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Absence to Presence:
The Life History of Sylvia [Bataille] Lacan

by

Jamer Hunt

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE
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ABSTRACT

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Sylvia [Bataille] Lacan (1908-1993) was a French film actress who was married to the philosopher Georges Bataille and to the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan. Despite this fact, she is virtually absent from the critical accounts of her two husbands' work. This is an account of her life and the forces that have functioned to keep her out of the historical record. In addition, I address the ways in which her two husbands' work contributes to that occlusion. I write the life of Sylvia [Bataille] Lacan in a variety of different frames and genres:

In the section on theories of gender and exchange, I trace the genealogy of the concept of the "exchange of women." Starting with Marcel Mauss and moving onto Claude Lévi-Strauss, Georges Bataille, and Jacques Lacan, I argue, following Gayle Rubin, that those theorists could only have relegated women to the status of exchanged object by reifying women into abstractions, divorced from the power and agency that they do have.

In the section on the cultural context of Sylvia [Bataille] Lacan's life, I show that a variety of cultural forces were competing to define the appropriate roles for women after World War II. I contend that in Surrealist art, for example, many of the artists encouraged other female painters and writers, while in their own work they relied upon stereotypical, infantilizing, and objectifying depictions of women.

In the section on film theory, I closely examine Une Partie de campagne, a Jean
Renoir film in which Sylvia Bataille starred. I map out the ways in which the film structures the spectator's gaze, configuring it as masculine, so that the tumultuous love scene at the film's climax is drained of its possible reading as a scene of rape.

I include a biographical chapter in which I piece together the rare fragments of text that do attest to Sylvia [Bataille] Lacan's life. Finally, I conclude with an interview that I conducted with her about her life and the influence she had on her husbands.
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Impossible is the task of fully acknowledging the immense debt that I owe to all those whose guidance, friendship and inspiration made this work possible. I do, however, want to make special note of those few whose contributions cannot go un-marked. To my parents James and Cynthia Hunt, to my immense family, young and old, and to Judith Long: it is by your example that I live and work, and it is with your love that I prosper. To my friends, your contribution is written visibly and invisibly across these pages. George Marcus's brilliant intellectual provocations made this project possible. Stephen Tyler, Colleen Lamos, and Kathryn Milun endowed my work with everything from rigor to irreverence. Those in the department of Anthropology at Rice University created that rare intellectual environment of sparkling debate and broad open-mindedness. And to Carole Speranza, I have but one thing to say: Grazie, Grazie, Grazie.

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Unless otherwise noted in the bibliography, all translations from French language originals are my own. I claim sole responsibility for any errors therein.
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But ink changes absence into intention.

Georges Bataille*
Chapter I

"Madame Lacan is not there."

These words, utterly banal, might have passed ephemerally into the air, were it not for the remarkable circumstances in which I heard them, and by whom they were spoken. It is my desire, then, to unravel the knot of their prodigious significance and to place them back into their proper context. For it is only by combining these two acts that these simple words can attain the stunning gravity that they had for me.

I would like to tell the entire story of Sylvia Lacan's life, but I will not do so. I would like to offer this as the thorough study of one woman's fascinating experiences through two world wars, two marriages, movie stardom, war heroism, political, artistic and intellectual engagement, but I cannot. Fate has not smiled warmly upon me, nor do I possess the patience and rigor of a true biographer. If this were simply her biography, I would not be the one to write it. My designs are different. It is instead an attempt to illustrate the "problem" of Sylvia Lacan. This I mean in the sense of an algebraic problem: that is, a question built-up from a small group of variables that all, in their different ways, pose additional questions.

The origin of this particular problem arose from a serendipitous fact that, to my eyes, leapt up off the page: Georges Bataille, the excremental philosopher, and Jacques Lacan, the surrealist psychoanalyst, had been married to the same woman. In certain knowing circles this might not raise eyebrows, but for me it was a thunderclap. To even begin to fathom my almost giddy response to this situation one must first understand the academic climate in which I was raised—the charged field of post-structuralist francophilia in the mid-nineteen-eighties. This was a period—perhaps just before their total institutionalization—when the
french intelligentsia still possessed a patina of exotic allure. There is really no better way to describe how they appeared to me than as a group of exalted mystics. Their names rolled off the tongue with an aura of Rimbaudian romanticism: Derrida, Irigaray, Lacan, Baudrillard, Kristeva, Bataille. They came, venerated, from a mountain top called France. Their texts stood before one opaque, impossible, and yet somehow promising of nascent, Dionysian revolutions. Their impenetrability only made them more seductive, more powerful. Theirs was a secret language that, once learned, promised cabalistic belonging and pagan alliance. They wore capes, and performed human sacrifices, it was said. Theirs was not a simple People Magazine celebrity, but a darker, more mysterious allure. So when it was rumored that two of the stranger members of this cult--Bataille and Lacan--had been married to the same woman, her identity still shrouded in mystery, I, still carrying these demigods with me, reacted.

I would be mischaracterizing my initial interest in the situation if I were to suggest that the only criterion that attracted me to the problem of Sylvia Lacan was the fact of her betrothal to both Bataille and Lacan. (It must be admitted, however, that this fact alone, given the extremely bizarre nature of her husbands, was often enough.) What made this particular situation all the richer was that both had also been charmed and seduced by the same idea of Woman. This fact was substantiated in a most remarkable way by a quote from Elisabeth Roudinesco, Lacan's biographer: "both [Jacques Lacan and Georges Bataille] nurtured an identical vision of the feminine, which may be detected in their respective writings" (Roudinesco 1990, 147). I say remarkable because Roudinesco seems to come to this conclusion based solely upon their writings, not their lives. That the latter is also true
does not seem as relevant. Why?

Their "identical vision of the feminine" derives, in part, from the work of a mutual acquaintance, Claude Lévi-Strauss. Simply put, Lévi-Strauss suggests, in his 1949 work *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*, that the fundamental organizing principle of society is the exchange of women among men. He adopts this theory from Marcel Mauss's influential little book *The Gift*, embellishing upon Mauss's theory that exchange, gift giving, and the circulation of cultural goods are the fundamental structuring forces of the social fabric. Whether or not one subscribes to that notion, here was certainly a case that, at least superficially, seemed to model the theory. That Bataille and Lacan had each succeeded in expounding and perpetuating Lévi-Strauss's influential observation only raised the stakes of this coincidence.

Edging further into the labyrinth, I was buoyed in my nascent endeavor by a scrap of information that I stumbled upon while making my first, hesitant steps into the mad world of Dr. Lacan. It appears in an endnote in Juliet Flower MacCannell's fine book, *Figuring Lacan*: "Paul de Man once told me that Sylvie Bataille, an actress, and former wife of Georges Bataille, was 'stolen' from the philosopher of the gift by Lacan. [Catherine] Clément reports that she was a Jew. I know nothing of the historical accuracy of the gossip Prof. de Man shared with me" (1986,34). Here, in an otherwise rigorous and scholarly book, was an unadulterated, unsubstantiated piece of pure gossip that, at the very least, manifested the same prurient interest that I entertained. Others, it seemed, shared my curiosity.

What was needed, though, was to broaden the problematic into something more than just this single crumb of intellectual gossip or rumor. Quite simply, these kinds of re-
marriages happen within all sorts of close-knit communities. What emerged, however—as I scoured texts both by and on Bataille and Lacan for anything on this woman was—nothing: that is, the resounding absence of any substantive information about her whatsoever.

It is a well worn scholarly trick—when faced with an insoluble problem such as the absence of material on this Sylvia Lacan—to move to a metalevel, to take a step back and look at how the problem itself, framed as it is, is limiting or productive. What immediately jumps out to anyone who has spent much time with the writings of Georges Bataille or, especially, Jacques Lacan, is the familiar coincidence of the terms "woman" and "absence". When these two abstractions collide in their work the results are often electrifying and usually controversial. In fact, this explosive dyad has provided the spark around which much of the resistance to and reception of these two figures has gravitated. Gradually, then, the vibrations struck by this "problem" of Sylvia Lacan began to resonate in intriguing ways with some of the theoretical provocations at stake in her two husbands' work.

So, could I use the figure of Sylvia Lacan and her absence as "filters" through which to read the archaeology of her own erasure? Still knowing nothing more concrete about her, this was the most promising tack. With her absence as a guide, so to speak, I could negotiate the corridors of this tortuous problem. Even better, I could construct a portrait of her: flesh out her figure with all the elements that directly or indirectly bear witness to her ringing absence. A character in Paul Auster's novel *Leviathan* devises a strikingly similar method: "It would be a portrait in absentia, an outline drawn around an empty space, and little by little

This was in 1990 when a great deal less had been available on either Georges Bataille or Jacques Lacan in American libraries. The only book with much at all concerning Sylvia Lacan was Michel Surya's biography of Georges Bataille, *La Mort à l'oeuvre* (1987).
a figure would emerge from the background, pieced together from everything he was not. She hoped that she would eventually track him down that way, but even if she didn't, the effort would be its own reward" (1992, 74). I could fill in her negative space with the bits of frayed string, shards of glass, fragments of ideas, and scraps of paper that never defined her, never even signified her, but nonetheless invoked her, however obliquely. Barbara Leaming, in her biography of Orson Welles, contemplated a similar strategy: fearing the possibility of never actually tracking Welles down, she was nearly resigned to,

[c]ryptic telegrams to and from Orson Welles, doodles on the backs of menus, telephone numbers he'd scribbled on torn bits of paper. They reminded me of the relics of saints, teeth and fingers, drops of sweat, preserved in medieval churches and monasteries. Out of them I began to construct Orson Welles, to decipher the story of his life, of where he had been, whom he had known, what he had done. Who needs Orson Welles, I kept telling myself, when his relics are preserved in scholarly archives across the country? If I gathered, and Xeroxed, enough of them, eventually I'd have a whole man.² (1983, 64)

I would "conjure-up" the presence of Sylvia Lacan, then. That was the term that kept slipping into my vocabulary. Properly surrealist in its latent mysticism, it also evoked an alchemical process of fabrication and assembly somewhere between Salvador Dali and Dr. Frankenstein (complete with the megalomaniac dangers as well). It would be an intellectual slight of hand trick: out of nothing--something. This would be an intervention into the virtual realities of Jacques Lacan and Georges Bataille with Sylvia Lacan as my guide.

*

Having not known, at this point, whether Sylvia Lacan was even still alive, I was faced

---

² I must thank George Marcus for bringing this parallel to my attention. It is no coincidence that Leaming considers this approach; Welles' own masterpiece Citizen Kane is perhaps the paradigmatic example of this method.
with a dilemma: the project, as I had conceived it to this point, was structured around an absence. How would I account for her presence—for the "real" Mme. Lacan—if she were still alive? Why not a "straight" biography?

Was I to take her life history? Unquestionably, if she was willing. But to what end? Why? While I imagined that it would be extraordinary, and a fine tonic to the torrents of information about her husbands, I was never entirely at ease with this prospect, for, as Lacan suggests, "I am teaching you that Freud discovered in man the substance and the axis of a subjectivity surpassing the individual organization considered as the sum of individual experiences" (1988,40). It felt like I was giving in to a particular, and limiting notion of the "real," privileging a certain kind of experience over and above the many ways in which an identity congeals. How could I, weaned on the "death of the subject," surrender to the easy lure of the real? I wanted instead to meet the challenge to stable, fixed identities that Bataille and Lacan, Irigaray, Foucault, and others undertook; I wanted to option alternate methods for representing a life history and its textual constitution. Not to include her own life experiences in this mix would be megalomaniac and irresponsible, but it need not be the sole bearer of meaning. As I have already admitted, this is not about Sylvia Lacan, but about the "problem" of Sylvia Lacan. What I realized is that the basic assumptions of what constitutes an object of study would need to transform and mutate into something adequate to the complexity of the post-structuralist assault on subjectivity. This project has been nourished in those ruins.

A curious side-effect of this problem manifested itself in various ways throughout this project's evolution. As is normal when meeting people, I was often asked the nature of my
research. Depending on the person's apparent interest, or lack thereof, I gave one of several
through their wife's eyes; absence and the exchange of women; Surrealism and women; or,
the intersection of Surrealism, Psychoanalysis and Anthropology in Paris between the two
world wars. What appeared to me as a single-headed project seemed to assert its disparate
faces at any moment. In other words, I could not even articulate the central point, the thesis,
the "hard nut" of my research. Rather than being discouraged, I took this for a sign that I had
accomplished something positive, that I had materialized an object difficult to circumscribe,
fluid in its presence.

By framing it this way, by "conjuring-up" Sylvia Lacan, I am also trying to avoid a
certain relationship to the material that I will be considering. Jane Gallop, in her approach to
reading Jacques Lacan, frames the problem in a way that I find useful in thinking through the
possible strategies for "reading" and "textualizing" Sylvia Lacan. Rather than simply offering
an elucidation of the meaning of his words, Gallop also keeps one eye on their splintering
connections, recognizing that Lacan himself never wrenched apart these two dimensions:
"Whereas a metaphoric interpretation would consist in supplying another signifier which the
signifier in the text stands for (a means b; the tie represents a phallus), a metonymic
interpretation supplies a whole context of associations" (Gallop 1985,129). I put forward this
example for the reason that it acknowledges the inevitability of the interpretive temptation
while keeping the door open for other modes of reading. Gallop's intervention frees up the
process--and its textualization--to the possibility that there is more to consider beyond simply
a life and its meaning. When faced with the wide-ranging kinds of texts that relate, in some
way, to Sylvia Lacan, the prospect of reducing that kaleidoscopic incoherence to the monologic category of her "life" is too unsatisfying.

Moreover, the life of Sylvia Lacan does not meet the criteria typically reserved for biographical inquiry. While her film career reached some luminous peaks, she played relatively minor roles in the majority of her films. And other than her films, she leaves very few of the traces—writings, paintings, sculptures, manifestoes, laws, or scarred battlegrounds—that comprise the hagiographies of her contemporaries. But if one were to only ever measure historical contribution by those criteria, it would remain, as it has too often been, a man's world. To account for, then, the contribution of a truly remarkable woman who slips into the fissures of history, one must re-imagine the categories and methods of writing it.

Surrealism, the medium out of which all three characters in this Wellesian drama were cultured, proffers another possible textual strategy: collage. Do not reduce the wonder of lived experience to its common denominators, but produce it yourself. Juxtapose, confront, realign, overlap, conjoin, spark. Out of all those found images, texts, words, sounds, memories, scraps of paper and overheard dialogue, produce something novel, something startling. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari describe a similar operation: "A magical chain brings together plant life, pieces of organs, a shred of clothing, an image of daddy, formulas and words: we shall not ask what it means, but what kind of machine is assembled in this manner" (1983,181). While this certainly risks the unhappy result of tired, old, modernist aestheticism, it is probably more faithful to the scattered failures and lightning fortuity of both lived experience and the process of its "entextualization".

I would prefer my narrative voice to drift seamlessly into the background, letting the
dramatic testimony and detail of Sylvia Lacan's life leap unencumbered to the fore, but its persistence is calculated. My own experience throughout this search enriches not at all the unfolding of Sylvia Lacan's life history. But to ignore the border fissures in the domains that are usually held separate--my research process, Sylvia Lacan's life history, theories of symbolic exchange, absence and representation, gender politics--is to maintain manufactured distinctions at a price. The idea is to test constantly the pressures that hold lives, texts, and ideas so far apart. More than just a matter of aesthetic preference, then, my method is an attempt to experiment with forms of representation, to essay the writing of a life.

*

The longer chapters will each, more or less, stand on its own. Each is an effort at illustrating some facet of the problem. The interceding chapters will string them thematically together, focusing on my route through the labyrinth of material and on some of the uncanny ways in which life imitated theory along the way. It is my hope that, throughout this work, even when Sylvia Lacan is not named, is not there, her absence will give form to the problem.
Chapter II

Already I am faced with a rather prickly problem that will not resolve itself satisfactorily: how do I name the subject of this work. I do not mean this in some theoretical sense, just the contrary: which name should I choose? She was most recently Sylvia Lacan. Before that, Sylvia Bataille, and before that, Sylvia Maklès. Do I opt for the most recent, and hence the most timely, given that she has maintained that name for the last four decades? Or does Sylvia Maklès more truthfully represent her, since that was her "true" name, her name before giving it away upon marriage? Many know her best as Sylvia Bataille, when she was most public in her persona, given that she was a popular movie actress. This problem is further complicated by the fact that she separated from Georges Bataille in 1933, but kept that name until 1953, when she adopted 'Lacan' by official marriage, despite having lived with him since 1940. In fact, the daughter that she and Jacques Lacan gave birth to was named Judith Bataille, neither Sylvia's "true" last name nor his.

I might consider using the name that corresponds to the particular period in which I am describing her, so that if I am describing her efforts during World War II she is Sylvia Bataille. But then what happens when I want to address her in a general way, not located in a specific historical moment? Certainly, just addressing her as "Sylvia" is no solution, and inappropriate. It seems as if no name represents her truly, her "truth". I do not seem to have this same problem with Lacan and Bataille (Georges and Jacques, that is). Patronyms suffice.
Chapter III

"You are my wife." - Jacques Lacan (1977,85)

I cannot know for sure whether Jacques Lacan ever actually uttered those same words to his wife, Sylvia, when or after they were officially married in the summer of 1953. They had been intimately involved since 1939, when both were legally wedded to others. Jacques Lacan was still married to his first wife, Marie-Louise Blondin, and Sylvia Bataille, as she was then known, was separated but not legally divorced from her first husband, Georges Bataille. What might one likely surmise from this? Certainly, the institution of marriage was not rigorously venerated by Georges Bataille, Jacques Lacan or Sylvia Bataille. For them, one might speculate, the responsibilities and obligations and laws of marriage were more of a legal than a moral imperative. A glimmer of Jacques Lacan's attitude to that hallowed commitment is discernible by paying close attention to the language with which he surrounds the excerpt above: "when by a 'You are my wife', a subject marks himself with the seal of wedlock" (ibid,85). The not so subtle sense of enslavement that inflects his language (his use of "marks" and "seal", for instance) reveals a particular suspicion towards the rite.

The idea that marriage involves more than a simple spousal choice informs the theories of social order and exchange that I will be presenting in this chapter. In fact, marriage rules are singled out as one of the most powerful indicators of the force that social structure exerts upon its constituent members. Lacan and Bataille will argue, following the leads of Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss, that it is actually the circulation of women amongst men that establishes the fundamental alliances of culture itself.

In order to understand better the origin and transformations of this theory of exchange
I will trace it from its source in Marcel Mauss's *The Gift* to Claude Lévi-Strauss's *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* before arriving at the interpretations that Georges Bataille and Jacques Lacan forward. Finally, in turning to Gayle Rubin's essay "The Traffic in Women", I will address some of the failures of the exchange paradigm, focusing in particular on its theorists' blindness to the power women do have. Along the way, I will scrutinize some of the theories and fictions that prop up and sustain the viability of the "exchange of women" paradigm.

*

The names of Marcel Mauss and Claude Lévi-Strauss are wed inextricably in the history of the French ethnological tradition and, more broadly, the human sciences. It is nearly impossible to read Mauss's *The Gift* without Lévi-Strauss's structuralist reading of it seeping through\(^3\); likewise, Lévi-Strauss's theories of exchange and kinship are permeated with Maussian systematicity and method. The place that *The Gift* has come to occupy in French intellectual history far surpasses its slight appearance. While broad in scope, it is a modest book--small, in fact--and it tends towards sketchiness and large generalities. How, then has it achieved its legendary status? Lévi-Strauss gives a clue in a passage that reflects exactly the ambiguities of this work,

So what is the source of the extraordinary power of those disorganized pages of the *Essai*, which look a little as if they are still in the draft stage with their very odd juxtaposition of impressionistic notations and (usually compressed into a critical apparatus that dwarfs the text) inspired erudition ...? Few have managed to read the *Essai sur le don* without feeling the whole gamut of the emotions that Malebranche described so well when recalling his first reading

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\(^3\) I am specifically referring here to Lévi-Strauss's brief but influential *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss* (1987).
of Descartes: the pounding heart, the throbbing head, the mind flooded with
the imperious, though not yet definable, certainty of being present at a
decisive event in the evolution of science. (1987,38)

Sadly, I must count myself amongst the unhappy few who did not experience that particularly
French form of jouissance upon my first encounter with The Gift. My appreciation perhaps
better resembles that of a gardener tending the slow growth of a uncommon plant, only
witnessing its efflorescence upon my eighth or ninth return, and only full appreciating it by
taking full measure of all that has grown up around it.

Among many possible readings, The Gift is a post-World War I lament to the
increased individualization of interests and the loss of communal norms and standards for
moral behavior in modernity. Elaborating upon conventional stories of social evolution and
drawing on material evidence from contemporary examples of our own recent past—ie.
"primitive" and nascent Western economies—Mauss both critiques the standard evolutionary
schema that ignore the complexity of primitive exchange economies and proffers the lessons
learned as elixirs to cure the diseased, self-aggrandizing, modern Man. But it is less the
lesson learned from the moralizing tale that frames it than the analysis within that has
reverberated throughout the human sciences. For what Mauss the ethnologist has
accomplished is nothing short of an archaeology of language and social structure.

By sorting and sifting through philological and ethnological fragments, Mauss
recreates systems of exchange (of the circulation of goods and materials) across diverse
periods and geographies. Arguing that, "the same morality and economy are at work, albeit
less noticeably, in our own societies, and we believe that in them we have discovered one of
the bases of social life" (1967,2), he sets a determining structure against the illusion of free
and individual will. But what is less interesting in Mauss's analysis is the hard data of his findings; what excites is the nature and power of the goods and their circulation that he describes therein.

To begin, regarding the essence of the gift and the proprietary rights of the owner, Mauss contends that,

The gift received is in fact owned, but the ownership is of a particular kind. One might say that it includes many legal principles which we moderns have isolated from one another. It is at the same time property and a possession, a pledge and a loan, an object sold and an object bought, a deposit, a mandate, a trust; for it is given only on condition that it will be used on behalf of, or transmitted to, a third person....Such is the economic, legal, and moral complex, of quite a typical kind. (ibid,22)

In this passage Mauss describes a slippage that for him signals not only the extra-economic dimension of social life precipitated by total prestations but also a range of seemingly conflictual concepts that cannot be contained within a contemporary, mono-valent notion of the gift. What appears on the surface to be individuals freely trading with other individuals, Mauss reveals to be complex networks of alliance that determine the responsibility, direction, and quality of the objects to be exchanged. All exchange is exchange by groups, clans, or tribes, and all surplus values profit the entirety, not the individual. Individual, free choice does not determine the gift's direction, but instead networks of differentially constituted obligations and rights do, producing each body and each object as named and placed within the social nexus. Ownership of property does not indicate one individual's rights to a particular object, but is instead an index of that subject's inscription within her/his own clan, and furthermore, is only one provisional resting point in an endless circulation of values.

More radically, though, Mauss appears to be contesting the (Western) differentiation
into a self-present, Cartesian subject-who-gives and an inanimate object-that-is-given in these economies:

In all these instances there is a series of rights and duties about consuming and repaying existing side by side with rights and duties about giving and receiving. The pattern of symmetrical and reciprocal rights is not difficult to understand if we realize that it is first and foremost a pattern of spiritual bonds between things which are to some extent parts of persons, and persons and groups that behave in some measure as if they were things. (ibid,11)

As he had also noted one page previously, "it follows that to give something is to give a part of oneself....One gives away what is in reality a part of one's nature and substance, while to receive something is to receive a part of someone's spiritual essence.... The thing given is not inert. It is alive and often personified" (ibid,10). Thus, while Mauss levels the distinctions between subjects and objects, at the same time, he argues that one can determine a stable or fixed nature to both the exchanger and the exchanged solely in relation to the social nexus of obligations and rights. Mauss's descriptions indicate that everything circulates and that anything's (anybody's) proper sense (proper name) can only ever be fixed provisionally--by stopping its circulation--and with some amount of ontological risk.

What is at risk, precisely? Stability. Mauss unearths at the bedrock of exchange the violent potential that inscribes the giver and the gift. It is both the stability of the group and the stability of the group members that is ventured in every moment: "In order to trade man must first lay down his spear....It is in this way that the clan, the tribe and the nation have learnt...how to oppose one another without slaughter and to give without sacrificing themselves to others" (ibid,80). Or, as Mauss writes in another passage, "When two groups of men meet they may move away or in case of mistrust or defiance they may resort to arms;
or else they can come to terms. Business has always been done with foreigners" (ibid,79). To better understand this agonistic theory of social intercourse and infrastructural violence it is necessary first to reconstruct the premises by which Mauss envisions these anxious encounters. To do this, one must travel back to that favorite moment in French philosophical speculation--before the Fall.

In the fine tradition of Rousseau, Mauss accepts the mantle of responsibility to envelop his analysis within the comforting narrative of an original myth. In this case, it is the genesis of the social contract and the evolution out of total chaos that Mauss recounts. By positing a kind of "pre-Cultural" moment of total "mistrust", "rash folly", "war", "isolation", and "stagnation" Mauss is contrasting it with the social progress that enmeshes individuals within obligations and debts that produce a lasting interdependency and stability; in other words, the laying down of the spear. If there were then an "original" exchange it would necessarily entail a first presentation, then a moment of time, then the substitution in exchange or reciprocation of an equivalent value. From that point onward, accepting Mauss's scenario, these original traders' actions would result from a combination of Pavlovian conditioning and enlightened, rational self-interest, establishing permanent, commercial relations and social alliances. But what is of greater interest in Mauss's teleology is that moment of time, that interval, the deferment that separates the "original" presentation and its return. For it is in that moment that is born both the spirit of the gift (in that alliance results) and the possibility

Mauss's scenario is rife with logical aporias and self-defeating constructs, and thus is difficult to accept at all, but for my own purposes it is necessary to leave aside a more rigorous analysis of this origin myth. For a convincing critique of a similar set of assumptions, see Jacques Derrida's reading of Rousseau in Of Grammatology (1974,255-268).
of total loss. It is in that moment of time that all risk emerges: a subject who mistrusts another completely could never assume a return, unless a stable trading relationship were already in place—in other words, "Culture". The ever-present risk of theft in the moment of exchange and its concomitant threat of open violence allows no space for the purely "disinterested" economies that Mauss so eagerly desires. In the face of total gain or total loss—the bivalent nature of the gift—is ventured the stability of any ontological coming-to-terms, or being.

Thus, what Mauss has described up to this point—the bivalent nature of the gift, the structural determination of the gift's direction, and the relational quality of subjectivity—all mark him as a structuralist avant la lettre. Mauss details a social nexus in which everything circulates—people, objects, symbols, values—and in which ontological stability is only ever gained in the misrecognition of the gift's nature. As Mauss writes, "for to lose one's face is to lose one's spirit, which is truly the 'face', the dancing mask, the right to incarnate a spirit and wear an emblem. It is the veritable persona which is at stake, and it can be lost in the potlatch just as it can be lost in the game of gift-giving, in war, or through some error in ritual" (ibid, 38); "One would 'lose the weight' of one's name by admitting defeat in advance" (ibid, 39); or, finally, "Everything is tied together; things have personality, and personalities are in some manner the permanent possession of the clan. Titles, talismans, coppers, and the spirits of chiefs are homonyms and synonyms, having the same nature and function" (ibid, 44). What Mauss puts at stake in these formulation is the ontological status of the named subject—who-gives (since that subject and that giving have more to do with structural position than with self-present willing) and the process by which one's name becomes affixed to one's body.
But does everything really circulate? In order to answer this precisely, one must read closely several quotes in which Mauss hedges that exact question. In the first, Mauss suggests that, "They [groups] exchange rather courtesies, entertainments, ritual, military assistance, women, children, dances, and feasts" (ibid,3). Later on, Mauss adds a twist to the nature of the list, "Goods, women, children, possessions, charms, land, labour, services, religious offices, rank--everything is stuff to be given away and repaid. In perpetual interchange of what we may call spiritual matter, comprising men and things, these elements pass and repass between clans and individuals, ranks, sexes and generations" (ibid,11-12). While in the first case it appeared that everything circulated, with the rather glaring omission of the exchangers—the men—the second, while still not including men in the grocery list, does equivocate on the possibility thereafter. Still later, Mauss further muddies the waters:

The circulation of goods follows that of men, women, and children, of festival ritual, ceremonies and dances, jokes and injuries. Basically they are the same. If things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns 'respects' and 'courtesies'. But in addition, in giving them, a man gives himself, and does so because he owes himself--himself and his possessions--to others. (ibid,44-45)

It appears as if Mauss cannot quite decide between a system of exchange in which everything—truly everything—is capable of movement, in other words, ontologically at risk, or whether the category of "Man" exists for itself, beyond exchange. This point is not a minor one. The entire nature of the exchange structure depends upon whether the masculine subject anchors it (thus affirming a certain phallocentrism), or whether it produces the masculine subject as just one of an infinite number of contingent possibilities. Mauss states categorically that exchange constitutes the bedrock of society and, in particular, "civilization". The alliances
that exchange produces are the glue that holds rivals together as neighbors; even more than
that, though, exchange inscribes the subject as subject at the same time that it puts that form
at risk. Whether Mauss affirms the ontological instability of the subject-effect or contains its
threat within a narrative of social progress is ultimately undecidable. It is plain, however, that
women circulate. He does not equivocate on this point. But Mauss is ambiguous regarding
the constancy and stability of the male subject-effect. This significant sticking point will also
snare Claude Lévi-Strauss in his attempt to broaden the function of marital exchange.

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Monumental in its size and scope, The Elementary Structures of Kinship may very
well prove to be the last work of its kind. At the same time technical and philosophical,
specific and universalizing, it is the product of a mind very much at ease with navigating a
maze of arcane knowledge. Distilling out his elemental structures from a byzantine tangle of
kinship terms and genealogical diagrams with Einsteinian grace and simplicity, Lévi-Strauss
maps out the world in the twilight of the enlightenment. Speculating on the dawn of Culture,
the fear of incest, and the bases of social alliance, this is a work that does not suffer from lack
of inspiration or hubris. In part, it is exactly these qualities that make The Elementary
Structures of Kinship a work not lightly criticized nor simply dismissed.

For what if its conclusions are true? What if exchange, and in particular the exchange
of women, is the fundament of Culture? The thesis certainly has truck in the human sciences,
despite the heat and light its sheer unpalatability has generated. In fact, the mere mention of
the text's title usually evokes the almost autonomic incantation of "the exchange of women,"
so allied has it become with this idea. Of course, Lévi-Strauss attempts much more within
it, but the simple audacity of the notion has prevailed. I will situate the text and its infamous construct with respect to the acknowledged debt owed to Marcel Mauss, and to signal some of the flash points around which subsequent critics gravitate.

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In order to grasp best the relationship between the work of Marcel Mauss and that of Lévi-Strauss, it is instructive to begin with the text that comments most directly on Mauss's work, *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*. As slim and unimposing as *The Gift*, this text has served as a kind of watershed in the reappropriation of Mauss's body of writing. Doing to Mauss what Lacan was doing simultaneously to Freud, Lévi-Strauss reads his master through the lenses of Saussurean linguistics, producing a more provocative and wholly original Mauss. Lévi-Strauss focuses primarily upon two of Mauss's most famous essays—on magic and gift giving—in order to illustrate Mauss's proto-structuralist leaning and his theoretical anti-humanism. What is most interesting in Lévi-Strauss's reading is his determination to produce a Mauss in perfect sync with his own structuralist program, even when Mauss is not up to the task. For while Mauss does focus upon the social in its conscious and unconscious manifestations as *the* object for ethnological inquiry, he is incapable or unwilling to reduce all phenomena to it. The differences between Lévi-Strauss's and Mauss's accounts are the relative primacy they accord to exchange and their explanations of the motor causes of its circulation.

Although other functions will sometimes supplant the place that exchange occupies in the Lévi-Straussian topography, he never describes it as anything but primary to the
instantiation of Culture. It is Mauss's short-sightedness to that place that provides Lévi-
Strauss with his first opportunity to surpass Mauss's analysis, but not without first enveloping
that myopia within hyperbolic praise,

Why did Mauss halt at the edge of those immense possibilities, like Moses conducting his people all the way to a promised land whose splendour he
would never behold?...In this essay, Mauss seems--rightly--to be controlled
by a logical certainty, namely, that exchange is the common denominator of
a large number of apparently heterogeneous social activities. But exchange
is not something he can perceive on the level of the facts. Empirical
observation finds not exchange, but only, as Mauss himself says, "three
obligations: giving, receiving, returning"...The only way to avoid the dilemma
would have been to perceive that the primary, fundamental phenomenon is
exchange itself, which gets split up into discrete operations in social life; the
mistake was to take the discrete operations for the basic phenomenon.
(1987,45-47)

The mistake that Mauss made in his analysis was in attempting to solve the riddle of the
exchange mechanism by recourse to a mystical properties--hau (or mana in a previous essay)-
at the expense of the structure he had already uncovered. What is at stake in these
formulations is the force that impels the subject to exchange, the force that propels the gift,
but also the force that is the gift. Lévi-Strauss adroitly reads into Mauss's lapse the index of
the kind of thinking Mauss is in fact analyzing, "So we can see that in one case, at least, the
notion of mana does present those characteristics of a secret power, a mysterious force,
which Durkheim and Mauss attributed to it: for such is the role it plays in their own system.
Mana really is mana there" (ibid,57). In other words, acting like the natives he is describing
when faced with an imponderable mystery, Mauss invokes a magical concept to explain what

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5 Lévi-Strauss will occasionally posit the Unconscious, Language, the Prohibition of incest,
or Exogamy at that same limit. While these functions are not identical, they are homologous,
and hence Lévi-Strauss seems to see no contradiction.
is beyond his imagination; Lévi-Strauss, on the contrary, seizes the opportunity to demonstrate the explanatory power of his apparatus.

Rights, obligations, duty, interest; Mauss had asked, in the Introduction to The Gift, "What force is there in the thing given which compels the recipient to make a return?", to which he mistakenly answered "hau". But where Mauss invokes spirit, Lévi-Strauss thinks language. To do this, Lévi-Strauss posits a fundamental relationship between signifiers and signifieds that, without the science of structural linguistics, is only ever explicable by recourse to such magical thinking. He begins by suggesting an origin myth: "[A]t the moment when the entire universe all at once became significant, it was none the better known for being so" (ibid, 60). What this implies for Lévi-Strauss is that there exists always and everywhere a "surfeit" of signifiers relative to signifieds. All of those left-over signifiers which must symbolize something, but whose signifieds are not known, are empty, get "soaked-up" by the category of the unknowable, the divine, or the magical: "some emotional-mystical cement". Scientific thought, according to Lévi-Strauss, works by a process of adequation, or, an incremental matching of signifiers with signifieds; it thereby relieves some of the anxiety that that signifier surplus engenders.

What Mauss could not see (yet what he still elaborated, according to Lévi-Strauss), was the unconscious totality that synthesized the contradictory aspects of the gift--"giving, receiving, returning". Mauss had tried to encompass the contradictory aspects within the concept of hau. But, like mana, Lévi-Strauss suggests, hau,

is no more than the subjective reflection of the need to supply an unperceived totality. Exchange is not a complex edifice built on the obligations of giving, receiving and returning, with the help of some emotional-mystical cement. It
is a synthesis immediately given to, and given by, symbolic thought, which, in exchange as in any other form of communication, surmounts the contradiction inherent in it; that is the contradiction of perceiving things as elements of dialogue, in respect of self and others simultaneously, and destined by nature to pass from the one to the other. (ibid, 58-9)

In other words, what causes things to circulate and the subject to feel the affective pressure to exchange is not some ephemeral quality called hau, but is exchange itself, given that it is this unconscious, signifying structure that precedes and constitutes the subject as an exchanging subject, and the gift as symbolic debt. Whether he labels it language or exchange, Lévi-Strauss draws into relief a hiccupping, unconscious totality whose instability and inadequation produce a perpetual supply of linguistic means and extra-linguistic effects.

If Lévi-Strauss is hesitant before the possibility of magical or mystical explanations, it is perhaps because, while he is sometimes wary of institutionalized science, he aspires to a rigorous, mathematical formalism in his own field of inquiry. It is significant, then, that neither mana nor hau makes an appearance in The Elementary Structures of Kinship, his magisterial wrestling match with exchange structures and their organizing power. What does this stout text--published during roughly the same period as his work on Marcel Mauss--ultimately accomplish? Is it a brazen unveiling of the profound homologies between language and subjectivity, incest and communication? An unreflecting condemnation of women's roles and status dressed in the robes of scientific inquiry and enlightenment universalism? An encyclopedic overview of the basic mechanisms of kinship structures? A true synthesis of Marx's work on commodity and Freud's on sexuality? A unearthing of the roots of gender inequality, or a chauvinist's sly wink at it? As with any work of this scope, the best answer is, perhaps, all of the above. Substituting the prohibition of incest for the gift as his
operational entry point, Lévi-Strauss seeks to unearth the simplest of mechanisms in the densest of fields.

To start with the idea of the prohibition of incest in order to then show the ways in which explanations of it that invoke affective categories or genetic determinism miss the point is typically brazen, and Lévi-Strauss obviously relishes the extremity of his example. He even begins with a favorite rhetorical gesture that he will often repeat: accusing other investigators of "primitive" thinking. He makes the insidious argument that the prohibition's theoretical intractability derives more from the investigator's own horror of and resistance to incest itself than from the problem's own conceptual complexity.6 Moving from there into the heart of darkness—in this case incest itself—Lévi-Strauss braves the jungles of humanity's most uncomfortable secret in order to expose its fraudulent ferocity.

What Lévi-Strauss discovers at the origin of the incest problem is a paradox or, as he labels it, a "scandal": because it is universal, the prohibition of incest is necessarily of the natural order; yet because it is a rule, it is, de facto, cultural in essence. Locating it therefore at the hinge between the natural and cultural orders, and yet piqued by its ambiguity, he broadens the defining characteristics of incest to consider why, in certain places and in certain times, particular spouses are prohibited while others are predetermined. Abstracting out from this position to another level, Lévi-Strauss then suggests that the incest prohibition is the

6 He ends Chapter I thus, "To find so ill at ease a writer [Lévy-Bruhl] who otherwise did not falter at the boldest hypotheses is not surprising if it is borne in mind that almost all sociologists exhibit the same repugnance and timidity in the face of this problem"(1969,11). This is the same kind of critical operation that he performs on Mauss and Durkheim regarding their use of mana and hau, and analogous to what he later does to Freud by suggesting that Freud, in creating the primal horde myth, was acting more like a neurotic than an analyst (ibid,492).
manifestation of the power of the rule \textit{qua} rule, or, in other words,

The \textit{fact of being a rule}, completely independent of its modalities, is indeed the very essence of the incest prohibition. If nature leaves marriage to chance and the arbitrary, it is impossible for culture not to introduce some sort of order where there is none....But it [the incest prohibition] is intervention over and above anything else; even more exactly, it is \textit{the} intervention. (1969,32)

Up to this point Lévi-Strauss has only described the incest prohibition's function--as the law of the Law--not its structural genesis; for that, he will require the lever of psychoanalysis and the lenses of linguistics.

Freud had, obviously, butted heads with this problem of incest a few decades earlier, but his analysis, particularly in \textit{Totem and Taboo}, does not survive the rigor of Lévi-Strauss's science. What Lévi-Strauss does adopt from Freud, though, is a way of turning the problem around so as to make its contours more visible and less familiar. Freud's contribution, according to Lévi-Strauss, was that in, "setting out to explain the origin of a prohibition, he succeeds in explaining, certainly not why incest is consciously condemned, but how it happens to be unconsciously desired" (ibid,491). Freud, by universalizing the \textit{desire} for incest, had shifted the field of observation away from the interdiction, and in doing so he opened up the mutual intrication of desire and its prohibition. To the extent that that is true, Lévi-Strauss is short-sighted in his acknowledgement of debt to Freud, since it was Freud who had articulated precisely the \textit{inseparability} of desire and prohibition within his notion of a prohibition's ambivalence (Freud 1950,29-30). It is this reconfiguration of the incest problematic as both a desire and an interdiction that will lead Lévi-Strauss to interrogate the modalities of kinship marriage laws and the particular case of cross-cousin marriage.

If there is a universal, unconscious desire for incest simultaneous with a repressive
mechanism that proscribes it, why do those proscriptions appear to be affective in origin? It is to that question that Lévi-Strauss responds by invoking the case of cross-cousin marriages in elementary kinship structures. Simply put, in such cases, "the division that it establishes between prescribed and prohibited spouses cuts across a category of relatives who, from the viewpoint of biological proximity, are strictly interchangeable" (1969,121). In other words, what should be structurally identical kin from a biological perspective are in fact locally differentiated into prohibited and prescribed possible spouses, negating the theory that affect, genetics, or biology have anything to do with the problem of incest. Instead, Lévi-Strauss suggests, the desire/repulsion toward the kin relation results from a sort of structural imperative that necessitates, for the enduring health of the system, the choice of certain, specific partners.

It is impossible to summarize briefly Lévi-Strauss's argument without, at this point, including his theory of endogamous marriage choice and the function of exchange in general. Doing to this problem what Freud, in a sense, did with the desire for transgression, Lévi-Strauss takes a kind of photographic negative of the prohibition of certain partners to illuminate its opposite--the active selection of other partners. Whether endogamous or exogamous, what is at stake is the naming of certain possibilities and certain impossibilities of spousal choice. In each case, what is important to Lévi-Strauss is that the prohibition of incest is not a negation of choices but an opening-up of prospective spouses. As Lévi-Strauss argues, and the passage is worth quoting at length,

A group within which marriage is prohibited immediately conjures up the idea of another group, with clearly defined features (the prohibition of incest joined with an exogamous system), or vague characteristics (simple prohibition
without exogamy), with which marriage is merely possible, or inevitable, according to circumstances. The prohibition on the sexual use of a daughter or a sister compels them to be given in marriage to another man, and at the same time it establishes a right to the daughter or sister of this other man. In this way, every negative stipulation of the prohibition has its positive counterpart....The prohibition of incest is not merely a prohibition as the previous chapter suggested, because in prohibiting it also orders. Like exogamy, which is its widened social application, the prohibition of incest is a rule of reciprocity. The woman whom one does not take, and whom one may not take, is, for that very reason, offered up. To whom is she offered? Sometimes to a group defined by institutions, and sometimes to an indeterminate and ever-open collectivity limited only by the exclusion of near relatives, such as in our own society. (ibid, 51)

Here we have, in effect, the central argument of The Elementary Structures of Kinship. By relinquishing certain partners, the male subject has promised to him (in the form of the pact that founds all cultural alliances) many others, who, by their very nature as beyond immediate affinity, create alliances greater and greater in breadth. It is thus that Lévi-Strauss can suggest that marriage is not just the joining of two families, but that, "Marriage between outsiders is a social advance (because it integrates wider groups). It is also a venture" (ibid, 48). This is a crucial aside. The risk involved is the same as that that Mauss described for the gift, and in this case the deferral plays the same role: in the delay between giving and returning (a gap underwritten by the pact. or promise), there always exists the irruptive potential of a gift not returned, or stolen.

By forsaking the immediate gratification that incest promises, the brother or father assumes that the social pact will provide him a spouse at a later time. Incest is therefore not a negation but the affirmation, or promise, of a future wife. It is this endless cycle of debt that establishes society as society, that determines the subject as subject, and that deflates the risk that colors every exchange. What Lévi-Strauss uncovers at the heart of elementary structures
of kinship is the structural necessity that wives circulate. He comes to the conclusion that, "the rules of kinship and marriage are not made necessary by the social state. They are the social state itself, reshaping biological relationships and natural sentiments" (ibid, 490). In essence, the structures of kinship only forbid certain conjunctions because, in the long term, those marriages would disrupt the "genetic code" of the structure itself, would set into motion a system that would eventually stagnate and dry-up. There is a mathematical necessity to systems of descent that produces the preference for particular spousal selection. Incest, in this case, is simply the subject's opting-out of the system, the subject's negation of the drive to ally, or, as Lévi-Strauss puts it, "keep[ing] to oneself" (ibid, 497).

But what is the nature of this "structural necessity"? It is here that Lévi-Strauss becomes his most scientifically structural, wading through the hard data of alliance and descent to isolate the germ of kinship systems. What emerges from this analysis (whose complexity is far too great to address adequately here), looks quite similar to Mauss, quite similar to Saussure, and yet totally unique to Lévi-Strauss. In short, kinship and marriage rules function not as the individual's right to choose a spouse willy-nilly, but as the structural imperative to choose a specific spouse. Borrowing Saussure's relational linguistics, Lévi-Strauss suggests that marriage rules obey similar laws, that, "exogamous and endogamous categories have no objective existence as independent entities. Rather, they must be considered as view-points, or different but solidary perspectives, on a system of fundamental relationships in which each term is defined by its position within the system" (ibid, 49). Privileging the structure over the person at all times, Lévi-Strauss distills out from the myriad of marriage rules exchange relations that, as in Mauss, predetermine the direction, quality and
nature of the exchanged material. From this analysis Lévi-Strauss is able to conclude,

All the errors in interpreting the prohibition of incest arise from a tendency to see marriage as a discontinuous process which derives its own limits and possibilities from within itself in each individual case.

Thus it is that the reasons why marriage with the mother, daughter or sister can be prevented are sought in a quality intrinsic to these women...However, from a social viewpoint, these terms cannot be regarded as defining isolated individuals, but relationships between these individuals and everyone else. (ibid,481-2)

As with signs in Saussure's system, or gifts in Mauss's, Lévi-Strauss isolates the most basic level of currency--women--in relation to which all cultural goods derive themselves. But if it is as exchange value that women function, how is it that Lévi-Strauss differentiates them in essence from the men through which they circulate?

Lévi-Strauss ventures several different explanations as to why it is that women circulate like valued objects, but never does he adequately address the nature, status, and quality of the men who constitute the active participants in that exchange. If ever one wanted to highlight the occasional moments of spontaneity and frivolous speculation in Lévi-Strauss's otherwise sober tome, it is only necessary to isolate the few stabs that he makes at offering rationales for Woman's second-rate status. Clearly ill at ease with the repercussions of his analysis, and yet buoyed by its classical, simple elegance, Lévi-Strauss offers several tenuous explanations. He will later, in an essay entitled "The Family", hedge his analysis significantly, alleging that other interpretations are possible, and that his women readers should not be put off by these particular cases:

The female reader, who may be shocked to see womankind treated as a commodity submitted to transactions between male operators, can easily find comfort in the assurance that the rules of the game would remain unchanged should it be decided to consider the men as being exchanged by women's
groups. As a matter of fact, some very few societies, of a highly matrilineal type, have to a limited extent attempted to express things that way (1956,284).  

Lévi-Strauss's ambivalence on this point seems more a matter of conscience than of theory. He does not hesitate in searching out myriad reasons why it is that men maintain the upper hand.

In the first attempt he makes at explaining why it is that women only are objects, he alights upon an interpretation that incorporates the economics of resource distribution, suggesting that, "There is a biological equilibrium between male and female births. Consequently, except in societies where this equilibrium is modified by customs, every male should have a very good chance of obtaining a wife" (Lévi-Strauss 1969,37). But even while this is so, according to Lévi-Strauss, there is always the problem of man's 'natural tendencies': "Social and biological observation combine to suggest that, in man, these [polygamous] tendencies are natural and universal, and that only limitations born of the environment and culture are responsible for their suppression" (ibid,37). Recognizing the plethora of strictly monogamous cultures that he wishes to incorporate into his universalizing analysis, however, he must find some way out of this impasse. Thus, in his shakiest stroke, he states,

This deep polygamous tendency, which exists among all men, always makes the number of available women seem insufficient. Let us add that, even if there were as many women as men, these women would not all be equally

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7 As Alain Delrieu points out, Lévi-Strauss does not ever name those societies in that particular article (1993:172n). In The Elementary Structures of Kinship he also states that it is a "basic fact" that, "it is men who exchange women, and not vice versa" (1969,115). In a footnote supporting that contention, he adds, "Certain tribes of South-east Asia, which almost provide a picture of the inverse situation, can undoubtedly be used as an example. This would not be to say that in such societies it is the women who exchange the men, but rather that men exchange other men by means of women" (ibid, 115n).
desirable...the most desirable women must form a minority. Hence, the
demand for women is in actual fact, or to all intents and purposes, always in
a state of disequilibrium and tension. (ibid,38)

So, while at the same time that Lévi-Strauss makes an argument for the structural imperative
of exchange and the anti-essentialism of marriage choice he offers an aesthetic, affective and
functionalist explanation for the circulation of women. Still not capable of adequately
buttressing the slippery premise of his theory, he lapses here into uncharacteristic accounts
clearly at cross-purposes with his evaluation to this point.

His second effort, this time approaching something of a linguistic analogy, but still
striving for the solution, again falls short. Deriving the role that women play as exchanged
commodity from Mauss's portrayal of the gift, Lévi-Strauss merges women into the general
category of things exchanged and then abstracts that to the level of the linguistic sign.
Everything exchanges except men, argued Mauss, and Lévi-Strauss here gingerly picks up
that same theme:

Its [exchange's] rôle in primitive society is essential because it embraces
material objects, social values and women....but above all because women are
not primarily a sign of social value, but a natural stimulant; and the stimulant
of the only instinct the satisfaction of which can be deferred, and consequently
the only one for which, in the act of exchange, and through the awareness of
reciprocity, the transformation from the stimulant to the sign can take place.
(ibid,62-3)

In the concluding, lyrical pages of this text, Lévi-Strauss continues with this theme, further
refining his formula:

The emergence of symbolic thought must have required that women, like
words, should be things that were exchanged. In this new case indeed, this
was the only means of overcoming the contradiction by which the same
woman was seen under two incompatible aspects: on the one hand, as the
object of personal desire, thus exciting sexual and proprietal instincts; and, on
the other, as the subject of the desire of others, and seen as such, i.e., as the means of binding others through alliance with them....In contrast to words, which have wholly become signs, woman has remained at once a sign and a value. (ibid,496)

This explanation is even more bewildering. Lévi-Strauss resorts to an unlikely origin myth in order to argue Woman's inherent status as an exchanged object. Why the emergence of symbolic thought should necessitate this condition is not supported, it is simply posited. Woman's split into an object both desired and deferred implies a kinship system whose dynamics are fully in effect, and this is not what Lévi-Strauss posits for the origin point. The male subject would have no reason to defer an immediate kinswoman, and she would not have such a split status, unless a system of compensation for that deferral (a promise of alliance) were already in place. He does admit that she too has a voice, but that is not enough to pull her out of her structurally unequal position. While she may have access to language, her position in no way resembles that of men: "To be unmindful of this would be to overlook the basic fact that it is men who exchange women, and not vice versa" (ibid,115). But all that Lévi-Strauss has demonstrated, so far, is that men exchange women because men exchange women, and nothing more.

This "basic fact"--now so allied with the name of Lévi-Strauss--is the bedrock upon which he constructs his theory of exchange, language, and marriage. What Lévi-Strauss has done is to combine these three levels of cultural production into a giant cultural machine that unceasingly spits out words, wives and goods. What makes that motor run, and why must women only circulate? Lévi-Strauss has already offered two possibilities in the realm of marriage--scarce beauty and natural stimulants. His third attempt, more continuous with his
theory up to this point, more mechanical in design, still consigns Woman to the level of sign, but at least fits with the structural determinism of the text. In fitting with the electro-chemical metaphors that drive his writing, it is orchestrated around the circulation of signs, but in this case the sign stands for the charge of the particle, as well as the molecule of language. In one passage, Lévi-Strauss suggests,

Speaking objectively, a woman, like the moiety from which she derives her civil status, has no specific characteristics...which make her unfit for commerce with men bearing the same name. The sole reason is that she is same whereas she must (and therefore can) become other....All that is necessary on either side is the sign of otherness, which is the outcome of a certain position in a structure and not of any innate characteristic. (ibid,114)

A bit further along, he extends that metaphor,

We have found this common quality in the fact that brothers and sisters, like parallel cousins, are similarly oriented, and bear the same sign within a structure of reciprocity, in some way canceling one another out, while cross-cousins bear opposite and complementary signs. Keeping to this metaphor, it could thus be said that they attract each other. (ibid,141)

This might just be the case of Lévi-Strauss stumbling onto a metaphor that presented itself spontaneously to him were it not for the fact that he flirts throughout the text with increasingly scientific models. By "scientific" I mean not just reproducible and objective, but simple and elegant as well. That he concludes the work by paring his research parameters down to just one question, culled from five hundred pages of encyclopedic kinship analysis, only reinforces that image. But at least in this case he is faithful to the nature of his analysis, even if the sleight of hand trick that imposes itself with his explanation is not ultimately

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8 He asks, "Ultimately, the whole imposing apparatus of prescriptions and prohibitions could be reconstructed a priori from one question, and one alone: in the society concerned, what is the relationship between the rule of residence and the rule of descent?" (ibid,493).
convincing. One can well imagine two particles, charged negatively or positively, repelling and attracting one another depending upon where within the electrified grid they reside; as metaphor, it is vivid. But does it explain the phenomenon, as Lévi-Strauss intends, or merely describe it?

This would be a question of less consequence were it not for the importance Lévi-Strauss attaches to a similar question posed in his reading of Mauss's *The Gift*, and were this not the crux of his critique in the *Introduction to the Work of Marcel Mauss*. In his reading of *The Gift*, Lévi-Strauss rightly fingers the inadequacy of *hau* as an explanatory mechanism, substituting his semiotics for Mauss's mysticism. But is he guilty of the same lapse? I would argue that Lévi-Strauss resorts to the "magic" of his concept of "structure" to explain why women circulate: they do so because they are structurally positioned as either same or other--positive or negative--and therefore attract or repel. But that, clearly, is a case of arguing from the structural diagram back to the circumstance. The structural diagram cannot explain *why* women circulate and men do not, only that they do.

In his three attempts at illustrating why he consigns women to the level of circulated object, and why they thus circulate--scarce beauty, natural stimulant, charged sign--Lévi-Strauss never adequately supports his assertions. They *must* circulate, that is true, but only because his model, his structure, requires it. Structural determinism is not an explanation. It is an appeal to the invisible powers of an explanatory mechanism. While he exhibits some hesitancy over this ungainly and pernicious categorization of women, he really never interrogates the status of men in the exchange networks he elaborates, and then only props up the objectification of women with desultory fictions. As with Mauss, the key question is
whether men, like women, circulate or anchor the system. While it seems that Lévi-Strauss argues from a purely structuralist position—that subjectivity, meaning, value and essence are differentially determined and provisionally affixed to the substances they name—male subjectivity slips out quietly unquestioned. Subjected to the glare of analysis, however, it sticks out like a sore thumb.

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The impact of Claude Lévi-Strauss's 1949 text radiated out, energizing and contaminating thinkers who rarely paid any mind to such technical kinship analyses. It reached the writer and philosopher Georges Bataille, for instance. But Bataille, an unconventional intellect, approached the problems of subjectivity, sexuality and the limits of the social body with a singular obsession that only rarely, though at times profoundly, converged with his contemporary.

A writer of fiction, philosophy, and social theory—and sometimes all within the same text—Georges Bataille's oeuvre defies simple analysis. Constantly challenging the absolute divisions between those categories, his work slips viscously through any critic's tight grasp. He emerged from the roots of the Surrealist movement, nourished as well—like so many of his generation (Lacan, Caillois, Queneau, Aron, Merleau-Ponty, Breton and others)—by Alexandre Kojève's legendary seminar on Hegel (Surya 1992,230). Bataille, though, was not content to relegate his social diagnoses and prognoses to the pages of his often barely noticed texts. He was also notorious as the architect of both intellectual and social experiments. From the journals Acéphale, Documents, Contre-Attaque, and Minotaure to the Collège de sociologie and the secret society named Acéphale, Bataille sought to redefine the nature of
collective organization and social movements. His was a social vision that scratched and clawed for some shred of meaning in human collective action, forged as it was in the wake of his society's devastating catastrophes and mute resignation.

While others occasionally adopted the findings of ethnology to support their philosophical assertions, Bataille quite actively mined the field of anthropology to dig up examples that illuminated, in stark relief, the Western world's most hallowed assumptions. He drew upon other cultures for ways to subvert the Occident's grip on the imagination and to create models for his own groups. Never really a part of the academy, Bataille spent the majority of his life as a librarian, but he counted amongst his close friends Alfred Métraux, Georges-Henri Rivière, Michel Leiris, and Roger Caillois, and he drew immense inspiration from the work of Marcel Mauss. His debt to the work of Lévi-Strauss, while consequential, is not nearly as meaningful.

In order to follow most coherently the line of thought that links Bataille to Mauss and then subsequently to Lévi-Strauss and his theory of matrimonial exchange, I will focus predominantly on the first two volumes of *The Accursed Share*. It is there that Bataille most systematically articulates his sympathies with Mauss, but it is also, in the second volume, the place of his most explicit reading of Lévi-Strauss. The addition of sexuality to the exchange equation is most elaborately detailed in *Erotism* (1986), and while the analysis is often identical to that in *The Accursed Share vol.II* (1991), Bataille develops the argument at greater length.

In *The Accursed Share vol.I* (1988), Bataille explicitly attempts to rewrite the function of exchanged objects within economies of signs, symbols and values. Trying to enact an
perspectival revolution in the human sciences, Bataille seized upon Mauss's ethical and
philological project in *The Gift* and turned it inside out, creating a disingenuously
straightforward and programmatic text. Keenly aware of his own limits and those of
discursive medium itself, though, he also calculated the disfiguring effects that the form of his
writing would have on his theoretical agenda. In the Preface to *The Accursed Share*, which
reads like a conventional, self-deprecating introduction while laying the groundwork for his
more subversive designs, Bataille writes that, "the announcement of a vast project is always
its betrayal. No one can say without being comical that he is getting ready to overturn things:
He must overturn, and that is all" (1988,10). Already Bataille is signaling here the
problematic relationship between his discourse, which strives to convey a surpassing of the
economy of meaning and sense and a language that always contains any *escape* within it. In
other words, according to Bataille, Language re-appropriates every attempt to illuminate what
is beyond itself. He acknowledges that his words cannot assume the meta-position of a
transcendent description of overturning but must, in themselves, in their materiality, *perform*
that operation. The paradox of this does not escape Bataille—it is the heart of his project—nor
does the absurdity; for at the same time that he is writing that one cannot *announce* the desire
to overturn traditional economic principles, he is engaged in exactly that.

Even more than that, however, he admits that simply the act of endeavoring to
articulate his theory subverts it:

Writing this book in which I was saying that energy finally can only be
wasted, I myself was using my energy, my time, working; my research
answered in a fundamental way the desire to add to the amount of wealth
acquired for mankind. Should I say that under these conditions I sometimes
could only respond to the truth of my book and could not go on writing it?
I am focusing on these otherwise typical comments that precede the "argument" because I see them as germane to the theory of exchange that Bataille develops throughout the text. Representation is an obstacle for Bataille, and for that reason he often selects examples that do not signify pure expenditure, but are themselves that. Bataille understands that language will infect his examples from their inception, prompting their ruin, so he stages that process at the same time that he is describing it. To contend, therefore, that The Accursed Share makes no sense, or fails in its project, would be to mis-represent terribly the nature of his endeavor. This is why his text is "disengenuously" straightforward: he weaves a coherent argument for a theory of exchange and expenditure that, even while staging its own unraveling, still amounts to something.

To begin, however, it is instructive to outline the kind of debt Bataille owes to Mauss and The Gift, and to illustrate where he leaves Mauss behind. Both texts are resolutely ethical, addressing themselves to a perceived moral and spiritual vacuum in the modernity of industrialism, capitalism, and the death of God; but while Mauss laments the disappearance of communal norms and values, Bataille strikes at the heart of these enlightenment vestiges. In the title itself, which puts a sinister spin on The Gift, Bataille traces the movement of pure loss and glorious expenditure that the gift represented, however problematically, in certain parts of Mauss's text. Seeing a potential in the form of the gift as pure loss, Bataille fashions "profitless expenditure" into the operative metaphor for a system of forces that transforms the basic assumptions of classical economic principles from the perspective of resource scarcity and human need into that of a ceaseless surplus and reckless waste. Drawing upon the
Maussian "total social fact", Bataille argues for a shift away from the perspective of the psychologized individual to that of the collective organism. His General Economy is an elaboration of a different genealogy of Man that starts from the premise that energy is always available for creation far beyond necessity, provided that one assumes the perspective of the totality, and not the atomized needs of the individual. This entails not just a shift in perspective, but a fundamental transformation of the precepts and assumptions of human knowledge. He includes this program in an esteemed tradition: "Changing from the perspectives of restrictive economy to those of general economy actually accomplishes a Copernican transformation: a reversal of thinking" (ibid,25). Part of this transformation will be a hollowing out of the individual, or subject, in favor a dynamic, almost physical model of energy and forces that echoes both Mauss and Lévi-Strauss in its construction.

Starting from a super-abundance of resources (or bio-energy) on the globe that, if not gloriously expended, will produce ruin catastrophically, Bataille writes, "A movement is produced on the surface of the globe that results from the circulation of energy at this point in the universe. The economic activity of men appropriates this movement, making use of the resulting possibilities for certain ends" (ibid, 20-21). The fundamental error of all reasonable discourses is the assumption that humankind's actions alter the general movement of the terrestrial energy. All living organisms' actions are in fact subject to the rules and patterns of the movement itself, and without attention to the vicissitudes of the play of energy, humanity is bound to suffer them. All "economic" activity appropriates an energy that always surpasses it, and every desire to increase the productivity, or growth, that the forces enable occludes the necessary, alternate process of expenditure needed to maintain equilibrium (ibid,21).
Either the excess can be absorbed, in which case the expenditure will be (involuntarily) catastrophically *acted upon* the system, or it can be (voluntarily) unproductively wasted in a *acting of* its potentiality. According to Bataille, "the final dissipation cannot fail to carry out the movement that animates terrestrial energy" (ibid, 22). Energy will be dissipated. The question is by what means.

One can read this entire critique, up to this point, as a systematic upending of the cherished values put forth by the Utilitarians. What obviously attracts Bataille to the work of Mauss in this regard is his discussion of potlatch, for it is there that one finds the finest example of the "pure" expenditure of goods that Bataille privileges. One occasionally hears Bataille's critics argue that what Bataille has taken to be the pure, unmotivated destruction of valuable goods to no productive end is, in reality, a ritual that displays the power and increases the prestige of exactly those who do the destroying. In other words, there is a gain from the expenditure—a gain in status—and no such act is therefore ever purely wasteful. This is, in fact, exactly Bataille's point. One must turn to his discussions of eroticism and the exchange of women in order to see one way in which he addresses this paradox.

Bataille was evidently convinced by Lévi-Strauss's text. He borrows both Lévi-Strauss's analysis of the role that incest plays at the formative moment when Culture emerges out from of Nature, as well as his demystification of the prohibition's affective force. But what intrigues Bataille more than the prohibition's distributive mechanics is the attractive force that the denied object holds for a subject. Bataille's analysis gravitates around the subject's transgression of the taboo, not repulsion from it. The experience of eroticism, in one of its forms, partakes of the heady thrill of transgressing a culture's moral and religious
boundaries. It is also, according to Bataille, the factor that separates animal from human: it is the supplement or residue that, tacked onto reproductive sexuality, differentiates animal coupling from mystical experience. Or, as Bataille suggests, "No one therefore will be able to shift from the asserted sovereign character of eroticism to the usefulness it might have. Sexuality at least is good for something; but eroticism... We are clearly concerned, this time, with a sovereign form, which cannot serve any purpose" (1991,16). Comprising all non-reproductive aspects of sexuality, eroticism functions for Bataille as a category beyond any possible utility. The prohibition of incest is, for Bataille, a form of eroticism, a subset of it. It is the human, and culturally variable, imposition of form upon theoretically possible sexual partners; it is the instantiation of a law.

A law, however (as Bataille more than anyone has shown), has two, contradictory aspects: it limits behavior by proscribing it, but it also produces the transgression of those limits as a (desirable) possibility. Thus, the prohibition of incest denies the subject certain choices, but it also produces incest as a potential. In a passage evoking Lévi-Strauss's dictum that incest is "socially absurd" before it is "morally culpable," Bataille argues that,

the object of the prohibition was first marked out for coveting by the prohibition itself: if the prohibition was essentially of a sexual nature it must have drawn attention to the sexual value of its object (or rather, its erotic value). This is precisely what distinguishes man from animals: the limit set on free sexual activity gave a new value to what was, for animals, only an irresistible, fleeting impulse, destitute of meaning. (Ibid,48)

One must, however, put this quote in the context of the general argument that Bataille is making. Unlike Lévi-Strauss, who views the affirmative aspect of the incest prohibition as the inaugural moment of culture, Bataille accepts a similar arrangement, but instead twists it
so that it is the negative form, the "No" uttered at the animal behavior, that signals humanity's surpassing of its bestial past. It is this negation of instant gratification that will mark the difference: "Humanity became possible at the instant when, seized by an insurmountable dizziness, man tried to answer 'No'" (1986, 62). Saying "No" to Nature, as Bataille describes it, has only fitfully succeeded. What Bataille hopes to capture, but struggles to represent, are those fleeting moments when this eruptive potential rends the banal routine of a well-ordered existence; the social order is embroiled in a constant dialectic of taboo and transgression, law and excess, economy and expenditure.

When not in the service of reproduction, the heterosexual act, according to Bataille, offers a privileged glimpse into the "beyond" of profane existence. How, then, do the rules of marriage and family fit into Bataille's scheme? Remarkably, he accords marriage a function at odds with his usual libertine proclivities. Bataille offers two explanations: the first, almost quaintly romantic (two terms never associated with his name), involves the deepening of experience that habit and regularity afford: "Without the intimate understanding between two bodies that only grows with time conjunction is furtive and superficial, unorganized, practically animal and far too quick, and often the expected pleasure fails to come" (ibid, 111). The second, much more typical of Bataille, highlights the ritual nature of religious practice, "the whole process of religion entails the paradox of a rule regularly broken in certain circumstances. I take marriage to be a transgression then; this is a paradox, no doubt, but laws that allow an infringement and consider it legal are paradoxical" (ibid, 109). As the legitimate transgression of society's generalized taboo on erotic coupling, the marriage act condones, according to Bataille, the expression of pure expenditure: "physically, the sexual
act is the gift of an exuberant energy. This is true of its more complex forms, of marriage and the laws of distribution of women among men" (1991:41). What is the link, then, between the gift, the sexual act, and the "laws of distribution of women among men"?

One must always keep in mind that Bataille's writing on eroticism is intended as a history of eroticism and not a theory of it. In one sense, he is trying to account for eroticism's dissipation in modernity, not counting its rare, vestigial appearances in mystical experience and wanton sexuality. Marriage, and in particular the role that women have come to play in it, he argues, has increasingly come under the sway of utilitarian calculation and economic productivity. This aspect has superseded the erotic dimension of marriage, in the process changing the nature of women, in Bataille's version, from "festivity" to an economic commodity. Initially, Bataille writes,

the gift is itself the renunciation, the prohibition of immediate, unreserved, animal gratification. Marriage is not so much the act of the betrothed couple as it is that of the woman's "giver," of the man (the father or the brother) who could have freely enjoyed this woman (his daughter, his sister) and who gives her away. The gift he makes of her is perhaps a substitute for the sexual act; the exuberance of giving, in any case, has the same meaning—-that if an expenditure of resources—-as the act itself....The renunciation of one's close kin—-the reserve of the one who forbids himself the very thing that belongs to him—-defines the human attitude that is contrary to animal voracity. (1991:56-7)

Here, once again, is the paradox of the gift: it is a profitless expenditure that is, in the context of a network of exchanges, promised an eventual return. What has developed historically, according to Bataille, is a "contradictory evolution" in which the material aspects of marriage—-gaining the labor productivity of a wife—-have dominated the erotic (ibid,49). As Bataille suggests, "once eroticism was dismissed from marriage, the latter tended to assume a chiefly
material aspect...the rules ensuring the sharing out of women as coveted objects did in fact ensure the sharing out of women as labor power" (ibid,49). Like two sides of a coin, marriage offers the potential for exuberant excess or material utility, sometimes landing on one side, sometimes the other. Bataille does not seem to adopt a strictly post-lapsarian narrative in his analysis of marriage, for there always and everywhere persists the turbulent, rending potential that society only provisionally masks with its smooth veneer.

Women, too, in this story, have an often contradictory function and place. Bataille readily accepts Lévi-Strauss's metaphor of women as a "natural stimulant", likening them, in his inimitable style, to champagne and festivity. They are, precisely, means, or conduits, available to and for men. With echoes of Lévi-Strauss's definition of incest as "keeping to oneself", Bataille extends the champagne metaphor, suggesting that not giving away one's daughter or sister would be akin to drinking champagne alone. Champagne, in Bataille's world, is meant to be offered, shared with friends: "this is the principle governing the consumption of a good whose nature is festive" (ibid,40). It is a gesture outward, beyond the self's own gratification, and in that respect it mimics the potlatch and gift. This movement then sets into motion, or continues in motion, the reciprocal obligations and debts that constitute, in Bataille's own words, "communication" (ibid,43). Women are therefore not objects of productive labor exchanged for economic ends, but they are, in the forms of marriage Bataille is analyzing, erotic objects:

These forms of marriage [by exchange and purchase] are unquestionably dissimilar to those in which we see the humanity of unions, where we assume a free choice on both sides, and yet they do not place women in the domain of commerce and calculation, but assimilate them to festivity, to champagne...

Thus, women are essentially pledged to communication, which is to
say, they must be an object of generosity on the part of those who have them at their immediate disposal...The sexual relation is itself communication and movement, it has the nature of a festival. (ibid, 42-3)

Assimilated to the status of a beverage, women clearly do not fare well in Bataille's analysis. As object, their capacity to incite male desire depends, in some cases, upon their status as prohibited. This, according to Bataille, changes as the nature of sexual relations evolves.

Bataille's notion of a sexual, or erotic, object transforms itself repeatedly throughout his two principal works on sexuality and economy, Erotism and The Accursed Share volumes II & III. But while it is not always simple to follow their development, their multiple and sometimes inconsistent facets are ultimately edifying. In one version, outlined in a chapter entitled "The Object of Desire and the Totality of the Real", Bataille describes the object of desire and the experience of eroticism in patently metaphysical terms. It is the depiction of the transcendental or mystical potential that rests untapped, except in sexual union. In the coming together of the two subjects, desire--represented first by the erotic object--is ultimately transcended, encountering the other's pure desire, and then producing a limit experience beyond mere physicality (1991, 113). In language alternately Hegelian and Lacanian, Bataille portrays a shifting landscape of erotic transcendence, upping the mystical stakes with each page: "now the object is no longer anything but that immense and anguished desire for the other desire...the two desires meet, intermingle and merge into one" (ibid, 113); "that in the embrace the object of desire is always the totality of being...In a word, the object

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9 According to Georges Bataille's biography, "The History of Eroticism," volume two of the Accursed Share trilogy, was written in the early nineteen fifties, but neither completed nor published during his lifetime. The unfinished manuscript was later re-fashioned into Erotism, published in French by Les Editions de Minuit in 1957 (Surya 1992, 672).
of desire is the *universe*, in the form of she who in the embrace is its mirror, where we ourselves are reflected" (ibid, 116); and finally, "its object is precisely the concrete totality of the real; and this implies that fusion with the subject which I clumsily attempted to describe" (ibid, 117). Bataille's "clumsy" and repeated attempts reveal both an often resorted to strategy on his part as well as a theoretical gambit. Trapped by a language incapable of representing exactly the kinds of experience that fascinate and obsess him, Bataille often makes several parries, employs shifting metaphors, and illustrates rather than represent the states he longs to, but cannot, describe. This is not simply a stylistic shortcoming. In his view, the states and objects he is trying to reveal are invariably beyond language but contained by it, so that his metaphors must navigate a realm that language cannot: mystical experience. This "making grasp-able" of ecstatic experience haunts all of Bataille's writing.

This first description of the object of desire cedes its place to a more developed and slightly less metaphysical one. Referring back to his analysis of exchange, Bataille determines that, to best fulfill the requirements demanded of an object of desire, women must first be reduced to the level of object or possession in order to be ultimately risked:

Of course, since the satisfaction of sexual desire requires the possession of a precious object, eroticism does not escape a tendency that is radically contrary to the one I spoke of first. If it corresponds to the desire to lose or to risk, it nonetheless had the effect of starting us down the path of acquisition and conservation,...If women had not become objects to be possessed, they could not have become, as they did, the objects of erotic desire. (ibid, 139)

At this point it appears as if the woman, the wife, can still be an object of desire (even in marriage, as discussed above), and therefore a partner with whom the man can reach his own nirvana. But as a possession, she is also apparently a *thing*, and here Bataille's logic becomes
a bit indecipherable. In one case, Bataille writes, "It wasn't the wife who became the erotic object...As a thing, both because and in spite of male jealousy, a wife is mainly the woman who bears children and works at home: this is the form in which she is objectified in the manner of a brick or a piece of furniture" (ibid,140). Elsewhere, he makes the same point, "Certain women become objects in marriage; they are the instruments of domestic work, of agriculture particularly" (1986:132). While marriage is not, apparently, tantamount to erotic dissipation, there does seem to emerge from within that institution the tendency toward labor productivity that is antithetical to Bataille's own agenda. He does not explain it, but he does offer further illustration.

Not only must the woman "assimilate" to the level of object for an active male desire, but she must also perform that role passively. Whereas Bataille had previously described a forceful confrontation of two active desires in "The Object of Desire and the Totality of the Real," here he falls back into worn stereotypes: "The object of desire must in fact restrict itself to being nothing more than this response; that is, it must no longer exist for itself but for the other's desire" (1991,143). Women, in Bataille's world, are better fitted for this renunciation than men, so that he adds, "with their passive attitude they try by exciting desire to bring about the conjunction that men achieve by pursuing them....They put themselves forward as objects for the aggressive desire of men" (1986,131). The woman's selflessness is not a transcendence of self, like the man's, but a denial and subordination of it. As if the suffocation of Woman's desire in the dialectic of eroticism were not enough of a conceptual morass, Bataille then introduces the figure that will provide the archetype for women's sexual role--the prostitute. One could never argue that Bataille hedged his theoretical convictions in the name
of propriety.

Bataille seizes upon the prostitute as a metaphor or figure that embodies pure loss, that makes the concept of it "graspable". Moreover, she is illustrative of the sumptuary economy of expenditure and gifts that he has attempted to articulate. The prostitute is therefore more than an example to illustrate a concept but is, in her materiality, that concept: "the prostitute forms a definite figure whose meaning is that of loss. In fact, she is not just eroticism but also loss having taken the form of an object" (1991, 141). As the erotic object that stands beyond the limited, procreative marriage situation, the prostitute's power consists of illuminating that limit. She is also, Bataille continues, the condition of possibility of any woman's desirability: "It may be painful, humanly, to admit that the detour of prostitution played a part in the formation of our [erotic] sensibilities" (ibid, 141). To the extent that she can incite desire, the wife/woman plays the part of, draws from the reservoir of, the prostitute.\(^0\)

The prostitute also represents pure loss in that she is part of the circulation of profitless goods that confounds the restrictive economy. In Bataille's explanation, the man offers gifts of jewels and finery, while the prostitute gives back sexual ecstasy. Nothing in this exchange could be considered productive, in the typical sense, and it fits with Bataille's

\(^0\) Bataille quotes William Blake to this effect:

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\begin{align*}
\text{In a wife I would desire} \\
\text{What in whores is always found} \\
\text{The lineaments of Gratified Desire} \\
\text{(in Bataille 1988, 18).}
\end{align*}
\]

One must keep in mind that Bataille is writing about a particular kind of prostitute with a specific status. He will adapt his analysis for different forms of prostitution (see below).
conception of alternate economic epistemologies: "What a woman can give outside marriage cannot be put to any productive use, and similarly with the gifts that dedicate her to the luxurious life of eroticism. This sort of exchange led to all sorts of extravagance rather than to the regularity of commerce" (ibid, 132-3).

In a maneuver reminiscent of his gestures towards historicizing marriage's shift from a hotbed of habitual eroticism to the dull drudgery of domestic humping, Bataille attempts to complicate this simplistic understanding of the prostitute's role by contrasting the courtesan with the "low prostitute". To do this, he details the characteristics of the category of prostitute he favors, in the process embracing the most absurd of stereotypes. His list of traits is both hackneyed and hypocritical for a writer well-known for his championing of base materialism, the solar anus, and an essay on the big toe. The various depictions are:

If we say of a woman that she is desirable, as a rule this is because she is beautiful....it is the feminine aspect, the Venus-like grace...that is essential....Only figures that are slender and even a little wild correspond to what desire is seeking.... desirable beauty always suggests—a world away—youth, flowers, springtime and an upwelling of fresh energy. (1991, 145-6)

Leaving aside for a moment the obvious genesis of these attributes, there is another explanation for their appearance. As Bataille theorizes, "The erotic value of feminine forms seems to me to be bound up with the absence of the natural heaviness that suggests the physical use of the limbs and the necessity for the framework of bone" (1986, 143). In other words, they signify the weight of the working world, the abuse of labored productivity and the membership in the common market of calculated exchanges. In contrast, the prostitute of Bataille's imagination transcends the quotidian demands of work, leading a life of leisure and idleness, unencumbered by daily drudgery. Any trace of a life of labor on her body only
shatters the pretense of mystical transcendence.² In lines that truly bear citing, Bataille distances himself from any remotely realistic assessment of women's condition in his society:
"Under the conditions of wealth, leisure and choice that prostitution reserves for women it is a matter of using paints, jewels and finery to make them more feminine....In contradistinction, women subjected to a factory job have a roughness that disappoints desire, and it's often the same with the crispness of businesswomen" (1991,146-7).

Blind to women's social condition and limited by his own taste for women of courtly indolence, Bataille's conception of how and why women circulate, exchange and become objectified drifts off into irrelevance. To be fair, he does, both in The Accursed Share volume II and Erotism, equivocate on the issue of women's access to desire: "Femininity's attraction for men, and masculinity's for women, represent in eroticism an essential form of animal sexuality, but they modify the latter in a radical way" (ibid,147), and again, "Theoretically a man may be just as much the object of a woman's desire as a woman is of a man's desire. The first step towards sexual intercourse, however, is usually the pursuit of a woman by a man. Men have the initiative, and women have the power of exciting desire in men" (1986,130). Clearly unaccustomed to considering female desire in any way but as a response to male's, Bataille's recuperative gestures here ring conspicuously hollow. Having initially detailed a scenario in which eroticism was ineffable, transcendental, and mutual, Bataille lapses into an absurd, theoretical morass. His investment of the figure of the prostitute as the essence of

²In this regard, Bataille writes, "Prostitution is an open sore as soon as poverty alone puts a stop to the movement" (1986,132), and also, "But the low prostitute, because she has become a stranger to the taboo without which we should not be human beings, falls to the level of the beasts; she generally excites a disgust like the one most civilizations claim to feel for sows" (ibid,134).
female desire deflates his credibility and ventures one's faith. He never attends to
the commodification of desire within the calculus of the prostitute, ignoring completely her role
as anything but a conduit.

In his effort to depict the profound role he views eroticism to play, and to describe the
experience in the process, he stumbles on the steps of stereotype. The broader point that he
makes is that, "What directly excites the body of animals, in a way analogous to the motor
action of light, reaches men through symbolic figures. It is no longer a secretion whose rise
gives rise to another odor, but a constructed image, signifying in sum the essence of
femininity" (1991,147). In other words, language and codes mediate desire, almost, but not
completely, snuffing out its revolutionary potential. Women circulate because men need them
as conduits to mystical experience, but then where does Woman's desire (that he alluded to)
fit? Bataille's adoption, from Mauss and Lévi-Strauss, of a theory of exchange, and his
subsequent construction of generalized economics is exceptional; his wedding of it to
sexuality and eroticism barely furthers its trajectory--in fact it nearly drowns it.

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It is undoubtedly the role of language in gender construction and the determinative
force of the unconscious that attracted Jacques Lacan to Lévi-Strauss's The Elementary
Structures of Kinship. Having first met Lévi-Strauss in 1949 as he was publishing this work,
Jacques Lacan and Sylvia Bataille introduced him to his third wife, Monique Roman, only
years after he had returned from his war-time exile in New York City (Roudinesco 1993,281).
The impact that this friendship had on Lacan's work was dramatic. Indeed, it is at times
difficult to perceive, in Lacan's subsequent work, where Lévi-Strauss's contribution to this
discourse on marriage rules ends and where Jacques Lacan's original formulation begins. This, however, is not to suggest that are no differences between the two theorists' approaches. So that, while Lacan does appear to fully endorse and adopt Lévi-Strauss's formulation of "the exchange of women", he also transforms the register of its applicability, in the process altering the nature of the problematic.

In order to begin to elaborate some of the influence that *The Elementary Structures of Kinship* had on Lacan, I want first to return one more time to the phrase "You are my wife," that ushered in this chapter, since the context within which Lacan situates it patently alludes to Lévi-Strauss's text. The full passage from which this excerpt is taken runs, "As such it [language] is enveloped in the highest function of speech, in as much as speech commits its author by investing the person to whom it is addressed with a new reality, as for example, when by a 'You are my wife', a subject marks himself with the seal of wedlock" (1977,85). There is one particular aspect of this quote which bears close attention: his deliberate use of marriage as an instance to illuminate one of the elementary structures of language. This example plugs directly into the genealogy I am tracing. Unlike many of his allusions, Lacan does not shroud his debt to Lévi-Strauss within arcane references, blank denial or cryptic intimation. In fact, as Elisabeth Roudinesco argues in her biography of Lacan, it is perhaps because of Lévi-Strauss's influence that Lacan was able to generalize his notion of the unconscious and the efficacy of symbols out from the familial drama in which he had previously located it (1993,283). Lacan even goes so far as to chide the psychoanalytic community for ceding the Freudian territories to the work of an anthropologist:
Isn't it striking that Lévi-Strauss, in suggesting the implication of the structures of language with that part of the social laws that regulate marriage ties and kinship, is already conquering the very terrain in which Freud situates the unconscious?

From now on, it is impossible not to make a general theory of the symbol the axis of a new classification of the sciences where the sciences of man will once more take up their central position as sciences of subjectivity. (1977,73)

Lacan will take back the Freudian provinces in this intellectual turf war, but not without following the elaborate network of roads and marks that Lévi-Strauss, the pioneering anthropologist, had already navigated. To show this, I want to focus for the most part on two essays by Lacan--"The function and field of speech and language in psychoanalysis" (1977) and "The meaning of the Phallus"—but in particular the former, for it is there that he is most Lévi-Straussian. I do not intend to elaborate an entire Lacanian theory of the social subject, nor do I claim to represent more than a corner of the Lacanian edifice, but what I do wish to trace is some of the debt Lacan owes to the Elementary Structures of Kinship, and how "the exchange of women" has seeped into a wider domain.

In a very general way, what Lacan's reading of Lévi-Strauss produces is a kind of sifting out of the Freudian subtext that permeates his work. Lévi-Strauss's shifting away from the interpersonal dynamics of the individual in the family to transindividual, social unconscious opens up a corridor for Lacan in which to escort Freud back onto the scene. If it was Freud who discovered the "true" workings of the unconscious with which Lacan often credits him, then it was Lévi-Strauss, and perhaps also Mauss, who illustrated how that unconscious is structured like a language. Lacan's particular genius was to tie those

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3 I am using the Jacqueline Rose translation of the "La Signification du phallus" that appears in her and Juliet Mitchell's collection Feminine Sexuality (1982).
speculations back into the engendering of the subject.

A critical step in emptying Freud of the apparent biological determinism that haunted his reception was the move that Lacan made, in light of Lévi-Strauss's analysis, to drain the traditional Oedipal triad of its reliance upon biological relationships and to replace that familial drama with the function of *naming*. Incest is incest because of the structural positions the actors occupy, not because of their biological essences as parent and child. To be named as a subject is to accede to one's place in the symbolic structure and to play by the rules of Law. Those are both the pre-conditions and the results of the symbolic order, culture, and subjectivity. Or, as Lacan puts it,

The marriage tie is governed by an order of preference whose law concerning the kinship names is, like language, imperative for the group in its forms, but unconscious in its structure....The primordial Law is therefore that which in regulating marriage ties superimposes the kingdom of culture on that of a nature abandoned to the law of mating. The prohibition of incest is merely its subjective pivot, revealed by the modern tendency to reduce to the mother and the sister the objects forbidden to the subject's choice...This law, then, is revealed clearly enough as identical with an order of language. For without kinship nominations, no power is capable of instituting the order of preferences and taboos that bind and weave the yarn of lineage through succeeding generations. (1977,66)

Both the rules of marriage and language inscribe the subject with the marks of Law, with the law of the Law, that, while denying access to the sibling or parent, promises the future availability of a spouse. But it is also that prohibition's instantiation which marks the subjects as named, before incest was even possible (since incest requires those names in order to be incest). Thus it is that the prohibition functions as a kind of impossible, or paradoxical,

\[\text{\textsuperscript{a}}\] Deleuze and Guattari describe this paradox perfectly: "The possibility of incest would require *both persons and names*...Our mothers and our sisters melt in our arms; their names slide on their persons like a stamp that is too wet" (1983,161-2).
hinge; it is for that reason that Lévi-Strauss writes, "Incest is socially absurd before it is morally culpable" (1969,485). However tautological it may seem, one needs the divide between Nature and Culture if only to later erase it in its own surmounting.  

Kinship denominations, then, act as a kind of differential motor-force that propel the subject-as-named into subjectivity, provided that one accepts the entry fee, the debt, that culture exacts from each one of its members. The subject is marked by what Nietzsche called "the instruments of culture" (1967,42), branding her/him with the obligation to return and to partake in the network of signifiers. To discover the scars on the body--the signifiers' effects on the subject, or symptom--one must look to the level of the total social fact, as Lévi-Strauss claims that Mauss intended it: "the notion of total fact is in direct relation to the twofold concern to link the social and the individual on the one hand, and the physical (or physiological) and the psychical on the other" (1987,27). Lacan will adopt this principle literally, outlining the sites at which analysis can unearth the payments made to the social apparatus,

The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood; it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be rediscovered; usually it has already been written down elsewhere. Namely:
--in monuments: this is my body...
--in archival documents: these are my childhood memories...
--in semantic evolution: this corresponds to the stock of words and acceptations of my own particular vocabulary...
--in traditions, too, and even in the legends which, in a heroicized form, bear my history;
--and, lastly, in the traces that are inevitably preserved by the distortions necessitated by the linking of the adulterated chapter to the chapters surrounding it, and whose meaning will be re-established by my exegesis.

5 This is what Lévi-Strauss means by, "The prohibition of incest is where nature transcends itself....It brings about and is in itself the advent of a new order" (1969,25).
(1977,50)

The material effects of the signifier on the body either show up as merely the marks of cultural belonging, as Lévi-Strauss might contend, or as the excruciation of symptomatic subject-effects in the Lacanian field—"A symbol written in the sand of the flesh" (ibid,69). In both cases, however, it is clearly the work of the unconscious that precipitates the subject's (mal)formation.

In what manner, then, do those symbols circulate, if Lacan does indeed embrace the Lévi-Straussian exchange paradigm? Lacan's symbolic economy draws from the reservoirs of the unconscious, as already indicated, but the contours of that labile mass do not readily announce themselves, nor does Lacan's language sit still long enough to ever describe it the same way twice. There is, of course, his infamous formulation, "The unconscious is structured like a language" (1978,149), but that tells us little at all that differs specifically from Lévi-Strauss's conclusions to *The Elementary Structures of Kinship*. In fact, Lacan seems quite taken with Lévi-Strauss's analysis, and in his "Function and field of speech" essay, is similarly impressed with the conclusions that Lévi-Strauss's draws from his analysis of Mauss. For it is in his introduction to Mauss that Lévi-Strauss articulates a concept dear to Lacan—the zero symbol—that Lacan then adopts eagerly to propel his own argument. According to Lévi-Strauss, the zero symbol, or floating signifier, as he also calls it, stands for the, "necessity of a supplementary symbolic content over and above that which the signified already contains, which can be any value at all, provided it is still part of the available reserve, and is not already, as the phonologists say, a term in a set" (1987,64). This is, as was already shown, the role that *mana* and *hau* serve in Mauss's structure. As an empty form that anchors
the structure and drives the movement of the circulating effects, the zero symbol embodies
the imperative to exchange, or the force of the pact that the presses upon the subject. What
the gift is, in essence, has nothing to do with its nature; it acts to enmesh the giver within the
system of obligations. It is for that reason that Lacan writes,

For these gifts are already symbols, in the sense that symbol means pact and
that they are first and foremost signifiers of the pact that they constitute as
signified, as is plainly seen in the fact that the objects of symbolic exchange--
pots made to be empty, shields too heavy to be carried, sheaves of wheat that
wither, lances stuck into the ground--are all destined to be useless, if not
simply superfluous by their very abundance. (1977,61-2)

What makes this potlatch so significant (and Bataille also latched onto this phenomenon), is
the emptiness that these forms dissolve into and the prominence that exchange *qua* exchange
commands. Negating referentiality, these circulating symbols produce effects but do not
signify, materializing, in their movement, the structures that determine the social subject. The
zero symbol is therefore the lack, absence or empty form that produces plenitude, forges
materiality, and inscribes the speaking subject within the effects of the signifier. By producing
its linguistic effects as symptoms, the symbol exceeds communication; it is the psychoanalyst's
job to read and to listen to those speaking parts that articulate themselves through the
symptom and the lapsus, soaking up the pools of signification that the unconscious leaks
through the gaps in communication. Lacan will use the metaphor, borrowed from Mallarmé,
of the worn coin that, effaced of its signifying value, will still, in its simple circulation as
currency, represent the presence of communication even when its value is erased (1977,43).
Like *mana* or *hau*, the zero symbol is both beyond and at the origin of language. Setting
things in motion, the subject experiences it as a drive to act, to participate, or to withdraw.
One can then see more clearly the Lacanian formulation of "desire" as that which is left over when a physical need is communicated via a language that is never adequate to its task.

"Identified with the sacred hau or with the omnipresent mana, the inviolable Debt is the guarantee that the voyage on which wives and goods are embarked will bring back to their point of departure in a never-failing cycle other women and other goods, all carrying an identical entity: what Lévi-Strauss calls a 'zero-symbol'" (Lacan 1977,68). Wives and goods--the formula looks familiar. Is it possible that Lacan, who systematically rethought the gendering of the subject, could simply reconcile himself to Lévi-Strauss's controversial account without so much as a perverted twist in the retelling? Without a doubt the nuances that Lacan adds to the gender story infinitely complicate the picture, but this does not necessarily mean that he abandons in any way the basic tenet of circulating women. A shift is observable, though, as Lacan moves away from a notion of the 'zero symbol' with its concomitant emphasis upon the linguistic nature of the unconscious toward a focus on the role of the phallus (a not altogether different construction) and its determining effects upon the subject.

Lacan drifted away from the generalized description of the unconscious and its analogues (kinship, language) in favor of a microphysics of gender relations. Having made Freud a linguist, he will import linguistics into the Freudian scene, re-configuring the Oedipal drama's principal constituents. It is, as Lacan will repeatedly make evident in "The Meaning of the Phallus", more instructive to mistake the phallus for Mallarmé's worn coin, or token, then to reduce it to the male organ it so (inconveniently) resembles. This point will loom large in the minds of Lacan's critics and serve as the focal point of innumerable arguments,
but for the moment it is most useful to follow closely Lacan's exact words. The relation to the phallus distributes gender identifications, but, as Lacan argues, "the relation of the subject to the phallus is set up regardless of the anatomical difference between the sexes" (1982,76). This, however, does not mean that their paths run parallel since, as Lacan claims Freud had pointed out, "there is only one libido, his text clearly indicating that he conceives of it as masculine in nature" (Lacan 1982,85). What is of critical importance is the relation to the phallus because, as the master signifier, it marks the subject as wanting, the signifier as lacking, and the Other as the fount of all possible satisfactions.

Using words that echo his depiction of the "zero symbol's" function, Lacan, in one of his myriad definitions of the phallus, suggests that, "the phallus is a signifier, a signifier whose function in the intrasubjective economy of analysis might lift the veil from that which it served in the mysteries. For it is to this signified that it is given to designate as a whole the effect of there being a signified, inasmuch as it conditions any such effect by its presence as signifier" (italics added, 1982,79-80). As both a member of the set and the impossible form that constitutes the set as a set, the phallus mirrors remarkably that other formulation. What distinguishes it, however, is the role it must play because of its pesky anatomical likeness.

The 'penis/phallus' controversy is a long and complicated one, Perhaps the only safe, brief conclusion about the whole affair is that, as in many other cases, Lacan's rhetoric is at times ambiguous, contradictory, and elusive regarding the relationship. While it is clear that there is no simple homology between the two identical twins, it is, on the other hand, impossible to suggest that the two members are not related. For his part, Lacan suggests that the phallus, as signifier, is, "chosen as what stands out as most easily seized upon in the real
of sexual copulation, and also as the most symbolic in the literal (typographical) sense of the term, since the equivalent in that relation of the (logical) copula. One might also say that by virtue of its turgidity, it is the image of the vital flow as it is transmitted in generation" (1982, 82). It is not the organ and yet it is also not so neutral as the worn coin that passes from hand to hand. It is a signifier and yet also a function.

I would argue that in this Lacanian schema the phallus has usurped the place that 'woman' had occupied as the circulated object that engenders subjectivity, and yet Lacan must rely upon the anchor that Lévi-Strauss's formulation provides in order to secure the role of the unconscious in the debt structure. In other words, Lacan uses "the exchange of women and goods" in order to argue for Freud's incipient linguistic structuralism, making Freud's Oedipal drama less biologically and psychologically determined. Once the intrasubjective relationships are seen as positional and structural, Lacan has no use for the distinction that women circulate but men do not. Instead, he reconfigures the whole problematic, "phallicizes" it, and reduces both males and females to the level of exchanged. Or, better put, he makes circulate a phallus that leaves in its path subjects called male and female. The difference is slight but, I believe, significant. Had Lévi-Strauss not made the male subject the anchor of exchange, the difference might be negligible; Lacan will make the phallus primary in determining the subject effects, never denying that it is tied in some way to the male organ, but effacing the simplicity of that connection. In sum, the social order is phallocratic, but the phallus is not fundamentally masculine.

The subject's relation to the signifier and to his/her own desire, as Lacan draws it, is thus mediated through the dialectic of being or of having the phallus. Like the gift, the
phallus promises a certain return of plenitude that, once received, only ensnares the subject further into the webs, pacts, and promises of an always deferring, never satisfying signification. Propelled by the motor of desire, alienated by desire's disfiguration into demand, the subject looks to the Other for what it lacks. Lacan has re-written the Oedipal drama into a tragedy of veiled identities, parting glances, and unrequited love; along the way, Freud's developmental model becomes distorted into a game of "who's got the phallus?"

Lacan describes it this way:

What can be seen to emerge in psychological genesis confirms this signifying function of phallus.

Thus, to begin with, we can formulate more correctly the Kleinian fact that the child apprehends from the outset that the mother 'contains' the phallus.

But it is the dialectic of the demand for love and the test of desire which dictates the order of development.

The demand for love can only suffer from a desire whose signifier is alien to it. If the desire of the mother is the phallus, then the child wishes to be the phallus so as to satisfy the desire. Thus the division immanent to desire already makes itself felt in the desire of the Other, since it stops the subject from being satisfied with presenting to the Other anything real it might have which corresponds to this phallus--what he has being worth no more than what he does not have as far as his demand for love is concerned, which requires that he be the phallus.

Clinical practice demonstrates that this test of the desire of the Other is not decisive in the sense that the subject learns from it whether or not he has a real phallus, but inasmuch as he learns that the does not. This is the moment of experience without which no symptomatic or structural consequence (that is, phobia or penisneid) referring to the castration complex can take effect. It is here that the conjunction is signed between desire, in so far as the phallic signifier is its mark, and the threat or the nostalgia of lack-in-having.

It is, of course, the law introduced into this sequence by the father which will decide its future.

But simply by keeping to the function of the phallus, we can pinpoint the structures which will govern the relations between the sexes. (1982,83)

This passage is valuable for the brevity and clarity with which Lacan develops his particular
version of the Oedipal complex. One could make the argument that, in her role as being the phallus, the woman, like the phallus in the sexual economy, does indeed circulate. But that would presume two separate facts that do not fit into the Lacanian paradigm: first, that being the phallus is something essential to women in general, at all times, and not merely the consequence of the other's desire at a particular moment in the sexual dynamic; and second, that being is anything but a desire to be the phallus--to be what the other lacks--that it is the effect of a "masquerade", as Lacan terms it, or of an "appearing" (1982,84). To be the phallus is as possible as to have the phallus is as possible as to say what one means is as possible as to satisfy one's lack. It is for that reason that Lacan can cavalierly suggest that, "there is no sexual relation"; given the foreclosed graspability of the phallus, no relation is possible. All positions aspire to the mark of plenitude the phallus promises, none achieves it.

The swath that Lacan cuts through the conceptual terrain that is the engendering of the sexual subject is circuitous, labyrinthine, and frequently befuddling. I have tried to focus primarily upon drawing connections between the argument that Lévi-Strauss puts forth on kinship, incest, and language in The Elementary Structures of Kinship and the re-writing of that argument that Lacan performs. It is clear that Lacan was drawn sympathetically to Lévi-Strauss's argument as to the nature of exchange, and, in particular to the "exchange of women". I contend, however, that, for Lacan, that reasoning was needed as a lever to rethink and re-write Freud. Once the primacy and function of the unconscious was affirmed, Lacan could get onto the business of reconfiguring the Oedipal drama, surpassing along the way the heart of Lévi-Strauss's argument. He transforms the "exchange of women" into the "circulation of the phallus", severing it from its roots in the patterns of the kinship web.
It is a welcome relief to consider Gayle Rubin's now classic essay, "The Traffic in Women: Notes on the 'Political Economy' of Sex." Moving from Marx and Engels' theories of surplus labor power into kinship analysis and onto psychoanalysis, Rubin traces the outlines of the problematic's history, weaving together the various threads that have bolstered the idea's longevity. What makes her essay so powerful, though, is her willingness both to engage with and to criticize the problematic's persistent misogyny. Reluctant to simply dismiss the field of inquiry, Rubin excavates this quagmire, retrieving the gems and dismissing the dirt. What distinguishes Rubin's reading of theories of exchange is her unwillingness to accept the categories and symbols of these often sweeping, speculative generalizations. Her historical materialist's attention to detail enables her gaze to penetrate the obscurities of convincing interpretations, complicating the tendency toward easy conclusions. While her conclusions are, in the end, further questions, her theoretical interventions pinpoint blindspots, illuminating their inadequacies in the process.

Her reading of Lacan, Lévi-Strauss, Freud, Marx and Engels eventually collides with a conundrum similar to Juliet Mitchell's confrontation with psychoanalysis. Namely, do these male theorists and their theories simply reflect sexist assumptions, or are they in fact describing the mechanisms, already in place, that objectify women? Rubin, stressing the contributions of Freud and Lévi-Strauss, argues that,

They see neither the implications of what they are saying, nor the implicit critique which their work can generate when subjected to a feminist eye. Nevertheless, they provide conceptual tools with which one can build

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descriptions of the part of social life which is the locus of the oppression of women...I call that part of social life the "sex/gender system." (1975,159)

It is with the hammer of the "sex/gender system" that Rubin will drive her analysis into the heart of the problem, pounding a stake into their ungrounded assumptions.

Skeptical of the ease of fit between Mauss and Lévi-Strauss's notion of exchanged object and that of the more contemporary, feminist critique of the objectification of women, Rubin is quick to make the distinction that, "[t]he exchange of women does not necessarily imply that women are objectified, in the modern sense, since objects in the primitive world are imbued with highly personal qualities" (ibid,174). This point, consonant with Mauss's original portrayal, is intended to reassess the dynamics of power as they are manifested in kinship systems. Her contention is that the power rests with the system to enforce the obligations of exchange and movement upon men and women equally. That power is systemic, not solely in the hands of the men; but the rights of bestowal, and the potential to benefit from the exchange, is (ibid,174-5). Rubin allows for a more nuanced appreciation of the role of marriage and kinship rules:

Kinship systems do not merely exchange women. They exchange sexual access, genealogical statuses, lineage names and ancestors, rights and people--men, women and children--in concrete systems of social relationships.... "Exchange of women" is a shorthand for expressing that the social relationships of a kinship system specify that men have certain rights in their female kin, and that women do not have the same rights either to themselves or their male kin. (ibid,176-7)

To generalize the "exchange of women," then, into a catch-all for social analysis only reifies the mechanisms by which sex and gender are in fact constructed, normalizing as much as clarifying.
What it normalizes, according to Rubin, is the systemic drive to differentiate into male and female bodies, and the structural imperative that all unions involve two different genders. The assumption that kinship systems mandate heterosexuality is exactly that—an assumption—and to argue, as Lévi-Strauss does, that the male/female dyad is the smallest viable social unit is to naturalize the sexual division of labor (ibid, 178). Kinship systems, as many authors have mapped them, are incapable of processing sexual relationships outside them, and only are relevant to the description of marriage rules. Or, as Rubin phrases it, "the incest taboo presupposes a prior, less articulate taboo on homosexuality. A prohibition against some heterosexual unions assumes a taboo against non-heterosexual unions" (ibid, 180). While one might argue that all that Lévi-Strauss and others were detailing was marriage rules—and marriage is typically heterosexual—even this caveat, impaired and inaccurate as it is, still leaves the vast blurry areas of gender, sexuality, and human relationships unaccounted for. Rubin poses that challenge to the presuppositions of an obligatory heterosexuality with this question: "What would happen if our hypothetical woman not only refused the man to whom she was promised, but asked for a woman instead?" (ibid, 183). There are, then, in Rubin's estimation, exactly three generalities that one can draw from Lévi-Strauss's analysis of sexual organization—"the incest taboo, obligatory heterosexuality, and an asymmetric division of the sexes" (ibid, 183)—each of which serves to prop up the apparent ubiquity of the "exchange of women".

Having unearthed some of the principal assumptions underlying kinship analysis, Rubin shifts her perspective slightly from the macro-production of gender categories to the more local, intra-familial dynamics that psychoanalysis has traditionally targeted. Her shift
is significant, for it represents the fusion of three dominant, modern paradigms: Marxism, Structuralism, and Freudianism. Rubin uses her "sex/gender system" as a cipher for decoding the complexities of the economic, social, and familial determinants of gender roles. Making her case for such a shift in emphasis, Rubin writes, "Anthropology, and descriptions of kinship systems, do not explain the mechanisms by which children are engraved with the conventions of sex and gender. Psychoanalysis, on the other hand, is a theory about the reproduction of kinship" (ibid,183). After this detour through Freud, Lacan, and their critics, Rubin eventually returns, by the essay's end, to the more materialist positions that catapulted her inquiry.

Briefly, after a short history of the debates surrounding the Oedipal complex and the production of gender types, Rubin alights upon Lacan's explication of the phallic function (influenced as it is by Lévi-Strauss), using it to support her conclusions about the asymmetrical nature of kin systems,

the oedipal complex is an expression of the circulation of the phallus in intrafamily exchange, an inversion of the circulation of women in interfamily exchange. In the cycle of exchange manifested by the Oedipal complex, the phallus passes through the medium of women from one man to another...It is where we aren't. In this sense, the phallus is more than a feature which distinguishes the sexes: it is the embodiment of the male status, to which men accede, and in which certain rights inhere--among them, the right to a woman. It is an expression of the transmission of male dominance. It passes through women and settles upon men. The tracks which it leaves include gender identity, the division of the sexes. (ibid,191-2)

In a certain sense Rubin is making explicit the social critique that rests unspoken in Lacan's discourse; but more than that, she has wrenched open the hermetic seal around the phallus as Lacan theorizes it, placing it into a more specific social/political context.
She is correct in suggesting that more specificity is necessary if such analyses are to elicit anything more than wan generalities, and the further questions she poses direct research into the proper channels: "Is the woman traded for a woman, or is there an equivalent? Is the equivalent only for women, or can it be turned into something else? If it can be turned into something else, is it turned into political power or wealth?...Can women be accumulated through amassing wealth? Can wealth be accumulated by disposing of women?" (ibid,207). Combining these kinds of questions with the keen attention to gendered assumptions that Rubin evidences, far more realistic portraits of the "exchange of women" can undoubtedly surface. The sex/gender system is neither immutable nor natural, and thus is open to major variations. It has even outlasted its uses, she argues, attached like a vestigial organ on the social body: "One of the most conspicuous features of kinship is that it has been systematically stripped of its functions--political, economic, educational, and organizational. It has been reduced to its barest bones--sex and gender" (ibid,199).

While Rubin's descriptions of the phallus's function and form are compelling, it is her prescriptions for social change that ultimately do not live up to the promise of her analysis. Simply put, she reduces Lacan's phallic function to a kind of familial determinism, at one point suggesting that, "If the sexual division of labor were such that adults of both sexes cared for children equally, primary object choice would be bisexual" (ibid,199). While this certainly seems a valuable goal, it neglects almost all of the linguistic and structuralist elements in Lacan's analysis, reducing them to a simple function of a family's division of labor.

A better set of suggestions, closing her essay, typify her contribution to this problem:

Traditional concerns of anthropology and social science--such as the evolution
of social stratification and the origin of the state—must be reworked to include the implications of matrilateral cross-cousin marriage, surplus extracted in the form of daughters, the conversion of female labor into male wealth, the conversion of female lives into marriage alliances, the contribution of marriage to political power, and the transformations which all of these varied aspects of society have undergone in the course of time. (ibid,210)

In a certain sense, Gayle Rubin's essay has come full circle, issuing the same kind of challenge that Marcel Mauss's work called for. She has torn the "exchange of women" out of an increasingly reified analysis in order to recalibrate its conceptual applicability. She is right that as a construct it is both enabling and obfuscating, penetrating and occluding. Without particular attention to the microphysics of gender construction and to the complicated networks of value, power, and relations that make up kinship exchanges, no worthwhile specificity is gained. And too often that lack of analytical attention comes at the expense of a clear-eyed reading of the kinds of power women do possess. Ultimately, it is her precise analyses and sharp gaze that provide the necessary relief. Mauss, Lévi-Strauss, Bataille and Lacan's collective myopia in the domain of women's power and agency handicapped their ability to penetrate the networks of women's interests. Rubin restores an edge to the blunt instruments of analysis that they had made of the "exchange of women". Lacking that political or social specificity, those critics could only relegate women to the status of object, absent any characterizing features.
Chapter IV

When the opportunity arose for me to leave for Paris I was not departing with grand hopes and exotic dreams. In fact, I had already convinced myself that I did not really like Paris, Parisians, the French language, French cuisine, or the fieldwork experience. In retrospect, I was simply intimidated. I had tried to convince myself that I ought to be excited, but mild panic was ascendant. I had nowhere to stay, knew no one personally, had few contacts, and a very meager budget in a very expensive city. Loaded down with forty pounds of books, eight months of clothing, and a computer that would soon prove useless, I dragged my dazed body into a very mean hotel.

Adrift in Paris, a city stunning and imperial, I felt as if I had strayed into one of those lonely landscapes that characterizes a Giorgio de Chirico painting. Amidst the ancient relics and neo-classical architecture I wandered, aware that I was surrounded by meaning but haunted by its significance. Paris flaunts its history. I, only moderately aware of its logic, took an immediate dislike of it. Too preserved, too bourgeois, too significant; I felt it a museum of the nineteenth century, unaccustomed to the profligate speed and chaos of an American megalopolis. Smug and self-assured, it lacked naive dreams and inspiring mimicry, content as it was with its own brand of home-grown culture. If one really strives to, it is quite easy to compile an impressively long list of reasons to resent Paris, and I had mine. But above all it was a city that everyone around the world adored, and that, for me, was reason enough.

I had sketched out a rough but ideal itinerary for the six months I had budgeted myself: one month to focus on honing my language skills; one to two months in the library
to round out my historical grasp of the interwar period; the remainder of my stay I would spend in an around-the-clock search for Sylvia Lacan, eventually including interviews and elegant Parisian dinners with her and her sophisticated crowd of admirers, family and friends. While others might have reversed those priorities, I considered it essential that I should not risk bumping into Mme. Lacan before I was overflowing with witty banter and pithy anecdotes. Moreover, having several months earlier determined that she must still be alive, I needed to reconfirm that fact since, given my rough calculation of her age to be in the eighties, that was not a situation that I could take casually for granted.

I had made a decision that I was going to try to approach Madame Lacan through very particular means. An obvious route would have been through her daughter and son-in-law—Judith Miller and Jacques-Alain Miller—the de facto gate-keepers of the Lacanian empire. The problem, to my mind, was that the Lacanian field was mined with possible pitfalls. It is impossible to overestimate the supercharged factionalization that Jacques Lacan left in his wake. It is terrain that many analysts have intellectually and legally brawled over, family has brought suit over, and many of its participants have memorialized in graphic, and often unflattering, detail. In other words, it is a war zone. While it promised the most direct line of entry, it also represented the very real possibility of an immediate, total freeze-out. Moreover, I wanted to avoid even setting foot into that morass, since I knew that while Sylvia Lacan would certainly have moved freely within that world, it was not her usual domain. My strategy was to try to contact her through other conduits, through a side door, so to speak, in order to avoid being perceived as already infected by the Lacanian in-fighting. She and she alone was my target, to put it baldly, and I mapped out my (oblique) approach accordingly.
No one confronts fieldwork for the first time with a firm grasp on what is actually to happen. My expectation was that all of those minutely detailed plans that had filled my funding applications would be shattered as soon as "real life" exerted its entropic effects. I was mentally prepared to hit a stone wall regarding the life of Sylvia Maklès, and that is essentially what happened. The library offered scant few particulars on her, beyond what I had already come across, so I changed my tack. Knowing that Mme. Lacan herself would have to fill in the portrait, I spent my days with books about Surrealism, the interwar period, intellectuals, the history of French women, and Universal Expositions; in short, almost anything that seemed relevant and that piqued my curiosity. For me, fieldwork was a bit like pearl diving: one takes in a lot of water and expends tremendous energy for a few tiny rewards. Still in denial about the urgency to seek out Mme. Lacan, I spent my days treading water, gaining a bit ground, but mostly surviving.

There is something peculiar to conducting "fieldwork" in a place like Paris. Fieldwork itself is so imbued with an occidental sense of the exotic, and the estrangement it produces, that it loses some of its focus imported into major European capitals. There are significant differences between life as it is lived in Paris compared to New York, or Houston, or Minneapolis, but those differences are along the lines of brand names, prevalence of bread in the diet, and phone habits. Unlike most anthropologists, I was not going to be spending my many idle hours scribbling ethnographic details into a burgeoning pile of notebooks. Clearly, thick description of native customs was not my purpose.

Having once again run headlong into the void that had characterized Sylvia Bataille's life history to that point, and lacking any encouraging results from my few forays into tracking
her down, and unable to find out if she was still alive, I truly struggled for inspiration. Disoriented and solitary, I was trying my best to carve out some purpose for my being there. Isolation, I have come to believe, is essential to fieldwork. Without it, one is content to roam within borders safe and secure. With it, one must venture forth into humiliating, odd, and singular situations for information, entertainment, or at least distraction. It is those strange circumstances that seem, inevitably, to produce the most illuminating moments. But even those are often only transient flashes of insight that fade as quickly as they appear.

In a very real sense I felt a total absence of progress during the first two months of my work. Almost daily I would vent my frustrations. They typically oozed an overwrought quality of bathos as I considered my unfortunate lot:

16 December 1992
I've come to Paris in search of the Real: to touch it, see it, hear it. My library work is always just a prelude to the crack of the Real. Viewing videocassettes of Foucault, Lacan. Listening to records of Lévi-Strauss. Going to lectures by Derrida, Sollers, Bourdieu, Eco. Fleshing out the myths I've been living with for years. In many respects, this trip can only represent a failure. I will bring the Real no closer to me even if I shake Sylvia Lacan's hand or help her out of an armchair. The past few papers, which have labored under the weight of the Real, now come face to face with it. The whole point seems to be to see whether the Real exists, but in the process, to so demystify it and banalize it as to drain it of all perverse interest.

3 January 1993
Once again I am stuck and despondent. I spent the night up cursing my jet lag, fantasizing about other possible lives and trying to keep warm. Today has amounted to about the same thing. Given that I am so miserable here in Paris I ought to make it my new year's resolution to get the hell out.

4 January 1993
As far as my work goes, I can really only foresee interviews with Sylvia Lacan as the remaining good that can come from this otherwise dismal adventure. That is really my only ace in the hole in this one line project, to touch a bit of mythic reality and leave with my little chunk of history tucked away for later
digestion.

6 January 1993
I really don't care anything about Sylvia Bataille, bless her soul. If someone could convince me that there were some value to finishing the project as I have conceived it then I would be delighted. Until then, despair and the abyss.

Sadly, I did seem to lack Gene Kelly's *joie de vivre* at being an American in Paris.

Despite my regular exhortations, I did surface from that period with a fuller picture of the cultural and historical milieu that Sylvia Bataille lived through. Those "wasted" research days also equipped me to begin to understand some of the myths and realities that women formed and that formed around women as they emerged from World War I. Seeking to stake new claims on the scarred moral and physical landscapes of war-torn France, women were making themselves more present in more public spheres than ever before. This was no less true for a Surrealist movement that had its birth in the interwar period. How women fared in this project, however, is hardly a simple story of unmitigated advancement.
Chapter V

Nusch Eluard, a particular favorite of the painter [Pablo Picasso], wore a bone shard that he had engraved especially for her; the others knew it was a special mark of acceptance and approval, Eileen [Agar] said. Eluard kept offering his wife to Picasso as a gift of friendship, but Eileen would not comment on whether or not the gift was accepted. -- Judith Young Mallin

Of World War One's many progeny, few are as enduring, or controversial, as the "Femme-nouvelle" (New Woman) and Surrealism. Born in the crucible of post-War France, in a cultural climate in which definitions, boundaries, and roles were shifting and mutating, the "after-shocks" of these two social moments reverberate still today. Arguably two of the most profound challenges to the ruling orthodoxies of their days, these two forces inevitably collided, leaving sparks, splinters, and masterpieces in their wake. I want to sketch out briefly a few of the major features that they share and at least some of the interesting entanglements that came out of their collision. While their repercussions never wholly determined the choices available to Sylvia Bataille, both contributed in part, at least, to the weave of her social fabric.

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The idea that the nineteen twenties in Paris was a time of remarkable efflorescence is now a well-worn cliché, but it is still surprising to reconsider the variety of paradigm shifting phenomena that redrew the cultural horizon: in 1920 the Parti Communiste first formed in France; by 1921 Einstein's theories of relativity had penetrated the public's psyche; during that same year Freud's work appeared for the first time in French -- Origine et développement de

la psychanalyse—followed by six new works in the succeeding two years (Pleynet 1990,50); Dada exploded onto the landscape, and Jazz boomed. It is impossible to even imagine the vertiginous feelings of grief and joy that the French population must have felt with the war's end, but what is still striking is the onslaught of radically new cultural expressions and ideas that this global disaster spawned.

France lost an estimated three million people in that war. Decimating the work force and creating a wide-scale panic about the weakening of the French nation, France was cleaved by a dilemma: the labor force needed warm bodies—which often meant hiring women—but the reproductive force needed exactly the same, with the identical solution. While the French government invited in a new wave of immigrants to bolster productivity, women were expected to renounce the work and responsibilities that they had earned during the war effort for a new national priority—repopulating France (Johnson and Johnson 1987,9). It was not strictly on religious grounds that France outlawed abortions and the sale of birth control in 1920; the national equation of population and strength had already seen a long, obsessive history (Desanti 1984,30). Into the middle of this pro-natalist fervor, with its essentially conservative view of women's roles, sprang a novel that helped to shatter the old model of women's temperament and behavior. La Garçonne, written by Victor Margueritte and published in 1922, featured an emancipated female protagonist who divorced, slept with men and women equally, and proudly gave birth to an illegitimate child. Condemned by the Church and censured by the government, this modern heroine's exploits resounded through a society ripe for social change but still clinging to traditional Catholic values (Johnson and Johnson 1987,35).
Along with these new kinds of archetypes and opportunities came a parallel revolution in lifestyle. One signal event for reading the change in dress, decor, architecture, and attitude took place in 1925, L'Exposition des Arts Decoratif. The roots of this spectacular stylistic transformation can be traced as far back as the massive restructuring of Paris proper by Baron Haussmann and the Hygienist movements' social engineering, but the phenomenon is more typically post-War--framed by unimagined horror on the one side and some resolute hope for the future on the other. Architecturally, the city was aired out, passage-ways were widened, and the social body was encouraged to breathe. Within the home, styles were evolving away from the dark, over-stuffed clutter of the late nineteenth century in favor of clean lines, sharp angles, steel and glass construction, and most of all, plenty of light (Desanti 1984,16-17). Brightness and dynamism ruled; Sonia Delaunay's swirling designs typifying the era's "modern" look. There was a noticeable rupture with the past, a keen and conscious will to shake loose from the traditions and histories that had dragged this generation into the War's grotesque nightmare.

This new élan manifested itself in the behavior and social patterns of (generally bourgeois) women as well. The concepts of leisure and vacation were barely nascent, but a revolution in the expectations and diversions of many women was emergent. The Hygienist movement had promulgated the virtues of clean air and open spaces, and women, as well as men, took to the country-side in search of regeneration. Exercise toned the body, making it more in step with the era's emphasis on speed and airiness. A sun-tanned body was no longer necessarily the index of manual, outdoor labor, but became instead the skin of vitality and vacations. The new looks for women stressed freedom of movement and trim lines as the
New Woman emerged from the War having dropped the cumbersome layers of previous styles. Along with garçonisme, the Bugatti Royale automobile, with its sleek lines and open top, became the symbol of speed, freedom and modern form, providing quick access to the fresh air and rejuvenating spas of France's outer regions (ibid, 21). Color, speed, simplicity, agility, form and, most of all, freedom marked this renaissance in women's, and men's, new vision.

With the advent of the nineteen thirties and the depression, however, women were still the first driven out of the work force. France's population push frequently thrust women back into traditional, childbearing roles, saddling them with the guilt of reproductive responsibility. While it would take until 1946 for women in France to vote (years, and in some cases decades, behind Anglo-Saxon countries), the tide was already set into motion. Some were in favor of turning back the clock, but a sea change of possibility had transformed women's expectations permanently.

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It was the older generations' war, for reasons that those same old people exalted. It had nothing to do with the young, and yet it was the young who fought it for them.
-- Louis Aragon

Sac au dos... are you familiar with that short story by Huysmans, one of the masterpieces of naturalism?... Well, one just needs to transpose that a bit, make it a little less simplistic, to best get an idea of the mood of young people, including myself. The war of 14 tore us up. It plunged us and our hopes into a cesspool of blood, idiocy, and mud. -- André Breton

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2 From Louis Aragon, Pour expliquer ce que j'étais (1989), and André Breton, Entretiens (1969). These quotes appear on pages 8 and 9 respectively, in the Préface, by Alain Jouffroy, of Fabienne Houlak's edited collection entitled, Folie et psychanalyse dans l'expérience surréaliste (1992).
It would be specious to suggest that only women's roles and attitudes changed dramatically after the Great War. The traumatic effects were pandemic, and the resentment forged by a half-decade of loss and violence could not pass unnoticed in all domains. The sense of squandered youth that pervades Aragon and Breton's quotes speaks volumes about its influence upon them and their friends. Dada had exorcised its demons by repeatedly shoving the West's values back down its throat in paroxysms of nihilistic glee. Surrealism, in some of its forms, on the other hand, sought salvation. That came in the form of the unconscious, or, more precisely, the Freudian unconscious. Surrealists picked up on Dada's rejection of Western, enlightenment rationality and values, but chose to surmount their negative theology in favor of a doctrine that started from the assumption of a liberating unconscious. It perhaps was, as Alain Jouffroy has suggested, the first and greatest challenge of the Occident by the Occident in history (Jouffroy 1992,11). Or, in André Masson's more elegiac tones, "To destroy that occidental edifice of lies, I still believe that to be the Surrealists' destiny" (Masson 1990,99).

With its full-frontal assault upon the idols and values of bourgeois society, Surrealism represented an activist agenda married to a confrontational, shocking aesthetic. Its original members were exclusively male, its regard equally masculine. While her argument centers around the figure of André Malraux during the nineteen thirties, Isabelle de Courtivron's assertion that a more masculinized, virile form of intellectual arose in reaction to the effete, introspective stereotype of preceding decades rings true with the Surrealists as well. She convincingly makes the case that the emergence of this new type—the *Homme Nouveau*—
coincided with,

...growing societal resistance to what was perceived as women's emancipatory gestures during the First World War and in the postwar period. It also converged with a number of associations that gained currency during this period: of writers with homosexuality, intellectuals with passivity, and France with decadence....He established in its place an ethic of action grounded in the pure space of male pursuits, whether revolutionary or philosophical, to which women had no access and thus which they could not weaken or dilute. (de Courtivron 1993,58)

So, despite remarkable gains in freedom of expression and personal liberty, the dominant intellectual movements of the period still considered women primarily as ornament and dressing, incapable of meaningfully contributing to their virile quests. It is this same concoction of testosterone and revolutionary rhetoric that inflected the original Surrealist clique, and women did not enter freely.

The fate and role of women allied with the Surrealist movement is one that is recently well documented. While there are dozens of women associated with the movement in its evolution over many decades, its heyday—generally considered the interwar period—saw few if any women reach the same status as Breton, Aragon, Eluard, Dali and dozens of others. Susan Rubin Suleiman attests to this discrepancy when she claims that during the movement's "ascendant" years—1924 to 1933 by her estimation—the registry of official members included not one single woman (Suleiman 1990,29). This fact, however, gives absolutely no indication of the number of influential, remarkable, and creative women who helped to shape Surrealism, only of their official lack of recognition. This reality is so striking because the women whom

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3 I am thinking particularly of Xavière Gauthier's *Surréalisme et sexualité* (1971), Whitney Chadwick's *Women Artists and the Surrealist Movement* (1985), the Mary Ann Caws, Rudolf Kuenzli and Gwen Raaberg edited volume *Surrealism and Women* (1991), and Susan Rubin Suleiman's *Subversive Intent* (1990), to name four exemplary works.
art historians now value were not entirely unknown, marginal, or alien to the social circles. In many, if not most of the cases, they were the lovers or spouses of the male artists (Raaberg 1991, 1). As is somewhat typical, they made their presence felt, but the arbiters of value—historians and art historians—have only recently recognized their contributions. Fortunately for those artists, there endures their body of work available for historians to reconsider.

The reasons why so few artists and critics took seriously the female artists’ creativity are not simple. Gwen Raaberg suggests that in many cases the women were significantly younger than their male counterparts. For this reason art historians have generally judged them by their later, more mature pieces, works that are often regarded as part of Surrealism’s second, weaker generation (ibid, 2). Isabelle de Courtivron offers a different possibility, namely,

In the early part of the century, a number of French intellectuals chose Jewish companions who had grown up in progressive milieus in which the world of the intellect was not considered with suspicion. These young women, freer in their ideas, less conventional in their mores, made more daring and intellectually challenging companions than their bourgeois Catholic contemporaries. Often, they were also wealthier, enabling budding young writers or painters to devote themselves to building the foundations of future greatness. (de Courtivron 1993, 54)

The willingness, or need, of many women to defer to the "genius" of their partners is not mystifying, given their traditional exclusion from the spotlight that power, celebrity, and creativity attracted. While it did not, fortunately, snuff out their creative visions, it did likely

This long list includes: Jacqueline Lamba and André Breton; Nusch and Paul Eluard; Kay Sage and Yves Tanguy; Leonora Carrington and Max Ernst; Frida Kahlo and Diego Rivera; Valentine and Jean Hugo; Gala and Salvador Dalí; Lee Miller and Roland Penrose; Remedios Varo and Benjamin Péret; and Unica Zurn and Hans Bellmer, to name just a few of the many combinations and permutations.
slow them down.

Another striking fact that one notices about the make-up of the Surrealist women (and men for that matter) is the predominance of non-French natives in the group. Beyond the original core of mostly male writers and poets--Breton, Aragon, Eluard, Crevel, Péret--the majority were native to a range of other countries. This was especially true for the women, and, as Suleiman argues, France has claimed, in the first few decades of the century, disproportionately few homegrown, female intellectuals or writers. This, compounded by the fact that the French did not have the successful suffragette and organized feminist movements of England and America to support them, goes some way toward explaining the relative dearth of French women in Surrealism's first circles. The ensuing growth in the number of women after World War II, she explains, resulted from the influx of new blood and energy to a movement too bereft of dynamism to attract the more consciously "avant-garde" male artists (Suleiman 1990,30-31).

Once the male hierarchy had accepted the women into the fold as artists of merit, what was the social and artistic atmosphere that they could expect to find? Most conspicuously, puerile and romanticized images of women dominated the Surrealist lexicon, defining for women a space as muse, or object, but rarely as productive artist. They were beautiful, mysterious, and inspiring, but only in the abstract. The most prominent, early, female members of the group had to contend with their colleagues' fascination with women as everything but equal. It is ironic then, or perhaps simply interesting, that so many women Surrealists similarly chose to focus upon the female form for their paintings. As Whitney Chadwick suggests:
The consistency with which women artists anchored their imagery in representations of the self suggests that one might well begin with a closer examination of the self-portrait in order to better understand the sources of their imagery and the particular role that Surrealism played, or didn't play, in shaping their self-images as artists.

Surrealism offered many women their first glimpse of a world in which creative activity and liberation from family-imposed social expectations might coexist, one in which rebellion was viewed as a virtue, imagination as the passport to a more liberated life. (Chadwick 1985,66-67)

This social freedom coincided with a parallel alienation from the ambitions that society placed upon women of their social, national, and economic backgrounds. The expectations and roles that French society had allowed for women made them suspect in many of the male Surrealists' eyes. They typically viewed women as conservative, in a league with clerical forces, and emblematic of the bourgeois values of family and home. The conflicting pressures on women—to reproduce or to produce, as the decision often became for them—are manifest in so many of their works.⁵ Negotiating a sea change in cultural expectations, these artists frequently used their paintings to explore the dizzying waves of possible identities.

* * *

Shifting from the historical context of gender relations out of which Surrealism arose, I want focus upon the textualization of "Woman" exemplified in the works of the male Surrealists. In other words, how does the figure of Woman function, and to what uses do the artists confront and use her in their works? What has made the ironies surrounding the movement so sharp is the relatively large numbers of women participating in the movement—perhaps unique in the history of artistic movements up to that date—and the hideously
adolescent and stereotyped representations that dominate the male Surrealists' lexicon. While women often struggled for acknowledgment and consideration within the movement, they were, at the same time, glorified, celebrated and plastered across the Surrealist landscape.

André Breton, (un)affectionately known as the Pope of Surrealism, wrote a rather remarkable passage in a work entitled *Arcane 17* (1945), calling for nothing short of a feminist revolution in knowledge. His oft-repeated quote is striking, upon superficial glance, for its progressive appreciation of women's potential contribution. Put into its proper context, however, its smug certainty and historical incongruity only smack more sharply:

The time will come when the ideas of woman will be asserted at the expense of those of man, the failure of which is already today tumultuously evident. Specifically, it rests with the artist to make visible everything that is part of the feminine, as opposed to the masculine, system of the world. It is the artist who must rely exclusively on the woman's powers to exalt, or better still, to jealously appropriate to himself everything that distinguishes woman from man with respect to their styles of appreciation and volition. (in Chadwick 1985,65)

Upon closer examination, however, one finds within this passage a proclivity that many male Surrealists succumbed to, that is, the idealization of Woman in the abstract, severed from any tie to her concrete capabilities or context. No one construct better embodies their total misapprehension than the *femme-enfant* (Woman-child), repository of unbridled male fantasy.

In order to best understand the fascination that the *femme-enfant* exerted for these men, one must first consider the primacy that the Surrealists accorded to an unfettered unconscious. Drawing primarily upon Freud's discoveries of dream interpretation—employed first-hand by Breton with traumatized war victims during his medical service in the first World War—the Surrealists actively mined the unconscious, looking to find there the revolutionary
underbelly of Western rationality and repression. Discovering sexual fantasy and dream-logic lodged there, they surmised that those two forces, more than any other, would eventually catalyze their subversive agenda. It is no surprise, then, that they would look around them to find the naturally occurring, spontaneous versions of their revolutionary cocktail. The *femme-enfant*—barely socialized, physically precocious, innocent, desirable, unthreatening, unself-conscious, mysterious—incarnated all the attributes they celebrated. Even more than that, she was not of the socially accepted child-bearing age and therefore beyond what they considered to be the "suffocating" confines of maternal conservatism and bourgeois familialism.\(^6\) Photographs from that period document the intense rapture upon the men's faces, mesmerized by the presence of these magical urchins.\(^7\)

The Surrealists were also smitten (led again by Breton) by the notion of *Amour fou*, a quasi-Platonic search for the divinely inspired other half. Roughly equivalent to "love at first sight", but shaded by the adjective *fou* (crazy), this belief that there exists only one Other destined to complete the soul derived in part from Plato's theory of the original hermaphrodite who, after being cut into two halves, spent a lifetime searching for its complement. Possibly

\(^6\) For a vivid glimpse into the not so suppressed hostility that many of the Surrealists harbored towards maternity, their tract defending Charlie Chaplin against his wife in their divorce proceedings, *Hands off Love*, offers a stunning picture: "with her two babies...which she brandishes like the filthy evidence of her own private demands....Everything appears criminal to this woman who believes or pretends to believe that her sole reason for existence is the procreation of brats who will beget future brats" (in Chadwick 1985, 130).

\(^7\) Remarkably, Gisèle Prassinos and Meret Oppenheim, possibly the most famous of all the Surrealists' young prodigies, continued to write and produce throughout their lifetimes, withstanding the Surrealists' appropriation and persisting with their strange and marvelous works. Despite their often dubious motives, the original generation of Surrealist men did have keen eyes, often recognizing nascent talent that continued to influence the cultural landscape for succeeding decades.
because this idea receives its richest treatment in Breton's *Nadja* (1960)—the story of a male protagonist's sudden discovery of a lover, their torrid relationship (he, still married), and her eventual decline into madness and abandonment—the iconography of the female Other consistently entails a kind of youthful, heady eccentricity and social non-conformity. Breton so cherished his ideal of *Amour fou* that he considered profound monogamy central to Surrealism's project, despite his many marriages. No Surrealist really practiced this monogamous ideal—too tempting was the next young, eccentric muse.

Robert Benayoun argues that Woman played a role similar to that of the "found object" in Dadaism: the Surrealists treated her as an object for use that transcended her particularity as signifying and human (Benayoun 1978, 44). They made of Woman a physical text—a vehicle—with which they could construct their vivid scenarios. They mined the myths of Woman for aesthetic ingredients just as they had mined Freud's dream technique for concrete images and poetic texts, disregarding the associations that Freud had privileged in the therapeutic context. This metaphorization of Woman was legion in both their painting and writing, producing an extensive array of woman-objects: *femme-enfant, femme-fleur, femme-fruit, femme-astre, femme-fatale, femme-etoile, femme-flamme*, Gradiva, Melusine, and Woman as sorceress, prostitute, praying mantis, promise, gift, and medium (Gauthier 1971, passim). The figure of Woman signified in manifold ways, and the Surrealists often collapsed a laundry list of poetic associations into one body. André Breton's paean (again from *Arcane 17*) to the mythical figure of Melusine shows exactly this:

Melusine...her belly is the whole harvest of August, her torso springs like fireworks out of the curve of her waist, molded like two sparrow's wings, her breasts are ermines taken in the trap of their own cry, all the more blinding
because they light themselves with the ardent coal of their shrieking mouths. And her arms are the soul of brooks that sing and perfume. And, under the collapse of her tarnished golden hair, all the distinctive features of the child-woman are forever assembled. (in Chadwick 1985, 64)

That women should occupy so many of the canvases and poems that the Surrealists composed is not surprising, since women have been objects for aesthetic contemplation for centuries. What makes this situation so beguiling is the vast cast of objectifications and the intensity of fear and adoration that they convey. Just as women were on the verge of social recognition, capable of attaining heights previously exclusive to men, the sexual liberationist Surrealists let loose with a wicked concoction of tired clichés.

To conclude, I want to discuss three separate attempts to try to untangle the fascination that Woman held for so many of the male Surrealists. While it might be just as enlightening to enact the reverse— to uncover the female Surrealists iconography of men— that proves much more difficult. Images of women, in general, dominate the female vocabulary as well. To explain this, Whitney Chadwick suggests that, "In the Second Sex, Simone de Beauvoir holds up the image of the mirror as the key to the feminine condition. Women concern themselves with their own image, she asserts, men with the enlarged self-image provided by their reflection in a woman" (1985,92). In either case, the male subject seems incapable of taking on referential status. The dialogue about and the struggle for the boundaries of gender definition seem to play out only across the female body in most of the early Surrealist art.

"In one sense, all Surrealist paintings are self-portraits, their sources internal rather than external, their imagery indistinguishable from the structure and functioning of their
creators' minds, their goal self-knowledge, but very few of those by male artists contain recognizable self-images. The exception is Dali" (ibid,66). Chadwick returns to this fundamental irony frequently throughout her text, essentially arguing for looking at Surrealism as a continuation of the formalist obsession with the female subject in painting. Her observation is crucial, for while an avowed exploration of the artists' internal topographies dominates the Surrealists' rhetoric, their fantasies are most commonly expressed through the vehicle of the female body. *Nadja*, for example, while ostensibly about the narrator's relationship to a transfiguring woman, is, in the end, primarily an occasion for Breton to probe his own mental landscapes. Nadja herself is effectively abandoned by the story's end. As Chadwick goes on to argue,

Fueling the male imagination by projecting it onto woman, Breton and Peret turn her into an abstract principle, a universal and an ideal. Passive and compliant, she waits for the world to be revealed to her. What they give us, finally, is not a role for woman independent of man, even as they acknowledge her power and her proximity to the sources of creativity, but a new image of the couple in which woman completes man, is brought to life by him, and, in turn inspires him. The role of the woman artist as a creator in her own right can be sought only in her works. (ibid,65)

While Chadwick's explanations occasionally drift toward generalities that are as penetrating as they are sweeping, her observations are nonetheless critical.

In a different mode, but with certain similar results, Xavière Gauthier approaches the figuration of woman with the a political agenda honed on the oft-conflicting paradigms of marxism and Lacanian psychoanalysis. That Gauthier's ground-breaking work appeared in France in 1971 is no coincidence. The post-'68 atmosphere was rife with Situationist and other sloganeering that strikingly echoed the Surrealists' own tracts. Sexual liberation and
social revolution were in the air, and perhaps most important, a strong feminist movement had
established itself to compete for the intellectual and political imagination of that generation.
One can read all of these impulses coursing through Gauthier's text as she alternately reviles
Breton for his conservative dogmatism while convincingly re appropriating the apparent
misogyny of Hans Bellmer's dolls and drawings. As Gauthier elaborates the litany of
Surrealist fantasies and *femme*-objects, both in their writing and plastic arts, she makes a
forceful case for the relevancy and danger of Surrealism for contemporary artists.

It is specifically through her detailed collection of Surrealist *femme*-objects that the
full impact of the figuration of woman emerges. With upwards of a dozen different kinds of
female hybrids, one begins to lose sight of woman as anything but an open, malleable form,
a repository for fear and fantasy. Gauthier first focuses upon the objectification that props
this operation, invoking the name of Marx, though it could just as easily have been Mauss or
Lévi-Strauss: "It follows from this that the forms of relation with woman (to eat her, to
collect her, to drink her, to breathe her, etc.) are simply so many ways of consuming her, so
many ways of manifesting a desire for possession. And we know that this need to transform
*being* into *having* is typical of capitalist society" (Gauthier 1971, 118). It is also typical, one
might add, of exchange scenarios. Woman functions as a kind of token of exchange,
circulated but not circulator.

Gauthier then pushes her analysis further, taking a step back from the particular
figurations to examine the general operation. Gauthier, up to this point, has lumped the
*femme*-objects into categories of good- and bad-objects, roughly corresponding to the charge
with which the Surrealists endow them. If woman is capable of being both adored and feared,
Gauthier argues, then she is, in effect, nothing in particular:

"Flesh to consume, she is also a devourer of men. Angel and demon, fairy and sorceress, she is the salvation and the fall of man. She guides him and leads him astray.... She symbolizes as much purity as sin. One and many, she is rest and movement. Victim and butcher, she nourishes and destroys man....She is his protector and protected, she gives to him life and death. She is his mother and child. Sky and earth, vice and virtue, hope and despair, she is at the same time God and Satan.

If she can be all of these things, that clearly means that she is not any one thing, outside of man's head. She is nothing, except a masculine invention. (Gauthier 1971,194)

"Headless", as Gauthier at one point calls her, Woman is not a contributor to her own fabrication, but simply a mindless vehicle, with few distinguishing marks. As an index, simply, of masculine desire, woman is draped anonymously all over Surrealist texts. As a force of salvation, however, she is glorified and sacralized, idealized beyond her individual incarnation. She is, as Gauthier suggests, citing Breton, the "great promise" of earthly salvation (ibid,145). She does not possess the power, but instead it pours through her, and it is only as a means for attaining the glory of that power that the male Surrealists address woman.

Where, if anywhere, is the male body? Does desire wrack the male body, splitting it apart and open, splaying it across tableaus, segmenting it up and spilling its contents? Man appears occasionally on the Surrealist landscape, usually dressed, dapper and demure. Gauthier will argue that René Crevel, the only avowed homosexual in the original group, was the only Surrealist capable of making his body present while not reducing woman to some stunted object. Although her argument is a bit too essentialist, her more general point is valuable: "This total refusal of the male to make of his body an object of desire goes together with his need to reduce woman to an object of desire....If Crevel did not feel this need, it is
without a doubt because he had the possibility to make his body a desired object" (ibid,237).

This point vaguely echoes an argument that Luce Irigaray makes in her article "Commodities among Themselves". There, she explores the masculine nature of exchange economies, suggesting that exchange is fundamentally homosexual, with woman acting as simply a medium through which homosexual alliance is formed: "Thus all economic organization is homosexual. That of desire as well, even the desire for women. Woman exists only as an occasion for mediation, transaction, transition, transference, between man and his fellow man, indeed between man and himself" (Irigaray 1985,193). Open, male homosexuality is a threat to the system because it explicitly betrays, or unveils, a homosexuality generally occulted by the flow of women (ibid,193-4). This means that male desire is redirected and idealized toward the female other, but that other is only a veiled substitute in a principally masculine chain.

Offering a slightly more nuanced reading of the Surrealists' female trouble, Susan Rubin Suleiman appeals to a different psychoanalytic reading in order to simplify the problem. To a degree, Suleiman shares Anne-Marie Dardigna's (1981) conclusions that avant-garde practices often reveal striking similarities, despite their superficial disparities. She cites Dardigna's judgment that,

The twentieth-century is characterized in literature by the total freedom of the subjective instance; the subject can finally tell all about its fantasies, its perversions, its hidden desires. That is well and good...But what voices are heard then? Always those of men. And what do they say? Nothing new: that women are dangerous, that they must be dominated, that their "flesh" must be conquered by assimilating them [to a male model] or by putting them to death. (in Suleiman 1990,83)

While one is often bored to the point of such disdain by constant adolescent ramblings in the
name of avant-garde iconoclasm, Dardigna's blanket statement disables reading practices as much as it enables them. Suleiman, on the other hand, has a bit more patience, seeing in certain instances truly subversive moments, even when clouded by pathetic ejaculations. Her main criticism, however, does not stray far from Dardigna's; whereas she grants a longer leash to the male avant-garde, she also hears in their strategies a disturbing, insistent theme.

Suleiman illustrates her dilemma through a reading of Bataille's *The Story of the Eye*. A clearly perverse, obscene, and brilliant text, it has insinuated itself into the pantheon of transgressive texts so admired by the new wave of French (post-structuralist) literary critics. It is a work that insistently undermines textual norms and forms but also re-enacts some tired and old transgressions with female bodies and organs. Not wanting simply to dismiss the work for its virulence, Suleiman struggles to find a proper place for it. Her larger and, for this argument, more relevant analysis widens out to include several other of Bataille's texts, and it is Bataille's fascination with the maternal figure that draws her close attention:

[I]n Bataille's fiction it is always a woman (and in the posthumous *Ma Mère*, it is the mother herself) in whose body the drama of transgression is played out. For the female body, in its duplicity as asexual maternal and sexual feminine, is the very emblem of the contradictory coexistence of transgression and prohibition, purity and defilement, that characterizes both the "inner experience" of eroticism and the textual play of the pornographic narrative. (ibid,85)

This particular drama, however, does not include the woman, as Suleiman indicates, except as conduit to a greater plane of masculine conflict.

Woman functions precisely as a stage, a medium through which the male subject negotiates his relation to another male figure -- the Father. The circuit is always male, as Gauthier pointed out. The limit against which the transgressive act bumps is what Lacan
terms the "paternal function". In other words, it is the name of the father, or, as it most powerfully appears, the Law. Bataille's work in particular, though this could be said for so many of the Surrealists, is engaged in a constant flirtation with limits and Law. Suleiman correctly pulls the veil off the fundamentally masculine nature of transgression that occupies itself with female sexuality only as a means to confront and resolve its relation to the father figure. Speaking in terms of her original dilemma, Suleiman concludes,

What does appear to me certain is that there will be no genuine renewal, either in a theory of the avant-garde or in it practices, as long as every drama, whether textual of sexual, continues to be envisaged...in terms of a confrontation between an all-powerful father and a traumatized son, a confrontation staged across and over the body of the mother. (ibid, 86-7)

Once again a familiar pattern surfaces. Man addressing man through the body of woman. Man is named, Woman is not. Absent any characterizing features, Woman is re-molded into any form. In these cases, the forms are means by which the Surrealists test the limits of representation, the limits of aesthetic propriety, the limits of bourgeois social norms—in short, the limits of the Law. Absent at the origin of the movement, women were only included in the abstract, multiply figured on the Surrealist landscape. Like the zero symbol, she fascinates and threatens.
Chapter VI

FEMME-ENFANT

REALITY-FANTASY

She didn't look her age and had the appearance of being Lacan's daughter rather than his companion. -- Zanie Campan

Throat clenched, heart pounding, she [Sylvia Bataille] has the look of a captured beast. -- Armand-Jean Cauliez

And finally Sylvia Bataille, who plays the young girl, expresses in a mesmerizing way--childlike grace accented with little bursts of her sensual voice--that sort of innocence from which arises the first desires of adolescence. -- Jean Rougoul

The young girl [Sylvia Bataille in Une Partie de campagne] has never read Freud, she hasn't followed the Existentialists to the masked balls on the Rue Blomet, and she has certainly not heard the florid phrases that accompany a glass of anisette in a bistro on the Rue Lepic. -- Léo Sauvage

We have all admired, at the cinema, the face of that ravishing beauty with the long, drawn, green eyes. In Renoir's Une Partie de campagne, she plays the role of that pure little angel with an abundance of talent; hypocrite and naïf, that is exactly what Sylvia Bataille is not. She was the wife of Jacques Lacan after having been that of Georges Bataille. -- Madeleine Chapsal

In effect, in my family, thought was exclusively reserved for men. It was their privilege, their mark of virility... Absolutely no question of a woman


2 1962,42.
3 1946,165.
4 1946.
5 1984,229.
claiming it for herself. -- Laurence Bataille\textsuperscript{6}

I only had to bring up the topic of the cinema with Sylvia for her to immediately launch into a range of non-conformist, lucid and concise opinions. She has the gentle face of a child, alert and sensitive, green eyes streaked with brown, porcelain skin, and a marvelous clarity to her gaze. -- Françoise Holbain\textsuperscript{7}

\textsuperscript{6} 1987,67.

\textsuperscript{7} In Philippe 1961:74.
Chapter VII

What is repeated, in fact, is always something that occurs—the expression tells us quite a lot about its relation to the tuché—as if by chance... The function of the tuché, of the real as encounter—the encounter in so far as it may be missed, in so far as it is essentially the missed encounter...

-- Jacques Lacan

It would be no overestimation to suggest that my search for Sylvia Lacan, or "Sylvia Lacan" (at this point I no longer quite knew if there was a difference), was rapidly spinning out of control. I could have very easily displaced my desire into research on other, related subjects, but I was in Paris for one reason and one reason alone. It would also be no overestimation to conclude that I had absolutely no idea how to begin to locate her, or even, and here this sticky problem arises again, whether she was still alive. I would even have written to her directly, without proper introduction, had I simply had her address, which I did not. In any given major world capital it is not so hard to imagine any random individual with a modicum of common sense finding another. In other words, it should not have been so complicated for me to find out the whereabouts of Mme. Lacan, had the whole endeavor not become so suffocatingly overdetermined.

I had already spent several months doing perfectly respectable research at the library on matters peripheral to Sylvia Bataille—Surrealism and women, Ethnology and Surrealism, Psychoanalysis—but time was quickening and the pressure increasing. But more than that, I was running out of options. I was treading water, or more precisely, beginning to take in quite a lot of water. I was simply without a clue. To break the tension, I luckily had the visit

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of an anthropologist friend to look forward to, and part of my plan was to show off Paris's new opera house by seeing Tales of Hoffmann there with her. After waiting a good hour and half in line for the cheap tickets, we, quite strangely, illogically in fact, decided that the opera was too long and that we wouldn't have time for a proper dinner. I cannot explain the logic of this peculiar decision now; suffice to say that we made the hasty decision to eat first, and then go see a movie instead.

I would not bother with this re-telling except that it was under these very odd circumstances that I fortuitously bumped into a former college acquaintance at the tiny movie theater. Never more than familiar with each other, we both stared, muttering, "I know you from somewhere." After piecing together our shared past, we exchanged phone numbers and went our separate ways. I might not have ever even called her back except that I knew so few people and was, frankly, bored. As it turned out, she was in the process of finishing her program in cinematography at a local institution. As we briefed each other on our respective career and life paths, she let me in on a little secret: there was a beautiful, little film library attached to her school that was open to the public and quite well stocked. She offered to take a look for anything on Sylvia Bataille, and promised to get back to me later.

This whole scenario took place over a number of weeks, and in the meantime I was making hesitant, baby steps in other directions. I was planning to send a letter off to a woman whom I knew was a friend of both Jacques and Sylvia Lacan during his lifetime, and from whom I naively hoped to get a letter of introduction. Not even knowing whether Mme. Lacan was still alive, I had no other choice but plow ahead, keeping my fingers crossed that I wasn't going to offend anyone recently in mourning. Predictably, I did not know this
woman's address, as is my style, so I was forced to search for her through her publisher.

Knowing that I could not just wait on her response, I had in mind two other writers whom I knew to know the Lacan family, and whose addresses I might also get from their publishers. I do not recommend this kind of approach, but it was all that I had at that point.

Frustrated because the publishers would not freely give out the locations of their charges over the telephone, I thought that my re-assuring presence might speed things along, so off I headed to their offices. As it happens, both of the two houses that interested me are located on the venerable Rue des Saints-Pères. Both were closed. Suddenly I remembered that a gallery (located, coincidentally, on the same street) in the area had presented a collection of photographs of Jacques Lacan, and that the curator was a possible source of information. It, too, was closed.

Convinced that every door to every slim lead I had would forever be sealed shut to me and my inept ways, I wandered toward the closest Metro station to head home. Living where I did at the time, that station was the Musée D'Orsay. From the Rue des Saints-Pères I had the choice of either the Quai D'Orsay—which would have been much windier on this blustery day—or the Rue de Lille. It is no surprise to anyone who follows the Lacan family saga that Dr. Lacan's famous office was at 5 Rue de Lille, and that Georges Bataille had lived, at one point during the nineteen thirties, at 3 Rue de Lille. Given the symbolism of the street for me, and that it was a cold day, I chose the latter.

As I made my way down the elegant street, I noticed that the exterior door at 3 Rue de Lille was wide open and from the inside glowed a lush, green garden. Curious to see the verdant garden of the excremental philosopher, and frustrated enough not to concern myself
with arousing suspicion, I snuck in the door. I do not even remember the garden. For there, on the row of apartment door buzzers was,

Lacan, S.
rue. bat.

Shaken, giddy, and shocked, I frantically searched about for other clues, desperately trying to remember whether Jacques Lacan had a family member whose name started with the letter "S". The name "Sybille" kept coming to mind. I had no reason to think that this could not be her address. Undaunted, I looked to the mailboxes. There I came across more ambiguous clues: the names "Lacan Bataille-Gomez" were affixed to one of the boxes. This was neither proof positive nor negative, but I had stumbled upon something. I remember thinking that Sylvia Lacan could be behind one of the doors, mere feet from me. Like a child discovering a longed for treasure but awed by its magnificence, I fled.

Someone with greater aplomb would surely have handled the situation differently. Rung the door bell, for instance. Still, I had entered an inner sanctum. Not the inner sanctum, of course; but after a rash of unopened doors, this was cause for minor celebration. I really hadn't learned anything new, in the end, but just this brush with 'Lacan'-s and 'Bataille'-s added a tangible quality to my quest.

It also unearthed some latent feelings that had been bubbling along since the project's inception, and which now came to the fore. The scrawled notes that I recorded that afternoon in order to not forget one moment, sight, or smell from that ephemeral encounter with a doorway, allude to it,

4 March 1993
If nothing else, I now knew where she lives and could, if necessary, write to
her. If the street were not so calm I would even stake it out. Made me realize how utterly voyeuristic and weird this process of being fascinated by another person is. If it were some object, that would be different, but to be so intrigued by a person brings up all kinds of strange, intrusive, pathological, stalker thoughts. What is the nature of the attraction?

I had visions of the b-movie The Fan. A young, over-zealous fan shadows an ageing actress, played by Lauren Bacall. As the fantasy world of dinners and meetings that he constructs around her begins to unravel, he gradually drifts into homicidal obsession. While I was nowhere near that point yet, did the nature of my strange pursuit differ dramatically?

At about this same time my old acquaintance called me back to say that she had found nothing listed in the library's card catalog under the name "Sylvia Lacan". Knowing that she had always used the name "Bataille" during her acting days, I suggested that I would love to see the library anyway to look some things up, and could we go together some day? Walking into this gem of a room with a view overlooking the Eiffel Tower and all of Paris, I headed straight for the card catalog. There were, in fact, two cards under "Bataille, Sylvia". Instantly the title of the article on the first card grabbed me by the throat:

"Sylvia Bataille, ou l'absence..."

Stunned by the wicked coincidence, I looked to the next card. It read, simply,

"Les Fiche de M. Cinéma"

When I enquired at the desk what that document might be and whether I could request a copy of it, they informed me that it, unfortunately, was impossible to locate.

Was I bound to find 'absence' at every turn? Pinballing back and forth between the ridiculous and the sublime, my search was attaining vertiginous dimensions. What exactly does it mean to find "absence"? That idea itself seems oxymoronic. Perhaps I was draining
the concept of its significance because, like a new word one learns, I was finding it everywhere I looked.

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The library in which I was now ensconced yielded a motherlode of information about the film career of Sylvia Bataille. Wonderfully ambiguous quotes about her abounded. Material was piling up in my previously barren notebook. I spent glorious days rifling through exotic film magazines from the nineteen thirties, the magnificent views of Paris filling my moments of distraction. These were not, per force, heady days, but the abundant progress I was making felt like just that, progress. I was even able to forget, momentarily, the dripping away of time. Whole day after whole day I spent with articles, interviews, and photos of Sylvia Bataille. After such a lengthy, fallow period I was blissfully drowning myself in pure, clear research. Such phases cannot last indefinitely, and in this case, I was awakened from my dream by my own nagging sense of duty. Moreover, and I now am starting to sound like a broken record, I still had no proof that it was Sylvia Lacan at 3 Rue de Lille, and no real sense whether this woman was even still alive. It was under these agonizing conditions that I entered the following into my journal:

23 March 1993

It has been now about two weeks since I wrote to _____ and the hope that she would contact me is waning. Moreover, I feel like my other contacts are equally remote, or at least out of telephone range, and that it may be time to contact Sylvia herself. There is so little time remaining that I can ill afford to wait another two weeks for anybody. To that end, I went to look again at Galerie Saints-Pères and decided to wander down Rue de Lille again. When nothing works, one can always wander down Rue de Lille. Of course, this time someone was polishing the letter slot on the outside door to 5 Rue de Lille, and gathering up my courage, I asked whether there existed a gallery behind the closed shudders, which I was certain there was. The kind woman
said yes, and that I should ring. Feigning nonchalance, I then asked whether this was the previous residence of Dr. Lacan, an obvious question given the plaque stating just that. She answered yes. "And Madame Lacan, is she still living?" I innocently asked. "Yes." "And is she still residing at 3 Rue de Lille?" Of course. Okay. What a marvelous door this is." And off I strolled, knowing only that she still lived and still lived there, where Georges had in the nineteen thirties. I might have asked whether she knew Sylvia, but that would have probably been pressing my luck. Still, though. Anyway, so now I contemplate THE letter. The stakes become rather gargantuan, but what else? I should try to find her telephone number, and the irony is that there is listed a Sylvia Bataille, on Rue Vieille du Temple, Georges Bataille still at Rue de Lille, I believe, and Laurence Bataille, somewhere. Do any of these character really exist?

With barely a month remaining in which to complete my work in Paris, I had only one thing left to do before I would be forced to ring anonymously, unannounced at her doorbell, a feat I knew I was constitutionally incapable of performing.

29 March 1993
Sent letter to Sylvia Lacan.

30 March 1993
Received response from Madame ________.

Having already given up any hope of response from Madame ________, I was surprised by the letter. She admitted to no longer being in contact with the Lacan family, and wished me well in my endeavor. It was now up to Madame Lacan to find something sympathetic, something that interested her in my plea for meeting with her. Out of the blue, with no connections in a city that is built upon social networks and introductions, I knew that my chances were slim that she would even be piqued enough to respond. Here is a translation of what I sent to her:

27 March 1993

I would like first of all to introduce myself. I am an American anthropologist here in Paris to do doctoral research from Rice University in Houston, Texas. The subject of my research is the, "contributions and roles of women in the
Surrealist and psychoanalytic movements between the two world wars."
History, as it has been too often written, concerns itself with great events and
works. While there has been much written on the era, there has been scarcely
little about the women involved, whose influence is, however, incontestable.
What I am most interested in, as an anthropologist, are the familial, social, and
professional structures which are often misrepresented precisely because
women's contributions are ignored.

While pursuing my research I have often been struck by the richness of your
life, a life decidedly unique in this century: you were the star of one of the
most beautiful films in French cinema--"Une Partie de campagne"; a
celebrated actress in twenty other films; a member of the October Group; and
married to two of the most important intellectuals of our time. Your role in
these influential currents has not been written, and, if you would permit me,
I would like to record your thoughts, memories, and ideas regarding this era.
For me, this would be a tremendous honor, for without your testimony, the
picture will never be complete. I do not want to bother you so, of course, this
could be as short as you wish it.

Unfortunately, I leave Paris at the end of April, and I truly hope to be able to
meet you before my departure.

As I await your response, Madame, please accept this expression of my
greatest respect.
Chapter VIII

Ultimately, the whole imposing apparatus of prescriptions and prohibitions could be reconstructed a priori from one question, and one alone: in the society concerned, what is the relationship between the rule of residence and the rule of descent?

--Claude Lévi-Strauss

At the age of nineteen, with her parent's necessary, legal consent, Sylvia Maklès wed Georges Bataille, age thirty. The year was 1928. She gave birth to their only child, Laurence Bataille, in June of 1930. They separated, though not officially, in 1934. In 1939, while Jacques Lacan was still married to his first wife, Marie-Louise Blondin, he began a romance with Sylvia Bataille. Sylvia Bataille gave birth to a daughter, Judith Sophie, in July of 1941. The father was Jacques Lacan.

This daughter of Jacques Lacan and Sylvia (Maklès) Bataille was named Judith Sophie Bataille, taking her patronym from her mother's first husband. Jacques Lacan and Marie-Louise Blondin divorced in December, 1941. Sylvia Bataille officially divorced Georges Bataille in August of 1946, and married her second husband, Jacques Lacan, on July 17, 1953. Jacques Lacan was then legally recognized as Judith's father twenty-two years after her birth, so she thus became Judith Lacan. Two years after she changed her last name from Bataille to Lacan, she married Jacques-Alain Miller, changing her name, finally, to Judith Miller.

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In October of 1939, Georges Bataille--separated but still legally married to Sylvia Bataille--began a romance with Denise Rollin. He lived in Saint-Germain-en-Laye, she at 3

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9 Lévi-Strauss 1969,493.
rue de Lille. In 1942, Sylvia Bataille and Jacques Lacan were looking for lodging, and Georges Bataille alerted them to an open apartment next door at 5 rue de Lille, into which they moved. Bataille and Rollin then moved out of Paris in the end of March of 1943 to evade the German army's occupation of Paris, and installed themselves, Georges' daughter Laurence, and Denise's son Jean, in a town called Vézelay. There, they made plans to bring Sylvia Bataille and her companion Jacques Lacan to Vézelay, going so far as to rent a house for them. Those plans never materialized. Instead, Diane Kotchoubey de Beauharnais, married, moved into that house. She and Georges Bataille began a love affair. Denise Rollin then broke with Bataille.

Upon Paris' liberation from occupying forces, October of 1944, Georges Bataille and Denise Rollin gave up the apartment at 3 rue de Lille. Georges Bataille had never officially lived there. Jacques Lacan then grabbed it up, relocating Sylvia Bataille's mother--Nathalie Maklès--and her two daughters--Laurence Bataille and Judith Bataille--to that apartment.

Eventually, 5 rue de Lille became Jacques Lacan's domain, the inner sanctum where he saw his many patients and developed his robust practice. There is presently a plaque by the door indicating exactly that. He and Sylvia resided at 3 rue de Lille.

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If one desires to find Sylvia Lacan, one must look in the Paris phone book under the following entry:

Bataille, Georges 3 rue de Lille
Chapter IX

What traces can one find of Sylvia Bataille's life in the pieces of paper, photos, formulae, shards and fragments that have been so kind and generous to Georges Bataille and Jacques Lacan? How much of her can we precipitate out from works devoted to the great men she surrounded herself with and brought together--Lacan, Bataille, Masson, Renoir, Carné, Prévert? And what status, ultimately, do these traces have relative to a biography, a life history, a mythology, or a portrait? Sylvia Lacan rarely had the chance to represent herself in the texts that will survive her, but she is still there, figured indelibly. Two sources--Jacques Lacan's biography by Elisabeth Roudinesco and Pierre Phillipe's magazine feature and interview with her--flesh out the major events in her life. Brief sketches, the contours of her character, a flash of humor and insight, a piercing regard, she lives in the details and interstices of others. Only on occasion does she emerge from her relative obscurity, and even then it is as someone else. Piecing together these fragments and moments can at best present a virtual whole, a textual whole, an illusion of unity, but that is all the technology that a biographer ever has at her/his means. Located somewhere between alchemy and scholarship, a textual life begins to take form.

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Sylvia Maklès was born on the first of November, 1908, in Paris. One of four girls and a boy born to a father of Roumanian Jewish descent--Henri Maklès--they were raised in neither great wealth nor great poverty, living off the irregular proceeds of their father's commercial enterprises (Roudinesco 1993,170). Their mother, Nathalie Chohen, must have helped to inspire the sisters with a particularly modern version of their possibilities, for each,
in differing ways, cultivated for herself a circle of intelligent and imaginative friends. Educated at boarding school on the avenue de Villiers, it was there that they also befriended the Kahn sisters--Simone and Jeanine, wives of André Breton and Raymond Queneau, respectively--who, through their own marriages, further expanded the circle of friends and relations that would comprise Sylvia Maklès' world. Bianca Maklès entered medical school, eventually abandoning it, but along the way forged friendships with André Breton, Louis Aragon, and her future husband, Theodore Fraenkel (ibid,170). Fraenkel, the "fourth musketeer" of Surrealism, eventually did become a psychiatrist and generalist, frequently acting as the physician to the Surrealists. Rose Maklès wedded the Surrealist painter and spiritual twin to Georges Bataille, André Masson. And Simone Maklès also married an intellectual--Jean-Baptiste Piel--a less well-known thinker who, nonetheless, edited the journal Critique along with Georges Bataille. What is most significant in these marriages is simply the historical texture that they give to the Maklès family and, in particular, to the four sisters. While none was to become a intellectual herself, it is nonetheless clear that there was something beyond simple beauty, or coincidence, that drew learned men to them.

Sylvia Maklès, early in her life, professed a keen desire to fashion a career in acting. Following in the footsteps of her older sister Bianca, who had dropped out of medical school to pursue acting with Charles Dullin's troupe, Sylvia eventually moved in with Bianca and Theodore Fraenkel, emulating her sister and role model by eventually learning from Dullin himself as well (ibid,170). From her studies with Dullin she moved on to join the Compagnie des Quinze (Company of Fifteen), where she had her acting debut in a stage production directed by Michel de Saint-Denis (Phillipe 1961,72). One can trace the origin of her
cinematic desires, according to Celia Bertin, to a scene that took place when Sylvia Bataille was nineteen or twenty." The story has it that Jean Renoir was screening his silent film *La Petite Marchande d'allumettes* (The Little Matchstick Girl) at the Vieux Colombier Theatre. Sylvia Maklès, impassioned by his work, strode up to him in the street afterwards, stopped him, and expressed her fervent interest in making movies. "You must wait," he told her, unaware that this young women would later, through her remarkable screen presence, help, in however modest a way, to cement Renoir's reputation as one of the century's premier film auteurs (Bertin 1986,99).

It was already the case by the mid-nineteen twenties that Sylvia Maklès was surrounded by the names that would become synonymous with the French artistic and political avant-garde. Through her friendships with Simone and Jeanine Kahn she was often in the company of André Breton and Raymond Queneau. Her relationship with her older sister Bianca, and thus, by marriage, with Fraenkel and his friends enabled her to circulate regularly in the Dada and Surrealist worlds. Her presence cannot simply be attributed to proximity and convenience. All accounts of her life suggest that she was an active, lively part of all collections of artists, thinkers, and activists. While her stunning, youthful beauty is

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"Celia Bertin describes Sylvia Bataille as being fifteen when the encounter took place. But *La Petite marchande d'allumettes* is routinely dated as 1928, (a date which is posited by Elisabeth Roudinesco in her version of the story, which she owes essentially to Bertin), which would have made Sylvia Bataille closer to twenty. The confusion quite possibly derives from the fact that Sylvia Bataille seemed to have claimed, for professional or personal reasons, that her year of birth was 1912, not 1908. This is the case, anyway, with the brief biography of her that appears on the backside of *Les Fiche de Monsieur Cinéma*, a sort of large format trading card, or publicity shot, chronicling thousands of French actors. Either this was her industry-acknowledged age, or it is possible that she herself maintained the falsehood when speaking with Ms. Bertin."
sometimes used to explain her presence amongst the luminaries, those who knew her
comen always upon her radiant intelligence, and this generation of intellectuals and artists
would remain her most intimate circle of friends throughout her life. Sylvia Maklès was also
a principal member of the Groupe Octobre, a politically engaged theater troupe that often put
on performances for workers, frequently staging them within the factories themselves. This
collection of writers, performers and artists would eventually disperse, but came to influence
the arts in diverse and profound ways.

This same period was not so untroubled for Georges Bataille. Born on the tenth of
September, 1897, in Billom, Puy-de-Dôme, to Joseph-Aristide Bataille and Marie-Antoinette
Tournadre, he was raised and schooled primarily in Reims. The first World War forced him
and his mother to flee, leaving the blind, syphilitic Joseph-Aristide behind. Distancing himself
from his parents' irreligiosity, Georges Bataille converted to Catholicism, eventually enrolling
in a seminary school, imagining a calling as a monk or priest (Surya 1992,29). His fall from
grace, according to his biographer Michel Surya, was precipitous and final:

At the beginning of 1922, Bataille is still pious, or at least humble before God.
By the end of 1924, he is leading "a most dissolute life." How to understand
the change? How is it that in so little time Bataille passed from the state of
a young man attentive to his religion's prescriptions...to that of a debauched
man, "an habitué of gambling joints and prostitutes," drinking and throwing
money away at the tables. (ibid,72)

Through Michel Leiris, first, and then Theodore Fraenkel, Bataille moved closer to the
Surrealists' inner circle, attracted and repulsed by the dynamism and excess therein. During
this same period, though, he was unable to write, incapable of translating his strange,
eccentric and rigorously philosophical vision to the page. For these reasons, on the counsel
of his close friends, he started an analysis with Dr. Adrien Borel. Borel, an iconoclast and frequent analyst to the Surrealists, only saw Bataille for one year, and yet it is to Borel that Bataille credits his subsequent literary outpouring (ibid, 125).

It was on his way to meet with Dr. Adrien Borel in 1927 that Georges Bataille, by all accounts, first met Sylvia Maklès. He, thirty, she, nineteen, they met at the Square Desnouettes. Each on the way to Raymond Queneau's atelier—well known hangout for artists and writers—they were most likely introduced by Bianca Fraenkel, Sylvia's sister. Still a minor, Sylvia Maklès and Georges Bataille would need the consent of her parents in order to marry legally in Courbevoie, France, on March 20, 1928. (Roudinesco 1986, 359).

What were the two like during that epoch? Georges Bataille's personality, according to Michel Leiris, his close friend and witness at his wedding, was full of contrasts: "His non-conformist spirit was marked by what one would now call 'black humor'...Rather thin and of an allure at the same time romantic and modern, he possessed...an elegance that would never leave him" (in Surya 1992, 95). Bourgeois and debauched, Bataille had a reputation for haunting the bordellos and brothels of Paris, a habit that most of his friends were well aware of. Sylvia Maklès was charming, intelligent, possessed an uncommon, youthful beauty, and showed a resolute commitment to her friends, ideas, and the acting craft. While accustomed certainly to the behavioral excesses of her Dada and Surrealist companions, she could have in no way been prepared for the life that her husband apparently still kept up. There is little to indicate that Georges Bataille desisted in his ways; the question remains, as Michel Surya puts it, whether Sylvia Bataille condoned, or was subjected to, his extra-marital adventures (ibid, 185).
It was during her marriage to Georges Bataille that Sylvia Bataille's cinematic career began to thrive. While still acting on the stage, she first appeared on film in 1930, in a short work entitled, *La Joie d'une heure*, directed by André Cerf. In it, she plays the role of a young shop-girl who is mistaken by a street hustler for a grand movie starlet (Les Fiches de M. Cinéma, n.d.). Three years later she appeared in her first feature film, *La Voix sans visage*, directed by Léo Mitler; in 1934, she acted in her second feature, *Adémai Aviateur*, directed this time by Jean Tarride. As she describes it in one of her rare interviews, published in 1961,

> It was my friends who had thrust me into theater, they thought that with the gift for gab that I had... But I knew nothing of acting, even though I had cut classes in order to study with Dullin. One day a man from Paramount came to see the show and called me aside. I was then presented to another man, and the two began to discuss, in front of me, in German. I wasn't bad, said one of them, but I had a big nose. Well, there went my career in cinema down the tubes, or so I thought. But then, they must have thought that something would come of it since I worked on, under the direction of Mr. Of-uncertain-nationality-who-thought-my-nose-too-big, my first film *L'Oeil de lynx*. I immediately adored the cinema. You know, I turned out a few quite imbecilic films, but each time I learned something new, each time I was enriched... even in *Son excellence Antonin*, even in *Vous n'avez rien à déclarer*? (Phillipe 1961,72)

It was not until 1935 that Sylvia Bataille began to work with the kind of film-makers who would revolutionize French cinema. To do that, she re-assumed her past cultural pedigree in the Groupe Octobre—as an engaged, politically committed actress—helping to forge a new kind of cinematic spirit.

> It was through her relationship with one of the giants in French cinema—Jean Renoir—and through her life-long friendship with one of its virtuosos—Jacques Prévert—that Sylvia Bataille worked on two extraordinary films. Jacques Prévert she had met one day while
seeking out André Breton at the Café Cyrano on the Rue Fontaine, and it was there that she first encountered him. As Sylvia Bataille herself described it, "As I was leaving, Jacques spoke to me, and we wandered together until four o'clock in the morning. Jacques never stopped talking...It was dazzling" (Bertin 1986,145). Jacques Prévert's influence on French cinema, and on French culture in general, is simply inestimable. A poet, artist, writer, and screenwriter, amongst his many talents, Prévert's keen wit and playful sensibility was as responsible for defining the interwar mood as Breton's more caustic iconoclasm. Roger Leenhardt characterizes it this way,

One cannot better define the Prévertian spirit (and that of his band of friends) than by [the café] Les Deux Magots. In the neighborhood frequented by heretic communists, incorruptible film-makers, and dissident Surrealists, this charming café is without a doubt one of the places that breathed with his spirit. (1936)

It was Prévert and the other members of the Groupe Octobre who would set, in a certain sense, the general tenor of Renoir's proletarian fantasy Le Crime de Monsieur Lange.

Coinciding with the rise of the Popular Front in France, the film depicts the lecherous, greedy exploits of a factory owner, Batala (played wonderfully by Jules Berry), who fakes his own death to avoid the wrath of debt collectors. The factory workers, left on their own to sink or swim, pull together, creating a harmonious environment of happy productivity. It is only the return of Monsieur Batala, cloaked in priest's robes, to assume the head of the now prosperous company that poisons the atmosphere. Realizing that Batala is, in effect, dead, Monsieur Lange, an otherwise sheepish, quiet employee, seizes the moment to shoot and kill him. The power of this moral tale hinges precisely upon the "crime". Renoir, who directed it, and Prévert, who wrote it, spin a marvelously slippery story, deftly leaving M. Lange's
innocence or guilt in the viewers' hands.

Taking as its principal dilemma the murder of a scabrous boss, *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* was a truly radical intervention into the medium. But it was also the unmistakable effort and comradery of the Groupe Octobre's members that energizes the film. Stories are told of the crew's egalitarian social hierarchy, of a truly collaborative process, and of a general *esprit de corps* unlike any preceding film. Sylvia Bataille remembers it this way, "*Le Crime*...that was my first big film with a true director. What a revelation it was for me! I came every day, even if I wasn't shooting that day. The work was extraordinary, everyone carrying his own weight. We did things very differently, changing and developing the characters" (Phillipe 1961,73).

At the same time that her professional career was escalating, Sylvia and Georges Bataille's marriage was disintegrating. Married in 1928, Sylvia Bataille gave birth on the tenth of June, 1930, to their only child, a baby girl named Laurence. Sylvia Bataille thus embarked upon her career not only as a woman, which presented its own obstacles, but also as a mother. This unwillingness to be strapped into conventional roles could not have come at no personal risk, as France was, during that period, rabidly pro-natalist. There is scarce detail on the marriage between the two, which only lasted until 1934.

Georges Bataille had been working throughout the years as a librarian at the Bibliotheque Nationale at the same time that he was struggling to pen the first of his novels and essays. He authored many of his most unconventional and scandalous pieces during their relationship, developing his theories of "base materialism", "heterogeneity" and "expenditure" as well as publishing, under the pseudonym of Lord Auch, his most notorious *Story of the*
Eye. His other work at this time included: "The Solar Anus" (1927); "The Big Toe" (1929); "Base Materialism and Gnosticism" (1930); "Sacrificial Mutilation and the Severed Ear of Vincent Van Gogh" (1930); "The Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic" (1932); "The Psychological Structure of Fascism" (1933); and "The Notion of Expenditure" (1933).² This remarkable outpouring of essays and ideas, many of which he took up again later in his life, represents the fruit of an uncommon mind laboring within an equally uncommon, and accepting, community. As already noted, he was not, despite his polished appearance, an angel. But he attracted around himself some of the period's most captivating and unconventional characters. It was through these relationships that Bataille would help to orchestrate the appearance of the journals Documents and Minotaure, two truly eclectic efforts.³ Leading the vanguard of dissident Surrealists, Bataille acted like a magnetic pole, attracting to him those disillusioned with André Breton's autocratic rule.

What exactly caused the demise of Sylvia and Georges Bataille's marriage is entirely conjectural, though one can certainly imagine some of the reasons. Michel Surya offers one possible window into the dissolution through the framework of a novel that Georges Bataille wrote in 1935, but only published 22 years later on his friends' insistence. In the Blue of Noon there appears the protagonist Troppmann's (ex-) wife, named Edith, who, Surya suggests, is modeled upon Sylvia Bataille. Laurence Bataille, their daughter, substantiates that assessment

² These are all collected, in English, in the volume entitled Visions of Excess: Selected Writings, 1927-1939 (1985), edited by Allan Stoekl.

³ On its masthead Documents lists its areas of inquiry as: archaeology, the beaux-arts, and ethnography. For Minotaure it was the plastic arts, poetry, music, architecture, ethnography and mythology, performance, and psychoanalytic studies and observations.
(Surya 1992,186). One must obviously tread lightly around any facile biographical information culled from one of Bataille's novel, since he so conspicuously plays with the boundaries between his work and life, but nonetheless, some engrossing material wells up from the text.

The narrative itself seems to spring in part from the emotional pain involved in a ruined marriage, commencing with a scene of debauchery with the 'next' woman in Troppmann's life, Dirty. The first mention of a wife occurs when Troppmann, disconsolate, visits Lazare, a woman "whom I only found appealing because of her ridiculous appearance: as though my lot required in these circumstances a bird of ill omen to deep me company" (Bataille 1979,27). It is in conversation with her that the wife is first mentioned,

"You are obviously too tired. You're sitting there as though you were about to keel over."
"That's a possibility."
"What's wrong?"
"I'm about to go insane."
"Why?"
"I hurt."
"What can I do?"
"Nothing."
"You can't tell me what's wrong?"
"I don't think so."
"Cable your wife to come back, she doesn't have to stay in Brighton."
"No. As a matter of fact, she's written me. It's best for her not to come."
"Does she know the state you're in?"
"She also knows there's nothing she could do to change it." (ibid,28-29)

A bit later, the tone continues,

Lazare took me home. She came in with me. I asked her to let me read a letter from my wife which I found waiting for me. The letter was eight to ten pages long. My wife said she couldn't go on any longer. She blamed herself for losing me; yet everything that had happened had been my fault. (ibid,31)
And finally,

I had sat down on the sofa next to Lazare while she was reading. I started crying again, although I tried not to. Lazare couldn't understand why the dream was making me cry.

I told her, "I can't explain everything to you. It's just that I've behaved like a coward with everyone I love. My wife has devoted herself to me. She worried herself crazy on my account while I was cheating on her." (ibid,33)

While the historical accuracy of the passages are certainly impeachable, it is impossible to believe that in 1935, one year after the dissolution of his marriage, the coincidence of details, events and emotions might not give some indication as to the state of affairs, however distorted. Moreover, it is worthwhile noting that Troppmann and Edith, while effectively separated, continue as husband and wife. That, too, was the case for Sylvia and Georges Bataille. But as one brief caveat to the tendency to read any strict parallel between life and text, one can read the passage in which Troppmann, devastated, narrates, "A black hole now opened inside me as I realized that I would never again clasp her [Edith] to my breast. All the tenderness in me called out to my little children: no answer would be forthcoming" (ibid,71). Not only did Sylvia and Georges Bataille have but one child (a fairly simple distortion) but Georges Bataille would come to spend long and frequent amounts of time, during that period, with his daughter Laurence.

Despite the separation from Georges Bataille in 1934, Sylvia Bataille kept his last name. This is explicable in part because they did not officially divorce until over a decade later, but also because she had already made a significant mark professionally under his name. And despite the agonized state of Georges Bataille's narrator in Blue of Noon, he and Sylvia in fact remained good friends, seeing each other regularly and sharing in the care for their
daughter.

Sylvia Bataille appeared in twenty more films during the time leading up to the second World War. None of her roles, however, was as substantial or as memorable as that of Henriette Dufour in Renoir's *Une Partie de campagne* (A Day in the Country). Shot during the summer of 1936, but not released until ten years later, this film would sear Sylvia Bataille's visage into the collective imagination of generations of cinephiles. One need only scan through the film's reviews to appreciate the momentous impact that the film had upon its viewers. Something in the union of Jean Renoir and Sylvia Bataille combined to create an enduring moment in film history.

The story of *Une Partie de campagne*’s production itself has entered the realm of legend: somehow catastrophic weather, fierce personal conflicts, Jean Renoir's abandonment, World War II, an incomplete shoot, and only fifty minutes of material added up to create what some consider one of the most beautiful and poignant love stories ever filmed. Its unfolding bears retelling since, from its many perspectives, it bears witness both to a remarkable filmic achievement, but even more so, to the redoubtable character of Sylvia Bataille. Pierre Braunberger, the film's producer, recounts at length his own experience at the film's financial helm. Braunberger, whom it should be pointed out had already produced Sylvia Bataille in several preceding films, was instrumental in facilitating many of the Groupe Octobre's own projects, and most importantly, was head over heels in love with Sylvia Bataille. He recounts it this way:

I produced that same year, 1936, one of those films that, of all that I’ve produced, is closest to my heart. I mean Jean Renoir's *Une Partie de campagne*. It is a true love story. I was very much in love with Sylvia
Bataille and Jean Renoir was my best friend....

Jean Renoir had written the screenplay to Une Partie de campagne based upon a Maupassant novella. We decided to film it during the summer of 1936, along the banks of the Loing river, not far from Marlotte's home. It happened to be the same locale where he had made his first film: La fille de l'eau. Many remarkably gifted people worked on Une Partie de campagne: Yves Allegret, Jacques Becker, Claude Heymann, Henri Cartier-Bresson was the still photographer, Luchino Visconti was assistant director, Claude Renoir was cameraman.

The summer of '36 was the rainiest that the region around Paris had ever known. Fortunately, I had taken the precaution of hiring everyone on contract! It kept raining and raining and raining...At the end of two months the crew was furious and one evening, when Sylvia Bataille and Jean Renoir were both in a particularly bad mood and seeming to reproach me for having made a film under these conditions, I said, "You don't like the rain, your sick of it, let's forget it." The next day I sent everyone back home, saying to myself that never had anyone had the nerve to terminate a film simply on the basis of love or friendship. I thought quite highly of myself for sometime thereafter, but two weeks later I was left wondering how to recuperate the million and a half francs that the project had already cost. One month after, I was desperate. I then asked Renoir to take the project up again, adding that I had originally intended it to be of longer length. He made a pre-edit of it and immediately I could tell it was a masterpiece. Renoir was not at all enthused to be working again on it, as he had just signed with Kamenka to Les Bas-Fonds (The Lower Depths). I offered to make Une Partie de campagne into a feature length film. I asked Jacques Prévert to write a screenplay that would encompass everything that had already been shot. He began working on it and, one day, after many conversations, he read it to us in a café near to the Salle Pleyel. Renoir liked it, but said to me upon leaving, "I already directed Le Crime de M. Lange, I am not about to start work again on another Prévert script."

Time had passed when finally, with the help of Pierre Lestringuez and other friends, I persuaded Renoir to finish the film according to the original screenplay. But several of the actors had changed considerably. Georges Darnoux, who played Henri, had really bloated-up and didn't at all resemble his character.

[...]A bit later, during the war, while I was holed up in the Lot region, and was swimming, I saw an entire German division pass by. Frightened, I jumped and hid myself, one whole day, on a little island. I was thinking about Une Partie de campagne and I projected in my head. Taking stock of the work so far, I realized that what we had shot was sufficient to understand the story and that it only lacked one or two intertitles in order for it to make sense.
Once the war ended, to be nice to me, Jean Renoir accepted this solution. Curiously, he never liked the film, possibly because the condition under which it had been made occasioned the falling out between him and Sylvia.

During the Occupation, the first edit, in the form of a working print, had been destroyed by the Germans. Happily, Henri Langlois had been able to save the negative. He returned that to me and we began to edit it. It was the ex-companions of Renoir, Marguerite Renoir, Jacques Becker and Pierre Lestringuez who did the work. Joseph Kosma, on since the beginning, wrote the music which went marvelously with it. The film was sold to the U.S. where it received the Critics' Prize. It opened in Paris in May of 1946. Renoir, after the success of the film—but only then—"recognized" this illegitimate child and reclaimed his paternity.

As you see, Une Partie de campagne created a world of trouble for me, but it is a film I adore...Sylvia Bataille was extraordinary in it. (Braunberger 1987,113-4)

While this does not differ dramatically in detail from the versions to follow, what does emerge, in comparison, is the responsibility that Braunberger himself accepts for ending the shoot. Its value rests in the rather complete history—from conception to opening night—of a project that spanned a decade, a world war, and several attempts on its life.

Renoir's own rendition of the events is much shorter, but still sheds light on some of the other dynamics. He quite frankly asserts, in language that cannot help but carry a certain innuendo, that, "This film came from my desire to do something with Sylvia Bataille;" it seemed to me that a film in period dress would suit her well" (Renoir 1979,156). Having worked with her in Le Crime de M.Lange, Renoir was obviously enough taken by her ability to play a combination of beauty, intelligence and youth that he would construct a film principally around her. He is known for his skill in intuiting, often just from an actor's physical type, a range of ability perfect for a role, and in this case, Renoir saw something in

The French is simply, "Ce film est venu de mon désir de faire quelque chose avec Sylvia Bataille..."
Sylvia Bataille's work in *Le Crime de M. Lange* that sealed his choice. His discrimination is quick: "Finally, to come back to Sylvia, I had the idea of this story by Maupassant because I saw in it things that would go well with her voice" (ibid,156). His choice was inspired. While previously a supporting character-actor primarily known for her strong ensemble work, Sylvia Bataille exploded on film as Henriette Dufour, displaying a range that shattered critical expectation.

Renoir is similarly succinct in his own assessment of the shoot's abrupt termination. One chronicler of Renoir's career, Celia Bertin, describes the incident rather neutrally: "But as everyone knows the filming was suddenly interrupted after a vehement dispute between Sylvia Bataille and Jean Renoir, who, one fine morning, announced his intention to leave to make *Les Bas-Fonds*...[T]he film came to an abrupt end in part because of the rain, and in part because the tensions between people became too taut" (Bertin 1986,163). Renoir himself, however, remembers things a bit differently, "'Everybody was happy but Sylvia, who was having some problems in her personal affairs'" (Sesonske 1980, 236). After weeks of idleness waiting for the incessant rains to subsist, waiting daily to accomplish nothing, it is hard to imagine that Sylvia Bataille was the only member of cast or crew to suffer from the tremendous delays. But Renoir clearly exculpates himself from the onus. Therefore we must now turn to her account in order to complete this historical triangulation.

One must not forget, in the course of retelling the production's unraveling, the enormity that this opportunity presented for Sylvia Bataille. Primarily relegated to small and moderate roles, this was the first film which was a vehicle expressly developed for her. That she would jeopardize that chance at all by confronting the director, gives some indication of
her character, commitment, and resolve. One senses exactly that in her portrait of the events:

*Une Partie de campagne*... Ah la la, what a difficult adventure! You know, don't you, how that finished?... Well, I assure you, those last days were not pretty. No one could look at each other, the atmosphere was poisoned... Why? You must understand that this was a cast contracted to wait day and night on the set for the sun and for its money! One day, Renoir arrives and informs us that he is dropping everything, that he has just signed onto *Les Bas-Fonds*... Well, I could no longer restrain myself and I insulted him, and he deserved it. It was awful. I remember returning to Paris, we were all stuffed into a tiny car... I had to go and free up my mother and daughter from the hotel where they were being held like hostages because I could no longer pay... We were all certain that the film would never open, that it was over. As for me, I was furious with Renoir. What I had said to him really stung him and he made it known that he would never make another film with me... Our row didn't survive the war, in any case. Now we have reconciled... But what he did then, well, it was simply unpardonable... After the war, when Braunberger showed us the edited version, without music, no one believed that it was possible to show it like that... Keep in mind, we all still remembered the initial event, and it was an unhappy, almost painful, memory. But remarkably, when Kosma added his marvelous component, the film was instantly, perfectly remade... a total surprise. (Phillipe 1961, 75-6)

Indeed, the horror of the intervening war effort, the success of the film itself, and ten years of time assuaged many deeply felt wounds that resulted from the filming of *Une Partie de campagne*. Looking back at her work with Renoir as early as 1952, Sylvia Bataille recognized Renoir's many directorial gifts; summing-up his genius at identifying and eliciting an actor's physical presence, going so far as to often forsake make-up even, she insisted, "we were not always beautiful, but we were always true" (Mayoux et al. 1952, 45).

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To suggest that Jean Renoir's direction and Sylvia Bataille's performance in *Une Partie de campagne* struck a nerve in the critics' collective imagination is patent understatement. The (mostly male) reviewers of the film nearly drool on the page in
describing the work and, especially, its final scenes. There is an almost eerie quality to the monotony of exaltation, tempered only rarely by technical analysis of the film's force. The reviews parade that kind of gushing, gallic lyricism that is virtually untranslatable and, in this case, surely a symptom of some sort of psychical over-investment. Were the reviews not so uniformly immoderate they might not be worth reciting at length, but in this case, some scope of the praise is necessary:

The face of Sylvia Bataille—a unique and unpredictable actress—before and after love is one of the most marvelous and heart-rending things that one could ever see in the cinema. (Jacques Siclier 1988)

The love scene on the island is one of the most agonizing and beautiful in all of cinema. It owes its stunning effectiveness to a couple of gestures and a look from Sylvia Bataille which have a wrenching emotional realism. In the space of a few frames she expresses all the disenchantment, the pathetic sadness, that follows the act of love. (André Bazin 1973, 51-2)

The confusion, the disordered sensuality, the naive pantheism, the corporeal emotion and exquisite storminess of spirit, she [Sylvia Bataille] communicates them all to the scene with an almost unsettling youthfulness. Nothing artificial, nothing labored, just a look a bit surprised, a line barely whispered, and something shrinking, yet open in her movements. Her silent love scene along the river banks among the leaves rustling from the impending storm is...one of the most gorgeous in our entire cinematic repertoire (Jacques Doniol-Valcroze 1947,223)

One of the most beautiful sequences in all of cinema is the moment in *A Day in the Country* when Sylvia Bataille is about to accept the advances of Georges Darnoux. The scene opens in a light, comic vein which one would logically expect to turn bawdy. We are ready to laugh, when suddenly the laugh catches in our throat. With Sylvia Bataille's incredible glance, the world begins to spin and love bursts forth like a long-stifled cry. No sooner is the smile wiped from our faces than tears appear in our eyes. (André Bazin 1973, 78)

Generally from eroticism is born desire, desire of all kinds, but Renoir creates for us eroticism born of a kiss, that is to say, from desire. Out of that sequence, where Sylvia [sic] Bataille and Arnoux embrace, from that natural,
profound carnal desire appears, suddenly, a eroticism perfect, complete, and pure.

The two lovers see each other again; into their glances slips the vivid memory and the bitterness of their future. Here, Renoir’s art transforms itself into apotheosis; it is no longer cinema, it is certainly not life, it is an action, a force, a tension inherent within ourselves, to which we participate, experiencing again the slightest words, the most futile gestures. (Gilbert Wolmark 1958)

And, in words uncannily resonating with Sylvia Bataille’s own professional experience after the war, Celia Bertin suggests that, “Henriette/Sylvia Bataille is yet another victim swallowed up by a meager life, having known but one afternoon of love cut short by thunderstorm. She is all the women who miss out on life because they do not have the means to do otherwise” (Bertin 1986, 163). The astounding performance that Sylvia Bataille gave did not have the career-altering impact that it might have had the movie opened ten years earlier. Still able to portray, at the age of twenty-eight, a young woman on the verge of emotional maturity, she was thirty-eight when the critics and other directors saw her remarkable work, well beyond similar roles.

Sylvia Bataille contented herself with relatively smaller parts in a variety of films during the period leading up to the war, acting in four films in 1937, one in 1938, five in 1939, three in 1940, and one in 1941. She distinguished herself in supporting roles, yet was unable to parlay the momentum that Une Partie de campagne would have given her into more prominent roles. For her excellent work she did win, in 1940, the Suzanne-Bianchetti Prize for the best young actress, but once again other factors would intervene--this time the war.

While it is impossible to estimate the working climate in Europe for Sylvia Bataille, a jew, in the years leading up to the war, she herself provides a chilling glimpse into it.
Chosen by the director Jacques Feyder to play the role of Yvonne in *Les Gens de voyage*, Sylvia Bataille traveled to Munich in 1937, experiencing first-hand the power and insidiousness of the fascist state:

> It is still an awful memory...For me, it was almost unbearable, you see...I remember stores off-limits, anti-semitic inscriptions...Luckily, there was Feyder and [Françoise] Rosay, always wonderful.[...] There were some difficult moments for me, dinners to which I could not go, a visit from Goebbels, those unavoidable moments when we were all fraternizing and, after drinking, someone dashing pins to his buttonhole an iron cross... I adamantly refused such things, helped all along by Rosay....You know, I remember that there presided over the entrance to the studio a large portrait of Hitler, obligatorily saluted each morning by the Germans. Little by little the French in our crew came to salute it as well...out of courtesy, I imagine. But I will never forget Marie Glory who never passed by the portrait without proffering a vibrant, "Heil Hitler, the asshole!" But then, what was really terrible was the return, having friends who didn't want to believe what was happening, who tried to reassure me...They were blind. (in Philippe 1961,76-7)

Her sense of foreboding upon returning to Paris was to be proven accurate on many fronts.

Other than her professional accomplishments, there is little information of Sylvia Bataille's daily life after her separation in 1934 from Georges Bataille and up to the war. The single mother of one child, she most probably sought her mother's aid in taking care of Laurence Bataille while she was working.⁵ Similarly, Laurence Bataille spent significant periods of time with her uncle and aunt, André and Rose Masson, often vacationing in Spain with them and their son, Diego (Masson 1990,208). Despite her separation from Georges Bataille, she was still on amicable terms with him, and probably continued to circulate in similar social circles (ibid,325). She must have cut a striking figure: intelligent, beautiful, talented, sharp, charming, and committed, she counted amongst her intimate friends the

⁵ This is indicated, in part, by her description of events after the filming of *Une Partie de Campagne*, when she went to retrieve her mother and daughter from the hotel.
leading and most subversive intellectuals, artists, and performers of the interwar period. Along with the impending war, the end of the nineteen thirties meant an encounter with another dynamic force that populated her social landscape, a man who would change the course of Sylvia Bataille's life—Jacques Lacan.

Sylvia Bataille had met Jacques Lacan on several occasions, for he and Georges Bataille were occasional companions as far back as 1933 (Surya 1992,422n). According to Elisabeth Roudinesco, Sylvia Bataille first encountered Lacan in the latter half of February, 1934, as he was returning from his honeymoon. Invited to dine with Lacan and his wife Marie-Louise Blondin, whom he had married the previous twenty-ninth of January, Sylvia Bataille apparently found them to be rather staid and conventional, nothing like the dazzling company to which she was accustomed. Jacques Lacan had another chance to meet Sylvia Bataille, this time in 1936 at Georges Bataille's home, and in this case he came with a greater arsenal. Rebuffed by her, he waited another two years, that is, until they met by chance at the Café Flore in November of 1938. This time, love struck them both (Roudinesco 1993,190).

The Dr. Lacan who charmed Sylvia Bataille was a complicated and charismatic individual. Though still far from gaining the infamy that would transform his later years, his work on paranoia had piqued the Surrealists' curiosity, leading to his inclusion in two issues of the journal Minotaure. Still more bourgeois than publicly scandalous, he was not, however, above the more private temptations of many mistresses. Roudinesco characterizes him during this period this way, "Not only was he a seducer, libertine, capricious and impossible to satisfy, but he was inhabited by both a belief that his own genius would produce volumes of great work, and an immense desire to be recognized, to become a celebrity"
(Roudinesco 1993,189). His encounter and relationship with Sylvia Bataille would propel him into contact with her world of artists and radicals, to which he quickly became accustomed, and away from his own comfortable, staid, culture of medical professionals. It was, to put it into very Parisian terms, the transformation from a "right bank" to "left bank" style of life (ibid,190-91).

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The next years were tumultuous and difficult ones for Sylvia Bataille. A now constant companion to Jacques Lacan, he was still married. The decreasing production of movies in France, because of the war effort, effectively diminished her opportunities to work, impinging upon her abilities to provide the constant moral and financial support to her child, parents and siblings, to which she was committed (ibid,177). The German army was pushing its way across Europe, eventually arriving as an invading force into Paris on the fourteenth of May, 1940; and with the increasing German pressure upon the French borders, large numbers of people were beginning to consider options for evading the invaders. Some headed off of the continent altogether: Breton, Ernst, Lévi-Strauss and others to New York, Caillois to Buenos Aires, for example, but rarely was that possible without someone's patronage to defray the costs and confront the bureaucracy. Sylvia Bataille left Paris in the early summer to join Rose, her sister, André Masson, Georges Bataille and his companion, Denise Rollin, as well as her daughter Laurence, in Druegac, a small village near Mauriac in the south of France (ibid,212). While Sylvia Bataille was escaping from Paris to rejoin her daughter and to save her own life, she was also pregnant. Jacques Lacan was the father.

Still married to Marie-Louise Blondin and no longer able to dissimulate his deepening
relationship with Sylvia Bataille, Lacan was sharing his time between his family in Paris and his mistress in the south. Rarely one to couch his emotions, he gleefully announced to his wife that Sylvia Bataille was expecting a child that he had helped to conceive. His wife was then eight months pregnant herself. In her subsequent despair she sought the counsel of her brother Sylvain, who advised her to immediately break from her cruel husband and seek a divorce. Their divorce was made legal on the fifteenth of December, 1941 (ibid,217-8). Thanks to his status as a doctor mobilized for the war effort, Lacan was able to obtain enough gasoline and the necessary permission to make repeated forays into the south to visit Sylvia Bataille, who had moved on from her initial refuge in Drugeac to Marseille, and from there, eventually, to Cagnes-sur-Mer (ibid,213).

In order to keep food on the table and shelter for her family, including her mother, Sylvia Bataille began working. While still in Marseille, she produced and sold fruit jellies that had been culled from the bits and ends of dates and figs that African vessels discarded upon arrival on French shores. She and several other refugees who had settled in the south developed a business that spread the fruits of its labor all the way up to Paris. Reassembling old friends from the Café Flore, she kept busy and earned money, eventually even creating a small business bolstered by the sweets’ success (ibid,217).

She later moved, with her family in tow, renting a house in Cagnes-sur-Mer. There she received frequent visits from Jacques Lacan, and gave birth to their only child, all the while helping others to flee France. Nothing would have been possible, if the story is at all true, without Jacques Lacan's savvy intervention. While it has reached legendary proportions, the most sober version of the incident is this: Lacan, upon discovering that Sylvia Bataille and
her mother had identified themselves to the French authorities, as Jews were required, walked into the local bureau offices, asked for and received the dossier on the Maklès/Bataille family, walked out the door with it and immediately proceeded to tear it up and destroy it (ibid, 213). It is an incident that portrays well Lacan's combination of bravura, style, haughtiness and intimidation, as well as his generous spirit. Most often shunning political action, he acted when his own interests, and those of his loved ones, were crossed.

Sylvia Bataille gave birth to a daughter, Judith Sophie, on the third of July, 1941. Because she was still legally married to Georges Bataille and, because she could not give her child the last name Maklès, which signalled its Jewish origins, and because Jacques Lacan was still legally married to Marie-Louis Blondin and thus prohibited from assuming legal paternity, she gave to her the last name Bataille (ibid, 220). This would at least protect her and her child's anonymity, which was crucial in avoiding detention and possible deportation to concentration camps. Her sister Rose, André Masson and their two sons had already fled to the United States, arriving in New York on the May 29, 1941 thanks to the generous patronage of Mrs. Sadie May, a Baltimore art collector and philanthropist (Levaillant in Masson 1990, 545-6). Letters that Rose and André Masson wrote in the fall of 1941, while in the U.S., indicate that they fully expected Sylvia and her family to be imminently arriving in the country as well, but that was not to happen (Masson 1990, 468, 474-5). Roudinesco suggests that it was Sylvia Bataille's conscious decision to remain in France during the war (Roudinesco 1993, 219). One thing is certain, she did not abandon her pre-war friendships, commitments, or sense of political engagement, as her longtime admirer and movie producer Pierre Braunberger remembers:
There you have the story of my life in wartime. Ultimately, I had a lot of luck, unlike any number of Jews who weren't able to escape the round-ups and the German army. Helped by my friends—Marc Allégret, Jean Tarride, Sylvia Bataille, and many others—I lived in that little village of Saint-Céré, where everyone eats so well. It is without a doubt the gastronomically richest city in France. Its location—beyond highways, railways and waterways—made it a privileged little island. Others, as I said, were not so lucky. (Braunberger 1987,133)

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Sylvia Bataille returned to Paris with the War's end, returning to a city jubilant to be free again yet tormented by its military and, more profoundly, spiritual defeat. The dirty stain left by collaboration with the German government would forever tarnish the French war effort, especially for the French themselves. The country's ability to recuperate and reorient after the catastrophe could only be measured in small increments, and if Sylvia Bataille's experience was any indication, scars were not healing quickly.

Her mother and her two daughters moved into an apartment on 3 Rue de Lille, which Georges Bataille and Denise Rollin had vacated during the war and transferred into Jacques Lacan's provenance in 1943, while she herself moved into 5 Rue de Lille. Since 1942 Lacan had been living at number 5, an apartment that neighbored Bataille. It was Bataille who had alerted Lacan to it when it was available, and this came at a time when Lacan needed quarters (Surya 1992,425). Number 5 eventually became the domain of Jacques Lacan, the little universe into which his patients and students entered to see him, and number 3 became Sylvia's, where she entertained guests and lived (Roudinesco 1993,247).

While her life began regaining some of the normalcy of before the war, if that was even possible, her professional pursuits did not. Hoping to step back into the industry that
she had worked so consistently for, she found only doors closed and opportunities denied.

In her words, she recounts the apathy and cynicism already entrenched in her colleagues,

My career ended in 1940...That says it all, doesn't it? [...] Already, aside from a few people, it was not pretty...It truly disgusted me in the beginning...And then, when I simply wanted to work again, same thing... I did not ask for anything but to work, nothing special...I thought it perfectly natural. At first I couldn't believe it, all that indifference, and then I had to face up to the obvious. (Phillipe 1961,71)

Unable to find work for herself, and relegated to knocking on doors to work again in a medium that she had already distinguished herself in, she was fortunate to have Jacques Prévert as a friend.

When they could not get Marlene Dietrich to play the role of Malou in *Les Portes de la Nuit*, Prévert suggested Sylvia Bataille for the part to the film's director, Marcel Carné. He chose instead Nathalie Nattier, a more elegant and distinguished actress, leaving for Sylvia Bataille the supporting role of Claire Lécuyer (Phillipe 1961,71). The film, which also starred, Yves Montand, left Sylvia Bataille with only bitter memories,

That was the most atrocious experience of my short career. Oh!, what a shoot... I don't know why, but Carné took an immense dislike to me...I understand that he was nervous, but all the same, he was absolutely odious toward me...For example, he would screech at me, "Is Madame Bataille only capable of exhibiting talent while in the presence of Monsieur Prévert?" As for me, of course, I answered him in the same tone; you see the ambience. (Phillipe 1961,71)

She appeared in only one more film, in 1949, and her brief testimony seems to ring with the disappointment of an aborted career, "After *Les Portes de la Nuit*, I was finished...A little role in *Julie de Carneilhan* directed by...who was it after all?... That's it, right, [Jacques] Manuel" (ibid,71). Perhaps the worst injustice, in some ways, was that the opening of *Une*
Partie de campagne came ten years after its making, in 1946, establishing, only too late, Sylvia Bataille's reputation as a world class actress.

She was not, however, a passive victim of unhappy circumstances, for she had had the opportunity to pursue her career elsewhere after the war. But with two children and a new family with Jacques Lacan, she apparently felt that the timing was not right. According to her longtime friend and producer Pierre Braunberger,

After the war, I worked on several projects with her, and I passed along to her some offers from Goldwyn who wanted her to work in the United States. She refused, considering her private life more important than her professional. It is sad to think that so great an actress, having set the tone for so many subsequent actors, refused to continue to practice her craft. (Braunberger 1987,115)

Faced with two momentous obstacles--an industry unwilling to accept her back without reproving her talent, especially as she approached forty, and a cultural context that did not encourage women to seek work outside of raising a family--Sylvia Bataille slipped out of the floodlights that had illuminated her so warmly. To hear Pierre Phillipe bemoan her absence is to understand some of the power she possessed in her craft:

She was irreplaceable, she remains unreplaced and, among those who, in full blossom, distanced themselves from the screen, she is without a doubt the one closest to the hearts and memories of cinephiles. Never did French Cinema witness such expression, such sensitivity, before her....Sylvia Bataille incarnated young woman with a prodigious limpidity, with that sort of wonderful honesty, or tactility that she shares with only a few rare actresses in cinema: Louise Brooks, Herta Thiele, who are able to--in those moments when they appear to us in the almost religious atmosphere of film--communicate to us that sensation of "real presence", of transubstantiation, well-known by devotees. (Phillipe 1961,69-70)

That "real presence" endures, burned into celluloid, resisting and occulting the vicissitudes of its history. It remains as a testament to the power of film to preserve and to obscure.
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The other, perhaps more real, presences in Sylvia Bataille's life were her husband and family, assembled now in two handsome apartments on the urbane, elegant Rue de Lille. As one might imagine, the longer Sylvia Bataille spent away from the cinema's spotlights, the fewer the traces she left to find; that is the irony and the tragedy of a life that is led outside of the textual records. She had the option of leaving for the U.S. during the war, which she refused, and she had it again after the war thanks to Goldwyn Studio's interest, and she again refused. Her clear preference, one can then deduce, was to stay with her family, friends, and country. Her life changed dramatically after the war: she was the mother of two young daughters, the constant companion to Jacques Lacan, and no longer actively pursuing a career that had been her preoccupation for at least a decade.

With the end of the war and the end of the state-sanctioned persecution of Jews, Sylvia Bataille could now no longer worry that her name carried with it a death sentence. She and Georges Bataille amicably divorced on July 9, 1946, having never found the initiative to terminate legally a marriage that had, by all estimation, been null and void for a dozen years. She apparently continued to use the name Bataille, at least in the few movies she worked in after the war, until her marriage to Jacques Lacan on the seventeenth of July, 1953 (Roudinesco 1993,250). While many would persist in referring to her as Sylvia Bataille, she was, from that point forward, known as Sylvia Lacan.

What is known of Sylvia Lacan after the war is filtered primarily through the lens of Jacques Lacan's own biography. While she was probably still extremely visible within her own social circles, little beyond her relationship to Jacques Lacan's life appears in textual
form. The dominant image of Sylvia Lacan from 1946 on is as the hostess in a long series of social occasions. It is a powerful index of a woman's invisibility that this dynamic, intelligent and talented woman's only traces throughout forty-five years are as the sophisticated housewife and the beautiful companion to Jacques Lacan. In the extant literature there are brief portraits of her as a mother to her two daughters, but even those are minimal, and resoundingly conventional. Perhaps she chose this anonymity, though that hardly seems the case with respect to her desire to work again after the war. It is almost absurd to recount the banal minutia that constitute her profile in the following five decades, yet that is all that is left. What does exist gives some glimpses into her subsequent life.

Jacques and Sylvia Lacan were married in 1953 during a small, private ceremony in Tholonet, near Aix-en-Provence, in the presence of Rose and André Masson. Each settled into barely separate domains: Jacques Lacan expanded his practice at number 5, and Sylvia Lacan entertained visitors at number 3. It was Sylvia who was responsible for decorating her husband's office, and therefore she who picked out the armchair and couch that would serve as the bedrock of Dr. Lacan's practice for the next several decades. In 1951 they purchased a serene country-house in Guitrancourt, located near Mantes-la-Jolie, that became a frequent weekend retreat (Roudinesco 1993,248-250). Often, when there with a large group of invited friends and colleagues, Lacan withdrew for the day to work on his lectures and notes. Sylvia Lacan entertained the guests. Madeleine Chapsal, an occasional invitee, describes the scene this way:

He wanted numerous people there on Sunday. Some were not even invited until the afternoon, and then we would all gather around Sylvia and tea, served in the corner of the grand study. Lacan, seated at a small table nearby,
worked on his Seminar for the next day.

All the while writing and getting up to consult dictionaries, historical works, and mythologies from which he mined his references to illustrate his arguments, he always kept an ear in on our conversation. We all gossiped and there was much to talk about: among the close friends of the Lacan family were many of the great intellectuals such as Merleau-Ponty, Claude Lévi-Strauss, Georges Bataille, who had been the first husband of Sylvia, Michel Leiris, and always many beautiful women.

Everyone also knew Sartre, Simone de Beauvoir, and their group...

At regular intervals a veritable crow's cawing interrupted us: "Whaa?! Whaa?!

That was Lacan who had heard, amongst our chattering, some particularly savory bit that he demanded we repeat. He took a great delight in anecdotes and rumors about the love lives and goings-on of somebody or another. (Chapsal 1984,35-6)

There would be many other of the century's luminaries visiting the Lacan family at their sanctuary, but none would make as much of an impression as the visit that Martin Heidegger and his wife made to Guitrancourt in 1955. Invited by Jacques Lacan, Heidegger spent several days there with his wife accompanying him. While he and Lacan sequestered themselves to talk philosophy, Sylvia Lacan was left to entertain Elfriede Heidegger, a woman who, apparently, rarely concealed her anti-semitism (Roudinesco 1993,299-300).

These are the only kinds of traces left of the second half of Sylvia Lacan's life. Appearances at soirées, entertaining her remarkable group of friends and intimates, turning a blind eye to her husband's womanizing, helping to arrange Lacan's papers for publication, she embodied the selfless spouse, reigning in her own aspirations. There is one image that lingers from her later years, one that seems to typify the choices that Sylvia Lacan made in her later years. The context was the shooting of a two-part feature entitled Psychanalyse I & II, later to be entitled Télévision. Convinced by Benoît Jacquot, whose idea it was, that television was poorly representing French psychoanalysis, Lacan agreed to record his
responses to a series of questions that Jacques-Alain Miller, his son-in-law and appointed successor, posed to him. Modeled upon his presentations in his regular seminars, Lacan performs brilliantly for the medium, displaying the legendary range of emotion, erudition and dynamism that made his seminars so popular. Jacquot remembers the scene,

Sylvia was there (which recalled her past as an actress), with her combs and brushes, primping him. We shot it exactly like a film. Moreover, it seems like a film when you watch it. At times Lacan reminded me of [Fritz] Lang’s Mabuse, at others Sacha Guitry or Jules Berry. In fact, he was playing Jacques Lacan. (Brochier 1993,47)

Out of the spotlight that Jacques Lacan expanded to fill, Sylvia Bataille was merely a pleasant memory that day. Instead, Sylvia Lacan was present, ceding the stage to her husband and son-in-law, assisting in their success, invisible.
Chapter X

Adapted from a short story of the same name by Guy de Maupassant, Une Partie de campagne (A Day in the Country) relates the Sunday adventures of a bourgeois, shop-owning family from Paris escaping to the gentle banks of the Seine in the countryside outside Paris. There, the Dufour family--Cyprien the father (Gabriello), Juliette the mother (Jeanne Marken), their eighteen to twenty year old daughter Henriette (Sylvia Bataille), her future husband and father's assistant Anatole (Paul Temps), and their aged Grandmother (Gabrielle Fontan)--settle for a day of picnicking on the grass and relaxing in the sunshine. All the while they are being sized-up and watched by two local, young men--Rodolphe (Jacques Borel), the schemer, and Henri (Georges Darnoux), the sullen romantic--who have eyes for both the daughter and mother, and nothing but scorn for the men's fumbling, fish-out-of-water manner. While watching the youthful Henriette enjoying herself ecstatically on the swings, the pair decide that the mother and daughter are well worth an afternoon's energy and go about planning their seduction.

Each with an eye on Henriette, they insinuate themselves into the picnic spot that the Dufour's had spied, present themselves as well-intentioned gentlemen, offering the two hapless men fishing poles and bait (which they enthusiastically accept) and the two women rides in their skiffs. Henriette's innocent excitement convinces the mother that she too should go, despite her fear of the water. While the impotent men manage to hook only themselves and catch old, rotten shoes, Rodolphe and Henri escort the women onto the water, ignoring the impending storm clouds. Contrary to one's expectations, it is Henri who lures Henriette into his boat, while Rodolphe good-naturedly entertains the rather less prized mother in his.
While Juliette and Rodolphe defuse any sexual tension in their mock, playful, open flirtation, the palpable tension in the other boat is hardly so easily attenuated. Overwhelmed by the unadulterated beauty of the natural surroundings, Henriette is drawn by a nightingale's song to a secluded islet, where Henri escorts her to a secluded copse. While she marvels at the bird, he moves closer to her, puts his arm around her, though she gently wards him off. When she thwarts his repeated attempts, he resorts to more force, grasping her to him, pinning her body underneath his. She frantically tries to resist him, then suddenly, apparently overtaken by her ardor, passionately returns his embraces. As we see an enormous close-up of her face and then tear-filled eye--filled with a dazzling combination of conflicting emotions--the storm suddenly bursts open, pelting the river with huge drops of rain. The film then explains, through an intertitle, that many Sundays have passed and that Henriette has married Anatole, her father's bumbling assistant. We then follow a forlorn Henri rowing his skiff one fine day back to the secluded woods where his memorable tryst with Henriette took place. There, in the exact spot, he finds Henriette, but this time she is with her slumbering husband. This affords Henri and Henriette one fleeting moment to exchange sad memories,

Henri: I come here often. You know, my fondest memories are from here.

Henriette: Yes, I think of it every night.6

Anatole awakens, barks out for Henriette, and the two former lovers part as Henriette obediently, sorrowfully turns back to her husband. Henri watches balefully from behind a tree

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6 This and all subsequent quotations from the film Une Partie de campagne are taken from the complete screenplay as it appears in Image et son n°150-151 (Avril-Mai), 1969. The translations are my own.
branch while Henriette, her bungling husband in tow, rows back to shore and out of his life once again.

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*Une Partie de campagne* works like a perfectly turned essay. No longer than it needs to be, Renoir directs with a pure economy of expression, dictated in part by the nightmarish conditions of the film shoot, but imprinting it nonetheless with his own, unmistakable mark. The Dufour family is quintessentially petit-bourgeois: they willingly oblige the conventionality that society has forced upon them. Provincialy urban, they live in stark contrast to the two locals who are patently at ease in their physical bodies and natural surroundings. Cyprien and Anatole are nearly a match for Laurel and Hardy, possessed of the same ineptitude and imbecility. Impotent in so many ways, as Renoir conveys, they serve as comic figures, always on the margin of the frame, never at ease. The aged grandmother, too, dressed in a profoundly solemn black dress, works comically, spending her time chasing after an unwilling kitten or regularly misunderstanding the few words uttered in her direction. The film, then, clearly revolves around the mother, the daughter, and the two rogues' relationships, fleshing out each character with a complex of desires, motives, and means.

There are really only three other bodies in the film—the inn-keeper (played by Renoir himself), his domestic help (played by his wife), and the young boy who is seen fishing in the opening scene—and none plays a particularly important role in the film's development. The same, however, cannot be said about Nature, which assumes the force of a principal character, determining the behavior, actions, and emotions of the other actors. Many critics have made a point of Jean Renoir's indebtedness to his father, Pierre Auguste Renoir, for the
shimmering, verdant landscapes and turn of the century costumes in the film, a debt that the younger Renoir acknowledges. But Nature takes on an even greater significance in Une Partie de campagne. Each character is, in some way, defined by her/his relationship to the natural order (or difficulty with within it), just as each character is equally inscribed by her/his place within a highly codified cultural order.

It is impossible to account for all of the cultural markers that color the film, but some indication of their use is crucial to understanding the film's dynamics. It is also impossible to ignore the class codes that Renoir uses to determine his characters. It is a film about Parisians and the baggage they carry with them, and anyone who has visited the French countryside has undoubtedly learned that the term "Parisian" is not generally complimentary. Reversing the standard cosmopolitan/provincial dichotomy, Renoir's Parisians are unsophisticated, ignorant, and thoroughly at ease outside of the strict social codes of the city. This is particularly true of Anatole and Cyprien, who seem constitutionally incapable of performing even the simplest tasks without significant personal duress: both awkwardly address the swings with no chance of success, both nearly injure themselves trying to fish. They also appear shabbily dressed and groomed throughout, Anatole in an ill-fitting suit and preposterous hair cut, M. Dufour's heft causing him to burst out of his suit. This is in marked contrast to the "country" folk--Rodolphe and Henri--who appear the epitome of suave and debonair, their hair perfectly in place, their manners impeccable. Where they are quick-witted and gentlemanly, their male counterparts are inarticulate and boorish. This obviously runs counter to the established class categories, especially given that Rodolphe and Henri seem to have no other vocation other than as "boatmen" for vacationing Parisians. Henri states to Henriette that he and Rodolphe
in fact are "business partners", but that is simply a ruse to impress upon her their appropriate class status, making themselves appear eligible to her eyes. Henriette and her mother are clearly more comfortably situated within their station. They are polite, well-mannered, appropriately attired in finely tailored clothes, coiffed; they are able to conduct themselves with poise in any circumstance. Renoir is obviously using this reversal of attributes to illuminate the hypocrisy of Parisians who consider themselves the most "cultured" people in the world. They are lost outside their "village", city bumpkins pulling into the country like the Beverly Hillbillies, in a borrowed, old milk truck.

The sexual signifiers with which Renoir inscribes his characters are no less patent, and no less powerful. In this case as well, the connection to the natural world highly codifies their positions, and Renoir's grasp of physical types helps to imbue his characters with an articulate body language. Nature, in its ripe plenitude, is a symbol of sexual power, and mastery over nature, or at least facility with it, signifies a facility with one's own desire. Monsieur Dufour, for example, is overstuffed, bursting out, he has so overindulged his appetite in younger days that he can now only imagine desire. When his wife tries to waken him from his post-prandial slumber for a romp in the woods, he can only muster an annoyed response. He, like Anatole, is splayed out after lunch, impotent to act and glutted. So obsessed is he with his yearning to fish that he is oblivious to the machinations of his rivals, willingly letting them escort the women onto the water. Anatole, for his part, is completely asexual. Ill at ease with his own body, his poorly fitting suits tie him up and constrict any freedom of movement he might experience on his day-off. He is forever fumbling to keep with banal tasks, is asleep with his wife when hidden in the woods, and is rowed by her back to shore by her at the film's end.
His bout with hiccoughs only reinforces the extent to which he is neither master of his own body nor able to take pleasure from its interruptions.

Madame Dufour, however, has a much more complicated and interesting relation to desire, balancing between bourgeois conformity and its conscious transgression. When Henriette asks her whether she too ever felt the powerful combination of tenderness for her natural surroundings and a vague desire that so puzzles her, her mother comforts her with the words that yes, she too felt it when she was young, and still does, only now it is more "sensible". Bursting with a kind a voluptuousness, rather than obesity, she understands desire, sees its ruses, and revels in its pleasures. One of the most interesting scenes in the film occurs when she is snubbed by her dozing husband who is far more engrossed in his own sleep than in her. Unsatisfied, she returns to her daughter's side. It is there that starts to complain that ants have invaded her bodice and are tormenting her. Asking Henriette to unlace her, she redirects her attention toward Anatole's immoderate hiccoughs, which so increasingly distress her that she becomes hysterical. When Henriette suggests water to assuage Anatole, and Monsieur Dufour can only admit that they only have wine on hand, Madame Dufour ardently responds to him, "Oh! If you were a real man, you would know where to find water." The transformation of desire into phantasm and then symptom at least signals that sexuality has a place for Mme. Dufour, which can hardly be said for her husband and future son-in-law. Finally, she must seek out her daughter to calm her nerves, asking her to scratch her back, eliciting the sighs of relief that indicate that at least in some way she is satisfiable.

It is fitting then, that she should ultimately end up in Rodolphe's boat. Both are keenly aware of the rules of the sexual game; both also know the pleasure in transgressing the roles
that they are constrained to play. Rodolphe is shrewd to the codes of sexual coupling but is cavalier about surmounting it. According to his calculations, and everything he does is pure "reasoned" calculation, both the mother and the daughter are fair game. Henri, on the other hand, is not such a libertine. It is Henri who explicates the structure of kinship, concluding that to have sex with Henriette would either mean marrying her or destroying her life. A child born from that encounter would be a "responsibility" that he chooses not to risk. Henri is a man, in Rodolphe's words, of "eternal love"; in other words, he is prey to the system of obligations and "responsibilities" that comprise any modern kinship structure. Rodolphe would simply gain pleasure from such a transgression, Henri would not, in theory. Henri, though, eventually reveals himself to be driven by more than just chaste sentiment, scheming his way into Henriette's boat and more.

It is Henriette however, that fuels the film's momentum, and it is also she for whom the motives and desire are the least patent. On the cusp of sexual maturity, Renoir makes Henriette pulled in two very different directions by two very powerful forces: nature and culture. She is the Surrealists' femme-enfant, possessing a physical maturity and spiritual naivety that defies the common logic of both. Ease and confusion alternately animate her desires, and nowhere does Renoir more explicitly manifest that than in the pivotal scene between mother and daughter under the cherry tree:

Henriette: Say mother, when you were young, I mean when you were my age, did you often come to the countryside?

Mme. Dufour: No, not often. Like you.

Henriette: Did you have that strange feeling as I do today?
Mme. Dufour: Strange feeling?

Henriette: Well, yes. Did you feel a kind of tenderness for the grass, for the water, for the trees?... a vague sense of desire? It grabs you here [points to her chest], it wells up in you, almost making you want to cry. Tell me mother, did you feel that when you were young?

Mme. Dufour: But I still feel it, my dear girl. Only now I am more sensible [raisonnable].

Renoir uses this dialogue, and the preceding discussion between the two characters, to communicate the almost spiritual affinity that Henriette shares with the nature that surrounds her. She is no less sexualized for being childlike, but that is indeed the film's power, judging from the critics' overwhelming response to Henriette's character. Throughout the film she communes intensely with nature, whether it be swinging ecstatically through the air, consuming the cherries that hang over her (she is the only one to do so), breathing in the immense silence of the water, or, especially, staring rivetedly at the nightingale while Henri makes his unwanted, sexual advances.

Henriette is not, however, simply childlike in her ways and manners. She is also keenly aware of the societal pressures upon her, and cognizant as well of her role to play in the family business: she admits that she cannot come frequently to the countryside because her father's business requires her presence; she refuses to continue on the water with Henri because of her concern for her mother's well-being; and finally, it is she who queries the two schemers about their own professional "responsibilities". Throughout the film she combines the naivety of a marvelling child with the exacting propriety of a young woman astutely aware of the status that she must not tarnish.

The status of Henriette Dufour--her exact place in the political and sexual economies--
is the pivot around which circulates the dynamic tensions in *Une Partie de campagne*. In part, it is precisely the problem of "responsibility" that subtends the plot's development, and Renoir manipulates the concept's manifold resonances in a variety of registers. It first appears in the conversation between Henri and Rodolphe that accompanies their fixation on the Dufour women's presence on the swings. Rodolphe, ever the more eager, sees nothing but the potential for a fine afternoon's distraction. Henri, on the contrary, wants no part of the dalliance, seeing only the "responsibilities" of a possible pregnancy or at least potential marriage. He would rather avoid altogether any encounter than risk the possible side-effects. Later, as Henri is warming up to the idea of an afternoon with Henriette, they find themselves alone together, discussing the reasons why Henriette cannot get away to the countryside more often. She states that her parents' business obligations prevent her from visiting more often, to which Rodolphe, seeing the two of them suspiciously together pipes in, "In short, responsibilities are scaring you less and less." Henri responds, "I am beginning to get used to them." Confused by this coded exchange, Henriette innocently asks, "You have responsibilities? A business perhaps?" Later again, as already noted, Henriette will show her earnest sense of responsibility when Henri offers to take her onto the island, and she answers that she better not, explaining that her mother's fear of the water is nagging her to return back to shore.

None of these moments would gain significance were it not for the fact that "responsibility" plays in the double registers of sex and economy. In short, decisions must be made with respect to either obeying the laws of social convention or acting instead upon personal desire, ignoring the consequences. Rodolphe and Henri's initial conversation is
simply a debate about the moral obligation to a social structure that codes them as "outsiders". It is a Lévi-Straussian discussion of the persistence of kinship rules and obligations in a "modern" society. Henriette is clearly from another clan, off-limits to them, and their choice is whether or not to obey the interdiction upon having sexual relations with a woman outside their own clan. The danger, then (that Henri eloquently articulates), is that by transgressing that rule of endogamy they will in fact throw a wrench into the smooth operation of the cycles of marital obligation, destroying Henriette's life along the way. Contaminated by an outsider, she would be subject to exclusion by her own group, losing her identity and, in effect, her "life".

What is Henriette, then, if not the perfect embodiment of the "exchanged woman"? Renoir's genius is in shifting this essay on the elementary structures of kinship to a contemporary setting, and in so doing, articulating the modern imbrication of the social with the economic. Two scenes in particular illustrate Henriette's status as object of exchange. In the first, after getting permission from Monsieur Dufour to go boating, Henri, Henriette and Rodolphe go galloping toward the shore. Henriette is literally switched back and forth from the grasp of her two suitors as they vie for her "hand". In the other scene, Rodolphe and Henri stumble upon the hat that she has left behind in the picnic area. Picking it up, they each grab back and forth at it until Rodolphe finally gains possession of it. Ironical the hat, a metonym for Henriette, is covered with flowers, and Rodolphe begins to pluck the petals one by one, playing a version of the "She loves me, she loves me not" game. Foreshadowing events to come, this literal de-flowering immediately presages impending storm clouds, as if the defloration had somehow provoked the storm.
Despite their efforts to seduce Henriette from the web of social obligations to which she is wedded, Henriette does ultimately end up married to Anatole; she accedes to the law of the Father, a law that had already promised her to Anatole. If the decision were only left to Henriette, which it is not, there is clearly no evidence to suggest that she would choose Anatole, the sexless, hapless appendage on their expedition. There is absolutely no relationship apparent between them, except that he is the heir apparent to her father's business. The extent of his impotency Renoir depicts in the scene in which Henriette and her mother approach the swings. While Cyprien attends to his wife's need for a push, Anatole stands apart from Henriette, who is herself in no need of his aid. Anatole's position, literally, mirrors the grandmother's, outside of obvious coupling. Never does he play a role that bears any relation to Henriette, except at the film's end, once the transaction is already completed.

Thus, one can read the tears that come to Henriette's eye in the extreme close-up at the end as a kind of commentary on the coming to awareness of the power of the social nexus. Her sexual encounter with Henri opens her eyes to the structural impossibility of continuing with him, and it is then, at exactly the moment when her innocence is lost, that she understands her fate. The sexual economy of which she is a part determines for her her eventual mate; she has no free, independent choice. The storms symbolize both her sexual awakening and the fury of her mis-directed ardor. Nature takes revenge for her transgression of the rule of marriage, dousing the budding romance with a hard-driving rain. This is reading is further substantiated by the conclusion—her re-encounter with Henri. Both appear in darker, more sober clothing, as if to indicate the cloud that hangs over their aborted union. This was the place of my most tender memories, he confesses; I think back on it every night,
she admits. The words that she cannot articulate at the end bespeak her mute, but unwilling submission to the Law. And when Anatole calls her to his side, she returns, distracted by what could have been. The film gracefully illustrates the power of the patriarchal sexual economy as it traces its designs across the body of one young woman. As a vestigial organ in a modern context, the rules of marriage still apply a force with the power to mold social relations, destroying a woman's own self-determination is the process.

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While that analysis of Une Partie de campagne makes sense in the context of its plot and iconography, it omits an account of some of the formal mechanisms that complicate and at times interfere with such a reading. One might describe this shift in emphasis as a movement from a more Lévi-Straussian reading of the film to a Lacanian one. Producing such an "objective" reading of Une Partie de campagne (as above) avoids any account of spectatorship and the construction of a critical gaze, two problems that profoundly inform Lacan's work. More significantly, however, it fails to address two of the film's most riveting moments. In each case, it is Henriette Dufour/Sylvia Bataille's look at the camera--in the first case mediated, in the second case not--that subverts the smooth operation of the cinematic codes.

We first see Henriette Dufour in the rented milk wagon as the family crosses the bridge that takes them to Père Poulain's restaurant. Here, she is neatly framed, as is the rest of the family, by the square window of the milk wagon. Simply an anonymous member of the family, this actually only functions to place her within that context, it does not introduce her character. That actually comes in the famous scene in which Rodolphe throws open the
window's shudder and we/they spy Madame Dufour and her daughter on the swings. Framing
the women on the swings like a tableau straight from Renoir the elder's oeuvre, the shot
through the window finally introduces both the pair of men and the film's viewers to Henriette
Dufour. It is of course no coincidence that Henriette is framed in this way, as she imminently
becomes the object of a triad of gazes that will begin to structure the act of looking for the
rest of the film.

I should say that it is a triad of gazes that operate within the diegetic space, as our,
the viewers', look adds a fourth dimension to the matrix. If Henri and Rodolphe constitute
the first point of origin of the scopic regime, the second is comprised of a foursome of
seminarists who wander by as Henriette is in mid-swing. Her effervescent effort distracts the
two in front, clearly the younger pair, and even one of the elders in back, but they are finally
prompted along by what appears to be the senior member of the group.\footnote{Unable to not look,
they reveal those desires cloaked behind their somber dress. The third axis of the diegetic
gaze is a group of young boys who, peering over the stone wall, excitedly watch Henriette
swinging; while the innocence of their intention is not obvious, their sheer enthusiasm is. All
three of these perspectives could perhaps be explained away as a filmic representation of the
line from Maupassant's story that describes Henriette Dufour as the kind of young woman
who leaves a mark on all those who have the good fortune to cross her path. That
explanation might hold true were it not for one fleeting gesture that unsettles the naturalness
of the spectatorial space.}

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\footnote{The seminarist in the first row but furthest from the camera is played, in an appropriately
perverse twist, by none other than Georges Bataille.}
After finally giving up on her heady ride on the swing, upon her mother's moderating suggestion, Henriette runs toward the window that frames her and from which Henri and Rodolphe watch her. Just before exiting out of the frame, however, she hesitates ever so briefly, casting an eye back in the direction of her onlookers—us. The gesture is so very slight that it can pass without notice, but it is misguided to underestimate the significance of its power. Up to this point, we, the spectators, are forced to adopt the gaze of, identify with, Henri and Rodolphe. Hidden in the shadowed recesses of their lair, they watch the unfolding events as we do, unobstructed and unseen. (One might argue that this so-called "identification" of the spectator with Henri and Rodolphe assumes a masculine subject/spectator who might buy into the scopic regime. I would argue, however, that the film precisely structures the viewer as masculine. The triangulation of Henriette by the three groups of male onlookers in effect stages the process of identification, repeating the gendered act of looking three times. It is not that the spectator is necessarily masculine, only that it is produced in that way). Henriette's look, then, catches them/us in the act of looking. The effect is analogous to the difference that Lacan articulates between the eye and gaze. The eye sees, from the subject's focal point outward; the gaze, on the other hand, comes from the object back to the subject and ensnares it. As the object of desire, Henriette Dufour exposes the structures that capture her. She "comments" on the cinematic apparatus, denaturalizing the smooth operation of its scopic economy. This gesture, easily overlooked, jars the spectator out of complacency, out of the naturalness of its look. It also sets the stage, however, for a second scopic intervention. In this case, though, the effect is far more emphatic.
The second scene occurs right before the end of the film and is, so say many critics, one of the most poignant moments in the history of cinema. I am referring, of course, to the extreme close-up of Henriette's eye, just after her sexual encounter with Henri. We first see their embrace as it fills the screen, then the giant image of Henriette's eye as a tear wells up inside of it. That remarkable shot then dissolves into a medium shot of Henri and Henriette together, clothed, but with her back to him. What makes the famous shot so radical is not simply the extreme close-up but two other elements—its sheer surreality and her look directly at the camera.

There is a long history to the analysis of a look into the camera, that is, a look that breaks the so-called "fourth wall" and interrupts the unblemished articulation of the fictional space. The film's ability, or inability, to recuperate it into the narrative dimension is often dependent upon the way in which the extra-diegetic space is formulated. As Marc Vernet argues, for example, that space is not simply that of the passive movie-goer but,

If the "spectatorial ego" is that part of me that participates in the fiction, which identifies with the characters, the look only reaches me in the fiction. If the "spectatorial ego" is that part of me that knows that I am at the cinema, that look does not reach me since it has for a vanishing point either place in a diegetic space with which I do not confuse myself or...something like infinity. The spectator is a role that the subject plays. (Vernet 1988,21-22)

While Vernet's analysis does apply in certain situations, it is not the most fitting in this case. A strategy more relevant for understanding the effect of Henriette's penetrating stare, borrowing from Lacan, is Slavoj Zizek's.

Zizek's novel enterprise is to approach films anachronistically, that is, to imagine that their formal mechanisms can inform a reading of Lacan, even at times that they informed
Lacan, rather than the opposite. Nevertheless, drawing upon Lacan's theory of the gaze as elaborated in his seminar of 1964 (gathered together as *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-Analysis* [1978]), Zizek probes those moments in a film that stand out, gather attention, and disrupt its smooth, naturalized flow—he names these points "phallic signifiers" (Zizek 1991,91). Deriving his concept from Lacan's analysis of Holbein's painting *The Ambassadors* (best known for its anamorphic skull), Zizek searches for those "uncanny" moments in film that suspend a spectator's powers of comprehension and, in the process, query the gaze:

the "phallic" element of a picture is a meaningless stain that "denatures" it, rendering all its constituents "suspicious," and thus opens up the abyss of the search for a meaning—nothing is what it seems to be, everything is to be interpreted, everything is supposed to possess some supplementary meaning. The ground of the established, familiar signification opens up; we find ourselves in a realm of total ambiguity, but this very lack propels us to produce ever new "hidden meanings": it is a driving force of endless compulsion...this paradoxical point undermines our position as "neutral," "objective" observer, pinning us to the observed object itself. (ibid, 91)

In its strange, almost surreal, form as well as in its irruptive dissolution of the diegetic space, I would argue that Henriette Dufour's look into the camera provides exactly one of these moments. As Zizek concludes the above citation, "This is the point at which the observer is already included, inscribed in the observed scene—in a way, it is the point from which the picture itself looks back at us" (ibid,91). What then, are its effects?

One way to unfold the myriad possibilities that Henriette's tear-filled look encompasses is to focus on the nature and status of the sexual act itself. As suggested above, the tears symbolize the loss of autonomy and the realization of a social structure's determining force upon an "exchanged" woman. This interpretation, however, completely elides the brutal
nature of the sexual encounter itself. I would suggest that the look at the camera affords, as
Zizek suggests, a double reading of the events, placing any final determination in suspension.
When Henriette accedes to Henri's desire (and her own?), are her defenses simply melting
away, or is it rape? Is Henriette giving in to her own urges, or is she simply surviving a rape
she cannot extricate herself from. Between desire and self-defense lies a chasm opened up
by her look at the camera.

If the act was rape, does that reading play out consistently with the end? In fact it
does: Henriette's tears bear witness to her pain; her final dialogue with Henri becomes, for
him, a self-exculpatory re-interpretation of the events ("You know, my fondest memories are
from here") and, for her, an anguished recounting of her daily nightmares since ("I think of
it every night"); Henriette's mute attempt at some final words becomes her inability to express
the rage and hatred with which she is then filled; her marriage to the sexless Anatole becomes
a means for avoiding the violence of the sexual act. That ending thus forces us, the viewers,
into a further identification with Henri, for we too have interpreted the events retrospectively
as lovemaking, not rape, despite evidence to the contrary.

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The point, however, is not which reading is ultimately "correct". Instead, it is that
Sylvia Bataille, in glancing directly at the camera, has put us, and our desire, into the picture.
By looking at us she puts into question the truth of, the nature of, the sexual act--does desire
seek its satisfaction through adoration or aggression?--a gesture that her future husband will
repeat. By looking at us she interferes with the any innocent way in which we see--with
whom or what are we complicit if we view the act as one of love and not rape, simply to
ensure the ending as happy? But most importantly, by looking at us she asks us what we desire, for what are we looking in her, and what pleasures are we gaining along the way? By looking at us Sylvia Bataille catches us looking at her, engages us, forever cracking the smooth screen of scopic inviolability behind which we often prefer to hide.
Chapter XI

[A]nxiety occurs not when the object-cause of desire is lacking; it is not the lack of the object that gives rise to anxiety but, on the contrary, the danger of our getting too close to the object and thus losing the lack itself.

--Slavoj Zizek

8 April 1993

CONTACT!! After having given up the ghost on the possibility of ever contacting Madame Lacan she answered the phone on the first ring, and when I tried to explain myself she was totally combative and ornery. When I stammered that I wanted to hear the stories of the "role of women in Surrealism" she retorted that it was all men, and I continued to stammer that it was women that interested me, women. She had absolutely no clue who I was, didn't seem to have received my letter, and generally seemed to have awfully strong opinions about my search. I was in a total blur, having not expected any response, and having assumed that she would have some idea of who I was. She finally, after saying "Listen..." three or four times blurted out, "You are here in Paris for how much longer? Listen, call me again on the twentieth of April and I will give you an appointment. Click."

She was about as far from being refined and reserved as one could imagine. Lively, contentious and opinionated come more immediately to mind. And will she remember me when I call on the twentieth, and will she care to give me an appointment? The whole conversation, quite according to script, started out with a confusion over identity, since she had no idea who I was and I didn't even suspect that it was she. It took two or three exchanges before the identities were even sorted out. I am probably less sure of the démarche than I was before the call, since it was much easier to deal with nothing than to deal with a gap in language and the general and overall confusion stemming from my linguistic handicap and a hard-of-hearing older woman. Life is never really simple, is it? But contact was made!! A very poor connection, sparks flew, but contact nonetheless.

Having essentially given up hope that Madame Lacan would ever respond to the letter of introduction and inquiry that I had sent to her on 29 March 1993, and quickly running out of time, I did what for me was the unthinkable--I picked up the phone and tried to call her.

Working under the assumption that her phone number was the one listed in the phonebook

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8 Zizek 1991,8.
under "Bataille, Georges 3 rue de Lille" (her ex-husband who had not lived there for half a century) I tried calling on several occasions. Given the months, or even years, of build-up that led to actually making voice contact, it was not surprising, then, that I suffered from a more than modest amount of symptomatic anxiety. I was, literally, sick to my stomach with from the tension.

This is not to suggest that the course of events progressed any more smoothly in the subsequent few weeks. I quickly dashed off another letter, nearly identical to the first, just to remind her who exactly I was, what I was doing, and when I would call her again. But more significantly, during the twelve days that separated my first conversation with her and my next call, I was struck by a strange feeling that I could not dispel. It was as if, in finally, personally contacting her, I had somehow pierced the bubble, the aura, that surrounded her. My goal now achievable, my object within range, the magic disappeared.

10 April 1993
For some reason I have a very bad feeling about what transpired or what will transpire with Sylvia Lacan on Thursday. I don't know if it is because I feel somehow duplicitous, or like I am bothering someone who clearly does not wish to be, or something else. I can't quite put my finger on it but it is as if now that I have made contact with her something is finished, the desire is filled. All the excitement is gone, all the energy, the mystery, the charm, the thrill, the fear, the anxiety (I am sure that that will return with no problem). It is as if in finally making her present I have finished something...Lack filled, not satisfying.

Of course I had really filled no lack, I had only made the possibility real and imminent. Whatever myriad possibilities I had imagined were quickly sobered, and whatever myriad scenarios I had considered by not finding her were similarly foreclosed.

All that was left was to make the phone call and set up the appointment:
20 April 1993
The day of reckoning turned out to be the weirdest of all. After finally getting up the nerve to call her, the same thing happened all over again: "C'est qui à l'appareil?" she squawked [a phrase that I would become tragically familiar with, it translates literally, and somewhat antiquatedly as "Who is it at the apparatus?" and more colloquially as "Who is there?"] As I explained myself all over again there finally seemed to be a moment of recognition, and then she dropped the "I cannot see you this week, call back next week." "OK, bye-bye." The first thing that came to my mind was the stupid confusion over my unpronounceable last name [in French "Hunt" sounds simply like a grunt], and the apparent lack of recognition on her part. I couldn't tell if she was blowing me off or not, whether she knew who I was or not, or whether she was just busy. Despondent over the fact that still nothing had been resolved; that I should have to wait another week just to have her dismiss me again seems ludicrous but unavoidable.

Her second deferral had really shaken me. With no real sense of whether she had any intention of seeing me or was simply being somewhat polite in evasion I did not know how to read her response. I was scheduled to fly back to the U.S. in two weeks, for good, and I was ready to abandon any hope of ever meeting her. It was early in the day and I had put off any decision about leaving for the next day, since I was in no frame of mind to make any sound judgments. I decided that, for diversion, I would make a brief tour of some of Paris's many cinema memorabilia shops in the hope of finding some Sylvia Bataille publicity materials or photo stills. As Paris boasts several dozen of these shops, I picked a handful and set off. I had especially been hoping to find the original poster from Une Partie de Campagne, or at least a reproduction, since it would assuredly have a picture of Sylvia Bataille on it. I was told, however, that it had never been reprinted in facsimile form and the original was, of course, quite rare. Finding nothing of much use in the first few shops, I was ready to abandon this venture as well, chalking up the entire day to bad fortune.

I had two shops left on my list, near each other, not far from my home, and so I
decided to take the one closest by Metro to where I was at that time, and then to return home. Strangely, and I have never since been able to explain this, the train did not stop at the station of my choice but proceeded on with no announcement. Fortunately, the other shop was two stops further along, so I chose to visit that one instead. As I entered, the shop owner was on the phone, so I looked around. The store seemed quite small, with very little immediately of interest, and I was about to leave, but, not wanting to appear rude, waited for him to end his conversation.

Really simply for politeness sake, and some nagging sense of duty, I asked whether he might have the poster from *Une Partie de campagne*. He smiled and pointed directly above him to a rather modest, but handsome poster that had not a photo of Sylvia Bataille but instead a freely drawn illustration from the film. After a few questions about it, I asked how much it would cost. Again he smiled and responded (apparently having divined my strong accent), in English, "One thousand dollars." I laughed, and joked in response that, sadly, I had but nine hundred dollars with me at the moment. This having broken the ice a bit, he explained the reasons for the high cost, which I knew already, and dropped the fact that he had had a copy many years previously that had sold to Martin Scorsese. This copy, he added, had arrived just three days ago.

I asked him whether he had any memorabilia pertaining to Sylvia Bataille, to which he answered that he had had some in the past, but no longer. He then asked why I was interested in her particularly, to which I gave a brief summary of my research. Had I interviewed her yet?, he inquired. Detailing the tortuous path by which I had managed to keep her at bay, I admitted that no, I had not, that I had spoken with her only this morning,
that she had rebuffed me again, and that I was planning on leaving the country shortly in any case. It was then that the single largest bombshell dropped: he was a good friend of hers. He would call her right away to set up an appointment.

Electrified by this possibility (and yet somewhat horrified that she might be feeling harassed by this American who had bothered her only several hours before), I watched as he called home to get the number for her and then placed the call. Numbed, I witnessed unfolding the lightning bolt of chance that would crack open this sealed door. When he got through to her, I heard a rather familiar problem present itself: "Sylvia? Sylvia, it's Jean-Louis...Jean-Louis...it's Jean-Louis Capitaine. Sylvia, it's Jean-Louis Capitaine. Yes, how are you today, surviving the heat in your apartment?" I could not hear, but could certainly imagine the repeated "C'est qui à l'appareil?" that followed his many attempts at recognition. They had a nice conversation during which he mentioned that an American gentleman was here in his store and wanted to see her, and could she possibly do him the favor of seeing this young man? After a good deal of catching up he got off the phone and told me that I only had to call her the following Saturday at ten in the morning and an appointment would be mine. Literally hours away from deciding to leave Paris with nothing positive to show for my efforts, I stumbled into an opportunity that could only be described as miraculous. I do not know whether it is more Lacanian or Zen, but in any case, there is some truth to the adage that the less one seeks the object of desire, the closer one comes to obtaining it.

Due to call her on Saturday for an appointment that day, as I assumed, I hurriedly composed a list of questions for what might be my only chance to see her. Though I could stay in Paris longer if necessary, other forces were compelling me to return home, so I had
to evaluate my options after our first meeting for the possibility of further interviews. But given the capricious nature of the process to this point, I was not about to save any questions for "next time".

24 April 1993
Day of reckoning, take 3. I was told to call her at what seemed to be precisely 10 am, got four hours of sleep, my stomach has been nauseous since yesterday morning, I tirelessly banged out my insipid questions, finished precisely at 10 am, and no one was there. Tried two more times, no one. Is she avoiding me, did she forget, has she taken ill, is she dead? My physiological reaction to all this is so intense that at times I thought it might be impossible to go through with it, and now what? I don't even dare eat much, and will probably end up in some catatonic state foaming at the mouth or fainting if I ever do get to 3 Rue de Lille. The deferral continues.

Later that day:

Finally I spoke to her. We had quite a normal conversation, and I see her at 2:30 on Monday. More delays, of course, but at least it is set. She seemed much more talkative, admitted that she had a hearing problem, and wanted to warn me that she really didn't occupy herself much with the women Surrealists. I think that she will be quite nice, in fact, and more could come of this than I had hoped a few days ago. At least now I can eat--stomach calmed.

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A strange sense of calm spread over me in the two days I had left until the meeting. Perhaps the most palliative balm was the fact of our having a quite pleasant conversation on the phone. By finally humanizing this "object" that had attained mythic proportions during my search for her I deflated the anxiety of the encounter with what Lacan would call the Real; perhaps it was now into the realm of the Symbolic, where the codes and rules of more routine interactions are played out. She had assured me repeatedly in our conversation that she had absolutely nothing to say or contribute about the relationship between women and Surrealism
(the general aim of my interest as I had explained it to her), despite my reciprocal protestation to the contrary.

Her one warning was to be on time, as she did not hear very well and her helper could only stay until 2:30 to answer the doorbell when I rang. Giving myself a few extra minutes in which to find some flowers to bring to her, I headed off on the Metro to her neighborhood. As anyone who has spent much time in Paris knows, there are flower stores everywhere in the city; it is one of its charms. I, however, could not find one in the vicinity of her apartment, and I started to wander impatiently and more urgently as the time approached 2:30 pm. Finally locating some, it was already 2:30, I was blocks from her address, and I was going to be late. Jogging, with flowers in hand, an uncomfortable suitcoat on, and drops of perspiration beading on my forehead, I arrived, rang the doorbell, was buzzed up to the apartment, and knocked on the handsome door.

Not expecting Madame Lacan herself to answer the door (not knowing what to expect, in truth), I was surprised to see a thin, elderly woman greet me. It had all happened so fast. The moment had arrived. The very first words she spoke to me were, "Vous êtes fou! (You are crazy)." And so she whisked me into the apartment, gave the flowers to her companion to take care of, and escorted me into her living room.

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What I will undoubtedly most remember from that afternoon is the frequency with which I found myself laughing heartily out loud. Not even out of nervousness, as I might have expected, but instead out of the sheer pleasure of our conversation and the sparkling, mischievous, and playful sense of humor that Sylvia Lacan displayed. The generosity with
which she received me into her apartment that afternoon was matched only by the reticence with which she admitted to any role of her own in the culture that surrounded her. Her self-effacement was extraordinary and almost impenetrable: I was simply unable to convince her that the life that she had led could be of interest to anyone, and she even went so far as to apologize on a half dozen occasions for having so little to respond to the questions I posed. If my desire was to make her role and contributions to modern French culture visible and legible, her's seemed to be to write efface herself from the picture, to write herself out of the text.

At 84 years old her memory was very sharp, and, as might be expected, she was the most animated while recollecting her film career. A certain amount of her reluctance might simply be explained by a kind of propriety that someone of her social standing adheres to. In other words, she did not want to appear to "easy", to divulge great quantities of information at the first question I posed to her. While still quite thin (as she had been her entire life), she was very simply attired in pants and sweater. We talked in the living room, a room that boasted several remarkable paintings on the wall, a scattered array of sculptures, a plush, elegant couch, the chair I was sitting in, and a large television set. Madame Lacan smoked several cigarettes during the interview, politely offering one to me as well (though I had never smoked before in my life, I was so caught up in the moment that I almost accepted one). Her apartment was richly appointed in discreet, handsome furniture, and had I had the occasion, I would certainly have profited from a closer look around. Instead, I was absorbed in the interview. Then, just as quickly, Madame Lacan whisked me out of the apartment, owing to a medical appointment for which she was already late. She had only
recently had a cataract operation (which explained, in part, her reluctance to meet with me previously), and needed to return to the doctor for some follow-up tests. Explaining that her recent operation had been quite traumatic, she admitted that she was not in her best form. She even went so far as to express that she was ashamed not to have more engrossing material for me. We set up a time for two days later when we could meet again, and as she escorted me out the door, I realized the true privilege that was mine.

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Despite being ill at ease with my ability to elicit information from her during our time together, I left with a sense of a relationship started. The whole affair had been a game of sorts, I began to realize: while I exhorted her on to tell me more, marveling at her interesting life, she "reluctantly" parceled out anecdotes and details, denying her own significance while increasingly revealing more. The long list of questions I had brought I had never taken out of my bag; they had seared themselves into my consciousness. A combination of novice nerves and a sense that I might not ever get another chance caused me to jump rapid-fire from one question to the next, rarely allowing the discomfort of dead air to provoke her into telling more than she might normally. Had I learned much that I did not already know? Not really. In fact, many of her recollections echoed those that I had read in the few interviews that she had granted. What did emerge was the keen sense of a person, the intangible qualities that defy two-dimensional representation: wicked humor, cagey intelligence, a sparkle in her eye, the warmth of her radiance.
She called me Tuesday night before our next meeting. She needed to go to the doctor again for more tests. She was fearful of more tests, as anyone who has undergone cataract surgery probably is, and would be in no shape to entertain visitors. Sadly, I agreed, and offered to see her a few days later. To that she responded that one could only guess at how she might feel, so I should call her later in the week. I was now faced with the dilemma of leaving on the next Saturday, or extending my stay. As she was clearly not in robust health at the moment, and as I had commitments back in the U.S., I took the gamble that I could see her again in the Fall when I would return. She seemed to be in good health generally, other than her eyes, so I decided to take my chances when she might be sufficiently recovered from her surgery and in better spirits.

Hoping to see her, however, just one more time before I left in order to cement, in some sense, our relationship, I called her on Friday morning. As she answered in her now familiar voice I introduced myself in the usual fashion: "Hello, this is Mr. Hunt, may I speak with Madame Lacan." To this, she responded, in a phrase I was all too familiar with, "C'est qui à l'appareil?" Speaking a bit more forcefully, I repeated "It is Monsieur 'Hhhunnt,'" drawing my name out as to make it sound like something more than a grunt. "Madame Lacan n'est pas là" (Mme. Lacan isn't [t]here). The phone clicked dead.

I was left bewildered. While I had become somewhat accustomed to rejection throughout this whole process, this was different. Had it really been she on the phone? Did

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9 The fact that she had my telephone number revealed an interesting detail. She could have only found it on the letters I had written to her, as I never gave it to her during the interview. So, despite her contentions to the contrary, she had indeed read the letters I sent, had kept them for future reference, and had only been twisting the truth to her advantage.
I mistake her for someone else? The answer to both was categorically "no". What of our relationship? What of our newly fashioned rapport? She had never hesitated to tell me before when medical complications prevented our meeting, so had it been her health she could simply have admitted as much. This simple sentence—Madame Lacan n'est pas là—had turned my world upside down. I was incapable of determining its significance, short of fitting it into paranoid delusions and conspiracy theories. That it perfectly summed-up the original premise of my entire undertaking was humor that, while not lost to me at that moment in time, hardly seemed amusing.

With this all too strange (and yet somehow predictable) turn of events, I was ready to just pack up and go home. I took its pregnant symbolism as a sign that things had come to an end. It was simply the most fitting note to end on, I felt.

Had it not been for the wise counsel of those around me, I would have left it at that. But friends persisted, dissuading me from leaving without at least calling one more time. So, Saturday morning, only a few hours before my departure, I rang her one more time. She answered, as usual, immediately recognized me, and then asked if I might be inclined to visit her that afternoon. I had no choice but to politely decline, cursing my bad fortune. I asked if she would be willing to continue our conversation again in the Fall upon my return. She answered positively, suggesting I wait until after August. As I bade her farewell, and thanked her again for the opportunity to finally meet her in person, she did the same, reminding me, in broken English, to "have a good trip". Our rapport back on track, the future full of possibility, I set off for home.

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The weight of the Real had not come crashing in on me, suffocating me, as I had expected. Instead, it had enriched me one thousand fold. One never really fills a lack, satisfies a desire, or meets the Real, that was clear. But what did happen was that Sylvia Lacan had far exceeded the myth. More faceted than any version of her that I could conjure up in my head or on paper, her dazzling presence only amplified the staggering dimensions of her absence.
Chapter XII

It is odd to recount a life, like that, detached from oneself. -- Sylvia Bataille

Jamer Hunt: I am sure that you have some opinions about the books your husbands wrote.

Did you ever give your opinions to your husbands about their books?

Sylvia Lacan: Never...Never. They always wrote their books as they intended to.

JH: And what did you think of their books? You read some of them?

SL: Some were good, others not so good.

JH: They generated a minor scandal, didn't they, such as The Story of the Eye?

SL: No. It was a very "high-brow" scandal, very opprobriative. Everyone agreed that is was a masterpiece....But, that is it. They never sought my advice.

JH: You met Georges Bataille where?

SL: I met him at an art opening...Surrealist?, Dadaist?...a Surrealist opening. There were several painters represented. He was a friend of my sister and brother-in-law. I was still in school then, I was sixteen. Then one day, because I was often not at school, I would leave my belongings at the station consignment, and then I would go wandering. I met Georges near the station at St. Lazare. He said, "You don't recognize me? I'm a friend of your sister's." "Oh, yes," I said, "I remember you." And then, well, that was it.

That is all.

JH: No, no, these are wonderful recollections, for me they are fascinating. What did you see in Georges Bataille?

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"In Philippe 1961,78.
SL: I saw that he was less of an idiot than the usual boys I went out with, went out dancing with.

JH: And what did he see in you, why was he attracted to you?

SL: Because I wasn't too ugly...

JH: [Laughing] No, but your intelligence as well...

SL: No, it wasn't for my intelligence. I had a way of carrying myself in life that pleased him...I was already "dramatic".

But you already know all these stories.

JH: No, no, not at all. What else I would like to know is how you and your three sisters all married Surrealists?

SL: You cannot say that [Jean-Baptiste] Piel was a Surrealist!

JH: Not at all? But he knew all those of that group?

SL: Yes, he knew them, but not all of them. He didn't know Breton, he didn't know...let's just say, I regret putting this way, that he wasn't close like I was... or Georges Bataille. Piel became Piel the day that Bataille gave Critique to him. Piel is no genius.

JH: Was it simply a coincidence that you and your four sisters married as you did?

SL: Yes it was just a coincidence. Of course it was a coincidence. My sister who married [André] Masson was thirty when she married, that's rather old for marrying, especially during that era. She, Masson's wife, had a rare intelligence.

But really, I have nothing worth telling you. It's like I told you in the beginning, I'm ashamed by how little of interest..

JH: But no...
SL: Yes. It's also so long ago.

JH: It is, but what I find so interesting, why I am talking to you, is that one hears so much from the "Great Men" of that era, and rarely from the women who were clearly their equals.

SL: I'm the very last one. That's why you wanted to speak to me. There's nobody else to see.

JH: No, no...

SL: Dora Maar is...Well, there really is no one left, eh? Possibly Jacqueline Lamba, but I'm not even sure. Do you know where she is?

JH: No, no idea at all.

May I ask you a few questions about your film career, then?

SL: Of course, but it was certainly brief.

JH: When you began your career...

SL: When I began? It was a friend, Roger Vitrac, you have undoubtedly heard of him, he suggested that I come and see a man, a wonderful man, whose name was Michel [ ], but who, during the war, was in London under the name of Jacques Duchaine [?]. He worked as an announcer on British radio in the effort against the Germans. I came by his theater and he offered me an audition. Finally I ended up in the troupe called Le Compagnie de Quinze. I was there for a while. And then there were some movie makers watching us. It is not very complicated.

JH: Did you think in the beginning that this would be a career for you, or was it simply a passion?

SL: Oh, a career, of course.

JH: To be a woman in that milieu, was it difficult, or in fact easy?
SL: In what milieu?

JH: Cinema.

SL: It was difficult for those who wanted to be difficult. I didn't find it too hard. It's true that some men were completely unpleasant, and you thought that you had to sleep with them just to make a film.

JH: And you said what to them?

SL: Goodbye and thank you.

JH: [Laughing] That's a pretty good answer.

SL: [Laughing] Listen, one is not... well, obliged to practice two trades at a time.

Would you like a cigarette? Will it bother you?

JH: You were in some of the great films of that era.

SL: No, I wasn't in many big films...

JH: You were, there was Carné, Renoir...

SL: Oh, Carné, I despised him! A horrible individual. Horrible. Horrible. Horrible. Yves Montand, Michelle Morgan, when they were interviewed on the radio refused to answer questions about him. They detested him. I detested him. He asked me to accompany him to Belgium in order to present a film there. He called me, maybe six months later, to ask if I would like to be in another of his movies... it was out of the question.

JH: You made two films with him?

SL: I made one before the war, and then one after the war. I took the job because I was trying to work again in my trade, so I accepted. It was Jacques Prévert, moreover, who told me "You must do it, you must work again." That's why I accepted that film. The role wasn't
very interesting. The film was rather poorly acted by everybody, excuse my frankness, although the press was good for me. I never watched that film. I never tried to watch it later...

In addition, after that, I could no longer make films because of my husband. You know who my second husband was...?

JH: Yes, of course.

SL: He was awful...When I was working on a film, he would come onto the set when the light was red, when it was forbidden for anyone to enter, he would stride across the set while we were in the midst of a scene...Well, of course, the producer complained that those interruptions cost him too much.

JH: [laughing] There are stories of the making of Une Partie de campagne, that it was a bit of a disaster as well, with all the rain?

SL: A financial disaster, for sure. We couldn't even finish the film. I had left my daughter and my mother like hostages in a hotel during that summer. No one had paid, the producer hadn't paid us. So, well, I made the film...It was, materially, a disaster. In the end they finished the film very quickly, in order to finally show it. I was furious with Renoir. I signed onto the film in Paris, but Renoir demanded that we wait on location in case the weather turned clear. It weighed on me day and night. I arrived at the shooting location and where is Renoir? Renoir is in Paris. This lasted eight days. I eventually found him back in Paris. I said to him, "You are a coward." He answered, "That's it, Sylvia, you'll never make another film with me." "That's just fine!" I said. That was the end with Renoir. Later on, we reconciled our differences.
JH: That was after the war?
SL: Yes, after.

JH: Did you go the premier of the film, after the war?
SL: Oh, I don't recall. It's not really my kind of thing.

JH: What did you think when you saw yourself for the first time on the screen?
SL: I don't remember when that was.

JH: Was it in *Ademaï Aviateur*?
SL: No, no, it was long before that. A little film for Paramount, I can't remember its title.

JH: And were you offered a contract by American studios?
SL: No, no, they asked about me, in '35, or '36, but I had a little daughter, and I didn't want to leave. Now I no longer have that daughter. That is all.

JH: During your film shoots, who took care of your daughter?
SL: Claude Démann [?] and Yves Allégret, who replaced him during Renoir's shoots.

   I was very very happy when I saw the final version of the film [Une Partie], because I found the scenery to be magnificent. I thought that the whole story, situated on the water, and the music of Kosma were wonderful. Because I saw it before the music was added...

JH: People say that *Une Partie de campagne* is one of the greatest films of French cinema...
SL: Renoir told me, eventually, that "The most beautiful scene that I ever filmed," he told me this in '52, I think, while here at dinner, " was the scene that I shot between you and Darnoux."

JH: Yes, that is often described as one of the most beautiful moments of cinema, and that you were one of the most beautiful and truest actresses.
SL: The "truest", yes, people told me that afterward. Because up until that film, actresses projected their lines a bit too much. It is true that that was one of the first times that they spoke naturally.

JH: Was that also true of *Le Crime de M. Lange*, which was made in '36, and of which people say...

SL: Yes, it was made before. There were no problems on that one.

JH: One reads in the histories of that production that it was a film in which everybody partook equally....

SL: Well, not really, there were some actors who caused some "dramas", but nothing too unusual. It's a good film, but the sound is poor. I don't know why. They didn't refurbish the film stock itself, I think that would have helped.

JH: It is often said that the sound in Renoir's films is not ideal.

SL: It wasn't too bad. It's is true that Renoir, well, he paid more attention to the image. He was a very very very great director, Renoir. I must admit that. Despite all the hatred I had for him, I recognize his greatness as a director.

JH: Was it easy to work with him?

SL: For me it was a pleasure. It wasn't work, it was a joy. He was the kind of director who could draw out from within you what you had there.

He was also a sour bourgeois, too. A sour bourgeois who wanted to make himself into a proletarian. I cannot stand that. End of story.

JH: You were also in several films written by Jacques Prévert?

SL: No, no, I was in *Jenny* which was not a bad film, and..

SL: Yes, that one, and *Les Portes de la Nuit*, that's it.

JH: Was there one other, *Les Gens de Voyage*, perhaps?

SL: No, that wasn't written by Prévert.

JH: You worked with him often, was that by coincidence, or friendship?

SL: No, for example, in *Jenny*, he wanted me to play the role of Lysette Lanvin, but I couldn't see eye to eye with Carné. Carné thought that I wasn't a pretty enough young woman. For *Les Portes de la Nuit*, he, Jacques, that is, wanted me to play the role that went eventually to Nathalie Nattier. But Carné decided that I wasn't "elegant" enough. And the poor girl who took the role, who was very nice, she couldn't even take her mink overcoat off, because she was heavy. That was Carné's way with women. I turned to Jacques [Prévert], I wanted to get away, but he said, "Make the film, you'll see, everything will work out." Then I abandoned my career.

JH: Was that in 1950?

SL: I don't recall exactly, '48, I believe.

JH: Did you miss being an actress?

SL: Yes, I missed it a lot. Now, not so much.

JH: Do you ever watch your films, nowadays, on television when they show? SL: I don't much like the television.

You'll be staying here in Paris for how much longer?

JH: That depends on things, but probably until the first of May, or so.

SL: Do you still have many people to see?
JH: No, not many. In my opinion, you're the most important...

SL: [laughing] The most important because I have nothing to relate to you. That way you can say whatever you want! True?

JH: [laughing] No, not at all. You have seen, what I mean is... well, what interests me...

SL: What interests you?

JH: What I am really looking to find out is your influence upon your husbands and their work.

SL: My husbands?! None whatsoever!

JH: [laughing] That's impossible.

SL: Absolutely none! No influence! None.

JH: What about their influence upon you. Did they change your life, your thoughts, your ideas?

SL: My last husband changed my life considerably, that is true.

JH: For what reasons? Because he...

SL: He was a man who worked enormously hard. Tremendously intelligent. You know who he is?

JH: Of course.

SL: He was...what is called, well, a domestic tyrant. You know what that is?

JH: Yes, [laughing], like many men.

SL: But he was worth the trouble. I have absolutely no reproaches to make toward him, though. Just the contrary. But, it was not possible to be a wife, a mother to my children, and an actress at the same time. It wasn't possible.

Also, my husband, with the actors, he was...horrible. He despised them.
JH: Jealous?

SL: Not jealous, he just despised them. They annoyed him. He didn't like them.

JH: Was it because of him that you ended your film career?

SL: Because of him, because of life in general...I had to choose. I made my choice, but I didn't make a good choice. The mistakes that I made, I made by myself.

JH: After your career as an actress, you interested yourself in what? Your children...

SL: Yes, my children, but I was interested in whatever it is one interests oneself in...

JH: Books?


JH: Did you pay much attention to your husband Dr. Lacan's seminar?

SL: Yes, of course.

JH: And did you attend them in person at the auditorium?

SL: Yes.

JH: Always, or from time to time?

SL: Not at the end. At the very beginning, until '64 or '65.

JH: What did you think of his ideas?

SL: Fascinating.

JH: Really? People say, and I find myself, that his work is extremely difficult.

SL: It isn't readable. It is above all, spoken. The first time that he gave me text, to read, it was...The Mirror Stage. When he returned, I told that I understood nothing.

JH: [laughing] And what did he say?

SL: He explained it to me.
JH: And after that it was ...

SL: I still had a lot of trouble. It really isn't meant to be read.

JH: One can see a television production with Dr. Lacan, called *Télévision* ...

SL: The one that he did here or the one he did in Louvain?

JH: Here. In my opinion, while watching it, I would say that he was a great actor.

SL: Extraordinary!

JH: Was it all simply acting?

SL: He performed magnificently. But it wasn't on purpose. It was just a part of his character.

His seminar, it was mobbed.

JH: And what did you think of all those things that happened between all the psychoanalytic associations?

SL: It was hell. It was hell.

JH: In your mind, what was the cause of it? Egotism on the part of all the parties?

SL: They just couldn't understand. They did not understand. He was difficult to understand. But they didn't understand the originality of the contributions that Dr. Lacan made. They were afraid of him, that was all. They were afraid. I saw it often. He was the only one saying those things.

JH: So...

SL: He was wonderful with them, they were simply afraid.

JH: There was a seminar dedicated to you called *"The Freudian Thing,"* around 1956, or '55, why to you?

SL: I didn't know that.
JH: One other question that always interested me: why was it that your first daughter, I mean, your second daughter, Judith, had the last name Bataille, after having been separated from him?

SL: It was Judith. Bataille, that is the daughter that I no longer have. That is her portrait, there. It is by Balthus.

JH: It is beautiful.

SL: She was an extraordinary person. She was very Lacanian.

JH: Oh, really. Why?

SL: He loved her dearly, my husband. He really adored her. She was also a psychoanalyst. She wrote a wonderful book, are you familiar with it?

JH: No, I haven't read it yet.

SL: I'm not sure you can still find it. What was it called?... *L'Ombilique du reve.*

(PHONE CALL INTERRUPTS)

SL: That was my daughter Judith.

JH: She is also well known. You have a very famous family.

SL: They do many things.

JH: You were just in the process of telling me Judith had the last name Bataille.

SL: That's because at the time, 1940, I had not divorced Georges Bataille. She couldn't carry my name since my name was what it was. I asked Georges Bataille's permission, and that is how she was named Bataille. And then after that she was called Lacan. We straightened it all out.

JH: You separated from Georges Bataille in '34?
SL: Yes, in '34.

JH: That means you stayed married to him for another ten or so years...

SL: I divorced him in '46.

JH: That is quite a while to be still married but never divorced.

SL: [confusion]. He remarried, and had another daughter. A very nice girl.

JH: But why did you take a dozen years to get divorced?

SL: Because it was all the same to us. We needed neither to be married nor divorced. When his second daughter was born, then he wanted to get remarried so that she could be officially recognized.

JH: And you met Dr. Lacan around 1939?

SL: '39.

JH: How did you find him to be?

SL: Very fine.

JH: Very handsome?

SL: Very handsome.

JH: Very interesting? Very droll?


JH: [laughing] Not at all? It is said that he had a lively spirit. He wasn't amusing?

SL: He could be funny when he ought to be funny. But when you met him, just like that, he wasn't, well, he wasn't what you call... [she makes a gesture].

JH: [Laughing] And during the war, were you two together?

SL: During the war I was in the Midi and he came to see me very regularly.
JH: And were you in the Midi for several years?

SL: I was in the south from ’40 to ’44. Four years.

JH: Were those the hardest years of your life?

SL: Yes, it wasn't easy. But I can't really complain, because there were so many people who experienced so much unhappiness. I really can't speak to that kind of suffering. My mother was alive, my daughter was alive, my brother was alive. For us, we were all alive. What can I tell you. It was dreadful for those who had it so.

JH: I read that you helped many people.

SL: Not a lot. I helped those that I could. Not a lot.

JH: In what way?

SL: I helped people along who were headed for England, because I have a house not far from...Cagnes-sur-Mer. We were located part way up a hill. Higher up on the hill I had a friend who sent me those who were departing for England. They would embark at 6:30 in the morning. They would arrive at my house in the evening, at five o'clock. At 6:30, 6:00, they would leave. I didn't do much.

JH: I read in the letters of M. and Mme. Masson that they intended to bring you to the United States. What happened? You decided to stay in France?

SL: They could bring me, my daughter, but they couldn't bring my mother. I don't regret it.

So you read that in the Masson's letters?

JH: Yes, they have published a thick book of his correspondence.

SL: You mean the book by Mme. Levaillant? What an awful book. Boring. Other places there are some more interesting things. It's hardly worthwhile, there aren't any letters by
others. There are some letters that will soon be published that are magnificent.

JH: Did you want to go to the U.S., or did you wish to stay in France during the war?

SL: Yes, I even could have gone to London, but I didn't want to, because of my daughter, first of all, I already had one. I couldn't have brought her. I was not going to leave her in the hands of others, especially the Germans.

JH: And after the war, in '46 I believe, didn't you receive at your residence in the Midi the philosopher Martin Heidegger?

SL: Yes, but that wasn't in the Midi, it was at our summer house.

JH: And how was he?

SL: He was adorable. His wife was horrible. His wife was a Nazi.

JH: It has been suggested that he also...

SL: Not in my opinion. He unfortunately took the place of... what is his name, the philosopher?...Pardon my memory lapse. Oh, don't you know his name? He took the place of this man on the faculty. I only knew him as a charming man. His wife was horrible. Horrible. A Nazi. That's all.

JH: Was it difficult to have a woman like that at your own house?

SL: Yes, but it wasn't for much time. She would say certain things to me and, well, that was it. I couldn't speak any more to her.

JH: And you received many people here in Paris and at your summer home? Whom did you find the most interesting? The most captivating?


We invited Eisenstein. You know who he is? He did Potemkin. I hosted the cameraman and
assistant to Eisenstein. Also Luis Bunuel, if you want "names", eh? Georges Limbour,
Michel Leiris, Giacometti, Max Ernst, Marcel Duchamp. We had everyone here. Picasso,
Breton, everyone. I invited them because I knew them well, got along well with them.

JH: There is an anecdote from Madame Chapsal...

SL: Oh what a...

JH: Who, Mme. Chapsal?

SL: Yes. And more than that, she had a vulgarity that I found... Because it was thanks to me
that she was able interview Georges Bataille, and thanks to me that she could interview
Tristan Tzara. Never again.

JH: There is a wonderful photo of you and Mme. Chapsal and Dr. Lacan where you are both
heartily laughing...

SL: Oh, really?

JH: Yes, in a book of interviews called Envoyez la petite musique. When you would receive
all those great men and women....

SL: Madeleine Chapsal is hardly a "great" woman.

JH: I mean the others. What would you do? Chat?

SL: Yes, of course.

JH: About what, for example? Art?

SL: Yes, about art, philosophy, literature, poetry, cinema, theater. About everything. It was
superb. That, that no longer exists.

JH: That era has probably disappeared.

SL: It was magnificent. Marvelous. We would spend extraordinary evenings, practically
every day.

JH: What writers, what poets, did you particularly like?

SL: Which ones...it is hard to say right away. I really loved *Nadja*. I didn't find Breton's
other writings as good. As far as others, I can't think of them off the top of my head.

JH: What did you think of M. Breton?

SL: I always got along well with him.

JH: I ask because there was a debate, a controversy between him and Georges Bataille.

SL: A debate, yes. There were a few, many, in fact. Even with Dr. Lacan.

JH: Really?

SL: Yes.

JH: And what did you think about all those controversies?

SL: On the one hand I thought Breton had a point, and on the other I did agree with Jacques.

Because, Breton, he didn't like a famous writer whom I also detest, and Jacques liked him.

Breton couldn't stand...I think it was Racine. Jacques liked him. That's all. No, it wasn't
Racine. I no longer recall. There were many of those kinds of stories.

But you know the saddest story? I must go to the doctor. Because of my operation. I would
love to meet with you again because I hardly told you anything of interest. I didn't tell you
any lies, though. Frankly, I don't have much to tell. I feel very bad for you.

JH: No, not at all! I find these stories fascinating.

SL: [laughing] No! No. It has only been eight days since the operation. It wasn't for fun
that I kept telling you "No," "No," "No." I really am exhausted.

JH: Of course, I understand.
SL: It was a very traumatic operation.

I am very sorry, but if you want to reconvene before you leave again I would be very happy to, because I am ashamed. The trifling things I was able to tell you. I'm ashamed.

JH: No, not at all...

SL: No, I am truly ashamed. But I must go now, the appointment is at 3:00 pm, and it is already 3:30.

JH: Ok.

END
Chapter XIII

I left Paris. I headed back home and away from the chimerical landscape that had been my recent adversary. I actually left re-energized, enthusiastic. All of the agonizing dead ends and marvelous coincidences, wrong turns and intellectual acrobatics, had been obliterated into the distant past by the sheer power of Sylvia Lacan's presence. One short conversation with her had proven infinitely more provocative than two years of filling in the void that she had left. I had never felt as excited about the project as I did those summer months.

I left Paris just at that particular moment for two reasons: I had personal matters to see to back in the U.S. and I reasoned that Madame Lacan would probably be more approachable once she had gotten past the trauma of the eye problems. While she was elderly, she appeared sturdy to me. Moreover, doctors are often unwilling to suggest procedures like cataract surgery on a patient who does not have long to live, since it places undue stress and discomfort. I felt reprehensible making these calculations, but my agenda was set, and they were really more justifications than anything. I was sure that I could return to Paris, by whatever means, in the Fall, so the plan was clear. I knew that if I did not somehow seize upon the slight but very real momentum that I had built-up I might never find myself in so sure a position again.

I knew that re-affirming the connection to her would be essential to any future progress, so I quickly sent off a letter expressing my appreciation for her generosity of time and spirit. At the Fall's beginning, when it finally appeared that I could secure the means to get back to Paris for two months, I dashed off another letter to her, this time detailing my
intentions to come for the months of November and December. I specified the exact date when I would call her in order to preemptively allay the possible problem of establishing recognition, since she was prone to that. I also felt that it was paramount that she be willing to see me again, and healthy enough to do so. There was obviously no point in returning if she was not.

The morning of the call, September 10, I felt a familiar foreboding. The four month hiatus had erased any sense of connection that had built up, and so it was with more trepidation than I expected or wanted that I rang her. This particular conversation matched the lightning brevity of so many in the past.

We started with the obligatory recognition dance, it ended very shortly thereafter. She told me that she was very tired, and then asked if I could call back next week. Far more disastrous encounters had tempered my resolve, so while this was not the outcome I had hoped for, neither did it discourage me.

I tried again just three days later, and this time things were more ominous. I got through to Sylvia Lacan, she eventually recognized who was calling, but she sounded horribly gripped by a cold. Her speech was punctuated by rattling coughs, attesting to the flu she professed having. When her voice did clear it was forceful, but the cough was deep and haunting. She asked if I could call her back later, and I regretfully agreed.

I had already made a reservation to arrive in Paris by the end of October. I tried her again several times, but each time I met with no success. All I wanted was to know if she would be willing to meet with me again when I arrived, but I never had a good chance to ask. Knowing that, logistically, this might be my last opportunity to get to Paris in the next year,
I felt that I had no choice but to go. I had needed a loan to help fund this trip, and if I could not parlay it into more interviews, I knew that I could not justify (either financially or academically) spending any more time on this search.

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I returned to Paris with a very specific agenda. I figured that just two or three more interviews would probably not be sufficient to exponentially increase what I knew, given the inevitable re-introductions and retracing. What I really sought was six or seven meetings, enough to get a much broader picture of Sylvia Lacan. While even one more interview could only improve my work, I really wanted more than that. I had, in the course of my conversations, stumbled upon a strategy that I thought might obviate her reticence and kindle even richer recollections. I would ask her to tell me the history and stories behind the many pieces of art that populated her apartment. This approach, I reasoned, would take the burden of spotlight off of her, would evoke a rich web of memories about the piece, its artist, and its provenance, and most of all, it might allow me an even greater glimpse into Sylvia Lacan's own ideas and impressions of her cultural landscape.

Wasting no time, as I had none to waste, I telephoned immediately upon settling in. The line was busy all afternoon. I tried again a day or two later, and this time got through. Same routine, this time she told me, once again, "I am very tired". ² She suggested that I call

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² Her exact words were, as usual, "Je suis très fatiguée." Much later, I was struck by a line I stumbled upon in a review of Jacques Lacan's biography that provided insight into one possible interpretation of her choice of words. Catherine Clément contests the claim that Lacan might have been mentally incapacitated at the end of his life, recounting a chance meeting she had with him only a few months before his death: "I saw an old man who was dying, very weary, 'tired' [fatigué], as those in the countryside discreetly put the inevitable, agonized decline, but he was lively, his gaze was piercing and melancholic, communicating
again later.

I was undaunted, but frustrated. I felt that the ephemeral tie that I had with her was unraveling, and any rapport that we had established fading into the remote past. On November 1, 1993 (what I only later realized was her eighty-fifth birthday) I was finally able at least to engage her in conversation, however brief. Once again she admitted to being very tired, although this time she added that she had been taking antibiotics to combat her recent illness. She recommended that I try to call her again in one month's time, and perhaps then she would be feeling stronger. Realizing that this was very nearly a knockout blow to my interview designs, I managed to get a few words in, mentioned that I did not have too much time left in Paris, and gingerly asked whether she would be willing to see me at all in a month, or whether even this was unlikely. Much to my relief, she was willing to meet with me again, but this fact still did not allay my tremendous sense of disappointment. On her timetable, I would at most have three weeks in which to conduct the interviews, hardly enough of a margin given her apparent condition.

Knowing that she probably did not pay close attention to the frequency of my calls, I immediately figured that I would shave that one month down to three weeks, given the urgency of my predicament. The advice that I received from others ranged dramatically: call her in three weeks, call her in two weeks, or show up at her door, unannounced, with flowers, as soon as possible. My gut instinct was to call in three weeks, but others did have a point. I had no time for passive tactics, and yet, having spoken to her directly, I did not want to harass an older woman who had already been generous enough to receive me once, had

through gestures" (Clément 1993,44).
agreed to see me again, and who was most definitely not feeling well. Anguished over this decision, and feeling time slipping away once again, I spent several restless nights and tortured days mulling over my best course of action. Ultimately, I decided that I must trust my own instincts not to "harass" Madame Lacan against her own wishes. I did, however, resolve to call her again after two and half weeks--that was as far as I could bend.

When I called her on November 18 (with my heart in my throat), I heard an entirely different Madame Lacan. "Do not call me insistently!" she intoned, rather angrily. Stung, but running out of options, I persisted, "Is there any possibility that I can see you?" "No," was her reply. Thinking that this was final, and yet unwilling to believe it, I further asked, "How about in two weeks?" She curtly replied, "All right," and our conversation abruptly ended. At this point, given the chastising, I felt I had nothing left but to try her again at the beginning of December. I was scheduled to leave Paris on December 22, so there was really little chance of conducting the extent of interviews that I had ideally sketched out in my head. But more than that, the fragile rapport that I had so painstakingly fostered seemed dashed on the rocks of my untimely impatience. My entire month of November had been consumed by an agonizing set of decisions about what the right thing to do was in this strange set of circumstances. Balancing my desires against those perceived of an infirm and elderly woman had nearly turned me old and infirm. A search that had started as a whimsical and idiosyncratic idea and then turned into a fun-house hall of mirrors was now taking a decidedly different direction: into the tortuous realms of professional and personal ethics.

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On December 1, 1993, with these concerns weighing heavily upon me, I called Sylvia
Lacan one more time. As I had now spoken with her on roughly one dozen occasions, I knew her voice intimately. I introduced myself as I had so often, "Hello, this is Mr. Hunt, may I speak with Madame Lacan?" In a voice that can only be described as weak and failing, she answered, "Madame Lacan n'est pas là." I thanked her, I hung up the phone, and in that one instant I made up my mind. I would not, even could not, bother her again. There was something so terribly sad in her brittle voice that my decision was immediate. With time she might improve, I tried to convince myself, and perhaps in the Spring I might patch together a way back. But in my heart I knew that that was not likely. This was the end, and it was an inevitable conclusion.

I had second thoughts, during that next week, but I put them and any hopes of contacting Sylvia Lacan far out of my mind. I finished up some business that I had left, channeled my energies in other directions, and prepared to head home for the holidays. It was wretched to have no clear sense of resolution to this labyrinthine search, but I could not further assault the dignity of an ailing woman. I decided that I would write her a letter upon arrival back in the U.S. explaining my departure and expressing my hope for future meetings.

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I left Paris December 22. Upon arrival for the holidays at my parents' home two days later, I received this message from a friend in Paris: Sylvia Lacan passed away on 22 December, 1993. The last words she had spoken to me were, "Madame Lacan n'est pas là."
APPENDIX A

OBITUARIES

From Le Figaro (26 December 1993)

Death of actress Sylvia Bataille

The actress Sylvia Bataille, widow of the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan whom she had married after the writer Georges Bataille, is dead at the age of 85. Her true name Sylvia Maklès, Sylvia Bataille often played the role of the delightful ingenue, which she did especially poignantly in Jean Renoir's 1936 film Partie du Campagne. She also worked in such films as Renoir's Le Crime de M. Lange, Marcel Carné's Jenny and Les Portes de la Nuit, [Maurice] Lehmann's L'Affaire du courrier de Lyon, and Christian-Jacque's L'Enfer des Anges.

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From Libération (24 December 1994)

Sylvia Bataille, End of the Party

Magnificent Henriette in Une Partie de campagne, she was the wife of Georges Bataille before marrying Jacques Lacan. She died in Paris. She was 85 years old.

Before becoming the companion and then the second wife of Jacques Lacan, she was Sylvia Bataille, heroine of Jean Renoir's Une Partie de campagne. She died on December 22nd in Paris at the age of 85 years old of cardiac arrest. Born the November 1, 1908, in a Jewish family of Roumanian origin, she had four sisters and a brother. The oldest, Bianca Maklès, student of Charles Dullin, married to the surrealist poet Theodore Fraenkel, never had the chance to become the actress that she dreamed of becoming: she died tragically, in 1931, of a cliff-side fall. The next oldest sister, Rose, later married the painter André Masson, while the third sister, Simone, wedded Jean Piel, founder of the journal Critique.

It was in 1928, at the age of 20, that Sylvia, the youngest Maklès sister, married the writer Georges Bataille, with whom she had one daughter, Laurence, born in 1931. It was three years later that she separated from him, but in the meantime she had realized her dream to work in the theater like her sister Bianca. At that time she was an integral member of lively Groupe Octobre with J.B. Brunius, Raymond Bussières, and later Jean Dasté, Maurice
Baquet, and Joseph Kosma. Under the direction of Jacques and Pierre Prévert, the "Octoberists" tried to rejuvenate populist theater, taking their inspiration from Brecht, Piscator, and agit-prop. Applying the power of verbal playfulness to an absurdist critique of bourgeois conformism, they invented a particular form of French poetic realism that ultimately flourished in the films of Jean Renoir, Marcel Carné, and Jacques Feyder.

Encouraged into a film career by Pierre Braunberger, she had her first role in a film by Jean Renoir—*Le Crime de M. Lange*—produced in collaboration with Jacques Prévert and actors from the Groupe Octobre. In it she portrayed a printshop worker, target of Jules Berry's seductive advances. In 1936, Renoir deliberately decided to make her the star by giving her the leading role in his adaptation of Maupassant's novella *Une Partie de campagne*; he hoped to reconstruct landscapes and images from his father's work: row-boating, taverns, picnics on the grass. Sylvia Bataille played the role of Henriette Dufour, a heroine who is both a victim of her destiny of servitude and a rebel to her condition.

This first starring role should have launched her film career, but the film remained unfinished and was only publicly projected ten years after its production. Still close with Prévert, however, Sylvia Bataille was chosen for a small role by Marcel Carné in *Jenny*, in which Françoise Rosay had the starring role, and then by Jacques Feyder in *Gens de voyage*. But the war put an end to her hopes: not only because the anti-jewish laws prohibited her from exercising her craft, but also because she was too politically committed to accept work under that regime. In 1938, upon becoming the companion of Jacques Lacan—with whom she would have a daughter, Judith, in 1941—she had already chosen a different destiny. She married him in July, 1953, in Tholonet, at the home of her brother-in-law André Masson.

In 1946, at the time of the first public projection of *Une Partie de campagne*, she nostalgically recalled the making of the film: "With Jean Renoir, we were not always beautiful, but we were always true."

Elisabeth Roudinesco

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From *Le Monde* (24 December 1993)

Wife of Georges Bataille and then Jacques Lacan
Sylvia Bataille is Dead

be interred Friday, December 24, in a private ceremony at Montparnasse cemetry.

She was known thanks to her brief career as a film actress, before her successive marriages to the writer Georges Bataille and the psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan, whose notoriety only steadily grew. Sylvia Lacan—born Maklès on November 1, 1908 in Paris, and Sylvia Bataille after her brief marriage to Georges Bataille in 1928—above all left a searing image on the history of cinema: her role as the heroine in Jean Renoir's Une Partie de Campagne. But this film—unfinished in 1936—was only ever shown to the public ten years later. It already belonged to her past, though, in which her desire to become an actress finally succeeded after several tries: first with the Prévert brothers' theatrical troupe Groupe Octobre, her first cinematic role in Le Crime de M. Lange, and appearances in the films of Marcel Carné and Jacques Feyder. The Second World War definitively interrupted the beginning of her career.

Promptly separated from her first husband, Sylvia was, at the end of 1938, the mistress and then the companion of Jacques Lacan, with whom she lived and eventually married in 1953. From her first marriage was born Laurence Bataille (deceased in 1986) who also became a psychoanalyst. From her union with Jacques Lacan, Sylvia gave birth to another girl, Judith, in 1941.

The tumultuous career of Jacques Lacan could not diminish the role that his wife played in his life. She put him into contact with the world of intellectuals and artists of which she was a part. Particularly, she perpetuated, by her own personal history, the fascination that Jacques Lacan had for the person and the work of Georges Bataille.

M.K.
APPENDIX B

FILMS OF SYLVIA BATAILLE:

1933
Leo Mittler: \textit{La voix sans visage}

1934
Jean Tarride: \textit{Adémat aviateur}
role: Marie-Jeanne

1935
Jean Renoir: \textit{Le crime de Mr. Lange}
role: Edith

Charles Felix-Tavano: \textit{Son excellence Antonin}

1936
Marcel Carné: \textit{Jenny}
role: Florence

Pierre-Jean Ducis: \textit{Oeil de lynx, Detective}
role: Gertrude

Leo Joannon: \textit{Vous n'avez rien à déclarer?}
role: Paulette Papillot

Jean Renoir: \textit{Une partie de campagne}
role: Henriette Dufour

Raymond Rouleau: \textit{Rose}

1937
Maurice Lehman: \textit{L'Affaire du courrier de Lyon}
role: Madelaine Breban

Marcel L'Herbier: \textit{Forfaiture}
role: Ming

Jacques Feyder: \textit{Les gens du Voyage}
role: Yvonne Barlay

Robert Siodmak \textit{Le Chemin de Rio}
1938
Charles Méré: *Serge Panine*
role: Micheline

1939
Jacques Constant: *Campement 13*
role: Marie-Louise

Yvan Noé: *Le château de quatre obèses*
role: Assistant de Carter

Christian-Jaque: *L'Enfer des anges*
role: Simone

Yvan Noé: *L'Étrange nuit de Noël*
role: Marie

Pierre Colombier: *Quartier Latin*
role: Sylvia

1940
Léon Mathot: *Le collier de chanvre*
role: Anny, la serveuse

Pierre Caron: *Ils étaient 5 permissionnaires*
role: Genviève

1946
Marcel Carné: *Les portes de la nuit*
role: Claire Lécuyer

Jacques Manuel: *Julie de Corneilhan*
role: Lucie
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