



Klimt, Modern Art Gallery, Vienna.

WHAT IS MODESTY?

- III -

THE HUMAN COURTING DISPLAY

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A ritual

Here still, the answer deserves an in-depth study of the ritual of the **courting display** of the human beings. A precise study shows that the implicit message being perfectly understood, the explicit message, decorated with rhetoric subtleties, undergoes much distortion. A French author (**F. Perrier**) points that : if the animal

goes straight to the goal, with human

"...when language interferes all that was green becomes red " " we as human beings are obliged to use the metaphor and the metonymy, displacement, condensation, the fall of signifier".

In fact, simple sweet talk or courteous love, the role of this ritual, is it vulgar or delicate, is to lead to a reciprocal adjustment of the ways of communication. They should neither shoke nor shoke themselves, in a progress out of the language. Everything takes place as if the partners took care continuously, each one for himself, **to avoid the conflict** between the communication by speech and the communication by gesture.

In the extreme desire, speech can be completely inappropriate. Everyone knows this, but let us allow the novelist to speak:

"he felt, through its sleeve, the heat of her shoulder, and found nothing to say to her, absolutely nothing, the mind paralysed by the pressing desire to seize her in his arms... She did not say anything either, motionless, inserted in her corner... " What was she thinking ? " he felt that he did not have to speak, that a word, only one word, in breaking silence, would break the spell ; but audacity failed to him, the audacity of the abrupt and brutal action. Suddenly he felt her foot stir. (Guy de Maupassant, Bel-Ami)

This play of speech and body is contradictory; we will find it, with pleasure, in literary arts. Thus the following passage, written by the same author:

"They had hardly exchanged twenty words until they were alone in the coach. As soon as they felt they were under way, they looked at each other and began laughing, in order to hide a certain embarrassment, which they did not want let to reveal. Du Roy and his wife, from time to time, pronounced some superfluous words... Du Roy, seated opposite his wife, took her hand and slowly kissed it... he still held her hand, wondering with concern by which transition he would arrive at the caressing stage."

To find the transition

The transition from the speech towards the gesture is precisely the whole problem of modest inhibition. It is necessary, for the human being to avoid all conjunction, which would be a conflict, between the explicit message, expressed by words, and the implicit message, sucked by the desire. For this reason lovers use an allusive language or a "secret code" Known only by themselves which fulfils perfectly this role.

For example:

"...on the following days he used the same pretext. If she had catleyas on her blouse he said : " It is a shame, this evening, the catleyas do not need to be arranged, they haven't been displaced as they had been the other evening ; it seems however to me

that this one is not very straight. Can I see whether they smell better than the others? Or, if she did not have any: "Oh! no catleyas this evening, no reasons for my small arrangements " So that, for a time, the order which he has followed the first evening remained unchanged, beginning by contacts fingers and lips upon the throat of Odette, and it was in this way that, each time, the caresses began; and much later, when the arrangement (or the ritual show of arrangement) of the catleyas had for a long time fallen in disuse, the metaphor " to make catleya ", become a simple term which they employed, without thinking, when they wanted to signify the act of the physical possession." (Marcel Proust)

Guy de Maupassant, in "Bel-Ami", gives the most complete example of the various processes of "deregulation" of the language in conflict with sexual desire.

The novelist leads us, skilfully, towards an increasingly silent ambiance. We notice initially that the desire for the sex act is once only clearly stated: that is when **Du Roy** murmurs: "*I would love you*".

A courting display

In the text, we find a great many deformations of speech, as they appear in the courting display. We notice, without difficulty, that the deformations of the statement affect at the same time, **the contents and the form, i.e. the words, themselves, and the way in which they are pronounced**. The processes used by the author, contribute to introduce the necessary gap between the implicit and the explicit speech of the partners. In addition, and for more safety, we notice the **dequalification of the enunciator himself on a ludic mode**.

Mme de Forestier uses a moment of chattering as a screen. She opposes a discourse on the future domestic problems. He was thinking of something quite different:

*"... he positioned his hands on his knees, as do wise little boys - You look stupid, like that - she said. He answered:--. (..) You have an experience which must dissipate my ignorance, and a practice in marriage which must remove my bachelor's innocence, there, Na! She exclaimed: - - That is too strong! He answered: - - That's the way it is. I do not know about women, - - Na, --(...) - - it is you who will give me education... this evening - Na, - and you can even start immediately, if you like, - Na. She answered brightly: - - Oh! For example, if you count on me for that! He pronounced, with the voice of schoolboy who mumbles his lesson: -But yes, - Na, - I count on it. I am even counting on you giving me a solid instruction... in twenty lessons... ten for the elements... reading and grammar... ten for the improvements and rhetoric... I do not know anything, - - Na. Shy replied, now enjoying herself: - - you are stupid. He continued: - - Since you are stating to address me as "tu", I will imitate this example at once, and I will tell you, my love, that I adore you more and more, (...)!
He spoke now with intonations of an actor, with a pleasant play of facial*

expression which diverted the young woman accustomed to the manners and the jokes of Parisian students (...) Then she blushed even more, while murmuring: - - One should never cut one's corn until it is ripe. -- He laughed, excited by the implications that he felt to gliding in this pretty mouth ; (...) the night fell softly, wrapping in transparent shadow, like light crepe, the wide countryside which extended to the right. The train accompanied the Seine; and the young people looked into the river, unrolled like a broad polished metal ribbon beside the road... (...) This evening melancholy entering by the opened door, penetrated the souls, so merry a while ago of the now silent couple. They had approached one another to watch this agony of the day, of this clear beautiful day in May. (...) Du Roy put an arm round his wife's waist and tightened her against him. (...). He murmured, low: - - I will love you, my little Made". The softness of this voice moved the young woman and made her flesh suddenly quiver. She offered her mouth leaning toward him, (...). It was a very long kiss, silent and deep, then with a start, an abrupt and insane embrace, a short breathless struggle, a violent and awkward coupling."

We will have occasion to examine, in another way the implemented linguistics processes. But it is interesting to recognize, here, their literary and stylistics aspects.

additional securities

The clear informative word, appears furtively, at the last moment and the conditional tense (*I would love you...*). After these words the lovers are silent until the sex act. Throughout the text, allusive remarks and insinuations replace explicit speech. The desire for discovery of love and of the body, **takes the mask of another discovery** (which, could be regarded as its opposite) : the discovery of the encyclopaedic totality of learning and knowledge. (*You will give me a solid instruction... I do not know anything...*). In this way the adult man, filled with sexual desire, hides himself behind the image of an innocent and mumbling schoolboy. Here, the modification of the verbal exchange of loving desire affects not only the pronounced words, **but even the identity of the person who pronounces them**. One sees the speaker playing comedy and mime - which, by definition, are not authentic. With the deformations of speech, and its ludic playing, **the voice is amended by mumbling**. The intonations become artificial. All this brings an additional safety. But, let us note, the voice makes the real message unsuitable. Mumbled or whispered, the capacity for communication is always decreased. The reader gets the impression of an amusing play, where the hero appears to have fun innocently in ludic behaviour. At this time, the partner must decode a speech of which she is the exclusive recipient. Indeed **humour always introduces a cut into the transmission of a proposal**.

The explicit statement is never clearly communicated. The recipient must recompose it by himself. We will speak at greater length about the ludic speech and the humour whose sexuality constitutes a privileged ground.

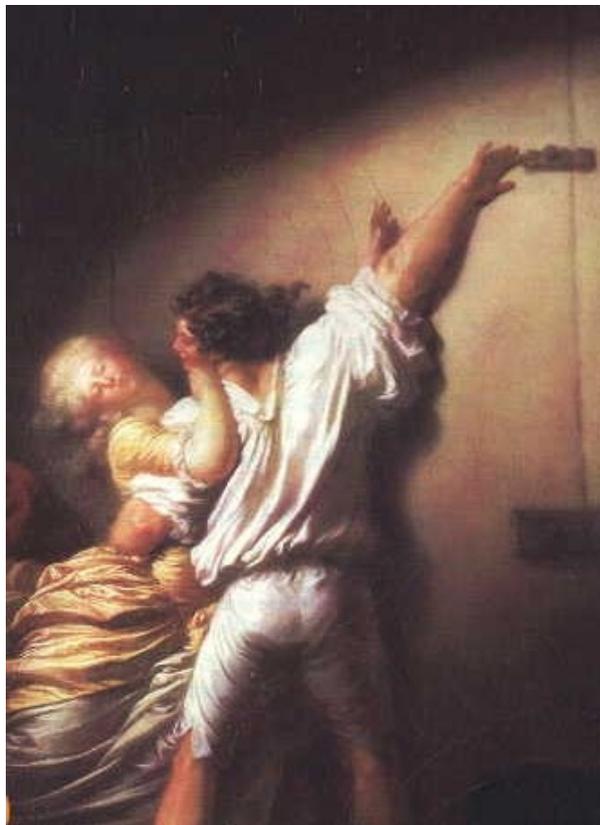
However, the mumbled voice, the allusive sense and the humour have the same effect: **they exempt the speaker**. They delegate to the recipient the mission of decoding the message.

In short, when sex act is imminent, the linguistic expression undergoes a general transformation which affects simultaneously:

- the implicit **content of statement**,
- the **support of the stating** (the voice, its level, its intonation)
- the role, the **identity of the enunciator**.

These function in the same way as a succession of safety locks.

The rhetoric jugglings, the symbolism of the gesture and the speech, play a very important role. In this courting display, the lovers constantly verify their complicity. But they avoid the least coincidence of the speech with the reality which motivates them. So carefully keeping their distance from each other, they must abandon speech. This transition is carried out thanks to an elective omission and a controlled drifting of the speech. Their goal is to arrive at a bodily and non linguistic communication.



Fragonard, 'le verrou'.

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