

Hermes  
National Museum Athens.

## *About cultural silence to pornography*

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Nascent Christianity thrust aside idolatry and carefully excluded any carnal collusion between the gods and human beings.

### *to appropriate one's own body and one's own sex*

It occurs that our culture, not only does not transmit the necessary language about sex, but discredits and impoverishes it. Eroticism becomes pornography; in spite of some progress, the pleasure, if it does not become vice, is confined to the domain of secrecy, lies and dissimulation. **Can a social function as important as sexuality,**

**therefore dedicated to the interpersonal exchange, be meaningless or disqualified?**

In relation to oneself, can such an important part of one's own intimacy escape the reflexive thought? The question arises in such terms: an interior Verb is necessary, as well for the appropriation of the physical being as for the recognition of the sexual act and its pleasure. (See: [SEXUALITY AND LANGUAGE: COMPLEX RELATIONSHIPS](#))

This inner Verb is essential to sexuality, whereas, in sexual intercourse, the word is abolished and, always, in the act, the being faces a gap in the symbolic system which abolishes the meaning. But one knows that for its achievement, sexuality has need of the other, real or imaginary. Sex must obey a cultural conformity, to coexist with the Law and social manners. **This is a required condition of the meeting with the person of another, necessary preamble to the meeting of the bodies:** normal human being cannot engage his being in a sexual relation, in which the other is not authenticated as a person. This inner Verb is thus a condition of the existence of the social being and the social state.

### ***cultural silence, familial silence***

With sexuality, the human being is faced with the paradox of an activity which contradicts the word, but which needs an exchange with the other, so that a linguistic person cannot procure pleasure, if he is not equipped with an adequate language. Concretely, the human being can't have access to the other, nor have his own sexuality if that which is communicated is not separated from that is which communicating (both for an instant confused in the erotic emotion). This essential separation is the time when the sign and the meaning are established, and where the spoken word re-establishes itself. For, as we know, the world can only be appropriated by means of signs. Finally, **it is the language which liberates sexual expression and any insufficiency here will produce a loss of meaning**, in other words, madness. The language of the love confirms this agreeably, and in a more tragic way, the entire human psychopathology.

This language, turned towards oneself but consecrated to the other, is to begin with, a secret language. It is not communicable and if, once constituted, the individual organizes his discourse in an adult linguistic strategy, the problem of its acquisition remains a priority.

### ***the recourse to science and the omission of pleasure***

All parents know that sexuality is not easily expressed by language. Fathers and mothers are all acquainted with the same embarrassment, during the education of their children, when children, or teenagers, begin to ask questions about sexuality. **Family silence is often a problem for the young.** The insufficiency of the signifier is also a deficit of language, therefore of meaning. This is a characteristic of our culture.

To circumvent this obstacle, which is a true linguistic taboo, the Western culture uses scientific speech, the best of itself and its specificity. But such a speech, if it applies to children before puberty, has no value beyond the phase of latency. After this period, the intimate desire, the attraction of the other and his body, becomes a permanent psychic topicality. The scientific speech remains however the most usual solution. Each one admits his need.

We give young people books on **sex education**. They are well documented, from the reproduction of butterflies (if not beans) to the birth of the little dog then the little sister. This information is generally well formed. But it is a scientist discourse, in other words an abstract discourse. This Western "education" **tries to give a sense to the sex act**. It teaches the reproduction of living beings, the perpetuation of oneself, and the perpetuation of the species, which are fundamental questions of childhood. It does not really answer the question of the desire. Because it does not speak about pleasure and its feelings, this education largely misses its goal: **it makes a generous "blackout" on the symbolic tear, central point of the erotic experiment** and central point of modest inhibition. Unlike the Eastern cultures, the emotive content, in our culture, does not embrace eroticism. Our scientific vision, substituted by the *ars erotica*, in the Eastern world, entirely omits verbal expression of sexual emotion and of the erotic communication between the partners. This silence may be accompanied by a hygienist point of view. And these "precautions", in one way or another, subtly reintroduce the Evil.

One cannot however be unaware of the acceleration which the pandemic of AIDS has just caused, paradoxically, in the evolution of moral comportment. This affection causes an omnipresent phantasm of death, an expiation of the fault. Its liberating effect on the language authorized that which the pleasure could not allow. It is indeed a language on the pleasure and the act of pleasure which one saw emerging, and at the same time a more responsible sexuality. But it is to be feared that, once the storm has passed, things may revert to their former state.

However AIDS reinforced the scientific regard toward sexuality, always maintained in the register of abstraction. The child and the adolescent hear current knowledge of anatomy and medical physiology. One hundred years after the first Freudian work, knowledge barely ventures onto the ground of eroticism. And this is the main question, which nourishes in their unconscious, the sexual culpability of adults, thus more surely transmitted to young people.

### ***to transgress but to settle in the sin***

In conflict with this culpability, young people are authorized to directly experiment their sexuality. This recent freedom recognizes the cultural gap of which we were speaking. This tacit permission **allows a reciprocal, but quite random initiation**. One perceives the difficulties, and the shared risks, according to the involved personalities and their psycholinguistics structure.

According to cases, according to the age of the partners, it will be too often incomplete, poor in words, poor in transmitted experiment. True initiation will come later. The mass of moralizing publications will not arrange the matter: too many aims at an expropriation of the person. On the other hand, if too refined, this initiation may allow an domination from which the young initiate may suffer for a long time.

One can also **speak about more serious risks where, in face of the associated forces both of the impulse and cultural silence**. Then violence may emerge, resulting from the impotence of words which have never been transmitted. But we overflow here the problem of the cultural gaps, to enter into that of too often tragic consequences.

## **joking, the disqualification of sex.**

We know that the joke is able to liberate speech when modesty creates an obstacle : scatology, alcoholism and especially sex. This **convergence with what is dirty, boundary-breaking or disqualifying is a problem**, but no one should underestimate the role of humour. The joke makes it possible to speak about sex even within the family. It delimits rather well the symbolic tear which characterizes the sexual act. At the same time, humour indicates this gap better than does scientific speech. This is not without advantages. Perhaps, from refined humour to bawdy stories, joking and laughter **are the main conversing way of living sexual information for teenagers**.

With the exception of those "who do not want to understand", information in a ludic form will reach the majority of the teenagers. Associated with useful liminal experiments, the joke is, especially for the adolescents and between them, an invaluable means of speaking about sex and love.

However a negative side cannot be dissimulated: some personalities are excluded: those who "do not like that", and suffer from it. One rediscovers them, as adults, naive and inhibited, in "psychological" consultations.

One can unfortunately be unaware that, by itself, **the joke implies the disqualification of its object**. Disqualifying the object, it disqualifies sex, the sexual being, the desire, the pleasure. By this diverted way it strengthens the case of the original sin.

## **from rupestral inscriptions to pornography**

The accompanying illustrations come from a work of **Leroy-Gourans** : "*La préhistoire de l'art occidental*" :

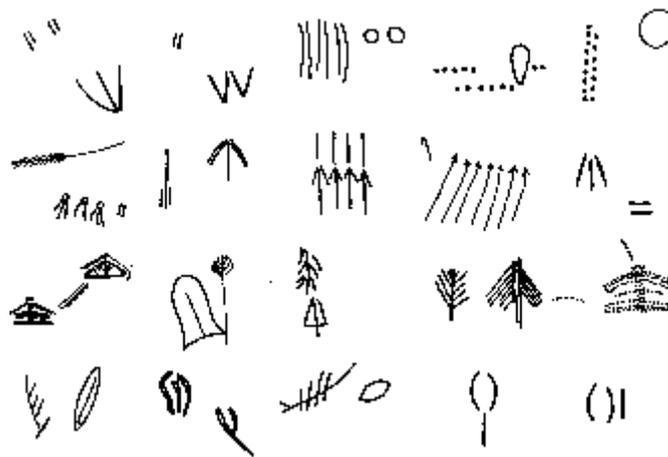


*inscription rupestre : signes masculins*

The societies, able to draw these rock documents, obviously had a language and elaborated techniques. Which means that the mediation of the signs was already a constituted way for the appropriation of the world.

Can one be surprised that the first graphic symbols, referring to the human, himself, where precisely related to the sex?

One can notice how these "symbols" resemble the modern graffiti, perceived as obscene. But **they could well fulfil the same function**, and achieve the same legitimating of sex, for those who drew them.



*inscription rupestre : signes féminins*

To reproduce the organs or the sex act is a means to validate them in oneself, to recognize oneself as a sexual being.

Currently this function is anticipated by these sophisticated scientific means which are **erotic electronic mail, video or electronic pornography** - remote heirs of the rock inscriptions. In the same way, are they not means of perfective initiation?



Etrusca pottery.

Thus the being can re-appropriate the censored parts of his body, and validate his bodily acts. These scientific sophistications are the ways towards a bodily signifier. But, it should be noticed, that there as well, the significance is obligatorily off-set. In all cases, the manifest reason for the act is not the desire. It is realization of such or such a performance, position, or exhibition, as many alibis or conversions of finality or diverted significances, curious homage of the obscene to decent.

The reason is also the transgression, and overbidding in the transgression: **the fault is always the keynote of the pleasure**. The erotic figures, even perversions, form however the signifier by which the communicated thing separates itself from the communicating thing and founds the meaning.

Thus occurs a certain re-appropriating of the body, of its erotogenic quality. This contributes to the acquisition of the inner pre-linguistic Verb. One however finds the inescapable disqualification of the sex, **in collusion with Evil, and the Fault**.

In fact we return here, more directly, to the field of the prohibited communication. An authentic sexual communication settles between the onlooker and the image which functions as a sexual signal. Can one then be astonished? Modesty and secrecy impose the dissimulation of their use as they impose dissimulation of sexual intercourse. That is enough to disqualify eroticism and to call it pornography.

### ***to become adult, to learn how to lie***

Here we return to the **familial silence**, often regretted by the patients.

We meet a new ambiguity:

- on one hand, the people who exaggeratedly underwent the harmful effects of this silence, manage with difficulty to have a sexual life, and suffer from it : "*in my family one never spoke about these things.* ";

- in addition, these negative attitudes are a condition of coexistence, and personal

development, **when proximity renders impossible the verbal and reciprocal information between parents and children.**

\* Secrecy, which is a part of modesty, hides the sexual activities of each one from the others under the same roof. In family proximity, the unvoiced comment makes it possible to function "according to the image" of close relations. It represents a kind of cut which has a facilitating function. Secrecy is a condition of free exercise of the sexual life for the parents; that also goes for the children. **Here, lies and dissimulations are necessary and usual.**

On the contrary, we know the very harmful consequences of a non-existent sexual discretion between parents and children.

The secrecy is the most specific character of the "primitive scene".

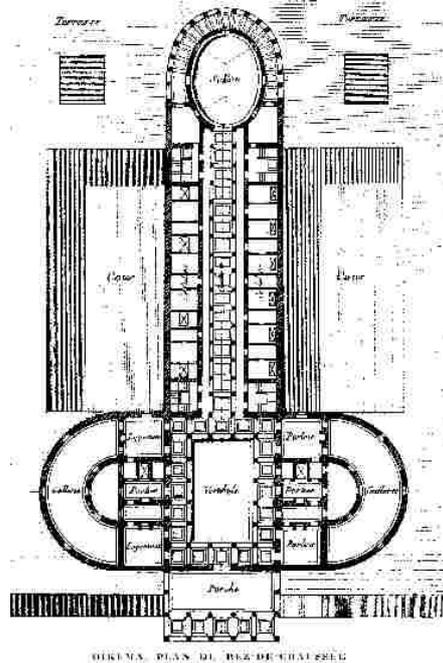


*Fragonard, Les curieuses, détail. (Louvres)*

## **Orientalism...and the return of "Idols"**

One can understand, then, the recourse to the oriental culture, thanks to which to the body re-asserts its rights. The means are multiple and varied: yoga, martial arts, Do in, meditation, collective sexual initiations etc. All go in the same direction, **which is the harmony of body and spirit.**

But, since the ancient origins of our civilization, the Occident is also the universe of the competition. One will then not be surprised, **that the elitism of sex, re-joins the elitism of the body.** So our epoch recreates its "sex-symbols" (with multiple prowess's) and recreates the formerly detested "idols". Ransom of cultural silence, the younger generations are, as they should be, particularly sensitive and attached to these, reinventing, by need and desire to exist, that which, with infinitely more richness, had so well succeeded for the generations of the Ancient World.



### **the house of pleasures**

" What a government does not dare to do, the architect faces it ".

Claude-Nicolas LEDOUX,  
the architect of the Royal Saltworks of Arc et Senans,  
thus designed the house of pleasure.

According to "*L'oeuvre et les rêves de LEDOUX*". CHENE Ed. Paris. 1971.

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