



And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other

Author(s): Luce Irigaray and Helene Vivienne Wenzel

Source: *Signs*, Vol. 7, No. 1 (Autumn, 1981), pp. 60-67

Published by: The University of Chicago Press

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/3173507>

Accessed: 22/09/2009 13:45

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use, available at <http://www.jstor.org/page/info/about/policies/terms.jsp>. JSTOR's Terms and Conditions of Use provides, in part, that unless you have obtained prior permission, you may not download an entire issue of a journal or multiple copies of articles, and you may use content in the JSTOR archive only for your personal, non-commercial use.

Please contact the publisher regarding any further use of this work. Publisher contact information may be obtained at <http://www.jstor.org/action/showPublisher?publisherCode=ucpress>.

Each copy of any part of a JSTOR transmission must contain the same copyright notice that appears on the screen or printed page of such transmission.

JSTOR is a not-for-profit organization founded in 1995 to build trusted digital archives for scholarship. We work with the scholarly community to preserve their work and the materials they rely upon, and to build a common research platform that promotes the discovery and use of these resources. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.



The University of Chicago Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Signs*.

And the One Doesn't Stir without the Other

Luce Irigaray

Translated by Hélène Vivienne Wenzel

With your milk, Mother, I swallowed ice. And here I am now, my insides frozen. And I walk with even more difficulty than you do, and I move even less. You flowed into me, and that hot liquid became poison, paralyzing me. My blood no longer circulates to my feet or my hands, or as far as my head. It is immobilized, thickened by the cold. Obstructed by icy chunks which resist its flow. My blood coagulates, remains in and near my heart.

And I can no longer race toward what I love. And the more I love, the more I become captive, held back by a weightiness that immobilizes me. And I grow angry, I struggle, I scream—I want out of this prison.

But what prison? Where am I cloistered? I see nothing confining me. The prison is within myself, and it is I who am its captive.

How to get out? And why am I thus detained?

You take care of me, you keep watch over me. You want me always in your sight in order to protect me. You fear that something will happen to me. Do you fear that something will happen? But what could happen that would be worse than the fact of my lying supine day and night? Already full-grown and still in the cradle. Still dependent upon someone who carries me, who nurses me. Who *carries* me? Who *nurses* me?

A little light enters me. Something inside me begins to stir. Barely. Something new has moved me. As though I'd taken a first step inside myself. As if a breath of air had penetrated a completely petrified being, unsticking its mass. Waking me from a long sleep. From an ancient dream. A dream which must not have been my own, but in which I was

captive. Was I a participant, or was I the dream itself—another's dream, a dream about another?

I start to breathe, or rather I start to breathe again. It's strange. I stay very still, and I feel this something moving inside me. It enters me, leaves me, comes back, leaves again. I make this movement all by myself. No one assists. I have a home inside me, another outside, and I take myself from the one to the other, from the one into the other. And I no longer need your belly, your arms, your eyes, or your words to return or to leave. I am still so close to you, and already so far away. It's morning, my first morning. Hello. You're there. I'm here. Between us so much air, light, space to share with each other. I no longer kick impatiently, for I've got time now.

The day dawns. I'm hungry. I wish I had the energy to walk. To run all by myself, near or far from you. To go toward what I love.

You've prepared something to eat. You bring it to me. You feed me/yourself.¹ But you feed me/yourself too much, as if you wanted to fill me up completely with your offering. You put yourself in my mouth, and I suffocate. Put yourself less in me, and let me look at you. I'd like to see you while you nurse me; not lose my/your eyes when I open my mouth for you; have you stay near me while I drink you. I'd like you to remain outside, too. Keep yourself/me outside, too. Don't engulf yourself or me in what flows from you into me. I would like both of us to be present. So that the one doesn't disappear in the other, or the other in the one. So that we can taste each other, feel each other, listen to each other, see each other—together.

I look like you, you look like me. I look at myself in you, you look at yourself in me. You're already big, I'm still little. But I came out of you, and here, in front of your very eyes, I am another living you.

But, always distracted, you turn away. Furtively, you verify your own continued existence in the mirror, and you return to your cooking. You change yourself according to the clock. You adorn yourself depending upon the time. What time? Time for what? Time for whom? I would like you to break this watch and let me watch you. And look at me. I would like us to play together at being the same and different: You/I exchanging selves endlessly and each staying herself. Living mirrors.

We would play catch, you and I. But who would see that what bounces between us are images? That you give them to me, and I to you

1. The French here—*Tu m'elles donnes à manger*—carries several nuanced meanings: "You give me [something] to eat"; "You give yourself [something] to eat"; and "You give me yourself to eat." (NOTE.—All footnotes are translator's comments.)

without end. And that we don't need an object to throw back and forth at each other for this game to take place. I throw an image of you to you, you throw it back, catch it again.

But then you seem to catch yourself, and once more you throw back to me: "Do you want some honey? It's time to eat. You must eat to become big."

You've gone again. Once more you're assimilated into nourishment. We've again disappeared into this act of eating each other. Hardly do I glimpse you and walk toward you, when you metamorphose into a baby nurse. Again you want to fill my mouth, my belly, to make yourself into a plenitude for mouth and belly. To let nothing pass between us but blood, milk, honey, and meat (but no, no meat; I don't want you dead inside me).

Will there never be love between us other than this filling up of holes? To close up and seal off everything that could happen between us, indefinitely, is that your only desire? To reduce us to consuming and being consumed, is that your only need?

I want no more of this stuffed, sealed up, immobilized body. No, I want air. And if you lead me back again and again to this blind assimilation of you—but who are you?—if you turn your face from me, giving yourself to me only in an already inanimate form, abandoning me to competent men to undo my/your paralysis, I'll turn to my father. I'll leave you for someone who seems more alive than you. For someone who doesn't prepare anything for me to eat. For someone who leaves me empty of him, mouth gaping on his truth. I'll follow him with my eyes, I'll listen to what he says, I'll try to walk behind him.

He leaves the house, I follow in his steps. Farewell, Mother, I shall never become your likeness.

I do gymnastics. I practice the body exercises suited to my disorder. I'll become a schooled robot. I move my body, completely unmoved. I advance and move about to the rhythm prescribed for my cure. Will, not love, regulates my gestures, my leaps, my dancing about. Each hour of the day finds me applying myself: trying to obey the doctors' orders. I concur totally with their diagnosis of my condition. I give them my complete attention, all my energy. I'll be the living demonstration of the correctness of their principles. Animated, reanimated by their understanding.

See from afar how I move with measured steps, me, once frozen in anger? Aren't I good now? A nearly perfect girl? I lack only a few garments, a little jewelry, some makeup, a disguise, some ways of being or doing to appear perfect. I'm beginning to look like what's expected of

me. One more effort, a little more anger against you who want me to remain little, you who want me to eat what you bring me rather than to see me dress like you, and I'll step out of the dream. Out of my disorder. Out of you in me, me in you. I'll leave us. I'll go into another home. I'll live my life, my story.

Look at how healthy I am now. I don't even have to run after a man, he comes toward me. He approaches me. I await him, immobile, rooted. He's very near. I'm paralyzed with emotion. My blood no longer circulates very well. I hardly breathe. I leave.

I can't tell you where I am going. Forget me, Mother. Forget you in me, me in you. Let's just forget us. Life continues . . .

* * *

You look at yourself in the mirror.² And already you see your own mother there. And soon your daughter, a mother. Between the two, what are you? What space is yours alone? In what frame must you contain yourself? And how to let your face show through, beyond all the masks?

It's evening. As you're alone, as you've no more image to maintain or impose, you strip off your disguises. You take off your face of a mother's daughter, of a daughter's mother. You lose your mirror reflection. You thaw. You melt. You flow out of your self.

But no one is there to gather you up, and nothing stops this overflow. Before day's end you'll no longer exist if this hemorrhaging continues. Not even a photographic remembrance as a mark of your passage between your mother and your daughter. And, maybe, nothing at all. Your function remains faceless. Nourishing takes place before there are any images.³ There's just a pause: the time for the one to become the other. Consuming comes before any vision of her who gives herself. You've disappeared, unperceived—imperceptible if not for this flow that fills up to the edge. That enters the other in the container of her skin. That penetrates and occupies the container until it takes away all possible space from both the one and the other, removes every interval between the one and the other. Until there is only this liquid that flows from the one into the other, and that is nameless.

No one to take you into herself tonight, Mother. No one to thirst for you, to receive you into herself. No one to open her lips and to let you

2. The word in French, *la glace*, has the second meaning of "ice" that carries more strongly than the English "mirror" a sense of movement frozen and rigidified.

3. The French is more elegant than the English can be: *Nourir a lieu avant toute figure*. Implied also in the word *figure* is the concept of "face" and of "identity."

flow into her, thus to keep you alive. No one to mark the time of your existence, to evoke in you the rise of a passage out of yourself, to tell you: Come here, stay here. No one to tell you: Don't remain caught up between the mirror and this endless loss of yourself. A self separated from another self. A self missing some other self. Two dead selves distanced from each other, with no ties binding them. The self that you see in the mirror severed from the self that nurtures. And, as I've gone, you've lost the place where proof of your subsistence once appeared to you.

Or so you thought. But by pouring your ice into me, didn't you quench my thirst with your paralysis? And never having known your own face, didn't you nourish me with lifelessness? In your blood, in your milk there flowed sandy mirages. Mixed in with these was the still-liquid substance which would soon freeze in all our exchanges, creating the impossible between us. Of necessity I became the uninhabitable region of your reflections. You wanted me to grow up, to walk, to run in order to vanquish your own infirmity.

So that your body would move to the rhythm of your desire to see yourself alive, you imprisoned me in your blindness to yourself. In the absence of love that provoked or accompanied the mobility of your features, your gestures. You desired me, such is this love of yours.⁴ Imprisoned by your desire for a reflection, I became a statue, an image of your mobility.⁵

In the place where you wanted yourself seen you received only transparency or inertness. An atmosphere indefinitely void of any reflection of you, a body uninhabited by self-knowledge. You could traverse every landscape or horizon, over and over again, without ever encountering yourself. Or bump up against this thing that you are, and that you have made me, hindering your/my progress. Opacity eclipsing any movement toward the light.

Who are you? Who am I? Who answers for our presence in this translucency, before this blind obstacle?

And if I leave, you no longer find yourself. Was I not the bail to keep you from disappearing? The stand-in for your absence? The guardian of your nonexistence? She who reassured you that you could

4. The phrase *tel cet amour de toi* carries the meaning "such is this love of yours," but also suggested is "such is this love of yourself," underlining the confusion/fusion of identities between mother and daughter.

5. Irigaray's own words—*j'étais pétrifiée dans la représentation de ta mouvance*—brings together ideas of fear and immobility as the English cannot. In these passages Irigaray creates a locus of coexisting opposites that contrast actual paralysis and potential movement: *paralyse, inanmée, gel, infirmité, enfermée, figée, pétrifiée*; and *coulait, fluide, marche, course, meuve, mobilité, mouvance*.

always find yourself again, hold yourself, at any hour, in your arms? Keep yourself alive? Nurture yourself indefinitely in your attempt to subsist? Feed yourself blood and milk and honey over and over again (I never wanted your meat), to try to restore yourself to the world?⁶

But so it is when one waits;⁷ this evening no one comes. You move toward a future that is lacking. There is no one in whom to remember the dream of yourself. The house, the garden, everywhere is empty of you. You search for yourself everywhere in vain. Nothing before your eyes, in your hands, against your skin to remind you of yourself. To allow you to see yourself in another self. And this makes you empty yourself even more into my body—to maintain the memory of yourself, to nourish the appearance of yourself. No, Mother, I've gone away.

But have I ever known you otherwise than gone? And the home of your disappearance was not in me. When you poured yourself into me, you'd already left. Already become captive elsewhere. Already entered into someone else's gaze. You were already moving into a world to which I had no access. I received from you only your obliviousness of self, while my presence allowed you to forget this oblivion. So that with my tangible appearance I redoubled the lack of your presence.

But forgetfulness remembers itself when its memorial disappears. And here you are, this very evening, facing a mourning with no remembrance. Invested with an emptiness that evokes no memories. That screams at its own rebounding echo. A materiality occupying a void that escapes its grasp. A block sealing the wall of your prison. A buttress to a possible future, which, taken away, lets everything crumble indefinitely.

Where are you? Where am I? Where to find the traces of our passage? From the one to the other? From the one into the other?

You go down, you go down again, alone, under the ground. Under the ground where we seemed to be walking. The one, the other. The one or the other. You abandon your firmness, your uprightness. Your steps, your features hardened by the determination that accompanies solitude. You return to this cave whose entrance you couldn't find. To this cellar whose doorway you've forgotten. To this hole in your memory where the silence of my birth from you was buried—the silence of my separation, inseparable from you. To the obscurity of your conception of me.

What happened in the nighttime of your belly to make you no longer know I existed? Of the two of us, who was the one, who the other?

6. The phrase used by Irigaray—*se remettre au monde*—carries the implication of physical birth (*mettre au monde*) as well as of giving birth to the self or of self-restoration.

7. The phrase *telle l'attente de toi* carries the meaning "such is your wait," but also suggested is "so it is when one waits for you," in recognition of the daughter's waiting for the mother.

What shadow or what light grew inside you while you carried me? And did you not grow radiant with light while I lived, a thing held in the horizon of your body? And did you not grow dim when I took root in your soil? A flower left to its own growth. To contemplate itself without necessarily seeking to see itself. A blossoming not subject to any mold. An efflorescence obeying no already known contours. A design that changed itself endlessly according to the hour of the day. Open to the flux of its own becoming. Turning, turning away, turning around as it was drawn or pushed toward the burst of growth, or held back near the hiding place of its first watering; unfolding in an atmosphere as yet free of images. Becoming ecstatic with its own rhythm and measure, not yet under the constraint of eyes in quest of its mystery. Full-blossomed, bound by the ring of a lost vision. Encircled in the blind periphery of a question without answer.

Was I not your predestined guarantor? The profile of yourself that another would have stolen from you? The skin that another would have taken away? Wandering without identity, discharging upon me this endless, and at each step excruciating, wandering of yours. In me, shaping your destiny of an unknown. The yet-undeveloped negative images of your coming to yourself/me.

Here is she who I shall be, or was, or would like to be—was that not your response to my birth? What place remained for me into which to be born? Where to start my birth outside of you? For even when I was yet inside you, you kept me outside yourself.

With your milk, Mother, you fed me ice. And if I leave, you lose the reflection of life, of your life. And if I remain, am I not the guarantor of your death? Each of us lacks her own image; her own face, the animation of her own body is missing. And the one mourns the other. My paralysis signifying your abduction in the mirror.

And when I leave, is it not the perpetuation of your exile? And when it's my turn, of my own disappearance? I, too, a captive when a man holds me in his gaze; I, too, am abducted from myself. Immobilized in the reflection he expects of me. Reduced to the face he fashions for me in which to look at himself. Traveling at the whim of his dreams and mirages. Trapped in a single function—mothering.

* * *

Haven't you let yourself be touched by me? Haven't I held your face between my hands? Haven't I learned your body? Living its fullness. Feeling the place of its passage—and of the passage between you and me. Making from your gaze an airy substance to inhabit me and shelter

me from our resemblance. From your/my mouth, an unending horizon. In you/me and out of you/me, clothed or not, because of our sex. In proportion to our skin. Neither too large nor too small. Neither wide open nor sutured. Not rent, but slightly parted.

And why would any other hurt be inflicted upon me? Didn't I already have my/your lips? And this body open on what we would never have stopped giving each other, saying to each other? This breach of silence where we constantly reenvelope ourselves in order to be reborn. Where we come to relearn ourselves and each other, in order to become women, and mothers, again and again.

But we have never, never spoken to each other. And such an abyss now separates us that I never leave you whole, for I am always held back in your womb. Shrouded in shadow. Captives of our confinement.

And the one doesn't stir without the other. But we do not move together.⁸ When the one of us comes into the world, the other goes underground. When the one carries life, the other dies. And what I wanted from you, Mother, was this: that in giving me life, you still remain alive.

8. The sentence in French—*Mais ce n'est ensemble que nous nous mouvons*—creates a sense of ambiguity since it suggests as well that “it is only together that we (can) move.”