

SLIGHT OF HOME

SLIGHT OF HOME:  
QUEER THEORY, JOSEPH LOSEY AND THE ARCHITECTURE OF DESIRE

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## Lay Abstract

This thesis aims to bring the notion of slightness to bear on a reading of domestic space in the films of the American-born, British film-maker Joseph Losey. By drawing on psychoanalysis, queer theory and cultural materialist frameworks, I examine the material traces, patterns, and forms of house and home, which cannot be folded into logics of identity. Rather than parsing a form of domesticity that is queer because of the nature of the intimacy or sexuality that it houses, I argue that the queerness of domesticity can be found in the forms, patterns and details of home which are too subtle to rise to the discursive level at which home becomes a disciplinary category.

## Abstract

This thesis aims to bring the notion of slightness to bear on a reading of domestic space in the films of the American-born, British film-maker Joseph Losey. By drawing on psychoanalysis, queer theory and cultural materialist frameworks, I examine the material traces, patterns, and forms of house and home, which cannot be folded into logics of identity. Rather than parsing a form of domesticity that is queer because of the nature of the intimacy or sexuality that it houses, I argue that the queerness of domesticity can be found in the forms, patterns and details of home which are too subtle to rise to the discursive level at which home becomes a disciplinary category.

Although the theoretical frame of this project is largely informed by psychoanalytic and specifically Lacanian-orientated queer theory, its focus on slightness marks a departure from the emphasis on negativity that has qualified this branch of the field. Examining in detail the Losey's films *The Servant* (1963), *Eve* (1962), *Secret Ceremony* (1968), and *The Go-Between* (1971), and drawing on materialist, semiotic and architectural points of reference, I explore the ambiguities of desire that inhere in the forms and detail of domestic space. I interpret these not as a deficit or withholding that either stands to be corrected or that insists on its own lack, but rather as a texture or quality already realized in its insignificance. In this way, the thesis offers a way to reframe the negativity associated with Lacanian psychoanalytic queer theory and to think of the queerness of domesticity as a kind of slightness that can be read in the forms domesticity takes.

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\*Some figures removed from final version of dissertation for copyright reasons. To see figures go to [www.slightofhome.cargocollective.com](http://www.slightofhome.cargocollective.com).

## Introduction

### A Faint Uncertain Ring

This thesis begins, as many things do, with a ring at the door. More specifically, it begins with what Harold Pinter, in his screenplay for Joseph Losey's 1963 film, *The Servant*, describes as “a faint uncertain ring”;

*Exterior. Knightsbridge Square. October. Day.*

*A quiet square off Knightsbridge. Winter sun. Bare trees. Number of parked cars.*

*At the far side of the square BARRETT appears. From high, see him approach. He*

*stops at the kerb. Cars pass. He crosses the road. His steps are sharp on the*

*pavement. Looking for a number he passes houses. He stops at a house, slightly*

*shabbier than the others, discerns number and goes up the steps. The door is open.*

*He looks into the dark hall. Silence. There is no doorknocker. He finds a bell, rings. A*

*faint uncertain ring.*

*Interior. Hall. TONY's house. Day.*

*From inside the hall see BARRETT enter and stand. The hall wallpaper is dark, of a*

*faded grape design. There are no carpets, no sign of occupation. Silence. He crosses*

*to the drawing room door, knocks.*

*Interior. Drawing room. Day.*

*From conservatory end of the large empty room see BARRETT look round the door.*

*He walks into the room and peers into the conservatory. Low down in an old deckchair lies a body.*

*Interior. Conservatory. Day.*

*BARRETT approaches, stops a little way from the body, regards it. He bends over TONY.<sup>1</sup>*

This, the opening sequence of the film, encapsulates many of the preoccupations of this dissertation. An upper-class house, albeit one “slightly shabbier than the others,” the suggestions of invasion, and bodies coming together in ways, and for purposes, that are far from explicit, are all details that will appear again and again in these pages. Stylistically, too, “the faint uncertain ring” sets the tone, in more ways than one, of the scene as a whole. The ring does not fill or correct the silence of the interior space, so much as it gives the silence and emptiness of the hall a kind of texture. If silence can be understood as the absence of sound and speech, then that negation seems to be the context of a queer kind of substantiveness all its own.

The scene suggests that what is slight or inconsiderable can operate, not as a deficit or withholding that either stands to be corrected or that insists on its own lack, but as texture or quality already realized in its insignificance. Whether thinking about the organization of interior domestic space as a kind of syntax (as contrasted with but also not entirely separate from the house’s semantics or meaning), or the “stickiness” of the figure of the child, my dissertation repeatedly foregrounds minor domestic forms and figures in order to reflect on the tensions and overlap between materiality and desire. I do this work through a

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<sup>1</sup> Harold Pinter, *Five Screenplays* (London: Methuen, 1971), 3.

consideration of the films of Joseph Losey. Losey, himself a “minor” figure among the history of cinematic auteurs,<sup>2</sup> began his career in Hollywood but after being blacklisted in the 1950s, he moved to the United Kingdom, where he became known for his probing portrayals of the English class system. The particular films I focus on span the period from the early 1960s to the beginning of the 1970s. As well as reflecting on the social context in which these films were produced, my study pays special attention to the formal dimensions of Losey’s representation of sexuality and intimacy. And thus I turn again and again to uncertain domestic forms, which amount to little more than their own ambiguity, which as it turns out is more than enough to go on in thinking about house and home as a place of desire.

In the excerpt of Pinter’s screenplay quoted above, the word “slight” appears in the form of the adverb “slightly.” It modifies the adjective “shabby,” which in turn describes the noun “house.” House, then, is the seemingly concrete thing upon which those other words operate. It is the object that description acts upon. But in fact the singular directionality of this signifying chain – adverb, adjective, noun – is far from absolute. It is not simply that the house is, as a house, slightly shabby. The house also figures slightness as such. “House” describes shabbiness and slightness as much as the other way around. “Carpet-bare,” “empty” and “faded,” the house that *The Servant* opens with is characterized by qualities that are less than they might be. Such a reading of the phrase, “a house slightly shabbier than the others,” not only gives the adverb “slightly” a noun-like thingness, it also displaces “house” as the concrete, stable thing being described. House in such a reading refers not to itself, as nouns typically do, but rather names, as adverbs do, a quality in something else.

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<sup>2</sup> For an account of Losey’s significance in cinema history see for example: Dan Callahan, “Joseph Losey,” *Senses of Cinema* 25 (2003): n.p.

The slight or minor has in recent years becomes a focus of inquiry across a variety of fields including cultural studies, literary criticism, critical theory, and film studies. In the context of architectural theory, Jill Stoner's *Toward a Minor Architecture* turns to the underused, banal, and inconsiderable in the built environment as a methodological alternative to the iconographic solidity of buildings as self-contained things.<sup>3</sup> Departing from Deleuze and Guattari's formulation of "minor literature,"<sup>4</sup> the art historian and queer theorist John Paul Ricco also explores the concept of minor architecture. For him, the term refers to sexuality as an anonymous assemblage of space, bodies, and practices. Minor architecture marks, in Ricco's words, "sites for the formulation, deployment and continuous re-constitution of a post-identity sexual politics" (240).<sup>5</sup> In the realm of literary analysis, Anne-Lise François's "theory of recessive action," through which she reads literature in terms of that which "cannot withstand the work of articulation,"<sup>6</sup> represents a preoccupation with slightness and the minor, as does Kathleen Stewart's interest in "ordinary affects," which she describes as phenomena that "work not through 'meanings' per se, but rather in ... density and texture as they move through bodies, dreams, dramas, and social worldings of all kinds."<sup>7</sup>

By diminishing the dual pressures of actualization and denial that silence is so often used to enforce, François aims to "make available for silent reading experience that which

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<sup>3</sup> Jill Stoner, *Toward A Minor Architecture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Kafka Toward a Minor Literature* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 1986).

<sup>5</sup> John Paul Ricco, "Jacking Off a Minor Architecture" *Stream* 1, no. 4 (Winter 1993): 236–43.

<sup>6</sup> Anne-Lise François, *Open Secrets: The Literature of Uncounted Experience* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 2007), 16.

<sup>7</sup> Kathleen Stewart, *Ordinary Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 3.

may not want, need, or be capable of louder articulation.”<sup>8</sup> And finally, in the arena of film studies, Eugenie Brinkema has demonstrated what we might call a turn to cinema’s slightness in as far as she resists the “expressivity hypothesis”<sup>9</sup> – the expectation that we read film texts for what they ‘say’ to and about ‘us’ – in favour of a “radical formalism.”<sup>10</sup> This hermeneutic reads cinematic form less as a code that must be analytically mined than as a textural surface. As varied as these scholars are in terms of disciplinary background, each of them complicates relations of surface and depth, framing their work as a kind of making do. Rather than seeking to articulate the meaning of their chosen subject matter, they attend to that which seems to decline the analytic status of meaning. Collectively, these scholars represent an ongoing interest in reading for that which “may not want, need, or be capable of louder articulation.”<sup>11</sup> Together they inspire reading practices that emphasize queerness over queer, that is, an attention to queer in the adjectival sense of something that modifies and qualifies, rather than something that is innate to particular people, places or things. Adjectivally, queerness can be thought about, less as a category that something either does or does not fall into, than as an operation that, like the suffix “-ness” itself, forms derivatives out of anything it touches.

### **Master of the House**

As both a cultural and material structure, the house figures prominently in the work of Joseph Losey, particularly in those films produced during the 1960s, after his move to the

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<sup>8</sup> François, *Open Secrets*, 16.

<sup>9</sup> Eugenie Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 36.

<sup>10</sup> Brinkema, *Forms of the Affects*, 37.

<sup>11</sup> François, *Open Secrets*, 16.

UK. One explanation for this preoccupation is that the house functions as a topos reflecting an American outsider's fascination with British culture and, in particular, the nation's shifting but resilient class system. Each of the films I explore in detail in this dissertation, and a number which I do not, feature intrusions of one sort or another, in which individuals enter into houses belonging to a class superior to their own. But, as I show, relations of class in Losey's films are rarely so one-dimensional. Instead of denoting a straightforward conflict between different strata of post-war British society, Losey's films often present antagonism and desire as intertwined aspects of class difference. What this pattern reveals is a fascination with the vulnerability of class superiority, Losey's sense of his own outsidership, and a desire to see the upper class world ruptured.

In different ways, each of the films I examine in detail here demonstrates an interest in the house, not simply as setting, theme or narrative figure, but as a visual and auditory medium in and of itself. For example, in Chapter One, I look at how, in *The Servant* (1963), Losey uses the interior layout of domestic space as a kind of cinematic grammar; and in Chapter Two, I look at the modern ensuite bathroom in the films *Eve* (1962) and *Secret Ceremony* (1968), reading it not simply as setting, but also as an apparatus for framing the female body. Detailing the ways in which the topos of the house appears (or doesn't) across Losey's career is, however, beyond the scope of this project. Losey made thirty-three feature films in his lifetime, his earliest films<sup>12</sup> being completed in the US before he was blacklisted

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<sup>12</sup> This period includes his first Hollywood feature, *The Boy with Green Hair* (1948), a pro-peace social allegory about racism. In Europe and under a variety of pseudonyms, Losey directed a second set of early films, which emphasize his US training as a filmmaker of melodramas, pop-Freudian thrillers and film noir. The films of this period are sometimes constrained by genre and dramatically overwrought. Losey typically did not have creative control of the films he made during this early period, both in the US and abroad, but they

by the House Committee on Un-American Activities in 1951.<sup>13</sup> My thesis does not provide a survey of Losey's oeuvre or an assessment of his status as a film-maker (auteur, queer, overrated, underappreciated); instead, it takes up a small collection of his films for close reading as texts of queerness and slightness.<sup>14</sup> The films I focus on – *The Servant*, *Eve*, *Secret Ceremony* and *The Go-Between* – represent what James Palmer and Michael Riley refer to as Losey's "mature" middle period, during which time, "Losey made his way to the centre of a personal vision that outgrew (without forsaking) his simpler outrage at social or political injustice. Social themes, even 'messages,' had not lost their significance for him altogether, but they were subsumed by more complex attitudes and artistic forms."<sup>15</sup> In this period, we

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nonetheless foreshadow many of the thematic and stylistic concerns that we see executed with greater intention in his later work. In *The Sleeping Tiger* (1954) the first of many Losey made with Dirk Bogarde, we also see the narrative motif of the intruder. In 1961 Losey made the prison drama, *The Criminal*, which would be the first to bear his real name after being blacklisted. It is, however, *The Servant* (1963) that is typically cited as Losey's "break out" feature. Its immediate predecessors are *Eve* (1962) and *The Damned* (1963). It was during the 1960s, while in the UK, that Losey made the films for which he is best-known today, including those he made with the playwright and screenwriter Harold Pinter and the actor Dirk Bogarde. Losey made three films with Pinter: *The Servant* in 1963, *Accident* in 1967, and *The Go-Between*, for which he won the Palme d'Or at the 1971 Cannes Film Festival. The 1970s and 80s mark another phase of Losey's career. The films made during this period are shaped by a concern with complex themes of lost identity, often in the context of historical trauma and political upheaval. In *Mr. Klein* (1972) an ostensibly apolitical Parisian art dealer is framed as a Jew during the Nazi occupation of France and is forced to try to prove his heritage amidst the sense that identity is something fractured and pernicious. And in *The Assassination of Trotsky* (also 1972), Losey contrasts Trotsky's authoritative search for political truths with the hollowed-out persona of the spy-like figure who kills him.

<sup>13</sup> For an account of the events surrounding Losey's being blacklisted from the US film industry, see Victor Navasky, *Naming Names* (New York: Penguin, 1980).

<sup>14</sup> For a reflection on Losey's auteur status and a broad analysis of films across his career see: Colin Gardner, *Joseph Losey* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2004), 274.

<sup>15</sup> James Palmer and Michael Riley, *The Films of Joseph Losey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 10. Making good use of Losey's interviews, Palmer and Riley's study blends an astute visual and historical analysis of Losey's productions with the director's own take on his films and the film industry more broadly.



note a shift in the way Losey was conceiving of films, insofar as he comes to contrast the openness of aesthetic forms with the concrete determinants of plot and motive. Writing about *The Servant*, for example, Losey insists, “I have become less and less interested in ‘story’ so far as films are concerned and more and more interested in theme, character, ambience, These tell, or should tell, the ‘story.’”<sup>16</sup> The films I examine in this dissertation, therefore, represent a specific ambivalence about the discursive and narrative dimensions of film, prioritizing mise-en-scène, and the formal and stylistic elements on the screen, above diegetic explanation. Ambiguity with precision is, as I have mentioned, a theme running throughout my consideration of Losey’s films. “I strongly believe in the essentially visual language of the cinema, almost to the point of making the dictum that a good film should be intelligible even if not a word of its language is understood,” he writes in a synopsis of *The Servant*.<sup>17</sup> Here, Losey evokes the wish to convey through a silent but material “language” something that the voice and dialogue cannot.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>16</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>17</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>18</sup> Despite the notoriety of films like *The Servant*, *Accident* and *The Go-Between*, and Losey’s close collaborative relationships with prominent figures such as Pinter and Bogarde, it could be argued that Losey remains an under-evaluated figure of twentieth-century culture. With new releases of his best known films, there are signs of a renewed interest in Losey’s work. But to date there remains only a handful of book-length, English-Language studies devoted to the director’s work, the most relevant being Palmer and Riley’s *The Films of Joseph Losey* (1993), and Colin Gardner’s *Joseph Losey* (2004). The number of magazine articles and interviews either on or by Losey, by contrast, are numerous, suggesting the interest Losey himself took in the reception of his films during the period in which they were first being released. This includes Michel Ciment’s book-length interview, *Conversations with Losey* (New York: Methuen, 1985).

Of course to call Losey the “master” of the house, as this section began, is also to suggest a paternalism to his cinematic gaze. Equally, it assumes the house is an object one can master, and relies on a close relationship between the idea of home and the consolidation of identities. Concerned with the postwar connections between domesticity and new forms of sexual citizenship, Chris Waters speaks about the dual discourses of tabloid publicity and scientific discourse in “the making of a respectable homosexual identity out of a confluence of competing discourses that circulated in Britain during the decade after the end of the Second World War. . . . the contribution it made to distinctly modern forms of selfhood” (151).<sup>19</sup> It is this modern form of selfhood, predicated on the legibility of desire, that Losey’s films can be read as complicating. Specifically, I suggest that his films evoke desire through forms that are too slight to count as “outings” of any identifiable sexual identity – and argue that this is the particular queer sleight of hand played through Losey’s films.

### **Historical Context: Domesticity and Emergent Gay Male Identity**

Although this thesis reaches in a number of historical and geographical directions, its immediate context is the British postwar period, marked, in part, by the release of the films examined between 1962 and 1971. In their introduction to the edited volume *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain 1945 – 1964*, the historians Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters argue that the postwar era was one in which the state came to define and be defined by the management of the contemporary self. “It was,” they write, “in the 1940s and

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<sup>19</sup> Chris Waters, “Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social: Peter Wildeblood and the Making of the Modern Homosexual,” in eds. Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 134-151.

1950s that the personal and subjective capacities of citizens entered into the calculations of government.”<sup>20</sup> For Conekin et al., the postwar period marked an intensified disciplinary relationship between citizen and government, where the progressive citizen and progressive state entered into an increasingly reinforcing relationship.

The liberalization of attitudes to homosexuality figures prominently in this regard. In recent years, a number of historians have underscored this period’s significance for the emergence of homosexual citizenship within national discourses of modernization (and vice versa). In *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London*, for example, Richard Hornsey details the late 1950s as the beginning of a period during which homosexuality was both decoupled from the decay associated with urban core and given a visible place within the project of reconstruction.<sup>21</sup> Of particular interest to the present study are the ways that home factors into the shared discourse of a respectable homosexual citizen and the progressive state. In his broad-ranging study of the spatial and sexual politics of the postwar city, Hornsey argues that the idea of a gay male home life – as a counterpoint to unruly forms of queer sexuality in the public realm – helped to bring about a decided shift in attitudes towards homosexuality beginning near the end of the 1950s. According to Hornsey, in the years immediately following the Second World War, homosexuality, like other sexual vices, was seen as a cultural consequence of urban and social decay, which the social engineers of post-war Britain sought to eradicate by literally building responsible forms of civic

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<sup>20</sup> Becky Conekin, Frank Mort, and Chris Waters, *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945-1964* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 1999), 11.

<sup>21</sup> Richard Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect: Unruly Life in Postwar London* (Minneapolis MN: University Of Minnesota Press, 2010).

movement and interaction into the very fabric of the city.<sup>22</sup> Around the mid-1950s, however, a new social strategy emerged for addressing the issue of male vice. The engineers of civic reconstruction began addressing the perceived problem of male homosexuality, not by attempting to eliminating it, but by drawing it into the fold of institutional and spatial planning in the broadest sense.<sup>23</sup> Increasingly, the institutional and public view was that homosexuality was not a vice ‘ordinary’ people could succumb to under corrosive circumstances, but rather an indelible, if unfortunate, psychological condition of the few. If this was the case, and homosexuality could not be eliminated, it could at least be given a ‘respectable’ place out of public view, in the home. As Hornsey elaborates:

Through this, the queer man could be formatively extricated from the center of the metropolis. The link between the city and male homosexuality became contingent rather than necessary, allowing the drafting of a new queer spatial sensibility that accorded with more normative modes of inhabiting, understanding, and moving through urban space. Within this new thinking, public queer activity remained immoral, antisocial, and essentially corrosive, but – for the first time – a conscious homosexual was being publically imagined who turned away from such behaviour and sought his place within the egalitarian diversity of the postwar community.<sup>24</sup>

The report of The Wolfenden Committee (officially *The Report of the Departmental Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution*) played a significant role in the shifting “spatial sensibility” of gay belonging that Hornsey describes.<sup>25</sup> Convened in 1954 by the

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<sup>22</sup> Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect*, 10-11.

<sup>23</sup> Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect*, 119-120.

<sup>24</sup> Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect*, 119.

<sup>25</sup> Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, 11.

home secretary, David Maxwell Fyfe, to assess the twin metropolitan vices of female prostitution and male homosexuality, the Committee called for the decriminalisation of private consensual sex between two men over the age of twenty-one, issuing recommendations that were eventually put into law in 1967 with the passing of the Sexual Offences Act. In its final report of 1957 the committee reasons:

Unless a deliberate attempt is to be made by society, acting through the agency of the law, to equate the sphere of crime with that of sin, there must remain a realm of private morality and immorality which is, in brief and crude terms, not the law's business.<sup>26</sup>

As Hornsey argues, the report effectively declares that there is little inherently troubling about sex between men, so long as it can be framed within prevailing ideals of domestic respectability.<sup>27</sup> The discretion and privacy associated with home, then, plays a significant

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<sup>26</sup> Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, 120.

<sup>27</sup> This period also saw the publication of a number of novels more or less echoing the image of respectable bourgeois homosexuality that Hornsey sees reflected in the language of The Wolfenden Report. According to Martin Dines, novels such as James Courage's *A Way of Love* (1959), Martyn Goff's *The Youngest Director* (1961) and Rodney Garland's *Sorcerer's Broth* (1966) helped middle class queer men cultivate a sense of respectability and self-worth through representations of domestic life. Of these novels Dines writes, "their primary motivation ... is the urgent need to present homosexual unions as analogous to heterosexual ones. By situating their homosexual protagonists firmly within bourgeois domesticity, these novels show that homosexual men could live respectable and productive lives, just like the rest of society, if only they were freed from the debilitating effects of punitive laws and misconceived prejudice. The novels of Courage, Goff and Garland, then, are propelled by a liberal impulse: more or less explicitly, they make a case for the decriminalisation of male homosexuality." Martin Dines, "Bringing the Boy Back Home: Queer Domesticity and Egalitarian Relationships in Postwar London Novels," *The Literary London Journal* 10, no. 2 (2013), <http://literarylondon.org/the-literary-london-journal/archive-of-the-literary-london-journal/issue-10-2/bringing-the-boy-back-home-queer-domesticity-and-egalitarian-relationships-in-post-war-london-novels/>. This period also saw the publication of a number of nonfiction social commentaries advocating for legislative reform and cultural tolerance of homosexuality. Like the fictional accounts described above, these texts represents a considered presentation of a respectable, bourgeois homosexuality. Examples include: *Society and the Homosexual* (1952)

role in the transition whereby homosexuality is thought of less as a result of moral and urban decay threatening the population itself, than as the ‘condition’ of a distinct and identifiable group within the population as a whole. This shift in the legality of homosexuality depended on a new understanding of homosexuality as an extension of, rather than as a threat to, the perceived interests of “regular” couples. Although Hornsey does not specifically mention Foucault in his discussion of the Wolfenden Report and its relationship to the emergent figure of a respectable gay male citizen, Hornsey’s is an astute reading of the role the home plays as a “normalizing judgement” of postwar subjectivity. As much as the respectable gay male citizen is set in contradistinction to the ‘normal’ family, this gay male citizen also reinforces the cultural authority of domesticity as a cultural and political discourse.<sup>28</sup> The more domesticity can be stretched to account for outliers, the more it functions as a way of knowing, rather than simply one kind of experience among many. It is thus the pervasiveness, rather than the restrictiveness, of domesticity as a category that accounts for its disciplinary role within national discourses of liberal progress.

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by Gordon Westwood (actually the sociologist Michael Schofield), *Against the Law* (1955) by Peter Wildeblood (convicted and sent to prison for “buggery” alongside the Lord Montagu), as well as the campaigning of the Homosexual Law Reform Society, established in 1958. Finally, Hornsey and Waters note that some liberal media reporting on the gay scandals of the period leant on the idea of a respectable gay citizen. Although by no means advocating for gay rights as such, towards the 1960s, more liberal publications represented a softening of public perception towards gay men, especially those men who could be framed, not as predatory denizens of the urban underbelly, but as consenting adults acting privately behind closed doors. See, Chris Waters, “Disorders of the Mind, Disorders of the Body Social: Peter Wildeblood and the Making of the Modern Homosexual,” in Conekin et al., *Moments of Modernity*, 151; and Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect*, 83.

<sup>28</sup> Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1: An Introduction*, Translated by Robert Hurley. (New York: Vintage, 1978).

Matt Houlbrook's *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918–1957* resonates with Hornsey's account of the shifting spatial relations of homosexuality in the postwar period in Britain.<sup>29</sup> Like Hornsey, Houlbrook pays particular attention to relations of class as they pertain to the sexual politics of the city. He challenges narratives that frame gay liberation in terms of “‘our’ struggle against a repressive society” resulting in “‘our’ own emancipation.”<sup>30</sup> Rather than positing a clear-cut contest between gay men and the dominant heterosexual society, Houlbrook's history of queer London shows “gay struggle” to be a question of the tensions existing *between* different groups of queer men, each with very different stakes in the emergence of a liberal definition of homosexuality. Houlbrook's research illuminates how notions of propriety and privacy associated with home – while serving a particular class of gay man – also worked to erode the plurality and fluidity of queer experience in the city, especially for young working-class men. If prior historians – most notably Jeffrey Weeks – celebrate the Wolfenden Report as a “collective ‘coming out’,”<sup>31</sup> then Hornsey and Houlbrook are interested in showing how these ‘steps’ in “the forward march of homosexual emancipation”<sup>32</sup> are in fact frames that legitimize certain forms of bourgeois homosexuality to the exclusion of others. From the mid-1950s, Hornsey writes, “domestic space was increasingly presented as the sole legitimate domain of queer expression.”<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>29</sup> Matt Houlbrook, *Queer London: Perils and Pleasures in the Sexual Metropolis, 1918-1957* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005).

<sup>30</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 242.

<sup>31</sup> Quoted in Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 242.

<sup>32</sup> Chris Waters, qtd. in Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 242.

<sup>33</sup> Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect*, 202.

If the social project of decriminalizing homosexuality was successful in radically redrawing the relationship between law and morality, moving the discreet and respectable “homosexual” within the boundaries of social acceptability and formal citizenship, the “victories” of 1957 and 1967 were achieved precisely through the exclusion of those unable to fulfill the requirements of respectability. Those who inhabited the spaces beyond their parameters – the effeminate queen, the man driven by uncontrollable lust into the city’s abject public spaces, the working man moving between male and female partners, the pedophile – were left to face continued social opprobrium and the ever-increasing threat of arrest. Queer political interventions were thus about power. They were about elite men’s privileged ability to access the sites of cultural and political influence and to create the “homosexual” in their own image, affirming and liberating a narrowly conceived conception of the self and engagement with the city, just as they excluded the vibrant alternatives pursued primarily by working-class men. The postwar accommodation between men like the members of the Homosexual Law Reform Society (HLRS), medical and legal “experts,” and the British state – symbolized by the Wolfenden Report and the Sexual Offences Act – cemented a growing division between the respectable “homosexual” and the disreputable queer.<sup>34</sup>

With this in mind, it becomes paramount to think how the liberalization of homosexuality reinscribes divisions and hierarchies along the lines of class, race, propriety and privacy. What Houlbrook and Hornsey present is a portrait of a postwar era in which domestic space served as the terrain on which a complex alliance was formed between state

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<sup>34</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 243.



actors seeking to affirm notions of social progress and a privileged class of gay man who could benefit from state recognition. For those who could align their personal identity with the ideals of the progressive state, the political recognition of a gay male citizen entailed a number of benefits. For those who did not fit the mold of the emergent gay citizen, however, that same process of state recognition entailed a number of deleterious effects. First, the sanctioning of homosexual desire within the stability and privacy of home coincided with increased scrutiny of supposedly ‘unstable’ and ‘indiscreet’ relations between men in public and semi-public spaces outside the home. The recognition that gave men license to be privately and discreetly homosexual in their homes also intensified the project of clearing the city of more unruly forms of public queer culture. As Houlbrook writes, “Against such changes, queer men’s continued public presence seemed increasingly unacceptable, increasingly distant from the spatial organization of respectable ‘heterosexuality.’”<sup>35</sup> Here, Houlbrook is referring to the ways in which more respectable forms of homosexuality are based on respectable forms of heterosexuality. Now that gay men had the possibility of private cohabitation, the state could see no reason for the existence of a public culture of gay sex. Or, as Hornsey writes, “any lingering displays of public immorality became a variable matter of individual self-discipline,” and thus subject to even greater condemnation.<sup>36</sup> Second, with the development of a liberal conception of homosexual identity, it became increasingly difficult for men – especially young working-class men – to participate in gay sex without being interpolated by “the binary opposition between ‘homo’ and ‘heterosexual’

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<sup>35</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 67.

<sup>36</sup> Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, 30.

that shapes contemporary understanding of male sexual practices and identities.”<sup>37</sup>

Houlbrook in particular laments the loss of the “democratic sociability”<sup>38</sup> of queer street culture during the 1950s and 60s.<sup>39</sup> The historical context in which this project is situated, then, is one where ideas of privacy and home support an emergent gay political subjectivity while simultaneously foreclosing queer cultures of sex outside the home. In other words, as much as home offers a private space for sexuality it also marks a certain kind of queer subject as legible to a civil project of postwar modernity. It is for this reason that I am interested in domestic forms which seem to shirk the threshold of discourse.

### **Domain of Objects, Ritual of Truth**

Given the way that the private realm of the home functions, as Hornsey and Houlbrook show, to produce a respectable and newly political gay male identity, we can begin to see the home as a discourse in the vein of Foucault’s description of disciplinary power. Indeed, as “a domain of objects and a ritual of truth,”<sup>40</sup> the house seems perhaps the clearest example of discipline’s place within the common fabric of our everyday lives.<sup>41</sup> Foucault’s famous critique of the repressive hypothesis suggests that power is not something imposed on us but something that enables, produces, constitutes and allows for. We need not go so far as invoking the panopticon as a metaphor for modern disciplinary societies when

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<sup>37</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 270.

<sup>38</sup> Houlbrook. *Queer London*, 65.

<sup>39</sup> Houlbrook, *Queer London*, 270.

<sup>40</sup> Michel Foucault, *Discipline and punish: the birth of the prison* (London: Penguin, 1979), 192.

<sup>41</sup> The point Foucault makes via his reading of the panopticon is that the “barbarity” of power in the late modern period is one of inconspicuous totality, rather than the “cruel and unusual” punishments of previous centuries.

the common house represents so well power's cozy relationship with the permissive state. Building on Eve Sedgwick's discussion of the binaries that organize and are organized by the hetero/homo binary,<sup>42</sup> we can see that what Foucault said about "the invention" of (homo)sexuality is also true of the invention of domesticity: they both constitute ways of organizing experience.<sup>43</sup>

Such an understanding of the house as a disciplinary space erodes any clear-cut distinction between private and public spheres. The disruption or erosion of this distinction is, of course, a major topic of concern for scholars of modernity. Hannah Arendt, for example, argues that modernity is characterized by the "loss of the world,"<sup>44</sup> by which she means the erosion or shirking of the public arena of action and speech in favor of the private world of personal introspection and the individualistic economic interests. Modernity, for Arendt, marks the loss of a distinction between the public and the private, out of which comes the age of mass society. But if modernity is characterized by the loss of a certain kind of public or political area, it is also precipitates a new kind of public based on the idea of the private individual. This is what the architectural historian Beatriz Colomina argues when, referring the twentieth-century home, she writes, "The private is now more public than the public."<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

<sup>43</sup> See Foucault, *The History of Sexuality*, 43.

<sup>44</sup> Hannah Arendt, *Men in Dark Times* (San Diego, Calif: Harvest Books, 1970), 13.

<sup>45</sup> Beatriz Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity: Modern Architecture as Mass Media* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1996), 8; How the private-public relation emerges as the crucial instance of the modern division of knowledge is also the subject of *The Secret History of Domesticity*, Michael McKeon's extensive seventeenth and eighteenth century "prehistory" of domesticity. McKeon's asserts that "domesticity is both a species of modern privacy and unintelligible apart from our modern experience of publicity; its story can only make sense within the more general story of modern privacy and its separation out from the realm of the public" (xxi). In the modern period, McKeon argues, "the private and the public are thrown into distinctive

Returning to the specific context of gay male subjectivity, Martin Dines, writing about the representation of British queer domesticity in postwar novels, argues something similar: “the bourgeois home,” he claims, “affords no private retreat for queers no matter how orderly and otherwise normative their lives may be. The ‘private’ of the domestic sphere ... is ineluctably a public concern.”<sup>46</sup> I read this ‘turning out’ of the private into the public that Dines and Colomina both describe as part of a disciplinary process whereby the home functions to establish the expectation that one’s desire be legible in the public and political arena.

An understanding of the disciplinary nature of domesticity is particularly important in thinking about the emergence of a category such as “queer domesticity,” because the Foucauldian model sees power as exerting itself in the production of difference. A Foucauldian understanding of power reminds us that the specification and naming of variants on a norm is the very means through which power exerts itself. For Foucault would see the power of domesticity, not in the prohibition of alternative kinship structures, but rather in their discovery within an existing system. By marking ourselves within an alternative domesticity, the home we thought we were leaving pulls us back in, and meaning is reestablished as the only home for the subject.

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relief against what had been a relatively homogeneous plane of existence and has become a heterogeneous landscape of semiautonomous structures” (xix). In other words, this relation, of which domesticity is the “most visible and resonant expression,” functions not as a strict dichotomy but a capacious way of knowing (xx). Michael McKeon, *The Secret History of Domesticity: Public, Private, and the Division of Knowledge* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2006).

<sup>46</sup> Martin Dines, “Bringing the Boy Back Home,” 21.

## Against Queer Domesticity

My research aims to build upon scholarship such as Hornsey and Houlbrook's that examines the shifting spatial relations of queer sexuality in the city, emphasizing home's disciplinary role in the post-war 'invention' of the modern homosexual citizen. Hornsey in particular shows how the privacy associated with home affords a more privileged class of gay men an aura of respectability, and from that, the opportunity to exercise a gay male citizen identity. Although gay male companionate domesticity is seen as a deviation, it is precisely in its status as variant that it re-centres heterosexual marriage and family as norm. What Foucault shows is that what makes discourse disciplinary is its capacity to operate as a higher order category under which "deviancy" is named and organized, rather than prohibited and censored. Therefore, expressions of home that do not initially appear domestic nonetheless become variations of that category of meaning rather than evidence of its epistemological limitations. For this reason, I am suspicious of the historical and cultural excavation of *queer* domesticity as a parallel to heteronormative domesticity itself. The qualification of a homelife that is queer risks positioning queerness as a variation of the norm rather than something that troubles that norm's disciplinary authority.

There is an emphasis on the disciplinary nature of queer domesticity in broader historical studies of the regulation of unruly desire in the postwar city.<sup>47</sup> Others, however, have emphasised queer domesticity as a category for exploring how queer men and women have used the home to transform and subvert heteronormativity.<sup>48</sup> Scholars such as Andrew

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<sup>47</sup> See Hornsey, *Spiv and Architect*; and Houlbrook, *Queer London*.

<sup>48</sup> See for example Andrew Gorman-Murray "Homeboys: Uses of Home by Gay Australian Men," *Social and Cultural Geography* 7.1 (2006): 53-69; Rebecca Jennings, *Tomboys and Bachelor Girls: A Lesbian History of Post-war Britain, 1945-1971* (Manchester: Manchester

Gorman-Murray, Rebecca Jennings, Alison Oram, and Brent Pilkey tend to foreground the diversity among contemporary and historical instances of queer domesticity in the ways these transform the dominant meanings of domesticity. Matt Cook's work on twentieth-century queer domesticities, for instance, imagines the home as a site of experimentation where gay men are able to fashion senses of self through intimacy with other gay men and in relation to their heterosexual counterparts. "The queer men I examine here," Cook writes in the introduction to *Queer Domesticities*, "have found a sense of 'composure' in their domestic similarities to 'normal' men and women as surely as in their difference."<sup>49</sup> For Cook, the category of queer domesticity is a matter of correcting two interconnected historiographical omissions from the scholarly record: gay men's place in the history of British domesticity, and the often ignored importance home plays in the lives of gay men. Cook describes queer domesticity as the space where "queer men orientated their sense of themselves – behind closed doors and apart from the more public bars, clubs, toilets, cruising grounds, courtrooms, and protest and pride marches that have more often drawn our attention."<sup>50</sup> Queer domesticity "take[s] queer histories more determinedly indoors," he continues, "and touches and troubles existing histories of home and family which almost entirely neglect queer lives."<sup>51</sup> It is, however, not simply the case that twentieth-century history neglects gay men. As Sedgwick would note, the centrality of the homo/heterosexual binary is mapped

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University Press, 2007); Alison Oram, "Sexuality in Heterotopia: Time, Space and Love between Women in the Historic House," *Women's History Review* 21.4 (2012): 553-51; and Brent Pilkey, "LGBT Homemaking in London, UK: The Embodiment of Mobile Homemaking Imaginaries," *Geographical Research* 51.2 (2013): 159-65.

<sup>49</sup> Matt Cook, *Queer Domesticities* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 6.

<sup>50</sup> Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 3.

<sup>51</sup> Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 3.

through the discourse of home.<sup>52</sup> By highlighting the inclusion of homosexuality within the judicial and cultural framework of privacy and domesticity, Hornsey demonstrates the role the home plays in the discourse of reconstruction London.<sup>53</sup> In other words, a public discourse of gay men’s right to privacy in the home was necessary for redrawing the relationship between law and morality with social consequences reaching far beyond just homosexuals. Therefore, far from being absent from the national identity and history (of home), the homosexual is central to the fashioning of ideas of domestic privacy and domestic intimacy upon which the very idea of the modern, liberal self is formed.

If some scholars of the postwar British era suggest home offers queers a space for the exploration of queer identity, I suggest the very possibility of that exploration is a condition of the construction of domestic modernity. As Cook puts it, “Home was a way for gay men to stand out and to be different. It was a way for them to fit in.”<sup>54</sup> This quotation underscores an understanding of queer domesticity in terms of expressivity rather than disciplinary power. And it stands in sharp contrast to Colomina’s suggestion that we might see the home, not as a strategy for self-expression, but as the mechanism by which modernity shores up the idea that subjectivity and the capacity for self-expression are one and the same.<sup>55</sup> Furthermore, Cook’s focus on the home as means to express identitarian difference<sup>56</sup> is problematic in part because it downplays the degree to which the cultural construction of home in reconstruction Britain has determined the very contours of the kind of queer subjectivity that it is then

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<sup>52</sup> Sedgwick, *Epistemology*, 43.

<sup>53</sup> Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect*, 201-246.

<sup>54</sup> Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 6.

<sup>55</sup> Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 7.

<sup>56</sup> Cook is primarily interested in tracing how home was “used by queer men in ordinary and extraordinary ways” (Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 2).

possible to ‘locate’ within the historical record. We read for the ‘missing’ subjects of domesticity without adequately questioning what domesticity as an apparatus leaves behind.

Feminist critiques of home offer another frame through which to cast doubt on the expressivity hypothesis of ‘queer domesticity.’ Of course one of the reasons gay men did not, until recently, anchor their identity through narratives of home life is that their participation in the fantasy of home as a distinctly feminine domain benefited them, just as it did their straight counterparts.<sup>57</sup> The home, as Adrienne Rich reminds us in *Of Woman Born*, “was a creation” of men’s making designed to exclude woman from “the ‘man’s world’ of wage-earning.”<sup>58</sup> The assumed gendering of the home as female was one of the ways, then, that gay men could maintain the privileges afforded all men, including access to waged labour, as well as the cultural means with which to pursue the luxury of “private” lives (both inside and outside the home) that women meanwhile were denied.<sup>59</sup> But if this process is not

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<sup>57</sup> This is something that Cook, in his all-male study of queer domesticities, glosses: “Some of the privileges that came with masculinity – the scope for greater independence and earning potential, for example – meant queer men were often more able to make their own way domestically” (Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 6-7).

<sup>58</sup> Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born – Motherhood as Experience & Institution* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1996), 46.

<sup>59</sup> As the stark contrast between Tony in *The Servant* and Leonora in *Secret Ceremony* suggests, attitudes towards women living alone were and are very different from our cultural understanding of “bachelor” culture. Even in situations where a woman might have a similar domestic arrangement as a man, the man who chooses to live on his own will be seen as a decadently independent, whereas the woman is seen as pathetic and impoverished (no matter how much money she might have). For an earlier example of this double standard take Gerty Farish whose independent domesticity is taken up at the beginning of *The House of Mirth*, not only as an indictment against, as we shall see in this exchange between Lily Bart and Lawrence Selden, her “marriageability,” but also her proclivity towards “queer things”:

“Even women,” he said, “have been known to enjoy the privileges of a flat.”

“Oh, governesses – or widows. But not girls – not poor, miserable, marriageable girls!”

“I even know a girl who lives in a flat.”

She sat up in surprise. “You do?”



simply symbolic (relegating women to the private sphere *qua* domesticity as female), then we can see how the material division of (waged) labour is not necessarily male/female – as is true in the *The Servant*. The labour of reproducing the home as the social site that enables workers in public life to produce wage labour props up the whole apparatus of capitalism. Of course the division of waged and unwaged labour is not strictly male/female. How do two men, for example, arrange the ‘female’ labor of housework, cleaning, cooking, maintaining, etc? We can see from this hypothetical that the benefit afforded to men by the gendered space of the home is uneven in a material sense. Assuming the cultural benefits of a public and professional life does not necessarily exclude one from the material pressures of reproducing home.

In the past few decades, much has changed to account for a new gay male identification with home. One change that lends to a consideration of the home as a place of labour is the new predominance of what Maurizio Lazzarato calls immaterial labour.<sup>60</sup> One central concern the discussion of immaterial labour highlights is the conceptual erosion of

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“I do,” he assured her, emerging from the cupboard with the sought-for cake.

“Oh, I know – you mean Gerty Farish.” She smiled a little unkindly. “But I said marriageable – and besides, she has a horrid little place, and no maid, and such queer things to eat. Her cook does the washing and the food tastes of soap. I should hate that, you know.” One of the things this conversation about Gerty Farish does in the novel is at once deflect from and raise questions about Selden’s own preference for living alone, as well as his own collection of queer domestic things, which happen to be surrounding Lawrence and Lily as they have their conversation. The “scandalous” oddity of Gerty’s independence is contrasted alongside the character-defining “detachment,” which prevents Selden – in this moment as in nearly every moment in the novel – from doing what is expected of him and proposing to Lily – all this without ever making it seem like Gerty and Selden’s independent homes might be judged by the same yardstick. Edith Wharton, *The House of Mirth* (Oxford; New York: Wordsworth Editions, 2002), 6.

<sup>60</sup> Maurizio Lazzarato, “Immaterial labor,” *Radical Thought in Italy: A Potential Politics* (1996): 133-47.

the line between home and workplace. In an era when the line between immaterial (or affective) and traditional forms of labour continues to be blurred, identification with the home becomes less a hindrance to than a prerequisite for access to the economy. In recent years queerness has emerged alongside home as a vocabulary by which to demonstrate one's affiliation with the aspirational classes.<sup>61</sup> Perhaps especially for middle-class affluent gay men, the home serves as a measure of one's affective commitment, not simply to the home or to family, but also to the very principle of a productive society. But while domesticity, as well as the familial institutions of marriage and reproduction that go along with it, emerges as a new context from which gay men can meet the shifting demands of capitalism's "werewolf hunger for surplus labour,"<sup>62</sup> for women, domesticity and reproduction have long been the *sole* measure of their productivity. The "queering" of domesticity, then, raises some difficult questions about gay men's complicated relationship to and active participation within patriarchal structures of "home" and its links to capitalist oppression. I argue that the new affirmation of queer domesticity runs the risk of perpetuating that tradition in as far as it helps naturalize a cultural category that has been defined by feminists less as place where one expresses oneself, than as an invention designed to exert economic power over others.

While one way of thinking about queer domesticity is as a site for the orientation and affirmation of sexual identity, feminists have seen it as a site of contention, resistance, and

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<sup>61</sup> See for example: Jasbir Puar, "In the Wake of It Gets Better," *The Guardian*, November 16, 2010. <http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/cifamerica/2010/nov/16/wake-it-gets-better-campaign>. Speaking of the recent spate of queer youth suicides, Puar writes of "how these deaths have been made to serve the purpose of highlighting an exceptional class of aspirational gay citizens at the expense of others."

<sup>62</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy* Vol. 1, translated by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 2011), 353.

exhaustion. Perhaps one of the most remarkable examples of this history is the International Wages for Housework Campaign, which grew out of the International Feminist Collective in Italy.<sup>63</sup> Like Adrienne Rich, Silvia Federici – a founding member of the campaign and author of “Wages for Housework” – rejects the fantasy of home as a compensation for labour and the “other” of work.<sup>64</sup> Federici argues that it is the essence of capitalist ideology to glorify home as one of the last salvageable places for finding authenticity in the world. It is precisely this ideology – the home as respite – that ensures that the vast majority of the labour that contributes to the growth and entrenchment of capital appears to be simply “an act of love” on the part of all those who work without a wage.<sup>65</sup>

... we can see the revolutionary implications of the demand for wages for housework. *It is the demand by which our nature ends and our struggle begins because just to want wages for housework means to refuse that work as the expression of our nature*, and therefore to refuse precisely the female role that capital has invented for us.<sup>66</sup>

Federici’s exhortation encourages us to wonder whether the home can ever be a liberatory space. “It is no wonder,” she writes, “that this ideology is enjoying a renewed popularity with capitalist planners in our present times of ‘crisis’ and ‘austerity’ and ‘hardship.’”<sup>67</sup> The

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<sup>63</sup> Members included Selma James, Brigitte Galtier, Mariarosa Dalla Costa, and Silvia Federici.

<sup>64</sup> In Rich’s words: “From the earliest life until the growth of factories as centers of production, the home was not a refuge, a place for leisure and retreat from the cruelty of the ‘outside world’; it was a part of the world, a center of work, a subsistence unit.” Rich, *Of Woman Born*, 7.

<sup>65</sup> Silvia Federici, *Wages Against Housework* (Bristol: Falling Wall Press, 1975), 3.

<sup>66</sup> Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, 4 (emphasis in original).

<sup>67</sup> Silvia Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and Feminist Struggle* (Brooklyn: PM Press, 2012), 35.

fantasy of home as a space of authenticity “outside capital” disproportionately benefits those with material stakes inside capital accumulation. An emphasis on the home as a means “to negotiate self-consciously [one’s] place within, [sic] local, urban and national cultures”<sup>68</sup> runs the risk of obscuring the ways in which the material and affective work that goes into local, urban and national cultures is also a form of surplus value consistent with the Marxist principle of the worker’s alienation from his own productivity. Some 40 years after Ruth Glass’ introduction of the term ‘gentrification’ as a means to describe urban change in London of the 1960s,<sup>69</sup> one need only consider Richard Florida’s “gay index,” a measure for the speculative value of property in gentrifying residential neighbourhoods,<sup>70</sup> to see how queer identity and ideas of home can operate symbiotically in the service of social assimilation and capitalist value production. This example, of course, shifts our attention from the unwaged labour of “housewives” to the surplus value produced by gay people in “up and coming” neighbourhoods, which is also outside formal structures of wage labour. The comparison forces our attention to what it might mean for gay people to “refuse that work as the expression of our nature.”<sup>71</sup>

In her demand for wages for housework, Federici forces us to think about how the discourse of woman’s “natural” place in the home serves a patriarchal, capitalist system bent

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<sup>68</sup> Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 248-49.

<sup>69</sup> University College London, Centre for Urban Studies, and Ruth Glass *London: Aspects of Change* (London: MacGibbon & Kee, 1964).

<sup>70</sup> Consider also his “bohemian” and “diversity” indexes” in *The Rise Of The Creative Class: And How It’s Transforming Work, Leisure, Community And Everyday Life* (Princeton, N.J.: Basic Books, 2002), 228-321. For a counter-history of the relationship of homosexuality to gentrification see Sarah Schulman, *The Gentrification of the Mind: Witness to a Lost Imagination*. (Berkeley: Univ of California Press, 2013), 36-52 and 111-132.

<sup>71</sup> Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, 4.

on profiting from the fantasy of woman's true nature as mother, wife, homemaker and servant. Studies about the expression of queer identity through the figure of the home must be equally cautious about their assessment of gay women and men's attachment to house and home. Even when "used confidently to articulate a radical politics and a sense of felt difference and endurance,"<sup>72</sup> the labour we put into home as an expression of ourselves is nonetheless an expression of capitalist and state imperatives, because it is those imperatives, Federici insists, that make the home appear to be something "outside of capital" in the first place.<sup>73</sup> It is not my intention to create a false equivalence between gay men and women's relationship to the home and its labour. It would be in the interest of men to obscure the conflict that produced by a reduction to sexual difference, including concerning the question of who is responsible for the labour of home. But I do want to draw attention to ways in which identity and the home function as sites of conflict, rather than merely expression.

While scholars like Cook attempt to bring queerness in line with the historical frame of the home, their work fails to pay adequate attention to the imbrication of identity and power that organizes the home at both a discursive and economic level. What Federici's work does, by contrast, is foreground how identification with the home is constructed at the social level, thus marginalizing women economically. What appears to be a natural settling of different people into different economic stations is in fact an active process of identity formation which serves a patriarchal system of economic hierarchy. While Cook sees the home as an extension of politics, his understanding of the home also occludes any politics

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<sup>72</sup> Cook, *Queer Domesticities*, 227.

<sup>73</sup> Federici, *Revolution at Point Zero*, 28.

that would finally refuse the home and its definitional links to forms of productivity, including the production of the natural “self” through the material determinant of home.

In the context of unfinished critiques about the relationship between home and “natural” female identity, then, we would be remiss not to approach with some suspicion claims about the home’s orientating capacity when it comes to queer identity. More in line with Federici’s critique, are queer theorists such as Lee Edelman, who see queerness not as a structure of orientation, but of disruption through repetition and accretion. Shifting our attention from the production of gendered identities within the home, to the broader definitional idea of identity as a kind of existential home we carry around with us, Edelman defines queerness as “the threat to the subject’s faith that its proper home is in meaning.”<sup>74</sup> Although not directly engaging in questions of domestic life, Edelman nonetheless shares with Federici a desire to locate politics where “*our nature ends.*”<sup>75</sup>

For Edelman, queerness is a structure of disruption alone. The definition is itself an attempt to disrupt the degree to which queer, like any identity category, is wrapped up in logics of reproduction, capital accumulation, and nationalism. In its gesture to the excess that refuses narrative production of the self as a coherent entity “at home” with the categories of experience available to it, queerness is an “other” socially constructed through discursive power. Bringing the notion of queerness into dialogue with the notion of home, is not simply a question of whether queers can properly be said to have a home (with Edelman answering in the negative and Cook the affirmative). Rather it is a matter of thinking about how each of

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<sup>74</sup> Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke UP, 2004), 39.

<sup>75</sup> Federici, *Wages Against Housework*, 4 (emphasis in original).

these two categories is impossible without the other. For this reason, defining queer domesticity as a mirror image of heterosexual domesticity, and as a complement to queer people's public lives, fails to capture the material and textual complexity of "home." Just as Foucault's work demonstrates that sexuality – while ostensibly a matter of "private" behaviour – is in fact a means of constituting the political itself, so too is the abstract and the physical house something that, while associated with the private, constitutes what counts as political. If it is true that it is the classification of sexual "dysfunction" that allows for the idea of a "normal" functioning sexuality, then the same can be said of houses. For it is only through the idea of queer "twists" that the home emerges as a category for stability, constancy, and the natural state. Therefore, it is worth thinking about possible alternatives that resists thinking about queerness and the home as either opposites or as opposites seeking reconciliation. Instead, I shall argue throughout this thesis, *what can be understood of queerness belongs to the history of home and vice versa.*<sup>76</sup> What Foucault demonstrates is that the prudent Victorians' earnest attempt to identify the normal productive role of the married couple ultimately manifests itself as a cultural "taxonomy" for the "world of perversion" – what Foucault calls those "other Victorians."<sup>77</sup> By the same token, the history of domesticity is already, in a sense, a history of home's queer "others."

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<sup>76</sup> Sedgwick reminds us that the "homo/heterosexual definition" precedes and ramifies in significant ways the "larger," i.e. ostensibly non-gay-related, topologies that comprise modern life, not least of all the distinction between private and public life. The homo/heterosexual binary, therefore, lies at the foundation of the domestic imaginary, irrespective of the particular forms of intimacy or sex that it brings into focus. Gay men, I argue, are not so much absent from the history of home, as Cook suggests, as they are invented by it. Sedgwick, *Epistemology of the Closet*, 43.

<sup>77</sup> Foucault *The History of Sexuality*, 3-15.

It is with this in mind that I approach the work of Joseph Losey. Losey was not himself gay, nor particularly interested in representing the lives of gay people. Instead, the queerness of Losey's films arise in the ways they challenge the idea of the home as the basis of desire's legibility. Thus, this dissertation does not base the idea of queer domesticity on the sexual identities or behaviours of the people being depicted. Instead it approaches the categories of queerness and domesticity as two overlapping material and semiotic categories of experience, both of which raise similar questions about the fundamental tension between sexuality and its role within the social.

### **Just Desire**

Conekin et al. suggest that the postwar period was one in which “the interior lives of citizens became an object of public scrutiny.”<sup>78</sup> Insofar as this scrutiny pertains to the role of domesticity as a public discourse, Hornsey and Houlbrook's research underscores that the privacy of home offers material benefit only to those gay men able to embody the dual pressures of discretion and legibility prescribed by notions of respectable domesticity. As such, the respectable homosexual that emerges as a visible participant in the civil project of postwar modernity is not an expansive figure of queer emancipation, but rather an avatar for those best able to align themselves with a reconstruction narrative of social progress and national unity. The supposed *privacy* offered by the home, in fact, constitutes a nascent kind of *public* legibility, serving the political and material interests of a very particular kind of homosexual subject. In other words, the luxury of privacy was afforded to those queer

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<sup>78</sup> Martin Dines, “Bringing the Boy Back Home,” 21.



subjects best able to make legible their ‘private’ lives/sexuality as something conducive to the liberal nation state. The material privileges and benefits of home rest not simply on having a home, but also on the degree to which one’s immaterial desires are legible through the political discourse of home, which is so intimately tied to notions of responsible citizenship. Of particular concern for this project, however, is not simply how the ideals of bourgeois domesticity give visibility to a certain class of queer subject over and above others. Instead, the interest here can more accurately be described as a critique of the very idea that sexual desire can and should be made legible through material arrangements of habitation.

In complicating the idea of the home as a discourse through which desire is made socially legible, my research repeatedly turns to a Lacanian understanding of desire as that which troubles any such translation. Lionel Bailly offers a definition of Lacanian desire that I am repeatedly drawn to, in part because it uses as its central image an architectural and specifically domestic feature of the sort my project explores: a passageway. “The articulation of need,” Bailly writes, “must pass through the narrow gateway of language and what cannot squeeze through and is left behind constitutes desire.”<sup>79</sup> Bailly’s defines desire as that which is left behind by the construction of meaning in language. In Lacan’s own words, “desire is what manifests in the interval demand excavates just shy of itself.”<sup>80</sup> Here, desire is that which remains outside the logic of meaning or language that nonetheless produces it. It is a remnant or by-product, that which is produced by, yet cannot be accounted for within, the Symbolic order of meaning. Such a description is familiar, for example, from the work of

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<sup>79</sup> Lionel Bailly, *Lacan: A Beginner’s Guide* (London: Oneworld, 2009), 111.

<sup>80</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 524.

Lee Edelman. Edelman defines queerness not unlike how Bailly defines desire, as that which refuses its own smooth movement through the portal of language, and thus figures only “the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form.”<sup>81</sup> We arrive, then, at an understanding of desire and queerness that foregrounds the lack, refusal, and negation of meaning. This emphasis on negativity is associated with the so-called “anti-social turn” of Edelman’s *No Future*, as well as Jonathan Goldberg’s “aesthetics of impossibility”<sup>82</sup> and Madhavi Menon’s “indifference to difference.”<sup>83</sup> But what if we turned our attention in Bailly’s evocative description of desire from the remainder that the gateway excludes to the materiality of the portal itself? Not unlike the entryway at the beginning of Pinter’s screenplay and the opening of this introduction, the portal that Bailly describes connotes a kind of slightness, a narrowness to be exact, that gives form to that which is in excess. It gives a shape and texture to negation. The literal frame of the doorway, then, is a figure that brings together my interest in thinking the cultural and historical materiality of domestic forms alongside the tensions between sexual desire and social meaning.

Returning to the psychoanalysis, for Lacan, the subject of desire is formed through instances of alienation and separation.<sup>84</sup> Rather than being a home for agency and experience, the Lacanian subject is the very “split” that divides it from cohesion and coherence in the Symbolic order. For Lee Edelman, this split goes to the very heart of queerness in that

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<sup>81</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 4.

<sup>82</sup> Jonathan Goldberg, *Melodrama: An Aesthetics of Impossibility* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 1.

<sup>83</sup> Madhavi Menon, *Indifference to Difference: On Queer Universalism* (Minneapolis: Univ Of Minnesota Press, 2015), 5.

<sup>84</sup> Lacan, *Écrits*, 269.

queerness “materializes the threat to the subject’s faith that its proper home is in meaning.”<sup>85</sup> One notes here the tendency to use “home” metaphorically in reference to the subject’s relationship to meaning. To say that the subject’s “proper home” is not in meaning is perhaps to open the possibility of an “improper” domesticity that makes do with materiality *sans* meaning. As Hywel Dix explores, the material and the Lacanian idea of the split subject are deeply interconnected. Dix describes cultural materialism as “a kind of Lacanian approach to literary texts ... [which] defines materialism as a process of language acquisition.” Such an approach, Dix continues, “analyses the process of subjectivity formation as it is worked out in the dialectical relationship between the ego and the social environment.”<sup>86</sup> Similarly, Scott Wilson’s *Cultural Materialism* draws on Lacan to foreground the ways the social is registered through language, situating the material in relation to the failure of symbolic, narrative and historical closure.<sup>87</sup> And Alan Sinfield’s *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* combines the work Raymond Williams and Lacan in his reading of Shakespeare.<sup>88</sup>

In thinking about the relationship between subjectivity and desire, my study is concerned with conflicting but interconnected understandings of desire. First, I explore desire as a kind of libidinal productivity that situates the subject as a legible citizen within

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<sup>85</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 39.

<sup>86</sup> Hywel Dix, *After Raymond Williams: Cultural Materialism and the Break-Up of Britain*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2013), 25.

<sup>87</sup> Scott Wilson, *Cultural Materialism: Theory and Practice* (Hoboken NJ: Wiley-Blackwell, 1995), 14; 37.

<sup>88</sup> Alan Sinfield, *Faultlines: Cultural Materialism and the Politics of Dissident Reading* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1992), 52-79.

the symbolization, narrativization, and historicization of disciplinary discourse. As Hornsey argues, while the Wolfenden Report recognized queer desire, it also sought to place it quite literally, both in distinction to ‘normal’ sexuality, and within the discourses through which postwar citizenship was being understood and thus normalized. In this way, desire not typically understood in relation to the postwar single family home ideal becomes just a different kind of domesticity. As Hornsey and Dines’s discussion of queer domesticity shows, home as a discourse of desire can work to bring queerness into the fold, so to speak. Home offers a means by which to show how queer desire, too, can reflect and support a “unified” vision of social cohesion and progress.

Second, in tension with this disciplinary understanding of desire, I aim to explore the concept of desire as something more effusive, and which draws in those qualities, conditions and forms of home that do not amount to a description of a subject’s *placehood*. Desire in this sense disrupts the former idea of desire that I associate with the discursive dimension of home. It disrupts the notion that desire can be a basis of belonging in as far as belonging involves the normalization judgement that links specific identities to specific places, and sees them as mutually constitutive. It operates along what Leo Bersani, citing Foucault, calls unforeseen “lines of force,”<sup>89</sup> and what Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman call “the subject’s constitution by and attachment to varieties of being undone.”<sup>90</sup> Desire in this sense is desirous without having an object, and certainly without having as its object the promise of its own belonging.

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<sup>89</sup> Foucault qtd. in Leo Bersani, “Sociality and Sexuality.” *Critical Inquiry* 26, no. 4 (2000), 641.

<sup>90</sup> Lauren Berlant and Lee Edelman, *Sex, or the Unbearable* (Durham: Duke University Press Books, 2013), 64.

Although the theoretical frame of this project is largely informed by psychoanalytic and specifically Lacanian-orientated queer theory, its focus on slightness marks a departure from the emphasis on negativity that has qualified this branch of the field. In “The Afterlives of Queer Theory,” Michael O’Rourke argues that queer theory can be mapped along the fault lines of hope, possibility, and futurity.<sup>91</sup> On the one hand are those theorists who insist on queerness, not so much as something positive that counters normative identities or structures, then as the force of disruption in itself. And on the other hand, there are those who are more interested in affirming the strange latency of queerness as something always yet to come. In contrast to advocates of the so-called anti-social turn are figures who have articulated the political potential of queer theory *as* potential. Scholars such as Michael Snediker,<sup>92</sup> Sara Ahmed, and José Esteban Muñoz emphasize links between the affirmative and the revolutionary, suggesting that the wholesale “fuck you” to the future and to politics that Edelman advocates may be less appealing to those who have never been a part of the future or political calculation in the first place. For these thinkers, the revolutionary potential of queer lies not in some prescribed meaning, but rather in the always-anticipatory world-making potential of queerness as lure or as “horizon.”<sup>93</sup> Their projects seek to “return us to the affirmative, revolutionary potential of queer studies, and seek to re-imagine a

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<sup>91</sup> Michael O’Rourke, “The Afterlives of Queer Theory,” *Continent* 1, no. 2 (2011): 104. See also: Robert L. Caserio et al., “The Antisocial Thesis in Queer Theory,” *PMLA* 121, no. 3 (2006): 819–28.

<sup>92</sup> See Michael Snediker, *Queer Optimism: Lyric Personhood and Other Felicitous Persuasions* (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2008); Sara Ahmed, *Queer Phenomenology: Orientations, Objects, Others* (Durham: Duke UP, 2006) and *The Promise of Happiness* (Durham NC: Duke University Press Books, 2010); and José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: NYU Press, 2009)

<sup>93</sup> Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 1.

hopeful, forward-reaching, world-making queer theory that matters as the future, as the telepoetic queer event, as the always already not-yet of the democracy to-come and the justice to-come.”<sup>94</sup> To quote Elizabeth Freeman, “as much as sexual dissidents have suffered, lived as objects of contempt or oblivion, endured physical and emotional punishment, we have also risked experimentation with our bodies and those of others, with affiliation, and with new practices of hoping, demanding, and otherwise making claims on the future.”<sup>95</sup>

The question then is: is slight a reflection of the affirmative or anti-social camps of queer theory? I see slight as a kind of qualification of queer negativity, which does not so much refuse as decline the call for the “more” implicit in utopian frames of queer world-making . It is a way of thinking about the fundamental ambiguity of desire, and of thinking about how such lack of definitive meaning modifies the substantive world. I see a focus on slightness as a fascination with the terms, forms, and qualities that emphasize insignificance. In other words, I am interested not in lack as such, but in the particular qualities and forms that the emphasis on lack itself connotes.

## **The Chapters**

In Chapter One, “The Syntax of Rooms: Domesticity, Sexuality, Catachresis,” I draw on linguistic, architectural and psychoanalytic references in order to explore the relationship between the material form of domesticity and the ambiguity of sexual desire. The focus in this chapter is Losey’s 1963 film, *The Servant*, and the queer coming together of the film’s

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<sup>94</sup> O’Rourke, “The Afterlives of Queer Theory,” 108.

<sup>95</sup> Elizabeth Freeman, *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (Durham NC: Duke University Press, 2010), xxi.

protagonist, Tony and Barrett, which I describe at the outset of this introduction. The film has recently been described as a self-censored portrayal of male homosexuality. However, in order to complicate the idea of sexuality as something that is *either* legible or hidden, my analysis develops a framework out of Robin Evans' well-known essay "Figures, Doors, and Passageways" in which he refers to the organization of rooms as the "compositional principle" of sociality in the home. In particular, my reading distinguishes between the syntax and the semantic of the home's architectural form. Whereas the semantics of the house speaks to the reasons or explanations behind any given gesture of intimacy within the house, the syntax of rooms, by contrast, refers to something that isn't discursively meaningful, but which is nonetheless a reflection of the desirous circulation of signs, bodies and affects within the home. By exploring the unique way Losey uses the structure of rooms to express sexuality, I approach Tony and Barrett's domestic intimacy as something "catachretic" rather than censored or hidden.

If Chapter One explores the syntax of the house as a counterpoint to the semantic meanings of domesticity, then the second chapter, "A Room of Her Own: Bathroom, Apparatus, Femininity" shows how a particular room in the house can work similarly to both construct and disrupt the disciplinary discursivity of home. I turn here from gay male queerness to the 'unruly' sexuality of female sex workers as portrayed in *Eve* (1962) and *Secret Ceremony* (1968). Both of these films make use of the ensuite bathroom as a topos for framing the female body. However, rather than reading the bathroom as a setting or symbol of femininity, I read it as cinematic apparatus, by which I mean a device that constructs the reality it seems only to reproduce objectively. Drawing on feminist film theory, I show how

the bathroom functions not simply as a space at which the masculinist gaze is directed, but rather as the very mechanism through which gendered relations of looking are produced. Against this discursive structuring of gender, however, I identify a number of slight and ambiguous details within Losey's bathrooms: a small splash on the surface of the bathwater, a premature cut, a ripping sound that seems both diegetic and nondiegetic at once. Such minor disruptions disrupt the symbolic dyads of meaning used to portray the female protagonists in these scenes; confuse the boundaries of body, space and cinema; and blur the formal structuration of the sexualizing gaze and its object. Like the obscure syntax of *The Servant*, and anticipating the stickiness I explore in the Chapter Three, these bathroom forms and noises are neither symbolic articulations, nor the negation of meaning as such. They are merely forms that, in a semantic world of meanings, foreground their own mere presence as such.

In the third and final chapter of my dissertation, "Sticking with the Child: Class, Materiality, Desire," I explore the figure of the child as a queer point of contact between questions of class and desire in Losey's 1971 film *The Go-Between*. Drawing from Marxist materialist and psychoanalytic frameworks, my analysis focuses on the patterning and tracing of the child across the film's setting of a grand English country estate in the year 1900. In this chapter, the house becomes externalized (seen from the outside), and the child is read as both an extension and a residue of its discursive reach. As the go-between or messenger for two clandestine cross-class lovers, the film's young protagonist, Leo, literally carries the letter of desire between the landed aristocratic Marian and the tenant farmer, Ted. Of particular interest to me is the strange codetermination between, on the one hand, the child's perceived limitations in knowing what he is doing/carrying, and on the other hand, his unique



capacity to move across the normally untraversable boundary of class. The ambiguity of the child's position with respect to both class and desire is visualized in *The Go-Between* as a kind of stickiness or trace, which as I argue, complicates strict discursive divisions including the traditional Marxist accountancy of class.

Across these chapters, then, the slightness of home troubles the disciplinary process precisely because it denotes that which is too insignificant to be counted in the calculation of home's meaning in social discourse. It does not so much resist disciplinary power as mark what does not quite amount to discourse, not even in such a way that could evoke counter-discourse as such. What we might call the material slightness of home offers a way of thinking about the queerness of domesticity in a way that declines the dual pressures of expressivity and foreclosure. In this sense, I pursue slightness as a defense of negativity. This dissertation shows that, like the domestic entry with which I began, mereness can also be an opening, an opening onto a body, an uncertain ring. Mereness represents the queerness of a domesticity that doesn't necessarily accord with discursive norms, or even with its "own" desires, or with what is felt as inside and outside (the self/home/body). The slightness of the home frames the desire it houses neither as a form of negativity that resists meanings absolutely, nor as a simple mode of expressivity. Instead, it lingers on forms and details that don't and don't need to rise to the level of discourse. And it leads us, as the chapters of this dissertation do, from the entrance hall, up the stairs, into the bathroom momentarily, and beyond.

## Chapter One

### The Syntax of Rooms: Domesticity, Sexuality, Catachresis

The Servant is ... *about a house*

Joseph Losey<sup>96</sup>

*The Servant* is a film about the relationship between a foppish aristocrat named Tony (James Fox) and his manservant, Barrett (Dirk Bogarde). Tony, we learn in the opening movement of the film, has just returned from some kind of imperial venture in Argentina, and having now inherited considerable family wealth, has purchased a handsome but rundown townhouse in a fashionable district of London. In the opening scene of the film, a man named Barrett is seen arriving at the house, which the script describes as “slightly shabbier than the others,” before making his way through the front door. Passing through the house’s dilapidated interior, he comes upon Tony napping in a deck chair in the conservatory at the rear of the house. As Barrett encounters Tony for the first time, he literally looms over Tony’s reclining body. It is a composition that speaks to the power dynamics that soon begin to unfold between the two men.

The purpose of Barrett’s arrival, we come to learn, is to be interviewed for the role of Tony’s manservant. Stern but deferential, Barrett secures the job without much difficulty. His first task as butler is to oversee the decoration and furnishing of the house. Tony, it would

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<sup>96</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

appear, is set on the idea of living in a traditional kind of way in a traditional kind of house with a butler there to keep things running smoothly. Tony's fiancée Susan (Wendy Craig) is perplexed by the arrangement. "Couldn't he live out?" she wonders. As the friction between servant and fiancée grows deeper, Barrett brings Vera (Sarah Miles) – supposedly his sister but in actual fact his lover – into the house as a maid and instructs her to seduce Tony. The ensuing relationship between Tony and Vera drives a wedge between him and Susan, and leaves him increasingly susceptible to Barrett's influence. By the end of the film, as the film critic Peter Bradshaw writes, "the servant becomes the master."<sup>97</sup> The film revolves around the shifting power dynamics between two men whose relationship seems to trouble in countless ways the formal description of their domestic arrangement as master and servant.

More recently, Tony and Barrett's positions as master and servant have also been framed as a coded representation of gay domesticity. The film critic Peter Bradshaw, for example, writes that "Harold Pinter's superbly controlled, elliptical, menacing dialogue is able to hint, to imply, to seduce, to repulse, in precisely the manner that gay men were forced to adopt in 1963, when homosexuality was still a criminal offence, and when representing homosexuality on screen was forbidden." "The film," Bradshaw continues, "hides its homosexuality in the shadows."<sup>98</sup> More broadly, the *The Servant* has been interpreted as a reflection of shifting class hierarchies in British postwar society. As Palmer and Riley suggest, the relationship between the two men dramatizes a reversal of power relations that

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<sup>97</sup> Peter Bradshaw, "The Servant – Review," *The Guardian*, 21 March 2013, [http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2013/mar/21/the-servant-review?CMP=twf\\_fd](http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2013/mar/21/the-servant-review?CMP=twf_fd).

<sup>98</sup> Peter Bradshaw, "The Servant: A 60s Masterwork That Hides Its Homosexuality in the Shadows," *The Guardian*, 27 March 2013, <https://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2013/mar/27/the-servant-homosexuality-harold-pinter>.

sees the working-class Barrett use the aristocratic Tony in precisely the manner in which the upper class exploits the lower class as a matter of course:<sup>99</sup>

The central conflict of in *The Servant* exposes the arrogant, self-indulgent corruption of a privileged class dependant on exploiting an underclass whose servility is but a thin veil for long-standing resentments and desires. But the film goes beyond an indictment of social or class inequalities, and beyond melodrama as well, in its shocking tale of a master and servant mutually destroyed ... it tells the story of a collapse, both personal and societal, in which false values, the politics of class, the vagaries of desire, and the power of uncertain sexuality claim equal places in a world suffused with hypocrisy.<sup>100</sup>

As Palmer and Riley suggest, far from being separate interpretations, the representation of “uncertain sexuality” and class exploitation are deeply intertwined elements in the film.

In 1962, the year *The Servant* was released, Britain was gripped by the public scandal of the John Profumo affair, involving sex, adultery, a high-ranking aristocratic Conservative minister, a teenage nightclub model, a society osteopath and an attaché of the Soviet Embassy in London. In *Capital Affairs*, Frank Mort reads the Profumo scandal as a flashpoint in the evolving consciousness of British class hierarchies after the Second World War.<sup>101</sup> First, the affair seemed to solidify the sense of the waning cultural and moral authority of the upper-classes in the post-war period, which many saw as an inevitable consequence of the entrenched moral laxity and sexual licence of the leisured and aristocratic

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<sup>99</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Joseph Losey*, 44.

<sup>100</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Joseph Losey*, 44.

<sup>101</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs: London and the Making of the Permissive Society* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).

milieu. And second, it revealed new and unstable points of interaction within the fabric of the nation. “The moral turmoil noted by so many commentators was,” Mort writes, “not simply the result of a battle between conservatism and progressivism or between old and new England; it was also a product of the dynamic interaction of these settings in the capital city and of the characters who moved between them.”<sup>102</sup> Thus what made the Profumo case so exceptional and sensational was not what anyone did *per se*, so much as the mobility of subjects across previously untraversable class boundaries and the overlapping of previously discrete metro-political spaces in the city and countryside.

In *The Spiv and the Architect*, Richard Hornsey makes a similar argument with respect to the trial and conviction of the journalist Peter Wildeblood. Wildeblood shot to public notoriety in the spring of 1954 when he was found guilty (along with Lord Montagu of Beaulieu and the landowner Michael Pitt-Rivers) of conspiring to incite acts of gross indecency and buggery with two younger working-class airmen. As the gay scandal played itself out in the media, Hornsey observes, homosexuality often seemed a secondary concern to the impropriety of cross-class intimacy.<sup>103</sup> In his concluding remarks, the judge on the case suggested that the jury should base their decision on the question of whether it was plausible that anything but indecency could have brought the men together. These remarks echoed the loaded question the prosecutor asked Wildeblood while on the stand: “what was the common link which bound you, a highly intelligent man and a beautiful writer, with Corporal McNally, who started honourably in the pits at Glasgow?”<sup>104</sup> As context for the production

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<sup>102</sup> Frank Mort, *Capital Affairs*, 122.

<sup>103</sup> Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, 97.

<sup>104</sup> Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, 97.

and release of *The Servant*, these cultural events suggest that the erosion of traditional class hierarchy during the postwar period was deeply intertwined with ideas of sexual impropriety, and thus encourage us to read the film outside of a single axis of experience, such as class, sexuality, or race.

In contrast to the idea that Losey and Pinter actively hid elements of their film, namely the ‘true’ nature of Barrett and Tony’s intimacy, I explore here the notion of desire as something that amounts to little more than its own ambiguity. In particular, how does this “little-more-than-ness” adhere in the physical space of the two men’s shared domestic space? In other words, rather than seeking an explanation that would clarify the ambiguity of Barrett and Tony’s queer domesticity, I am interested in the way the structure of the home in which they live invites us to decline reading their intimacy in terms of the twined pressures of expressivity and concealment. As I explore later in this chapter, Losey was himself preoccupied with thinking about filmmaking as a medium of “precise ambiguity.”<sup>105</sup> While elaborating and developing this idea of ambiguity as something “explicit,” as Losey has it, I am keen to avoid reading the deepening of the relationship (and ambiguity) between Tony and Barrett as following on from or denoting the “collapse,” as Palmer and Riley suggest,<sup>106</sup> of some existing social structure, and instead as the expression of an ambiguity that exists within material structure. I want to ask if we can think about the ambiguity or “unspokenness” that Bradshaw describes in ways that do not involve a return to speech.<sup>107</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>106</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Joseph Losey*, 61.

<sup>107</sup> Peter Bradshaw, “Why *The Servant* Is One of the Best Memorials to Pinter,” *The Guardian*, 5 January 2009, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/filmblog/2009/jan/05/harold-pinter-the-servant>.

Likewise, I resist reading the trajectory of the two men's relationship in terms of the imposition of Barrett's agency over Tony's. "Barrett, who can anticipate and even create Tony's desires," writes Palmer and Riley, "controls the feckless aristocrat by making him a prisoner of his own senses."<sup>108</sup> Such a reading, however, risks forsaking the role of Tony's desire in the unfolding narrative. Being the object of another person's control is, after all, not necessarily the relinquishing of one's own desire.

On the one hand, Bradshaw's comment that *The Servant* hides its homosexuality in the shadows implies that Pinter and Losey actively cloaked one kind of relationship (homosexual) by way of another (master and servant), as if given a more progressive social environment, they might have made a different film altogether. On the other hand, Bradshaw also acknowledges the complexity the film presents with respect to the imbrication of what is legible and what is concealed. "The taboo nature of homosexuality creates a ferocious voltage in the writing," Bradshaw writes, "its unspokenness speaks volumes."<sup>109</sup> In this final phrase, "its unspokenness speaks volumes," Bradshaw captures the idea of silence as itself a kind of articulation.

In this chapter, I wish to further develop the idea of unspokenness. How might unspokenness be read as something other than the expectation of speech? As something fully formed, and which takes shape in the unspeaking structure of Tony's house? When Bradshaw writes that homosexuality's unspokenness speaks volumes, we can, of course, read this to mean that what is hidden in the film constitutes its meaning. But playing with his phrasing

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<sup>108</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Joseph Losey*, 50.

<sup>109</sup> Peter Bradshaw, "Why The Servant Is One of the Best Memorials to Pinter," *The Guardian*.

slightly, we can also take it to mean that the muteness with respect to Tony and Barrett's queerness is spoken, not in speech as such, but rather in the volumes that forms take in the space of home. Or perhaps, indeed, in the volumes shaped by the house itself. Such an interpretation invites us to read the mute shapes and patterns of the film outside of the discursive binary of silence and voice.

To do so, this chapter looks at the representation of domestic architecture in *The Servant* as a way of thinking about the house as a discourse of desire. At the core of my analysis is not so much the historical relationship between sexual desire and the house as their mutual relationship to the determinants of language. In suggesting that houses have (or are) a grammar, I am not posing a metaphorical question about how we talk about houses in a political context, or how houses might “speak to” our cultural or political sensibilities about the proper place of desire. It is a question of the ways that language and architecture determine one another's indeterminacy as social forms, forming and deforming the limits and boundaries of subjective encounters. “The grammar of houses” means understanding syntax as the way rooms open one onto another; it means understanding etymology as the origin of different kinds of rooms and their shifting cultural connotations; and it means understanding grammar as a set of expectations about how certain bodies ought to occupy and move through the home. Drawing on psychoanalytic and poststructuralist theory, however, my emphasis on grammar represents an attempt to avoid functionalist arguments about either architecture or language. What I call the grammar of houses, then, is the inquiry and the questioning of a feeling of home (*domus*) with language (*logos*) as an ambiguous and fragile experience of being held by what dispossesses us. Key to this inquiry and questioning is an



exploration of the tensions between the syntactical and semantic qualities of both language and architecture, where the organization of rooms, like the organization of signs, forms an uneasy unity with what those rooms (or signs) can and cannot say about the subject who uses them.

The syntax of rooms is a notion informed in large part by the work of Robin Evans. His much-cited text, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” provides a model for thinking about the organization of domestic space as a kind of syntax for the unfolding of intimate relations within the home.<sup>110</sup> His work suggests that the layout of architectural space structures the ordinary ways its inhabitants relate to others in the intimate space of home. But while Evan’s analytic frame makes it possible to understand the ways we privilege certain forms of intimate relations above others, it also reinscribes the limits of what counts as intimacy. In other words, to take architecture as a legend for the social relations is bound to yield some complicated and shadowy zones on the border of what is readable as such. Or as Lorens Holms writes, “desire as it manifests architecturally remains unsatisfied in architecture.”<sup>111</sup> This means that the syntax of rooms is not simply a means of organizing signs into a coherent whole, but is also something that has a quality of its own distinct from the question of whether a particular domestic structure makes sense as such.

I begin my discussion by looking at Tony’s town house within the context of what Peter Kalliney, Jed Esty and others describes as the nationalistic “turn inward”<sup>112</sup> that

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<sup>110</sup> Robin Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” in *Space Reader*, ed. Michael Hensel, Christopher Hight, and Achim Menges (Chichester UK: Willey, 2009): 73-96.

<sup>111</sup> Lorens Holm, “What Lacan Said Re: Architecture,” *Critical Quarterly* 42, no. 2 (2000), 31.

<sup>112</sup> Peter J. Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger: A Literary Geography of Modern Englishness* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2015), 6; 7. See also: Jed Esty, *A*

coincided with Britain’s shifting imperial interests. This look inwards invites us to consider the house in ways that complicates nationalistic identity-bound meanings of home. The following section then turns to Losey’s own perspective on film and filmmaking, showing how he understood cinema less as a space for the realization of meaning – national, sexual, social – than as an arena for the experimentation of forms which are not substantive in the way of meaning or explanation. One of these forms is the interior structure of domestic space, which I read as a kind of syntax. In my reading, syntax pertains at once to cinematic form in terms of frames, scenes and cuts, as well as to the architectural organization of passageways and rooms in the house. Syntax is a term that is at once tied to and distinguished from semantics. Whereas syntax has to do with the structure of a phase, anything to do with the meaning of a phrase belongs to semantics. In *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* Noam Chomsky famously explores how “grammaticalness is ... a matter of degree.”<sup>113</sup> Sentences which are syntactically valid may not be semantically valid, while sentences which are “derivatively generated,”<sup>114</sup> as Chomsky describes it, may nonetheless be meaningful. What interests me in particular is the way in which syntax operates as a quality of language in tension with, but never strictly against, the question of meaning. Simply put, we can look at, consider, even experience the syntax of a phrase no matter its semantical validity. Therefore, what accounts for what we might call the mere presence of syntax is that it represents a texture or quality of language that need not be substantiated through the question, *does this make sense?* But which is nonetheless something we can sense.

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*Shrinking Island: Modernism and National Culture in England* (Princeton NJ: Princeton University Press, 2003).

<sup>113</sup> Noam Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax* (Cambridge MA: MIT Press, 1965), 11.

<sup>114</sup> Chomsky, *Aspects of the Theory of Syntax*, 150.

Specifically with reference of the work of Evans, there is a rich history of reading architectural space as grammar or syntax. The sequencing and relation of rooms in a house mirrors the sequencing and relation of signs that produce the narratives (laws, conventions, and ideal) that define culture or the “symbolic order.” As with a sign in discourse, each room only has meaning relationally and retroactively. It is only when the sentence is completed that the sense of the first words are determined. By the same token the meaning of a given room only has meaning in relation to a whole. But of course just as the meaning of an individual law, sentence, ideal or demand is never truly complete, so too does the house unfold in a multitude of directions (“both sides, round, about”) which makes it less a structure of a whole than a holding space for incompleteness itself. The house thus represents the location of dislocation, as Lacan might say. In this light, I attempt to identify queer experiences of domestic space – where the conventional organization of space in the home functions as the basis for queer relations between people – as instances of catachresis. My conclusion builds on these meditations concerning the tensions between meaning and form in the structure of home in order to offer a syntactical reading of the relationship between Barrett and Tony.

### **Returning Home**

Having stepped inside the house, to witness the unfolding of Tony and Barrett’s initial encounter through the syntactical structure of the house, it is worth taking a step back to appraise the house as a setting for such an encounter. In particular, I am interested in thinking about the broader social meanings of the house as produced by nationalist discourses of

post-war reconstruction and the emergent gay citizenship of that period. The reference in Pinter’s script to the house’s dilapidation speaks to the multiple tensions between old and new at play in the spatial politics of post-war London. Given Tony’s civilizing discourse about building cities for the poor of Asia Minor who have settled in the jungles of South America, the film is self-conscious about the way ideas of home were being influenced by the perception of Britain’s waning identity as a global imperial power.<sup>115</sup>

Tony’s involvement in this pseudo-commercial, pseudo-humanitarian project illustrates his naive class privilege and the metamorphosis of imperialism into pseudo-commercial, pseudo-humanitarian ‘development’ discourse. In a comedic passage in the film, Tony boasts of his involvement in a project to build three cities in the jungle. There is some confusion between what a poncho and a guacho are, and one senses by the flippancy with which Tony speaks about the project that he may be overstating his role in the enterprise and may even be the target of some kind of swindle (the project later appears to fall through). Nonetheless, Tony’s arrogance about pseudo-humanitarian nation-building connects in interesting ways to the – in more than one sense – domestic project of refurbishing a Georgian townhouse in central London. In *Cities of Affluence and Anger*, Kalliney explores how the British class system has been tied to the shifting (mis)fortunes of British imperialism. The perception of imperial decline in the post-war period spurred a national inwardness, Kalliney suggests, and gives rise to an “emerging discourse of English

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<sup>115</sup> For an account of queerness and post-imperial melancholia see: Sarah Brophy, “Queer Histories and Postcolonial Intimacies in Alan Hollinghurst’s ‘The Line of Beauty,’” in *End of Empire and the English Novel since 1945*, ed. Rachael Gilmour and Bill Schwarz (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2011).

exceptionalism.”<sup>116</sup> Tony’s return home from the New World to set up a proper residence in London can be read as an expression of this renewed commitment to English national identity. And it draws a link between cultural attachments to the old (Tony’s old Georgian house) and fantasies about the new (modern cities in the jungle). On the one hand, this identity sought forms of modernity beyond the expansive imperial imagination, but on the other hand, reaffirmed the metropole as the centre. Tony’s cocky remarks about “building cities” and helping “those poor bastards” in Argentina suggests the repressed and racialized other against which English exceptionalism was forged. The image of a new international order in which Britain could position itself as a humanitarian and modernizing force on the world stage worked to entrench its economic and ideological supremacy within the Commonwealth and beyond. As Conekin, Mort and Water emphasize in the introduction to *Moments of Modernity*, “western modernity constitutes itself as the given, unmarked unit of history, constructing a binary opposition between itself and the problematic ‘marked’ side, which is only comprehensible in terms of its distance from western myths of advancement.”

<sup>117</sup> They seek to show how Britain sought to reproduce “an epistemological regime ... founded on colonial domination” even in the context of its ‘post-imperial’ turn inwards.<sup>118</sup> Tony’s description of building cities in the jungle for great ‘masses’ of people speaks to the humanitarian outlook which helps to centre Britain’s authority in determining what development looks like. It is this benevolent stewardship which helps Britain and the West

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<sup>116</sup> Peter J. Kalliney, *Cities of Affluence and Anger*, 6; 7.

<sup>117</sup> Conekin et al., *Moments of Modernity*, 14; see also Zygmunt Bauman, *Legislators and Interpreters: On Modernity, Post-Modernity and Intellectuals*, (London: Routledge, 1987), 111.

<sup>118</sup> Conekin et al., *Moments of Modernity*, 14.

determine its own nodal centrality in the trade, capital and financial structures which persist today. These great masses in the jungle can also be read as the spectral other of postwar domestic concerns about the falling birth rate and the need to perpetuate white British ethnicity. As Pat Thane argues in “Population Politics in Post-War British Culture,” concerns about the falling birth rates in England were never far removed from fears about overpopulation in other racially marked parts of the world.<sup>119</sup> The pseudo-humanitarian venture of building cities in the jungle suggests the need to contain the other by exporting the ‘neutral’ infrastructure of advanced industrialized societies.

Thus, Tony’s purchase and repair of a townhouse in the heart of fashionable London speaks to the ways the perceived centrality of Britain’s past substantiated its claims to the modern, that is, how the old was mobilized to justify the new. After the war, the Tony’s neighbourhood of Knightsbridge – like many others – was earmarked for large-scale commercial redevelopment.<sup>120</sup> Plans published in a 1962 issue of the *The Architects’ Journal* illustrate the redevelopment of a large chunk of neighbourhood near the Knightsbridge underground station and just below Hyde park [see Figure 1]. The plans call for the construction of what is essentially a large ring road, cutting out an existing network of streets and raising a number of existing buildings. At the center of the loop is a large sunken garden (“the size of Parliament Square”) and next to that a collection of three towers and two lower buildings “all ris[ing],” as the article explains, “from a three-storey plinth containing shops

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<sup>119</sup> Pat Thane, “Population Politics in Post-War British Culture,” in *Moments of Modernity*, 114-133. See also Nadine Attewell, *Better Britons: Reproduction, National Identity, and the Afterlife of Empire* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2014).

<sup>120</sup> In Pinter’s screenplay for the film, Tony’s house is described as being located in Knightsbridge. In the film however, the exterior shots of the house are in Chelsea, the adjacent neighbourhood to the south.

surrounding an open square.”<sup>121</sup> A large black and white sketch included with the aerial master plan shows a view looking north across the enclosed shopping square comprising a series of covered walkways rising above a landscaped courtyard (see illustration below). Two of the three towers can be seen shooting vertically into the the sky, exceeding the pictorial frame in dramatic fashion. The project reveals a vision of postwar housing radically different from the single-family, each-house-its- own-private-entry housing of the Edwardian terrace house. The towers are, of course, multi-unit housing but there are a number of other key differences. The sketch reveals a mix of residential, commercial and social uses in one architectural composition. Shopping units, a hotel, private residences, a ballroom, public garden and square are all included in the plan. Crucially, the boundaries between these distinct functions are fluid and ambiguous. The building materials depicted in the sketch are conspicuously transparent. The plaza is depicted as busy but not crowded with people, their bodies unobscured by the see-through railings and partitions of the various intersecting pathways and landings. Some move casually through the space, others appear to linger, taking in the scenery – be it alone, in pairs, with children, or even with dogs. Collectively, these elements contribute to a sense of communality, openness, and mobility that belies a deeper state of division. The perspective of the sketch and the plan in general suggest a closing off of space. Although the sketch is an exterior view, the elevation of the shopping structure around the plaza connotes a strong sense of interiority, with the elegant mature trees scattered throughout the plaza adding to this layering of inside and outside.

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<sup>121</sup> “New Knightsbridge,” *The Architects’ Journal*, March 21, 1962, 614.

Returning to the “slightly shabby” Georgian terrace that Tony returns to fix up in one sense stands in stark contrast to the vision of housing represented by plans published in a 1962 issue of *The Architect’s Journal*, and indeed to the monumentality of post-war reconstruction in Britain during those years – a monumentality of public welfare in Britain, not abroad. Yet in different ways, they both suggest a turn inwards that is very much invested in asserting Britain as a visionary centre of modernity. Most of these visions were never realized, but they nonetheless provide intriguing context for thinking about Tony’s presumed attachments to a particularly traditional ideal of upper-class English domesticity.

### **A Cinema of Ambiguity**

The house functions as a crucible for Losey’s shifting attitudes to the function of narrative cinema. As Palmer and Riley argue, in the early 1960s, Losey was attempting to move away from the discursive quality of what they call his earlier “message films.”<sup>122</sup> He expressed a profound dissatisfaction with the expectation that films should have “something to say”<sup>123</sup> beyond the affective world of their immediate relationship with the viewer. As Losey once wrote, “there aren’t any readymade answers ... You can only provide a stimulation which I think at its best is some sort of complete artistic statement, which therefore is form and emotion.”<sup>124</sup> Form and emotion stand in here for a kind of “enoughness” (“some kind of complete,” as he has it<sup>125</sup>) at odds with the idea of “films as answers.” Losey’s turn away from explication, in other words, suggests a desire to think

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<sup>122</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Films of Joseph Losey*, 10.

<sup>123</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Films of Joseph Losey*, 10.

<sup>124</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Films of Joseph Losey*, 10.

<sup>125</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Films of Joseph Losey*, 10.



about film in terms of the intractable ambiguity of ongoing experience, rather than as an attempt to organize the world into a recognizable pattern in relation to which the subject can be positioned and understood.<sup>126</sup> The tension that Losey suggests exists between form and emotion, on the one hand, and social explication on the other, is also helpful for thinking about the cultural figure of the house. If we have become all too accustomed to thinking about the house as a social structure that scales down and organizes the world into a recognizable pattern of interaction and attachment, then perhaps we fail to see how the house, while remaining anchored in material reality, also constitutes a transient field of immediacy and intensity at odds with the idea of society as a pattern of personalized sites of belonging.

In the spring of 1963 Joseph Losey wrote an eight-page letter to the publicist responsible for the US marketing of *The Servant*, which had been released in the UK earlier that year. Losey was anxious about the way the film's story might be marketed to a US audience. Losey had high professional and artistic aspirations for his latest film, and he urged the publicist “to see to it and to take great pains that no audience is brought into the theatre under the misapprehension that they are seeing the usual sex drama, kitchen sink drama, horror or suspense story.”<sup>127</sup> One cannot help but feel some pity for the publicist who was

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<sup>126</sup> Here we can think about what Losey calls emotion as something more akin to affect, which is a concept that has been brought to the fore of recent critical discussions in the humanities by scholars such as Brian Massumi (*Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation* [Durham: Duke University Press, 2002]), Lauren Berlant (*Cruel Optimism* [Durham: Duke UP, 2011]), and Sianne Ngai (*Ugly Feelings* [Cambridge MA: Harvard University Press, 2005]). Massumi defines affect in terms of openness and in contrast to emotions, which unlike affects are categorized and thus reified at a discursive level as specific and contradictory emotions such as happiness and sadness.

<sup>127</sup> Letter from Joseph Losey to “Leslie,” dated 5 May 1963, JW/L/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

instructed to be as precise as possible in conveying to potential audiences what this film was about, while at the same time being told that “the essence of ‘The Servant’ [sic.] is that it cannot be pre-determined either by its makers or its exploiters.”<sup>128</sup> On the one hand, Losey wanted to make sure his film was not reducible to the melodramas that he had once been known for, nor to the social realism or so-called kitchen sink realism that was redefining British cinema at that period.<sup>129</sup> But beyond the notion that *The Servant* is difficult to define, what Losey seems to be insisting is that what *The Servant* is about is its own indeterminacy.

Indeed, Losey once described his work as a part of what he called “the cinema of the ambiguous.”<sup>130</sup> But while Losey sought to deflect from the idea that films should be about providing audiences with “takeaway answers,” it would be wrong to read his films in terms of active concealment, as has often been the case, especially around the question of homosexuality in *The Servant*. If for Bradshaw *The Servant* “hides its homosexuality in the shadows,” then Losey makes shadows a form of visibility rather than of concealment. Through an interest in the idea of film’s visual language, Losey asks what it might mean to think about the screen as a field of substantive reluctance or that it “affirm[s] by [its] very reticence,” to borrow a term from Anne-Lise François, who regards ambiguity as a kind of

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<sup>128</sup> Letter from Joseph Losey to “Leslie,” dated 5 May 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>129</sup> Kitchen sink drama and kitchen sink realism are terms related to British New Wave cinema and the Angry Young Man film genre of British filmmaking in the 1960s. Losey’s dismissive reference to Kitchen sink drama suggests a desire on his part to distance himself from these genres while inadvertently acknowledging the degree to which his films bear their imprint. For more on British new wave cinema see B. F. Taylor, *The British New Wave: A Certain Tendency?* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006).

<sup>130</sup> “An American Abroad” [draft article], dated 21 Jan 1964, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

finish rather than an attempt to occlude or delay a final effect.<sup>131</sup> Central to this is an understanding of domestic space as both present and mute, or slight, which lends itself to a kind of grammar where the organization of rooms, passageways and domestic things represent a syntax, not for organizing speech or text, but for disposing and composing bodies in space.

This emphasis on the substantive reluctance of space echoes the literary tradition of defining ambiguity as a kind of roominess. In his landmark 1930 volume, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, William Empson writes: “Ambiguity, in ordinary speech, means something very pronounced, and as a rule witty or deceitful. I propose to use the word in an extended sense, and shall think relevant to my subject any verbal nuance, *however slight*, which *gives room* for alternative reactions to the same piece of language.”<sup>132</sup> Rather than defining ambiguity in terms of outsmarting or deceit (hiding and withholding knowledge), Empson defines it as a kind of slightness that makes room. Empson’s spatial metaphor is perhaps not as incidental as it might first appear if we note the root-word “amb” (meaning “both sides, round, about”) embedded in the term ambiguity, which links it to the idea of ambience. If, as Empson puts it, “the same piece of language” is but the basis for “alternative reactions,” then ambiguity suggests a critique of functionalism and formalism while at the same time affirming the spatial forms associated with roominess, including surface, finish and ambience.

As noted earlier, Losey was keenly interested in the tension between the explicative determinants of what he calls film’s “story” and the qualities related to what he called the

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<sup>131</sup> François, *Open Secrets*, 154.

<sup>132</sup> William Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*. 3rd ed. Edition (New York: New Directions, 1966), 1 (emphasis mine).

film’s “ambience.” At the time of making *The Servant*, Losey was actively seeking to describe a mode of narrative cinema that would re-establish the visual significance of his films’ spatial character and mood over the discursive significance of their “message.”<sup>133</sup> “I have become less and less interested in ‘story’ so far as films are concerned,” he writes, “and more and more interested in ... ambience.”<sup>134</sup> Losey’s films are in many ways stories *about* houses, but more than this, they engage the house as the vehicle for exploring (the) roominess (of language), as a visual medium through which to complicate the relation between space and narrative. The house thus becomes indicative of Losey’s desire to eschew the explicative function of plot in favour of the transient and recessive elements of the screen – “the essentially visual language of the cinema,” as he once wrote.<sup>135</sup> My suggestion, with respect to the representation of domestic space, however, extends beyond a privileging of certain elements of narrative cinema above others (ambience over story). I argue that Losey’s ambivalence about “story” can be read, at least in *The Servant*, as a response to the development of house and home as *the* quintessential story of what it means to desire in the modern national and state context. If the story of the house is the story of how sexual desire came to have its place in the social by virtue of settling for an actual, material place in society, Losey’s interest, by stark contrast, is in desire as a form of dislocation. Not least of all, the house for Losey represents a departure from the idea of the social as the narrative that brings us all neatly together under one roof.

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<sup>133</sup> For more on this historical shift in Losey’s filmmaking see: Palmer and Riley, *Films of Joseph Losey*, 1-16.

<sup>134</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>135</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

With the historical establishment of the single family house as the dominant gauge for measuring the coherence, permanency and authenticity of intimate relations (a unit for measuring the subject's compliance with the social and economic aims of the state),<sup>136</sup> it is perhaps not surprising that Losey would turn to the house as a way of inverting that meaning. For Losey the house is about the non-coherence of desire, its paths of divergence away from itself, and the emptiness of the points of intersection between meaning and structure that supposedly define the subject as an entity “at home” with itself. The error of contemporary critics such as Bradshaw has been to read the relationship between Tony and Barrett as a product of working within the restrictive space of homophobia (our cultural blindness to queer domesticity, as Cook might say) instead of within the roominess of desire. By reading *The Servant* as a coded allegory for the exclusion of gays from narratives of placehood, critics of the film have run the risk not only of reinstating the normative home structure as the natural endpoint for all narratives of intimacy, but also of mistaking desire for the structures that delineate (and thus limit) its place in the social. In sharp contrast to canonical films about British domesticity such as *This Happy Breed* (1944), *The Servant* rejects the idea that the home is the natural climax of the epic known as the liberal Western state.<sup>137</sup> Rather than “orientating” (Cook) alternative forms of desire and intimacy in society, domesticity in *The Servant* “gives room” (Empson) to bodily encounters which may not want, need, or be capable of taking up their rightful place in the story of liberal inclusion.

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<sup>136</sup> Hornsey, *The Spiv and the Architect*, 201-246.

<sup>137</sup> *The Happy Breed* (1944) was directed by David Lean and adapted from Noël Coward's 1939 play of the same name. It traces the lives of the Gibbons between 1919 and 1939 through the lens of London suburbia and “celebrates the stoicism, humour and resilience of ordinary British people.” See “BFI Screenonline: This Happy Breed (1944),” accessed October 3, 2017, <http://www.screenonline.org.uk/film/id/488558/index.html>.

Just as the precision with which Losey describes the ambiguity of his film to his US publicist leads to a kind of circular indeterminacy (Losey explains that the only basis of his film is that it cannot be explained), so too does architecture in Losey's films represent the desire for an understanding of desire as something that satisfies itself with a desire to be at home with itself. That is to say, architecture in Losey's films frames desire as that which has the desire to be satisfied by the idea of desire's own home. Thus the architecture of home is imagined not as a structure of closure and representation (a structure which grounds social relations) but of non-closure and polysemy (unsettling social relations). The home we might say, borrowing from Derrida's notes on the polysemy of what he calls the trace, is the place "where the relationship with the other is marked."<sup>138</sup> This other to which Derrida refers means everything from the other who is not me, to the Other of estrangement (unheimlich), to the radiation (traces) of alternative paths and meanings that extend from any one "piece" of language. If as Derrida puts it, "language bears within itself the necessity of its own critique,"<sup>139</sup> so too does the architectural language of desire known as the house bear within itself the necessity of its undoing.

Elaborating on this spatial exegesis of language's roominess, I want to consider the organization of domestic space as a manifestation of the subject's relation to language.<sup>140</sup> In

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<sup>138</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997), 46.

<sup>139</sup> Jacques Derrida, "Structure, Sign and Play in the Discourse of the Human Sciences," in *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University Of Chicago Press, 1978), 284.

<sup>140</sup> The ambiguity of language calls upon a topology of intersection and divergence. Empson's definition of ambiguity emphasizes the polysemy ("alternative reactions" [*Seven Types*, 1]) of specific "piece[s] of language," (*Seven Types*, 1) be they words, signs, morphemes (the basic linguistic units of words that can carry a meaning), and so on. But implicit in the very idea of pieces of language is the notion that language is made up of series of individual signs connected to make a chain of signification. We can thus define ambiguity

both contexts, desire is taken to be the product of the subject's disposal into a structure of ambiguous rather than intuitive relations. Just as no sign makes sense on its own, but only in relation to other signs in a signifying chain, so too are the meanings associated with the subject's place within the home relative to the particular way in which the house is organized, including the way one room relates to and is separated from another.

### **The Syntax of Rooms**

An earlier but illuminating literary illustration of what I mean by the syntax of rooms can be found in E.M. Forster's *Howards End* (1910).<sup>141</sup> The novel is, in part, Forster's assessment of early twentieth-century British urban modernity and capitalist expansion. His

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spatially as being of two dimensions – the synchronic (the plurality of meaning affixed to a given piece of language or sign), and the diachronic (the plurality that emerges and multiplies through the multiplicity of relations between pieces of language in the signifying chain). This idea – the workings of the signifying chain – comes from Jacques Lacan, who builds on Saussure's discussion of the “syntagmatic” and “associative” relationships between signs. “There is in effect no signifying chain [diachronic chain],” Lacan writes, “that does not have, as if attached to the punctuation of each of its units, a whole articulation of relevant contexts [synchronic chains] suspended ‘vertically,’ as it were, from that point” (*Écrits*, 169-70). The point Lacan makes is that signification (the structure of meaning itself) does not rest where we think it does. The signifying chain is not simply a topological metaphor for describing language; it sets the linguistic basis of desire as the spatial condition of the subject's desire. We tend to think about meaning as residing in signs – i.e. signs (signifiers) contain pieces of meaning, which can be combined with other pieces of meanings to produce fuller meanings. This interpretation of language supports the idea of a gradual, cumulative process of understanding. But for Lacan signs are simply the empty points of intersection from which “alternative reactions” depart. Therefore not only are signs merely points of departure, but the paths they lead onto are themselves infinitely ongoing because they can be elaborated ad infinitum with other points of intersection. Desire for Lacan is always “desire for something else” (*Écrits*, 431). When the subject enters the symbolic order, she is essentially dissolved into this topology of divergent pathways so that the “object” of one's desire never culminates at a single point or where one thinks it should be, but remains adrift in the horizontal and vertical axes of unfolding meaning.

<sup>141</sup> E. M. Forster, *Howards End* (Mineola NY: Dover Thrift Edition, 2002).

anxiety about the era's economic and social hypocrisies and injustices is conveyed through the representation of London urban development “as humanity piled itself higher and higher on the precious soil of London”:

It was the kind of scene that may be observed all over London, whatever locality – bricks and mortar rising and falling with the restlessness of the water in a fountain, as the city receives more and more men upon her soil. Camelia Road would soon stand out like a fortress, and command, for a little, an extensive view. Only for a little. Plans were out for the erection of flats in Magnolia Road also. And again, a few years, and all the flats in either road might be pulled down, and new buildings, of a vastness at present unimaginable, might arise where they had fallen.<sup>142</sup>

At the centre of the novel is perhaps the one thing capable of tempering the “welter of London” (98), as Forster calls it, namely “the power of Home” (158). But through the character of Leonard Bast, Forster demonstrates just how unfairly that power and sanctuary is distributed. The interior of Leonard Bast's meagre flat on Camelia Road is described in the following passage.

As Leonard was kicking off his boots he jarred the three-legged table, and a photograph frame, honourably poised upon it, slid sideways, fell off into the fireplace, and smashed. [...] Leonard tried to pull out the fragments of glass, and cut his fingers and swore again. A drop of blood fell on the frame, another followed, spilling over onto the exposed photograph. He swore more vigorously, and dashed into the kitchen,

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<sup>142</sup> Forster, *Howards End*, 32.



where he bathed his hands. The kitchen was the same size as the sitting-room; beyond it was a bedroom. This completed his home. He was renting the flat furnished; of all the objects that encumbered it none were his own except the photograph frame, the Cupids, and the books.<sup>143</sup>

Of particular interest to me is the sequencing of rooms in the above description, which can be contrasted with the “old and little, and altogether delightful”<sup>144</sup> Howards End, the rustic but noble country house around which the novel’s plot unfolds. The novel begins with a letter written by Helen Schlegel to her sister, Margaret, in London.

From hall you go right or left into dining-room or drawing-room. Hall itself is practically a room. You open another door in it, and there are the stairs going up in a sort of tunnel to the first-floor. Three bed-rooms in a row there, and three attics in a row above. That isn’t all the house really, but it’s all that one notices—nine windows as you look up from the front garden.<sup>145</sup>

The stark contrast between the homes of Bast and the Schlegels rests not simply in their size or the appearance of their furnishings, but also, crucially, in the syntactical organization, or lack thereof, of the rooms. Specifically, the hall – practically a room of its own – gives Howards End a complex grammar that seems to be missing in the rigid and crude sequence of Bast’s three rooms. Like a preposition, the hall at Howards End organizes the rooms in a way that gives meaning to the overall composition of the house, separating the upstairs from the relatively public and formal spaces of the ground floor, and the daily rituals of the dining

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<sup>143</sup> Forster, *Howards End*, 34.

<sup>144</sup> Forster, *Howards End*, 1.

<sup>145</sup> Forster, *Howards End*, 1.

room from those of the drawing room. One can imagine the hall serving as a node for the tributaries through which the individual family members make their entrance in the morning or evening from their respective bedrooms upstairs. In her letter to Margaret, Helen notes *not* noticing the other rooms of the house. These would include the kitchen and the other utility rooms occupied by the servants that float unmade in the background of the novel at Howards End as well as Wickham Place, Helen and Margaret's London home. These secondary rooms – significantly insignificant in Helen's letter – nonetheless contribute to the overall composition of the house if only to serve, like prepositions, the dominant terms of the house. Helen's description evokes the corridors, doors, passages and other conjunctive "ways" altogether missing in the rigid axis of Bast's home. There seems to be no hall or corridor in his simple flat. The kitchen must be traversed to access the sitting room from the bedroom and vice versa. The equivalency that Forster notes between the size of the sitting room and the kitchen is also significant. Whereas at Howards End, rooms are given their appropriate weight in the overall composition of home, Bast's "encumbered" flat fails to give domestic spaces their proper place. It is the kitchen's parity with the sitting room, rather than any particular thing about it, that offends.

The blood on Bast's hand foreshadows his death at the end of the novel, which in its own way enshrines Margaret and Helen as the spiritual and legal heirs of Howards End. The novel's preoccupation with the "spirit" of houses and interiors is never far, however, from the realities of leases and private property. As Daniel Born argues, "Real estate permeates the novel: personal relations never proceed within a material vacuum."<sup>146</sup> The painful contrast

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<sup>146</sup> Daniel Born, *The Birth of Liberal Guilt in the English Novel: Charles Dickens to H.G. Wells* (London: University of North Carolina Press, 1995), 122.

between Bast, “worth helping” but ultimately and yet fatally “encumbered” by his station in life, is materialized in the crude organization of his flat, where there is but one way to move and no avoiding unpleasantness. For the Schlegel sisters, by contrast, when faced with the construction of a block of flats on the site of their Wickham Place, their worry is not so much in finding a place to live as finding a place to live that they will love (“Thank goodness she, too, had some money, and could purchase a new home”).<sup>147</sup> The Schlegels’ desire is deceptively simple: “We merely want a small house with large rooms, and plenty of them.”<sup>148</sup>

Like *The Servant*, *Howards End* stages the unsanctioned mingling of classes around the central figure of the house, its material surfaces, limits and ambiguities. And like *The Servant*, it seems to occupy a historical vantage point poised somewhere between the industrial squalor of an older London and an unfamiliar future. Both texts reveal the element of power infused in these relationships between rooms: The function of a given room is determined by its distance from other rooms as well as by who is permitted to take part in or is responsible for the kinds of actions and movements that take place in it. As much as the labour that takes place therein, what defines the scullery, for example, is its distance from the front of the house and polite spaces of retirement and entrainment. The labour of the scullery is thus comprised not only of the physical exertions of scrubbing and cleaning, but also the distance that must be traversed by the body tasked with moving between it and the dining room or bedroom. But what kind of territory opens up when these prescribed lines of association between rooms are disrupted, when for example, the servant barges in on his

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<sup>147</sup> Forster, *Howards End*, 77.

<sup>148</sup> Forster, *Howards End*, 109.

master and mistress, or when the kitchen becomes the site of corporeal desire typically reserved for the bedroom?

These two scenarios, which feature prominently in *The Servant*, along with a variety of other scenarios of trespass, which I discuss in the following section, might be described as instances of catachresis. The notion of catachresis – the use of a word in a way that is incorrect<sup>149</sup> – when applied to my reading of home, represents a misuse of the way the house is intended to be used according to hierarchical class and gender relationships set by society. But ultimately my interest in this linguistic term has to do with the way the conventional understanding of catachresis as a discrete lapse in the proper relation of words detracts from the alterity embedded in the very process of speaking or writing. As Jacques Lacan’s definition of desire has it, all words take the place of things that have no place in words.<sup>150</sup> By the same token, the notion of catachresis in space can be used to think about this alterity, or what Lacan calls “the discourse of the Other,” embedded within the social meaning of home. Catachresis does not necessarily mean a rupture or rejection of home outright, only in the expectation of home as a legend for the organization of individuals into a coherent whole. Abandoning the strict distinction between proper words and catachresis is a necessity for the thinking and feeling of what we call lyric or poetic language. And it is the same “poetics of

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<sup>149</sup> The OED defines catachresis as the “application of a term to a thing which it does not properly denote,” and as an adjective, “wrongly used, misapplied, wrested from its proper meaning.” The meaning of spatial catachresis in context of home involves the tension between use and misuse as it pertains to the bodies, spaces and meanings of domesticity.

<sup>150</sup> “Desire is what manifests itself in the interval demand excavates just shy of itself, insofar as the subject, articulating the signifying chain, brings to light his lack of being with his call to receive the complement of this lack from the Other—assuming that the Other, the locus of speech, is also the locus of this lack.” Lacan, *Ecrits*, 524.

space,” to borrow the title of Gaston Bachelard’s study of home, that defines *The Servant*.<sup>151</sup>

What Gaston Bachelard does for the house in *The Poetics of Space* is imagine it as a geography of thought suffused with the ambiguity of dreams and imagination.

Sometimes the house of the future is better built, lighter and larger than all the houses of the past, so that the image of the dream house is opposed to that of the childhood home.... Maybe it is a good thing for us to keep a few dreams of a house that we shall live in later, always later, so much later, in fact, that we shall not have time to achieve it. For a house that was final, one that stood in symmetrical relation to the house we were born in, would lead to thoughts—serious, sad thoughts—and not to dreams. It is better to live in a state of impermanence than in one of finality.<sup>152</sup>

Although Bachelard’s study of the house has become a seminal referent for the relations between space and poetics, critical writing on domesticity today suggests that it remains easier to imagine space as something understood through language than it is to imagine language as something understood through our experience of space. In a sense, my discussion of the architecture of ambiguity and of desire, like Bachelard’s “topoanalysis,” is an attempt to even out that imbalance. Space, simply put, can teach us about the subject’s relationship to language. If language is “the house of Being,” as Heidegger famously wrote, then we might do well to wonder: *why a house?* In other words, how can we think about the house as language, the house as like language, the house as illuminating workings of language?

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<sup>151</sup> Gaston Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Penguin Classics, 2014).

<sup>152</sup> Bachelard, *The Poetics of Space*, 81.

## Cinema and the Floor Plan

Losey's films are distinct, I argue, for the way they mediate between, on the one hand, the sense of immersive space typical of narrative cinema, and the comprehensive perspective associated with the medium of the blueprint or floor plan, on the other. As we see in *The Servant*, the comprehensive sense of the organization of rooms and doorways in the house is as important in Losey's representation of domesticity as the cinematic perception of occupying spaces. This cinematic peculiarity – the sense of a mediation between two distinct perspectives of architectural space, one immersive, the other diagrammatic – not only distinguishes Losey's films stylistically from other filmic portrayals of domestic space, but it also aligns his visual style with a kind of spatial grammar. When we speak about language we tend to think about it operating on two levels: semantics and syntax, two dimensions which together form the broader complex of grammar.<sup>153</sup> Architecture too has a semantic dimension, which conveys the function or meaning of particular bodies in space and their movement through space; and it has a syntax, which concerns the structure and rules that govern the way specific spaces are organized within the totality of the house. The point I make with respect to these two elements of grammar is not simply a matter of describing metaphorically two different ways of representing space; it is a matter of the uncertain

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<sup>153</sup> The “levels” of language, that is, language, grammar, semantics and syntax, are, of course, shifting and intertwined terms. In the field of semantics the basic tendency is to divide language structure into three branches: grammar (or syntax), which is the framework or skeleton of language; semantics, which is the meaning of language; and phonology, which is the speech-sound system (not discussed here). For my purposes here, I follow Noam Chomsky's convention in using “grammar” as the general term subsuming the relations between syntax and semantics (rather than being an alternative name for syntax). *Syntactic Structures* (The Hague: Mouton, 1957), 6.

boundaries that define all representation: where do you draw the line between the symbolic and structural elements of language? This section uses linguistic categories to consider the complexity of home as an incomplete relation between the structure and meaning of house.

Robin Evans's "Figures, Doors and Passages" is a seminal text in the critical literature on the relationship between the material organization of domestic space and the nature of social relations. The organization of rooms in a house may seem neutral and indispensable, but Evans argues that this sense of neutrality and indispensability is ultimately a "delusion" that belies the power that the architectural arrangement of space exerts over our lives.<sup>154</sup> For Evans, architecture operates as a kind of cipher for understanding the social and intimate ideals of different cultures in different epochs: "If anything is described by an architectural plan, it is the nature of human relationships, since the element whose trace it records – walls, doors, windows and stairs – are employed first to divide and then selectively reunite inhabited space."<sup>155</sup> The organization of domestic space, in other words, is both a representation of and a means of enforcing the values of the broader society, including the practical rules governing the interaction or lack thereof between peoples of different genders and classes.

One characteristic of Evans's work is that it approaches the house from the very particular perspective of the plan. He frames his argument through the bird's eye view of the architectural place, rather than as a body situated in architectural space. Michel de Certeau calls this perspective the "solar Eye, looking down like a god."<sup>156</sup> A floor plan is essentially a

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<sup>154</sup> Evans, "Figures, Doors and Passages," 73.

<sup>155</sup> Evans, "Figures, Doors and Passages," 73.

<sup>156</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 92.

technology or medium designed to offer, in a single glance, the totality, logic and scale of a spatial arrangement: what De Certeau calls in context of the city “the exaltation of a scopic and gnostic drive” to structure and organize space.<sup>157</sup> This perspective is in stark contrast to the way architecture is rendered cinematically, as Barrett’s approach to the house at the opening of *The Servant* makes clear. In this case the viewer is not “a celestial eye” but a body grounded. Walls occlude, while doors and windows provide entry points and vistas for both the characters in the film and the film’s viewer. Sometimes, as we see for example in the majestic, sweeping crane shots typical of the opening segments of Douglas Sirk films,<sup>158</sup> the viewer is invited in as if by some gracious non-diegetic force. In other words the viewer’s gaze begins from up on high only to arrive at what De Certeau calls the “text” of the built environment and a place constituted by a system of “signs.”<sup>159</sup> In such films, viewers approach or are brought to the threshold of the house as a stranger might be, and the view suffices to see the rooms one by one as characters occupy them or move through them. In cinema, houses are often experienced as an aggregate of rooms-as-sets, without providing the viewer a comprehensive sense of the house as a comprehensive arrangement. Consequently, unlike in floor plans, subsidiary and transitional spaces such as closets, bathrooms and corridors often remain absent from the cinematic depiction of houses. This blindness to the idea of the house as a comprehensive system accounts for the fact that ostensibly secondary

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<sup>157</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 92.

<sup>158</sup> See for example: *Written on the Wind* (1956) and *All that Heaven Allows* (1955): although both films are in many ways about houses, they also present architectural space very differently.

<sup>159</sup> De Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life*, 117.



spaces such as closets, bathrooms and kitchens are often not a part of the domestic setting of film.

To borrow a term from linguistics, we might say that the architecture of cinema emphasises the body immersed synchronically. Rooms exist at one point in time according to a sequence of scenes. In cinema, unlike in the reading of a floor plan, there is synchronicity between a particular event or action and the particular room in which it occurs. The architecture of the floor plan, by contrast, represents space diachronically, or across time, comprising all possible movements within the totality of the home. The floorplan is a syntax, in that it is neither meaning nor perfectly separate from it. Any number of fates might be rendered so long as they are rendered through the halls and chambers that make up the plan. In other words, the semantics or meaning of the floor plan has to do with its capacity to represent overlapping movements, which are not contingent on a single narrative or spatial plot.

Why is it useful to consider these distinct forms of architectural representation in relation to film? The contrast between the architectural and the cinematic view of domestic space is not significant in and of itself. What it demonstrates, however, is that the grammar of architecture, which Evans demonstrates so elegantly through his analysis of floor plans, can be expanded and complicated in significant ways when we consider the various representative forms that architecture takes. By suggesting that the architectures of cinema and of the floor plan mirror what linguists call the synchronic and diachronic elements of language, respectively, we can begin to read architecture with the same level of complexity

as language.<sup>160</sup> These forms of representation diverge from one another in the way they account for the same environment but they also inform one another in the same way semantics and syntax do. Indeed my contention is that what makes the grammar of houses in Losey's films so significant is precisely the way it mediates between the architectural view of the floor plan and the cinematic view of immersive space. "A motion picture," Losey writes, "is something ... conceived in motion, composition, thought and totality in motion."<sup>161</sup> Much of this sense of motion, thought and totality in *The Servant* is owing to the particular way the film privileges the sense of the house's totality of a complete arrangement of distinct spaces, thus transcending the clasp of walled-in space. Of course, we do not actually see any floor plans in *The Servant*. The camera never actually approximates the solar eye of the architect looking down on a hollow schematic of rooms. But Losey's films are nonetheless preoccupied with the architect's interest in depicting the complete layout and logical organization of the home, as we see described quite neatly in a long letter Losey wrote to the set designer of his 1962 film, *Eve* [see Figure 2]:

The bedroom and the bathroom are not actually the focal points for any scene, but they should be used effectively as possible for background. [...] one should have a sense of the whole and its limited circular geography should be established in the very first scene. [...] The doors from the living room to the bedroom, the bedroom to

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<sup>160</sup> This is one way of expanding on from Beatriz Colomina's understanding of architecture as a public discourse. Colomina bucks the tendency to mark a firm line between architecture *as it is* (built form) and representations of architecture (plans, photographs, moving image), insisting that there can be no clear-cut distinction between the two (*Privacy and Publicity*, 8).

<sup>161</sup> Draft of "An American Abroad," 21 Jan 1964, JWL/1/11/5, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

the bathroom, the bathroom to the corridor, and the corridor to the living room make a circle within the rectangle of the flat.<sup>162</sup>

We see the same preoccupation with defining the circular geography of domestic space at the very outset of *The Servant*, especially in early iterations of the script.<sup>163</sup> The film is originally described as beginning with an elaborate mapping of the layout of the house, as Tony and Barrett move from the garden into the kitchen in the basement of the house, up the stairs onto the ground floor hall, through the drawing room and so on. While this mapping of the interior space at the outset of the narrative is much simplified in the final edit of the film, throughout the course of the film, viewers nonetheless are made aware of the relationship of the rooms in Tony's house. (In *The Servant*, we *do* see where Tony keeps his suits.) As in Eve's apartment, each of the floors of Tony's much larger house comprise a set of rooms that "make a circle within the rectangle." This distinctive quality of the logical flow of rooms emerges as a signature of Losey's settings. Furthermore, on the first floor (one up from the ground floor), we see the same peculiarity that we see in Eve's apartment, where the bathroom, by virtue of its double entry points, serves as a link between Tony's bedroom (via his private dressing room) and the elegant landing and hall on the first floor. That the bathroom should provide the link between the private realm of the master bedroom and the relatively public space of the first floor landing is dense with symbolic and narrative significance.

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<sup>162</sup> "Camera," letter dated 15 Jan 1962 and titled "Note to Gianni on the ambience of Eve's Flat," JWL/1/9/1, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>163</sup> Draft script for *The Servant*, n.d., JWL/1/11/1, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

I will have more to say about Losey's bathrooms in the following chapter. Here, I want simply to draw attention to the way in which the bathroom functions not so much as the terminus for a particular set of activities and behaviours, but rather, a passage through and beyond. This architectural idiosyncrasy of the throughway bathroom facilitates the gradual reversal of power relations in Tony's house. A memorable bathroom scene takes place shortly after Barrett has persuaded Tony to hire his sister, Vera, as the maid. Tony is dressing for an evening with Susan with Barrett enacting the role of groom. Hastily Tony crosses his dressing room towards the bathroom and is suddenly met with the door being shut in front of him. "Don't come in. I'm naked!" Vera shouts. "Who is it," she asks, although it can be only one person – the person whose inscription adorns the expensive affects about the room – literally inscribing the ensuite as his. Because of the established organization of rooms in the house, we know that Vera has entered the bathroom from the opposite door on the second floor landing. Her apology – "I'm sorry sir, I thought everyone was out" – perplexes Tony. He meets Barrett in the bedroom: "She's having a bath in my bathroom. Well, I mean to say ... I mean ... after all ... you've got one of your own upstairs." The complexity of ways through the house demonstrate the fragile physical boundaries between private and public, with the private accessed in multiple ways, and boundaries that were strengthened by now failing social divisions. If the hall of *Howards End* is "practically a room," then the same reversal can be seen here. A room, perhaps the most private, typically located as a terminus in 'out of the way' places of the house, becomes instead corridor-like, marking passage, encounter and fecundity. What the throughway ensuite bathroom seems to evoke is an atmosphere where it becomes increasingly unclear who is intruding on whom.

The “limited circular geography” that Losey describes allows for a syntactical reading of the circulation of bodies and signs in space.<sup>164</sup> A character’s place in the home at any given moment in the film is never static, but rather perpetually disposed (in both senses: arranged and discarded) along and against the pathways that define home. This is in contrast to films where characters seem to occupy interiors emphatically, like figures in a landscape. In Hornsey’s description of Basil Dearden’s 1961 film *Victim*, there is a representational correspondence between the meaning of domestic rooms and what they say about the characters who occupy them.<sup>165</sup> What the syntax of rooms allows for is a departure from an understanding of architectural space as something that holds, like a container, the subject whose movements map neatly onto a linear unfolding of time. It allows for the apprehension of a more fluid circulatory system of bodies and signs existing diachronically in space.

Building upon Evans’s analysis, we have a basis for thinking about Losey’s architectural “plan as a picture of social relationships.”<sup>166</sup> By establishing for the viewer the house’s architectural mapping, Losey is emphasizing the nature of the house as a mechanism for dividing and uniting inhabitants in particular and particularly *coded* ways. But at the same time, as my comparison between the architectural and cinematic views suggests, the grammar of architecture that Evans demonstrates through his analysis of floor plans can be expanded and complicated in significant ways when we consider the other means through which architecture is expressed, which is to say as complexly embodied, rather than as omnipresent space. Indeed there is no one grammar through which to comprehend

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<sup>164</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>165</sup> Hornsey, *The Spiv and Architect*, 230.

<sup>166</sup> Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” 77.

architecture as a picture of social relations, in part because the boundaries and divisions of the house that structure social relations are also simultaneously the means by which they decompose into forms not readable in social terms. As a “compositional principle”, architecture, like grammar (as a confluence of syntax and semantics, for example), remains radically decomposed because any one unit (a room, a sign) is but the basis for alternative reactions and pathways.

### **Domestic catachresis**<sup>167</sup>

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<sup>167</sup> In an interview with Richard Kearney, Derrida explains that “philosophy is literary, not so much because it is metaphor but because it is catachresis. The term metaphor generally implies a relation to an original ‘property’ of meaning, a ‘proper’ sense to which it indirectly or equivocally refers, whereas catachresis is a violent production of meaning, an abuse which refers to no anterior proper norm. The founding concepts of metaphysics—logos, eidos, theoria, etc.—are instances of catachresis rather than metaphors.” Richard Kearney, *Dialogues with Contemporary Continental Thinkers: The Phenomenological Heritage : Paul Ricoeur, Emmanuel Levinas, Herbert Marcuse, Stanislas Breton, Jacques Derrida* (Manchester University Press, 1984), 123.

Unlike metaphor or simile, there is no straightforward equation between signs. It is not necessarily evident which is the word that should be there, which leads Derrida to suggest that a catachresis corresponds to a meaning “deprived of their signifier.” Derrida, Jacques, *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1982, 255-6). This accounts for the jarring or violent effect of catachresis. Its wrongness is felt without necessarily corresponding to a correction. But Derrida’s observation pertains largely to the literary use of catachresis as a rhetorical device (“I will speak daggers to her” in *Hamlet*). In a more colloquial context, where a word is used instead of a similar sounding one, discursive intention is lost. It just “comes out.” And it sounds right enough. Notwithstanding the violence that Derrida describes, perhaps one of the most interesting features of catachresis is in its potential to go unnoticed, especially in everyday speech. In this sense, it is a slight sleight of grammar. As in the case of “a sl(e)ight of hand,” it is an error so subtle that in speech there is almost not any error at all. Only the written page reveals such a misstep – dyslexic, embarrassing perhaps, but also one that subtly reveals the innate ambiguity of sleight. As a movement of dexterity, sleight captures something of slight’s Germanic origins – namely the Old Norse word for ‘smooth’ (*sléttir*) or ‘to make smooth’ (*slétta*). Furthermore, a sleight of hand slights the observer in trickery. Catachresis is a rhetorical error, but one that preserves the syntax of a phrase or sentence. Its semantic ambiguity provides passage in the signifying chain. It is not a question of hiding meaning, for the wrong one is out there in

As is typical of Georgian homes, Tony's London terrace is characterized by the use of corridors on each of the principle floors tunnelling almost through the length of the house, thus making it possible to access rooms discretely rather than sequentially.<sup>168</sup> Staircases link the internal arteries of the house with entries at the front and rear of the house, thus making it possible for the comings and goings of various residents to occur without disruption to the primary living spaces. This means that servants can move easily about the house without being seen. Guests can be let in through the hall before being received formally in the drawing room, thus eliminating the need for hosts and servants to cross paths. As Evans elaborates, "the introduction of the through-passage into domestic architecture first inscribed a deeper division between the upper and lower ranks of society by maintaining direct sequential access adjacent to, but never within the house proper; where they were always on hand but never present unless required."<sup>169</sup>

Evans's article focuses on the distinction between the Italian medieval matrix of connected rooms with multiple doors, and the cellular room model typified in the nineteenth-century houses of the British gentry. The Italian plan demonstrates a sense of variability in the way one moves through the house, with multiple doors in a room leading to as many different parts of the edifice as possible, while the British plan suggests a more rigid and terminal sequencing with a firm distinction between primary spaces for the retirement of its privileged occupants (owners), service areas, and the corridors used to get between them. Whereas "in virtually all domestic architecture prior to 1650, there is no qualitative

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plain view. The example of slight/sleight suggests the line between function and dysfunction of words is blurrier than it seems.

<sup>168</sup> Evans, "Figures, Doors and Passages," 83.

<sup>169</sup> Evans, "Figures, Doors and Passages," 83.

distinction between the way through the house and the inhabited spaces within it,”<sup>170</sup> suddenly the corridor, “as a device for removing traffic from rooms,”<sup>171</sup> becomes central to the organization of the house. As Evans describes, “one might say that, with the matrix of connected rooms, spaces would tend to be defined and subsequently joined like the pieces of a quilt, whilst with the compartmentalised plans the connections would be laid down as a basic structure to which spaces could then be attached like apples to a tree.”<sup>172</sup> What Evans’ comparative analysis suggests is that the architectural plan dictates more than simply the ways of moving through the house; it orchestrates the very sense of what is possible, the ideals, expectations, and restrictions of what it means for social and intimate relations to unfold in space. While the medieval Italian model dictates a social context based on closeness, carnality and accidental encounters [see Figure 3], the British model suggests a social context based on privacy, distance and decorum, hence the meagre, encumbered feeling of Bast’s flat with the impertinent proximity of kitchen, sitting room and bedroom.

On an architectural level, Tony’s house epitomizes many of the qualities that Evans identifies in the British corridor and cellular room model, which is to say a sense of sociality based on a cultural sensitivity to decorum, seclusion, and the separation of classes. At the same time, however, we see that the structural features that Evans describes as allowing for clearly segregated spaces, and thus structuring social hierarchies based on privacy and decorum, also serve to erode those divisions and hierarchies. As they function in *The Servant*, these throughways actually complicate the distinction Evans makes between the

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<sup>170</sup> Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” 77.

<sup>171</sup> Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” 81.

<sup>172</sup> Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” 86.



matrix and cellular room models. Corridors become rooms and rooms become corridors. These features, I argue, are the very basis for the fraying of the social characteristics they were designed to enforce. The misuse of the house's compositional principles becomes a kind of grammar, establishing an ambient sense of intimacy based on missteps and intrusions. This misgrammar of circulation in the house cuts athwart ideas about the way architectural design determines social and intimate relations. It suggest that such designs look more like a malleable language in the mouths of its inhabitants, than a strict format for the way bodies are disposed in space. It is nuance, subtlety, and intricacy that mark out the roominess of the subject's place in a given chain of signification, be it linguistic or architectural. Although each room in the house has a prescribed place and function within the wider totality of home, the lived reality of that organization is constantly being (de)composed as relation of time and movement. The body's movements from room to room (synchronic) intersect with various modes of behaving in a given space (diachronic) to produce a subjective relationship to space that can be ambiguous, contradictory and even incoherent.<sup>173</sup>

We might therefore endeavour to approach the house critically, and not in terms of an attempt to determine how Tony and Barrett's home might represent an alternative model of domesticity. Instead of thinking discourse as 'domesticity' and its terms 'rooms', the

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<sup>173</sup> Again De Certeau's discussion of the tension between the strategies of the powerful who implement a "plan" on space with the downward perspective of a god vs. the everyday tactics of the body walking through the plan is a useful reference here. In *The Practice of Everyday Life* De Certeau sees the subject as neither fully autonomous, nor fully governed by the built environment, but instead as producing and reproducing its meanings as a relation to space. My own discussion, however, is less willing than De Certeau to see the body as the author of her own composition. This is because I do not see writing or speaking as a sovereign act that allows the subject to negotiate with structures of power, but the very means through which that power is realized.

suggestion, following Lacan, is to approach the house as an opening onto the solecistic space of “a discourse that proceeds in the following way: each term is sustained only in its topological relation with the others.”<sup>174</sup>

In the context of *The Servant*, the idea of misgrammar involves the home’s failure to render the servants (Barrett and Vera) invisible and subservient, and to secure for the master of the house the seclusion and retirement that it is designed for. During Susan’s first visit to the home, Barrett is there to open the door, to take her coat, and to serve her and Tony their drinks. As well as accommodating Tony and Susan’s quiet evening as the servant, Barrett also impertinently, if subtly, oversteps his place quite literally. When Susan compliments Tony on the decoration of his drawing room Barrett interjects, “the simple and classic is always best, Miss.” Barrett’s polite deference to Susan is in fact an incursion into a terrain of decoration and home-making associated with the female role. As Gillian Swanson has noted, women were seen in large part as being responsible for the consumer task of arranging and managing the good and practical home, which in turn played a key role in the modernizing thrust of reconstruction, and redefinitions of British femininity after the war.<sup>175</sup> Barrett’s interest in the home’s presentation thus comes up against the function of the home as the place for husband and wife relations.<sup>176</sup> All the while, Barrett remains the agent that literally serves that relation. In the same way, the use of the wrong term in the flow of a sentence can

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<sup>174</sup> Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, 89.

<sup>175</sup> Swanson, “‘So much money and so little to spend it on’: morale, consumption and sexuality” in *Nationalising Femininity: Culture, Sexuality and Cinema in World War Two Britain*, ed. Christine Gledhill and Gillian Swanson (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 70.

<sup>176</sup> Palmer and Riley’s reading of this emphasizes the vacuity of Tony’s identity in the face of Barrett’s influence.

be at once a kind of trespass on the meaning of a sentence and the very thing that ensures that its syntax remains intact.

In subsequent scenes Barrett interjects in increasingly forceful ways, but nonetheless always under the pretext of ensuring the smooth structural operation of the house. At the end of Susan's first visit, Barrett walks in on the couple making love on the rug by the fireplace in the drawing room. Susan is furious. "Why didn't he knock?" she demands. "He made a mistake," Tony responds defensively. "Mistake! Well for God sake, restrict him to quarters," and after a pause, more graciously this time, Susan adds, "Couldn't he live out?" Ultimately, Susan's indignation about Barrett's intrusion suggests her own sense of being out of place. These examples demonstrate the way that Losey uses the boundaries of domestic space to complicate the lexicon of home beyond a simple calculation of identity and placehood.<sup>177</sup>

Tony is defensive of Barrett's place in the house even when, or especially when, he oversteps his place. In the face of the suggestion that corridors are used "to overcome these annoyances," in the scene described above, it is precisely the corridor that allows for Barrett's incursion into the private realm of his master and would-be mistress. It allows Barrett to approach unseen and unheard literally up to the mantle of romantic heterosexual intimacy. What emerges is a critique of the notion that we can read domestic architecture as restrictive because of normative structure that can and must be *either* followed or transgressed. Barrett's intrusion is like a catachresis in space in that it represents – as the

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<sup>177</sup> There are echoes between the contradictory expectations placed on Barrett – he must at once foster the growing bond between Tony and Susan by facilitating their evening together while at the same time remaining irrelevant to that bond – and the way a child's bedroom suddenly goes from the place where the mother is most needed to the place with the "keep out" sign on the door.

term suggests in its Greek origins – the “abuse” of certain established rules.<sup>178</sup> But it also shows that such abuse follows the same pathways as the “proper” use. Therefore architecture cannot in and of itself be read as a grammar for social relations, as if the structure of space would influence different inhabitants in the same way across time. Instead it is the circulation of bodies, signs, and affects across multiple diachronic registers where the grammar of houses should be read. While the regime of good grammar represents an attempt to restrict the failure of language to certain discrete locations in a structure that is otherwise stable and legible, I take catachresis here to imply that instability is the very thing that defines the structure of language. Derrida uses the notion of catachresis, which he describes in spatial terms as an “irruptive extension,” as a way of referring to the original incompleteness that is

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<sup>178</sup> Heidegger, Foucault and Lacan hold distinct views on the idea of language as a kind of house for subjectivity. What the idea of architectural catachresis suggests is the slippages between the organized totality of home and the body that, in Freud’s words, “slips—along the lines of a symbolic equation.” Freud qtd. in Dylan Evans, *An Introductory Dictionary of Lacanian Psychoanalysis* (London: Routledge, 2006), 153.

One way of thinking about the schematic arrangement of the house (the floorplan) is as a kind of equation or algebra where various rooms and features add up to what we recognize as a house. But it is not simply the case that the house represents a rigid, oppressive structure against which the subject chaffs diminutively. As in language itself, the body is both bound by and produced through the organizational structure of the house in which she dwells. This idea evokes the conceptual notion of language as a kind of enclosure or shelter. Heidegger refers to language as the “the house of Being,” which is perhaps a close cousin of the panoptical metaphor that Foucault uses to describe the discursive nature of power. *Pathmarks* (Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press, 2010), 254.

Lacan also evokes the encompassing quality of language, describing the subject’s “entry” into language as the very basis of subjectivity. However, while Heidegger and Foucault’s work suggests that there is no outside language, this is not the case for Lacan. Much of Lacan’s work is preoccupied with affirming the existence of that “outside,” which is the subject of numerous interrelated terms within the Lacanian vernacular, including the Other, the Real, the *synthome*, and desire itself. But it is, according to Lacan, our exclusion from that space outside the “house” of language that brings desire into the world. Losey too is interested in those slippages that seem at once at odds with the ordinary pattern of the house’s arrangement, and yet enmeshed within it.

a part of all systems of meaning.<sup>179</sup> What interests me about the idea of catachresis, in other words, is that it represents at once a misuse of language and the very nature of all language, which is to say that fact that language is never a pure relationship between signs and the things they describe, but a contingent, layered and contestable relationship. If the propriety built into the “compartmentalized” or “apple to a tree”<sup>180</sup> structure of British domesticity can accommodate the abuse of that structure, then the home emerges as a material instance of the way all structures of meaning bear within themselves the basis of their own undoing. In this way the house remains a field of ambience (both; on both sides; around, about; vague; obscure) rather than a readable compositional principle of intimate relations.

Corridors and other in-between spaces are particularly significant in thinking about the imbrication of composition and decomposition of meaning in space. Far from simply segregating privileged and less privileged bodies, the corridor in the scene described above forges complex and even contradictory lines of intimate and erotic attachment. It is the separation between thoroughfares and living spaces that allow the rooms of Tony’s house to communicate with all the complexity, ambiguity and contradictions of language itself. The house becomes inseparable from the various forms of sneaking around that define Barrett, Tony, Susan and Vera’s queer arrangements. Barrett’s affair with Vera, which, as we shall see, literally takes place over Tony’s head, intersects with and colours Tony’s affair with

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<sup>179</sup> For Derrida, catachresis “concerns first the violent and forced, abusive inscription of a sign, the imposition of a sign upon a meaning which did not yet have its own proper sign in language. So much so that there is no substitution here, no transport of proper signs, but rather the irruptive extension of a sign proper to an idea, a meaning, deprived of their signifier.” *Margins of Philosophy*, trans. Alan Bass (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 255.

<sup>180</sup> Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” 86.

Vera. In portraying these ambiguous and overlapping relations of intimacy, the camera pays special attention to doorways as objects, as well as to the movement of bodies through them (a defining feature of Losey's cinematic style). Losey dramatizes the multiple thoroughfares that lead to and from a given room, including a hidden passageway in a bookshelf, which the various sets of lovers make use of to slink round – both in and *in defiance of* the fantasy of one family under one roof. In one scene in particular, we see how the circularity of rooms, corridors and entry points allows Tony and Vera to evade Barrett's detection (even as Barrett knows all along what is going on). Losey's film troubles Evans's schema in as far as *The Servant* is constantly mediating between ideas of seclusion and division, on the one hand, and circularity and an overlapping matrix of routes on the other. Corridors and discrete service doors, here, become the very thing that allows for the carnality that, as Evans argues, Georgian architecture was designed to regulate against.

Although there are several features of Tony's Kensington terrace house that are consistent with Evans's description of English domestic architecture based on privacy, distance and segregation, Losey's interest in architecture has more to do with the indeterminacy of architectural form than the way its arrangements predetermine the movement and interaction of bodies. In Caroline Levine's recent engagement with the question of how to connect form to politics and the social, she writes that "critics and theorists have tended to assume that powerful social institutions integrate and homogenize experience; they put into practice coherent ideologies that organize and constrain experience."<sup>181</sup> Evans's understanding of the house as a compositional principle for

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<sup>181</sup> My interest in the question of how to connect (specifically architectural) form to political, historical and especially social context is less willing than Levine's to distinguish between

comparing the social ideologies of different cultures falls into this formalist trap, but at the same time it opens up the possibility of thinking about architecture in terms of (de)composition – or the way composition opens up an ambience that is different from itself (what Derrida calls *différance*). In the same way that the compositional principle of grammar involves parts that are codetermining but mutually exclusive (syntax and semantics), so too is the idea of home composed of parts that do not necessarily form a coherent totality of meaning. Again, this is illustrated by the “mutually exclusive cohabitation” of the architectural view associated with the floor plan and the cinematic view of immersive interior space<sup>182</sup>: how can the house be both a comprehensive form viewed from above and an enclosed set of spaces experienced one at a time?

The sharpest example of catachresis comes when Susan and Tony discover Barrett and Vera making love in the master bedroom (the crisis point at the end of the film’s second act). Having noticed the upstairs light on from outside, Tony and Susan enter to hear the faint sound of the lovers echoing from above. The camera stays with Susan and Tony as they enter the main hall. Vera and Barrett carry on a boisterous sexual repartee ignorant of their master

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“disorganization” and the specter of formlessness. Caroline Levine, *Forms: Whole, Rhythm, Hierarchy, Network* (Princeton University Press, 2015), 17. The proliferation of formal encounters “where different forms are not necessarily related, opposed, or deeply expressive, but simply happen to cross paths at a particular site” (19) does not preclude what remains outside the possibility of formal encounter. Levine’s account of the way “different arrangements can collide to strange effect, with minor forms sometimes disrupting or rerouting major ones” (18) is incredibly elegant and useful. However, what it sometimes seems to be doing is attempting to make the social *worthy* of her attachment to it. That is to say that it seems that she wants to put her new formalism in service of social justice, of literacy in structure of power in order to better read, manipulate, or transform them. An alternative way of thinking about the social is as the residue of the inherent impermanence and failure of attachments and desires to stick to the forms built to make sense of them.

<sup>182</sup> As Lacan might say, desire grows around the place society reserves for it. The social is the residue left by the failure of our wish for a society that would be deserving of our desire.

and mistress' unexpected return. Tony and Susan are stunned. "It's your servants," Susan utters with a mixture of disbelief and contempt. Barrett eventually comes from the bedroom to the landing, but his figure remains off screen. From upstairs, his shadow appears against the wall of the stairwell between Tony and Susan's bodies below [see Figure 4]. Tony's gaze remains fixed on Barrett who lingers, presumably naked and in full view. We sense his cool insolence as he slowly takes a drag of his cigarette. The smoke mingles with the outline of his shadow before dissolving into the reflection of light on the wall. As a shadowy projection on the wall, Barrett's body complicates the standard distinction between absence and presence. Meanwhile, after looking fleetingly up at Barrett, Susan casts her gaze downwards.

Having established the organization of rooms in Tony's house, Losey can be certain that we understand that Vera and Barrett's intrusion takes place literally over Tony's head, the master bedroom being located above the entrance hall and the drawing room at the front of the house. In a reversal of their social stations, Tony and Susan must crane their heads awkwardly to see the servants who have trespassed into the sacred privacy of the master bedroom. "This is your house," Susan cries breathlessly to Tony, "they're in your room. In your bed." The scene implies a kind of catachresis of domestic space in as far as the various bodies, like misused words, occupy the wrong place in the compositional structure of the home. It is not the case that the erroneous position of the bodies means that the structure of the house is illegible. As with catachresis in language, the 'error' is not simply the negation or denial of meaning. This is because the erroneous use of a word in an otherwise legible sentence structure has the poetic potential to draw out the texture or feel of the structure of language itself. In other words, catachresis or the misplacing of words has the potential to



underscore the qualities pertaining to the form of language which are quite distinct from the straightforward question of whether the phrase ‘makes sense’ or not. By the same token, as I elaborate in the final section of this chapter, Tony, Vera, Barrett and Susan’s catachretic place in the organization of the home draws out forms of desire which exist fully formed outside of the questions of whether they are legible as desire or not.

Once Barrett and Vera are ordered to leave the house by Tony, the prospect of a restoration of the presumptive husband and wife unit briefly flickers into view. “Come to bed,” Tony says to Susan. But instead Susan storms out of the house. This scene, which occurs, as I mention, at the halfway point in the plot, is in many ways a premonition of the film’s conclusion. Following the evening during which Susan and Tony discover Vera and Barrett making love, Tony is left alone in the house, which quickly succumbs to chaos. It isn’t long before Tony rehires Barrett. The intimacy between the men grows deeper, but also more ambiguous. It seems to waver between erotic attraction, domestic companionship, drug-fueled co-dependency, and murderous mutual resentment. Over the course of some time, Barratt turns a desperate Vera away only to eventually bring her back again. In the highly stylised final scene of the film, Susan makes an attempt to rouse Tony to her defence by kissing Barrett, who then taunts her and sees her to the door. As she crosses the threshold of the house into the street one last time, she slaps Barrett across the face. As Palmer and Riley write, the final scene in the film “exploits ambiguity to make explicit the nightmare of

dissolution that is implicit from the beginning.”<sup>183</sup> Their description of “explicit” ambiguity echoes Losey’s own evocative phrase, “precise ambiguity.”<sup>184</sup>

### **The Sociability of the Staircase**

A sequence of bodies forms along the dark curved railing of the staircase [Figure 4]: from Susan, firmly at ground level, to Tony, latched to the railing at the foot of the stairs, to Barrett’s shadow cast from a doorway off the ground-floor landing, and finally to Vera, not visible, but whose voice can be heard beckoning to Barrett from the bedroom. This sequence of bodies coincides with the symbolic hierarchy implicit in the architectural organization of the house – from the entrance hall as a space of interaction with the street, the public, and the stranger, to the master bedroom as the space associated with both the privacy and authority of the man of the house. In this way, the staircase and the dark railing running diagonally across the frame symbolize the upstairs/downstairs divide and help to dramatize the reversal of power relations between Tony and his servants. The railing also serves as the semantic axis for a number of other diametrically organized identity relations, including master/servant, wife/mistress, and gay/straight. Besides the idea of servant becoming master, we can read Susan’s identity as the prospective lady of the house as in the process of being supplanted by Vera, whose voice takes on an omnipresence, calling to Barrett to “come back to bed.” The diagonal line of the railing means that Susan is cut off from the rest of the frame, which happens to form a triangular shape, thus visualizing the love triangle she has,

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<sup>183</sup> Palmer and Riley, *Joseph Losey*, 61.

<sup>184</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

up to this moment, been unaware of. The vertical slats of the banister literally bar Susan from the upper, triangle-shaped half of the frame. This represents a kind of expendability, which is further symbolized by her relative proximity in the sequence of bodies to the exit and to the street. Thus Susan's physical exclusion in the frame is contrasted with Vera's omnipresence as voice – an interplay of female inclusion/exclusions, and voice/silence that I take up as the subject of the following chapter. In the present scene, Vera takes on the kind of presence associated with a wife's domestic permanency, while Susan is literally cornered into the role of mistress whose place in the house is less static. The division of the railing also acts as a threshold between the hetero/homosexuality binary, in that Tony and Barrett's potential homosexuality is seen as both in conflict with and a reflection of Tony and Susan's heterosexual pairing, with Tony literally clinging to the divide. Or in other words, the domesticity of the house is seen as *either* heterosexual or queer, but not both at the same time. Overall, this reading of the spacing of bodies in the composition of the scene implies the correspondence of individual subject positions along axes of oppositional meaning.

We might call such a reading of the architectural structure of the handrail semantic in as far as it seeks to organize meaning compositionally within domestic space. A semantic reading interprets the handrail as a form that organized the place and meaning of bodies in distinction to one another. A syntactical reading, by contrast, might try to think about the sequence of bodies in terms of that which does not accord to binary categories of meaning. In an article titled "Sociability and Cruising," Leo Bersani draws a distinction not unlike the contrast between semantics and syntax I am interested in here. Drawing on the work of Georg Simmel, Bersani makes a distinction between society and sociability – a distinction

that marks the difference between relations of desire that operate along what he calls foreseen and unforeseen “lines of force” respectively.<sup>185</sup> The kind of desire involved when subjects relate across coherent lines of difference (inscribed through signs and structured through identity), is what Bersani calls society. Conversely, relations of desire which operate “when content is stripped away,”<sup>186</sup> constitute sociality. It is the latter, this nonrelational form of desire, that can be associated with the syntactical reading of the domestic interior. Syntax, like sociality, is what is left when content or semantics is stripped away. It suggests the qualities of structure in tension with the idea of the home as something that makes intimate relations legible as such. In similar vein, in “Queer Research,” William Haver explores the idea of “heteroclitic sociality,”<sup>187</sup> again distinguishing sociality for the social as such. Whereas the social is conceived as a totalized field, sociality “can never simply resolve itself into conceptuality.”<sup>188</sup> The syntax of rooms, however, is not the negation of home’s conceptuality, content, society or meaning, so much as the instance on something else besides.

More specifically, a syntactical reading of the banister scene endeavours to hold onto structures of desire, such as the diagonal cut of the railing or the wafting of smoke literally blurs the boundary of Barrett’s shadow, while at the same time attending to the way desire lingers, dissolves and oversteps structural positions of identity. As a point of contact in

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<sup>185</sup> Bersani borrows the term “lines of force” from Foucault. Leo Bersani, “Sociability and Cruising,” *Umbr(a): Sameness*, no. 1 (2002), 20.

<sup>186</sup> Bersani, “Sociability and Cruising,” 10.

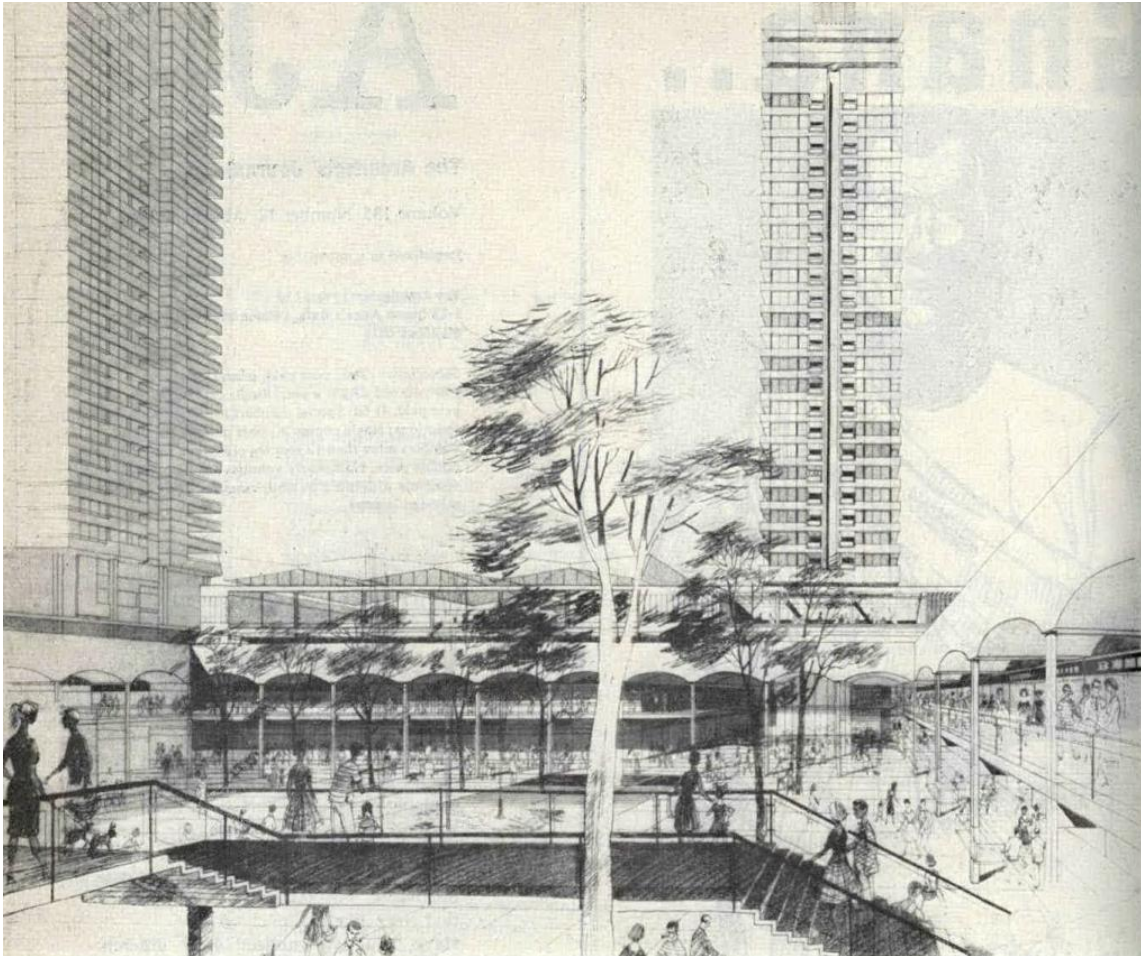
<sup>187</sup> William Haver, “Queer Research; Or, How to Practice Invention to the Brink of Intelligibility,” in *Eight Technologies of Otherness*, ed. Sue Golding (London: Routledge, 2013), 284.

<sup>188</sup> Haver, “Queer Research,” 283.

house, the handrail, for instance, implies anonymous contamination, the wearing away of surface, and the ability to lend support to figures, like Tony, who seem to want to cling to a space between opposites. Just as it divides the space in the composition of the shot, the banister also literally lends support to Tony who appears to cling somewhere between the two options offered by the frame. Furthermore, in its lithe crossing of the screen, the railing implies its own continuity beyond the limits of the frame, and thus gestures to that which remains outside of the bifurcated picture, and thus any oppositional framing, be it master/servant, queer/straight, wife/mistress, or upper/lower class.

Such a reading of a particular architectural detail as a banister may seem idiosyncratic, but in fact it speaks broadly to how domestic form can complicate our understanding of the relationship between home and sexuality. I have attempted to offer an alternative to contemporary readings of the film that overwhelmingly suggest, “the film is really about homosexuality.” To this end, my attention to the syntactical formalism of the domestic suggests a mode of interpreting sexuality outside the discursive binary of secrecy and exposure. However, if my reading of *The Servant* has emphasized how form can complicate the disciplinary meanings of domestic intimacy, it also raises questions about how domestic form might, by contrast, work to discipline desire. Therefore, in the next chapter, I turn from the overall structure of the domestic interior to the specific location of the bathroom in order to consider how domestic space structures the meanings of the female body. Here I emphasise the bathroom’s historical and cultural specificity, not simply as space within the home, but as a way of seeing the female body. The disciplinary nature of the bathroom, I shall show, operates in terms of how it visualizes the female body through the

same postwar rhetoric of modernization that was framing the bathroom the showpiece of postwar domesticity.

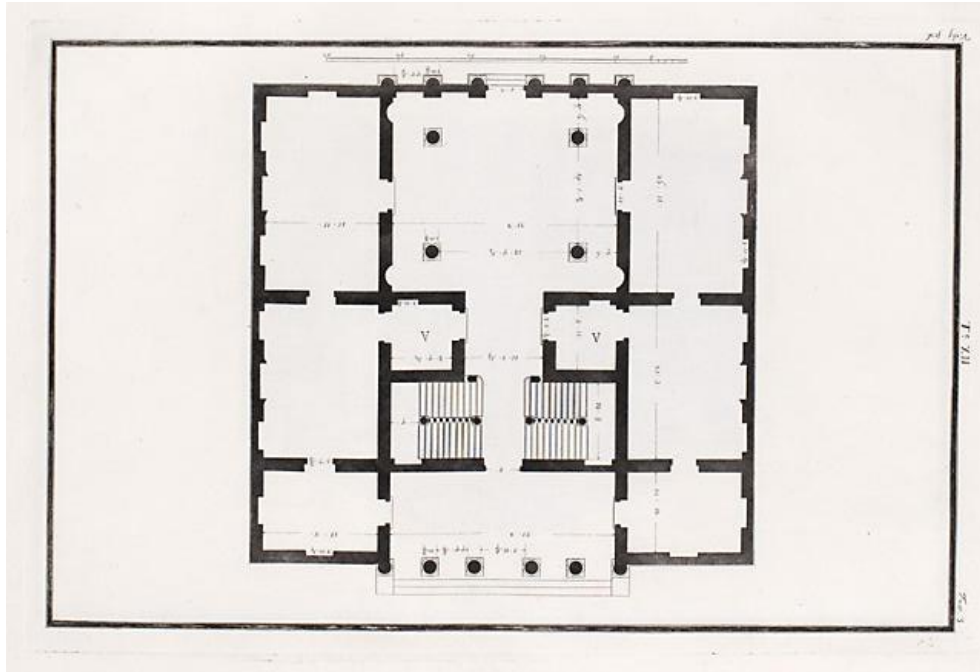


*Figure 1: Architectural sketch of the proposed “New Knightsbridge” as published in *The Architects’ Journal* (1962) the year before the release of the *The Servant*. The plan shows an enclosed public square and towering residential housing, suggesting a sense of the modern (transparency, verticality, circulation), as well as the nationalistic “turn inwards” that Peter Kalliney, Jed Esty and others describe.*



*Figure 2:* The circularity of movement in Eve's apartment. By author.





*Figure 3:* Planta do palácio por Ottavio Bertotti Scamozzi, 1781. An example of the domestic form that Evans associates with European Medieval architecture, where “a matrix of discrete but thoroughly interconnected chambers.”<sup>189</sup> The floor plan shows how rooms open one onto another without the intervening throughways of corridors, meaning that one must pass through rooms consecutively.

**[Figure 4 removed in final version for copyright reasons. For figures see [www.slightofhome.cargocollective.com](http://www.slightofhome.cargocollective.com).]**

*Figure 4.* Tony and Susan discover Barrett and Vera love making in the master bedroom. *The Servant* (1963), dir. Joseph Losey.

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<sup>189</sup> Evans, “Figures, Doors and Passages,” 77.

## Chapter Two

### A Room of Her Own: Bathroom, Apparatus, Femininity

The bathroom in *The Servant*, I have suggested, represents a site of catachresis in the normal syntax of the home. The bathroom, specifically the modern, integrated ensuite bathroom, is a recurring feature in Losey's films, and in this chapter, I explore how it functions in relation to the representation of women. In particular, I argue that the bathroom serves as a heuristic juncture for the way femininity is constructed by and constructive of the broader binary meanings of modern culture. We have only to think of the topos of women *au toilette* in the canons of European painting to see how the gendered ideologies of the bathroom extend beyond film and the twentieth century.<sup>190</sup> Taking the infamous shower scene in Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho* (1960) as a spatial trope, however, we can also infer a unique relationship between the bathroom and spectacularization of the female body in cinema. Scholars have noted that cinematic portrayals of women in film tend to fall into one of two categories. They either signal "a communal friendly place, with a focus on appearance and cosmetics"<sup>191</sup> or "a place of sexual vulnerability, [and] violent death,"<sup>192</sup> with both scenarios

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<sup>190</sup> For a reading of the representation of women *au toilette* as a modernist convention, and its interplay in painting, literature and literary interpretation see: David Trotter, "Modernist Toilette: Degas, Woolf, Lawrence," *Moveable Text* 5 (2009): 1–21. Trotter reads combing, washing, dressing and other feminine grooming activities as a means, rather than simply a subject, of literary interpretation.

<sup>191</sup> Fran Pheasant-Kelly, Barbara Penner, and Olga Gershenson, "In the Men's Room: Death and Derision in Cinematic Toilets," in *Ladies and Gents: Public Toilets and Gender* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2009), 205.

<sup>192</sup> Glen Donnar, "Monstrous Men and Bathroom Mirrors," in *Spaces of the Cinematic Home: Behind the Screen Door*, ed. Eleanor Andrews, Stella Hockenhull, and Fran Pheasant-Kelly (London: Routledge, 2015): 180; Margaret Morgan also explores the bathroom as a place of

emphasizing the “to-be-looked-at-ness”<sup>193</sup> of the female body. In the two films that I analyze here, however, the scopophilia of the bathroom is complicated by the manner in which that space in the home is accessed. Both films begin with women invading homes which are not theirs. If, as Palmer and Riley suggest, “the world of Losey’s films is not a hospitable one for women,”<sup>194</sup> then perhaps the manner in which these women first intrude, and then make themselves conspicuously *at home* where they are might give us a basis for reading Losey against Losey with respect to the representation of women. In other words, if Losey’s cinema is not hospitable to women, then how might the female protagonists of these two films upend the expectation that hospitality is something they need?

Specifically, I argue that the bathroom operates as an apparatus in the sense in which film theorists use the term, namely, as a reference to the technological conditions of a particular cinematic expression. Apparatus theory challenges the ideological neutrality of technology, showing that the cinematic apparatus itself is both product and producer of social values and assumptions. As an apparatus, the bathroom encodes sexual difference out of the binary distinctions that form the broader ideological pattern of modernity.<sup>195</sup> The bathroom

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spectacular femininity and violence. See “The Plumbing of Modern Life,” *Postcolonial Studies* 5, no. 2 (2002): 190-1.

<sup>193</sup> Laura Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” in *Film Theory and Criticism: Introductory Readings*, ed. Leo Braudy and Marshall Cohen (New York: Oxford UP, 1999), 809. See also John Berger, *Ways of Seeing* (London: Penguin Classics, 2008). Berger argued that “*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at” (47, emphasis in original).

<sup>194</sup> James Palmer and Michael Riley, *The Films of Joseph Losey* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 142.

<sup>195</sup> I draw here from two foundational texts of apparatus theory by Jean-Louis Baudry. See Jean-Louis Baudry’s “The Apparatus: Metapsychological Approaches to the Impressions of Reality in the Cinema,” *Camera Obscura* 1 (1976): 104–26; and “The Ideological Effects of the Basic Cinematic Apparatus,” *Film Quarterly* 27, no. 2 (1974): 39–47.

thus becomes a space where the gender politics of good and bad femininity play themselves out within the context of that space's link to national and technological discourses of progress. This angle on the bathroom's architectural and technological constitution aims to highlight its heuristic function as a juncture within a broader network of patriarchal social relations. What I mean by "apparatus" is that I do not simply look at the bathroom as an isolated place or a specific cultural setting; instead, I wish to think about the bathroom as a mechanism for framing and editing. This framing and editing, I argue, produces the figure of the femininity in relation to a set of discursive binarisms. By exploring the way the bathroom frames women in relation to these binaries, I aim to demonstrate how the construction of sexual difference lies at the centre of modern structures of knowledge, especially normative or regulatory discourses of home, and is not simply one of their many consequences. At the same time, a consideration of Losey's bathrooms – specifically as a site of slight sounds and movements – complicates the disciplinary function of the bathroom as a social structure.

My analysis looks at the representation of Eve in Losey's 1962 film, *Eve* (alternative title *Eva*), and Leonora in his 1968 film *Secret Ceremony* through thinking about the bathrooms they come to occupy as part of acts of home invasion – an invasion alluded to earlier by the bathroom-occupying figure of Barrett's female counterpart, Vera, in *The Servant*. I begin by looking at how ideals of maternal femininity are tied up in the modern domestic bathroom as a symbol of national progress and cohesion. I argue that Eve and Leonora, through their intrusions in the home, can be read as agents of disruption within the hygienic space of the bathroom and home, upending idealized images of domestic femininity. I then turn to elaborate upon the idea of the bathroom as apparatus. By presenting a brief

cultural history of the bathroom's cultural ascendancy within the home, I aim to show how the bathroom is encoded by the broader social relations of modernity, which in turn encode the bodies that use it. The bathroom thus serves not simply as a setting or symbol of femininity in the home, but as a medium of its expression. And finally, given the symbolic limitations within which this construction of femininity takes shape, I present an alternative reading not so much in terms of an articulable expression of femininity, but rather through the minimal forms of the bathroom. In tension with the discursive nature of the bathroom, I read the bathroom's slight perturbations that move ambiguously between body, bathroom and cinema as garbling, or perhaps gurgling, the discursive production of femininity in the domestic bathroom.

### **Bathing Beauty**

Losey's 1962 film, *Eve*, begins, like *The Servant*, with an invasion. A tremendous downpour leads Eve, played by Jeanne Moreau, to seek shelter in the house of a celebrated Welsh novelist named Tyvian, who is living the high life in Italy. By breaking a window, Eve and her male companion gain access to a ostentatiously modern abode outside of Venice. Shedding layers of damp clothes, Eve seems to gravitate deeper into the house as if by force. Her companion follows her, diligently carrying and arranging her expensive-looking things, first upstairs, then through the bedroom, and finally into the large ensuite bathroom. She treats the man like a servant even though it is he who is paying her ("I paid good money for her," he later boasts). When Eve begins to run the bath it is as if she has drawn a line in the sand. Immediately the man excuses himself. He'll wait for her downstairs, he says

obsequiously, to which Eve replies nothing. Once alone, she begins a cool appraisal of the bedroom: the texture of the bed sheets, the weight of a vase, the books in the bookshelf. With callow indifference she tosses some wilted cut flowers into a wastebasket. All the while Eve has been slowly undressing in an elaborate striptease that is both flirtatious and cold. The final object in the room that she assesses, with a towel wrapped carefully around her body, is her own reflection in a full length mirror.

*Secret Ceremony* (1968), set in late 60s London, is also a film about a woman who finds refuge in a home that is not hers. The opening sequence of the film, not unlike the scene described above, begins with a woman exposed to the elements and ends with her luxuriating in an enormous ensuite tub in a rich stranger's house. The elements to which Leonora, played by Elizabeth Taylor, are exposed, however, are of a more figurative kind. Like Eve, Leonora is a sex worker. But if Eve is a courtesan of the European demimonde, Leonora is a common down-and-out prostitute. The film opens with a quick succession of shots: a close-up of a small pile of bank notes and coins on the mantelpiece along with a black and white photograph of a young girl; a mid-shot of Leonora removing a cheap platinum blonde wig in the mirror; a closeup of a besuited man's feet as he leaves the room; and finally a mid-angle shot of a dingy and empty bedsit apartment. The following sequence moves to the damp grey streets of London. On a city bus, Leonora is approached by a young woman in girlish garb who bears an uncanny resemblance to her daughter (the girl in the photo). The 'girl' follows her, breathlessly and repeatedly uttering "ma ... ma." She follows Leonora across the grounds of a church cemetery. The girl seems to want something. At first Leonora is perturbed, but eventually, overcome with the painful recollection of her

daughter's death from drowning (the reason for the visit to the cemetery), Leonora acquiesces to the girl's control. The girl, Cenci, takes Leonora to the imposing and eccentric mansion where she lives alone.<sup>196</sup> Here, we see Leonora's own eerily similar appearance to the orphan girl's mother. Like Eve, as soon as Leonora is left alone, she undertakes a survey of the master bedroom beginning with an enormous wardrobe filled with gowns and fur coats. Wearing a white mink coat from the wardrobe, she steps into a palatial ensuite bathroom with an enormous marble tub and an elaborate Victorian shower that is alight with panes of intricate stained glass. Back in the master bedroom, at a small cabinet of keepsakes and ornaments, she examines two coins, testing them between her teeth before putting one deep in her purse. When the girl arrives with breakfast, Leonora cautiously takes up the role of the girl's mother, which secures the exhausted woman first a nap and then a bath. Leonora's intrusion may not be a literal one. She is, after all, invited in by the girl. But nonetheless that sense of a protracted incursion characterizes the film as a whole. The manner in which the two women meet, coupled with Leonora's legibility as a sex worker, the rapidity with which she makes herself at home, and Cenci's child-like demeanor, all contribute to this sense of invasion.

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<sup>196</sup> The setting for the film is the real-life Debenham House in London designed by the Arts and Crafts architect Halsey Ricardo for (Sir) Ernest Debenham, the department store owner, and erected between 1905 and 1907. According to *The Survey of London*, Ricardo sought to "erect a building immune to the destructive effects of a city atmosphere" (n.p.). In this sense, the house is itself a symbol of hygienic domesticity insofar it is designed as a turning away from the dirt and decay of the outside city. "The Holland Estate: Since 1874 | British History Online," accessed July 21, 2017, <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/pp126-150#h3-0004>. For images see: <http://www.british-history.ac.uk/survey-london/vol37/plate-90>.

The scenes discussed above from these separate films have many differences. However, what they do share – the figure of the female sex worker, her intrusion into the home, and finally into the hygienic space of the bathroom – is an intriguing pattern that suggests a possible disruption to what Luce Irigaray calls the “sterilizing” economy of “woman’s maternal destiny ... [which emphasizes] the production of the child.”<sup>197</sup> However, before turning to look at how this pattern can be read as disrupting the hygienic logic of the bathroom, I want to briefly highlight how the bathroom itself constitutes and is constituted by ideals of modernity.

### **Bathroom Ideals**

The bathroom figures prominently in twentieth-century British discourses of national progress, which are in turn indebted to ideals of domestic femininity and vice versa. In her monograph *Bathrooms*, Barbara Penner situates the bathroom within a broader narrative of the progressive British state:

The metabolic view rightly underscores the fact that most modern infrastructural improvements share one critical goal: improved circulation. Above all else, capitalism and industrialization demand efficient circulation to enable the free movement of goods and people; the primary role of local government is to regulate the movement of water, goods, traffic, people and waste. As part of this remit, from the mid-nineteenth century onwards, authorities intervened more actively in city workings to provide public services such as paving and street lighting and, crucially,

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<sup>197</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Speculum of the Other Woman* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1985), 32.



water and sewage systems. Britain was at the forefront of the move to pass public health legislation to ensure that private homes and businesses were properly connected to these centralized systems. It is at this moment that the story of the modern bathroom truly begins.<sup>198</sup>

Penner identifies the bathroom as a technological fulcrum, wedding the material interests of industrialization and the progressive nation state. More specifically, we see how the domestic bathroom, and in particular its location indoors through modern plumbing infrastructure, serves as an emblem of how the national and economic progress championed by the state is realized as a material benefit at the everyday domestic level. In *The Place of Home*, for example, the historian Alison Ravetz ends her discussion of the progressive evolution of domestic bathing practices before and after the Second World War by departing from her archival analysis to strike a more imagistic and optimistic note about how the advances of public infrastructure benefited the private lives of ordinary people: “Thus over the decades, the dumping of buckets of water and the emptying of the zinc tub became relegated to history. For children and parents, the pleasant ritual of ‘bath time’ with celluloid ducks took its place.”<sup>199</sup> Although Ravetz mentions “parents” and not “mother,” we can nonetheless see how the family (and especially the mother) is taken to be the benefactor of advances in public (and thus male) infrastructure projects. Not only is the mother liberated from the labour of hauling water for baths, she is also rewarded with the innate pleasure of bath time – no longer a chore but a delight. This image of bath time reveals how ideals of family and

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<sup>198</sup> Barbara Penner, *Bathroom* (London: Reaktion Books, 2013), 13.

<sup>199</sup> Alison Ravetz, *The Place of Home: English Domestic Environments, 1914-2000* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995), 138.

hygiene are tropes within national discourses of social progress. Through spatial figures such as connection, centralization, and circulation, the bathroom both frames and is framed by narratives of national progress and cohesion. Through this economy of exchange, the seemingly private images of bathroom scenes can be read as products of a very public representational lens. Through the dialogic from labour to pleasure ideals of motherhood and femininity as well as ideals of modernity are mutually constituted in the bathroom.

In order to elaborate on this point, we can turn to Douglas Winnicott, the child psychoanalyst famous for his analysis of the relationships between mother and her offspring. Winnicott takes up the domestic scenario of bath time as the basis for an extended meditation on the role of the mother in the early development of the child. “What cannot be taken for granted,” he writes, “is the mother’s pleasure that goes with the clothing and bathing of her own baby. If you are there enjoying it all, it is like the sun coming out, for the baby. The mother’s pleasure has to be there or else the whole procedure is dead, useless, and mechanical.”<sup>200</sup> Such a scene might not be possible without the kinds of advances in domestic engineering that Ravetz describes. The mother’s labour, pleasure, and the technological modernization of the home would appear to be deeply intertwined. In a paper read to a Christian educational institute in 1968, Winnicott elaborates upon the innate abilities of the mother in the context of the family bath:

the way a baby is held ... is of primary significance. You could make a caricature of someone smoking a cigarette and holding the baby by the leg, swinging it round and

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<sup>200</sup> Donald Winnicott, *The Collected Works of D. W. Winnicott*, ed. Lesley Caldwell and Helen Taylor Robinson (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016), 274 [originally published in *The Ordinary Devoted Mother and Her Baby*, 1949].

putting it in the bath, and you know somehow that this is not what babies need. There are very subtle things here. I've watched and talked to thousands of mothers, and you see how they pick up the baby, supporting the head and the body. If you have got a child's body and head in your hands and do not think of that as a unity, and reach for a handkerchief or something, then the head has gone back and the child is in two pieces – head and body.<sup>201</sup>

Winnicott's initial description casts the entire mother-child bathroom scene in the optimistic glow generated by the mother's innate enjoyment of her role as the mother. As in Ravetz's description of the "the pleasurable ritual of bath time," domestic labour is recast as maternal pleasure. The labour required of the mother in order to bring about this new day is seen, not as work, but as an expression of her innate self. In clothing and bathing the child, the mother is an agent of unity, literally holding the rising sun of a new day in her hands.

But the nature of this link to ideas of progress is paradoxical. Winnicott suggests that the mother's pleasure in bathing the child is what prevents the whole thing from becoming "mechanical." Thus, as much as we can read the figure of the mother within national discourses of progress, her contribution to it rests largely in figuring a counterpoint to mechanization and other qualities that define twentieth-century progress. Recalling Ravetz's description of the evolution of bath time from domestic chores to family ritual, we can see how the mother is seen as the benefactor, rather than the agent, of industrial progress even as her body and actions of mothering, on a more figurative level, symbolize an optimistic, cohesive future. Thus the maternal body is charged, quite literally, with securing the future

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<sup>201</sup> Douglas Winnicott, *Winnicott On The Child* (Cambridge MA: Perseus, 2009), 235.

against what is “dead, useless, and mechanical” about the very process that drives it. If idealized representations of women are tied up with such national narratives of progress and cohesion, it is in part because they represent a sanctum of warmth, sunlight and nature at odds with the brute forces of industrialized modernity.

The mother’s pleasure is what holds things together. Indeed, it seems from Winnicott’s description that the mother’s responsibility has less to with doing than it does with enjoying. Slavoj Žižek has commented on “the superficial opposition between pleasure and duty” in modern culture, writing, “totalitarian power goes even further than traditional authoritarian power. What it says, in effect, is not, ‘Do your duty, I don’t care whether you like it or not,’ but: ‘You must do your duty, and you must enjoy doing it.’”<sup>202</sup> But there are two types of pleasure at play in Winnicott’s accounts of bath time. With slapstick flare, Winnicott depicts the mother as torn between the baby, which we know represents the “sun coming out,” and the cigarette with all its built-in connotations of filth and sex. The choice is stark and the consequences no less severe than the cartoonish dissolution or harm of the child. The scene reproduces femininity as an opposition between motherhood and sexuality. The bathroom, according to Megan Morgan, is a fitting place for such an opposition. In “Plumbing the Modern World,” she argues that the bathroom defines at a material level the persistent parsing of women’s sexual expression into two mutually exclusive identities: “Tap water is our pure mother, wastewater our slut.”<sup>203</sup> “The fantasy of the feminine is one of plenitudinous sexuality, be it damnable and detestable, or elsewhere, clean and pure,” writes

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<sup>202</sup> Slavoj Žižek, “‘You May!’: Slavoj Žižek Writes about the Post-Modern Superego,” *London Review of Books* 21, no. 6 (1999): 3–6.

<sup>203</sup> Margaret Morgan, “The Plumbing of Modern Life,” *Postcolonial Studies* 5, no. 2 (2002): 174; see also 173.

Morgan.<sup>204</sup> Like the bathroom itself, the female body both produces and is produced by binary logics of hygiene and waste. Thus, there is a complex symbiosis between ideals of femininity and national ideals of progress and productivity. If the mother holding the baby is holding things for the good of the nation, then the (same) mother with the cigarette is choosing sex, filth, and frivolity over the infant, over the home, and over cohesion itself.

Winnicott's description of mothers bathing their children is indicative of the broader shift in perception regarding the bathroom that Ravetz describes. Despite its connotations of privacy, the postwar bathroom becomes a locus of visibility for the respectable family and in particular the nurturing mother. Turning briefly to another visual medium, evidence of this idealization of maternal femininity vis-a-vis the bathroom can be garnered from a 1958 American advertisement for Kohler Co. bathroom fixtures [see Figure 5]. The ad depicts two young boys playing with toy boats in a shallow pool of bathwater from outside the tub, dry and fully dressed. In the background their mother attends to their younger sister who watches on with glee. The slogan reads: "Is your bathroom a *family room*?" Here the bright, modern, and hygienic space of the bathroom serves as a kind of updated kitchen table, a space around which the family gathers, a place of plenty, order and cohesion. The rest of the ad reads, "A bathroom and a family get-together don't go together ... For your family's greater good you need enough bathrooms for everybody's wants, without waits ... equipped, of course, with fixtures by Kohler of Kohler." The text of the ad seems somewhat to contradict the illustration itself – bathrooms *aren't* for family gatherings, unless of course you have the luxury of having "enough" bathrooms to ensure the safe separation of such a pleasant scene

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<sup>204</sup> Morgan, "Plumbing of Modern Life," 173.

as mother with her children at bath time and those less savory functions for which the bathroom – or more specifically the toilet – are designed.

### **Insurgent Domesticity**

In a sense, Eve and Leonora's intrusions into the home, and eventually into the tub, is a form of insurgent domesticity. As outsider figures, both Eve and Leonora displace more ideal figures of domestic femininity. An important question remains, however. Does replacing idealized forms of femininity in the home disrupt the patriarchal power that constructed them as such? Consider the following scene in *Secret Ceremony*. For a brief moment, alone and completely inert in the tub, Leonora, the conspicuously childless whore, seems to luxuriate in the warm water, her neck stretched all the way back so that her head is resting on the ledge of the enormous tub, her hair dangling wet into bright blue water. But it isn't long before Cenci bounds in cheerily to join her. When Leonora protests – “a big girl like you!” – Cenci rejoins in the voice of a spoiled girl, “but you always let me scrub your back on Sundays!” “Is it Sunday?” Leonora asks in an affected upper class accent, once again taking up the role of mother. Cenci brings with her into the tub a large rubber duck. Uncomfortable with the young woman who has now made her way into the bath, Leonora makes an excuse to leave. “I better get out before I fall asleep.” she says. “And drown?” Cenci retorts mischievously. (But how could she know that Leonora's daughter had died by drowning?) “What do you know about drowning?” Leonora snaps angrily. “Ducks don't drown,” Cenci says chuckling, holding the toy beneath the water. Now flushing with agitation, Leonora reaches out for the duck: “No! Let it be!” In sobs that mingle with Cenci's

chuckles, Leonora attempts to rest the toy from the young woman's arms. Her cries crescendo into hysterical laughter, back down to a whimper, and then into a full-blown mad laughter. It becomes difficult to tell whether Leonora is attempting to free the toy from Cenci or, in fact, to keep it submerged.

If the "celluloid duck" in Ravetz's history of the domestic backroom can be read as a symbol of the dissemination of social and technological advances at the domestic and familial level, then the rubber duck in *Secret Ceremony* represents a kind of perversion of that narrative.<sup>205</sup> Cenci is not a child at all, and Leonora's performance as mother is just that, a performance. Far from serving as the context of women's innate pleasure in mothering, here, the bathroom frames only sexual and murderous ambiguity between "mother" and "daughter." If Leonora (initially) takes pleasure in the bath, it is not from any innate sense of motherly purpose, but rather from the material benefits with which it is associated: the hot breakfasts, the mink coat, the clean bed, and the warm bath, all of which stand in sharp contrast to the grotty arrangements of her former life. Running throughout the film, is a clear sense of Eve's desire for the material comforts of Cenci's well-appointed home, even as she remains suspicious and nervous about the daughter who makes that enjoyment possible.

Like Tony and Barrett in *The Servant*, *Secret Ceremony* is a film about two people who enter into a queer kind of domesticity, which uses the structure of a very conventional one – mother and daughter – as a kind of pattern for cohabitation. The film ends with the two women falling out viciously when Leonora can no longer follow in the increasingly dark fantasy world that the girl is creating. All the while, what Cenci is really trying to convince

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<sup>205</sup> Ravetz, *The Place of Home*, 138.

Leonora of is something that we assume her real mother either never believed or would not acknowledge, namely that she was sexually abused by her stepfather. After the falling out, Leonora attempts to offer the girl her services on a professional level as domestic help. But this attempt to forge an explicitly economic relationship is met with bitter uncaring. Cenci kills herself, leading Leonora to take revenge on Cenci's stepfather, killing him at Cenci's funeral.

One way of reading Leonora's act of violence is as retaliation against an invisible patriarchal violence that determined the limits of Leonora and Cenci's queer domesticity despite never being a part of it: Leonora literally bans Cenci's step-father from the house once she moves in. In a comparable way, Eve's intrusion into the house constitutes an attempt to displace, not only Tyvian's innocent and devoted fiancée, Francesca, but also the ideals of virginal version of femininity that adhere to her. As in *Secret Ceremony*, Eve's intrusion seems to reach its symbolic apex in the ensuite bathroom. In her brief critique of the film, Megan Ratner, describes Eve's intrusion in the following terms.

She heads direct for his bedroom to dry herself off ... Moreau then does a seductive dance, mussing and caressing her hair, slowly unzipping her dress, her back partially bared and erotically flirting with the camera, the slithering come-on directed at the audience yet not self-consciously so, Billie Holiday's lyrics the only dialogue. She conquers Tyvian's room, usurps him even before he arrives. By the time Tyvian returns, she has found her way to his huge tub and languishes – the operative verb for Moreau in this film – in the opaque, bubble-less bathwater.<sup>206</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Megan Ratner, "Eve: Sinfully Underrated," *Senses of Cinema* 18 (December 2001), [http://sensesofcinema.com/2001/underrated-and-overlooked/losey\\_eve\\_ratner/](http://sensesofcinema.com/2001/underrated-and-overlooked/losey_eve_ratner/).



Ratner sees something redemptive in the scene. Eve doesn't simply intrude; she "conquers" the house and "usurps" its owner. For Ratner, the slow, mute, detached way in which she occupies the space means she not only occupies it; she assumes it as an extension of herself. Barely uttering a word, she makes Tyvian's space as her own.

We can compare Eve's intrusion with what is perhaps one of the most famous break-and-enters in cinematic history. Indeed, it would be difficult not to compare Eve's act of trespass to that of the equally well-dressed Lisa Carol Fremont (Grace Kelly) in Hitchcock's *Rear Window*. According to Mulvey's (in)famous account of scopophilic pleasure, it is only when Lisa breaks into the apartment of a suspected murderer across from where her boyfriend, Jeffries, lives that she succeeds in penetrating the realm of his desire. As Mulvey writes, "when she crosses the barrier between his room and the block opposite, he ... sees her as a guilty intruder exposed by a dangerous man threatening her with punishment," all of which gives Jeffries the chance to save her.<sup>207</sup> Certainly Eve's intrusion into the house of an author, one who has been read as a reflection of the film's director, is suggestive of an attempt to place herself in the scopophilic realm. But what sets Eve apart from a figure like Lisa is that she presents none of the latter's guilt and fear, thus forestalling the pleasure that comes from a woman's helplessness.

Indeed, Eve seems almost conspicuously blasé about the prospect of the owner's return. Not only does she make herself at home, she makes a show of making herself at home, tossing things about indifferently; with her record player belting music from the

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<sup>207</sup> Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," 840.

adjoining bedroom, she lounges casually in the tub even as a commotion erupts below. When Tyvian arrives to find Eve's companion in his house, an altercation ensues between the two men. While this action is taking place below, however, the camera lingers with Eve in the bathroom. Eve remains unperturbed, swaying lethargically in the deep water, her hair collected messily above her head. The scene then cuts to a mid over-the-shoulder shot, as we might see in a conversation scene. From behind Eve, the back of her head resting on the ledge of the bath, we see her extend her leg out of the water in a sudden little kick, revealing a smooth porcelain appendage and sending a little torrent of water into the air.

Mid-movement, as Eve's foot reaches an apex, there is an abrupt cut revealing a large, prominently displayed photographic portrait of Tyvian's demure and elegant fiancée, Francesca, who is not at all unlike the demure and elegant Lisa in *Rear Window*. Ratner describes Francesca as having a "clamorous innocence."<sup>208</sup> Such a loud innocence would appear to be a pretty exact antonym of Eve's mute impertinence. Eve's little kick and the abrupt cut that follows draws a contrast between the two women – between, that is, the categories of virgin and whore.

Later, Eve's portable record is interrupted by Tyvian as he continues his argument with the other man, now in the bedroom. Without hesitation or concern, Eve exits the bath, rights the record and returns to the bath. She doesn't so much as glance at Tyvian, let alone acknowledge him or attempt to explain herself. The righting of the record seems to say what she can't be bothered to. Without reading Eve into the false choice of either speaking or being silenced, we can interpret her gesture as one that rights or writes Holiday's female

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<sup>208</sup> Ratner, *Eve*, np.

vocals without asserting it into, or demanding reciprocity from, the conversation between the two men. Just because she doesn't feel the need to speak doesn't mean she would stand for being interrupted. In the fleeting moment that Eve is in the room (wrapped haphazardly in a bathrobe), Tyvian becomes entranced by the woman.

Losey describes *Eve* as a film about a woman and one man's sexual obsession for her.<sup>209</sup> Eve is a courtesan with a penchant for expensive things. When asked what she likes best in the whole world, she replies, "money, money, money." Throughout the course of the film Tyvian throws away his marriage, his career, and his money, all in an attempt to please Eve, who seems to take a sadistic but impersonal pleasure in seeing Tyvian suffer. In an extensive interview, Losey discusses the film in autobiographical terms as an exploration of his own relationship with women and, in particular, his ex-wife. He describes his interests in wanting to draw out in the film the way something as fraught and indeed torturous as Eve and Tyvian's relationship can take on a kind of banality and become, in his words, a "domestic thing," "a marriage which wasn't a marriage."<sup>210</sup> Near the end of the film, Tyvian's adoring wife, Francesca, kills herself after walking in on Tyvian and Eve during the former's honeymoon. Now Tyvian is friendless and broke. He has been exposed as a literary fraud. In the final scene, preparing to take a luxurious trip with another man, Eve has nothing to say to Tyvian but to remind him to feed the cat.

Collectively, then, Eve and Leonora's bathroom-oriented invasions suggest a kind of takeover of more ideal, hygienic versions of femininity – the virgin and the mother – which both feed and are fed by broader ideals of progress and cohesion. If, as Randolph Trumbach

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<sup>209</sup> Ciment, *Conversations with Losey*, 218.

<sup>210</sup> Ciment, *Conversations with Losey*, 218; 212.

argues, “the figure of the prostitute contradicted all ideas of the natural domesticity of women,”<sup>211</sup> then Eve and Leonora’s insistence on a material place within the home can be read as an interruption of what counts as “natural domesticity” in the first place. This is Eve and Leonora’s queer status as domestic “things.”<sup>212</sup> But what is perhaps most disruptive about their invasions is that they both agitate the imperative of female pleasure as such, since the “opaque, bubble-less bathwater” would suggest there is something radically flat about their enjoyment, if what they experience in the bath is enjoyment at all. Leonora treats her role as mother transactionally. The girl is her ticket to the comforts of home. As for Eve, she seems to take little pleasure even in the anguish she appears deliberately to inflict on Tyvian.

There is, however, a problem with such a reading of female invasion insofar as the expression of a radical alternative femininity ends up reproducing the binary structures of meaning that frame and limit female experience in the first place. In other words, if Eve and Leonora conquer or usurp certain sanitized ideals of virginal maternity, they leave in place the symbolic binary structure – good/bad, clean/dirty – that is the basis of masculinist representation. Thus a reading of the films that recasts them as narratives of feminist invasion works in tandem with the masculinist construction of femininity, because it involves simply a realignment, rather than a disruption, of the discursive binaries of modernity.

Writing on the figure of the femme fatale, the film scholar Mary Ann Doane elaborates on this point. Doane argues that “visions” of radical femininity in mainstream cinema are so

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<sup>211</sup> Randolph Trumbach, “Sex, Gender, and Sexual Identity in Modern Culture: Male Sodomy and Female Prostitution in Enlightenment London,” *Journal of the History of Sexuality* 2, no. 2 (October 1991): 203.

<sup>212</sup> The use of “things” here suggests that Eve and Leonora are not quite domestic, but rather, domestic-ish. As prostitutes, that is to say, their domesticity is treated as both contestable and an object of curiosity.

thoroughly mediated by male structures of spectatorial desire that they represent, not women, but rather the socialized fantasies of the men who construct the film.<sup>213</sup> The femme fatale, she writes, “is not the subject of feminism but a symptom of male fears about feminism.”<sup>214</sup> Representing dangerous women as anchored to the image and diegesis of film is one way of containing the perceived threat they pose to the phallogentric order more broadly.<sup>215</sup> This presents something of a double bind in as far as expression of ‘radical’ femininity gets folded back into the pleasure of a male-constituted gaze. As I elaborate in the following section, however, exploring the bathroom as a technical apparatus can help us unpick the way the meaning of women is produced within a symbolic domain of binary terms.

### **The Bathroom as Apparatus**

“Far from being a straightforward pieces of technology,” Penner writes, “bathrooms are culturally determined and historically specific.”<sup>216</sup> In *History of Shit*, Dominique Laporte makes a similar observation, describing the twentieth-century bathroom’s movement indoors

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<sup>213</sup> Writing with a specific focus on the representation of sex workers in film, Russell Campbell makes an equivalent claim, arguing that “prostitute characters in film are creatures of the male imagination” (5). This is particularly relevant given the frequency with which sex workers appear in Losey’s films, whether in minor roles, as in the conclusion of *The Servant*, or in leading roles as in *Secret Ceremony* and *Eve*. See Russell Campbell, *Marked Women: Prostitutes and Prostitution in the Cinema* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 2006), 5.

<sup>214</sup> Mary Ann Doane, *Femmes Fatales: Feminism, Film Theory, Psychoanalysis* (New York: Routledge, 1991), 2.

<sup>215</sup> While Doane insists that the femme fatale says more about the men’s perceptions of female desire than she does about women themselves, Doane nonetheless holds onto the figure of the femme fatale as something that can trouble the phallogentric representational logic of film. In a chapter subtitled “Epistemology as Striptease,” Doane describes the femme fatale as “the other side of knowledge as it is conceived within a phallogentric logic” (*Femmes Fatales*, 103).

<sup>216</sup> Penner, *Bathroom*, 18.

as being far from a purely practical phenomenon. “The privatization of waste” is a development “whose universality is not historically given,” he writes.<sup>217</sup> For Laporte, the shift from outdoor to indoor toilets reflects a broader cultural contraction into the family unit. Penner and Laporte represent a materialist counter to any notion of the bathroom as neutral technology, framing it instead as flush with ideology. In the foundational texts of apparatus theory, Baudry makes similar claims with respect to the apparatus of cinema. “Cinema,” he writes, “reconstructs and forms the mechanical model ... of a system of writing constituted by a material base and a countersystem (ideology, idealism) which uses this system while also concealing it.”<sup>218</sup> Baudry offers a materialist rebuttal of purely semiotic and aesthetic readings of film, examining cinema as a mode of production that is itself culturally produced. Similarly, rather than simply a contained space of a specific set of devices and activities, the bathroom can be read as producing the body as a kind of text. As a technological apparatus, the bathroom both produces and is produced by the broader culture. The bathroom, then, is not simply an interface for clean water and sewage, but it also functions as a node for the symbolic ins and outs of a representational order, an interior within the interior.

In recent years, film scholars have in numerous ways called for a turn away from the apparatus theory that characterized much Lacanian-influenced, film theory of the 1970s and 80s. In particular, contemporary film scholars such as Giuliana Bruno and Lisa Cartwright have expressed wariness about what Pansy Duncan calls “the perceived Cartesianism of

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<sup>217</sup> Dominique Laporte, *History of Shit*, trans. Nadia Benabid and Rodolphe el-Khoury (Cambridge MA: The MIT Press, 2002), 29.

<sup>218</sup> Baudry, “The Ideological Effects,” 39.

psychoanalytic film theory's master, singular, disembodied 'gaze.'"<sup>219</sup> For Bruno, the Lacanian-informed apparatus theories that used to dominate film studies produce a neutral scholar-spectator so cool and collected in their disposition that they become indistinguishable from the apparatuses they seek to understand and critique. From this perspective, apparatus theory can be understood as an adherent to what Eugenie Brinkema calls the "expressivity hypothesis,"<sup>220</sup> the assumption that the basis of reading film is to uncover the ideology, signs, and meanings hidden within such aspects as the technological conditions in which a film is produced. Although Brinkema's "radical formalism"<sup>221</sup> is decidedly not a search for expressivity, feminist or otherwise, she is careful not to disavow apparatus theory or the gaze in the same way as many post-cinema theorists have done. Brinkema is interested in rethinking what the apparatus does – and doesn't do – rather than moving on from it. My aim is not to reproduce the apparatus as a sovereign observational center, so much as to deconstruct it in order to better understand its formation of and by the broader cultural discourse. By thinking about the bathroom in Karen Barad's terms of "material reconfigurings" in the cultural construction of femininity, my goal is to stretch the possibilities of apparatus as a frame of analysis rather than moving on from it.<sup>222</sup>

As mentioned previously, Ravetz describes the post-war period as a turning point in the way practices of hygiene were organized in the home. It was not until this period that the modern bathroom as it is typically understood today (clearly separate from the kitchen and

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<sup>219</sup> Pansy Duncan, *The Emotional Life of Postmodern Film: Affect Theory's Other* (London: Routledge, 2015), 17.

<sup>220</sup> Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 36.

<sup>221</sup> Brinkema, *The Forms of the Affects*, 37.

<sup>222</sup> Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 142.

primary living spaces, with hot running water, a washbasin and accompanying toilet) was considered a standard to which all houses could uniformly adhere. Although such a provision was by no means universal,<sup>223</sup> the 1950s in Britain nonetheless marked the establishment of the modern bathroom as a standard-bearer of the “decent” home as well as a prerogative of the social welfare state.<sup>224</sup> Ravetz describes the sudden turn by which the bathroom becomes, not just a standard feature, but indeed the “showpiece” of the respectable home.<sup>225</sup> The bathroom may be in and of itself an object worthy of display, but crucially and somewhat paradoxically it also operates as an apparatus of visibility – not only a showpiece, but a showcase of post-war modernity. Thus we can think about the image of the female body as something construed by the disciplinary tensions that constitute the bathroom as a boundary between the private and public. If this is the case, then the principles that determine the place and shape of the bathroom within the house are also, to an extent, the principles that determine the disciplinary relationship between femininity and the home.

With respect to the bathroom’s disciplinary function as a representational apparatus, there are several moments of transformation which I wish to explore in detail, each of which say something about how the bathroom constructs femininity in binary terms. First, the internalization of the bathroom within the house moves the interface of clean/dirty from the

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<sup>223</sup> Gray and Russell note that the great majority of people living in privately rented, and particularly subdivided, housing during the 1950s had no access to a private bath (Quot. in Ravetz, 131). And as Ravetz documents, “it was only over the next decade that this proportion was reduced to less than ten per cent, and by the early 1970s the subject had lost its interest for official statisticians” (137).

<sup>224</sup> The provision of a bathroom and WC is addressed extensively in postwar housing reports. See Dudley Report, *Design of Dwellings* (London: HMSO, 1944), 15-7, 24, 27-8, 30, 164, 168, 201-2 28; and Parker Morris (Ministry of Housing & Local Government), *Home for Today and Tomorrow* (London: HMSO, 1961), 12, 35, 58, 68 & 74.

<sup>225</sup> Ravetz, *Home*, 138.



doorway or threshold of the home, to the private place of the bathroom in terms of the inflow of clean water and the effluence of sewage. Second, as a node within a public infrastructural network, the bathroom helps to constitute the public as a collection of miniature privacies, and therefore one of the most private spaces in the home is at once its most public.

A large part of the way the bathroom connotes progress within twentieth-century histories of domestic architecture relates to its atomization as a distinct space within the home, bringing together a previously disparate set of activities, implements and technologies. The story of the domestic bathroom is one of gradual incorporation and internalization. What would eventually be amalgamated within the architectural remit of the *bathroom* originates as a loose set of implements and actions at the margins of domesticity: the kitchen sink,<sup>226</sup> the chamber pot, the outdoor privy, and the cast iron tub used in the kitchen during winter or the back garden in the summer. As Ravetz observes, in most British housing before the Second World War, washing took place alongside other dirty household work in the scullery or kitchen at the back of the house.<sup>227</sup> In this context, the bath, far from the namesake of a particular room, was merely one of many functions of the kitchen or scullery. In many cases, Ravetz notes, the bathtub doubled as a kitchen work surface: “a wooden board covered the bath when not in use and all other operations had to be suspended when it was.”<sup>228</sup> Alternatively, the bath was “hung on a nail in the backyard”<sup>229</sup> or left “standing like a chained animal in the bleak space of the scullery.”<sup>230</sup> With the help of nails and chains, the history of

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<sup>226</sup> According to Ravetz, the kitchen sink was used for all but the most thorough washes (135).

<sup>227</sup> Ravetz, *Home*, 134.

<sup>228</sup> Ravetz, *Home*, 134.

<sup>229</sup> Ravetz, *Home*, 134.

<sup>230</sup> Cleeve Barr (1959), quoted in Ravetz, *Home*, 134.

the twentieth-century bath marks it as something tolerated at the periphery of the home but essentially belonging to the outside realm. Ideals of postwar progress, however, brought the toilet and bath indoors, repositioning it as the symbolic show piece of private and familial discretion in the home.

The incorporation and internalization of the bathroom can be read as an architectural reflection of what Foucault calls the “specification of individuals.”<sup>231</sup> Foucault demonstrates how, in the modern period, people who carry out certain practices are turned into personages, such that various forms of *doing* become certain kinds of *being*. We see this specification quite clearly in Winnicott’s description of bath time, where the specific tasks of “clothing and bathing” the infant become not so much activities carried out by the mother, but motherliness itself. In a disciplinary model, it is the categorization of such activities as motherly that determines the identity “mother,” and not the other way around. The manner in which the mother in Winnicott’s scene seems to hold the “two pieces – head and body” of the child together echoes this unification of parts into wholes. The establishment of the bathroom within the home as a discrete pairing of hygiene and sanitation reflects the order and unitariness that Winnicott observes in his “thousands of mothers” as they carefully and joyously carry out the task of bathing the infant.

This process of internalization and incorporation – the designation of the bathroom as “showpiece” – reflects its elevated status as the newly anointed space within the home for managing the domestically constitutive binaries of inside/outside and clean/dirty. Ravetz documents a shift in the post-war period regarding the perceived appropriateness of having a

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<sup>231</sup> Foucault, *History of Sexuality*, 42-3.

bath in the kitchen. In 1944, in response to the suggestion that baths were wasted on the working-class who used them, not for washing, but for storing coal, the *Daily Mail* retorted, “can one wonder that baths have been so used if the bathroom is near the back door?”<sup>232</sup> As this comment suggests, social perceptions of proper hygiene center on not only *whether* one bathes, but also *where* one bathes. The toilet or water closet presented additional problems with respect to the organization of sanitation facilities in the home. Ravetz observes that even with the relative availability and affordability of domestic plumbing, the toilet’s inward drift was an uneven and contentious one. That the toilet should occupy a space within (or next to) the bathroom, or even the house itself, was far from settled even well into the twentieth century. Ravetz notes that for older generations of working-class people, the indoor toilet was seen less as a modern convenience than as an intrusion.<sup>233</sup> Despite this debate, Ravetz remarks that by the post-war period the universal preference – if only that – was for a bedroom-floor WC.<sup>234</sup> Furthermore, she notes that working-class people tended to dislike having the “downstairs WC too close to the front doors or kitchens, which they found embarrassing.”<sup>235</sup> Even as the indoor WC became the standard,<sup>236</sup> discussion of its proper

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<sup>232</sup> Quoted in Ravetz, *Home*, 134.

<sup>233</sup> Such was the significance of this debate that it was addressed directly in a 1918 parliamentary report on housing. It is easier, the report reads, “to say where this convenience should not be placed than to find in a small cottage an entirely suitable position.” As if hesitant about the toilet’s full-fledged induction into the sanctity of home, the officials of the report advise that in small homes the WC should be placed either off the entrance lobby or as a back projection off the scullery. The Tudor Walters Report (1918), qtd. in Ravetz, *Home*, 139-140. See also Morgan, *Plumbing Modern of Life*, 189. Morgan discusses the perception in the USA toward the end of the nineteenth century that indoor plumbing and toilets brought disease into the house.

<sup>234</sup> Ravetz, *Home*, 140.

<sup>235</sup> Ravetz, *Home*, 140.

<sup>236</sup> Ravetz notes that “overall, the diffusion of the WC was slow and patchy: the decade of the most progress was 1951-1961, when the number of households sharing a closet was more

place continued in terms of whether it should share a space with the bathroom or occupy a small room of its own. The 1961 Parker Morris Report on housing, *Home for Today and Tomorrow*, suggests that in houses with a second WC downstairs, it was permissible to conjoin the upstairs bathroom and WC. In the absence of this convenience, however, the authors of the report advise that the upstairs WC should have its own private compartment, thus keeping separate the activities of bathing and shitting.<sup>237</sup> With the provision of a second toilet there would be less chance of imprudent forms of mixing between clean and dirty.

The modernist imperative of circulation that Penner described as core principle of the modern bathroom architectural and technological development should also be marked as a fundamentally expansionary process under industrial colonial capitalism. This expansionary process, of course, has continued apace into financialized globalized capitalism, based entirely on the circulation of goods, bodies, financial flows, algorithms, debt bundling, and so on, but has its origins in British colonial modernity, and in fact was first “worlded” by their empire into the sort of scale we know today. Circulation has at this historical moment become a fundamental organizational process for capital, which accordingly requires the orderly circulation of bodies within the proper norms of consumption and production. Idealized representations of women *au toilette*, whether caring for a child or engaged in personal hygiene, might seem to produce a static body with nowhere else to go; however, this stillness also marks women as coincident with codified domestic space and its attendant

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than halved; but many people had no chance to experience up-to-date sanitation until well after the middle of the century. In 1971, over 10 percent of all households still had to use an outside WC and it was not until the 1980s that those lacking any access to a flush toilet fell to negligible proportions” (140).

<sup>237</sup> Morris, *Home for Today and Tomorrow*, 12; 35. The British preference for the separation of the toilet and bath is confirmed by Mass Observation 1943 (Ravetz, 140).

domestic (national) narratives of progress. Part of what is interesting about Eve and Leonora is that they circulate between the streets and the house, and re-occupy the bathroom in a way that potentially disrupts both normative public and sexual circulations as well as gendered social reproduction.

The debates about the proper place of the bath and toilet within the home that Ravetz chats reflect the history of the bathroom as part of a discourse of internalization and incorporation. They also convey the way the bathroom both represents and produces representations of the private/public split, distilling broader debates about the segregation of activities between home and city to within the boundaries of the home itself. As a relatively public space within the home, “near the back door” is seen as an insufficiently private space for bathing.<sup>238</sup> In addition to suggesting exposure on the part of the bather, kitchen bathing also involves the interruption of the normal work flow in the kitchen. The impropriety of bathing near the back door in the kitchen, then, comes not only from the perceived exposure of the bather; it also risks impeding the efficiency of the home in general and thus its productivity within the city itself. At a domestic level, then, the isolation of the bath to a more private space within the home speaks to the broader imperatives of efficiency and circulation that guided the project of postwar urban renewal. At a national level, this infrastructural shift signals the basis for neo-imperial urban development projects (like

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<sup>238</sup> *The Daily Mail*'s concern over the placement of the bath near the back door reflects the historical privatization of bathing, well documented in studies such as Wright's classic text *Clean and Decent*, which traces the culture of hygiene from the civic ideals of public bathing in Greco-Roman antiquity to the shift towards more individualized performances of sanitation during the Victorian period (public forms of mass bathing being seen as a public health provision for the working class rather than the ideal). *Clean and Decent* (London: Routledge & Paul, 1960), 151; 180.

Tony's "cities in the jungle") in postwar geopolitics.<sup>239</sup> As Hornsey observes, postwar urban renewal was intimately bound up in the regulation of sexuality in city, "safeguarding the city's flows and regulating the ordered usage of its component functional spaces."<sup>240</sup> While calling for the decriminalization of male homosexuality in certain circumstances, the Wolfenden Report actually advocated for harsher laws for street-based forms of sex work or what the report refers to as "street offences."<sup>241</sup> The report observes that, "from the evidence we have received, there is no doubt that the aspect of prostitution which causes the greatest public concern at present time is the visible and obvious presence of prostitutes in considerable number in the public streets of some parts of London ... The streets must be cleared up."<sup>242</sup> The report suggests that the problem with respect to prostitution is above all its "visible and obvious presence." Although no easy comparison can be drawn between bathing and prostitution, we nonetheless can see how pushing sex work out of the public arena can be seen as part of the same project that isolates the bathroom in the house. Both projects involve isolating the unruly body to its 'proper' place and out of the way of the disciplined circulation of bodies in space.

In light of this, we can reconsider Eve and Leonora's progressive trajectory within the house – from the raw outside elements (Eve) or the proverbial streets (Leonora), through the threshold of the house, upwards through the master bedroom, and finally into the

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<sup>239</sup> See Joe Nasr and Mercedes Volait, eds. *Urbanism Imported or Exported: Native Aspirations and Foreign Plans* (London: Academy Press, 2003).

<sup>240</sup> Hornsey, *Spiv and the Architect*, 23.

<sup>241</sup> Committee on Homosexual Offences and Prostitution, *The Wolfenden Report: Report of the Committee on Homosexual Offenses and Prostitution* (New York: Stein & Day, 1963), 130.

<sup>242</sup> Committee on Homosexual Offences, *The Wolfenden Report*, 134-5.

bathroom and the warm encapsulation of the bathtub itself. This trajectory mirrors the historical tract of the bath/room inwards from “down the garden path” to “first door on the left.” As Alison Ravetz has argued, in the postwar period, the bathroom becomes a symbol of the supposedly universal advances made possible by the postwar state. We see this, for example, in the way the bathroom is used to tout the benefits of postwar council housing to residents suspicious of modernist architecture.<sup>243</sup> Examining the cultural significance of the bathroom as the incorporation of previously disparate sets of activities and objects sheds light on the relationship between domesticity and femininity in unique ways. The bathroom’s trajectory inwards is not simply architectural in the strict sense. It represents a particular way of suturing the relations of modernity, such as privacy and publicity, secrecy and visibility.

The bathroom’s historical drift inwards relates to the way in which the infrastructure of public water and waste management allowed for the boundary between outside and inside, clean and dirty to shift from the concrete boundary of the home to the technological interface of taps and drains. Lawrence Wright argues that “sanitary planning begins with an understanding of the conflicting uses of running water – that by washing and drinking upstream from the source of excrement two diametrically opposed processes could be segregated within a single system.”<sup>244</sup> In this analogy of the stream, hygiene itself is

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<sup>243</sup> Further underscoring the centrality with which the modern bathroom figured in the progressive imaginary of the 50s and 60s is the degree to which this particular room animated the welfare mandate and public perception of postwar social housing. The novelty of modern bathrooms with hot running water and built-in fixtures figured prominently in the popular and institutional discourse of council housing during reconstruction. For working-class families unaccustomed and potentially wary of the modernism of postwar social housing design, the modern bathroom encapsulates both a sense of wonder and the notion of democratized comfort and convenience with which new forms of housing were being championed. See Ravetz, 138; and Bullock, *Building the Post-war World*, 215.

<sup>244</sup> Wright, *Clean and Decent*, 3.

understood as the segregation of a whole into opposite parts. If one of the perceived triumphs of industrialization is bringing that primitive stream indoors, this is only possible alongside the strict re-articulation of the distinction between inside (clean) and outside (dirty).

How does this brief cultural history of the bathroom inform a discussion of the representation of femininity? What my reading of the bathroom aims to show is that binary logic of femininity is ingrained within the material structures of the bathroom. The bathroom is not simply a setting of gender. As a node in a network of binary relations, it generates the symbolic tensions that constitute the meaning of sexual difference. This is true insofar as its material shift inwards and anatomization in the home is both an expression and determinant of, not only sexual difference per se, but also the enumerable binarism that constitute its disciplinary meanings. Apparatus theory suggests that it is necessary to understand the technological determinants of the cinematic apparatus in order to grasp the representations it produces. What I am suggesting here is that this is true of the bathroom as well.

### **Hygienophilia**

The modern domestic bathroom comes to resemble, I want to suggest, the scopophilic realm within in which sexual difference is structured along the axis of binary terms of meaning. In “Visual Pleasure in Narrative Cinema,” Mulvey explores how “the unconscious of patriarchal society has structured film form.”<sup>245</sup> Specifically, she demonstrates how the camera, the viewer and the male protagonist become conceptually fused as the active counterpart to women’s passive availability to the gaze. The same could be said of the

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<sup>245</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” 841.



architectural form of the bathroom. The masculinist gaze structures the organization of domestic space including the bathroom in ways that determine gender along oppositional axes of meaning.

If Mulvey's argument is centered on the visual dimension of film, then Kaja Silverman's *The Acoustic Mirror* makes an analogous argument with respect to sound.<sup>246</sup> Silverman describes the ways men's voice in classic film operates free floating, prescient and omniscient, while women's voice remains bound to bodily spectacle: screaming, crying, panting, murmuring. When women do speak, their voices are normatively characterized as "unreliable, thwarted, or acquiescent."<sup>247</sup> Unlike men, whose voices often break with the cinematic rule of synchronization, women's voices remain an extension of the image. They are housed, as it were, in the diegesis but separate from the authorial address of film.<sup>248</sup> Silverman notes the extreme rarity with which women's voices are heard as voice-over in classic film. We see this gendered tension between the silent female body and the disembodied male voice in the shot where we see Eve moves lethargically around the bath while the two men can be heard below beginning to argue. Thus, the men's voices function as a kind of voiceover of the spectatorial pleasure of Eve's body. The fact that the action of the film carries on downstairs (off screen) is consonant both with Mulvey's description of how the forward thrust of narrative film plot rests with men and not women, as well as

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<sup>246</sup> See Kaja Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror: The Female Voice in Psychoanalysis and Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988).

<sup>247</sup> Kaja Silverman, "Dis-embodiment of the Female Voice" in ed. Patricia Erens *Issues in Feminist Film Criticism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 330.

<sup>248</sup> The camera is often described as the enunciator in film studies.

Silverman's argument that men's voices in cinema are not encumbered by the body in the same way that women's voices are.

The bath anchors and structures the female body in similar ways as the cinematic apparatus. In *Eve*, the bath is cut deep into the floor and is edged in thick dark granite, framing Eve's body so as to redouble the visual boundary of the screen. A brief instance this composition is itself framed by a long horizontal mirror which momentarily catches Eve's reflection in the water. In *Secret Ceremony*, the large raised bath allows for a more level camera angle. And for much of the bathroom scene, the opaque blue water runs roughly plumb with the lower edge of the frame and just below shoulder height of the two women. The result is that the diegetic element of bath water and the non-diegetic element of the frame from a continuous line literally shaping the image of the two women. Whereas men are often represented in film in ways that emphasize their movement in three dimensional space – “a figure in a landscape,” as Mulvey puts it<sup>249</sup> – women are more often tightly delineated by the frame, flattened by the screen, and fragmented in close-up. The framing of the bath redoubles these pictorial conditions, something that, in *Eve* at least, is further emphasized by the diminishing effect of the high angle (downward) shots of the scene. Even though the camera shots of Eve, Leonora and Cenci in the bath are technically wider than close-up, the submergence of the female body produces roughly the same effect. As Mulvey describes this effect, “one part of a fragmented body destroys the Renaissance space, the illusion of depth demanded by the narrative, it gives flatness, the quality of a cut-out or icon rather than verisimilitude to the screen.”<sup>250</sup> Precisely because of the way that the opaque bathwater

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<sup>249</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure,” 843.

<sup>250</sup> Mulvey, “Visual Pleasure,” 838.

conceals most the women's bodies, the bathroom scenes in *Eve* and *Secret Ceremony* become, in Silverman's words, "thick with body."<sup>251</sup>

The *Eve* sequence which I have been discussing ends in Tyvian's bed. After Eve's bath, the trio have a brief conversation downstairs before Eve retires to the master bedroom for the night. Here the two men move to dispose of their competition. "Between gentlemen ... I've paid good money," Eve's companion, implores, to which Tyvian replies, "if you think I'm going to let you sleep in my bed with that woman you're out of your mind." In this exchange, Eve is discussed as an object of exchange in a transaction she has no involvement in.<sup>252</sup> Tyvian emerges as the victor and proceeds to the bedroom to collect his prize. Once in the bedroom, he slowly moves towards Eve, eventually advancing across the bed in a stalking crawl. Eve, however, has other plans. Silently and almost-apathetically, she clobbers him over the head with a nearby vase. No doubt we can read Eve's act of violence towards Tyvian in his own home in line with Ratner's description of Eve "usurping" the master in his own domain, a reading in line with a similar logic of inverted power relations from Losey's *The Servant*. But this territorial and insertive logic of female redemption demands greater consideration. What would it mean to understand Eve as claiming men's domain with her body (violently and sexually) and not her voice? Shouldn't she have a say, as such? As Losey explains in an interview with Tom Milne:

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<sup>251</sup> Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 62.

<sup>252</sup> In *Between Men*, Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick explores the ways in which women operate as merely 'excuses' or 'goods' for mediating relations between men. The male-male or 'homosocial' bonds that comprise institutes of the power, Sedgwick argues, are mediated or triangulated through women. *Between Men: English Literature and Male Homosocial Desire* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985). Luce Irigaray makes a similar argument in *This Sex Which Is Not One*, where she identifies women's object-like status in the "homm(e)osexual economy" of exchange between men (192).

I wanted to make her a woman who said virtually nothing but whom one sensed through the way she dressed, where she lived, what she had round her house, how she behaved privately, what she read, where she went when she was alone, etc. And there were a good many other sequences planned for the picture which are not there, including her visit to a confessional in the Catholic church – without words, nothing was ever said.<sup>253</sup>

This description of Eve's silence is potentially dissatisfying since it limits Eve's meaning to what we sense of how she looks and moves, and ignores what she has to say. The ending of *Secret Ceremony* conveys a similar kind of silencing. After Cenci poisons herself, she attempts to call out to Leonora who has just moments earlier begged the former take her back into house. Just as Leonora leaves the house, Cenci appears to yell with extended arms, but no voice comes. Leonora later stabs Cenci's stepfather without uttering a word. The next and final shot is of Leonora in bed, back in her grotty bedsit flat and muttering a nursery rhyme to herself madly.

No doubt Silverman would find these instances of silence, and the reduction of these women, in various ways, to their bodies – in violence, in death, in madness – telling. For Silverman, “[t]he crucial project with respect to the female voice is to find a place from which it can speak and be heard, not to strip it of discursive rights.”<sup>254</sup> The political basis of Silverman's work is to claim a place for women in the Symbolic realm and so the emphasis on finding female voice is important not least because it counters the incessant reduction of femininity to women's 'biological essence.'

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<sup>253</sup> Tom Milne, *Losey On Losey*, 28.

<sup>254</sup> Silverman, *Acoustic Mirror*, 192.

However, not all feminist critics share Silverman's view. Whereas Silverman seeks to locate female voice and thus to establish woman's place in the Symbolic Order – the domain of language – other feminist scholars understand the Symbolic Order as the very mechanism of women's oppression. For Luce Irigaray, for example, the Symbolic Order is not simply dominated by men, it is the means through which that dominance is produced. In this sense, women's subjugation exists *in* the Symbolic Order and not as a consequence of being shut out from it. In other words, it is the Symbolic Order that secures women *a priori* in a masculine universe because it holds that women speak only *as* women – ie. only in reference to masculinity.<sup>255</sup> Irigaray argues that seeking the positive representation of women as a kind of symbolic sovereignty or “libidinal coherence,” as she puts it,<sup>256</sup> is to dissolve femininity into the “economy of the same” in which women are like men but different.<sup>257</sup> Thus the objective for Irigaray in thinking female experience in a patriarchal world is not to gain ground within the already existing symbolic register but to disrupt it and to neutralize its interpolating authority. Furthermore, Irigaray does not share that same skepticism about the association between women and the body. Whereas Silverman sees the body as a counterpoint to discourse, and visual evidence of women's exclusion from the Symbolic, Irigaray sees textuality and corporeality as inescapably intertwined. Thus for Irigaray, the body is not anything like a biological essence, it is part of a morphological imaginary, which may or may not correspond with the flesh and blood body. According to Elizabeth Grosz,

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<sup>255</sup> See also Elizabeth Grosz, 'Philosophy, Subjectivity, and the Body: Kristeva and Irigaray, Carole Pateman and Elizabeth Grosz eds., *Feminist Challenges: Social and Political Theory* (Sydney: Allen & Unwin, 1986), 142.

<sup>256</sup> Irigaray, *The Sex*, 216.

<sup>257</sup> Irigaray, *The Sex*, 130.

Irigaray's aim "is to speak about a positive model or series of representations of femininity by which the female body may be positively marked, which in its turn may help establish the conditions necessary for the production of new kinds of discourse, new forms of knowledge and new modes of practice."<sup>258</sup> Rather than trying to correct that which is missing in the Symbolic Order (women's voice), Irigaray attempts to turn the Symbolic Order inside out, forcing it into new points of convergence with the body. Thus the body is not opposed to speech, but rather has the potential to offer ways of speaking differently, or, to put it in Irigaray's words, the possibility to produce "different subjective configurations."<sup>259</sup>

Let me suggest that where Ratner sees power in Eve's silent and reticent body, Silverman would likely see only women's exclusion from discourse. Ultimately, however, I see both Ratner and Silverman as producing similar arguments with respect to the politics of symbolic visibility. Whereas Ratner emphasizes Eve's conquering of the physical space of the home, Silverman seeks space within the representational space of the Symbolic. Both authors seek to insert women into existing structures, be it Tyvian's house or the representational economy it represents, where female subjectivity may be realized in speech. Their projects are in this sense dicta-territorial, if you will. Their perspective is based on the idea of speech or expression as something embodied in a subject which is neatly contained in the symbolic order. From a psychoanalytic framework, however, these levels are fluid and translation between them less clear.

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<sup>258</sup> Elizabeth Grosz, "Philosophy, Subjectivity, and the Body," 124.

<sup>259</sup> Luce Irigaray, *Democracy Begins Between Two*, trans. Kirsteen Anderson (London: Routledge, 2001), 137.

Challenging the phallogocentric order of cinema must involve more than finding place for women's voice; it demands interrogating how we understand the relationship between space and articulation in the first place.<sup>260</sup> Where in Chapter One, I argued for a syntactical reading of the domestic in *The Servant*, here, the apparatus works at the level of semantics. Spatial metaphors such as conquering or usurping may not produce the desired effects because they preclude states of being not based on articulation and individuality. While language mediates experience, experience cannot be fully articulated by its terms. And that which it fails to contain, according to Lacan, circulates as desire. If challenging the phallogocentric order of cinema or the broader society depends on claiming places of symmetry between the speaking subject and the meaning of that speech, we run the risk of excluding the very states which disrupt the patriarchal order, namely, here, a femininity that is not easily contained in meaning. It means paying attention to states which are not consistent with

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<sup>260</sup> Another way of thinking about the relationship of voice and place is via what phoneticists call the “place of articulation.” The OED defines the “point (also place) of articulation” as “the position in the mouth at which obstruction of the air passage takes place in the production of a consonant.” In thinking about the relationship between voice and place more broadly, it is intriguing to me that the place of articulation in this phonetic sense should have so much to do with the restriction of flow and the boundary of the body. In this context, articulation is literally the sound of the body restricting itself. (In simple terms, vowels are different sounds free flowing from the vocal cords, whereas consonants involve the obstruction of airflow in particular ways.) Therefore, the way we shape sounds into language through consonants involves a kind of placing that is also a form of self-obstruction. Luce Irigaray, somewhat controversially, turns to the feminized anatomical image of multiple lips as a way of describing the unique economy of female sexuality. The analogy is useful to Irigaray because, as Elizabeth Grosz puts it, it involves “a mutual and reciprocal touching” at odds with the phallic singular. Does this mutual and reciprocal touching constitute a place of articulation in the sense described here? Or is the force of the lip or tongue against another part of the mouth required to restrict the passage of air enough to cancel the reciprocal and mutual nature of this touching? These questions raise interesting connections between the body, the phonetic and the spatial. See Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies: Toward a Corporeal Feminism* (Bloomington IN: Indiana University Press, 1994), 105. For Silverman's critique of Irigaray's “two lips” trope see: Silverman, *The Acoustic Mirror*, 146.

an understanding of subjectivity as the very point at which the boundaries of self are in flux and the origin of one's speech is in question.

For Irigaray, conquering or usurping the representational economy as it is currently structured is not enough because it is that system which already defines women as oppositional to men. So, for example, countering the ideal form of femininity with a seemingly more disruptive one ends up capitulating to the binary logics – good/bad, virgin/whore, inside/outside, clean/dirty, lethargic/productive – that constitute the disciplinary nature of sexual difference in the first place. Women may, on the one hand, figure one half of a hierarchical dichotomy. A materialist reading of modernist plumbing infrastructure and the interior move of the bathroom positions women as the passive benefactor, rather than the agent of progress, for example. But, on the other hand, the category of “woman” becomes the very structure that regulates the clear division between inside/outside, clean/dirty, domestic/public, and so on. Therefore, rather than seek an authorial female voice as a counterpoint to the incessant association of women and body, Irigaray's aim is to retrieve the bodily in language and thus to “speak” differently. For Silverman, the overdetermination of the female body is synonymous with the exclusion of the female voice. But what if we sought to look at the body outside of the expression/silence dichotomy, as if those were the only things the body could do?

### **Between Silence and Speech**

I end by returning to the bathroom once again in order to offer a reading that attempts to forestall its discursive nature and role as a hygienophilic arena. Having looked at the way



the bathroom encodes disciplinary meanings of gender, I am curious about qualities in the conjoined cinematic and domestic architectural apparatus which may not serve in its (discursive) function as such. A rattle in the machinery, a glitch in its program, or a clog in its pipes perhaps. In other words, now that we have explored the bathroom as a kind of language (semantic, rather than syntactical) that both produces and is produced by the pivot point between the female body and modern discourses of progress, I wish to consider qualities of that pivot, but which are not themselves orientated along an axis of silence and expression, or readability and incoherence. If there were such a quality or “glitch”<sup>261</sup> in the representational apparatus of the bathroom, we might call it slight insofar as it represents – not unlike that which does not fit through Baily’s narrow gateway of language – something that is both of and at odds with the structure that brings it into being. We are thus invited to read against the heuristic grain of the bathroom, observing forms that disrupt the lines of division that make meaning (the surface of the water, the cinematic cut, the narrative/diegetic frame) but which do not amount to more than expressions of ambiguity itself.

As I have observed, the whole scene, indeed Eve/Moreau’s entire performance (both the character, and how that character is portrayed by the actor) in the film, is characterized by silence. However, as the bathroom scene makes abundantly clear, Eve’s silence is rather noise-ish, if not exactly noisy. But to call this noise-ishness *Eve’s* at all is to mischaracterize it, as the ambiguity of its origin is a part of what makes it noise, rather than sound, in the first place. As Eve glides back and forth in the enormous tub, she spouts water and then smacks

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<sup>261</sup> Lauren Berlant, “The Commons: Infrastructures for Troubling Times.” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 34, no. 3 (June 1, 2016): 393.

her lips together irreverently, pausing with each opening as if to blow invisible bubbles. As a mouthing without words, the movement might be read as a performance of speechlessness, or the reduction of female expression to the level of the body alone. But there is also something aside or even inside the silence of the scene that catches our ear, a barely perceptible smacking or popping sound. The sound is so slight, in fact, that a viewer might be inclined, as I have been, to replay the scene to make sure that what they heard was in fact a part of the film's soundtrack, and not simply a sound suggested by the image alone – although perhaps that distinction is not so significant given that the sound an image only evokes may be no less worthy a detail of analysis than anything actually on the soundtrack.

We can return to the bath shot, discussed briefly above, of Eve's head depicted from behind at slightly raised angle. From this perspective, in brisk movement, Eve extends her leg, white flesh cut starkly by the line of the water, sending a splash up into the air. Mid-movement, as Eve's foot reaches an apex, there is an abrupt cut to the portrait of Tyvian's fiancée. After a brief moment, the scene then cuts back to Eve's leg, now descending back into the water. The cutting away from the image of her appendage redoubles the cut performed by the surface of the opaque water which fragments Eve's body along an axis of in/visibility. The bath in other words reproduces the way the camera fetishistically isolates fragments of the female body, which operates in contrast to the omnipresence of Tyvian's voice and bodily presence in the scene. The initial cut-away from Eve's foot stands out as a conspicuous exception to the film's general adherence to the rules of continuity or invisible editing. Its suddenness suggests a blip in time that momentarily interrupts Eve's display of the body. So abrupt and uncharacteristic is the cut, we might even wonder if there

were a defect in the apparatuses of recording or playback. Whereas cutting in narrative film is generally used to create the illusion of temporal and spatial continuity, this cut makes its cutting known. Yet the authorial purposefulness of the cut is undercut by a sense of accidentality. In other words, the cut's visibility as a cut is not necessarily one that connotes directorial sovereignty. If anything it connotes an elision in the authorial, Cartesian command of cinematic representation. On the one hand, the cut might work to veil or censure Eve's almost clichéd performance of to-be-looked-at-ness, the way she extends her smooth leg up out of the water for no apparent reason but to make it visible. But rather than read the cut as an action that acts upon Eve or her representation – which would only redouble an active/passive divide between female image and male author – I am more interested in the way the ambiguity of the cut overlays and mingles with the fluidity of Eve's movements in the tub.

Adding to the incongruity of the cut is a peculiar noise that accompanies it, something between the mechanical sound of a record scratch and the guttural release of a belch. The sound is non-diegetic, yet it also seems to occupy a diegetical place alongside the splashing, spouting and smacking in the scene. Thus, in a number of ways, both visually and acoustically, the cut disrupts, not simply the diegetic flow of the scene, but also the symmetrical relationship between the diegetic and extradiegetic divide. The multiple framings that hold and fragment the women in the space of the bathroom also keeps them in safe opposition to one another. The kick might be read as an act of aggression towards Franchesca, Eve's symbolic rival. In this sense, it translates not so much as a grand disruption of the space of the architecture of the film as a kind of shrug. In response to the

intolerable distinction between filth and purity that the hygienic space presupposes for female sexuality, Eve neither protests nor resists. She does not so much demand a reparation, a room of her own in the film, so much as decline or disdain the very imperative of a link between herself and cinematic space. The kick, this gesture, lies somewhere between a kink and the clichéd come-hither gesture of a woman displaying her smooth glistening leg for all to see. Like Eve's mouth, the little non-kick connotes a fluid, unsatisfactory division between the resistance and availability of the female body. It liquefies the tension between the spectacle of women's hygienic bodies and unsanitary fluids. And thus it neutralizes the dichotomy between pleasure and disgust that anchors the female body in meaning. Yet the kick, the splash, the cut each speak to a kind of fluidity between them that is neither properly spatial nor discursive, and which thus troubles the symbolic meaning formed by the strict parsing of femininity. Because of its odd, almost accidental quality, the cut defies straightforward understandings of its authorship, an ambiguity that also says something about the nature of Eve's kick as a kind of non-verbal utterance.

These minor cinematic and bathroom gestures reflect how the operations of scopophilia and synchronization work to reveal the way the bathroom functions as a discursive apparatus anchoring women's bodies restrictively, along with a kind of voicelessness, to the cinematic frame and diegesis. What I have tried to suggest, however, is that there is a way of reading the bathroom scene from *Eve* and the silences that substantiated Leonora and Cenci's queer mother-daughter relationship in such a way that sidesteps the supposition that the deprivation can be corrected through a (re)claiming of space. As much as Eve is contained both physically and symbolically by the binary apparatus of the bathroom,

there is also something there, too diffuse to matter. This “something there” troubles the discursive link between self, place and voice, and the binary logic that anchors subjects in place as articulations of being *in relation to*, and which works in particular to confine women against the perceived boundlessness of male desire.

**[Figure 5 removed from final version of dissertation for copyright reasons. To see figures go to [www.slightofhome.cargocollective.com](http://www.slightofhome.cargocollective.com).]**

*Figure 5: Kohler of Kohler bathroom advertising. From *The Architects' Journal* (1962).*

### Chapter Three

#### Sticking with the Child: Class, Materiality, Desire

A scene roughly halfway through Losey's 1971 film, *The Go-Between*, marks an important turning point in the narrative.<sup>262</sup> A boy in a neat green suit carries a letter in his hand as he strides briskly across the grounds of a country estate. He glances over his shoulder at a stately manor house off in the distance, an image that mirrors closely the cover illustration of the first edition of the book on which the film is based, L.P. Hartley's 1953 novel of the same name.<sup>263</sup> In the film, the boy is portrayed through a series of cuts at progressively greater distances from the house. Once he is well beyond its formal gardens, and with a large tree trunk as cover, the boy hesitantly opens the letter. Before reading the page, he appears to steady himself in preparation. Glancing at the words, the child seems stunned. He stares blankly at the space in front of him. Suddenly he brings his sleeve across his face to wipe tears from his eyes before dropping to his knees against the tree in muffled sobs. The letter, or at least that part of it that has been exposed, reads simply, "darling, darling."

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<sup>262</sup> In many respects, *The Go-Between*, for which Losey won the 1971 Palme D'Or at the Cannes Film Festival, marks the height of his professional career. In the '70s and '80s, Losey made a series of films that critics greeted with either ambivalence or derision, and which remain rarely seen or discussed. Although Pinter did finish a screenplay adaptation of the seven volumes of Marcel Proust's magnum opus *À la Recherche du Temps Perdu* for a film to be directed by Losey, the two never again released a film together. For more on the Proust screenplay and Pinter's working relationship with Losey see: Michael Billington, *Harold Pinter* (New York: Faber & Faber, 2007), 224–330.

<sup>263</sup> L. P. Hartley, *The Go-Between* (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002).

What does the letter tell the boy that so upsets him? The boy in question is Leo Colston (Dominic Guard). As a middle-aged man (Michael Redgrave), he looks back to the year 1900 and tells the story of the long hot summer he spent on the eve of his thirteenth birthday as the house guest of his school friend, Marcus, and the latter's wealthy banking family, the Maudsleys. The family have leased Brandham Hall, which sits on a large country estate in rural Norfolk, from its aristocratic landowner, Lord Trimingham. The Maudsleys have aristocratic ambitions of their own, naturally, which they stake squarely on the marriage of their beautiful daughter Marian (Julie Christie) to Lord Trimingham. It is against this strictly classed social backdrop that Leo is enlisted as "the go-between," delivering secret letters for Marian and Ted Burgess (Alan Bates), a handsome tenant farmer on the Brandham estate. Thus one answer to the question of what the letter tells the boy that so upsets him is that it pushes him to a realization of his role within a deeper social structure that he doesn't quite understand.

In a sense, however, the question with respect to the letter is not what it reveals but what it fails to reveal to the boy. In press materials for the film, Losey describes Leo as a boy "who does not understand why the grown-ups he likes act the way they do. Nor do the adults who use him take into account his sensibilities or the possible consequences to the child ... Leo is in an impossible situation – caught in a triangle of sex at an age where sex is a titillating mystery."<sup>264</sup> On the one hand, then, there is the child's unknowing with respect to sex. But on the other hand, as we see in the scene in which Leo reads the letter (or at least a part of it), this unknowing is itself possessed of a kind of texture and intensity that makes it

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<sup>264</sup> Press Information Manual, *Paris Opening*, n.d., JWL/1/18/13, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

more than a simple state of lack. As in the famous case of Henry James's *What Maisie Knew*, the film seems above all interested in dramatizing the child's unknowing as itself a kind of perspectival force in the narrative. The figure of the child in *The Go-Between* works similarly to figure the unknowability of desire as itself a quality within the material world.

The motif of a letter that frames both a “titillating mystery,” as Losey puts it, and that which is, in a very real sense, on the surface of things (the ink on the page, the tears across Leo's sleeve, the rough texture of the tree trunk upon which the boy collapses) calls to mind Jacques Lacan's reading of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Purloined Letter*.<sup>265</sup> This early lecture of Lacan's has become a classic reference point in psychoanalytic literary theory. Poe's famous story is about a stolen letter hidden in the only place that (almost) no one thinks to look, out in plain view. As Lacan points out, the actual contents of the letter are never revealed to the reader. Lacan is interested in the way the letter constitutes the desirous sociality of the characters in the story. The letter, in other words, demonstrates how the motives and desires of various people can be circulating around something that is both unknown and yet not hidden either. For Lacan, then, what “binds and orients”<sup>266</sup> the characters in the narrative is not the prospect of a specific revelation contained in the letter (some hidden but objective truth), but rather the “admirable ambiguity of language” itself, an ambiguity that takes shape, quite literally, out in the open. In my third and final chapter, I explore this mingling of surface and ambiguity as a kind of stickiness, which takes the form, variably, of a material trace on the surface of Leo's skin or on the surface of the letters he carries.

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<sup>265</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, “The Purloined Letter,” in *The Portable Edgar Allan Poe*, ed. J. Gerald Kennedy, Revised edition (New York: Penguin Classics, 2006), 327–44.

<sup>266</sup> Jacques Lacan, *Écrits*, trans. Bruce Fink, 1st ed. (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2007), 11.



In *The Cultural Politics of Emotion*, Sara Ahmed uses the idea of stickiness to refer to the ways bodies, objects, and signs contaminate or act through each other over time. “Rather than using stickiness to describe an object’s surface,” she writes, “we can think of stickiness as an effect of surfacing, *as an effect of the histories of contact between bodies, objects, and signs.*”<sup>267</sup> Like Lacan, Ahmed is interested in the way signs act and matter through each other independent of any essential meaning. Our task as readers, then, becomes less about unearthing the hidden truth of stories, then attending to the stickiness of what Kathleen Stewart calls the “live surface” of the ordinary.<sup>268</sup> For me, what stickiness connotes is simply the way the lack of what we can properly call knowing itself forms the density of experience.

Returning to the scene with which I began this chapter, there is a way in which the image of the boy, the letter, and the looming house speak collectively to the knotty relationship of the aesthetic and material conditions of childhood. It is, therefore, also an image that speaks to a number of themes that preoccupy scholars working at the interface between queer studies and childhood studies. There are perhaps two general directions that drive this research. The first has to do with the productive parallels that can be drawn between the experiential categories of childhood and queerness. In *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century*, for example, Kathryn Bond Stockton explores the child’s proclivity for unexpected “lateral relations” with what it comes into contact with.

<sup>269</sup> This sidewaysness, Stockton argues, links the child and queer subject in their ability to

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<sup>267</sup> Sara Ahmed, *The Cultural Politics of Emotion* (London: Routledge, 2004), 90 (emphasis in original).

<sup>268</sup> Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 4.

<sup>269</sup> Exploring a number of way in which the child is disposed to move sideways, complicating teleological narratives of child development, Stockton asks, why is that children have to

sidestep the rigidity of binary social categorization. The concept of sidewaysness links the child and the queer in their capacity to trouble the taken for granted notion that the direction of our growth is up.<sup>270</sup> Stockton's work is characteristic of a stream of scholarship that explores the various complex ways we might think about the queerness of children and the ways childhood affects the meanings of queer.<sup>271</sup>

The second broad convergence of queer and childhood studies puts these two figurations of subjectivity – childhood and queerness – into more of a divergent relationship, examining the ways in which the figure of the child is produced and mobilized by adults for expedient cultural and ideological purposes. The emphasis here is less on the overlapping of childhood and queerness, than it is on how the idea of the child's unknowing or innocence is culturally produced in order to shore up normative politics of intimacy and sexuality. This line of reasoning can be traced to Philippe Ariès's foundational work on the Western invention of the child as a distinct category of human experience.<sup>272</sup> Whether implicitly or explicitly, Ariès is a key reference for a number of landmark studies preoccupied with the

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grow 'up.' *The Queer Child, or Growing Sideways in the Twentieth Century* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 62.

<sup>270</sup> Stockton, *The Queer Child*, 4-6. Stockton's sidewaysness resonates with Sara Ahmed's notion of affective stickiness. For Ahmed, stickiness is "how emotions work by sticking figures together (adherence), a sticking that creates the very effect of a collective (coherence)." "Affective Economies," *Social Text* 22, no. (2004): 119. Both Stockton's idea of sidewaysness and Ahmed's thinking around stickiness emphasize the fluid relationality of signs.

<sup>271</sup> See: Natasha Hurley, and Steven Bruhm, eds. *Curiouser: On the Queerness of Children* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2004).

<sup>272</sup> In a much-discussed passage, Ariès writes, "In medieval society the idea of childhood did not exist." *Centuries of Childhood: A Social History of Family Life* (New York: Vintage, 1965), 125. Sharon Stephens provides a useful nuancing of his claims, writing "the modern conception of childhood as a separate life stage emerged in Europe between the fifteenth and eighteenth centuries, together with bourgeois notion of family, home, privacy, and individuality." *Children and the Politics of Culture* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), 5.

fraught relations between children and sexuality. These include Lee Edelman's framing of the child as the "face" of "reproductive futurism";<sup>273</sup> James Kincaid's observation that moral panics about predatory pedophilia paradoxically involve cherishing the erotic vision of children that they purportedly abhor; as well as Jacqueline Rose's discussion of the way in which children's literature propels adult desires at the expense of addressing children themselves. What each of these very different scholars agree on is that the figure of the child is habitually used (and abused) in ways that regulate the experience of adults and children alike.

My own analysis draws upon these frames for analysis concerning the relationship between the child and queerness in order to think about how the figure of Leo in *The Go-Between* traverses across spaces of perspective, desire and class. Crucially, it is precisely in relation to Leo's lack of knowledge with respect to sexuality that he seems to have a privileged capacity to move between the normally untraversable distinction such as innocence/sexuality, upper/lower class, economics/representation. This capacity, I argue, works as a kind of stickiness that creates tactile or gummy points of contact between the diegetic space of the narrative and the material context in which the film is "read" and produced. In thinking about how the child seems to possess something precisely because of what it lacks, this chapter aims to contribute to what Nat Hurley in the introduction to the special issue on "Childhood and Its Discontents" calls "an effort to understand the aesthetic,

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<sup>273</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 75.

psychic, and material conditions under which childhood is at odds with the ideals we construct for it.”<sup>274</sup>

To this end, I structure my analysis of *The Go-Between* in terms of different manifestations of the child’s stickiness. I begin by looking at the way the novel and, in particular, the film rely on the conception of the limited point of view of the child narrator as a way to centre a kind of perspective in the excess of comprehension as such. This perspectival stickiness offers me the basis through which I read the child’s stickiness as something that complicates the representation of class in the film. My discussion of Marx’s children, which bridges the first and second half of this chapter, suggests that we can trace the stickiness of the child to Marx’s own analysis of child labour. The figure of the child in *Capital*, I argue, connotes that which exceeds and complicates the totality of Marx’s model of value from within the text itself. Returning to the film in the following section, my analysis shows the stickiness of the child at work, so to speak, exploring how Leo substantiates Marian and Ted’s desire as a kind of queer surface that resists being translated into meaning. And finally, my closing remarks on the death of the child represent an attempt to think through Leo’s queerness in terms of the perceived loss of his own childhood resulting from the events of his summer spent with the Maudsleys. I hope to show how the figure of the child works not unlike the grammar or apparatus explored in previous chapters, framing desire as something at odds with the articulation of meaning, but nonetheless fully realized in the film’s material patterns and traces.

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<sup>274</sup> Nat Hurley, “Childhood and Its Discontents: An Introduction,” *ESC: English Studies in Canada* 38, no. 3 (September 29, 2013), 18.

## **A Matter of Class**

The brief character sketches I have provided – a beautiful rich heiress, a handsome farmer, a bachelor lord, and the middle-class school boy whom they befriend to do their bidding – suggest the broad strokes of the class structure within which the romance plot of *The Go-Between* unfolds. Leo is cast as the bourgeois intermediary whose split class alliance makes him useful in the triangle between the tenant farmer, the landed aristocrat, and the finance capitalist.<sup>275</sup> In his analysis of the novel and film, Tom Brass reads Leo as the “dupe” at the centre of what is essentially an agrarian class struggle:

the socio-economic liminality of Leo – who embodies the ‘inbetween-ness’ of the urban petty bourgeoisie – is evident from his unknowing entanglement in an affair that transgresses class boundaries and his oscillating loyalty to those (and others) involved. He is literally caught in the middle of what is symbolically an agrarian struggle between the landed aristocrat (Trimingham) and his tenant farmer (Burgess), each of whom is paying court to finance capitalism (Marian). In this respect, it is he who is the dupe.<sup>276</sup>

For Brass, then, Leo illustrates the petty bourgeois’ role of doing the dirty work of the ruling class. Literally spreading himself across the class divide, he trusts a system which offers him

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<sup>275</sup> Nicos Poulantzas, whom I reference in greater detail below, provides the following definition of the petty bourgeoisie: “wage-earning employees who do not belong to the working class but are themselves exploited by capital, either because they sell their labour-power, or because of the dominant position of capital in the terms of exchange (services).” *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1978), 251.

<sup>276</sup> Tom Brass, *Class, Culture and the Agrarian Myth* (Leiden: Brill, 2014), 225.

only the illusion of participation. When Ted threatens to seriously disrupt the ruling alliance between aristocracy (Trimingham) and capital (Marian), Leo takes the fall. While appearing to be a member of the family, he has in fact been a buffer between them and the threat of the working class, represented here by Ted's potential to disrupt the symbolic and literal wedding of finance capital and the landed aristocracy.<sup>277</sup> From Ted's perspective (or that of the worker), Leo represents an 'in,' a link to the beautiful and prosperous, and everything that is different from his own menial life as a farmer. From Marian's perspective (or that of the bourgeois elite), Leo represents, not so much a kind of illusory access,<sup>278</sup> as the ability to get what one wants without having to get one's hands dirty. As we shall see, it is Leo who sheds the blood, sweat and tears in facilitating Marian and Ted's affair.

These remarks on Leo's class position expose the film to a particular kind of historical materialist reading. In such an analysis, Brandham Hall is read as a synecdoche of the broader society, with individual characters representing distinct positions in the capitalist hierarchy. A reading that associates specific characters with specific class positions is useful because it helps us to think about how structural relations of class operate at an intimate level. It can help us to see, not only how a particular child can be used in ways that reproduce material inequalities, but also how the ideas of childhood and child innocence, far from being simply neutral realities or ideological constructions, form and are formed by lived

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<sup>277</sup> From a classical Marxist perspective, the petty bourgeois absorbs the scorn directed at the ruling class from the proletariat. While at the same time, from positions of relative authority and in the guise of justice and fairness (as journalists or teachers for example), they reproduce the values of meritocracy and aspiration upon which capitalism is based.

<sup>278</sup> As I elaborate below, the petty bourgeoisie is understood by Marxist theory as casting its lot with the ruling class, which controls the means of production and appropriates the surplus value generated by the working class, in exchange for superficial forms of bourgeois privilege.

experience, everyday decisions, and intimate interactions. Therefore, the child and child innocence suggest points of sticky contact between the lived experience of desire and material realities of class.

As much as Brass's reading is useful in thinking about the class dynamics in the film, one of the things I am interested in doing in this chapter is exploring how the figure of the child complicates the surface and depth analogy, where surface is seen as the lived but ultimately naive experience of a deeper social system or structure that exists below what is easily perceptible. In *Ordinary Affects*, Kathleen Stewart offers an alternative to analytical approaches based on "the notion of a totalized system, of which everything is always already somehow a part."<sup>279</sup> Her research describes a shift from "models of thinking that slide over the live surface of difference at work in the ordinary to bottom-line argument about 'bigger' structures and underlying causes."<sup>280</sup> Building on Stewart's insights, my argument is that the figure of the child in *The Go-Between* complicates the understanding of class as a deeper truth. Rather than putting a Marxist class reading of the film in opposition to a psychoanalytic framework which foregrounds questions of language and desire, my analysis of the *The Go-Between* reads class as inseparable from the sticky and shifting relations of bodies, objects and signs that make up the lived experience of desire. My reading of desire thus involves thinking about class as itself a kind of slightness that resists its own interpretation as (to recall Stewart) a "totalized structure" of meaning.

Within the film, this resistance to reading class as totalizing structure can be linked to the way the letter in Leo's hand, far from revealing a deeper truth, seems to declare little

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<sup>279</sup> Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 1; 4.

<sup>280</sup> Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 1; 4.

more than the texture of its own ambiguity. In the repetition of the single word, “darling,” the weight of language shifts from semantic to textual. An address separate from the actual message or content of the letter, the echoed refrain takes on a granular, synchronic openness to the live surface of the present.<sup>281</sup> Rather than cutting into a deeper meaning, revealing to Leo an underlying truth to which he has been ignorant, the smears of blood on the page become ambient and blend heterogeneously with the intensity and texture of the boy’s soft suit against the rough tree bark, the soft grass underneath and the damp across the child’s face. The ambiguity of what the letter says (or doesn’t) is realized in the tracing and patterning formed between Leo’s body, substances like blood, tears and ink, and the boy’s material environment. And this reveals a broader understanding of class in the film. Rather than figuring class as a deep structure, it is shown as a complication of surface.

### **What Children (Don’t) Know**

In his much-discussed preface to *What Maisie Knew*, James reflects on the appeal of narrating the story of an adulterous tangle of adults through the “confused and obscure notation” of a child.<sup>282</sup> The child in question is Maisie, and her divorced parents use her to inflict their resentment on one another and as a scapegoat for their own sexual misdeeds. The central narrative strategy of the novel is the principle that the child sees more than she understands. “Small children have many more perceptions than they have terms to translate

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<sup>281</sup> Stewart, *Ordinary Affects*, 4.

<sup>282</sup> Henry James, *The Art of the Novel: Critical Prefaces* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2011), 144.



them,” James writes.<sup>283</sup> Tony Tanner has noted that “in a sense the book hinges on what Maisie does *not* know,” and in particular on what she does not know about sex.<sup>284</sup> However, it is not simply a case of the child being kept in the dark, so to speak. The complexity of James’s interest in the child rests on the near paradoxical way in which the “great gaps and voids” of the child’s understanding dovetails with the substance of the narrative.<sup>285</sup> “She has,” James says of Maisie, “the wonderful importance of shedding a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension.”<sup>286</sup> Rather than thinking about Maisie’s point of view as a discrete, singular subjectivity from which a story is told, we can think about the girl as a quality within the text that invites a particular kind of reading where that which is “far beyond any reach of ... comprehension” is a substantive quality of the text itself, or in other words, where unknowing is not the starting point for the discovery of greater or deeper truths, but rather a state already illuminated by the intensity and texture of shifting bodies, signs and objects.

James’s interest in the usefulness of the child’s wanting perspective is a preoccupation shared by Losey in the making of *The Go-Between*. It is “wanting” both in the sense that the child’s perspective is lacking in comparison to the adult’s and in the sense that this *wantingness* is itself qualitative or adjectival as I use the term in the introduction of this dissertation.<sup>287</sup> This much is made clear in a long letter written by Losey to Harold Pinter, the film’s screenwriter, in the lead-up to the film’s production. Losey highlights a number of

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<sup>283</sup> James, *Art of the Novel*, 145.

<sup>284</sup> Tony Tanner, *Henry James: The Writer and His Work* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1985), 89.

<sup>285</sup> James, *Art of the Novel*, 145.

<sup>286</sup> Henry James, “Preface,” in *What Maisie Knew* (New York: Penguin, 1966), 11.

<sup>287</sup> Adjectival in the same sense that I describe shabbiness in the introduction.

aspects of the novel which, he concludes, “Hartley had not mastered.”<sup>288</sup> Specifically, Losey describes Hartley’s dialogue in the novel, *The Go-Between*, as encumbering Leo with an unsuitably mature vocabulary. As a particular example, Losey asks Pinter, “do you see any kid in any circumstance being able to handle such a line as ‘not to that bally old strawstack?’”

<sup>289</sup> The filmmaker takes issue with the way the novelist uses the boy narrator as a vessel for the adult Leo’s (and vicariously his own),<sup>290</sup> which is to say adult, thoughts and feelings. “There is,” he writes, “a certain confusion in the book between the child’s direct thoughts and Hartley’s later memories and reflections.”<sup>291</sup> This confusion might be expected given that, in both the novel and the film, it is an older Leo who recounts the story through the filter of personal recollection. Yet for Losey, as for James, it is paramount that the perspective from which the narrative is told is consistent with the constrained verbal capacity of the child. Losey’s suggestion to Pinter is to “reduce to an absolute minimum” Hartley’s “padded” exposition.<sup>292</sup> Although there are multiple ways of reading an expression like “padded,” I take it here to reflect Losey’s view that Hartley burdens his child narrator with a

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<sup>288</sup> Joseph Losey to Harold Pinter, n.d., JWL/1/18/11, Item 18, Envelope 10, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>289</sup> Joseph Losey to Harold Pinter, n.d., JWL/1/18/11, Item 18, Envelope 10, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>290</sup> As I explore in the conclusion of this chapter, much of the criticism of Hartley’s novel highlights the autobiographical nature of the narrative. As a boy, Hartley stayed with the family of a schoolmate in a country house in Norfolk, just as Leo does. The connections go further than this, however. In his introduction to a 2002 reprint of the novel, Colm Toibin reads Leo’s traumatic experience as a boy as a bibliographical basis for Hartley’s queer disposition as a man who was “uncomfortable” (ix) and “studiously avoided intimacy” (x-ix). Colm Toibin, “Introduction,” in *The Go-Between* by L. P. Hartley (New York: NYRB Classics, 2002).

<sup>291</sup> Joseph Losey to Harold Pinter, n.d., JWL/1/18/11, Item 18, Envelope 10, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>292</sup> Joseph Losey to Harold Pinter, n.d., JWL/1/18/11, Item 18, Envelope 10, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

discourse beyond the child's own comprehension. Losey's criticism of Hartley does not simply turn on the need to represent children accurately. The issue is rather a matter of capturing, through the figure of the child, the encounter with the boundary of comprehension itself. In other words, it is precisely Leo's discursive, and thus perspectival, limitations that underscore a kind of "wonderful importance" in the film, or in Empson's terms limitations whose ambiguity "gives room."<sup>293</sup>

In the context of cinema, this "wonderful importance" takes a visual form. It is as if the discursive meaning that evades the boy's comprehension accumulates as semantic excess on screen. What Losey and James both express is the notion that children are not simply limited in their rhetorical capacity, but that they convey something of the very nature of subjectivity as an encounter with the threshold of understanding. In her study of the spectacle of children in cinema, Vicky Lebeau argues that the filmic medium in general has a long history of associating the child with the inexpressible. Since its very inception, she argues, cinema has used the figure of the child as a visual embodiment of the discursive boundary of language. "The small child," she writes, "tends to be discovered at the limit of what words can be called upon to tell, or to mean."<sup>294</sup> It is through this reliance on children as the pictorial representation of the threshold of discursive meaning that, as Lebeau writes, "cinema lays claim to the child."<sup>295</sup> In effect, Lebeau's argument is that cinema picks up where James left off. In cinema, that is to say, the limits of the child's discursive knowledge

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<sup>293</sup> Empson, *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, 1.

<sup>294</sup> Vicky Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema* (London: Reaktion Books, 2008), 16.

<sup>295</sup> Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema*, 7.

are transformed into the visual grammar of the child's body.<sup>296</sup> As Lebeau might suggest, through the silent articulation of the child's body, film (unlike literature, which relies one way or another on narrative voice) is able to capture the sense of what is beyond the child's capacity to know and to say. This makes film particularly well-suited for exploring what James calls "figures that are not yet at [the child's discursive] command."<sup>297</sup> Thus, a crucial feature of the analysis that follows has to do with the interplay of text and cinematic images, and in particular the way the imagery of Leo's corporal excess reveals the limits of thinking about class as a functionalist structure of society.

The limited perspective of the child as understood by James and Losey offers a frame for thinking through not only the relationships in *The Go-Between*, but also the limits of the discursive categories we have for understanding them. One alternative name we might give this "wonderful importance" is desire. Desire can be thought of as melding together the unknowable with the textural surface of experience. This is because, although fundamentally ambiguous, desire operates without the promise of ultimate truths. If we follow Lacan's theory on the subject, desire is always a matter of the gap between an articulation and the full truth of what that articulation seeks to call into being. And as Lebeau suggests, it is precisely this gap – "the limit of what words can be called upon to tell, or to mean"<sup>298</sup> – that the figure

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<sup>296</sup> In literature, by contrast, the representation of the child will always be filtered through language. As Sheila Teahan observes, the question of what Maisie knows in James' novel is complicated by the fact that her point of view is recounted in the third person: "for though the narrator claims merely to report what Maisie knows, he is deeply implicated in the construction of that knowledge" (127). Teahan notes her disagreement with critics who assume that it is possible to distinguish the narrator's language from Maisie's. Sheila Teahan, "What Maisie Knew and the Improper Third Person," *Studies in American Fiction* 21, no. 2 (Autumn 1993): 127.

<sup>297</sup> James, *Art of the Novel*, 146.

<sup>298</sup> Lebeau, *Childhood and Cinema*, 16.

of the child is called upon to embody in cinema. Much of Lacan's theory of desire is situated in a discussion of the infant child's accumulation of verbal language. Lacan observes the perceptual gap that exists between what the infant can demand and what the child wants. Even if the child's request for, let's say, a bottle is effective in pacifying them, it is invariably only a paltry substitute for something far more complex and holistic that the growing child demands: unity with the mother's breast or the state before such demands as "bottle" or "feed me" had to be made at all. What is demanded then is never what is needed, and for Lacan, it is precisely this gap that gives rise to desire, a gap which, rather than abating, only grows more intricately folded as one's linguistic faculties mature.<sup>299</sup> Marian's echoed address of "Darling, darling," for example, seems abundant in its own failure to capture the true sense of her longing and frustration. As the carrier of this desirous refrain, Leo embodies the space between Marian's feelings and what can be expressed of them.

James, Losey, and Lebeau discuss the child as a figure that is valued for something that it lacks. Simply put, the child's lack of comprehension or verbal capacity constitutes a positive, if ambiguous, quality in the text or film. There is something of paradox, then, in the way the child's deficit constitutes a kind of value, or even a "surplus childhood."<sup>300</sup> This value, as I have mentioned, is what Losey sees as being eroded when Harley gives Leo a vocabulary and style of speaking that is inappropriate to his age. Marx defines surplus value as the value added by the worker which is immediately absorbed into the process of capitalist

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<sup>299</sup> For Lacan's discussion of how desire grows out of the interlocation between mother and child as the latter acquires language see: Jacques Lacan, *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI: The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, ed. Jacques-Alain Miller, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York, 1998), 243.

<sup>300</sup> "Surplus childhood" being a term I glean from Hurley (17).

accumulation. In a sense, surplus value is a kind of meaning that the worker produces but which is never theirs to give because as soon as it is produced it is absorbed into a system from which the worker is alienated. “Capital is dead labor,” Marx writes, “which, vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labor, and lives the more, the more labor it sucks.”

<sup>301</sup> Playing with this concept, it is worth considering a different kind of surplus value, one that would exist alongside economic surplus value, but which also complicates the very idea of what is valuable (or meaningful) as such, and thus which remains outside capital’s deadening grip. We can think about surplus value, not as a supplement, but as an excess. This would be to name a kind of energy or substance that exceeds what can be extracted into a system of value because it is not recognized by that system as value. To return to my discussion of James Losey and Lebeau, we see how the child’s unknowing or innocence can itself be read in these terms as a kind of surplus value. The child makes perceptible something that remains wedded to their own lack of comprehension, in effect bracketing something in surplus of meaning as such.

### **Excess Class**

The labour Leo performs within the film is inseparable from the work he performs as the limited perspective from which the story is told. The boy’s mediation of Marian and Ted’s desire intersects and mirrors the way he mediates the viewer’s relationship to the film. This *mise en abyme* of diegetic and nondiegetic relationships (between characters in the film and between the filmmaker and viewer) draws to the fore the link between the representation

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<sup>301</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume I*, ed. Friedrich Engels, trans. Ben Fowkes, (London: Penguin, 2011), 342. Hereafter cited parenthetically.

of Marian and Ted's desire and the broader question of representation as such. Desire, in other words, begins to look, not like something that exists "out there in the world" waiting to be told, but as constituted by the fraught and granular relationship of signs. With respect to Marina and Ted's forbidden desire, Leo is less of an intermediary than a frame. He doesn't so much crisscross a forbidden class boundary, as shed light on the experience of class as a part of the live surface of experience.

Taking a step back, it is worth recalling the distinctly spatial way in which Leo operates as messenger. With his ability to move from one end of the Maudsley estate to the other without generating suspicion, Leo transits between the strict boundary between Marian and Ted's class positions. As a schoolmate of their youngest son, Marcus, Leo shares enough social standing with the Maudsleys to be deemed an appropriate house guest, yet his outsider status as the child of a bank clerk is repeatedly foregrounded in the film. In one telling scene, Leo is scolded by Marcus for folding his clothes after undressing. He is told to leave them wherever they happen to fall and that the servants will pick them up: "That's what they're there for," Marcus schools Leo. But Leo's class position also affords him a kind of fluidity in the house. Early on in the film we see Leo downstairs in the service area of the house, sitting on a kitchen table and licking the spoon of some baking under the pleased watch of a pair of kitchen maids. The suggestion here is that Leo's dexterity, mobility across the class (and gender) boundaries that otherwise strictly organize life at Brandham, makes him uniquely valuable, perhaps especially for the young Marian whose every move seems to be subject to

her mother's watchful eye.<sup>302</sup> It is in this context that Ted and Marian enlist Leo to do their cross-class bidding.

Leo's mobility within Brandham Hall reflects the ambiguous positionality of his class position in society more broadly. A vast literature exists on the complex political and ideological role of the petty bourgeoisie in industrial societies. One of the key figures in this field is Nicos Poulantzas.<sup>303</sup> Holding on to an essentially binary class-struggle model, Poulantzas notes the central ambiguity of the petty bourgeoisie. Although he describes at length its distinctive economic, political and ideological characteristics, he nonetheless insists that the petty bourgeoisie is not in itself a separate class, but a group between classes. In economic terms they are, as Al Szymanski writes, "essentially controlled (and indirectly exploited) by the logic of capital and thus subordinate to the capitalists" and an extension of

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<sup>302</sup> The eighteenth-century manor house is one of the most powerful symbols of strict class structure available. For Victoria Rosner it is the elite environs of the Victorian country houses that offers the most pronounced iteration of the way the division of rooms "reflected a carefully conceived vision of social order." *Modernism and the Architecture of Private Life* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005), 61.

<sup>303</sup> This literature points to the fact that the wealthy bourgeois class represents an infinitesimal minority in terms of population. To maintain economic power, they must maintain a mutual relationship with the petty bourgeoisie and, through its mediation, with the proletariat. In different ways, the petty bourgeoisie and the bourgeoisie rely on one another, but the nature of their relationship is hierarchical with the petty bourgeoisie using their ideological authority to entrench the logics of capital against their true economic interests. For more on the petty bourgeoisie as a middling class between capital and labour see, among others, Erik Olin Wright, "Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies," in *Class: Critical Concepts*, ed. John Scott (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), 344–87, 363; John Scott, *Class Boundaries in Advanced Capitalist Societies* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1996), xxix; Leon Trotsky, *Fascism: What It Is and How to Fight It* (Aakar Books, 2005), 32; 54; Alan Hunt, ed., *Class and Class Structure*, (London: Lawrence & Wishart, 1977); and Frank Bechhofer and Brian Elliott, *Petite Bourgeoisie: Comparative Studies of the Uneasy Stratum* (London: Palgrave, 1981).



the working class.<sup>304</sup> However, in ideological terms, they not only take up qualities of the bourgeoisie, they often do their dirty work by justifying exploitation in liberal terms of meritocracy, individualism, reform, upward mobility and so on. Thus, rather than processing “actual” (material) power, the petty bourgeoisie has what Poulantzas calls “authority.”<sup>305</sup> That is to say, with the bourgeoisie’s tacit approval, they speak in the language of neutered radicalism. Their “anti-capitalist” political and ideological demands in effect neutralize the true class conflict between the workers and the capitalists, thus further entrenching capitalism as the basis of social structure. For example, although the petty bourgeoisie are themselves exploited by capital, they see subjugation as a technical deviation from a norm, rather than the very basis of the capitalist system. In other words, the petty bourgeoisie participates in the subordination of the working class (to which they themselves belong). Their “demands,” Poulantzas writes, “do not comprehend the actual nature of political power.”<sup>306</sup> Thus, the petty bourgeoisie is in a sense not unlike the child, confused and lacking full comprehension of the situation. Without a proper place in the capitalist struggle, they are not only infantilized but queered.<sup>307</sup> Difficult to pin down, agnostic, passive, feminized, the

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<sup>304</sup> Al Szymanski, “A Critique and Extension of the Professional-Managerial Class,” in *Between Labor and Capital*, ed. Pat Walker (Boston: South End Press, 1999), 54. Similarly, Poulantzas writes, “the petty bourgeoisie is not a bourgeoisie smaller than the others; it is not part of the bourgeoisie at all, since it does not exploit, or at least is not chiefly involved in exploiting, wage labour” (*Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, 151).

<sup>305</sup> Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, 290.

<sup>306</sup> Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, 292.

<sup>307</sup> John D’Emilio’s “Capitalism and Gay Identity” is useful here to demonstrate that gay identity is to some extent a function of industrialization, urbanization, and the production of leisure time since the 19th Century. “Capitalism and Gay Identity,” In *Powers of Desire: The Politics of Sexuality*, edited by Ann Snitow, Christine Stansell, and Sharon Thompson (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1983), 100–113. Similarly, Kevin Floyd has linked sexuality, queer theory, and Marxism in his theory of “the reification of desire.” Kevin Floyd, *The Reification of Desire*, (Minneapolis: University Of Minnesota Press, 2009).

petty bourgeoisie represent a difference that is not easily reconciled to the model of a binary struggle between the working and ruling classes. Of course, this is not to say that middle-class people are particularly queer (or vice versa). However, what queerness and the petty bourgeoisie share is that they do not easily fit into the binary categorizations on which heteronormativity and Marxist analysis respectively are predicated.

In *The Go-Between*, the queer ambivalence of the petty bourgeoisie and child's inbetweenness are folded into the figure of Leo. Early on in the film, we learn that Leo lives with his widowed mother in "rather a small house." Leo's father had been a bank clerk, a pacifist, and a book collector. This specific set of details borders on a caricature of petty bourgeois life, if one that is also a little queer. As a bank clerk, Leo's father operated within the sphere of power without ever actually possessing that power, which remains firmly in the hands of the bankers (as represented by the Maudsleys). But while Leo's father does not have access to the means of production, his cultural and political "authority," as Poulantzas puts it,<sup>308</sup> is symbolized by the handful of details we are told about him. Leo's father's book collection symbolizes his possession of "cultural capital" which must suffice to fill the void that separates him from "true" power.<sup>309</sup> But rather than taking up a revolutionary stance of resistance to that fundamental alienation from power, Leo's father aestheticizes and monetizes knowledge in the form of what is described as a valuable book collection. This is the petty bourgeois's "confused and obscure" notation of the world (to recall James once

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<sup>308</sup> Poulantzas, *Classes in Contemporary Capitalism*, 290.

<sup>309</sup> Recalling my discussion of *Howards End* in Chapter One, it is precisely this cultural capital that the character of Leonard Bast – who lives at the extreme lower end of petty bourgeois society – seeks for himself through his ardent interest in music and literature.

again).<sup>310</sup> Thus in terms of perspective there is a symmetry between the political ambivalence of the petty bourgeoisie and child's sexual ambiguity.

As much as this ambiguity pertains to Leo, it also reflects upon the broader material context of the film and novel's pastoral setting. As in Raymond Williams's *The Country and the City*, Brass's analysis aims to demystify the idea of rural life as simple, natural and unadulterated.<sup>311</sup> In particular, Brass's reading of *The Go-Between* seeks to expose the class conflict, expropriation, and exploitation hidden behind idealized representations of the 'timeless' English countryside. Brass details not only the depictions of class within the narrative but also the historical context in which the novel was written and published (1953), casting Hartley's image of country life as a privileged and conservative author's reaction against the progressive reforms of the postwar period when it was written. "The political backdrop to [*T*]he *Go-Between*," writes Brass, "is the post-war grassroots political radicalization that followed the 1930s economic depression and culminated in the Labour electoral landslide of 1945."<sup>312</sup> For Brass, Hartley's novel is above all a representation of opposition to an elected Labour government that was threatening to invade the territory of the rich in the interest of the working class. I do not necessarily contest Brass's argument. Certainly, there is evidence of Hartley's reactionary conservatism in his own reflections on

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<sup>310</sup> We might even venture to read Leo's father's pacifism as a metaphor for an abnegation of class struggle in favour of a passive kind of political intellectualism – although we must also accept that pacifism is also a class critique, insofar as war serves the interests of the industrialism and nationalism.

<sup>311</sup> In this classic text, Williams explores the representation of the English pastoral in terms of what he calls a specific "structure of feeling" that masks the intertwined and dehumanizing relations of imperial, agrarian, and industrial capitalism. See Raymond Williams, *The Country and the City* (London: Oxford University Press, 1973), 35.

<sup>312</sup> Brass, *Class, Culture and the Agrarian Myth*, 236.

the novel. By Hartley's own account, the narrative was an attempt to mourn the loss of a more perfect and more innocent time: "I wanted to evoke the feeling of that summer, the long stretch of fine weather, and also the confidence in life, the belief that all's well with the world, which everyone enjoyed or seemed to enjoy before the First World War ... and so I was able to set my little private tragedy against a general background of security and happiness."<sup>313</sup> The way that Hartley generalizes the "fine weather" of his privileged youth as a universal historical fact is vexing, as is his perception of the Great War as a kind of rupture of innocence rather than the product of ongoing structures of domination and violence. In his critical writings, Hartley again and again refers to the period before the Great War as a Golden Age marred by an unthinkable "abyss."<sup>314</sup> In his introduction to a 2002 edition of the novel, Colm Toibin writes, "It was vital for Hartley to believe, as his world crumbled, that he had known such an England and could evoke it quickly, simply, effortlessly. Thus the relationship of weather to landscape, of servant to master, of village to big house, of England to Empire is perfectly in place."<sup>315</sup> It wouldn't be a stretch, therefore, to include *The Go-Between* among the examples Williams gives of "a myth functioning as memory,"<sup>316</sup> where "the structure of feeling" of the 'timeless' English countryside neuters the stark and violent realities of imperial, industrial and agrarian capitalism.

Notwithstanding the complex understanding Brass presents of the interrelatedness of class positions, his analysis presupposes a social system where individuals act as subjects

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<sup>313</sup> Toibin, "Introduction," x.

<sup>314</sup> Quoted in Ali Smith, "Rereading: *The Go-Between* by LP Hartley," *The Guardian*, June 11 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jun/17/lp-hartley-go-between-ali-smith>.

<sup>315</sup> Quoted in Ali Smith, "Rereading: *The Go-Between* by LP Hartley," *The Guardian*, June 11 2017, <https://www.theguardian.com/books/2011/jun/17/lp-hartley-go-between-ali-smith>.

<sup>316</sup> Williams, *The Country and the City*, 43.

grounded in discrete class positions. This emphasis on the way adults in the film exploit Leo based on class interests does not account for how, simultaneously, desire works to erode the comprehension of society as a structure of oppositional identities. As I shall demonstrate, it is Leo himself who inserts doubt into the perception of society as a set of discrete positionalities interacting according to the rules of an objectively perceived system. As Leo mucks the surfaces of the things he touches, he contaminates the purity of any discrete subject position. This process of material contamination speaks to the idea of a child's limited narrative perspective in that his "tracing" of the world is more smear than semantics. In this sense, the child's deficit marks a site of resistance to the legibility of subsumption in capitalist social relations.

I have mentioned the ways that Leo's subordinate class position is repeatedly drawn into focus in the film. But perhaps it would be more accurate to say that what is made apparent to viewers are the ways in which Leo's class difference constantly hovers at the edges of his perception. On his way into dinner on the day of his arrival, Leo overhears Mrs. Maudsley describing his family situation to her other guests. The fact that Leo overhears this underscores the desire on the part of Losey to show the difference between adult and child perception. The child always sees and hears more than we can assume they understand. Leo is firmly situated within a particular class, but as the embodiment of the film's representational strategy, he also complicates the idea of class as something that can be observed from an omnipresent position as a coherently operating system.

Rather than thinking about class as a set of positions that determine the social relations in the film, where desire becomes simply expressive of class interest, my own

reading views class as the contested substance that arises out of what expressions of desire leave behind. It is the view of the child – the confused and obscure perspective from which the narrative is told – that troubles the possibility of conflating class and desire in the novel and film. The figure of Leo does not simply represent a particular class position that mediates the interests of others; what Leo manifests is an understanding of desire as inseparable from the shifting ambiguity or stickiness of class's signifiers. Desire arises through the figure of the child from out of the gap that exists between our experience of the social and the discursive means and categories (such as class) that we have for understanding it. And it is precisely from the representative solidity of class in the film, that something seems to seep, like beads of sweat, from the surface of the circuits of social life at Brandham Hall. If the estate, with its neatly parceled-out sections of land (the formal garden, the lawns, the farm) and the house with its strictly regulated interior spaces is the emblem of social organization in terms of class, gender and kinship – behind which hides the imperial divisions of race – then Leo, who is forever literally surpassing its containment, materializes something of the stickiness of class. And for that matter Leo, as a container of class, is himself perpetually exceeding himself, literally perspiring through the garbs of class identity. Before turning to explore in more detail why a the predominant class readings of the film is insufficient, I first turn to a concrete example of Leo's perspiration.

### **Hot Tea**

The first example of Leo's stickiness to which I want to turn is one that makes a particularly literal example out of the idea of the child's excessiveness. Here I examine Leo's

sweat as manifesting a kind of residue of class's totalizing logic. Leo has arrived at Brandham Hall with a single industrious wool suit. As the summer temperatures mount to a boil, the suitability of Leo's attire becomes a talking point. During afternoon tea, Leo is teased by Marcus's older brother for looking like he needs to be cooled down with "a pair of bellows." Flushed and sweating, Leo's reply is "I might look hot, but I'm really quite cool underneath." "Did you leave your summer clothes at home?" Mrs Maudsley then asks. On the one hand, such a question seems cruel, for it is unlikely she would not know the truth of the matter – that Leo has only one suit. But on the other hand, it allows Leo to think that everyone around him believes him when he explains that his mother must have forgotten to pack the rest, a 'rest' he knows he doesn't have. Leo's sweat, then, exposes the material circumstances of his class position at Brandham Hall, but it also bespeaks a kind of layering of experience, whereby Leo insists that there is an "underneath," which is to say multiple meanings, to any one surface. In other words, in looking at an everyday moment of aristocratic life – a seemingly unremarkable conversation during a luncheon on the lawn of stately home – it is not so simple to say that it is something in which a "deeper" class structure can be discerned. This is because as an intimate, ordinary exchange, the scene is itself contestable, layered and fluid. The idea that this scene can be read as a live surface of class relations, rather than simply a local or intimate realization of something structured, encourages us to read individual actions, not simply as the result of class realities, but also as a basis for them. Case in point, we soon learn that Marian's act of generosity in taking Leo into town to buy him a new suit has the ulterior motivation of arranging a rendezvous with Ted. However, the class relations are not simply a matter of Marian using (capitalizing upon)

Leo and giving him a suit (something like a wage) in return; they also involve innumerable relations that do not rise to the level of exchange as such, including, for example, Leo's relation with himself as something hot on the surface but cool underneath.

If class exists on multiple layers, its bounded layers (sweat on a boy's body) also allow for its transgression. The exchange at tea about Leo's suit provides Marian with an alibi for her to orchestrate a trip into town where, we later learn, she knows she will find Ted. She proclaims that she and Leo will go into Norwich to buy him a suitable summer suit. The fact that Leo, as he interjects, "ha[s] no money," is of no consequence since the new suit is to be, Marian declares, a gift from the Maudsleys in honour of the boy's upcoming thirteenth birthday. As a gift with ulterior motives, the suit can be read as a symbol of the nature of the relationship between the petty bourgeoisie and the capitalist class. The petty bourgeoisie gets to look and act like the bourgeoisie so long as the former does the latter's dirty work for them, namely serving as an advantageous interface with the working class (Marian's rendezvous with Ted). Such a reading reveals the sometimes-hidden operations of the class. However, things become even more complicated when we take into consideration the ways the suit reflects not only material class relations, but the immaterial quality of Leo's boyishness as well.

Upon Marian and Leo's return from their excursion into town, the latter is enjoined to give a little display of his new attire for the whole family and their house party. Dressed in this new suit and perched on a small footstool in the drawing room, Leo receives a volley of praise from the entire family and their guests. His position in the middle of the room, with the Maudsleys circled around him attentively, visualizes the child's centrality as the narrator



of the film. It also suggests the bourgeoisie's willingness to include the petty bourgeoisie in their way of life, if only superficially. The same boy who had teased him in the earlier scene is especially attentive and complimentary. "What green is this?" he asks, drawing his family and the viewers' attention to the particularities of Leo's clothes, the rich colour of the jacket and short pants, the thin ribbon bow tie, and its almost fragile neatness. The suit both corrects and redoubles Leo's out-of-place-ness. The green accentuates his doll-like innocence, bringing Leo "back" to a more perfect vision of childhood. But in doing so it contrasts not only with the industrious brown tweed he had arrived in, but with the muted palette of ivory and khaki summer dresses and suits worn by the rest of the women and men. Just as the boy's perspiration and flush in the summer heat constitute a kind of sheen that both exceeds and exposes Leo, so too does the suit seem to express the conceptual fragility of class difference, for what is colour but degrees of scattered light? What green is this? The green of money, greed and envy? Or of nature, innocence and inexperience? What the suit seems to symbolize is the deviancy of the sign itself. By extension, Leo's body literally wears that deviancy.

These multiple meanings tied to Leo's suit allow for the labour of the suit to work in different contexts. It figures prominently in the way Ted first perceives the boy. It is a large haystack that first draws Leo onto Ted's farm. Leo climbs to the top, slides down and grazes his knee on an axe wedged into a chopping stump. Ted is furious to find the boy fooling around on the property. However, Leo's trim suit cues Ted into his relationship with the manor house. Ted's demeanor is suddenly attentive and caring. Just as the surface sheen of Leo's overheated body exposed him to the Maudsleys' ridicule, the patina of wealth

generated by Leo's new suit conveys to Ted a truth about the boy that isn't quite his. Ted's sudden kindness towards the boy is not a matter of simple deference, but derives, rather, from a sudden realization of the boy's potential utility as a mole at Brandham Hall. Ted uses the petty bourgeoisie's "in" with the ruling class to disrupt the terms by which he is able to interact with them.

The blood from Leo's grazed knee is another example of bodily excessiveness that serves to complicate the easy conflation of desire and class interest. After Leo cuts his knee, Ted brings Leo into the kitchen of the farmhouse where he dresses the boy's wound in a white handkerchief. In the following scene, Marian is seen cleaning and wrapping Leo's knee in fresh gauze. "Is this *his*?" she asks expectantly, examining the bright red splotches on the stark white linen and kneading it softly like a piece of paper that won't crush. "Shall I throw it on the rubbish heap?" asks Leo. "Oh, I don't know. It seems to be rather a good handkerchief," she replies pensively. As the use value of the handkerchief is lost – ruined by the stain of Leo's blood – it takes on different kind of value, a negative kind of value similar to the deficiency that Losey sees in the child because his perceptions offer something in excess of comprehension as such. Leo's sticky blood comes to stand as for the confused and obscure notation of the child, and its capacity to make room for a "wonderful importance." Marian salvages the ruined handkerchief, and literally holds onto it, not for anything that it says or explained, but for its feel and texture.

It is not until Marian begins washing the handkerchief that Leo produces the letter he has brought with him from Ted. As a supplement, then, the ruined handkerchief conveys something about the letter, something that is in excess of the letter. In its senselessness, it

resists any interpretation of the kind Brass proposes that focuses squarely on relations of power. Marking the literal excess of the child – the spilled blood which is also a kind of meaningless scrawl – the handkerchief is a paradoxical symbol of perspective initiated at the point at which legible social structure fragments. It is not that the adult characters in the film are not materially grounded in specific class and other material and embodied realities.

However, as I discuss in the following section, their desire comes from the very limit of what those realities can subsume into sense. It is not that desire “transcends” the social boundaries of class in the film; the conclusion of the film makes this much clear. Rather, desire manifests as something sticky on the surface of the material boundaries of class, sometimes as the sniffing muck of a crying or sweating child, sometimes as a bloody handkerchief, sometimes simply as the ambiguous inflection of a phrase like “darling, darling.”

### **Marx’s Children**

Feminist critics of Marxism have argued that its conventional frameworks are insufficient as a lens for thinking through structures of subjugation and power because they totalize and reduce subjectivity to the singular axis of class. Monique Wittig, for example, argues that “Marxism does not take into account the fact that a class also consists of individuals one by one. Class consciousness is not enough,” she writes.<sup>317</sup> Marx is sometimes

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<sup>317</sup> Monique Wittig, “One Is Not Born a Woman,” in *The Straight Mind and Other Essays* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1992), 18. A great deal of feminist criticism has pointed out the limitations of Marx’s “heroic” discourse with respect to its inability to conceive of the world as anything other than a contract between competing groups of men, albeit one that is sometimes negotiated in the name of women and their children. Haraway summarizes this critique when she writes, “Humanistic Marxism was polluted at the source by its closely related impotence in relation to historicizing anything woman did that didn’t qualify for a wage.” “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of

seen as exemplifying a kind of “totalitarian” modernity, subsuming all relations into a single paradigm of class.<sup>318</sup> In her critique of historicist approaches, Joan Copjec makes a similar point, warning against perspectives that fail to account for their own irreducible other.

Although Copjec’s critique is not aimed at Marxists in particular, her comments support the critique made by feminists such as Wittig and Heidi Hartmann.<sup>319</sup> Joan Copjec defines historicism as “the reduction of society to its indwelling network of relations of power and knowledge” which forecloses any condition of subjectivity in excess of material conditions.

<sup>320</sup> We can elaborate upon this by saying that one of the things that a Marxist framework of class does not adequately account for in reading all experience through what Marx calls the “silent [elsewhere translated as “dull”] compulsion of economic relations” (899) is the role desire plays in challenging oppositionally defined categories of experience.

Although Marxist analysis can end by flattening the subjectivity of experience, I would argue, however, that within Marx’s own writing there exists a body that complicates

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Partial Perspective,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (London: Routledge, 2010), 413.

<sup>318</sup> In his treatise on the postmodern condition of knowledge, Lyotard famously singles out Marx as exemplifying the kind of “totalitarian” thought that the postmodern era was putting into obscurity. It used to be, writes Lyotard, that “the Hero of knowledge” had only to show the senselessness of the world we’re caught up in for “salvation to rise from these inconsistencies.” *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984), 13, xxiv.

<sup>319</sup> See also Heidi Hartmann’s well-known critique of Marxist theory. Hartman argues that, in even the most sincere attempts to reconcile feminism and Marxism, sex tends to be “absorb[ed] . . . into class struggle.” As a consequence, the ways that patriarchy operates as the basis of capitalism’s historical and ideological formation (rather than simply one of its outcomes) are all but ignored. “The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Towards a More Progressive Union,” in *Feminist Theory Reader: Local and Global Perspectives*, ed. Carole McCann and Seung-kyung Kim (London: Routledge, 2010), 187.

<sup>320</sup> Joan Copjec, *Read My Desire: Lacan Against the Historicists* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1996), 6.

and challenges the totalizing effect of the class consciousness framework. This body is the body of the child. “At once erotic and agnostic,” the child is a sticky figure in Marx’s account of capital. It is the most vulnerable of capital’s victims. But precisely for this reason – because it doesn’t seem to put up a fight – the child is also a difficult personage for Marx to place within his logic of capitalist exploitation. The child is both a cipher through which the totalizing structure of capitalism is described, and a body that gestures towards something beyond that totality, coating the cogs of Marx’s critique of capital with a kind of queer residue, neither a part, nor exactly outside, of the analytic frame of capital. Take for example the quoted testimony of George Allinsworth, cellar-boy, aged 9, who explains:

next morning we had to begin at 3am, so I stopped here all night. Live five miles off. Slept on the floor of the furnace, over head, with an apron under me, and a bit of a jacket over me. The two other days I have been here at 6 a.m. Aye! it is hot in here. Before I came here I was nearly a year at the same work in the country. Began there, too, at 3 on Saturday morning – always did, but was very [near] home, and could sleep at home. (369-370)

What interests me about this passage is the equivocal energy of the child, which is both docile and effusive. On the one hand, he is completely incorporated into the process of producing surplus value, so much so that he doesn’t even return home to rest. On the other hand, it is precisely the child’s (erotically charged?) vulnerability to the capitalist that seems to constitute something – a kind of value – that resists the seamless incorporation of labour into the production of surplus value that characterizes the Marxist model. In other words, the

last thing that resists being subsumed into capitalism's all-consuming authority is the child's inability to match that authority with anything like a resistant subjectivity.

In the following excerpt, Marx speaks of the implementation of mid-nineteenth-century laws in England designed to curb child labour. He emphasizes the ease with which the manufacturers manipulated the letter of the laws to their advantage, claiming the child as theirs:

[the laws] did not, however, prevent [the manufacturers], during 10 years, from spinning silk 10 hours a day out of the blood of little children who had to be placed upon stools for the performance of their work. The Act of 1844 certainly 'robbed' them of the 'liberty' of employing children under 11 longer than 6 ½ hours a day. But it secured to them, on the other hand, the privilege of working children between 11 and 13, 10 hours a day, and of annulling in their case the education made compulsory for all other factory children. This time the pretext was 'the delicate texture of the fabric in which they were employed, requiring a lightness of touch, only to be acquired by their early introduction to these factories.' The children were slaughtered out-and-out for their delicate fingers, as in Southern Russia the horned cattle for the sake of their hide and tallow. (148)

On the one hand, the figure of the child exemplifies Marx's critique of the ever-expanding reach of surplus value and labour which generates profit for capitalists out of waged labour. The capitalists' need for surplus labour, in other words, robs the child of a home life and thus of his childhood altogether.<sup>321</sup> At the same time, however, the child symbolizes a value that

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<sup>321</sup> Surplus labour is to the worker what surplus value is to the commodity. Just as capitalism stretches the value of goods into what we know as surplus value, so too does it stretch the

resists being consumed or sublimated, precisely because it embodies the limits of what these systems comprehend as value. Marx's use of the child, whether consciously or not, figures something sticky, which is to say something that persists stubbornly on the surface of the factory process. The child suggests a physical residue generated by but not integrated within the process of capitalist accumulation, something beyond the grip of capitalism's hunger. As the capitalist "robs," "annuls," and "slaughters" the child, the latter becomes even more childlike in their "delicacy" and "lightness." In other words, as the industrialist robs the child of their childhood, they also help to create the meaning of childhood. Like a museum specimen on a plinth, the factory child in Marx's quoted account is "placed upon stools" (148). This image is reminiscent of Leo propped on a foot stool at Bradenham Hall. The two settings in which this trope recurs could not be more different, but what this slight (dis)placement of child hints at is the tendency of children to appear to be, as Hurley writes, "at once of, in, and beyond the worlds they inhabit."<sup>322</sup> In the factory, the child's elevation allows them to perform their task, but it also highlights the diminutiveness of their bodies, their childishness. The factory floor highlights the continuation of the cleavage Ariès

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value of the worker in a process called surplus labour. Marx argues that the hours and minutes the worker gives to factory production are not 'solid' units that can be traded objectively as if on the "free" market. Although the worker is compensated for his labour, in actual fact, this labour is constantly being stretched in all directions: "During the 15 hours of the factory day, capital dragged in the labourer now for 30 minutes, now for an hour, and then pushed him out again, to drag him into the factory and to thrust him out afresh, hounding him hither, in scattered shreds of time, without ever losing hold of him until the full 10 hours' work was done. As on the stage, the same persons had to appear in turns in the different scenes of the different acts. But as an actor during the whole course of the play belongs to the stage, so the operatives, during 15 hours, belong to the factory, without reckoning the time for going and coming. Thus the hours of rest were turned into hours of enforced idleness, which drove the youths to the pot-house, and the girls to the brothel" (147).

<sup>322</sup> Hurley, "Childhood and Its Discontents: An Introduction," 3.

describes, that childhood becomes understood as a separate domain set apart from the everyday experience of adult society. As Sharon Stephens notes, “though the luxury of childhood was initially available only to the upper classes, notions and practices characterizing this new domain came to be propagated ... throughout society.”<sup>323</sup> It is possible then to think about the framing of child labour as a horror to be prohibited, in which Marx’s political economy played a part, as a means through which the culturally constructed domain of childhood was extended to the working classes.

There is, then, a kind of back and forth between the social theory of capitalism and the cultural construction of childhood. In *Children’s Literature and Capitalism*, Christopher Parkes makes a related argument about shifting perceptions of childhood in relation to capitalism. Parkes makes a distinction between an initial and later phase of industrialization in Britain. During the industrialization of eighteenth century, Parkes writes:

the child emerges as both a victim of and a threat to capitalism. The exploitation of children in the nation’s dark satanic mills revealed the unsentimental nature of the economic capitalist society as that which can only destroy the innocent child. By contrast, a new rhetorical strategy emerges in the nineteenth century, which equated the spirit of capitalism with the spirit of childhood. Children were re-configured as subjects defined by their innate ingenuity and invention and, in the process, they were transformed into ideal participants in capitalist society.<sup>324</sup>

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<sup>323</sup> Sharon Stephens, “Introduction,” in *Children and the Politics of Culture*, ed. Sharon Stephens (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1995), 5.

<sup>324</sup> Christopher Parkes, *Children’s Literature and Capitalism: Fictions of Social Mobility in Britain, 1850-1914* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), 1.



Parkes's thesis is valuable in demonstrating the imbrication of the cultural production of childhood and the political economy of capitalism. However, Marx's account of child labour demonstrates a "spirit of childhood" at odds with the capitalist energy that Parkes describes. The child's spirit, as it were, is a kind of *lack* of spirit, a quality of being used up, exhausted, and deprived. This depletion itself forms a "value" that can't be calculated within a seamless equation of surplus value. This lethargy itself substantiates the child, just as his lack of comprehension substantiates a unique kind of narrative perspective for Losey. Both Marx's factory child and Losey's child narrator are overdetermined from without in a way that does not become fully subjectively embodied and symbolized.

The figure of the child further complicates Marx's science of the totalizing logic of capital by seeming always to trace or trail something of home life with him in spite of, or precisely because of, the all-consuming force of the factory floor. In George Allinsworth's testimony, home is evoked as the place from which the child is kept on account of its distance from his work. In other, similar testimony, home is again evoked implicitly as a place beyond the factory to which which children are prevented from returning:

J. Murray, 12 years of age, says: 'I turn jigger and run moulds. I come at 6.

Sometimes I come at 4. I worked all night last night, till 6 o'clock this morning. I have not been in bed since the night before last.'

Fernyhough, a boy of 10: "I have not always an hour (for dinner). I have only half an hour sometimes: on Thursday, Friday,'and Saturday.'" (354)

Marx seems furtive in the way he presents the child. Variably draped in a jacket or propped on a stool, the child's body is simultaneously displayed and concealed by their physical

placement in the factory. Marx describes the child as perpetually “coming and going to and from work” (374), as if caught, not only between the depleting space of the factory and the regenerating space of the home, but also coming in and out of the consciousness of how Marx’s theory “lays claim”<sup>325</sup> to the child.

In response to the ways that Marxist economists (including Marx himself) tend to ignore unwaged labour, including the various forms of domestic labour performed by women and children,<sup>326</sup> Marxist feminists have expanded his concepts into the realm of home and other sites of care and social reproduction to demonstrate the central role these forms of labour play in the process of capitalist accumulation.<sup>327</sup> While it is necessary to consider how activities not typically recognized as labour nonetheless contribute to the social reproduction of capitalism, my argument suggests a different track in thinking about the home vis-a-vis the elliptical figure of the child in *Capital*. Rather than bringing Marxist analysis into the home, as it were, I am interested in how the home haunts the space of the factory. The more the work day expands, the more home agitates the totalizing logic of Marxist analysis. As the child is kept from home or school – his proper place – he also brings something of that

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<sup>325</sup> Recalling Lebeau’s description of how cinema lays claim to the child (7).

<sup>326</sup> Federici, for example, argues “that Marx’s analysis of capitalism has been hampered by his inability to conceive of value-producing work other than in the form of commodity production.” She draws to the fore Marx’s “consequent blindness to the significance of women’s unpaid reproductive work in the process of capitalist accumulation.” She continues, “ignoring this work has limited Marx’s understanding of the true extent of the capitalist exploitation of labor and the function of the wage in the creation of divisions within the working class, starting with the relation between women and men.” *Revolution at Point Zero: Housework, Reproduction, and the Feminist Struggle* (New York: PM Press, 2012), 92. See also Margaret Benston, “The Political Economy of Women’s Liberation” 21, no. 4 (September 1969): 13–27.

<sup>327</sup> See for example: Lise Vogel, *Woman Questions: Essays for a Materialist Feminism* (New York: Routledge, 1995); and Ellen Malos, ed., *The Politics of Housework* (New York: The New Clarion Press, 1975).

prohibited space and thus the other itself with him, contaminating the purity of the factory's capitalist as well as the ontological operation of valuation. With “vampire-like” (342) hunger, the capitalist robs the child of “the restoration, renewal and refreshment of the vital forces” found at home (375). The child's persona is infused with the meaning of home. Through the figure of the child – in true dialectical style – the home haunts the factory scene. There is something, a kind of remnant that evades the extractive, accumulative ability of capital. This remnant, literally accumulating on the surface of the factory floor – an apron under him and a jacket as a blanket – takes the homely shape of a resting child.

If the factory children described in these excerpts from Marx are in a sense depicted as robbed of their childhood, we must also consider the ways their inculcation in industrial exploitation produced the very image of childhood as we know it. Vulnerable and perpetually imperilled, but in ways that evoke tenderness and sentiment, the child's body prone on the furnace sleeping with a jacket laid over him like a blanket is the very picture of domestic tranquility. That is to say, the child in such a description lies, if not beyond the capitalist's “werewolf hunger for surplus labour” as such (353), then certainly beyond Marx's analytic frame for comprehending it. What a classic Marxist analysis would see in these accounts of child labour is a particularly egregious instance of the “vampire-like” hunger for surplus value. What they would likely not point to is the way the figure of the child worker in *Capital* also produces a kind of surplus or excess that is not so easily contained within the system or logic of value production that it theorizes. Simply put, the child, while representing the worst of capital's logic of surplus value at any cost, also figures the residue that resists commodification absolutely. Why does the child become more, not less, childlike in such

scenes? Why does it take the violence of capitalism to reveal what is worth protecting? We tend to read such accounts of child labour in terms of the loss of childhood. But in what ways does Marx's account of capitalism's endless predation construct the child in terms of a kind of deficit (of strength, rest, vitality, etc.) that is itself a kind of value, if only in the way it marks something outside of capitalism's reach? It is precisely in the ways the figure of the child acquiesces to surplus labour that the child also seems to connote something beyond what it is possible for capital to amalgamate.<sup>328</sup> The child figures something both of and beyond capital, something that resists being objectified as surplus labour even as it literally adheres to the factory floor. Home and the figure of the child which radiates from it are valuable precisely because they denote something that *remains*, something outside an apprehension of class relations as a totalizing paradigm. In a sense what the child figures in Marxist critique is its own deconstruction. If child labour robs the child of their childhood, it also produces what we know of the child subject – ie. constantly imperilled by the threat of being misused. In this way, the death of childhood at the hands of the ruling class is not entirely dissimilar from the misappropriation of the child with which Losey charges Hartley when he writes that the latter has given Leo dialogue that he cannot “handle.” Here, Losey participates in the production of the child as under threat of being misused, delicate, lacking in stature. These qualities which, on the one hand, denote the child's susceptibility to the demands of capital, also signify that which coats the furnace of the capitalist's ceaseless theft of energy. Such a reading does not extract the child from the material realities of class, but it

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<sup>328</sup> In this way, the child might be read as embodying something like the Lacanian Real of capital.

does gesture to the residue that oppositional categories used to account for experience leave behind.

### **Desiring Children**

The material condition of the working-class children whose testimonies Marx quotes in *Capital* are notably different than Leo's. Impoverished as he and his mother might be as members of the urban petty bourgeoisie, the question for them is whether to sell Leo's father's books, and not whether Leo will have to leave school to work in a mill. Indeed images of child labour in factories and mills remain some of the most familiar early photographs of children. As George Dimock argues in his study of Lewis Hine's famous child labour photographs, "The fight over child labour was not exclusively about bringing an end to an egregious aspect of capitalist exploitation. It also entailed far-reaching struggles over who children were, what their roles in the family were to be, how they were to be valued and cared for, and who had the power to regulate them."<sup>329</sup> Though Leo's labour is significantly different to the labour in a factory, nonetheless, the comparison is useful because of the degree to which images of child labour have informed our understanding of childhood itself, and not simply of the experiences of those children forced into work.<sup>330</sup>

What is perhaps most troubling about images like Hine's is our perception that the child labourers they depict seem to lack the consciousness we have – that the photographs

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<sup>329</sup> George Dimock, "Children of the Mills: Re-Reading Lewis Hine's Child-Labour Photographs," *The Oxford Art Journal* 16, no. 2 (1993): 37–54.

<sup>330</sup> For a detailed account of the lived experience and legislation regarding working Victorian children, see Michael Lavalette, *A Thing of the Past?: Child Labour in Britain in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 1999).

are supposed to have brought into being – about the cruelty of the system in which they are being exploited and their value within it. That value, as I have noted in relation to the issue of the child’s narrative perspective in film or literature, is the product of a lack of physical stature or experience which is nonetheless itself in some sense useful. What the lack of understanding and rhetorical capacity on the part of the child narrator is for James and Losey, a child’s delicate malleable fingers are for the capitalist system of evaluation. Just as the former sheds “a light far beyond any reach of her comprehension,” so too does the child’s delicate feebleness constitute a surplus value beyond what we typically understand as valuable. My suggestion is that the question of what a child protagonist can or cannot handle discursively speaking and the more politicized question of what kinds of work children should and shouldn’t be able to do in an industrialized capitalist society are not as distinct as they might first appear.

Although it remains possible to read Marx’s scenes of child labour as snapshots of the loss of childhood, such depictions also contribute an understanding of the child as possessing something in excess of a reading of capitalism and class as a discrete and logical system. It is precisely a sense of what they lack – their feebleness and immaturity – that makes them excessive forces within such prose. As much as the child is encased by the scene of the factory, they remain irreducible to it. Of course, it is not that the child transcends or escapes capitalism. On the contrary, the figure of the child manifests that which is beyond the ability of a theory of capitalism to make sense of the social world. We read the child, be it Maisie, Leo or a factory worker in one of Hine’s photographs, as lacking the capacity to understand

the system of capitalist extraction in which they are ensnared, and this childish unknowing itself figures something for us beyond what capital can claim as its own.

With this in mind, consider how the erotic relationship between Marian and Ted in *The Go-Between* is represented essentially as two separate erotic relationships with the boy.<sup>331</sup> The two lovers are only depicted in the same frame once. In that scene, the Maudsleys have gathered with the local village people as part of a yearly tradition in which the members of Brandham Hall play the village in a game of cricket. As if strangers to each other, the two play a duet – Marian at the piano and Ted singing – while barely acknowledging each other. In a pointed way, the scene conveys the degree to which class and gender dictates the structure of people’s comportment and movement. Even while socializing in the same space, Marian and Ted exist in strictly separate social spheres and it is unthinkable that the two could be anything more than polite acquaintances. As if to emphasize the separateness of these worlds, neither the novel nor the film ever depicts the rendezvous that Leo, unbeknownst to him, has been arranging. The cross-class carnality that might otherwise make the narrative a companion piece to *Lady Chatterley’s Lover* (1928) is withheld.<sup>332</sup> Instead, the erotic charge is refracted through the figure of Leo.

I say refracted, rather than communicated, because it is precisely in the way that Leo embodies the limits of expression as such that leads to his association with eroticism in the

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<sup>331</sup> In this state of separation, Leo embodies Lacan’s famous and deliberately provocative statement that “there is no such thing as sexual rapports.” *The Seminar of Jacques Lacan. Book XX, Encore: On Feminine Sexuality, the Limit of Love and Knowledge, 1972-1973*, Edited by Jacques-Alain Miller and translated by Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1998), 17. The meaning of Lacan’s statement is not that sexual relationships don’t exist, but rather that those relationships are not constituted by mutual comprehension.

<sup>332</sup> The first filmic adaptation was the 1955 *L’Amant de Lady Chatterley*, which was only released in the U. S. after a 1959 court battle.

film. In other words, the boy's erotic value doesn't have anything to do with something he has, physically or otherwise, but in the way he figures sexuality as something he does not comprehend. In the novel, when Leo observes Ted's beautiful body for the first time, he notes how it "spoke to me of something I did not know... maturity in its most undeniable form."<sup>333</sup> That Ted possesses a knowledge that Leo lacks is clear in the film too. However, the representation operates quite differently. Rather than a gaze directed at the sexualized body of Ted, whose physical prowess represents a knowledge of sexuality lacking in Leo, in the film the perspectival relationship is reversed in the sense that sexual energy rests not with the knowledgeable body of Ted but with the wanting body of Leo.

Following the scene in which Leo collapses to the ground after opening the letter in his charge is a long exchange with Ted in the latter's farmhouse kitchen. After a conversation in which Ted persuades Leo to go on acting as their "postman," the topic turns to Ted's pregnant mare. Naively Leo asks what made her have the foal. "You seem to know something about it," Ted prods. "I don't know anything about it. That's the point," the boy responds. Ted struggles to deflect the question. The recourse to euphemism, "spooning," only leads to a flurry of more questions. "It's a question for your father," says Ted. "You'll find out." But nothing satisfies the boy. "Alright, let's make a bargain. I tell you all about it on the condition you go on being our postman." The deal made between Leo and Ted seems to imply a straightforward exchange. Leo will go on delivering letters on behalf of the clandestine lovers in return for sexual knowledge. But paradoxically Leo is already fully realized as a symbol of erotic desire. This is because desire is itself an open question. At

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<sup>333</sup> Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 73.



another meeting between Ted and Leo in the farmhouse kitchen, the boy's questions grow even more intense: "what is lover-like? What does it mean? What is a lover? What does a lover do? Are you a lover? What do you do?" Although Ted remains silent in the face of this inquisition, there is nothing he could say that would answer the boy. But more to the point, the answer, like Poe's purloined letter, isn't hidden at all. Leo isn't simply asking what Love is, he is asking *for* love. In this sense, the boy embodies the very thing – desire – that he doesn't comprehend.

### **The Death of the Child**

In *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive*, Lee Edelman argues that the figure of the child manifests Euro-American cultural investments in the production of a perpetually deferred future which flattens all politics into a singular promissory horizon of "better." For Edelman, this "reproductive futurity," as he calls it, evacuates the radical insistence of queerness – as that which resists the past, present or future grounds of a collective social identity.<sup>334</sup> What I have been arguing here is for a reappraisal of the child as something that can in fact corroborate Edelman's understanding of queerness as "the resistance, internal to the social, to every social structure or form."<sup>335</sup> I have argued that the figure of Leo manifests the function of desire in the film as a kind of perspiratory excess of the totalizing class structure depicted in the film – neither a transcendence nor a transgression, but a sheen on the surface of capitalism's ability to fold all meaning into its own logic of value and

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<sup>334</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 3.

<sup>335</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 4. For a critique of Edelman see Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia*, 88-95; James Penny, *After Queer Theory: The Limits of Sexual Politics* (London: Pluto Press, 2013), 42-46.

production. Although Leo has a specific class position, he also represents the limits of social structure as such. Like the beads of rain on a window pane which forms the background to the opening credits of film, the child's body precipitates on the smooth surface of the capitalist logic of accumulation.

Children grow up to find themselves. "It Gets Better." Or so we are told. Unless something devastating happens, as in the case of the Leo, which proves to stall their maturation irrevocably. Losey describes *The Go-Between* as "the story of the destruction of a little boy."<sup>336</sup> Hartley himself is no less subtle, writing of the adult Leo, "he had, as he believed, ruined his life by taking messages between two people."<sup>337</sup> Leo's future, specifically his future as a man, is ruined irrevocably by his involvement in the events of his summer at Brandham Hall. Little is revealed of the older Leo's sexual dysfunction. Toibin writes that Leo is "mortally wounded" by his implication in the sexual misadventures of Ted and Marian, from which he "will not recover."<sup>338</sup> Similarly, the critic Jason Cowley writes that the discovery of Ted and Marian by Leo at the end of the story "deforms the adult Leo's life," describing him as "sexless and/or impotent."<sup>339</sup> Rather than suffering some specific perversion or symptom, however, the destruction of the boy seems to exist only in negative

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<sup>336</sup> "Shooting Notes and Schedule," JWL/118/13, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK. Full quotation: "the story of the destruction of a little boy and his life by the unthinking but not necessarily malicious use of him by a variety of adults propelled by their self-interest and passions. The boy is on the edge of innocence, but not entirely innocent. In other words, he is caught at a time of delicate balance."

<sup>337</sup> L. P. Hartley, "Introduction," in *The Go-Between*, by L. P. Hartley, (New York: New York Review of Books, 2002), 11.

<sup>338</sup> Toibin, "Introduction," x; xxi.

<sup>339</sup> Jason Cowley, "Corbyn's Lost Poem, the Aussie Battler and the BBC's Take on The Go-Between," *New Statesman*, September 17, 2015, <http://www.newstatesman.com/politics/uk/2015/09/corbyn-s-lost-poem-aussie-battler-and-bbc-s-take-go-between>.

terms: *without* sex, “im” or not potent. In other words, the adult Leo’s “deformation” is a matter of lacking (like a child) whatever it is that adults have that make them fully formed.

The fact that the actual nature of his stymied development goes unmentioned is precisely the point. His queerness is his sexual unreadability – which has been the effect of Leo all along. In the film, the adult Leo is portrayed as a nondescript middle-aged man, neatly dressed and unassuming. In short clips interwoven with the main narrative, we see the narrator travel by train to Norwich and then by car to a stone cottage. A maid escorts him into a modest drawing room where he meets Marian – now elderly – and agrees to take one last letter from her to her grandson, a young man we are told bears an undeniable resemblance to Ted Burges. Throughout this exchange, polite and listening, the man never speaks. His voice as the narrator plays over him non-diegetically so that he literally talks over himself.

There is another figure we can take for the “deformed,” “mortally wounded,” adult Leo, namely Hartley himself. Biographical details of Hartley often portray a man “uneasy and withdrawn” with “a great hypochondriac” as a mother.<sup>340</sup> Shortly after the publication of *The Go-Between*, the writer and publisher John Calmann described Hartley as sitting “like a delightful old pussy listening and purring contentedly. A pleasant man but so obsequious that I could not believe he really wrote [*The Go-Between*].”<sup>341</sup> The description of Hartley as a purring cat suggests not only a fey domestication, but also a kind of neutered or sexless self pleasure. Elaborating this perception of Hartley, we might even read Losey’s comment about what the author “had not mastered” in the novel as evoking the author’s perceived

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<sup>340</sup> Toibin, “Introduction,” viii; vii.

<sup>341</sup> Toibin, “Introduction,” viii.

sexlessness in as far as masculinity is understood to be a requirement of a kind of mastery. Whether as an author or a man, what Hartley, like Leo, ultimately fails to realize is a certain kind of legibility.

As the ungrown-up and the never-will-grow-up, both the older and younger Leo bear the mark of what Lacan calls the *sinthome*, a play on the phonetics and on the meaning of ‘symptom.’ Like a symptom, the *sinthome* is a manifestation, but unlike a symptom it is not the ciphered message of something deeper. “The *sinthome*,” Edelman asserts, “refuses the Symbolic logic that determines the exchange of signifiers; it admits no translation of its singularity and therefore carries nothing of meaning.”<sup>342</sup> From this Edelman develops the neologism “*sinthomosexual*,” denoting “the place of meaninglessness associated with the *sinthome*; to figure an unregenerate, and unregenerating, sexuality.”<sup>343</sup> The *sinthomosexual*, then, is not unlike the “delightful old pussy” who enjoys a kind of nonreproductive pleasure of her own. To think about Leo in terms of the *sinthome* means thinking about how Marian and Ted, as well as Hartley and Losey, have used Leo to symbolize the unsymbolizable nature of desire. As various critics, as well as Losey and Hartley themselves have suggested, being used in this way constitutes for Leo the destruction of his future adulthood. But rather than thinking about this destruction as something that bears resolution, we can take it as a reference to a state of queerness and therefore a kind of failure that needs no correction.

At the end of the film, Leo is forced by Mrs Maudsley to take her to the location of Marian and Ted’s secret rendezvous. In contrast to the only other scene in the film where we see the lovers together, here Marian and Ted are depicted lying in a mound of hay wrapped in

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<sup>342</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 35.

<sup>343</sup> Edelman, *No Future*, 47.

a tight undulating embrace. After Mrs Maudsley overcomes her initial shock she attempts in vain to shield the boy's eyes from the sight. But what exactly is it that the boy sees? Interestingly, in the novel what Leo sees is something quite strange, "a shadow on the wall that opened and closed like an umbrella."<sup>344</sup> It is as if, not quite understanding *what* is taking place in front of him, Leo's mind works to fill in the blank.<sup>345</sup> We can read the image as a kind of psychic placeholder for what James calls the "great gaps and voids" in the child's understanding of sex.<sup>346</sup> However, rather than thinking about the strange image of the opening and closing umbrella as an image in the boy's mind's eye – an image which when narrated from Leo's perspective stands for his incomprehension of Marian and Ted's desire in its raw form–, we can think about it as a final gesture towards what the figure of the boy capacitates throughout the film, a reading of desire as the blending of ambiguity and the ordinary things that make up lived experience. In other words, the erotic dimension of Marian and Ted's relationship is not something perceived by the boy and then passed on to us, the viewers, discursively. Rather, the figure of the child allows us to read their cross-class desire as the pattern and trace woven into the materiality of the film.

To say that Marian and Ted's desire is the product or representation of class positions would be to suggest that their desire emanates from within themselves as discrete articulations of a structurally coherent socio-economic structure. But desire in the films is

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<sup>344</sup> Hartley, *The Go-Between*, 305.

<sup>345</sup> The supposedly traumatic event of Leo witnessing Marian and Ted having sex has resonances with Freud's Wolf Man case study where the psychoanalyst famously concludes that the source of his patient's psychic and physical disorder is having once witnessed the primal scene of his parents having sex. Sigmund Freud, "From the History of an Infantile Nerosis ('Wolf Man')," *The Freud Reader*, ed. Peter Gay (New York: W.W. Norton, 1989), 400-428.

<sup>346</sup> James, *Art of the Novel*, 145.

“beyond” them, both in the sense that their relationship is doomed and in the sense that they cannot explain it. As if to represent this, it is not their own eyes through which they perceive each other, but Leo’s. Furthermore, this perception is characterized by his lacking comprehension. Thus in the novel, for example, Leo’s secret observation of Ted’s bare body at the river bank is characterized in terms of misperception; it “spoke to me of something I did not know . . . maturity in its most undeniable form.” As Leo secretly watches Ted, the boy serves as a proxy, both for us as viewers and for Marian’s desire (Marian splashes in the shallow waters nearby without knowing Ted is there). Hartley describes the boy seeing Ted smiling “an intimate, pleased smile, that would have looked childish or imbecile on most people, but on him had the effect of a feather on a tiger.”<sup>347</sup> Like the image of a fucking umbrella,<sup>348</sup> the metaphor of a feather on a tiger is one that borders suggestively with incomprehensibility. In a sense it is a picture of the incomprehensibility of desire itself. The signs “feather” and “tiger,” like the signs child and man, adhere without quite being resolved

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<sup>347</sup> There is a similar passage near the end of Hartley’s the novel in which Ted’s body is presented as a kind of incompressibility. Leo finds Ted in his kitchen “with a gun between his knees, so absorbed that he didn’t hear me.” He watches Ted, “the muscles of his forearms . . . moved in ridges and hollows from a knot above the elbow, like pistons working from a cylinder” as “he pushed the wire rod up and down” while cleaning his gun. Ted makes him hold the gun. “I got a strange thrill from the contact, from feeling the butt press against my shoulder and the steel cold against my palm” (204).

<sup>348</sup> Umbrellas are themselves classed objects. In Forster’s *Howards End* (discussed in terms of the representation of domestic space in Chapter 1), the impoverished clerk, Mr Bast, first crosses paths with the comfortably middle class Helen Schlegel (with whom he later has a sexual affair) when the latter accidentally takes his umbrella home with her. For Helen Schlegel, an umbrella is just a detail in an abundant pattern of domestic materiality, something lost, found, and replaced without much thought or care, whereas, for Bast, it is something important and expensive enough to be possessive of, even if his umbrella happens to be “all gone along the seams . . . an appalling umbrella” (29).

into a system of meaning, but nonetheless constituting the immediacy of experience, and not some hidden or foreclosed truth.

Building off of my discussions of syntax and the mechanical apparatus of film in the previous sections of this dissertation, my primary concern here has been thinking about the materiality of desire in relation to the figure of the child. If the adult male and female characters I have examined in previous chapters have been, in some sense, both composed and disposed by the interior architecture of the house, Leo by contrast, has been read as a figure looking upon the house from afar. We see this, for example, in the image with which I began this chapter, that of Leo striding across the lawn while glancing over his shoulder at the looming manor house in the distance. We also have this image of the child at a distance from the house in Marx's description of the boy worker torn from his home to be in the factory. Perhaps what accounts for this discrepancy between Leo and the adult characters I study in terms of their placement in relation to the house is that, in *The Go-Between*, the child constitutes the perspective from which the story is told as much as he is character within it. Thus, rather than being constructed through the internal grammar of the house, he looks upon the house as a figure in space. But his perspective is not that of a contained ocular angle so much as a sense of texture and density. Accordingly, the image of Leo looking back and forth between the love letter and Brandham Hall echoes the place of the viewer or scholar of Losey's films, as well as the filmmaker himself. Leo straddles the diegetic and nondiegetic realms of film, and approaches the house in ways that understand its representational and materialist dimensions as deeply intertwined.

## Endings

### A Faint Uncertain Thing

If one of the things that characterizes scholarly research is the impulse to return again and again to a given text, reference or image, then perhaps it is fitting here to return to where this dissertation began, Tony's house and the setting of his and Barrett's first encounter. Described in terms such as "bare" and "faded,"<sup>349</sup> what distinguishes this house is perhaps not so much a given quality as the faintness of quality itself, insofar as qualities name what things are like (adjectives), rather than what they are (nouns). Central to this sense of slightness in the opening sequence of the film is the interplay between silence and sound evoked by the "faint uncertain ring" of the doorbell that Pinter describes in his screenplay as echoing through the empty house. This acoustic element emphasizes the house as a kind of ambience or roominess. Reading the excerpt from Pinter's screenplay alongside the film, emphasizes the interconnection between the structure of the film and that of the house itself. More specifically, from "exterior" to "hall" to "drawing room" to "conservatory," the setting descriptions of each new shot coincides with a different room in the house. The result is that the temporal structure of the film in terms of cuts coincides with the spatial logic of the home in terms of the division of rooms. In continuity editing in film – the kind we see in *The Servant* – it is (somewhat paradoxically) the cuts which allow for the illusion of continuous time in the film. By the same token, we can say that the logical sequencing of rooms in a house generally provides a kind of narrative coherence to the ways in which intimate space is

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<sup>349</sup> Pinter, *Five Screenplays*, 3.



shared and occupied. In the context of the *The Servant*, however, the sense of progression in the pattern of both the film and domestic setting only underscores the uncertainty of the nature of the two men's first encounter, as the latter is seen moving through the interior of the house before coming upon Tony. Already then, in the opening movement of *The Servant*, there is an interest in how the relationship or coming together of bodies can be understood through ideas of sequencing and order. Queerness, in other words, is operative here in the mere sequence and pattern of the home and film in as far as that sequence and pattern does not involve the explanation of Barrett or Tony's relationship as such.

We note the repetition of “silence” in Pinter's screenplay,<sup>350</sup> both before and after Barrett rings the doorbell, which appears in two single word sentences. In its completion as a sentence, the silence of the house takes on a fuller meaning than as the simple negation of sound. Silence, here, is something that fills, wall-to-wall, the space of the house, just as it does the boundaries of the sentence in the script. Rather than marking a break in the silence, the ring meanwhile links to two silences in the two shots, across the cinematic cut that divides them. Thus, it also bridges the interior and exterior shots, inside and outside, home and street. But on the other hand, the ring, like any ring, is also something precise in its simplicity. The tension between the “faintness” and “ringing” quality of this sound is similar to the acoustic juxtaposition we find in Pinter's description of Barrett's “sharp” footsteps on “silent” pavement. Both descriptions suggest a tension between silence and the onomatopoeic quality of a percussion-like sound. There is an elemental quality to the sounds of a bell and footsteps, as if Barrett were inscribing such sounds across the surface of the

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<sup>350</sup> Pinter, *Five Screenplays*, 3.

pavement and the interior of the house just as Leo smudges the surfaces of things in *The-Go Between* – an inscription, like Eve’s little kick in *Eve*, too faint, too slight to operate at a semantic level.

The subject of this thesis has been the uncertain and often faint chord that the house continually strikes as a cinematic motif in the films of Joseph Losey discussed here: *The Servant*, *Eve*, *Secret Ceremony*, and *The Go-Between*. The faint uncertain ring with which *The Servant* opens can be taken as a figure for the way that the films I have discussed use the material structures of architecture to evoke that which is fundamentally non-structural and non-representational about desire. Reading the faint uncertain ring in terms of what Losey calls “precise ambiguity”<sup>351</sup> reminds us that ambiguity can be other than wanting meaning. It connects uncertainty to the density of experience, unraveling the putative function of the house as a clear delineation between the known and unknown, and between what belongs and what does not. In other words, it unravels the house’s function as the material incarnation of a set of definitional boundaries, thus challenging the sense of certainty we take from the idea that such definitions can capture and secure the subject, and thus secluding her from the exposure of the outside world. The house is not a kind of self-contained nucleus, but an extension of the outside, where – to evoke Deleuze – the inside is merely a “fold” of the outside.<sup>352</sup> Tony’s house is bare, raw, and worn, suggesting an interior that is already, in a sense, exposed. And yet we can tell, from the way he moves through the house, that Barrett does not quite belong. The faint uncertainty of a ring that echoes foggily through space and

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<sup>351</sup> “Synopsis of *The Servant*,” 2 July 1963, JWL/1/11/15, Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

<sup>352</sup> Gilles Deleuze, *The Fold: Leibniz and the Baroque* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992).

blurs the line between a set of binary distinctions between privacy and publicity, safety and exposure, the familiar and the strange. In one sense, the ring's "uncertainty" is a symbol for the ambiguity of Barrett and Tony's relationship, and the inarticulacy of that which brings them together.

Although the tendency has been to read Barrett's arrival as merely the first step in a long, slow inversion of power relations between master and servant, I would prefer to foreground this scene in terms of a much more general sense of exposure or openness. Such an "openness-to" disperses the axis upon which such a reversal between master and servant can take place, which is to say, the sovereignty of the home as a limit point for two dichotomous subject positions. Barrett's intrusion is not violent or forced – "the door is open," as the screenplay makes clear<sup>353</sup> – but muted and vague. It rouses Tony without arousing in him any urgency or fear. From the beginning, then, the film seems intent on challenging our ideas about the home and its conceptual grounds as a place of a strictly kept boundary between the welcomed guest and the intruder. It seems appropriate, then, to understand these spatial relations of home invasion, not in terms of a foreign entity charging through a sovereign body, but in terms of a fluid uncertainty that faintly runs through the rooms of a house already bearing the effects of exposure. Such an image recalls what Deleuze has called the fold, where the inside is nothing but a fold of the outside. Similarly, Colomina has asserted that "the house is all surface, it does not simply have an interior,"<sup>354</sup> by which she means, the house and its "interior" life represents, not something innate and private onto itself, but simply a means of producing and articulating what Deleuze calls

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<sup>353</sup> Pinter, *Five Screenplays*, 3.

<sup>354</sup> Colomina, *Privacy and Publicity*, 281

“forces of the outside.” Barrett and Tony’s first meeting might be, in one sense, a confrontation between two men of different standing (literally and metaphorically) but, like Deleuze’s fold, their encounter is also an opening. The nature of that opening, as well as how that opening constitutes what I have called “the architecture of desire,” runs to the heart of this dissertation. From footprints and doorbells, my analysis moved to a broader set of architectonics, including the floor plan of Tony’s house, the development of the modern bathroom, its architectural details, and a variety of domestic “ways” – entryways, doorways, passageways. Building on the device that Pinter establishes in this opening scene, we see how these material openings provide a basis for Losey’s cinematic “language” and thus a medium for questioning the idea of the house as a closed boundary of intuitive desires and settled intimacies.

If a conclusion in a thesis is a means of coming home to an argument, or indeed bringing the reader to that home’s ending, I want to suggest it can never be that same home we left. Deleuze’s idea of the fold becomes useful here to suggest that the closure I seek in returning to the encounter between Tony and Barrett, an encounter with which I began and with which this thesis departs, can only ever be a kind of opening. Therefore, in conclusion, I end with three more openings, that is to say, three endings that open one onto another like a series of rooms.

### **Ending One**

[Lambert Strether] passed back into the rooms, the three that occupied the front and that communicated by wide doors; and, while he circulated and

rested, tried to recover the impression that they had made on him three months before, to catch again the voice in which they had seemed then to speak to him. That voice, he had to note, failed audibly to sound.<sup>355</sup>

Henry James' *The Ambassadors* (1903) is a novel about a man, Lambert Strether, who is sent by the wealthy Mrs. Newsome to bring her son, Chad, home to America from Paris where he has been meandering amongst questionable people for some time now. In the process of retrieving Chad, however, Strether himself begins to meander, and to lose his orientation home. In the quotation above, which appears near the end of the novel, Strether has returned one last time to the place in Paris where he first met Chad. If the relationship of these rooms and the wide doors that connect them is that of "communication," it also seems to convey something approaching the opposite of communication. The rooms form what a slightly earlier passage calls "the vague vista of the successive rooms."<sup>356</sup> The pairing of a "note" with that which "fail[s] audibly to sound" is reminiscent of the opening sequence of *The Servant* as Barrett moves through a sequence of rooms accompanied by both silence and a faint uncertain ring. What the rooms convey, then, is a correspondence slighter than that of articulation and voice.

James represents doorways as spaces of "lurking,"<sup>357</sup> "slightly lingering" things,<sup>358</sup> and of encounters with "ostensible"<sup>359</sup> purpose. Far from neatly delineating meaning and ordering people in space, doorways literally frame the vague, the slight, the lingering. At the

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<sup>355</sup> Henry James, *The Ambassadors*, Edited by Adrian Poole, New Ed edition (London: Penguin Classics, 2008), 384.

<sup>356</sup> James, *The Ambassadors*, 383.

<sup>357</sup> James, *The Ambassadors*, 352.

<sup>358</sup> James, *The Ambassadors*, 320.

<sup>359</sup> James, *The Ambassadors*, 271.

same time, however, it is the threat of really being called ‘home’ – home to America that is – that perpetually threatens whatever whiff of freedom Strether finds in being, in multiple senses, abroad.

## Ending Two

It is to the mute resonance of the word that Jean-Luc Nancy has attuned our ears, at the opening of “Interlude: Mute Music,” a chapter in his book *Listening*. Formatted as a series or chain of one-sentence lines that extend for approximately the first page and a half of the text, each of which captures the auditory-linguistic refraction and inflection of the word *word*, we might take this to be an inspired poem or hymn to mute music, including that which opens up and *sustains the play between silence or sound* – not as an interlude or intermission between the two, but as the sonorous interlude that silence and sound strike, in their inextricable shared-separation.<sup>360</sup>

I acknowledge and dwell with the seeming contradiction of my suggestion that slightness can give room. In some ways, Ricco’s description of Nancy’s work is helpful in thinking about the ways in which that dwelling in contradiction can take place and for considering the space between binaries – form/content, structure/meaning, syntax/semantics – as itself substantive. The idea of the “sonorous interlude” between the moves from silence to sound, Ricco suggests, cannot be thought of simply in terms of moving from one absolute to another. Rather, it should be understood as that slight space of “inextricable shared-separation.” If the

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<sup>360</sup> John Paul Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014), 39 (emphasis mine).

house is a marker between belonging and not belonging then, perhaps, the house also provides a means of thinking about the dissolution of identities, categories, meaning, not as negation, but rather as slightness, the something that endures precisely in the absence of something more considerable.

### Ending Three

Queer theory is no one's safe harbor for the holidays; it should offer no image of home. It can only function as another mode of experiencing, and allegorizing, the persistent displacement that constitutes desire and enables it to function as both spur and resistance to every totalization that would claim to know its "state." Utopic in its negativity, queer theory curves endlessly toward a realization that its realization remains impossible, that only as a force of derealization, of dissolution into the fluxions of a subjectless desire, can it ever be itself.<sup>361</sup>

For Edelman, queer theory "should offer no image of home" in so far as home connotes a settling of what queerness means.<sup>362</sup> Like Edelman, one of the things that guides my

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<sup>361</sup> Edelman, Lee. "Queer Theory: Unstating Desire." *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 2, no. 4 (1995): 346.

<sup>362</sup> While not the focus of this project, it should be noted that in recent years, the example of the language of colonization deployed in Edelman's essay signals queer theory's imbrication with what Scott Morgensen has called "settler homonationalism," raising critical questions about the historic construction of sexual citizenship and metaphors of displacement, return, and home in terms of some of queer theory's moves for unsettling. Scott Morgensen, "Settler Homonationalism: Theorizing Settler Colonialism within Queer Modernities," *GLQ: A Journal of Lesbian and Gay Studies* 16, no. 1–2 (2010): 105–31.

understanding of queer is that it is not so much a name for something, as a force that disrupts the very logic of identity and categorization. Edelman's work and his framing of queer has been a strong influence on my research as a graduate student over the years. However, what now stands out to me in the quotation above is not what would have struck me when I was introduced to Edelman over a decade ago following the release of *No Future* (2004). What now catches my eye in Edelman's description of queer theory is the quality that Edelman ascribes to the force of its "derealization," and "dissolution," that is, the form that negativity, for Edelman, takes: that is, the "curv[e]" in the endlessness of his negation. This curve reminds me of Foucault's reference to the diagonal line when, in "Friendship as a Way of Life," he says that "homosexuality is a historic occasion to reopen affective and relational virtualities, not so much through the intrinsic qualities of the homosexual but because the 'slantwise' position of the latter, as it were, the diagonal lines he can lay out in the social fabric allow these virtualities to come to light."<sup>363</sup> Like Edelman, Foucault resists thinking homosexuality (or queerness) in terms of identity. He also imagines that negation of "intrinsic qualities" by evoking a formal quality of a line. What this suggests to me is that in the "de-" and the "diss-" prefixes of queer negativity's derealization and dissolution, there is also a mereness that gestures towards the ways the lack of meaning implicit in queerness forms the materiality or even architecture of desire. A qualification or even substantiation of queer negativity, my interest in slightness thus proposes to think queerness, not in terms of negation as such, but rather in the textual and material forms and qualities it takes in its

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<sup>363</sup> Michel Foucault, "Friendship as a Way of Life," in *Ethics Subjectivity and Truth: The Essential Works of Foucault 1954-1984, Vol.1*, ed. Paul Rabinow, (New York: New Press, 1997), 138.



refusal of meaning. I have used the terms slightness and mereness in these pages to refer to qualities and forms that are less than absolute, including less than absolutely negative. The complex sense that these two terms convey perhaps has as much to do with their shared suffix “-ness” as it does with the commonality of the root words mere and slight. The suffix “-ness” makes abstract nouns out of the parts of speech (adjectives) that modify and describe. To this end, “ness” draws that which does not have the weight of a person, place or thing into the world.

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Appendix

Archives Visited

Joseph Losey Special Collection, British Film Institute, London, UK.

Harold Pinter Collection, British Library, London, UK.