use within a particular language-game. Meaning is achieved through functional and productive interaction with other lives. For example, the process of connecting a word to its respective object (or connecting an action to its respective goal) is just one of a number of language games. Many other approaches are possible depending on the context.⁴ Conversely, Johannes’ words make sense within a certain reference, because Cordelia can understand how she functions within a particular, and closed, language-game. She realizes that she functions as being a desired object. Johannes’ style resembles the idea that Deleuze and Guattari (2000) associate with language, when they write that the “elementary unit of language—the statement—is the order-word... Language is made not to be believed but to be obeyed, and to compel obedience” (p. 76). If the elementary unit of language is the order-word, then language functions as an access code, saying the right thing at the right time, which, of course, is only possible from the perspective of Johannes—he alone knows the objective. However, what is interesting is that Cordelia gradually notices that meaning is not defined by its referent (i.e., Johannes’s objective), but by the context. In other words, what is occurring with this happening of the two of them meeting is not something that is given per se. For example, Cordelia gains access to additional facets of herself, such as her ability to love, by which she also surpasses Johannes. At the end, he has placed her in a position where he no longer can make her grow. He only knows the codes for one purpose. He is in despair when he leaves her. He does not know how to go on.

The difference between the two lies in the understanding of the term “game,” as in Wittgenstein’s “language-game.” More than one participant is required to play a language-game (Wittgenstein 2009, p. 87e). In contrast, Johannes play by himself because he either

⁴ I thank one of the reviewers for clarifying this point.

refuses or is incapable of relating to what also takes place. His objective makes him immune.⁵ Cordelia, therefore, embodies an exemplary process of change, principally because of her awareness of what happens. She pays attention. Furthermore, she shows greater courage because she is the one who actualizes the end when she decides to go elsewhere.

The Process

The Seducer's Diary includes a description of how Johannes seduces Cordelia. He invites her to become a woman, not the ever-ending becoming-woman. This invitation is liberating. Nevertheless, Johannes operates using a specific norm, which is his limitation. The difference between norms as liberating or limitation resembles the difference between a transcendent metaphysic of being and a creative metaphysic of change. He makes Cordelia interesting within his set of beliefs. He actualizes some of her potential by turning her into an erotic species, the one that he desires. However, when her interesting potential is emptied—seen from his position—she becomes an object of no interest to him. In other words, the seduction stops because the seducer is unable to notice and actualize anything further. The seducer quits. He does not re-evaluate his beliefs in light of his new experiences (Deleuze 2002). He resigns.

The positive aspect of seduction, therefore, would be a seducer who keeps seducing; however, this would require a seducer who does not seduce in light of a specific goal. This is also Kierkegaard's quest: How *not* to stop seducing. The positive seducer follows what works. Such a seducer remains open. Such a seducer can change direction, that is, can ascribe new meaning to overcome obstacles. For example, Cordelia becomes *his* curse, not *he* hers. She transforms the game they are playing; or, to use Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the order-word, she produces a new subjective position, she moves from being an object to becoming a subject. Now he will have to obey her, because she is his curse. Experience becomes "the highest authority," even though no experience is infallible (Rogers 2004, p. 23). It depends on one's interaction with what happens.

Johannes plays a game where he can win. Unfortunately, he never learns in order to become wiser. In time, he loses. For this reason, the reader pities him at the end where their roles shift. Rogers (2004, p. 27) wrote that "*Life, at its best, is a flowing, changing process in which nothing is fixed,*" and continues, "it should be evident there are no fixed points... Life is guided by a changing understanding of and interpretation of my experience. It is always in process of becoming."

Kierkegaard deliberately focused on the process. Elsewhere, he described the self as "a relation which relates itself to its own self, or it is that in the relation that the relation relates itself to its own self; the self is not a relation but that the relation relates itself to its own self... a synthesis is a relationship between two. In that regard, man is not yet a self" (Kierkegaard

⁵ Another way of describing what happens is through the four types of the "psychological contract" in HRM as defined by Boxall & Purcell (2011, p. 244–45), e.g., between Johannes (i.e., manager) and Cordelia (i.e., employee). First Johannes establishes the "partial contract" where part of his actions and rhetoric appeals to Cordelia. Then, he succeeds in establishing the "trial contract" since Cordelia plays along. Last, there is the "mismatch contract" where the rhetoric and actions of Johannes does not match the perceived reality of Cordelia. It is here she moves on and "looks for other options", as many employees do as well (p. 252). What is interesting, however, is how *The Seducer's Diary* shows how Johannes tries to establish a "congruent contract", i.e., where the rhetoric appeals to Cordelia, because it coincide with her perception. Johannes begins to seduce, i.e., lead elsewhere, because Cordelia does not have any previous experience to rely on. The problem is, though, that he cannot follow her due to his own too restricted agenda.

1962c, p. 73). The self happens because of what occurs, i.e., its relation with itself is externally formed by what is not itself; it is becoming.⁶ This is the problem with Johannes: he does not allow himself to be affected. He ends up as a pathetic character because he wants to protect himself, defend his own self. He is too afraid to expose himself, to change. The purpose of his relation with Cordelia is reduced to a comfortable idea—a Platonic Idea—that does not include the aim of understanding what really happens. Thus, for Johannes, the idea is more seductive than the actual process, whereas what is seductive for Cordelia is the process, not the idea. She believes in the process.

Johannes stops being a seducer when he refuses to act. Instead he only re-acts. He is no longer capable of using his strength. Rogers wrote the following: “If there is such a thing as truth, this free individual process of search, I believe, converge toward it” (2004, p. 27). In other words, the more one cultivates oneself by relating to the outside, the freer one becomes, in the sense of being able to do what one can, and not necessarily what one is likely to do. Any type of change begins (or, rather, picks up speed) with a complete openness to experience (Rogers 2004, p. 187).

Thus, the seductive process requires refraining from acting defensively and trying to explain everything according to a specific objective or ideal, and approaching an openness and a willingness to intermingle with what actually occurs. Once the seduced notices that he or she is not being led elsewhere (i.e., becomes), he or she finds the process more controlling than seducing. Instead of trying to control experiences, observing and noticing one’s feelings, thoughts, and beliefs in the process is more fruitful because, then, the person qualifies one’s decision, i.e., what is worth affirming based on one’s own life situation. “When I accept myself as I am, then I change... we cannot change, we cannot move away from what we are, until we thoroughly *accept* what we are.” (Rogers 2004, p. 17). This is also the point where the therapist becomes with the client. As I mentioned earlier, the therapist shows “unconditioned positive regard, a complete acceptance; a sensitively accurate empathetic understanding” (Rogers 1990, p. 11).

Kierkegaard illustrated how it might be possible to move from an aesthetical stage towards an ethical stage. It constitutes a movement from something idealistic towards something more subjective, which intermingles with practice. Cordelia, for instance, does not represent an ideal. Instead, she is able to evaluate her situation based on what constitutes the events that are occurring. Her evaluation does not refer to unchangeable transcendent norms, values, or objectives. Instead, she tries to relate to the relations that she is experiencing. She follows Johannes’s direction around the carousel, but once she realizes the pattern, she changes direction towards something that is superior. She connects because she is not something specific, something that is given. She is more.

The Frame

At the beginning of *The Seducer’s Diary*, a mirror reflects Cordelia. Simultaneously, *The Seducer’s Diary* alludes that there is more to her potential than what the mirror can embrace.

⁶ Here as well, I read Kierkegaard from a Deleuzian viewpoint. For example, in *Empiricism and Subjectivity*, Deleuze wrote, “relations are external to their terms,” i.e., human nature is formed by encounters, not by an ideal to be represented (1991, p. 66). In addition, Deleuze hereby touched upon something that Kierkegaard dealt with in *Fear and Trembling*, i.e., belief anticipates knowledge (Deleuze), or faith begins where reason stops (Kierkegaard 1962b, p. 50). Although, for Kierkegaard faith does not anticipate reason, still experiences of faith might nurture a belief that, perhaps, will produce new knowledge.

Kierkegaard wrote the following: “A mirror hangs on the opposite wall; she does not reflect on it, but the mirror does reflect her... who indeed dares to catch her, but not to embrace her. Unhappy mirror, which can indeed seize her image, but not herself” (1962a, p. 292).

The mirror betrays the image of Cordelia to others. Still, the mirror will never understand the depths of her, for which reason it will lose her. The mirror, of course, serves as a metaphor for representation, i.e., for Johannes. By using this metaphor, Kierkegaard aimed at criticizing the type of thinking that represents an already given ideal. He confronts the scarcity of attention, i.e., time and capabilities are limited. “Not everything can be attended at once,” as March notes, of course not; however, as Weick and Sutcliffe (2006) suggest, then attention it is not a matter of quantity, but the quality of the actual attention. Focus on the here and now, not the final objective.⁷

For Kierkegaard, thinking is an activity that faith cultivates. Furthermore, the mirror is only framing a part of Cordelia and, hereby, actualizing one particular image of her, but not Cordelia in toto. To see her reflection is not to love her, i.e., to notice what she might become, but only to love a part of her.

A frame could be understood as the determination of a relatively closed system, which includes everything present in the image. The frame forms a set. In this situation, understanding the frame as the literal frame of the mirror becomes obvious. Still, each frame consists of something that is “out-of-field” (Deleuze 2001). “The out-of-field refers to what is neither seen nor understood, but nevertheless perfectly present.” Two mobile tendencies that are inseparable from the frame cause this effect: a movement towards saturation and a movement towards rarefaction. For instance, “when a set is framed [Cordelia], therefore seen, there is always a larger set, or another set with which the first forms a larger one, and which can in turn be seen, on conditions that it gives rise to new out-of-fields, etc.” (Deleuze 2001, p. 16). Johannes, as already mentioned, does not notice how Cordelia might become more than what suits his objective. He is interested in framing her in a specific manner to form her accordingly. Her potential becomes his, instead of hers. He tries to control her. He shrinks her power. This is also where the seduction stops.

For example, when Cordelia is permitted to spend some time on the countryside with Johannes, he has arranged everything at the country house as tastefully as possible. Johannes wants her to find a setting – a frame or context – that harmonizes with the parts of her memory that he likes. He does not allow her to imagine or think too freely. The game he plays does not require her participation, only her obedience. He continues:

[E]verything is arranged for her reception; she will not lack opportunity to admire my memory, or, more correctly, she will not have time to admire it. Nothing has been forgotten that could have any significance for her... Everything is the same, only more sumptuous... The illusion is perfect” (1962a, p. 406–407).

⁷ Scarcity of attention also affects the organization’s planning in recruitment and selection of new employees. As one theorist points out: “The nature of work in the 21st century presents many challenges for staffing. For example, knowledge-based work places greater demands on employee competencies; there are widespread demographic, labor, societal, and cultural changes creating growing global shortfalls of qualified and competent applicants; and the workforce is increasingly diverse” (Ployhart 2006). In addition, and more importantly, at least for a professional workforce, is the fact that the distinction between one’s professional and private life is diminishing. Work has for many turned into a lifestyle, therefore, the organization also needs to pay attention to the forms of life, i.e., thoughts, feelings, behaviors and values of the employee. If work and life intermingle, then staffing is not only a strategic challenge, but also an existential.

What makes Johannes' approach problematic from both a learning and a change perspective is, of course, that the setting is an illusion. The meaning is already defined by its referent (i.e., Johannes' objective), not by her involvement. It emphasizes the paradox of numerous change processes where the room for changes is extremely small (Chia 1999).

Following this line of thought, a more productive change process would require a hyper-attentiveness where one melts with the other or with what happens. To truly grasp what happens, one must refrain from having access to a beneficial position, or select the correct images according to an already given ideal. This, of course, is fundamental. A metaphysics of change allows one to creatively engage in sense-making, even to the extent where it might contradict the common, present ideas of right and wrong. This type of attention allows for ethics as a type of experimentation.

Discussion

Seduction begins with attention and ends with awareness. Johannes gives Cordelia all of his attention, he concentrate on one aspect, i.e., how she could fit into his objective. However, at one point, Cordelia becomes aware. She becomes conscious of his agenda when she acknowledges how her feelings do not match his. She realizes that Johannes does not want her to grow, but to come into his bed. He is not interested in her or in what she might be able to do. His ambitions are extremely limited. Kierkegaard demonstrated, however, that the real interest is not in Cordelia, but in *her interest*, i.e., how what happens forms her, or, to paraphrase Kierkegaard, how her relation with him relates to her. Following Kierkegaard, one can only grow when one has the courage to let go of one's illusionary control (Kierkegaard 1962b). That is when one has sufficient fantasy to imagine that things might be different. The farewell letter demonstrates that: "I realize now..." This mix of courage and fantasy is what liberates the person. Johannes might free Cordelia from marriage, but then he stops. What is interesting, therefore, is how one is capable of having the courage to stand against the current tendencies or norms, i.e., how separation is connected to seduction. One must choose oneself every day by supporting what works. In other words, becoming is an on-going process. Cordelia is interesting because of her actions. She has the courage to end something by letting herself be led somewhere else. She is free, for which reason she grows wiser and creates new bonds. Johannes is not free; therefore, he is unable to love, but can only convince himself that he can love.

In *The Seducer's Diary*, Kierkegaard is interested in the concept "interesting," which creates an interest. For Kierkegaard, interest leads to an encounter that a person might have with another. It is not the person per se who is interesting. Rather, what is interesting is how a person becomes interesting through encounters with the outside, and how he or she transforms these meetings into something meaningful. The relation and how one relates to it is what is critical. The process of seduction as a learning process is, therefore, also a process of self-awareness and self-overcoming.⁸ It is hold up by trust that "goes beyond predictability" (Mayor et al. 1995). The process becomes productive, when each one of them (at least

⁸ It is related to the distinction between performance versus learning goals, where the former is related to extrinsic motivation and the latter is related to intrinsic motivation (Heyman and Dweck 1992; Dweck 2007). The idea of self-overcoming is also related to Nietzsche's (1973) philosophy. Furthermore, the same discussion is to be found between the differences between agency and stewardship theory, where the latter focus more on intrinsic motivation Davis et al. (1997).

Cordelia) realizes that her secret also is the secret for Johannes. It happens when she realizes his secret: his lack of courage and imagination. These are values that she actualizes in her final letter. “I am thine, thine, thine, thy curse.” She is exactly what he cannot see, because he cannot actualize her potential. Johannes cannot see the difference Cordelia as a curse or a courtesan. Kierkegaard wrote the following: “How beautiful it is to be in love; how interesting it is to know that one is in love. This, you see, is the difference” (1962a, p. 309). This is the difference between Johannes and Cordelia. She learns something because of her awareness, and, consequently, she is able to compose what happens into something useful. She is ethical.

How did Kierkegaard emphasize this capacity? Principally, he did it through his composition, i.e., the style of the story. His ethics has a compositional power.

Ethics, unlike morals, according to Deleuze, does not operate with transcendent or universal norms or values (Deleuze 1997, 2002). Rather, ethics is an affirmative manner of evaluating what a person does, think, say, and feel according to the immanent modes of existence that it implies. For Deleuze, ethics becomes an experimental art of living. It does not consist of asking what one ought to do, but of what might be possible.

The question “what might be possible?” address the given degree of power between the seducer and the seduced, respectively. It emphasizes that the process of seduction brings in focus each person’s capacity. “What can I do, what am I capable of doing?... How can I come into active possession of my power? How can I go to the limit of what I can do?” (Smith 2011, p. 125). Such questions are both ethical and part of the seducer’s toolbox.

The central claim, of course, is that moral judgment, which is often placed negatively on the seducer, seldom refers to the actual actions of the seducer, but much more to sympathy or feeling sorry for the “victim.” Moralism victimizes, instead of enabling a new way of living. In addition, moralistic judgment overlooks what the seducer cares deeply about: the one being seduced. The only disadvantage is that the seduced might become much more than what the norms describe as being the right behavior. The seducer is not ambitious. For example, Cordelia is not only a potential erotic figure; she is also a potential curse.

The point is to actualize or affirm what is in the midst of becoming. This allows a possible definition of seduction: *to create a lasting impression*. With this definition in mind, something in seduction is sustainable. This leads to the question, What is transmitted to the next generation? The answer is the approach. The lasting impression is the process of change itself, not the specific outcomes of change (Chia 1999, p. 215).

As Deleuze wrote, “Either ethics makes no sense at all, or this is what it means and has nothing else to say: not to be unworthy of what happens to us” (Deleuze 2004, p. 169). To lead elsewhere, in a fruitful manner, is to affirm what might become regardless of what is customarily defined as right or wrong. The challenge is to be equal of what happens, to become the offspring of one’s own action (Deleuze 2004). The change, whether of a person or an organization, takes form through an encounter, not through an abstract idea or objective. In alignment with Tsoukas and Chia (2002), then the performance is never evaluated according to a given goal, since everything is always changing. Yet, what is important is that individuals “interact with others and with themselves at the same time: They undertake action while being mindful of earlier patterns of action,” (p. 575). Our memories, beliefs and habits are constructed and reconstructed as an ongoing process of becoming worthy of what happens.

Thus, the following questions arise: How does seduction work? How does it function? How does it become useful? Seduction works by creating a lasting impression. It passes on the sustainable. Deleuze pointed out the following:

The *Ethics* judges feelings, conduct, and intentions by relating them, not to transcendent values, but to modes of existence they presuppose or imply: there are things one cannot do or even say, believe, feel, think, unless one is weak, enslaved, impotent; and other things one cannot do, feel or so on, unless one is free and strong. *A method of explanation by immanent modes of existence* thus replaces the recourse to transcendent values. The question is in each case: Does, say, this feeling, increase our power of action or not? Does it help us to come into full possession of that power? (Deleuze 1997, p. 269)

In short, the manner in which a person thinks, believes, feels, and speaks are intimately linked to the manner in which that person lives, and vice versa. An evaluation, therefore, does not refer to a given set of values, but to a way of being that serves as a basis by which a person judges. The authority of the evaluation is the person's life. The manner in which a person feels is given by that person's lifestyle (Deleuze 2002, p. 2). The criterion is whether one's power to act is increased or not. When Johannes evaluates his actions, he does so according to an objective that serves in the manner of a moral category: he must have her. However, this form of evaluation stops the process of becoming.⁹ Conversely, Cordelia illustrates how becoming is embedded in practice or in her mode of existence. For me, Cordelia increases her power to act when she writes this: "You have presumed to deceive a human being so that you became everything for me, so now will I find all my joy in being your slave, I am thine, thine, thine, thy curse." Now I will find joy in being! She is able to become worthy of what happens. She becomes ethical, while she provides us with a new form of life; she accepts being his curse because he did not perform in accordance to what is possible. Still, some might judge her to be immoral. However, once again, one can only make such judgment by stepping outside the process of becoming.

The conclusion, which is based on the mentioned assumptions, is that seduction as a process of change is positive when it allows for new modes of existence, or a new concept (e.g., interesting) by which to live. Therefore, ethical or unethical change per se does not exist; only changes that lead to relative levels of recognition or awareness. This is the difference between reaction and action, between power and impotence, between Johannes and Cordelia. An affirmative practice affirms what is interesting, i.e., how one makes sense by embracing what is vital. In other words, one only affirms the impression that one wants to last. It is a sustainable practice. For Cordelia, this is the joy of being his curse. She can embracing what has happened, as if it were her own decision.

⁹ Johannes addresses some of the recent problem in management theory, which might be described as establishing a fruitful balance between control and trust, or control and collaboration. This raises new challenges, e.g., how may one cultivate a culture of trust and collaboration, see, e.g., Rosanas and Velilla 2005; Sundaramurthy and Lewis 2003. The approach that I suggest is for the organization to show more trust, when dealing with a professional workforce, because the organization does not know what the employee might be capable of doing. An immanent ethic, as presented here, presuppose trust. This is relatable to some of the studies conducted by Deci and Ryan (2002), e.g., autonomy, intrinsic motivation and self-organizing tendencies.

Seduction as a Practice of Change

This section draws on the preceding arguments to outline the key features of a seductive practice of change in relation to personal development and growth. Its principal purpose is to revitalize the concept of seduction as an ethical concept that might introduce new perspectives to the area of individual change. In *The Seducer's Diary*, Kierkegaard stresses that a true choice is choosing the choice, which I have related to Deleuze's idea of affirming or repeating what brings life, i.e., confirming that which makes something new possible, e.g., new ideas of how to live.

In *Fear and Trembling*, Kierkegaard tells the story of Abraham, who is told by God that he must sacrifice his son. In that act (choosing the choice), Abraham rediscovers his son. Does this mean that when the seducer abandons Cordelia he also rediscovers her? Yes, but for him each seduction is a remembering of the last seduction. For the seducer, the present *is*; therefore, it has ceased to act, instead of becoming. For Cordelia, the present returns to itself as past, and she notices what she has left after she has left it. She is a relation "which relates itself to its own self."

Conversely, for Johannes, the most crucial story is the past. This, unfortunately, resembles too many ideas within personal development or change management, where past successes are used to formulate future goals. Nonetheless, such practice does not lead elsewhere. On the contrary, it spins around in the same circle that leads to an unproductive mixture of hope and despair.

Thus, the moral is this: do not repeat "best practice" or past successes, i.e., do not repeat the same rationale. Instead, affirm what is in the midst of becoming. This also touches on the broader challenges that today's performance-centered society faces. The order-words dictate increased efficiency according to certain ideals and norms. Such performance ideals seldom make room for the individual's sense-making. In addition, it does not encourage an ongoing process of becoming, because the process stops when, for example, a business organization evaluates its employees according to predefined objectives. The norms and ideals of a performance-centered society generate greater pressure on the individual, which might lead to stress. Unfortunately, there is a tendency to emphasize two manners of overcoming stress (Pedersen 2009, p. 24). Either the person manages to cope with the pressure, or he or she must move on to something else. This means that the process of actualizing becomes normative, based on external premises. It turns into what Kierkegaard calls "either-or," i.e., a dance between two equal ideals that can only be surpassed if one can believe in what actually occurs. The problem emerges when one is not free to do what one can because of what one encounters, but must control one's behavior according to certain norms and ideals (Janning 2015). Similar, Cordelia is interesting because of her manner of dealing with pressure. Her sense-making is a creative or inventive process because she does not operate through an ideal. Rather, her becoming is actualized in practice.

What one can learn from this study is, first of all, to show interest for the other person's interest, which, of course, is something else than simply showing interest. Showing interest for another person's interest is a manner of committing oneself to an external relation. To accept what one cannot control. A well-known example is Google who shows trust when they give some of its employees the autonomy to work on their own projects for 20% of their time (Pink 2009). Second, one ought to pay attention to what is presently occurring, not to abstract ideals. Such attention means rejecting nothing. Here there is a growing literature on paying attention (Weick and Sutcliffe 2006; Janning 2014) often implementing thoughts from philosophy, art

and mindfulness in management. The challenge, as I see it, is not to reduce any of these findings to business instruments. Rather, to extend our understanding of doing business. Third, one ought to be able to repeat that which is worth affirming, that which brings life. This is where Deleuze might bring new ideas to our organizational perception. The guiding norm is the following: “*whatever you will, will it in such a way that you also will its eternal return*” (Deleuze 2002, p. 68). These three elements are the cornerstones of an affirmative practice.

Deleuze concisely wrote the following:

To affirm is still to evaluate, but to evaluate from the perspective of a will which enjoys its own difference in life instead of suffering the pains of the opposition to this life that it has itself inspired. *To affirm is not to take responsibility for, to take on the burden of what is, but to release, to set free what lives.* To affirm is to unburden: not to load life with the weight of higher values, but *to create* new values which are those of life, which make life light and active. There is creation, properly speaking, only insofar as we make use of excess in order to invent new forms of life rather than separating life from what it can do. (Deleuze 2002, p. 185)

Seduction as a practice of change, therefore, is an affirmative practice that aims to become increasingly alive, rather than to reach a goal.

In my view, Rogers, in harmony with Deleuze and Kierkegaard, is correct in arguing that a life is a flowing and changing process in which nothing is fixed. Unfortunately, this flow is often stopped when change becomes something static, something that proceeds from A to B. Even so, a life “is always in process of becoming” (Rogers 2004, p. 27). The challenge is how to stimulate a person towards self-creation and growth. As mentioned, it begins with what each person finds interesting in his or her encounter with life, because, by paying attention to this interest, one can access how a person overcomes obstacles and setbacks. In addition, it relates to the fundamental idea that the happening where something happens is open for interpretation. In my view, this is what Rogers means what he refers to the therapist as “a midwife to a new personality,” or a new way to live. Everything begins in the middle, and not with the end in mind, by paying attention to what touches or affects one. Massumi (2002, p. 36) described this as “the *perception of one’s own vitality*, one’s sense of aliveness, of changeability (often signified as ‘freedom’).”

It is this critical awareness or attention that is unfolded in the process of seduction, and it is this attentiveness that enables an ethical form of life, where it becomes possible to distinguish between what is critical and what is not.

Conclusion

The seducer, Johannes, is not interesting. Not even Cordelia. Rather, what is interesting are the new forms of life that Cordelia make possible when she acts. She becomes increasingly alive, because she has the strength to revolt against his illusions, as well as having the ability to create a room where she can overcome her own ignorance.

The problem with Johannes is that he does not recognize what he does not know. Instead, he moves on to what he knows; consequently, his ignorance does not lead to better questions that lead to new knowledge. Instead, he seeks shelter by repeating the same. Change after change without really changing at all.

A seductive theory of change, as proposed here, includes the aim of enhancing what works without knowing what that is beforehand. It is difficult because one must pay attention to everything, i.e., reject nothing beforehand. How does one do that? By getting eliminating specific objectives or goals.

A seductive theory of change stresses that learning, growing, and becoming wiser arise from dealing with the uncertainties of life. This is the context in which one might become worthy of what happens. Such theory keeps balancing on the limits of one's knowledge, while asking what works? What functions? What might be possible? It is by asking these questions – without rejecting or judging – that seduction can enrich organizational life.

To seduce is to lead elsewhere. As long as the process does not break, lasts, and is sustainable.

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Finn Janning PhD, is an independent philosopher. His main interest is contemporary philosophy, especially the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze. Areas of particular interests are ethics - often in relation to personal and organizational development.