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Traje de luces: The Daub, the Art, or the Craft?

Abstract

Corrida the toros is considered a symbol of Spain. Corrida as a spectacle similar to a theatre spectacle is subject to rules. All elements of the spectacle, stages as well as tools used during corrida fall under strict rules, the same applies to the costumes worn by "actors" taking part in the corrida. *Traje de luces* – a lucent costume, which next to the bull itself is regarded as the most recognisable symbol of corrida. Matador's outfit is considered as a piece of art by ones, others will see it as a ostentatious costume. What is it in reality? The answer to this question is not easy and obvious. The delicate handwork and five-star materials position the costume of the matador as a work of art; however, garish colouring and exaggerated embellishments seem rather gaudy. *Traje de luces* should be always considered in a wider context, because only in that case its symbolism and meaning can be actually interpreted. Outside the corrida de toros the bright costume of the matador is only a colourful outfit, however in its natural environment, that is on the arena, it gains a completely different meaning. In this article, I will introduce various points of view on the topic.

Keywords:

traje de luces, costume of the matador, art, daub, craft, corrida de toros, spectacle, culture, Spain

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1. TRAJE DE LUCES - WHAT IT IS?

Corrida the toros as one of tauromachy traditions is driven by a set of rules. Tauromachy in the broad meaning is sequence of acts which leads to confrontation between a man and a bull. Corrida in its most popular and widely spread form is structured in a very special way: each element of the act – from the place of the performance (plaza the toros) throughout the stages of the spectacle (tercios), finally tools and accessories (spade, banderille) – must be in line with the rules found in local regulations as well as in the Royal Decree dated 2nd Feburary 1996². Strict rules apply to the almost symbolic costume worn by toreador³ which together with the bull itself is associated with Spain. All directly involved in corrida the toros are obliged to wear *traje de luces*. This includes picadors⁴, banderilleros⁵, matadors⁶, and helpers appearing on the arena. The name of the costume is explained as "the bright costume" due to the rich gold and silver embellishments, which shimmer and shine in the bright sun. To answer the question stated in the title of the article it is necessary to describe the costume and look closer on its evolution over the years.

The modern costume of the toreador consists of many parts. Beginning from the top – there is montera. Montera is a usually black headgear which was introduced to the tauromachy by Paquiro (Francisco Montes the Rhein, 1805-1851)⁷. Paquiro was famous for his weakness for covering his head with a big hat made of astrakhan fur (karakuls). Over time, the fitter was reduced from the prototype more or less by half. Montera replaced a hair mesh cap, which was used previously to keep

² Detailed record of the decree applies changes used in tauromachia Reglamento de Espectáculos Taurinos, website Noticias Jurídicas, http://noticias.juridicas.com/base_datos/Admin/rd145-1996.html [accessed 23.11.2013].

³ In this article, I will be using a polish term 'toreador', despite the fact that this is actually a wrong terms to use, however it is widely used in the Polish language. It's worth noticing that in the Spanish language the word "toreador" does not exist since the XVIII century, approximately. Then the term was only used to name those who were fighting the bulls by riding the horse (today called picadors and rejoneadors). The one we call "toreador" in the polish language, appears under the word "torero" in the Spanish language and this is the correct term to use. In addition, "toreador" is yet another term used in the Polish language, which I find is unjustified.

⁴ Toreadors on horses that take part in the walking corrida, are the main participators in the first part of the corrida de toros (tercio de varas).

⁵ Walking toreadors that use spears, known as banderillas, participate in the second part of the corrida de toros (tercio de banderillas).

⁶ Other names – diestro, espada. Main toreador of corrida de toros. His task is to kill the bull in the third and last part of the corrida de toros (tercio de muerte).

⁷ Montera comes from a toreador whose surname was Montes.

hair in place and prevent disturbing a matador during the fight. The montera worn by toreadors participating in walking corridas today consists of three parts joined together: the round toque and oval pieces – morrillas attached to either side, which create an oblong shape of the montera. The top of the headgear is often adorned or embroidered; however, in a subdued and not a garish way. Long hair and wigs reminiscence which were associated with a nobles in the past is nowadays coleta. Coleta – pigtail which during a fight should be fasten in bun shape on the back of the head.

Natural plaits were preferred in the past however over toreadors following the fashion was wearing their hair short replaced natural coleta by artificial attached to their hair. It is considered that the costume of wearing colleta was purely practical — it purpose was to protect, cushion results of possible fall during the fight. Currently coleta has only symbolic meaning. When toreador decides that he is going to terminate his professional careerer announces that he is cutting of his pigtail or officially informing of removing his coleta.

The most obvious and inevitable part of the costume are trousers, vest and short jacket. They become coloristic set made of silk. The jacket known as a chaquetilla which means "small, short" - has long sleeves, clearly marked and richly ornamented epaulettes. The jacket seems to be straight/ stiff is due to rich embroidery and lining. To guarantee the toreador elbow – room the underarms stitches are left open the same us the form of the jacked which stays undone throughout the spectacle. Vest – chaleco – sewn of the same fabric as the jacket and it is similar length as the jacket and reaches waist of the fighting man. Trousers – taleguilla, identical in colour with the jacket and vest – with raised state to avoid showing of white shirt while the toreador rises his arms up and the jacket is pulled up during this movement too. Trousers, always with belt attached are narrow and reaches mid – calf. The ornamentation is specific as it appears exclusively only on outside of the pant-leg. The inside of the leg is practically not decorated which make it similar to military stripes. Decorations end just below knees in a form of few rows of small frills. Internal part of the pant – legs are not decorated which gives the toreadors comfort and free movements during the fight.

Under the vest toreador wears white cotton shirt and tie or kerchief tided under the collar. Under the trousers toreador puts on stockings very often in pink colour which should fit closely to the body. The footwear is very important in the whole outfit as well. These are shoes – shuttles on the flat heel, mostly black, made of natural leather and decorated with knots. *Traje de luces* is completed by the cape called capote de paseo. Capote is richly ornamented in its central part of it. Toreadors wears it exclusively during special occasions and first of all during the

commencement of the spectacle – paseillo – when all participants of the corrida de toros take part in the parade around the arena to take to the spectators and particularly to the president of the spectacle⁸.

Toreadors taking place in corrida on foot as well as in corridas where toreadors riding horses are obliged to wear appropriate outfits however this described above refers to the corrida taking place on foot. To complete the description it is necessary to mention the embellishment and colour schemes. Most popular form of embellishment is embroidery which are prepared like other elements of the outfit in special tailor's workshops. Embroidery of gold or silver but also in other colours can be handmade or produced by production line, both are popular but as expected the handmade are much more expensive⁹. Embroidery covers entire surface of the costume with exception to the parts of trousers. Traje de luces is owning its name to these gold or silver embroidery as well as to application of glittering sequins and rolled up in to loops spirals. Currently the most popular colours are: red, violet, black, green, brown, white, blue and pink. The full scale of colours is allowed to use to make the costume unforgettable it is only up to the owner's imagination and taste. Some of them choosing intensive colours which suits their personality others goes for colours with symbolic meaning. Numerous of toreadors never will wear costume twice if in the past he experienced any accident or injuries in it¹⁰.

2. HISTORY OF TRAJE DE LUCES

Modern toreador's costume is a result of historic transformations and takes its roots from outfits in which members of aristocracy were fighting bulls in the past. Until XVII century the outfit of participants of the corrida te torros was no different than others everyday clothes it is probably down to the fact that the toreador as a profession wasn't yet recognised. First historic notification regarding *traje de luces* for fighting on food toreadors appears in XVII century¹¹. Toreadors

⁸ The chairman of Corrida de toros – el president de la corrida de toros. Most often recruited from among highly important local officials.

⁹ G. Fernández, *El traje hace al torero; delante del toro, el torero hace al traje*, webside Badajoz Taurina, http://www.badajoztaurina.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=artic-le&id=8453:qel-traje-hace-al-torero-delante-del-toro-el-torero-hace-al-trajeq&catid=8:entrevistas&Itemid=4, [accessed 23.11.2013].

¹⁰ J.F.B. Pedraza, *Iniciación a la fiesta de toros*, Madrid 2008, p. 120.

¹¹ P. Domingo, *Historia del traje de luces del toreo*, webside El Arte Taurino, http://www.elartetaurino.com/traje%20de%20torero.html [accessed 21.07.2013].

establishing first caudrille (teams of toreadors) by specific clothes wanted to distinguish themselves form other professions. Initially it was minor elements of the costume: sashes, bows, belts, caps. The differentiation related to clothes relied on two types of the outfit: (1) for toreadors contracted by determined local plaza de toros (toreros de band) and (2) for toreadors who were not organized in any associations (toreros de ventura)¹². *Traje de luces* as the obligatory costume began to be shaped in the late XVIII century, on the base of contemporary fashion trends, which determined length of the trousers and obligation to wear vest. The colours of the costume couldn't been chosen at will. In 1730 in Seville has been decided that toreadors will be allowed to wear costume in red- with. In other regions it was permitted to use other scheme however appearing in Seville the local rules must be respected. In later decades outstanding toreadors using their influence introduced set of additions to traje de luces. This way it has been introduced not only the fitter but also volute, decorative and colourful stones and sequins. Those costumes were called "goyescas" and contemporary traje de luces is its direct inheritor 14. In the first half of XIX was established classical Spanish costume which latter has been associated with traje de luces. In early tauromachy magazines such as Pepe Pepe-Hillo. Revista de Toros y Variedades¹⁵ it was possible to read among other things also about toreador's costumes¹⁶. Currently *traje de luces* is the symbol of Spain referring to folklore and local tauromachy traditions. Matador's costume can be bought by ordering it in the workshop but their knock -off's are available in many local souvenir shops. Matador's costume is very popular as a fancy dress outfit for children and used during masquerades. This copy of the sophisticated original costume is most often identified with the daub, therefore it is proper to wonder whether true matador's costumes so not bear the guilt of daub.

¹² These toreadors have mostly complete freedom in terms of choosing their own outfit, they are not restricted by local rules.

¹³ The name comes from Francisco Goya, who among many things, who captured in his graphics scenes from the plaza de toros. Toreadors were presented in peculiar fashion, but already associated with tauromachia costumes.

¹⁴ J.A. del Moral, *Cómo ver una corrida de toros. Manual de tauromaquia para nuevos aficionados*, Madrid 2011, p. 196.

¹⁵ Appearing from June 1875 to 1879

 $^{^{16}\,}$ M.B. Badorrey, Rosendo Arús y Arderiu. Insigne revistero taurino catalán, "Caireles" 2010, No. 29, p. 91.

3. THE DAUB?

Polish Language dictionary says: "the daub -1. plastic composition, the literary composition, the film, etc.. about artistic cheapness; 2. object performed with splendour but completely deprived of the taste"¹⁷. In dictionary of provenance vocabulary by Wladyslaw Kopalinski definition of the daub: worthless picture, literary composition, the film (...) from German Kitsch – the trash, rubbish – term coming from Munich painters associations active around 1870 year¹⁸. Looking for synonymous of the daub we come across: the bungle, crap, the trash, the mediocrity, and other¹⁹. Since, when the daub for good felt at home almost in all spheres of our life socially – cultural, arose many derivatives of these definitions. Since daub settled down in all aspects of our social and cultural life for good the definition of it has grown in meaning and become topic of numerous detailed elaborations.

Quoting Andrzej Banach daub could be defined as "the hysteria", "the exaggeration" whether "the bias", easily "the shoddiness" could be fitted in in the definition. Looking at traje de luces we can surely see all mentioned above features, what depends in the large measure on the personal relation to the turomachy. Opponents of the corrida de toros decidely more often will depreciate the cultural meaning of all, what constitutes this tradition. Not otherwise is in case of the toreador's costume. Exaggeratedly adorned costume, outstanding is a clear opposition to everyday clothes of the average people – can be perceived as the daub. However it needs to be remembered that toreador does not parade in traje de luces outside the arena. The costume is an inseparable element, a part of the spectacle. Here and only here is where it's belongs. Interpretative challenge constitutes "bias". The bias can be determined by local rules applied to the toreador's costume²⁰. This means that the toreador has considerable but not unlimited free choice in the selection of the outfit. As a consequence the toreador can't be mistaken with any other profession. Additionally every toreador has his own, unique costume differing in detail from the others. Does *traje de luces* fulfil condition of the bias? In my opinion – not. Certainly it fits in some conventions but it's frames are broad and flexible enough that it can't be associated with the bias. On the other hand

¹⁷ Term in the Polish online dictionary *Słownik Języka Polskiego PWN*, http://sjp. pwn.pl/szukaj/kicz [accessed 16.06.2013]

¹⁸ W. Kopaliński, *Słownik wyrazów obcych*, Warszawa 2000, p. 260.

¹⁹ Term in the Polish online thesaurus dictionary, *Słownik Wyrazów Bliskoznacznych*, Językowce, http://www.jezykowce.pl/synonim/slownik-wyrazow-bliskoznacznych/kicz [accessed 06.12.2013].

²⁰ A. Banach, *O kiczu*, Kraków 1968, p.16.

shoddiness explicitly unites with low quality. Although *traje de luces* can't be classified as a trashy. The silk, the guipure, expensive and colourful ornaments undoubtedly fits in in the most known definition of the daub but do not bears the guilt of rubbish. Fabric used, handwork and the necessary time consuming labour put in to it place it maybe not in line with the art but surely with high end craft.

Herman Broch forsaw in his analyses that the daub would be implemented on other – outside the art – areas of life – social and cultural. Elżbieta Anna Sekuła writes: "... [Broch – annotation by MZK] made as aware that no matter how hard we will deny it we are creators and admires of the daub. It owes us its lush existence, reciprocating with pleasure which we draw from the relationship with it"²¹. Spectators of corrida the toros are expecting during the spectacle: shining on stage, well visible colours from furthest corner of the plaza and finally, something extraordinary, unparalleled in other context. In this context the toreador's costume is nothing more than the disguise of the actor on stage. This is the mask which is worn in determined situations and this mask is outright expected by the audience.

It is not in fact essential, whether we will fully agree with any definition of the daub or only partly we will acknowledge some elements actually seized. From the anthropology point of view which is interested in every aspect of widely understood culture – it does not matter, whether we analyse the art – high/true, whether treated as a daub. Krzysztof Piatkowski writes: "... [Anthropology – the annotation MZK] never differentiated between "high" works, folk products and picturesque histories etc. (...) tried to follow symbolic contents, not rejecting artefacts of qualitatively not sophisticated, artistically dubious or common"²². In this sense *traje de luces* waking controversies and being the purposes of the artistic criticism is a perfect example of the exploratory problem.

Doubts related to the classification traje de luces remains when it comes to the analysing of it function in tauromachy tradition. The costume of toreador in a way legitimises what happens on stage. Not everyone has the right to kill a bull, not everyone is expected to do so. Aficionados of coridda de toros do not admit possibility in which on stage would be able to appear anybody and do what is allowed only to the matador. In consideration of the fact that the tradition of tauromachy rotates around the mechanism characterizing the course of rituals – also the costume of whom is taking part in this ritual is specific and expected to be so.

²¹ E. Sekuła, A. Kangur, *Kicz jako źródełko radości* [in:] *Kiczosfery współczesności*, W.J. Burszta, E. Sekuła (eds.), Warszawa 2008, p. 35.

²² K. Piątkowski, *Kicz jako problem antropologiczny* [in:] *Kiczosfery współczesności*, W.J. Burszta, E. Sekuła (eds.), Warszawa 2008, pp. 15-16.

Outside plaza de toros traje de luces loses it's symbolic meaning. And if we are to talk about it in the context of the daub – it is exclusively in the situation when it's function is transformed. In my opinion toreador's costume worn by anyone involved in the tauromachy is a daub: it does not fulfil functions credited to it, it is abstracted outside it's natural context. Likewise carnival costumes – *traje* de luces used as a fancy dress costume in my opinion features daub. The same situation appears when the tourists trade the souvenir – trade create demand on the generation of object copying toreador's outfit which with the original does not have nothing in-common. Even more *traje de luces* can be original – bought from matador itself and become the daub if for instance hang on the wall instead of painting. This is called "the rule of maladjustment" which says that "(...) in every object exist some deviation from the usual function which it should fulfil. The daub hits by always misses – hits the false note. Replaces what is pure, through heterogeneous, typical for the daub are exaggeration or extenuation of the object" $(...)^{23}$ The function traje de luces on the arena is the other than the same costume hung up on the wall, whether the copy of this being bought on the stall outside plaza de toros or outright on any Spanish airport. Without a doubt in this case the context underlies classification of the costume as a daub or not. This is characteristic of many other costumes strongly related to the context of its use. For example traditional professorial toga and the biretta separately from academic – ceremonies doesn't looks very seriously or respectful. However the ermined cloak in respectable walls does not wakes the ridiculousness and is outright expected.

4. THE ART?

If corrida the toros is interpreted as element of the art – the theatrical performance, then the costume of the matador is simply costume of an actor. In This context it is extremely important that it is made correctly. Traje de luces is not only about the comfort of toreador, in the act of individual gestures and steps equally essential is the guarantee of safety. Admittedly matador's costume does not reminds armour nor harness protecting from injures however its individual elements performs as such: short chaquelita which does not reach a hip makes impossible to be hitched by bulls horn, the same as smooth tightly adjoined stockings. The attention to

²³ A. Moles, *Kicz, czyli sztuka szczęścia*, Warszawa 1978, p. 76; A. Bisko, *Prawie jak sztuka* [in:] *Kiczosfery współczesności*, W.J. Burszta, E. Sekuła (eds.), Warszawa, 2008, p. 196.

details during production of traje de luces has exactly the same significance as detailed preparation of any other theatrical costume²⁴. If the art of corrida de toros requires to use costume which is garish, colourful, unconscionable but at the same time made of highest quality fabric and with diligence by professionals, then there is no ground to consider the costume as a daub.

Reception of the art and its interpretation is in principle matter of taste and penchants. Often it is so that the evaluation of theoreticians and critics of the art is not matched be the colloquial perception of the given phenomenon of the artefact. This results from the fact that "(...) every art is in a manner conventional and contains the element of the concession in the interest of taste of the recipient (...)". ²⁵ There is no doubt that traje de luces – regarded as an art, to express it more clearly – fulfils determined with some definition of the art conditions: "the human ability to express or generate fillings to one third of humanity by music, visual or other artistic means"26. Visual perception is what the spectators are presented with, not less important is the fabric and it's texture. Feel of the outfit delivers very interesting experience, confirms the splendour and the wealth of used components. Traje de luces is not modest and reserved, and because fulfils clearly determinates social function, delivers the pleasure to spectators. According to Abraham Moles criteria the costume can be counted as a daub and art: "The daub opposes to the simplicity: the all art has its participation in this, what useless and what absorbs the time: taking from this the daub is also an art, because makes daily life pleasant and bearable with its many ornamental rituals (...)"27.

The costume of toreador is inseparably related to this what is happening on plaza de toros. To the state of requisite without which the matador as the performer would not have the testimony to perform what is expected from him. The costume is as the mask, we can like it or not, however without it the spectacle is not full. Furthermore, analysing traje de luces as the element of the art, it is proper to pay attention to the presence of the corrida de toros (also to the toreador's costume) in many artistic works. Such painters as Francisco Goya whether Pablo Picasso, acknowledged in the world of art, inspired themselves with the tauromachy introducing toreadors in their costumes in the full beauty.

²⁴ A. Hausbrandt, *Elementy wiedzy o teatrze*, Warszawa 1981, p. 188.

²⁵ A. Moles, *Kicz*, *czyli sztuka szczęścia*, Warszawa 1978, pp. 13-14.

²⁶ Term in the Polish online dictionary ABCPedia, http://www.abcpedia.com/diccionario/definicion-arte.html [accessed 08.10.2013].

²⁷ A. Moles, *Kicz*, *czyli sztuka szczęścia*, Warszawa 1978, p. 27.

5. THE CRAFT?

In consideration over traje de luces in the context of the craft we should first of all understand the term: "the craft". From among many definitions functioning in the literature of the object it is proper to mention definition published in The Dictionary of Polish Language. We read: "(1) craft the small production, including making and repairing commercial items manually or with simple tools, (2) the skill of producing such a objects, (3) in reference to fields of the art: the capture of the technique, the creative workshop, (4) the profession", the occupation and arts and crafts: "the field of fine arts including manual production of artistic useful objects"²⁸. Remaining at this in principle clear and uncomplicated definition most interesting for ours advisement will be points 1, 2 and 4 – point 3 and the definition of arts and crafts can apply to considerations regarding art only.

Traje de luces is a specific object and actually a set of items strictly coordinated in colour and fabric. Properly prepared costume of toreador not only let the person wearing feels prestigious and be considered as such but also need to give guarantee in case of many unforeseeable situations on the arena. Majority of costume marked out for bull fights are handmade. In Spain there is numerous privately owned workshops in which are manufactured almost all elements needed to make traje de luces, but there are also such which specialize in the production of determined parts of the costume: shoes or stockings.²⁹ Most of tailor's works dealing with the preparation of traje de luces is privately owned and specializes only in this single field of craft. Usually tailors perform their work manually, possibly with the use in some cases of machines. The price of traje de luces depends on the method it has been prepared, time it took to put it together which might various from several weeks to few month.³⁰ Due to results of recent economic crisis many related to corida de toros business responded to demand of private recipients – collectors. In such situation it is how the costume is decorated depends exclusively on commissioned order. There is no doubt that manual preparation of costumes and tailor's skills includes the outfit in the field of craft. In case of production on the greater scale – though we don't speak about factories – and for costumes from outside the business this seems to be more complicated issue. In this matter it is

²⁸ Term in the Polish online dictionary *Słownik Jezyka Polskiego*, http://sjp.pwn.pl/szukaj/rzemios%C5%82o [accessed 02.01.2014].

²⁹ R. Felices, *Catalunya Taurina*. *Una historia de la tauromaquia de la edad media a nuestro días*, Barcelona 2010, pp. 318-319.

³⁰ Prices range from several hundred to several thousands of euro.

essential whether the product comes for example from respectable workshop or is acquired on the stall or the bazaar. In many cases the quality of these products is incomparable. This concern in the wider seizure of the general apprehension of the daub in case of the source of the acquisition of the object.³¹ The costume of the toreador made for the toreador is always a craft and depending on individual feelings of the recipients can be perceived as the art or the daub, however the "stall" copy or even the dear reproduction always in my evaluation will be a daub.

6. SUMMARY

At the sight of photos from the corrida de toros and dressed in the outfits toreadors some react with words: "Oh it is kitschy!". In consideration of the fact that the corrida de toros is over the recent years subject on one hand to the excoriation by anti – tauromachy organizations, from the other hand is strongly defended by its supporters. It is obvious that in the evaluation all of it aspects the decisive meaning lies in individual taste and subjective point of view. In researches and interviews started in the beginning of 2012 dominates two strong points of view on this matter. Supporters have not doubts that traje de luces is true work of art, opponents while treat it exclusively as the daub.³² Will it be possible to find a balance which could be accepted by both sides? With certainty it will not be possible to question the skill of craftsmen preparing costumes for toreadors and also the quality of the fabric used for its production. Beyond debate is also the historic meaning traje de luces. I cannot explicitly find, whether this is the daub, whether the art but surely this is high end craft. I incline in the perception of the costume of the toreador as arts on the condition that it is presented in the suitable context. The atmosphere of the corrida de toros, struggles between man and the bull, gestures and attitudes of the matador causes that - this is the right place for traje de luces. In the above circumstances I have no doubts that this is an art.

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³² A. von Rebeur, webside Hiper Kitsch, http://hiperkitsch.blogspot.com/2009/09/los-toreros-son-kitsch.html [accessed 24.12.2013]

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