

CHAPTER 1

The Difficulty of Beginning

I wanted to write on a theme about which I felt I had something to say and felt like saying it. But I was not able to begin.

If I have to go some distant place, like New York or Palermo, I hesitate a little before making up my mind, even if the place attracts me. Once I resolve to go, however, I manage to leave and get there without difficulty. As a matter of fact, once the decision is made, things arrange themselves, and I know what I have to do. I can easily tell what depends on me, what I must take into consideration, and what I can disregard. And from beginning to end I act accordingly.

On the other hand, although my experience of writing is no less extensive than my experience of travel, the decision to write does not have the same effect on my thoughts. Rather, it has almost the opposite effect of putting my thoughts into disorder. Consequently, I find myself torn among different choices, uncertain about what can be done. I easily fall prey to the most unpredictable second thoughts, and many times I find myself compelled to start again and to go ahead with a thousand uncertainties.

This writing would have not been any different, except that this time the starting point became, after many second thoughts, interrogating the difficulty of starting at all and bringing to an end an undertaking made of words.

My dream was always to make of this undertaking something perfectly logical, that is, something provided with a perfect correspondence among me, the language I use, and what I said. If I could do this, I thought, my words would support themselves from within,

through the force of the order they express, without interference from anything else. I thought that, little by little, as I got closer to this coherence I would contend less and less with my doubts and second thoughts, because the words would show that they do not depend on me, although I have written them. They would have been written as if they were dictated to me because of the correspondence between what I wrote and what demanded to be written, which would be so close and visible. In this correspondence, I would be as tranquil as a queen on her throne.

I turned to philosophy. Although philosophy seemed to be made to help me, it did not. Quite the reverse—in the long run, I discovered later, it trapped my mind.

This discovery came at two different moments. The first moment came when I was studying philosophy at school. There I learned, among other things, the importance of the starting point. If I were to say not just anything, but that which demands to be said by me, I would be able to proceed logically. The beginning of a work that has the quality of being logical would naturally be so in its turn. That is, the beginning would be logical not only in fact but also in principle, so that nothing essential would be presupposed by it, and everything would have to follow the logic of the beginning without being forced. Finding a logical beginning is as important as it is difficult. According to Hegel “the difficulty of beginning” is a specialty of philosophy.¹ In philosophy, “the principle ought also to be the beginning, and what is the first for thought ought also to be the first in the *process* of thinking.”² The beginning in philosophy is like its seed, in the sense that philosophy develops from within itself. Another metaphor used for philosophical undertaking, besides the botanical one, is the engineering metaphor of foundations. Both metaphors give the idea of something that stands by itself, which is what I was looking for.

When I came to see how philosophers solve the problem of beginning in a logical manner, I noticed that all of them try, in a variety of ways, to simplify the starting point to the utmost by eliminating from it much, as much as possible, of what can actually be found there the moment one begins to do philosophy. None of them begins from the given reality, as I would have done. The argument they often give is that the beginning, if it is logical, is also the foundation, and as such it cannot contain anything that could reveal itself to be false, transient, or deceptive, which could invalidate the construction.

A great philosopher of the beginning as a foundation is Descartes. His way of reasoning is typical because he excludes from the starting point knowledge gained through the senses, even though up to that time, such knowledge was considered the most certain. In the first of the *Meditations on First Philosophy* he writes: "I have found that the senses deceive, and it is prudent never to trust completely those who have deceived us even once."³ Therefore, Descartes excludes not only deception, which is obvious, but also the possibility of its occurrence, even when this occurrence is also the occurrence of the true, as in the case of the senses. Would this not be an even worse deception?

Like Descartes, Locke also resorts to the metaphor of the foundation. As is well known, at the basis of all knowledge Locke puts experience reduced to sensation (of external material things) plus reflection (on the processes of our mind): there is nothing else, neither father, nor mother, nor language, nor needs, nor feelings . . . Usually this excessive rigor is corrected later. For example, Descartes himself, whose foundation-beginning excludes feeling as an attribute of "thinking matter," later corrects himself and again takes feeling into consideration in order to assimilate it to a way of thinking. Then, at the beginning of the twentieth century, Husserl corrects the Cartesian abstract conception of thinking without having been thought (of feeling without having been felt, etc.). But the tendency to make the beginning an absolute principle and to make the philosophical undertaking a type of construction was not corrected. Thus, Husserl says that to enter into philosophy we must rid ourselves of the "bond . . . of the pregiveness of the world."⁴

Philosophers arouse criticism in me that is perhaps justified but secondary. The blockage of the first phase of my research was due not so much to the simplifications of the philosophers as to the use I made of them. Perhaps I should tell what my reaction was when I learned that in order to philosophize we must bracket what we normally have before us. And in short, this necessity rather fascinated me. It seems to me that the whole history of Western philosophy transmits this fascination. It is like a promise of happy abduction, of elevation above all and everybody. This desire goes back to Plato and maybe, even earlier, to Parmenides.

Plato's excessive rigor regarding the beginning of philosophizing is the object of a powerful *mise-en-scène* that from ancient culture has filtered into Christian and modern culture, and even to us today.

I am referring to the strange symbolic “parable” of Book VII of *The Republic*, known as the myth of the cave.⁵ As is well-known, in this myth the philosopher compares the human condition to the condition of men imprisoned in a deep cave with their faces turned toward its back. Into this cave come the shadows and echoes of a world unknown to them. One of the men is released and taken outside into the blinding daylight, to which he slowly grows accustomed until he can look at the sun.

Throughout the tale, there is no sign of desire: the prisoner is snatched away from his condition and forced out. Nor can we find manifestations of joy—only grief, difficulty, and discomfort. The character Socrates explains that “it is a question of . . . the turning about of the soul from a day that is like night to the veritable day” . . . “the conversion of the soul itself from the kingdom of generation to truth and being.”⁶

In the *Discourse on Method*, Descartes’s tale of his mental itinerary in the room with the majolica stove where he had the idea of the method can be read as a modern version of the myth of the cave. The myth has not been directly transposed and, although I cannot prove it, it seems to me that the myth has been passed down through medieval culture. At least this is the impression I had when I read the texts. The ascent of the prisoner from the depths of the cave corresponds to Descartes’s theory of leaving childhood and its “appetites,” leaving his homeland and the schoolbooks that had filled his mind with errors and doubts. After a period of travel and of various work experiences, he was convinced that he could not give credit even to what he learned by example and habit. So he resolved to study himself as if he were the only book that could teach him to tell the true from the false. On this foundation he planned to rebuild the whole body of the sciences. As for the reality of experience, he would regard it with a detachment less dramatic but no less radical than that of the prisoner who has emerged from the depths of the cave:

I shall think that the sky, the air, the earth, colours, shapes, sounds and all external things are merely the delusions of dreams which he [the malicious demon] has devised to ensnare my judgement. I shall consider myself as not having hands or eyes, or flesh, or blood or senses, but as falsely believing that I have all these things.⁷

Husserl also describes the beginning of philosophizing with words that remind us of the fascinating beauty of Plato's text, for example, when he says that "we who are philosophizing in a new way" go through a period that he describes as a "*total change* of the natural attitude, such that we no longer live as heretofore." It is a period of "total transformation . . . which we resolve to take up once and for all," and it is like a "liberation."⁸

But this kind of philosophizing, the conception of philosophy to which I was attracted, was fruitless. I will relate an incident. I attended the University of Louvain. I could not decide whether to study logic or linguistics. I chose linguistics, and after some months of intense study I went to show the work I had done to a linguist. He seemed perplexed. I explained the general lines of my work, and he remarked: "You should begin from the most recent research; you will look at the beginning later, if necessary." I had done nothing but study Saussure with the idea that by going back to the beginning I should have understood [*capito*] the rest. Or, I should say, I would have known [*saputo*] the rest. I was disconcerted when I heard the linguist's words. They contradicted what I believed to be obvious, and they showed how my conviction was not obvious to all. I became even more disconcerted to see suddenly how correct his words were, although at the time I could hardly articulate this, and certainly my adviser did not suspect it. I realized that, roughly speaking, I began from the beginning because I was unable to start from where I was, and this was because I was nowhere.

I stuck with philosophy and with my conception of it. As often happens, what attracted me to philosophy and what stopped me from moving on in philosophy were basically the same thing. I was drawn to philosophy because I was looking for symbolic independence from given reality. I did not want to find myself mentally at the mercy of random and unexpected events any more. I was not able to get to that symbolic independence because I finally understood that philosophy, although it sheltered me from the whimsical domain of the real, set me against my mother, whose work I implicitly judged to be ill-made. I wanted to get to the beginning of things in order to understand and to understand myself, and to do so I went against my mother. This is not something that I explicitly thought or that was taught to me in philosophy, at least not in these terms. But this is what doing philosophy came to mean to me. Why on earth did I

think of it in such terms? Because, unknown to me, there was inside of me an unacknowledged aversion toward the author of my life that philosophy came to reawaken. And because between philosophy and this unarticulated feeling, a vicious circle had developed. The more I looked for symbolic independence, the more the fear of given reality and subjection to it grew inside of me.

Probably my first inclination toward philosophy was not an innocent choice. Probably from the beginning I was moved by an unconscious will to invalidate the authority and the work of the mother. My philosophical preferences would confirm this. I chose philosophers and a conception of philosophy in transparent rivalry, at least in the language utilized, to all that belongs to the matrix of life. Just think of Plato and how he insistently opposes the search for being and truth to the "kingdom of generation."

However, I am sure that I did not turn to philosophy as a result of my aversion to the mother, although later both came together in the manner I am describing. I am sure of this for two different reasons. The first, simple reason is that my entrance into philosophy, or specifically my choice of studies, was authorized by my mother on my request. The second reason is that, once I found the way out of the trap, philosophy soon took on a new sense, favorable to the new direction of my research.

But I have found the way out with the politics of women and not with philosophy. From the politics of women I have learned that for her free existence, a woman needs the symbolic power of the mother in the same way that she needed her mother's physical power to come into the world. From the politics of women I have also learned that a woman can have the power of the mother completely on her side in an exchange of love and recognition. Before the politics of women there was neither love nor recognition between the power of the mother, on one hand, and my needs, on the other. (I could not pass in love and recognition between the power of the mother, on the one hand, and my needs, on the other.) Lacking that, I believed that my aspiration to the symbolic independence of philosophy was antithetical to what seemed to me the arbitrary, and not well defined, reign of the author of my life.

The vicious circle of which I spoke earlier closed right over this deformed image of the mother. I felt and acted as if the woman who brought me into the world was the enemy of my symbolic independence.

It was as if my symbolic independence necessarily involved my separation from her and from her purpose—a way of thinking common to many women. Actually it is not correct to call it a way of thinking; rather, it is something implied, it is almost a schema underlying a whole way of feeling and acting. For women, nothing from the outside comes to refute this state of affairs—as if it were natural that a woman should detest her mother and feel detested by her. In reality, it is a question of a terrible symbolic disorder.

Now, I ask myself, to what extent has philosophy perpetuated this disorder?

There is no doubt that both the history of philosophy and the culture of which it is part show signs of a rivalry with the work and the authority of the mother. Plato's symbolic tale, which shaped the *forma mentis* of the ancients as well as medieval and modern people, contains the evident metaphor of a second birth. And outside of this metaphor, which is not left to the reader's intuition but is, instead, explicitly delineated, there is a political conception of the just and the true that aims to supplant another symbolic order. Plato calls this other order the kingdom of generation and he presents it as intrinsically unjust and deceptive.

This operation will be repeated innumerable times. It is a very simple operation that can almost be confused with the operation of metaphor, the most common of the figures. It consists in transferring to cultural production (such as science, law, religion, etc.) the attributes of the power and the work of the mother, depriving and reducing the mother to an opaque and formless nature, above whom the knowing, ruling, believing subject must rise in order to dominate her. As Husserl says, "through the epoché a new way of experiencing, of thinking, of theorizing, is opened to the philosopher; here, situated *above* his own natural being and *above* the natural world, he loses nothing of their being and their objective truths and likewise nothing at all of the spiritual acquisitions of his world-life," and so on (Husserl's emphasis).⁹

As Luce Irigaray teaches, perhaps Freud's theory of parricide, derived from Sophocles's *Oedipus*, is not at the origin of our culture. Instead, as Euripides's *Oresteia* suggests, there is matricide. Irigaray writes that men have made of their sex a tool to dominate the power of the mother.

Philosophical language confirms this view. Between patriarchy and the development of philosophy there is a complicity that I did

not take into account when I turned to it to find symbolic independence. Now I see that the kingdom of generation and the natural world of which philosophers speak are not nature—whether good or bad, ordered or chaotic, it matters little—but they are the possibility of another symbolic order that does not deprive the mother of her qualities. And I see that the cosmologies of the philosophers are also political treatises, perhaps even more so than the treatises explicitly dedicated to politics.

But there is the risk that I am committing against philosophy the wrong I have done to the mother, that of attributing to her the lack of what she cannot be and also the excess of what she can be in order to relieve myself of my own lacks and excesses. There is the risk that I am doomed to repeat this operation indefinitely. Because I lack a logical beginning, I go around in a circle and always start all over again without ever reaching symbolic independence.

It is true that the philosophy to which I turned in order to evade the blind authoritarianism of things (and of the mother, according to my mistaken notion) kept me in my mistake and consequently aggravated the mental disorder I was experiencing. But could not this effect be imputed to philosophy that has been improperly pursued rather than to philosophy itself? I myself admitted earlier that my inclination to philosophy was perhaps not pure. Maybe from the very beginning I had intended to invalidate the work and the authority of the mother.

Many philosophers have considered the possibility of making improper uses of philosophy. Plato discourages the teaching of dialectics to those who, because of youth or disposition, “treat argument as a form of sport solely for the purposes of contradiction” in imitation of the true philosophers, so that they end up “rush[ing] to the conclusion that all they once believed is false.”¹⁰ Could not this be my case? Shortly after this passage Plato specifies that women are not excluded from political office and consequently from the philosophical education that is indispensable to those who rule.¹¹ And as he did in regard to men, Plato adds about these women that they are “women who are found to have the necessary gifts.”¹²

If a woman does not have the necessary gifts, she could turn to philosophy for reasons that true philosophers do not have, such as, for instance, in order to compete with the mother and supplant her. This would explain why such a woman would not succeed in benefiting from philosophy in her search for a way to think and live logically.

If I look at the works of great philosophers, I almost think that the problem can be reduced to the bad use of philosophy by people (e.g., women) who are not gifted for it. Those philosophers speak in a beautiful manner. They immerse themselves in the deep waters of doubt (Descartes's image) without drowning in them, and they emerge regenerated a few pages later (in Descartes's case—it takes longer for others). They plan and carry out huge and radical deconstructions from which nothing is spared. And, nonetheless, these philosophers are always greatly supported by their language. They choose and reject with unflinching criteria among the givens of their historical context. They separate themselves from given reality without losing contact with it, just as they also separate themselves from tradition but not from what nurtures it (for this point I have in mind especially the relationship between Christian and Greek philosophers). And in all of this they are apparently untouched by the ghosts of retaliation against maternal power. I charge them with having silenced that power, after having imitated it and stripped it away.

As a matter of fact, in the use of language as well as in relation to present reality and to earlier thinking, these men show a capacity for symbolic weaving that I have lacked (I think again of the incident in Louvain) and that I now know they must have learned from their familiarity with the matrix of life. They show they have frequently come in contact with it and have learned its art.

But this is not what they teach. Philosophers do not teach and, perhaps, are not able to teach how to weave symbolically, an ability they learned in their relationship with the mother. This ability has come to them thanks to a historical privilege that they seem to believe is a gift fallen from the sky or their natural attribute. The patriarchal society in which philosophy has developed regards the love between mother and son as its most precious good. This love is the hearth where great desires glow; it is the kitchen of sublime undertakings, the workshop of the law. Everything seems to link up with it. If there is one thing I envy about men—and how could I not envy it—it is the culture of the mother's love in which they are brought up. This is the practical foundation; this is the living seed from which philosophical discourse develops.

But philosophers do not give any account of this. Ignoring the historical privilege of sons, they mask with ideal foundations the origin of their knowledge. They love a silent mother whose work they present

as an image and an approximation of their own, and by doing so they overthrow the order of things.

On the other hand, if I do not have the necessary gifts for philosophy, this must also be seen neither as a misfortune willed by heaven nor a fault of nature. Rather, it is a historical condition. I was born into a culture that does not teach women to love the mother. Yet it is the most important knowledge; without it, it is difficult to learn the rest and be original in something . . .

Suddenly I realize that the beginning I have been looking for is in front of me: it is knowing how to love [*il saper amare*] the mother. That this is so is certain because other beginnings are not possible for me. As a matter of fact, only this beginning breaks the vicious circle and frees me from the trap of a culture that, by not teaching me to love my mother, has also deprived me of the strength required to change it, leaving me only with indefinite laments.

But how will I learn? Who will teach me? The answer is simple: I will learn from my necessity, which is so great and so skillful that it has already taught me what it means to love the mother. I discover that this necessity has always been with me, and it has always supported me in my search for the order that will give me symbolic independence. As a matter of fact, what else was this ever-greater difficulty of beginning if not an incentive to induce me to keep looking until I could find the true beginning? In the end, this was also a way to make me get to the starting point. Even that obscure feeling of aversion I carried inside of me, which became stronger with the failed attempts to reach symbolic independence, was a way of finding the beginning.

According to Freud, the initial love or attachment, as he calls it, of the little girl for her mother is very strong, but it is almost always destined to turn into hatred. He says that the existence of that love is clear, but it does not last because the daughter must detach herself from the mother, and “the turning away from the mother is accompanied by hostility; the attachment to the mother ends in hate.”¹³ In the past, when I read those statements, I sometimes considered them false and misogynous and other times sadly true. But their truth is the result of patriarchy. Now I consider those assertions superficial. In reality, there is no transformation of love into hatred, but only the inability to love, so that the initial attachment goes wrong and it becomes like a wound that does not heal.

In this way, then, the difficulty of beginning was solved, and I have found the logical beginning for my research. It is a poorer beginning than the most severe of the philosophies of foundation-beginning would require. As a matter of fact, my knowledge of how to love the mother is anything but rich. It includes a few items of substance won by a perhaps rather long and compelling but almost unconscious negotiation [*contrattazione*]. It is a negotiation that I have carried out so far only because I was caught between attachment and aversion, aversion and fear of retaliation.

But I have found the beginning, and I can already say: it is only the beginning! Therefore, I feel rich and I move on. Philosophers disagree with each other on the limits of knowledge and power. I put myself among those who do not admit absolute limits. As a matter of fact, I do not see a limit to what I can obtain from a mother who has freely given me my life. In the same way, there will be no more limits to my demands, now that I have learned to formulate them.

Chapter Notes

Chapter 1, page 1: What would I have liked to write that I did not manage to begin writing? I do not know what it was because that never took shape; maybe it is exactly what, in the end, I am writing here. What I know instead is the theme: the politics of women. I began writing the very moment I realized how philosophy had trapped me by promising to teach me how to undertake a perfectly logical enterprise that resonated with the antimaternal feelings in me. However, I have not abandoned the idea of undertaking a perfectly logical enterprise. What I mean is that I did not find the starting point by renouncing that enterprise, but by making it agree, instead of competing, with that love that bound me from an early age to the woman who gave me life.

Chapter 1, pages 1–2: I cannot say what I mean exactly by logical and logic. Maybe I will know that later. In a philosophical work such uncertainty might seem a bit shameful. However, I think it is justified. If I am not sure, rather than give a wrong definition of something that in its name and in history requires rigor, I had better not give any. That's it, what I have just said is logical enough.

Chapter 1, page 6: I call the mother the author of life. And the father? The question will be raised when patriarchy begins to decline. Perhaps that

is right now. If we give credit to the child's point of view—as I think we should in these things—the father is in the first place the companion of the mother; the man she chose or accepted for company and work; second, and thanks to her words, he will later be recognized as coauthor.

Chapter 1, page 7: From the very beginning in philosophy I searched, unaware and unsuccessfully, for a solution to my symbolic disorder. The purpose of my search was to achieve symbolic independence, which approximately meant being able to say *I* even when I am, materially, a *we* or an impersonal entity (for instance, in the hands of a nurse on duty). The relationship between not knowing how to love the mother and the symbolic disorder is intuitive. It is not difficult to intuit how completely we are exposed to the arbitrary domination of others and of things when we do not know how to love the mother. Women's body against body in relation to the real is manifested in their notorious tendency to fantasize about love and in a less well-known underhand resistance to doing what they are supposed to do. In her *Notebooks*, Simone Weil writes about her enigmatic inability to carry out small tasks such as cleaning her room, a task she imposed on herself. To me, typical female virtues of diligence and docility hide the substantial lack of corresponding human qualities. This phenomenon has given me a useful hint for my research. I believe that fantasizing about love, a true hemorrhage of female energies, and also women's rebellion against the order of necessity (which in its turn wastes incalculable energies) can be traced back to the fact that we do not know how to love the mother. In reference to women's conflict with the real, I use the expression "body against body in relation to reality" from the title of a conference organized by Luce Irigaray, "Body against Body in Relation to the Mother"—a concept she explains in her article with that title published in *Sexes and Genealogies*, trans. Gillian C. Gill (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 9–21.

Chapter 1, page 7: In the same conference, "Body against Body in Relation to the Mother," Irigaray proposes that matricide is the origin of our social order. "Orestes kills his mother because the empire of God-Father, who has seized and taken for his own the ancient powers . . . of the earth-mother, demands it" (12). Further on Irigaray writes, "man, and the race of men, has transformed the male organ into an instrument of power with which to master maternal power . . ." (17).

Chapter 1, pages 8: Twice I interrupt my critique of ancient and modern classical philosophy to say: "perhaps it is a justified critique but surely it is secondary." I could say the same thing of the critique of classical philosophy by contemporary thought, known as critical theory, weak and postmodern thought, and so on represented by thinkers such as Derrida, Foucault, and Vattimo. The critique of logocentrism (which in feminism becomes a critique of logophallogocentrism) may be justified but it is secondary if it is done from

the point of view of a logo-centric experience, such as mine, because of its symbolic disorder. If the focus of my research were the critique of Western philosophy I would end up protracting my symbolic disorder. For me, it is enough to unlearn what I have never been able to learn.

Chapter 1, page 10: Before Freud, the Marquis de Sade relates the hatred of the daughter for the mother to women's sexual liberation. In the fifth dialogue of *Philosophy in the Bedroom* Sade writes, "I want the law to allow women to give themselves to as many men as they please; I want women to be allowed to enjoy all sexes and all parts of the body, just as men do." In the seventh and last dialogue, the young Eugenie, who has been taught sexual pleasures by a group of libertines, hurls herself at her mother who has come to take her back home:

MADAME DE MISTIVAL: Oh merciful heaven! my Eugenie is doomed, 'tis evident . . . Eugenie, my beloved Eugenie, for the last time heed the supplications of her who gave you your life; these are orders no longer, but prayers; unhappily, it is only too true that you are amidst monsters here; tear yourself from this perilous commerce and follow me; I ask it of you on my knees!
(*She falls to her knees*)

DOLMANCE: Ah, very pretty! a tearful scene! . . . To it, Eugenie! Be tender.

EUGENIE, *half-naked, as the reader surely must remember*: Here you are, my dear little Mamma, I bring you my buttocks . . . There they are, positively at the level of your lips; kiss them, my sweet, suck them, 'tis all Eugenie can do for you . . . Remember, Dolmance: I shall always show myself worthy of having been your pupil.

The scene rises to a crescendo of Eugenie's fantasized violence toward poor Madame de Mistival (from Marquis de Sade, *Philosophy in the Bedroom*, trans. Richard Seaver and Austryn Wainhouse [New York: Grove Press, 1966], 270 and 355–56). Of course, Freud's language is rather different from Sade's. "We will now turn our interest on to the single question of what it is that brings this powerful attachment of the girl to her mother to an end. This, as we know, is its usual fate: it is destined to make room for an attachment to her father. Here we come upon a fact that is a pointer to our further advance. This step in development does not involve only a simple change of object. The turning away from the mother is accompanied by hostility; the attachment to the mother ends in hate. A hate of that kind may become very striking and last all through life; it may be carefully overcompensated later on; as a rule

one part of it is overcome while another part persists.” Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, trans. James Strachey 24 vols. (London: Hogarth Press, 1932–36), vol. 22, 121–22. Although they use different language, the Marquis de Sade and Freud both draw a parallel between the daughter-mother relationship and that of the son-father as a necessary rebellion and a symbolic killing. Both of them also conceive female sexuality according to the model of male sexuality. The man is the paradigm for the woman. This is so according to the modern conception of equality between men and women, a concept that does not include the thought of sexual difference. This explains how equality as it is being codified in our culture is an apparatus of impositions forced on women who have no alternatives except that of going back to their traditional subordination, and how such a form of equality is at the same time the origin of inequality, caught in a vicious circle.

Chapter 1, page 10: Now I want to return to symbolic independence. There is symbolic independence if there is symbolic order. Our concept of symbolic order (which is perhaps the major product of the philosophical work of our century) originates, according to my reading (which does not rule out other readings), in the failure of Wittgenstein’s *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*. Frankly speaking, this book is rather odd because it formulates a theory of language based, on the one hand, on a debatable interpretation of Russell’s logic and, on the other hand, on ignorance of the most elementary science and philosophy of language. However, thanks to this book, a whole line of scientific and philosophic research of a positivist nature was pushed to the point of failure because the book showed how, in this type of research, the sayable can say *everything* except what interests us. I quote one of the last statements in Wittgenstein’s work, proposition 6.52: “We feel that even if *all possible* scientific questions be answered, the problems of life have still not been touched at all. Of course there is then no question left, and just this is the answer,” *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (London: Routledge, 1922), 187. The concept of symbolic order and its determining importance came into my life and into my text when I discovered what I call its logical beginning; that is, knowing how to love the mother. What difference do I see between logical and symbolic order? Almost none, but at the same time I see a huge difference. For instance, the difference I see is that the symbolic order in order to be such depends on our acceptance of it. This means that the symbolic order is historical and that it can be changed. It also explains why it is propagandized and imposed on us, for instance through education. When the symbolic order is imposed on us it is clear that it is not an order anymore but a disorder, which manifests itself in many ways such as personality problems and the loss of intelligence, which should be seen not as psychological problems but as consequences of symbolic disorder, as Freud and psychoanalysis understood.

Then there is the social order based on relationships of force, which remains an order even when it is imposed on us. The three orders (or, if we prefer, the three ordering instances of human reality) always operate together but sometimes in harmony, sometimes in conflict, sometimes in confusion, weakening one another. The symbolic instance is not the strongest, but for me it is the most important because freedom is its principle. This freedom is not in logic or in society, whereas through reasoning and social action we actually express our freedom and nonfreedom. The symbolic order regulating us by making us feel free is first of all the language we speak. Our symbolic disorder too manifests itself in the most precise way in the language we speak.

Chapter 1, page 11: Concerning the limits of knowledge and power, I include myself among those who do not admit absolute limits. I'd like to make this note: the sense of limit is that we establish it in order to overcome it. As a matter of fact, once the limit is established, it is already potentially overcome. Nowadays, there is a sort of feminine public teaching (for instance, about science after the very serious incident at the atomic base in Chernobyl, in the Ukraine, USSR) that is not accompanied by any attempt to overcome it. I am afraid that this goes against women's search for freedom in that within the patriarchal social order women are seen (and see themselves) as bearers of an absolute limit. The lack of expression of female desire results in what men call castration, which appears to me to be evident in some feminist philosophy of science.