

# Conversations

Luce  
Irigaray



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## **Conversations**

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Luce Irigaray

*with*

Stephen Pluháček and Heidi Bostic, Judith Still,  
Michael Stone, Andrea Wheeler, Gillian Howie,  
Margaret R. Miles and Laine M. Harrington,  
Helen A. Fielding, Elizabeth Grosz,  
Michael Worton, Birgitte H. Midttun



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# Introduction

Dialogue has always been a way of approaching knowledge and truth. Depending on the tradition and the era, one person or the other asks questions. Sometimes it is the master who questions the disciples in order to guide them, and sometimes it is the disciples who question the master in order to learn, at least when they dare to do that and the master agrees to participate in such an exchange. Our times, unfortunately, rather privilege criticism and arrogance, and questioning often amounts today to putting the master on probation instead of being a quest for truth. What is more, as it is generally believed that wondering about something presupposes a certain ignorance, it is no longer in one's own name that one asks questions but in the name of those whom one teaches or whom one is presumed to represent and who are supposed to be ignorant. Foremost in this regard are journalists, who ask questions in order to inform others without taking any part themselves in the conversation. Only neutrality with respect to the truth at stake but also between the interviewer and the interviewee would be acceptable and would correspond to the ethics of a good interview.

Thus, the main concern is no longer to reach the truth, a concern for which dialogue would be the most appropriate method, and, furthermore, it is no longer even to have a dialogue, because the questions are not asked in the name of the one who takes part in the conversation. Only a technical competence in carrying out an interview remains, in which criticism and conflict are indispensable to sustain interest and, thus, the attention of the audience. Asepsis alone is acceptable and an absolute relativism, with the exception of obedience to fashionable leanings and political correctness,

which can vary according to the media, environments, countries and cultures.

This way of holding a conversation has invaded intellectual circles. It is presumed to be the only way of guaranteeing the scientific nature of conversation. And the more this loses any content, the more the formalism of the process, which ought to convey that content, becomes the unique guarantee of a supposed truth. In fact, conversation then takes place between two persons who do not know one another, who do not share anything and who behave towards one another as robots, separated by a sort of isolating closure or a mediating third possibly still more impersonal and indifferent – except where money is concerned.

One could send the supposed defenders of these norms in relating to truth back to the dialogues of Plato – why not to the *Symposium*? – in order that they might inform themselves about the manner in which these dialogues infolded. They could then discover that love was approached in a context of love affairs between the participants, who were almost somehow making love. Truth was then perhaps more true than the truth claimed by our contemporaries, because it was based on experience. A personal experience, which involves our flesh itself instead of taking place almost *in vitro* through sanitized methods. An experience that, henceforth, would soil the truth of ourselves so much that we ought to give it up.

The conversations which are gathered here do not obey such imperatives, which are programmed by what is most questionable and futile in the effects of our metaphysical tradition. The persons taking part in these conversations for the most part know one another, and they talk to one another without renouncing either their bodily and sensible belonging or their convictions. If the exchanges are not yet fully dialogues, it is because the participants are not at the same stage of their journeys, have not lived through the same experiences nor produced the same work. It is also this way because the framework of these conversations is, more or less explicitly, questioning my own work, a work in which the questioners take an interest and to which they devote a part of their own research. Reciprocity in the exchanges was thus not really always possible, but my answers aim at such an outcome both with regard to the participants in the exchanges and to every reader of the book.

Unfortunately, most of us have stopped believing in a supra-sensible truth that exists outside of ourselves and would be valid for all people in all spaces and times. Now truth results from who or what we are, from our

experience(s), from our journey, among other things from our advancement in the recognition of the other as other and in our ability to exchange with such an other in mind. The quality of the conversations, which are gathered in this book, could be assessed, not according to the degree of asepsis and disengagement, but according to the degree of attentive respect for the other. That is, according to the involvement of the persons who enter into dialogue in the exchange itself; instead of their neutralization for the benefit of a truth indifferent to the one and the other, a truth that they would attempt to reach in the name of a scientific ascetism beyond any personal involvement. No doubt, something of this ideal remains, especially on the part of certain participants. Taking time to reflect about oneself is not yet, or no longer, the habit of cultural circles, who are ready to object to you that Plato offers a model of dialogue between philosophers, without noting how much the participants in the *Symposium* threw themselves into their search of truth. For these Greeks, truth was not yet the outcome of a mere logical reasoning. The relation between themselves and argumentation was still at work and alive in the discovery of truth, even if they aim more and more to substitute the *logos* itself for it. But it is still starting from their experience that Socrates and his disciples talk about love. Only between men, it is true! Undeniably, Socrates mentions the words of Diotima, but in her absence. There is thus no exchange in difference between the sexes or genders in the *Symposium*. Socrates talks in the name of Diotima, but not with her. The way to enter into dialogue between man and woman is thus lacking in this presumed model of dialogue. And this spoils not only the content of the words, but also their logical organization, with a lack prejudicial to truth itself. Our Western tradition has suffered and still suffers because of such a lack, which notably appears in its claim to aim at a neutral and sterile truth as the very best for humanity. It has also missed a correct conception of what gender itself is, for which, and already in the words of Diotima, it substituted generation, preventing in this way a possible dialogue, especially a dialogue both amorous and about love.

In fact, a dialogue always ought to correspond to a love story, if not between the two persons who enter into dialogue, at least between them and that about which they try to exchange. The best dialogues happen when love exists both between the two persons and towards the subject which is at stake between them. Such a situation still existed in the time in which Socrates lived, but it was vanishing because ideas or ideals began to

replace life itself, and love that life needs to rest and develop. Which was also questioned by the absence of Diotima: even if Socrates appealed to her advice on the subject, she is kept out of the symposium. How can views of love have any worth outside of any practice of love itself? And what part of life, of love and truth is left to one side when relations stop at relations between those who are alike? How then to maintain the two? To preserve this two from being immersed in the multiple? From falling back into undifferentiation? No doubt some features distinguish those who are the same at a sexuate level, but that often blind attraction determined by sexuate difference no longer exists between them, an attraction which often becomes destructive for lack of cultivation of its transcendental dimension. A transcendence, then, which not only stays beyond and outside ourselves and to which we ought to submit our desire, but rather that the desire for the different other can awaken in ourselves.

A dialogue always ought to take place between two people awakened in this way, who question themselves in order to guide one another on the path towards coming closer in respect for their differences and transcendences. Who also question how they could create between them a shareable world: a truth, an art, an ethics and a politics, which transcend each one but which they could both share. Then the questioner and the responder really exist and can alternately exchange their roles. And the questions have a content concerning a truth both external and internal to each subject, a truth both objective and subjective, which asks questions about being – and Being – of each one and their own world, as well as about a world in which all humans could dwell and share between them.

Exchange, then, is real and not formal, and because it has to do with reality between two humans, it passes on a truth that somehow is shareable by others. This is the intention which animates the conversations gathered here. They touch on various cultural fields and cultures, and took place at different times. After some hesitation, I decided to present them in chronological order because it is the order which most corresponds to the reality and the truth. I hope that my academic questioners will forgive me for daring to propose as a postscript an interview with a journalist. I thought that to compare this interview with the other conversations could be relaxing and instructive, because the journalist asks questions that academics do not pose, but about which many people wonder.

Luce Irigaray, October 2007

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# Thinking Life as Relation

*Conversation between*

Luce Irigaray, Stephen Pluháček  
and Heidi Bostic

*Stephen Pluháček and Heidi Bostic:* We met Luce Irigaray in Paris in the spring of 1996 while attending her seminar, 'La question de l'autre', at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales. Our discussions there focused on her recent work, including *I Love to You, Je, tu, nous* and *Thinking the Difference*, which constitutes the basis of this interview. The following questions were presented in written form and were responded to in writing. During numerous meetings, the questions and responses were discussed and analysed. In this manner, from May to August 1996, the following interview came about. We wish to thank Luce Irigaray for her patience and insight throughout this process.

\* \* \*

STEPHEN PLUHÁČEK and HEIDI BOSTIC: Your work, like the work of certain other contemporary philosophers, puts the universal subject into question. But unlike many other philosophers, you seem more able to offer, and more open to the idea of, concrete alternatives and concrete plans of action for effecting changes inside the space opened by the resituation of the universal subject. How is it that you are able to propose positive and concrete alternatives and plans of action?

LUCE IRIGARAY: Do I dare say that perhaps my way of questioning a universal subject is right and that, as such, it permits, and even demands both a theoretical and practical refounding of culture?

So, I do not believe that to question the universal subject starting from the multiple is sufficient, because the multiple can always be equivalent to a multiple or a sub-multiple of *one*. The explicit or implicit measure remains the *one*, more or less real, imaginary or simply mathematical. The critique of the universal subject cannot be limited to the substitution of the multiple for the one because it deconstructs certain values necessary for subjective constitution without a questioning radical enough to permit the emergence of other values. Thus, to deconstruct all reference to unity, to the absolute, to the ideal, to the transcendence and so on, without bringing about a reorganization of the energy invested in such values risks the disintegration of the subject to the benefit of the savage reign of death drives or of the coming to power of an even more totalitarian authority, these two possibilities not being incompatible.

The gesture that I make is different, probably because I start from reality, from a universal reality: sexual difference. The deconstruction of the *one* generally realizes itself either through abstract models or through non-universal empirical realities, in space and time: the putting into question is therefore too partial to reach a real universal. Moreover, this deconstruction often is fulfilled in an auto-logical manner, as for the construction of the *one*. It is therefore the latter, which finds itself, eventually passed from the real to the imaginary or reduced in a simple numerology.

In order to question the universal subject, it is necessary to approach another logic. The only logic that can assure a rational and universal foundation is that which starts from the reality of two genders, masculine and feminine. Such a logic compels us to rethink, theoretically and practically, the subjective constitution as well as the one of the individual or collective world. The *one* no longer remains here the visible or invisible, conscious or unconscious paradigm, which governs rational organization; this organization henceforth takes into consideration the existence of two subjects, irreducible one to the other.

Certainly, this reality of the *two* has always existed. But it was submitted to the imperatives of a logic of the *one*, the *two* being reduced then to a pair of opposites not independent one from the other. Moreover, the duality was subordinated to a genealogical order, a hierarchical order, in space and in time, which prevented considering the necessity of the passage to another mode of thinking, and of living.

My procedure consists therefore in substituting, for a universal constructed of taking account of only one part of reality, a universal, which

respects the totality of the real. The universal therefore is no longer *one* nor unique, it is *two*. This obliges us to refound our culture, our societies in order to reach a civilization at the same time more real, more just, and more universal.

S.P. and H.B.: You have suggested that a critique of patriarchy, which is not accompanied by the definition of new values founded on natural reality, runs the risk of being nihilistic. What is this natural reality and what does it mean for a critique of patriarchy to be accompanied by the definition of new values founded on this natural reality?

Epistemologically speaking, how may one gain access to this natural reality?

L.I.: This question rejoins the one which precedes, and permits the completion of its response. A pertinent critique of patriarchy implies an interpretation of its system as insufficient in order to render account of one part of the real. Without returning to a real more real or more total, the inversion of an order of values is nihilistic in the bad sense of the term.

For me, questioning the patriarchal world has been possible from the discovery of the fabricated character of my feminine identity. Neither my consciousness nor even my body had free access to the real. I could not pass from nature to the spiritual because I was held in a determination of the one and of the other which was foreign to me. The sensible as well as the intelligible were presented to me and imposed upon me according to norms which were not proper to me. Therefore, I had to recover an immediate perception of the real and at the same time to elaborate a symbolic universe which corresponded to it.

Let us take an example. If my body, as feminine, was reduced to a nature for man, indeed for humanity, it can not at all be the nature from which I perceive the world, I perceive myself, and I can be and become subjectively and objectively that which I really am. If my woman's nature was considered as living matter at the service of the other's desire and of reproduction, I could not experience it as a 'for me' and assume its becoming spiritual through a dialectic of in-self and for-self. It was necessary therefore to come back to a relation with nature which was not already artificially structured. It is moreover partially starting from a strangeness of my immediate sensible experience to these values that I began to interrogate the patriarchal universe.

But I live in a cultural tradition. My relation to the world, to others, and



to myself is marked by it. I had to, I still have to, effect a gesture that is at least double: deconstruct the basic elements of the culture which alienate me and discover the symbolic norms which can at the same time preserve the singularity of my nature and permit me to elaborate its culture.

This enterprise is not simple! It requires an aptitude to perceive and to analyse perceptions, about which the tradition of India, in particular that of yoga, has taught me much. Vigilance in relations to the other has equally alerted me to a necessary respect for the difference between the other and me. The consideration of dominant values and their being put in perspective in the unfolding of History has allowed me to relativize the cultural universe in which I was living. And the analysis of the discourse of philosophers has revealed to me that the argumentation internal to their system often necessitates bids for power or jumps which bear witness to the partially artificial character of the logic which is at work here. These are only some examples of epistemological recourses used for questioning a cultural horizon.

S.P. and H.B.: You have indicated that a cosmic or natural order exists which could and should serve as the basis for a terrestrial order – social or political. Why and how should the terrestrial order be based upon the cosmic order? Furthermore, if men are less linked than women to cosmic rhythms, why should they conform to these rhythms?

L.I.: I don't understand what you mean by 'serve as the basis'. If you signify that it is necessary to start from the micro- and from the macro-cosm to organize a social and political order, then I can recognize in your question a dimension which is important to me. A social and political order which is not founded upon the real is precarious, and even dangerous. All the imaginary disturbances, all the authoritarian deviations, all the cultural regressions are possible here.

I don't think however that it suffices to start from the cosmic or natural order to build a social or political order. This would risk falling again into the errors of the patriarchal world. In my opinion, a harmonious civil community, an accomplished democracy can only be founded upon relations between citizens. But these relations must be at the same time respectful of the needs and desires of each person, and be as non-hierarchical as possible, nevertheless assuring the cohesion of the society. In this sense, a relation between a man and a woman both capable of transforming their

immediate attraction into civil coexistence seems to me a valid base for a social and political order. Of course, it is necessary to multiply this relation between two as many times as there exists an encounter between two citizens of different genders. But the human community is woven right through by such encounters. It is therefore possible to constitute it starting from this relational place or bond.

The social order is thus constructed in the respect for nature and for its cultural elaboration, necessary for elevating the relation between the genders to a civil level. That woman lives in greater continuity with the cosmos does not exempt her from elaborating this dimension of herself in order to be capable of a civil relation with man. It is in this sense that I have spoken of a necessary proof of negativity, for her, in the relation to the other. That said, it is possible to hope that her proximity to the micro- and to the macro-cosm lends her to be a better guardian of the safety of nature than man has been up until the present. Planet Earth and the world of the living certainly are in need of it!

S.P. and H.B.: In *Je, tu, nous*, you write that the rapport between biology and culture has not been sufficiently examined, and that despite the fact that biology has been used to exploit women, they should not avoid (re)thinking this relation between biology and culture. Given the possibility that this (re)thinking of the biology/culture relation could lead to a new and greater exploitation of women, what are your suggestions about how to (re)think this relation? ('The Culture of Difference', in *Je, tu, nous*, p. 46).

L.I.: Obviously, I do not agree with the expression used by Freud in reference to the feminine condition, 'Anatomy is destiny'. The use made of it is at once authoritarian, final and devalorizing for woman.

But what has served to exploit women is a biology interpreted in terms more masculine than feminine. In the chapter 'On the maternal order', which precedes the passage to which you allude, a woman biologist objects to the patriarchal argument concerning the necessity of the paternal law in order to break off the mother–infant fusion since, in the very womb of the mother, nature has planned a third, the placenta, between the mother and the foetus.

This revelation can only contribute to the awareness of women in view of their liberation from laws imposed upon them from the outside. It invites them, on the other hand, to respect that much better a distance and a

difference with the other that nature, in themselves, respects already. No male biologist has expressed in these terms, to my knowledge, the role of the placenta as regulating third. Why? Would it not be, among other reasons, because it is a question there of a biology of the relation between two living human beings? Which corresponds little to a masculine anatomic science, usually thought starting from cadavers or from animal experimentation.

This same tendency is found moreover in other scientific processes realized by men. Whether it is a matter of biology, physics, mathematics, linguistics, logic, psychology, etc., generally the closed, the finite, the 'dead', the isolated is preferred to the open, the in-finite, the living, the relation. Sometimes there exists a play of oppositions between extremes but it is only belatedly, marginally and not without resistances that science has become interested in 'the partly-opened', in the 'permeability of membranes', in the theory of 'fields', in the 'dynamic of fluids', in the current programming of discourse, in the 'dialogic', etc. Now these objectives have more affinity with the feminine universe.

It cannot be harmful to a woman to discover the reality of her biological economy. What harms her is to be subjected to a science which is not appropriate for her, or to be reduced to a simple nature. To be opposed to a knowledge of nature in order that this not be used to harm women, would not be an homage to them. On the other hand, it is useful to incite women to vigilance about what does or does not correspond to them. It is also important that they not accept being reduced to a pure body, a pure nature, whether it be by inertia or by submission to the other. As I said in 'Your Health: What, or Who, Is It?', what allows women to escape diverse forms of illness, physical and mental, is their own desire, their own will, their own access to the spiritual world, their breath, their 'soul'.

S.P. and H.B.: To what degree does the effort to rethink the relation between biology and culture remain insufficient in so far as it fails to take into consideration other species? That is to say, is maternity limited to the production of children within one species? Whereas the relation mother/placenta/child plays a more or less important role in a social imaginary, are there not similar and perhaps more important relations which are established not only among organisms of the same species, but also among different species, as is the case with microorganisms (for example, certain types of bacteria) on which human life depends and who also depend upon humans for survival? In this direction, could you imagine a motherhood which is open to men as well as to women?

L.I.: I do not have enough knowledge to reply exhaustively to this question. I think I have partially answered it in the preceding and following responses. It seems to me that the questioning turns on an antecedent, or perhaps a future, of the life animated by consciousness. It is thus that I would designate approximately the human child: capable of autonomy became capable of consciousness. I am not in a position to elucidate such perspectives, which are partially imaginary.

Shifting the question a little – not so much really – I could say that, to live maternity, men should accomplish two cultural revolutions: to prefer life over death, to be capable of a radical respect for the other's alterity. Without these two mutations, I think that men are not capable of engendering the living endowed with autonomous existence with respect to them. Is it not thus that maternity can be described?

I would also ask: why the will to be a 'mother' rather than to assume an identity of man, of father in the respect of one's limits? It is thanks to gender difference that another human is engendered. What will result from the blurring of identities? Whom and what does this serve today? To surpass a still unaccomplished human destiny? Why this immoderation? Is it not, once again, a vehicle of death more than of life?

S.P. and H.B.: In your work, you often refer to a natural reality said to be living. Could you indicate how and where the line is established between the living and the non-living? Additionally, how is the establishment of this line linked to gender?

L.I.: I have much reflected on this question. I think that it is close to the one on the possible engendering of the living by man in himself, on the maternal model. I am not sure that I have finished my meditations on the problem! Today, I would say that the living is that which continues to grow, to become. This growth cannot be reduced, in any way, to a proliferation of the same, to its multiplication nor to its simple repetition as happens in certain physical or mental illnesses. It implies a constant relation between the same and the different, in which is assimilated from the different only that which does not destroy the organism of the same nor that of the other. Willing only the same or only the different destroys life. Frequenting only the same or only the different represents a danger for the metabolism of life. To these considerations, it is of course fitting to add the problems relative to belonging to a species – human, for example – to a kingdom – vegetable, for example.

The existence of gender within the human species is certainly a factor protective of the living because it maintains a necessary economy in the relations between the same and the different. It is interesting to note that the manifestation of gender is assured by particular chromosomes, different in women and in men, whose effect is not exclusively somatic. The safeguarding of life would be in some way dependent on chromosomes not reducible to a purely corporeal genetics. Which can incite us to meditate on our desires for immortality, for eternity, for incorporeal divinities!

S.P. and H.B.: We will turn now towards linguistics. You are a philosopher who also employs linguistic tools. According to you, what is the relation between philosophy and linguistics? What can each discipline offer to the other?

L.I.: No one will deny that philosophy is constructed with language. In the West, this discipline has often been called metaphysics, that is to say a science capable of organizing material or immediately sensible realities with logical instruments which removed them from their first nature. The birth of Western philosophy is accompanied by the constitution of a *logos*, a language obeying rules such as those of self-identity, of non-contradiction, and so on, which distinguish it from a simple empirical language. These logical rules have been defined in order to ensnare the totality of the real in the nets of language, and thus to remove it from sensible experience, from the ever in-finite contiguity of daily life.

Philosophy thus represents an artificially constructed language in comparison to what is called natural language. But the latter is itself already constructed and there is an interaction between philosophical discourse and everyday discourse.

The experience of linguistics taught me to reflect on the production of language more than most other philosophers do. This led me to question the linguistic instrument supposed capable of discovering, articulating and transmitting the truth. I realized at least two things which seem decisive to me. First, the language that philosophy uses is not, in itself, neuter: it is marked by a gender, notably grammatical, which in a way does not correspond to reality. Philosophy cannot therefore claim universal truth if it uses such a language without interpreting it; philosophy appears as a partial truth and, in some way, as dogmatic because it imposes as true that which corresponds to the truth of a certain subject blind to its singularities. A single gender marks philosophical discourse in its form, its content, the

definition of the subject, the relation to the world, the limits of the horizon.

Now, there exist two subjects, irreducible one to the other. My linguistic training enabled me to verify it scientifically. Man and woman do not speak in the same way, do not structure the relation between matter or nature and mind in a similar manner. The reflection on discourse, on language, to which I was led through an education in linguistics, enabled me to interpret the history of Western philosophy, to interrogate the particularities of its truth and its lacks. One of these is particularly evident: the small number of logical means that the masculine subject has developed for communicating in the present with another subject different from him, in particular with a subject of another gender. Analysis of feminine discourse shows that the woman is much more attentive to this than the man. But she lacks logical rules in order to be able to realize this tendency in the respect for herself and for the other. Reflecting on language produced by the two genders can provide thoughts about the subjective and objective transformations necessary for a perspective appropriate to the feminine subject and for intercommunication between the genders.

S.P. and H.B.: Your work often seems phenomenological and dialectical at the same time. How do you characterize your method?

L.I.: I don't think it is possible to speak of one single method. Criticizing and constructing necessitate different procedures. Moreover, my manner of criticizing is new because it has recourse to interpretation more than to simple judgment. And, in order to interpret, I use several ways, such as discourse analysis, putting into historical perspective, inversion, etc. But, I often use these procedures differently than in the past. Thus, with regard to inversion, as I explained it in *I Love to You*, I 'inverse' myself as much if not more than I 'inverse' others, the theory of others. To leave the patriarchal horizon required, on my part, a certain turning over of my subjectivity, the access to an autonomous perspective, an autonomous look, beginning from which I was able to perceive from an outside the cultural world which surrounded me.

This radical turning over of an immediate point of view, including on the intellectual level, required nevertheless some dialectical articulations with the past and the future of the History in which I am situated. It also demanded a faithfulness to experience and rigour in its phenomenological elaboration. A certain recourse, or return, to the phenomenological

method seems necessary in order to make enter into the universe of our rationality some natural, corporeal, sensible realities which until now had been removed from it. It is true for me. In considering the unfolding of the history of philosophy, it seems that it is the same way for other philosophers.

Using phenomenology without dialectic would risk nevertheless a reconstruction of a solipsistic world, including a feminine world unconcerned with the masculine world or which accepts remaining parallel to the latter. The dialectical method, such as I use it, is not at the service of the reassumption (*Aufhebung*) of all singularity into an absolute objectivity to be shared by any subject. My way uses the negative as a path which permits, at each moment, dialogue between subjects in the respect of singularities, in particular of gender. Here, the negative is therefore insurmountable and the absolute can never be unique nor universally shared. The negative maintains real and living the *dialegomai* between subjectivities which, beyond appearing to self and to the other, must speak to one another in order to be and to become self, in order to elaborate a culture resulting from the spiritual fecundity of subjective differences.

S.P. and H.B.: In a woman, how can one separate the characteristics resulting from her sociocultural oppression, and the characteristics which reflect, so to speak, her 'being'?

L.I.: It is important to distinguish characteristics of the oppression already codified in the culture and those that the woman continues to create herself each day. Both suppose a hierarchy between the genders. For example, the linguistic practices which unequally value that which is related to the masculine gender and to the feminine gender are a mark of oppression; they can appear at the level of gender properly speaking, of connotations of words or of representations. It is the same for religious values and, more generally, symbolic values which are already instituted. Social inequalities take place in a cultural context which makes them possible thanks to an ideology.

The socio-cultural world is not, in itself, non-egalitarian, but a sexist worldvision permits it to be that way. Now such a view is still very much alive, both in cultural stereotypes and in the way in which women perpetuate them each day through their behaviour. Everyday experiences demonstrate that women have more respect for the speech of men, that they listen

better to them, and more willingly have confidence in them. Already, the mother attends to the will of the little boy more than to that of the little girl. Even if her behaviour is inspired by desire, it is important to modify it in order to not maintain a devaluing ideology towards the feminine subject.

In addition to these values and behaviours to be modified, there are others, little known, still to be discovered and cultivated in order to affirm the existence of feminine identity. Thus, experiences in mixed groups of different cultures, languages, ages, sociocultural membership show that women privilege in their speaking intersubjectivity, the relation to the other gender, the relation between two, men preferring the subject–object relation, the relation to the same gender, and that between the one and a little-differentiated many: the people, the society, the citizens. It doesn't appear desirable to abandon the spontaneous choices of women. They have an obvious value and cannot be considered as inferior to the choices of men. But, it is necessary to cultivate them. So, the preference for the relation with the other gender, peculiar to the existence and to the being of the woman, must be practiced neither as a subjection nor to the detriment of the dialogue with one's own gender.

S.P. and H.B.: In *An Ethics of Sexual Difference*, one finds the description of two sorts of feminine relationships. The one, horizontal, is linked to the relation between women and between sisters. The other, vertical, is linked to the relation between daughter and mother, mother and daughter. What can we do to ensure that a vertical relation does not become hierarchical?

L.I.: The verticality of the relation between daughter and mother is linked to nature. It implies a complicity in belonging to the same nature and also the possibility of *doing as*: begetting in oneself, nurturing . . . The verticality of the relation to the mother cannot be thought, according to me, like the relation to the father, *a fortiori* to the God as Father. It is inscription in genealogy, in the unfolding of the history of the human species as life. Certainly it is fitting to raise the mother–daughter relation to a cultural dimension. This requires taking up and developing elements of civilization that we find, for instance, in archaic Greece, in Middle- and Far-Eastern traditions. The culture of the filiation with the mother will remain much more tied to nature than that of filiation with the father. Even on the spiritual level, it preserves a relation to macro- or micro-cosmic reality, it remains in continuity with matter.



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