



## WHAT IS MODESTY?

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### *A REVERSIBLE PHENOMENON*

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**At this point in our study, a question arises: does the mutual exclusion, indicated above, function in a single direction?**

## *when the language inhibits the impulse.*

In other words, if the irruption of the impulse can disqualify the language, can one not imagine, in a reversible way, that the development of the **impulse may be inhibited by the language?**

In our hypothesis, this possibility could not be excluded:

- because modesty is attributed to an antagonism between the act of speech and the bodily act;
- and because this antagonism is attributed to the mutual exclusion of the procedures, coming into play in one case or another.

That would only relate to the "*deferable*" impulses for it is obvious, that a long speech could not attenuate a "pressing need", and a empty stomach "does not have ears", as say French people. In fact, even more than with the "*deferable*" impulses, this scenario initially relates to the impulses associated **with an interpersonal exchange**, such as sexuality. Thus, in this competition between the modes of communication, inhibition would exist:

- to the detriment of the linguistic act,
- to the detriment of the bodily act.

The first case constitutes the most manifest aspect of verbal modesty, such as we have studied it until now; the second case lets suppose that the verb can inhibit the impulse. Do these reversed conditions exist? In fact no one is unaware of the fact that the word is sometimes able to thwart the shameless aggression. More commonly, it can be used as screen in the gallant approach:

*You tickle me, finish. But he did not go away, gently running his curly moustache, in an irritating and prolonged caress, over the white flesh. She was shaken: - - Stop it ... Cease. He no longer listened to her , pulling her to him, kissing her with an avid and quivering lip... she released herself with a great effort...: - - Oh! Really, George, stop. We... can manage to wait until Rouen well. He remained seated, reddening, and frozen by these reasonable words; - - So be it, I will wait, he says with cheerfulness, but I am no longer capable of pronouncing twenty words until the arrival... - - I will speak, she says. She sat down gently near him. And she spoke, with precision, of what they would do on their return. They had to preserve the apartment in which she lived... she had regulated... all the financial details of the household... Du Roy no longer listened, deeply occupied by other thoughts. (Guy de Maupassant, Bel Ami)*

But this same screening function that we have just seen nicely illustrated by the novelist in the courting display, applies also to other situations. In everyday life, there are moments and places of proximity, and even quiet promiscuity between the sexes. One can feel a relatively intense infra-verbal communication when an exchange of words between a gathering of people is not established. In the subway or in any waiting room one recognises the instinctive play of seeing / being seen between men and women. If a spoken communication occurs, each one, if he wishes it, notices in himself that the phantasms are directed towards more "civility".

## *Some rituals the very elaborate...*

Pious people, dedicated to a mystical universe, the religious world, are not withdrawn from the impulses and covetousness's by their mere faith. In front of importunate seductions, they have prayers and speeches, the goal of which is to put aside, if not the Devil, at least disturbing feelings or undesirable emotions. Works intended formerly for pious people now make us smile when, in such or such case, they expressly recommend such or such prayer, such or such invocation with the purpose of putting aside the thoughts or the desires coming to disturb the serenity of the heart.

*But the effectiveness is not doubtful as this priest who no longer managed to overcome a phobic fear of contact proved to us. In the event, in a depressive moment, he was seized by the irrational fear of touching, by inadvertence, the lips of his faithful when he gave Communion. Faintness occurred at with each office but it knew how to surmount it by mentally reciting at the desired time a short prayer (known as "jaculatory" prayer). There we see a good example of phobia of contact drawn aside by a subtle verbal worship practice.*

One will obviously object to a substitution of rites. However, the priest could again take his ministry and we observe the effectiveness of the word in the face at a problem of contact.

## *At the Doctor's Surgery*

This inhibition of the contiguity by the verb is not reserved for the religious life. It applies even more strongly, but without their knowledge, to scientists and doctors. The medical and auxiliary medical disciplines place the experts in **physical proximity** with people, their beings and their bodies, suffering or demanding. From this relation it is necessary to evacuate the sensitive side.

The procedures undoubtedly vary according to cultures. The **shamanism**, which works towards the same goal as does our medicine, appears to intensify the ritual of the gesture and the word, for lack of scientific speech. It is the same for **charlatanism**, practice which indicates false doctors and those who, insufficiently informed, have little access to the shield of science. But in all cases, desire has no place...

In Western discourse, where there is no explicitly shamanic practice, the screening role belongs to scientific speech, purified of any symbolic value, and for which it is no reality in the beginning.

By this abstracted speech, medical people, in the practice of their profession, are protected from sensitive realities. It is thus especially concerned **with this antagonistic capacity of the verb.**



In situations of great objective immodesty, even obscenity, no modest reaction could emerge which would affect either the language or the emotional mastery required by practice of care. The explanation resides in that the scientific abstraction has no existence apart from the logos, and that science only exists in the abstraction.

## Linguistic section

These considerations take care of a characteristic of the human language which is its **creative power**. This faculty enriches considerably the conceptual capital of thought. It leads to scientific speech, in other words the Hellenic vision of the world. It is distinct from the power of "**nomination**", when this applies to entities which pre-exist in the distinct reality.

We must distinguish these various capacities of the human language. That is not simple, because the **cry**, the **phonic gesture**, the **olfactory message**, or the **art** have been considered, without distinction, as languages. At the extreme, an author claimed that the first conversation was engaged by the first two unicellular beings which approached each other in order to fertilize themselves. This conception is mystifying and amalgamates distinct orders.

1°) Without going back to the amoeba, let us observe that when, in place of tears, the (French) baby claims his feeding-bottle by shouting "**lolo**" (milk), he uses a phonic expression which is not invented but learned. It is an imitative act for the benefit of the nominative function of language.

"**Lolo**" (Milk) is not a spontaneous phonic gesture. It is an **arbitrary sign** (signifying)

and simply applies to a distinct reality. This word does not add anything to reality. It simply applies the nominating power to a reality detached from the empirical contiguity. This is a *"differentiator"* word which indicates categories; **it did not create anything.**

2°) a other procedure, derived from the **similarity** is absolutely different. The concerned function is a report of resemblance: the real object does not exist or cease to exist to the benefit of an idea (introduced by the comparison).

For example the **verticality**, commune with the human and the tree, is neither one nor the other: it is an abstract idea. The words **"cold"** and **"hot"**, as arbitrary signs, are in accordance with the Saussurian theory. But the **cold** and the **hot** **do not need to be named to exist.**

Let us examine the word **"Temperature "**; it applies as well to the one as to the other. It **indicates neither the cold nor the hot and constitutes an abstract idea.** In the same way the word **passion** is neither **love** nor **hate** but it makes it possible to hold a discourse on the one and the other starting from a common characteristic.

The formation of the abstract entities supposes the capacity **to perceive** an analogical relationship. That is not specific to the human and is not sufficient. It is also necessary to **give it permanence** and one cannot imagine perception and silent retention, i.e. without the capacity to restore the sense by the word.

Abstract thought thus supposes the capacity of **perception of an analogy**, *plus* the **retention capacity**, *plus* the capacity of **formulation and stating** which allows social communication. As for the function of the language, everything opposes the **concrete concepts** (such concepts of cold or hot) to the **constructed concepts** (p. Ex. **Temperature**): in the first case one observes the simple application of the function of nomination to a pre-existent concrete reality, in the second case there is authentic creation of a concept **which does not return to any existing referent in reality** (we call it : *abstract operator*). In other words, this category is known as abstract because it does not return any reality accessible by its sensitive qualities.

## *To eliminate the sensitive*

On this is based any characteristic of theoretical discourse by which the word achieves to separation from the thing, and the concept from the sensitive matter in which it is included. It is a response to the problem posed by **Catherine Labrusse-Riou** when she sees the immodesty spread out *"in certain writings or scientific photographs"* adding at once: *"No matter! ... the statute of knowledge takes precedence over the revelation of our perversions, of our monstrosities or quite simply of our unease... There we are in the field of the science which, as says the author, by itself cannot attack modesty"*.

How? *"By elimination of the sensitive which is not scientifically conceptualizable"*. This observation clearly points out the role of the abstract conceptualization about which one perceives that it interrupts the connection with sensitive matter.

We could apply here the speech of **Marcel Le Henaff** who, in connection with the **Encyclopaedists**, evokes the dull and pretentious form of medical speech. In its

traditional form this speech, *"neutralizing, incapable of conveying the nuances which gives the whole specificity of a passion; it generalizes and renders impotent. But it has an advantage: it names..., it is accorded with an unlimited right of inventory, even of what can be classified as the "embarrassing" kind."* And it adds: *"it is allowed to grant a statute of perfect innocence to the accumulating bulimia of science: all must be explored, indicated"*.

## *astonishing redundancies*

By his formation, the expert sees himself equipped, in this sense, with a superabundance of concepts whose redundancies feed the satire and, from **Diafoirus** to **Doctor Knock**, nourish beautiful literary pages. At the risk of provoking smiles, medical speech has always decorated itself, and, from congress to conferences, from symposiums to forums, briskly persists in astonishing scientific-verbal productions. No matter! That has undoubtedly as a **function not to leave any place to the sensitive**, and to forge the shields necessary to the practice. Thus, each part of the observable universe is set up within the scientific statute, in which the suffering or the desire of another **becomes classifiable indication**.

Thus, in a clinical interview, in a physical examination, each facet meets its referent in a theoretical corpus.

The desire and the impulse would be explicitly in question, as in a sexology consultation, classification and theoretical speech play an essential part. It does not matter that the real knowledge is so meagre on the psychophysiology of desire, mechanisms of the female orgasm or male erection. What we have just exposed allows us to see that words are necessary. They provide the necessary function of inserting the language in a significant chain whose system of reference is entirely abstract, i.e. **detached from the world of sensitive qualities**. This speech, more often marked than rigorously constructed, is needed *"to forbid the imaginary from being surprised by reality"....* to the detriment of guaranteeing the truth of the knowledge?

If modesty has some relationship with a body / word conflict, **language has a resolving power**, but also the knowledge which is bound to it and which it conveys. This problem by its very statement will not fail to bring us back to the origins, i.e. the Genesis, but also to the fundamental data which govern the access to the knowledge.





Courbet, L'origine du monde. Musée d'Orsay. Paris.

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