

## HAIR, THREADS, AND UMBILICAL CORDS: Louise Bourgeois's Dream of Connection

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An emotion that runs like a thread through Louise Bourgeois's art, diaries, and dreams is the anxiety of being alone, disconnected, and abandoned. For her, hell is not, as Sartre put it, other people. It is being alone. Underneath this anxiety, psychically, and as present as her famously long hair, is her deep longing for feeling and being connected, manifest in hair, threads, and the umbilical cord. This article discusses her dream of connection as embodied in her drawings, prints, and sculptures.

"It is not an image I am seeking. It's not an idea. It is an emotion you want to recreate, an emotion of wanting, of giving, of destroying" (Meyer-Thoss, 1992, p. 194, quoted in Wye, 2017, p. 65). An emotion that runs like a thread through Louise Bourgeois's art, diaries, and dreams is the anxiety of being alone, disconnected, and abandoned. For her, hell is not, as Sartre put it, other people. It is being alone. Hell is the absence of the Other (Kuspit, 2012, p. 130). Underneath this anxiety, psychically, and as present as her famously long hair, is her deep longing for feeling and being connected, manifest in hair, threads, and the umbilical cord. Her dream of connection is embodied in her drawings, prints, and sculptures. As Kuspit (2012) notes about her drawings, "Her line is hair-like—a thread 'modeled' on a hair" (p. 131). Threads, strings, and cords embody Bourgeois's dream of a constant and continuous connection.

Late in life she noted:

Rocking to infinity  
The red skein  
It will never be interrupted, abandoned, or cut  
There is one eternal thread and it is you  
(Horn, 2004, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 20)

*Red Room (Child)* (1994), one of her only pair of *Cells*, a series of forty large works, contains multiple spools of red thread, ready for sewing, weaving, or being left, as were the leaves of her diaries, "loose threads that are nonetheless a reliable guide through the labyrinth of her inner life, like Ariadne's thread" (Kuspit, 2008, p. 302). According to mythology, the Minotaur, a monster with the body of a man and the head of a bull, was kept by king Minos in a vast labyrinth on Crete and fed on young men and women (Grimal, 1991). When Theseus, son of king Aegeus of Athens, arrived to be a victim, Minos's daughter Ariadne fell in love with him and gave him a skein of thread to unwind as he wound his way through the labyrinth. After killing the monster, Theseus found his way out, much as an analysand, guided by the analyst, finds his or her way out of the maze of the unraveled unconscious. Likewise, hair, "in its constant reappearance as twists, knots or undulations of flaxen thread, . . . can be seen to thread its way right through Bourgeois' work" (Bernadac, 2006, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 154), embodying her lifelong anxiety of being abandoned and disconnected.

Bourgeois thinks unconsciously of herself also as the mythical women Penelope and Arachne (Kuspit, 2008). Penelope weaves by day, unweaves by night, and reweaves the next day, in order to hold off her suitors, thus to protect her connection with Odysseus, her husband. Bourgeois titled an installation at the Tate Modern *I Do, I Undo, I Redo* (1999-2000). She stated that *I Do* is a positive affirmation, where she is in control. Relationships are fine and peaceful. She is the good mother, caring and giving. *I Undo* is the unraveling, the torment when things do not go right. It can be total destruction and terrific violence. She is the bad mother. *I Redo* is an attempt to go forward, finding solutions to problems and repairing relationships (Morris, 2008, p. 158).

I first discuss the theme of weaving embodied in Bourgeois's many spiders, especially the enormous *Maman* (1999). The maternal spider patiently weaves and repairs, while it is also a dangerous predator, waiting for prey to be caught on its sticky threads. I suggest that the first and primal loss is of the uterine home and that the second loss consists of a severed umbilical cord. To illuminate these, I interpret a dream, a nightmare of the mother's name being Death, which Bourgeois noted down in 1959. Then I turn to her terrifying thought of being left alone, of the umbilical cord, the "Ur-thread," being severed. Bourgeois never came



**Figure 1.** *Maman* (1999). Bronze, stainless steel, and marble. 30'5" × 29'3" × 3'37" (9.27 x 8.92 x 10.24 cm). National Galley of Canada. © The Easton Foundation.

to terms with this experience of abandonment. She threatens to set the house on fire if it recurs. Finally, I analyze the series of drypoint prints, *Do Not Abandon Me* (1999), in light of the Israeli psychoanalyst Bracha Ettinger's matrixial model of subject formation. I close with a brief gesture to infinity, the 2008 installation *À L'infini*. With its hand-colored softground etchings reaching through fourteen large sheets, it embodies Bourgeois's dream of an infinite connection.

## THE ARACHNIC ARTIST

Bourgeois grew up within a family of tapestry repairers in France. From an early age she helped with the tapestry repair work. After washing tapestries in the river with the workers, she would help twist them to wring out the water. She became an artist when her parents needed her to draw missing parts of tapestries for the weavers (Morris, 2008, p. 286). Her mother often sat outside in the sun repairing tapestries, and Bourgeois has reflected, "This sense of reparation is very deep within me" (quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 242).

*Maman* (1999) is an approximately ten-meter high steel and marble spider (see Figure 1). Its title designates it a maternal spider. Bourgeois has associated the spider with her mother, “deliberate, clever, patient, soothing [and] reasonable” (Morris, 2008, p. 170). The spider spins webs, and Louise’s mother sat outside mending tapestries with needle and thread. But even patient mothers, no less than spiders, can be menacing figures to a child.

The monumental scale of *Maman* (1999), as shown in the figure, evokes characters in animal fables and—by stirring up memories, moods, and mysteries—makes the spectator feel like a child. Melanie Klein (1929) begins her paper “Infantile Anxiety Situations Reflected in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse” by discussing Maurice Ravel’s opera *L’enfant et les Sortilèges* (*The Child and the Spells*), or, in German, *Das Zauberwort* (*The Magic Word*), the libretto written by Colette. A child is sitting at a desk not wanting to do his homework. All the things on the stage are very large to emphasize the child’s smallness. After his mother punishes him by taking away all sweets, he flies into a rage, smashing and destroying everything in the room. The maltreated objects come to life and cry out, “Away with the dirty little creature!” (p. 85). The destructive rage eventually shifts into anxiety over losing his mother or her love, the fundamental dangers of loss of love or loss of the love object (Klein, 1929, p. 92). This anxiety makes the things on stage seem even more gigantic.

The enormous size of *Maman* can create anxiety in a spectator, and we wonder what anxiety might have led the sculptor to embody an insignificant creature in such monumental proportion. Anticipating the dream I discuss later in this paper, might it be the girl’s sadistic desire to rob the mother’s body of its contents, giving rise to the anxiety that the mother will in turn rob her body? *I Undo* is the unraveling, the torment when things do not go right. It can be total destruction and terrific violence. In the opera the child’s sadism abates as he softly whispers the magic word, “Maman.” Klein (1929) comments, “He is restored to the human world of helping, ‘being good’” (p. 86). Bourgeois’s *I Redo* is an attempt to go forward, finding solutions to problems and repairing relationships (Morris, 2008, p. 158).

Formally, *Maman* embodies a dialectic between sculpture and architecture, and phenomenologically it oscillates between reparative tenderness and aggressive attack, typical of the depressive position (Potts, 2008, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 262). While the

imposing size of the legs architecturally suggests columns, they also embody a lightness as they taper to fine points barely touching the floor, as a dancer who seems to defy gravity (Bal, 2001). But then the spectator might be caught in a web of anxiety. The spider is a predator patiently waiting for some prey to be caught on its sticky threads. A part of the artist, the creative part that is sustained by aggression and rage, seems to welcome, even need, the dangerous predator that embodies this oscillation between attack and repair within the depressive mode of generating experience (Ogden, 1989, cited in Schiller, 2017).

As Ovid (c. 10 CE) tells it, Arachne, the mythic first weaver, was not afraid of aggression, competition, or ambition. Her tapestries were wondrous, and Athena, the divine weaver, was enraged that Arachne would not acknowledge her talent as a gift from the goddess. Athena would not let this self-sufficiency and refusal of humility go unchallenged. She set up her loom and, unafraid of divine envy, so did Arachne, her heart set on victory. When Athena looked at her competitor's weaving and found no fault, she repeatedly struck the girl on the forehead. Unable to endure such divine rage and envy, Arachne sought to hang herself. Feeling pity and saying "Live but hang, you wicked girl," Athena changed the girl into a spider who, in the words of Ovid, "as a spider still/Weaving her web, pursues her former skill" (p. 125). The successful result of ambition in the finished work was a threat that Athena could not tolerate. She punished Arachne with sadistic retaliation, as many parents, unable to contain a child's aggression, do, unless they collapse in depression (Schiller, 2017). Several of Bourgeois's sculptures, such as *Janus Fleuri* (1968), in Figure 2, and *Spiral Woman* (1984) hang by a thread, as, emotionally, the sculptor seems to, as well.

Bourgeois made several versions of *Janus*, naming them after the Roman deity or spirit with a double-faced head. Looking forward and back, as an analysand does, *Janus* embodies a sense of time, the past and the future, beginnings and endings (Larratt-Smith, 2012, p. 78). She has said that the polarity she experiences "is a drive toward extreme violence and revolt . . . and a retiring" (Wye, 1982, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 161). On another occasion she noted, "It hangs, it is simple in outline but elusive and ambivalent in its reference. . . . It is perhaps a self-portrait—one of many" (Bourgeois, 1969, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 161). Since one of the *Janus* sculptures is called *Janus Fleuri*, we might wonder



**Figure 2.** *Janus Fleuri* (1968). Bronze, gold patina, hanging piece. 10-1/8" × 12-1/2" × 8-3/8" (25.7 × 31.8 × 21.3 cm).

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Photo: Christopher Burke.

whether the sculptor flowers, flourishes, when she sees herself as a connecting seam, included and enclosed between two strong and clear-shaped figures.

Bourgeois has also identified with *Spiral Woman*, saying in an interview, "This is what it means: She hangs up in the air. She turns around and she doesn't know her left from her right. Who do you think it represents? It represents Louise. This is the way I feel. . . . It . . . means that she is herself, hanging, waiting for nobody knows what" (Bourgeois, 1998, p. 258). My suggestion is, of course, that she is waiting and longing for connection and, underneath that, dreading disconnection, both embodied in hair, threads, and cords.

## THE DREAM OF DEATH

The original trauma of abandonment was, for Bourgeois, being born (cf. Rank, 1924). Her ambivalence toward a mother who

abandoned her by ejecting her from the womb is manifest in her fury over having been born, and thus abandoned from the oneness with the mother. This also gestures toward a longing for a return to the maternal womb.

She kept diaries from the age of twelve. The following is an entry from when she was seventy-eight:

The abandonment  
 I want revenge  
 I want tears for having been born  
 I want apologies  
 I want  
 Blood  
 I want to do to others what has been done to me  
 To be born is to be ejected  
 To be abandoned, from there comes the fury.  
 (Morris, 2008, p. 20)

Bourgeois embodied her fury and aggression in sculptures, symbolizing and sublimating the profound anxiety over feeling that she had nothing to hold onto (Mitchell, 2012, p. 57), as well as the fear of her own immense aggression and destructive impulses (Nixon, 2012, p. 85). Bourgeois was in psychoanalysis with Henry Lowenfeld from 1952 (her father died in 1951), frequently in the beginning, then occasionally, until his death in 1985 (Kuspit, 2012, p. 17). According to Kuspit, Bourgeois identified with Lowenfeld, and he was the “one unequivocally good object in her life” (2012, p. 20). With him, as only in psychoanalytic settings, she found a place where her destructive impulses were allowed, even welcomed. She was well-read in the psychoanalytic literature and wrote a comment in 1964: “(To Lowenfeld this / seems to be the / basic problem) / it is my aggression / that I am afraid of) and this / nucleus would fit in / with Melanie Klein / and Freud)” (Nixon, 2012, p. 85).

If the first and primal loss is of the uterine home, the second is, I suggest, the severing of the umbilical cord, an embodiment of the emotion of connection, and the “Ur-thread.” As she noted,

To be born is to be ejected  
 To be abandoned, from there comes the fury.  
 (Morris, 2008, p. 20)

To develop these, I first discuss a dream, a nightmare of an empty mother, an empty womb, and I then consider the series of dry-point prints called *Do Not Abandon Me* (1999).

When asked what her biggest losses had been, Bourgeois replied, "The death of my husband and the death of my mother. So 1932 and 1973 are dates that I cannot forget" (Kuspit, 2012, p. 130). The implication of my two related foci is that the connection with the mother/maternal object is intense and ambivalent, that is, filled with love and with hate.

Bourgeois's dream, a terrifying nightmare, was noted down on January 15, 1959<sup>1</sup>:

*I read before falling asleep Sartre 10PM  
 Le Mur and the room  
 I cannot fall asleep I wait  
 awake until 2 hours and 30, then take  
 an aspirin— I dream of a family  
 scene where life is calm. The  
 mother is very tall corseted formidable  
 but nothing unpleasant ever  
 occurred—  
 All of a sudden a person (domestic  
 type) asks do you know what  
 a symbol is—it is something that  
 pretends to be something else.  
 You know this woman that you call your  
 mother—she really is "Death" her  
 body is like a wicker basket  
 underneath her dress—I am atrociously  
 flabbergasted to have lived so long  
 without knowing and Thank God without  
 being in conflict with her—I am so  
 frightened in retrospect all day the next  
 day that I rush through  
 all the errands that Robt has asked me  
 to run pay all the checks I am  
 afraid to be at fault—I am  
 also sad and a little disillusioned. I don't  
 find any pleasure in J.B.'s visit.*



In Sartre's (1939) short story "Le Mur" (The Wall), three men spend the night in a cell waiting to be executed the following morning. The narrator, one of the three, feels crushed under the enormous weight of dread. "It was not the thought of death, or fear; it was nameless." Dread is of nothing; it is nameless. He is told that his life will be saved if he reveals where one of his other companions is hiding. After initially refusing, he finally decides to lie and says that the man is hiding in the cemetery. Later in the day he finds out that the man had in fact left his hideout and gone to hide in the cemetery. The story ends, "I laughed so hard I cried. . . ." Perhaps the protagonist is as "atrociously flabbergasted" as the dreamer.

Bourgeois's comment from 1964, that it seems to her analyst that she is afraid of her own aggression comes across now as an intellectualized acknowledgment of her "basic problem." In the dream she is struck emotionally, with all the force of, as she put it, her "volcanic unconscious," with a recognition of her destructive impulses (Bourgeois, 1980, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 290). She then spends the next day terrified and atoning.

The theme of weaving reappears in the dream, since a wicker basket is woven from some cane material that bends easily. The implication is that the basket is hollow, that the mother is empty, without an internal life to connect to, without insides to anchor an umbilical cord. An anxiety that her maternal object might be a psychic hole emerges. If every dream is about the dreamer, this dream is also a fear that as a mother, she, Louise, is absent, hollow. The mother in the dream is not only dead; her name is "Death." Louise is so frightened that she, as a good girl, carries out all her obligations the next day, as if to appease Death, restore mother, her connection to life. Art and dreams are both ways of recognizing oneself, and Bourgeois has said, "In my art I am the murderer" (Larratt-Smith, 2012, p. 11). This seems no less true in her dreams.

Interpreting this dream, Mitchell (2012) suggests that Louise may have, in fantasy, felt responsible for the death she saw reflected in her depressed mother's eyes. A sister was born, but soon died, between Henriette, the eldest child, and Louise, the middle child, and Mitchell hypothesizes that the impact of this may have caused a maternal depression, "an archetypal instance of André Green's 'Dead Mother'" (Mitchell, 2012, p. 56). This is, I think, only partly the case, because the important defense against the

dead mother is decathexis, that is, a void of psychical energy, of the maternal object, and Bourgeois's aggression and volcanic unconscious seem to be anything *but* decathected manifestations of mourning a dead mother in Green's sense. For Green (1972), a brutal change in the maternal imago is "experienced by the child as a catastrophe," and a loss of meaning (p. 150). The child tries in vain to repair the mother, only to feel impotent. Green distinguishes castration anxiety, which he associates with a bloody act, and therefore calls "red anxiety," from threats of abandonment, where the "context is never bloody" (p. 145). States of emptiness result in decathexis, which leave blank (from French *blanc*) holes, traces of psychical holes in the unconscious. Green, however, captures the dream well, in observing that the patient/dreamer "has the feeling that a malediction weighs upon [her], that there is no end to the dead mother's dying,"—*this woman that you call / your mother—she really is "Death"*—. Green ends the sentence, "and that it holds [her] prisoner" (p. 153). Reading Sartre's short story about prisoners sentenced to death seems to have been the instigating cause, the day's residue (Freud, 1900, p. 178), that stirred up this dream.

I return to Klein's (1929) paper, "Infantile Anxiety Situations in a Work of Art and in the Creative Impulse" to suggest that Death is the dreamer's terrifying recognition of herself as leaving destruction in her wake.

Klein (1929) suggests, based on her clinical experience, that a girl's most profound anxiety originates in her sadistic desire to "rob the mother's body of its contents" (p. 92). Her lust for destruction in turn gives rise to the anxiety that the mother will rob *her* body. The wicker basket underneath the mother's dress can be understood as a blend of the desire for a sadistic attack on the maternal object, as well as the terror of the mother's vengeful attack on her, which can also be the fear of her own sadistic aggression as a mother. Is the dreamer "atrociously flabbergasted" because she grasps the oneiric message that this early infantile situation of anxiety and danger is one that she cannot, does not want to, give up? Bourgeois has written "When I do not 'attack' I do not feel myself alive" (c. 1965, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 36). She has realized that aggression and rage enliven and sustain her creative impulse. "Sculpture can integrate a lot of blind and shapeless aggression, but it demands more than that—aggression is necessary and useful, but not sufficient. As anger leads to destruction, an



**Figure 3.** *Do Not Abandon Me, state V of VII, variant* (1999). Drypoint, with selective wiping and ink additions.

Plate: 11-7/8" × 9-13/16" (30 × 25 cm).

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intense (steady) rage can be productive" (p. 36). If rage fuels her creativity, it may be so valuable that without it the sculptor may become empty and barren. It may, as Klein (1929) notes, be an old anxiety situation that she never mastered, and therefore an anxiety that enhances the repetition compulsion (p. 90). *I do, I undo, I redo* is a repetition compulsion that sustains Bourgeois's creativity. It may be both a necessity and a desire to murder her mother over and over again. Like a symbol, she has pretended to be something else, a loving daughter, while her name really is "Death." Klein notes modifications of the girl's earliest danger situation to be a dread of being alone, dread of loss of love, and dread of loss of the love object. These are derivatives of the primary lust for destruction, and Bourgeois weaves them together

with threads of unmodified rage and longing: “If I am abandoned again, I am going to set the house on fire” (c. 1960, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 20).

## DO NOT ABANDON ME

Figure 3, *Do Not Abandon Me*, the fifth of seven variants of this set of drawings, connects the newborn child by a red umbilical cord to the mother. The child floats in the air, in height with the mother’s head, defying gravity, secured by the umbilical cord connecting navel to womb, though Bourgeois connects it navel to navel. Partially unfurled from a fetal position, the child is poised to drape over the mother’s knee, or has just left it. The tableau is *mise en scène* on a round stage, reached by two steps and surrounded by a bell jar, held in place by a banister. Mother and child are not connected by a gaze; both sets of eyes look straight ahead, at us, the spectators. As the title indicates, the connection is fragile, filled with abandonment anxiety. The mother does not hold the child in her arms; the two are contained within a bell jar, perhaps re-creating the dream of the uterine surround, our first home.

In the first variant of the series, state I, the stairs, the stage, the bell jar, the banister, and the chair are all outlined in thin red pencil against a calm blue background, but the chair is empty. If the bell jar is a gesture to the uterus, this uterus is empty, maybe signaling annihilation anxiety. Also, the mother has abandoned, or been removed from, the scene. This echoes the dream wherein the woman she calls her mother really is “Death,” her body like a wicker basket underneath her dress. The dreamer has been deceived all along—her mother has only appeared to be her mother. Where mother/matrix/womb should have been is emptiness.

In “Inhibitions, Symptoms and Anxiety,” Freud (1926) names birth the prototypical experience of anxiety. It is a separation from the mother, and all subsequent experiences of anxiety are reproductions of the trauma of birth (p. 133). Anxiety is, for Freud, a reaction to a state of danger, the first danger being the absence of the mother, which puts the infant in a state of helplessness. Otto Rank (1924) suggested in his book *The Trauma of Birth* that there is a relationship between the earliest phobias and the impressions made on infants by the process of birth. Freud (1926) strongly argues against this possibility, on the grounds that it is not cred-

ible that a child can remember the trauma of birth. In Freud's view the anxiety of birth has no psychic content; it is rather a biological phenomenon of self-preservation. The "danger" (scare quotes in the original) is, according to him, simply one of "non-satisfaction, of a *growing tension due to need*, against which [the infant] is helpless" (p. 137, emphasis in original). The economic disturbance is caused by an accumulation of stimulation that must be discharged. The foetus can be aware of some disturbance, but have no knowledge of its life being threatened (p. 135).

Many have ventured theoretically to the moments after leaving the womb, but few to the moments before. From a biological point of view, ultrasound research has shown that a fetus is an active participant in the maintenance and outcome of a pregnancy (Piontelli, 1987). According to Piontelli, the fetus responds to pressure and touch. It can choose a position and engage in movements that are not aimless, but have a regulatory function. Piontelli's research has shown that the uterus is not a silent, secluded receptacle, but that sounds, such as stomach rumbles, as well as maternal emotions are directly felt by the fetus.

I propose a reading of the umbilical cord as an embodied emotion of connectedness based on Ettinger's (2006) model of subject formation. She suggests that the infant registers sensations of connection in late uterine periods that are later repeated on a new register (Pollock, 2006). Becoming a subject is not achieved through separation, but through a continuous process of co-emergence while interconnected. Ideally, we become subjects/who we are together with others, not in psychic isolation. This is a model for a shared dimension of subjectivity (Pollock, 2006, p. 65), anchored by the two concepts *matrixial* and *metramorphic*. The matrixial refers to a prenatal symbolic space, a structure referred to as a dynamic borderspace for subjectivity as encounter. Metramorphosis captures a process of transmission, of co-emerging and co-affecting partial subjects. These neologisms, as well as hyphenated and hybrid forms of concepts/words, signal a feminine track for becoming a subject without either absolute separation or symbiotic assimilation being possible (Pollock, 2006, p. 5). It is a feminine model for relations, change, and interconnectivity, because the intrauterine encounter is always with a female m/other.

A matrixial framework deflects, but does not replace a phallic framework. Ettinger (2006) locates the theoretical source for this matrixial model in Freud's (1919) essay "The Uncanny." An

uncanny feeling is a repetition of something familiar, a terrifying phantasy that springs from a castration complex. But Freud goes on to note that the most uncanny of all feelings is the terrifying phantasy of being buried alive. This, he notes, is a transformation of another phantasy, which, unlike the castration phantasy, “had originally nothing terrifying about it at all . . . the phantasy of intra-uterine existence” (Freud, 1919, p. 244). While the castration complex is prototypically male and a model for phallic representations, wherein loss, splitting, cutting, separation, and absence are featured, a matrixial dimension yields a feminine model for representation within an object-relations domain (Ettinger, 2006, p. 75). Within a matrixial perspective, becoming-together and co-emerging-in-difference in the womb precede being one, that is, individuality, and corresponds to subjectivity-as-encounter. The matrixial object then, is not a figure of lack, of rhythmic absence and presence, as in Freud’s (1920) *fort-da* scene, but a figure of relational differences in a dynamic borderspace of active and passive co-emergence with an uncognized, but registered/sensed other (Ettinger, 2006, pp. 81-82). Plurality and difference are posited as fundamental. Within a matrixial framework one can take Bourgeois’s plea “Do not abandon me!” as a wish not to be theoretically articulated within a phallic framework, wherein subjectivity is formed through loss, cutting, separation, and castration. This raises the question of how subjectivity can be formed and claimed without some form of abandonment.

Building on D.W. Winnicott’s and Christopher Bollas’s object relational domains, in particular on Bollas’s (1979) transformational object within postnatal relations, Ettinger develops the concept of matrix as a “transforming borderspace of encounter of the co-emerging I and the neither fused, nor rejected uncognized non-I” (Ettinger, 2006, p. 64). There is a boundary between the mother and the fetus, though it is permeable, a borderspace. The mother affects the fetus through her emotional and physical states, and the mother in turn is affected by the movements of her fetus as well as by fantasies of her fetus and future child. The mother is cognitively aware, while the fetus’s and newborn’s experiences are captured by Bollas’s (1987) concept of the “unthought known.” Here, what is known or registered is prior to signification, not unlike Kristeva’s (1984) concept of the semiotic, and arises in the slight movements between closeness and remoteness. In this dynamic borderspace the two are separate yet connected.

Their connectedness is embodied in the umbilical cord and the plea, “Do not abandon me!” can be uttered and/or registered by either, or both, mother and child.

Again, the text I connected to the cell *Red Room (Child)* (1994) earlier in this paper:

Rocking to infinity

The red skein

It will never be interrupted, abandoned, or cut

There is one eternal thread and it is you

(Horn, 2004, quoted in Morris, 2008, p. 20)

This captures Bourgeois’s dream of connectedness.

## TO INFINITY

One of Bourgeois’s last works, the installation *À L’infini* (2008) consists of fourteen large sheets of hand-colored etchings of interlocking cords that rhythmically and horizontally wind their way from lower left to upper right. Each sheet is unique, but “the twisting printed forms echo from one to another (Wye, 2017). The cords embody the longing for and the dream of connection. Intertwining, braiding and unbraiding, entangling in elaborate knots, they find junctions as they pass by fetuses floating in amniotic fluid (No. 1). On either side of two cords intersected by a penciled shape suggestive of a vaginal opening, a couple is entwined in a tight embrace, the woman’s long hair floating off and forming a faint cord (No. 11). Louise Bourgeois’s dream of an infinite connection is embodied in hair, threads, and umbilical cords in her art.



## NOTE

1. Louise Bourgeois, January 15, 1959. Loose sheet. LB-0257. © The Easton Foundation. Bourgeois wrote in both French and English, and sometimes in a hybrid of the two. The use of italics here indicates text originally written in French.

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**The Psychoanalytic Review**  
 Vol. 105, No. 6, December 2018