



WHAT IS MODESTY?

- IV -

THE OBSCENE AND THE GUILT FEELING

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In the standards of human loving, there is no bodily approach without disqualification of the language. Our human display finds its sense in this adjustment, this substitution of the registers of communication. This leads us to the extinction of the speech, and we know that, after a sexual encounter, speech will re-assert its rights, in the time, as we say, that it takes to smoke a cigarette...

An elective omission

In the courting display, the partners intend to respect the necessary gap between word and gesture, between act and speech, or, as the linguist would say, between signifier and signified; remarks too close to the facts would be awkward and would miss their goal. **The immodesty aims to destroy this necessary gap (Catherine Labrusse-Riou)**. It appears to us better adjusted to say that an explicit speech would destroy it. At the risk of rupture, the "full" expression would lead to the immodesty.

Thus two psychic attitudes dominate the human display:

- the continued but tacit checking of complicity between partners;
- the simultaneous omission of any vocabulary referring to the sexual intrigue.

It is offensive when this omission is not respected, when this adjustment does not take place with reciprocity.

The impossibility of statement is now visible by its opposite: the statement produces immodesty **and, more particularly, in speech, detail become obscenity.**

It is very important, now, to keep in our mind that the point is not the bodily connection but the linguistic connection, in other words the language.

When the detail is obscene

The effect of obscenity in speech is well underlined by **le Hénaff** in his study of **Sade**. He shows how the writing of this author is entirely traced for this purpose : *"... the stating goes to its limit, extends meticulously, frees absolutely all meant, in short goes particularly toward the detail "*.

Thus he take an example in the **120 Journées de Gomorrhe**:

" Duclos, interrupted the President, has no one informed you that your accounts must be carefully detailed and as extensive as possible that we can only judge the passion at which you speak, and the manners and the character of the man, as if you do not disguise any of the circumstances because the slightest circumstances are infinitely used in order to excite our sensibilities.

- - Yes, Monseigneur, acknowledged Duclos, I was warned not to neglect any detail and to enter into the finest detail each time that they could be of use in throwing light on the character or on the style. Have I been remiss in this?

- - Yes, said the President, I do not have any idea of the dick of your second récollet, (monk) nor of its discharge. In addition did he shake your cunt and does he have his dick touched? You see, how many neglected details! "...

Duclos thus gives the precise details which were expected of her :

" That is right, Duclos, known as Durcet, the President was right ; I could not give a correct representation in the first account, and I now perceive your man. "(XIII, 78-79.)

The detail, says **le Hénaff**, is **this point where reality surprises imagination**. By a form of inversion, **Sade** puts in writing: not the knowledge but, in the knowledge, the desire. This "unreservedly naked exposure, this unmeasured exhibition" (in the writing and by the writing) defines, for the commentator, **the space of obscenity**.

Our search will be unsatisfactory because we do not know for which reasons the

detail becomes obscenity in the human coupling, for example; this coupling being, moreover, the most banal, most repeated and most universal of any behaviours... on our planet.

In a word, what comprises obscenity? The spectacle of coupling animals is often proposed and commented on in the medias; it is not necessarily obscene. But the **animals are not linguistic beings** and the same medias, showing with a relative audacity certain diseases, their prophylaxis, reproduction or the human body, respect scrupulously certain visual censors of the "primitive scene".



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It should be pointed out, the immodesty always emerges from the communication of sexuality by the means of a verbal, gestural or graphic action; but the bodily act carried out or experienced is never indicated as obscene in itself and neither could it be. It becomes obscene: if the speech, writing or the image make it an **object of communication**; if the act is carried out or accomplished in order to be spoken of or shown.

In the intimacy of an encounter, the obscene can emerge from simple statement, for example if one of the partners during the course of the act, verbally evokes the scenario of the erotic progression.

But the essential questions are still posed, the first of which being: once the context in which immodesty or the obscene has been defined, appears, the question which remains is to know from where the capacity of provocation comes, and the aggressive feeling which results?

The answer is not in the desire, nor in the pleasure of the act, neither in the love display, nor in the intimate caresses, which are only shameless if they are spoken of or exhibited. It is clear that **if decency demands the no communication with others, therefore secrecy, the immodesty is formed in opposition**: it appears in a subversive conjunction of the act and the word that the couple attempts to avoid in its display.

Guilty victims

These facts lead us toward the concept that the body act and the act of language belong to mutually exclusive categories. The question, which we will have to answer, is **to know if the process is specifically related to the sexual matter or if this problem of language and communication is more general**. Let us remark, for the moment, that this antagonism of the bodily act and of the word does not explain the negative emotion that creates their conjunction.

This problem remains: how and why this mutual exclusion exists. Why, in certain cases, it causes an emotive crisis?

In connection with immodesty we must ask ourselves about the causes of its humiliating effect, the feeling of being victimized and, especially, **the paradoxical guilt feelings of the aggressed person**.

A young man who had been raped by his teacher, kept silence during twenty years then committed suicide. His mother stated: *"he did not think of himself as being the victim he considered himself the guilty party"*.

Here, it is tempting, and as old as time, to call upon the concept of taboo. But to resort to this juggling act would be to give as explanation that which is to be explained.

Whatever the forms of the aggression, whatever the possible cases, the victim does not necessarily undergo anguish or fear. But he always undergoes shame and especially, is sometimes unable to speak for a very long time.

In such a circumstance, a triple event associates:

- an immediate verbal inhibition, without which the offender would be the loser;
- an intellectual inhibition which, durably, suspends all mental development;
- an emotional disorder which increases the feeling of aggression.

The hypothesis of a conflict between the body act and the linguistic act allows two possible causes for this inhibition :

A) first hypothesis : the failure of the verb is due to the consequences of the emotion, as provoked **by an unspecified psychic traumatism** ; the great emotions are silent but, after the emotional shock, this does not explain the durable silence;

B) second hypothesis : the modest reaction finds its origin in a reciprocal exclusion between the body act and the linguistic act ; the emotional crisis that the insult causes, **would find its first explanation in the lack of langage**, which may be the expected consequence of the incompatibility of sex and language that we have just described.

The fundamental point is thus summarized: **it is not the emotion which inhibits the speech but the suspension of the language, whose inhibition causes an emotional crisis.** There are important reasons.

The deactivation of the significant chain...

Indecent behaviour must be considered in various ways. The insult can be purely verbal, but not necessarily: any form of communication, by the gesture or by the image acts in the same way. (Has a significant power any communication which uses a representative mode, even if this has the appearance of an act of nature: an obscene gesture is often the imitation of a natural act.)

Erotic suggestion by word or gesture, if aimed at a **linguistic being**, affects the sexual being; the offender addresses his sexual receptivity. (He aims at a person who is not voluntarily committed to the known ritual). Challenged in his sexual identity, the victim allows registering in his body *"all the prohibited signifiers that the language had as function to repress"*, or more precisely it appears that the language cannot accept at this moment.

By the sexual interpellation, the significant chain is deactivated.

One can thus say that **the opposition between the word and the body send the subject back towards his pre linguistic universe**, from the moment that he is affected in his body, in every case and whatever his level of consent.

It is here that the second act of the drama is played. If the animal, deprived of speech, is not confronted by this problem, anyone can perceive that, in human beings, the suspension of faculties of language outlaws. The characteristic of the immodesty's insult resides in that it causes - as all consenting love - a "deactivation of the significant chain" (in which the subject himself is always represented). With this suspension of the linguistic abilities, **it is from the interior that the law is brutally interrupted**, insofar as the language itself "is the place of the forbidden, the absolute Law".

The reactivation of the pre linguistic universe.

Much more than the physical act (even rape) the *"confiscation of the symbolic system"* inflicted on the victim, returns it to unconscious pre-linguistics memories and, undoubtedly, to some "formless incestuous libido". By this failure of the language, **the door is opened with antiquated, pre-linguistic, pre-oedipal resurgences of libido**. By this bias there erupts in the attacked person feelings of shame and guilt. This belongs, less to the sexual exchange of the adult person, than to **re-appearing incestuous and unconscious recall of his own childhood**.

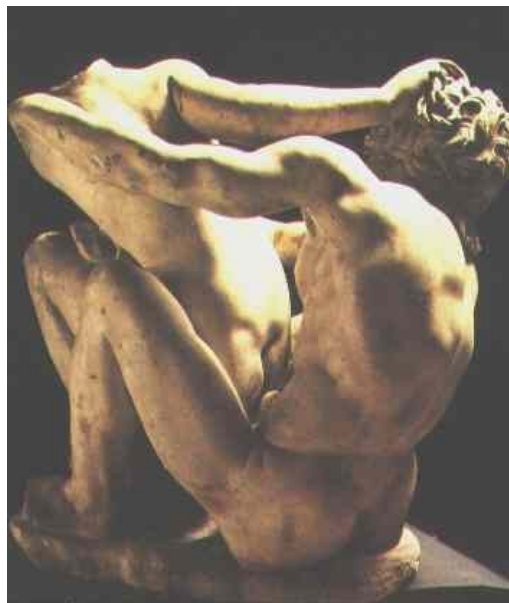
By instituting, excluding conditions, the failure of the significant chain explains this unexpected feeling of the guilty victim. This feeling is specific to the assault on decency. It is as important for the clinician to know this as for the lawyer.

Such is the paradox of immodest offence.

Admittedly other factors intervene in this process. But the guilt feeling would not persist if the linguistic capacity were not removed. Besides, this force exists only as a consequence of the "confiscation of the symbolic system", of which we have spoken.

In short :

- the obligatory nature of an erotic relation defines the "victimisation", as for all violence;
- when sexuality is concerned **a paradoxical character appears : the feeling of guilt ;** this guilt feeling is due to another phenomenon which can be divided into two distinct registers :
 - * the **withdrawal of the linguistic capacities**, consequence of the antagonism between the bodily act and the act of speaking;
 - * this suspension creates a phenomenon, of another nature : **a face-to-face with the non-symbolized**. This face-to-face has necessarily the shade of incest.



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