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**Maid in Space**  
**Contemporary French cinematic translation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century**  
**rebellious maid figure**

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A thesis submitted in fulfilment of requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy  
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## Abstract

This thesis offers a spatial analysis of the representation of female servitude and rebellion in contemporary French cinema through the archetype of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebellious maid figure. The rebellious maid figure is an historical, social and cultural construct upon which a series of spatialised iconographic features were grafted during the nineteenth century and that continue to be employed in contemporary cinematic *mise en scène*.

This thesis uncovers dual spatial translation processes. The first process under study is the translation of the maid's 'space syntax' (a spatial and architectural iconography) into the cinematic medium. Film, by way of its spatial diegesis and *mise-en-scène*, manifests in a particular manner the archetypal maid's narrative of servitude and rebellion. This will be demonstrated through the study of Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995) and Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de pages* (2006), two films that represent, in a typological manner, the domestic architectural setting associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century *bonne à tout faire* and her syntax of space. The second process that I refer to is that of the translation of the maid's space syntax onto updated, contemporary social contexts and spatial settings of female servitude and rebellion in cinema that are divorced from the original domestic environment of the traditional maid figure. Achache's *Le Hérisson* (2009), Klapisch's *Ma part du gâteau* (2011), Charef's *Marie-Line* (2000), and Mennegun's *Louise Wimmer* (2012) will be analysed in that context.

By examining how the maid figure is translated across time, space and medium, this thesis demonstrates the power of social and cultural constructions of space to endure radical temporal and environmental changes. In effect, this thesis will argue, the archetypal 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure and her attendant space syntax survive as a latent construct that filmmakers draw upon in order to stage narratives of servitude and rebellion. The findings of this undertaking seek to inform critical understandings of the politics and poetics of the representation of rebellion in films that present narratives of female servitude.

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## Introduction

The maid is one of the most potent subjects and symbols of women's sexual fetishization and bondage, economic exploitation, and social marginalization. The maid of all work (*'la bonne à tout faire'*) has become something of a trope, a symbolic body upon which society projects its fears and fetishes surrounding women. This thesis will locate the various permutations of this maid figure in cinema, with a particular focus on contemporary representations of servitude and rebellion.

The maid was a widely discussed social figure during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, existing as a site of rebellion or threat to the social order in the bourgeois imagination. She appears in cinema in a position of extreme economic and social vulnerability. This posture in turn propels her to overthrow her situation, exacting revenge on her immediate oppressors – her masters – who pay the price for the systemic abuse she suffers. This narrative of the maid's rebellion assumes multitudinous forms in contemporary French cinema, ranging from murder through to more subtle forms of resistance. It is the purpose of this thesis to unravel the cultural meanings ascribed to the rebellious maid narrative, and thus contribute to cinematic and feminist knowledge.

Rather than the stylised and marginal genre of the *soubrette*, I am interested in representations of the female servants that supposedly corresponded to a social reality.<sup>1</sup> This thesis is concerned with the maid who was the subject of public discourse and mainstream (realist and naturalistic) literature during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. It is this maid figure that I argue is textually woven into contemporary cinematic representations of servitude.<sup>2</sup> Despite the variety

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<sup>1</sup> The maid is a figure with clear associations with punishment, power and bondage, and lays claim to being the first S/M figure. (Camille Favre in Joseph Confavreux, 2011) That this figure has such marked associations with the taboo suggests that she is a prime vessel for the performance of marginalised femininity and that she is encumbered with a set of codes essentially problematising her from the start. I do not intend to engage with the maid that is the subject of fetish cultures – the *soubrette*, which I consider to be too categorically different from the social figure of the maid at large. The rebellious maid figure, however, necessarily contains some of the imagery typically associated with the *soubrette*, who was originally constructed through the maid's feminine, fetishised labour (serving rituals, submissive postures, sexual labour, uniforms, feather dusters etc). The particulars of the *soubrette*, this fetishistic maid, in turn influence mainstream representations of female servants. (See Mirbeau's *Journal d'une femme de chambre* and the shoe fetish). This *soubrette* was always a recognisably stylised representation located within the realm of libertine literature and pornographic photography.

<sup>2</sup> My use of the term 'servitude' throughout this thesis is based on the French expression '*servitude*', which has less direct connotations with 'slavery' than it does in the English. That is, the maid's servitude that I refer to is based on service labour that is remunerated and not practiced through a system of bondage. The ambiguity contained within the use of 'servitude' in English in this thesis moreover hints to the contemporary existence of

of types of maids within domestic settings, performing various tasks and subject to heterogeneous modes of treatment, *the* maid appears as an entity in the bourgeois imaginary. (Martin-Fugier, 1979, p. 7)<sup>3</sup> This entitative maid figure has given rise to a unifying iconography that is essentially characterised by a dualistic good and evil maid. This thesis will show how this archetype has been translated onto current models of female servanthood that are the subject of cinematic representation, and to what effect.

The rebellious maid narrative is one of contextual servitude followed by consequent rebellion.<sup>4</sup> Servitude must be understood as a particular form of domination that is so absolute that rebellion is both a logical consequence, and one that is problematized by the inherent isolation afforded by this social state. Servitude is a condition, and is as such different to other forms of domination that are rebelled against through collective struggle. As Ross (1997, p. 26) writes, paraphrasing Marguerite Duras (1955, pp. 18-9), condition is a 'state' ('*état*') that 'shares some ground with "class" or "*métier*," without being quite synonymous with either.'<sup>5</sup> The state of being in-service was considered by ruling class commentators during the 19<sup>th</sup> century to be a progressive form of social relations that in no way called for the servant's rebellion. Bouniceau-Gesmon (1885, pp. 32-3), one of the main proponents of servitude and a critic of servant protest, was at great pains to signal the differences between slavery and servitude, so as to assuage any criticism of this last condition:

*L'un est ... la dégradation de l'homme ; l'autre l'élève aux sommets de sa dignité par le travail libre, pour l'affranchissement duquel la doctrine évangélique a si longtemps lutté contre la puissance et les persécutions du paganisme, le travail qui, dégagé de toutes les entraves, réglementé, développé par la charité, rémunéré, honoré comme il doit l'être, résoudra bien des questions effrayantes parce qu'elles sont mal posées et porte déjà dans ses flancs le criterium de toute sécurité sociale actuelle et l'avenir des sociétés modernes !*

Alexis de Tocqueville (1840, p. 117), too, in *De la démocratie en Amérique*, expressed the opinion that servitude during his time was in fact a transaction between equals: '*Sous la*

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models of domestic service that indeed objectively constitute modern-day slavery, and the continuing pertinence of this brand of social domination.

<sup>3</sup> '*Si l'on peut, malgré la diversité des conditions de vie faites aux domestiques, parler de la bonne, c'est que ce personnage apparaît comme une entité dans l'imaginaire bourgeois.*'

<sup>4</sup> Not all represented maids are rebellious, however, and this thesis considers only those who do conform to this narrative of rebellion in its selection of films for analysis.

<sup>5</sup> Ross (1997, p. 26) cites Marguerite Duras' elaboration on servitude as a state in *Le Square* (1955, p. 18-9): 'It isn't a profession [*métier*] what I do. It's called that in order to simplify it, but it isn't one. It's a kind of state, a whole state unto itself, you understand, like being a child, for example, or being ill.'

*démocratie, l'état de domesticité n'a plus rien qui dégrade, parce qu'il est librement choisi, passagèrement adopté, que l'opinion publique ne le flétrit point et qu'il ne crée aucune inégalité permanente entre le serviteur et le maître.*' And Abbé Grégoire, who had been a vocal opponent of slavery, similarly did not recognise the legitimacy of servant rebellion. (See Petitfrère 1986)

From Mirbeau's (2003, p. 253) fictional diary-keeping maid Célestine in *Journal d'une femme de chambre*, first published in 1900, we can, however, see the rebellious position imputed to servants with regard to their condition, a condition that is diegetically assimilated with slavery and that indeed calls for avenging:

*On prétend qu'il n'y a plus d'esclavage... Ah ! voilà une bonne blague, par exemple... Et les domestiques, que sont-ils donc, sinon des esclaves ?... Esclaves de fait, avec tout ce que l'esclavage comporte de vileté morale, d'inévitable corruption, de révolte engendreuse de haines.*

The maid's potential transgression against her employers is inseparable from the consideration of her servitude. It is through this dialectical prism, this cause and consequence narrative, that I will consider their spatialised representation in cinema.

Martin-Fugier wrote in 1979 that in order to understand the sociological 'place' of maids, one needed to look at the geographical 'place' they occupy: '*S'interroger sur la place des bonnes, c'est se demander dans quel lieu, dans quels interstices, elles ont le droit d'exister.*' (1979, p. 9) The maid's 'place', which she is, like all subservient figures, ordered to know, is a fertile if ambiguous concept. 'Place' here refers not only to a physical location – a space – but also to a social position. The ambiguity of the maid's place is compounded by the basic premise that she is positioned spatially and socially in a milieu that is not her own and is required to perform in such a way that befits her masters' propriety, yet does not outshine them: she must know her place while nevertheless remaining out of place.

The maid's codification in relation to domestic space exists in a complex social and intertextual system that calls for analysis. The particularly spatial characterisation of maids is a seemingly obvious proposition if one considers the base premise that the domestic service model of the live-in maid of all work entails the imbrication of classes under the one roof – spatial proximity and social distance. And within this initial dislocation, the maid's status and labour direct a certain occupation of space that is different from that of her masters, for whom the home is obviously primarily a site of domesticity and leisure. Yet until now the parameters



of this social positioning of the maid in space, the architectural determinism that promoted a spatial difference between maid and masters, and the representational implications of such a construction have remained largely un-investigated, as essentially a footnote in the history of architecture and social histories of domestic servants. Much of the research on the history of domestic servants and the maid figure precedes the so-called ‘spatial turn’ in the humanities, which goes some way to explaining the general lack of broad analysis in discussions of the spatial aspects of servitude. It therefore may be of use to undertake, drawing on the insight of these theoretical advances, an in-depth analysis of the role played by the organisation of space in the social control of female domestic servants, with a view to understanding the impact this had on the social and cultural perception and representation of the maid figure to this day.

This thesis attempts to account for this under-recognised yet crucial aspect of the representation of the maid within what Cresswell (1992, p. 7) refers to as a ‘normative landscape’ and its represented spatial transgression through the medium of cinema, one particularly well suited to the creation of meaning through the organisation of space. For Cresswell (1992, p. 7), a ‘normative landscape’ is ‘the way in which ideas about what is right, just and appropriate are transmitted through space and place.’ In turn, these normative landscapes that are designed for the dominant, which, in relation to the maid, constitute the prescriptions of her service in domestic space designed with the masters in mind, are transgressed in the rebellious re-mapping of space, in what Cresswell (1996, p. 11) refers to in his study as ‘heretical geographies’. In the films that I will analyse, I will focus my attentions on the cinematic representation of this tension between prescribed, ‘normative’ organisations of space, and the transgression of the spatio-social boundaries that are designed to maintain the ambiguous spatial posture of those deemed and constructed as out of place.

Very little of the research on the maid had analysed the representation of this figure on screen, despite the Vidéotheque de Paris (now the Forum des Images) programming a two-month-long retrospective of films about masters and servants entitled *Maîtres et Valets* in 1997, that could have foreseeably led to a development of scholarship focussed on the maid figure in audio-visual culture.<sup>6</sup> In a French context thus far, however, only D. Memmi, a sociologist, has

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<sup>6</sup> Addendum: In March 2013, soon after this thesis was submitted for examination, the Festival international de films de femmes in Créteil with a maid theme took place. The festival screened several historic maid films and held an event called ‘*Les Bonnes – Remue-ménage en images!*’ at which domestic service scholar and feminist philosopher Geneviève Fraisse was invited to speak. The poster for that year’s festival foregrounds a young Asian

addressed the cinematic representation of servants, and in a non-gender specific study that traverses the Franco-British 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>7</sup> The particularly spatial construction and characterisation of the maid figure that had been established prior to the advent of cinema demands to be addressed through the lens of the eminently spatial medium of cinema.

The rebellious maid's particular characterisation through space is, this thesis will argue, the defining element of this protagonist's cinematic treatment. In order to demonstrate this proposition, I establish the 'space syntax' of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure – the foundational era for this conceptual category – that will be argued to be the representational framework through which servitude and rebellion are staged in contemporary French cinema. Space syntax, in this thesis, refers to the mapping of the servant's space according to the relations between served and servant. This mapping of the maid's space according to social strictures occurs both within the environment of the bourgeois home, and in the translated spatial settings of updated contexts of servitude and rebellion. The translation of the maid figure in cinematic representation is effected through conformity to the particular space syntax that defines how maids are seen to occupy space in their servitude and how they re-map this space through their rebellion.

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woman in a prostrated position, glaring down at the viewer with her face half-shadowed, gripping the hose of a vacuum cleaner in her rubber-gloved hands as if it were a machine gun. In the background, the hose connects not to a vacuum unit, but rather to a flattened film camera, in an image that prompts several lines of thought regarding the relationship between servitude, feminist contestation, and cinematic representation that are explored in this thesis.

<sup>7</sup> D. Memmi has published two articles (2003 and 2006) that address the cinematic representation of the maid to varying degrees. The first one does so through a comparative survey of masters and servants in French and British films from the 1930s to the present, while the second one tangentially addresses the question of the maid figure in cinema within the broader sociological context of domination. Memmi's second article is a discussion of domination in French cinema, in which some of the material from her previous article appears in modified form. Scholarship on cinematic maids in a Hollywood context has been somewhat more developed, though it remains relatively scarce.

There has been one doctoral thesis and an article written on post-war American televisual representations of racialised maids (Kim 1997; 1999) – *Maid in color: the figure of the racialized domestic in American television* (1997), which addresses the racialisation of domestic servants in American post-war television, and a subsequent article by Kim, 'Invisible and undocumented: The Latina maid on network television' (1999).

Leonard's chapter 'Ready-Maid Postfeminism? The American "Domestic" in Popular Culture' (in Gillis & Hollows Eds. 2003), discusses the representation of Latina and African-American maids as foils for their middle-class mistresses in romantic comedies.

In the past two years, there has been a popular discussion of the box-office hit *The Help*, essentially in terms of its (mis)treatment of the African American mammy figure.

My research has also found one working paper by Marklund (2001) about the reception of Losey's film *The Servant* in 1960s England from the angle of the interrogation of the class-based system, and the representation of the 'manservant' as 'obsolete.'

The maid's cinematic representation is fundamentally complicated by her historic invisibility that was prescribed by the condition of servitude on the one hand, and that has furthermore been entrenched by the fact that, as Alison Light (2007, p. 1) writes: '[servants] have so long lived in the twilight zone of historical record'.<sup>8</sup> In an intensely visual medium, how is the invisible made visible? Through the elaboration of a spatial framework of film analysis, I will demonstrate that the bringing into visibility of the maid figure on screen occurs through a spatial construction that reproduces the architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, an organisation of space that confined her to certain marginal zones where she was out of sight from her masters. Film follows the maid to the hidden spaces prescribed by her condition, narrowing in on thresholds and marginal locations, bringing the socially and culturally invisible into the frame.

Gorfinkel and Rhodes (2011, pp. xi-xii) refer briefly to 'cinema's archive of place', which they describe as having been produced 'almost unconsciously', and as 'interacting with our memory of places as well as our contemporary use and habitation of them.' Architectural features associated with 19<sup>th</sup> century domesticity act as an 'archive of place' for the maid figure's representation that are taken up and perpetuated in French cinema to this day in a process of translation.

Susan Hayward writes (2011, p. 45) that 'cinema is not a pure product. It is inherently a cross-fertilization (a hybrid) of many cultures, be they economic, discursive, ethnic, sexed, and more besides.' This intertextual, hybrid conception of cinema is one that I share in my study of the representation of maid figures and their servant avatars such as the cleaning lady and the concierge in contemporary French cinema. I will explain what elements constitute this character and what place she is given to exist on screen through directors' representational choices. I will demonstrate that the archetypal 19<sup>th</sup> century maid, a figure established within a particular context of social and cultural control by the bourgeoisie over those who served them,

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<sup>8</sup> See McBride (1976), Martin-Fugier (1979) and Robbins (1993).

See also the research produced within the context of The Servant Project, a consortium of international scholars funded by the European Commission and set up to investigate domestic service past and present in recognition that this field had been heavily under-researched and that there are implications in the history of domestic service for its present day incarnations. The aim of the Servant Project was to influence global policy to ameliorate what often amounts to modern-day slavery and is a geopolitical issue of increasing recognition. Several international conferences took place at the turn of the twenty-first century on the subject as part of the Servant Project: *Le phénomène de la domesticité en Europe, XVIe-XXe siècles*, Prague, September 1996; *Bonnes pour le service. Déclin, professionnalisation et émigration de la domesticité Europe-Canada 19e-20e siècles*, Brussels, December 2001; *Models of Domestic Service*, Munich, 2003.

survives as a latent construct in contemporary France under a representational concern that seeks to cinematically stage narratives of marginalisation and social exclusion that stage, in various ways, the social relations of servitude.

When considering the cinematic representation of maids, one cannot assume a monolithic or internally coherent authorial approach. This is the case even in instances where films reproduced an iconography of the maid that established her as a social threat and which, as such, affirmed and *served* the interests of the bourgeoisie. Hayward (2011, p. 45) reminds us that cinema ‘is not a single, unified voice, nor is it the product of a single patriarchal discourse.’ The films analysed in this thesis subscribe to a multiplicity of political aesthetics regarding the maid figure in representation. It is possible, however, to identify the ways in which filmmakers frame the maid according to an iconography that was established pre-cinema, at a time in which perceptions of domestic servants (and their resultant cultural representation) were often highly pejorative. The particular features of that iconography continue to permeate representations of modern-day servitude with an ingrained political aesthetic of rebellion as a response to a social relationship that has historically marked France and that continues to do so. The chapters to follow will bring to light the iconographic connections between the historical rebellious maid figure and her contemporary incarnations.

Most scholars of domestic service have accepted the fact of female domestic servants’ historical oppression and repression. In chapter 1, I note how others have also accounted for the 19<sup>th</sup> century’s perception of the maid as threatening. However, the crux of the relationship between the maid’s constructed rebelliousness during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and the implications of this for subsequent cultural representations of female servants has yet to be explored. Such an undertaking will be the point of departure in chapter 1. This will be a process that first involves explaining why the maid was seen as rebellious. The maid trope is found to be at the service of conflicting bourgeois sentiments that foreground both the material and symbolic necessity of the maid (the ‘*perle*’) and the anxiety she induces through her physical presence within the home (the ‘*souillon*’).<sup>9</sup> The first chapter of this thesis supplies a review of the literature on the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure that locates her as a conceptual category with pronounced contradictory characterisations: both a figure at the service of her masters’ social and symbolic domination, and the subject of opportunistic defamation. It is this particular construction of the

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<sup>9</sup> The *perle* and *souillon* trope has been discussed by Martin-Fugier (1979) and by Yates (1991).

maid figure that I argue continues to modulate French cinematic representations of female servitude.

This thesis sees space, and particularly architectural space, as one of the fundamental processes in the establishment and consolidation of the rebellious maid figure during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. For historical and architectural reasons particular to France, the French maid's occupation of domestic space is highly specific. Though the situation of domestic servants in Europe and England was comparable throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, architectural differences played an important part in rendering the French maid's relation to domestic space somewhat unique, in ways that would continue to influence conceptions of the French maid to the present day in cinema. Chapter 2 will thus put forward the case for this particularly spatial conception of the female servant through a mapping of the maid's space and place within 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic architecture.

Chapter 3 will allow for the establishment of a theoretical framework for the analysis of space in film. In cinema, the spatial metaphors that identify the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid are upheld and further ingrained in the character type of the servant woman, with the translation of the maid's space syntax into the filmic medium. Recourse will be had to the spatial processes that defined the understandings of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *bonne à tout faire's* servitude and rebellion in order to arrive at the definition of the ideal type of the cinematic rebellious maid in chapter 3. My selection of six films from the turn of the twenty-first century will be preliminarily explained against the backdrop of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure's iconography in a manner that anticipates the spatial analysis to follow in the case studies of chapters 4 and 5.

Chapter 4 reads Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995) and Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de Pages* (2006) as faithful cinematic translations of the live-in maid's space syntax as it was established in the context of the social architecture of the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois dwelling. I designate the term translation as the transferral of the spatial language of the maid's representation in architecture into that of cinema. These two films will be shown to reproduce, in a formalist manner, the iconographic parameters of the maid's spatially conceived servitude and rebellion. The film analysis in this chapter will be comparative, and the segregated environment of the home will provide the structure for the discussion of Chabrol and Dercourt's *mise en scène* of servitude and rebellion.

Chapter 5 hinges on the hypothesis that the maid figure carries a set of iconographic and representational characteristics that are spatially transposable. It contends that the maid's space syntax has the capacity to be translated onto alternative social and spatial settings that are contextual to updated narratives of servitude and rebellion. The films analysed here are *Le Hérisson* (Achache 2009), *Ma part du gâteau* (2011), firstly, and *Marie-Line* (2000) and *Louise Wimmer* (2012), secondly. I will argue that the historical maid figure's iconography, with its focus on liminal space and on power asymmetries expressed in the occupation of space, is grafted onto contemporary female servitude and rebellion staged in alternative locales. I will show, through the spatial analysis of film, that the protagonists of these four films can be understood through the prism of the archetypal maid figure, even though these films offer up contexts of servitude that may functionally diverge from that of the live-in *bonne à tout faire*. The schema through which these spaces are cinematically staged will be assimilated to the space syntax of the maid figure that was established in 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of domesticity. This chapter will further the understanding of how the organisation of space contributes to the evocation of pre-existing latent characterisations of the maid figure, and more generally will comment on the extent to which space 'plays' in film, as first signalled by the French architect Mallet-Stevens. (1925, p. 288 in Vidler 2002, pp. 100-1) This chapter will furthermore demonstrate how architectural and spatial modifications that reflect the evolution of contemporary French society in turn shape the rebellious maid plot, contributing to this intertextual construct of the maid figure.

Chapter 6 ('The poetics and politics of representing the rebellious maid figure and avatar in contemporary French cinema') will more broadly assess the ways in which recent cinematic representation of servitude and rebellion remains indebted to the 19<sup>th</sup> century archetype. It will address the question of the maid's violent rebellion in its historically situated origin, as well as rebellion as refusal. This chapter will further discuss the corpus of films' engagement with the typical punishing of the maid's rebellion, and how this narrative element is reframed away from the historical denial of the legitimacy of servant protest and freedom from servitude through social mobility.

This thesis proposes to study the contemporary cinematic embodiment of the 19<sup>th</sup> century iconographic maid through the study of six French films spanning the years from 1995 to 2012: *La Cérémonie* (Chabrol 1995) and *La Tourneuse de pages* (Dercourt 2006), that will

be analysed in Chapter 4; *Le Hérisson* (Achache 2009), *Ma part du gâteau* (Klapisch 2011), *Marie-Line* (Charef 2000), and *Louise Wimmer* (Mennegun 2012), that will be analysed in Chapter 5.

These films are all centred on narratives that are tenuously encompassed within the idea of ‘women’s film’. They present themes of female friendship and solidarity, as well as rivalry between women, and they all attempt to explore female subjectivity in ways that set them apart from mainstream French film production (typically hetero-normative, middle-class, and male-centred).<sup>10</sup> All of these films reached reasonably large audiences, were exported to foreign markets, and were quite widely discussed by critics, some more positively than others. It is, however, the variety among these films that form my corpus that is most patent characteristic of their sum, in ways that the following chapters will display. They are varied in terms of genre, ranging from the dramatic comedy, to the poetic realist film, to the social drama, to the psychological thriller. Their directors belong to different schools of filmmaking, and are not united by institutional status, age, ethnicity, class, or sex.<sup>11</sup> Some of the actors who play the heroines of these films embody a conventional, youthful femininity (Sandrine Bonnaire, Isabelle Huppert, Déborah François, Karin Viard), while others are more associated with an alternative femininity that does not fit the narrow stereotypes of beauty and youth that are common to French film production (Muriel Robin, Josiane Balasko, Corinne Masiero). Most strikingly, some of these films present a formalist vision of the live-in maid of all work (*La Cérémonie*, *La Tourneuse de pages*, *Ma part du gâteau*), while others depict the archetype of rebellious maid figure, as I will demonstrate, in transformed service professions (*Le Hérisson*, *Marie-Line*, *Louise Wimmer*).

Despite the seeming eclecticism of this corpus of films, it is indeed in their difference that the individual films form a whole. The difference contained within these films attests to the broad-reaching potential of the servitude/rebellion dialectic in cinematic representation. It hints to the translatability of this narrative across genres, aesthetics, location, and represented social and cultural milieu. The six films that have been selected for in-depth analysis offer a broad and pluralistic contextualisation of the various ways in which servitude and rebellion is

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<sup>10</sup> None of these films, however, can be considered to be anything but ‘mainstream’, in that they are produced for a wide audience and present a largely classical *mise en scène*.

<sup>11</sup> Five of the six films are however made by men, and five are made by non-coloured directors. Though it is beyond the prerogative of this study to investigate the significance of the directors’ cultural and sexed identity, this point nevertheless remains one of potential significance, and could constitute ulterior inquiry.

conceived and represented in French cinema, while nevertheless drawing collectively on the 19<sup>th</sup> century model of the rebellious maid figure. More broadly, these films offer interpretations of the validity and viability of rebellion against oppression that can be fruitfully compared.

This corpus is confined to narratives set during the present day, even though period representations of maids are currently being produced to considerable success in France.<sup>12</sup> This selection was based on the desire to assess the ways in which the rebellious maid plot is spatially translated into contemporary contexts of servitude and rebellion. But it was also a selection made in order to understand what the cinematic engagement with contemporary contexts of servitude can tell us about current socio-cultural understandings of this model of social domination, on the one hand, and the political and aesthetic responses that filmmakers in turn offer in their respective representations of rebellion. Many period representations do, however, conform to the spatialisation of the maid figure that I explicate in this thesis and will thus, where appropriate, be referred to in order to support my argument.

I now offer brief thematic synopses of the films that comprise this corpus, providing introductory justification for the conception of their heroines as translated figures of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebellious maid. These descriptions of the films crucially leave out the most important aspect for this thesis' reading, that is to say the spatialisation of the maid figure according to her iconographic 19<sup>th</sup> century spatio-architectural construction, since this is the proposition that this thesis undertakes to prove.

Claude Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995) is a formalist maid film, in that it presents an acknowledged *bonne à tout faire* in a bourgeois domestic setting. In many respects, it classically traces the rebellious maid narrative while supplying the full spectrum of iconographic maid characteristics. *La Cérémonie*, an adaptation of Rendell's novel *A Judgement in stone*, referencing in many ways the original murderous maid narrative of the Papin sisters and its representation by Genet in *Les Bonnes*, traces the passage of the maid protagonist from *perle* to *souillon*, culminating in a quadruple murder of the Lelièvre family by their maid Sophie (Sandrine Bonnaire) in company with her friend, the postal worker Jeanne (Isabelle Huppert).

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<sup>12</sup> *Les Blessures assassines* (Denis 2000); *Séraphine* (Provost 2008); *Un Cœur simple* (Laine 2008); *Les Femmes du sixième étage* (Le Guay 2010); *Les Adieux à la reine* (Jacquot 2012); *Augustine* (Winocour 2012)

Bertrand Jacquot is, according to Unifrance, in the process of remaking *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre*, with Marion Cotillard reputed to be cast in the role of Célestine, making this Jacquot's third film about a maid following *La Fille seule* (1996) and *Les Adieux à la reine* (2012).



Denis Dercourt's film *La Tourneuse de pages* (2006) is a tale of delayed and meticulously planned revenge by a young woman, Mélanie (Déborah François), against a famed pianist, Ariane Fauchécourt (Catherine Frot). Audiences are from the outset under no illusions as to Mélanie's manipulative character; Mélanie's dutiful and effaced personality are a foil for the malicious plan that will constitute her revenge for what she perceives to be an unforgivable sabotage of her ambitions as a young pianist. A psychological thriller, *La Tourneuse de pages* is a highly stylised representation of the maid's revenge that draws extensively from the iconographic corpus of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid; it references Chabrol's film *La Cérémonie* in many ways, prompting a comparative reading of these two films.

The four remaining films present avatars of the original maid figure and as such constitute a test case. These films present protagonists who are in positions of servitude as defined above, but not necessarily live-in servants. *Le Hérisson*, while set in an Haussmannian building (the foundational geographic location for the *bonne à tout faire* in cultural perception) nevertheless focuses on the servitude of a concierge, rather than that of a maid; *Ma part du gâteau* centres on a blue-collared worker turned cleaning lady, turned live-in servant and nanny; *Marie-Line* features a group of cleaning workers in a hypermarket; and *Louise Wimmer* traces the existence of a homeless woman who intermittently cleans hotel rooms and people's homes. Yet these various serving figures manifest the archetypal rebellious maid figure in the space syntax through which their servitude and rebellion narratives are articulated on screen. It is through these films that I will demonstrate the transferability of the space syntax of the maid to ulterior social settings and epochs. It is here that the strength of the theory of the maid's space syntax and its capacity to be cinematically translated will be truly tested. I will synthesise these films below, putting forward the thematic elements that begin to justify their categorisation as modern-day incarnations of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebellious maid figure.<sup>13</sup>

Mona Achache's film *Le Hérisson* (2009), based on Muriel Barbery's book *L'élégance du hérisson* (2006) presents Renée Michel (Josiane Balasko), the concierge of an old-fashioned and upmarket Haussmannian building on the Left Bank. The protagonist presents a surly and simple exterior that hides an 'elegant' intelligence that she conceals in her stereotypical, ideal

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<sup>13</sup> These plot synopses focus on the elements that preliminarily designate the servitude and rebellion that I will subsequently show through spatial film analysis to be representational embodiments of this latent construct of the maid figure.

servitude – a condition that she will contest in ways much subtler than the protagonists of Chabrol and Dercourt’s films.<sup>14</sup>

Cédric Klapisch’s film *Ma part du gâteau* (2011) follows France (Karin Viard), a newly unemployed mother of three from Dunkerque who, to make ends meet, travels to Paris to take up domestic work. Klapisch’s film transposes the maid’s servitude and rebellion narrative onto contemporary France in the grips of ‘*la crise*’, with the individual rebellion of the maid standing in parallel to a broader class-based rebellion of blue-collared workers against the world of corporate finance.

Mehdi Charef’s film *Marie-Line* (2001) presents a group of predominantly migrant women who clean a hypermarket in the northern outskirts of Paris at night, with the narrative however being centred on the titular character, Marie-Line (Muriel Robin), a *française de souche*. Rebellion against servitude here takes the form of resistance against the state and management, and solidarity between the oppressed.

Cyril Mennegun’s *Louise Wimmer* (2012) traces the daily existence of its titular protagonist (Corinne Masiero), a woman who is homeless and living out of her car, working cleaning shifts at a hotel and a bourgeois dwelling, while waiting to be allocated social housing. Louise Wimmer’s servitude extends beyond her service labour to encompass her homelessness, an all-encompassing condition of placelessness that is met with resistance and defiance.

With the conclusion of these preliminaries, I will now begin an analysis of 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois imaginings of the rebellious maid figure. Specifically, I contend that these social anxieties helped to construct the maid as a conceptual category that could be transposed across time, space and representational form.

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<sup>14</sup> *Le Hérisson* equally features a Portuguese *femme de ménage* character, Manuela (Ariane Ascaride), thereby presenting a nuanced narrative presence of the servant figure within this archetypal locale of the Haussmannian building. Manuela, however, remains a peripheral character that serves only to narratively draw out Renée’s servitude and rebellion.

# Chapter 1: The Birth of the Rebellious Maid – Chronology and Criticism of a social and cultural figure

*'Le vécu de la bonne, c'est aussi l'imaginaire bourgeois.'* Martin-Fugier (1979, p. 151)

## Introduction

The history of domestic service is complicated by the fact that the historical sources available fall into two broad camps, neither of which were accounts by maids themselves: literary representation on the one hand<sup>15</sup>, and personal accounts from middle-class employers,<sup>16</sup> court records, hygienist material, and domestic treatises<sup>17</sup> on the other. Many historians tend to combine these different source types in their research into domestic service, with literary representations given as much weight as other sources (see Martin-Fugier, 1979 and Fraisse, 2009<sup>18</sup>, for example). Though this absence of available self-representations has been somewhat discredited within a broader European context, with the discovery of autobiographical works more pointedly in German and English contexts (see Sarti 2006a, p. 188), France genuinely lacks examples of texts written by servants.<sup>19</sup> There was no French equivalent of Hannah

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<sup>15</sup> One of the primary sources that underlie specialist understandings of 19<sup>th</sup> century maids' lives and the related manner in which they occupied the popular imagination continues to be a body of mid-to-late century novels by realist and naturalistic French authors. There are pitfalls in using these texts as such central sources in social history research, yet such recourse is inescapable given the absence of servant-generated discourse and narratives. It is when studying the constructedness of the maid figure that these literary sources are of most value, as they can be considered to have culturally synthesised contemporary social perceptions of servants while modelling future representations at the same time.

<sup>16</sup> For master/mistress accounts of maids see Martin-Fugier (1979).

<sup>17</sup> For details of conduct books/treatises surrounding the employment of domestic servants, see Martin-Fugier (1979), Petitfrère (1986, pp. 9-12), Piette (1998). Petitfrère's list is the most comprehensive in terms of its time span, going back as far as treatises written under Louis XIV.

<sup>18</sup> Fraisse's *Service Ou Servitude: Essai Sur Les Femmes Toutes Mains* (2009) was previously published as *Femmes Toutes Mains: Essai Sur Le Service Domestique* (1979).

<sup>19</sup> France was linguistically fragmented throughout much of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, specifically with regard to provincial rural populations (the main feeder of domestic service); and compulsory and free education didn't occur until the Ferry laws (1881-1882), meaning that the overwhelming majority of rural peasant class young women throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century were illiterate, a factor that set France apart from England in a way that would enduringly influence one-sided and therefore fetishistic representations of maids in a French context.

A singular example exists that narrates the life of servants during the (close of the) 19<sup>th</sup> century: Chabot (1988), *Histoire de Jean et Yvonne, domestiques en 1900: racontée par Paul, leur fils, à Michel, son petit-fils*. This account is thus a twice-mediated one that eventually was transcribed a century after Jean and Yvonne's existence as servants at the close of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Cullwick, the Victorian-era English maid who diarised her servitude for the pleasure of her master.<sup>20</sup>

This absence of self-representation enduringly obscured the social reality of domestic servants' existences. Those who were served assumed authorship over the lives and identities of those who served them, depicting their charges in highly stylised ways as inherently nefarious. This bourgeois representation of maids further enshrined the maid in public discourse as a figure based extensively on masters' prerogatives of control over the servant body. This discourse contributed to the cultural construction of the maid as rebellious and as criminal. Literature by realist and naturalistic French writers, from a sometimes different political positioning, equally engaged with this figure at the service of the bourgeoisie. These texts by authors such as Zola, the Goncourt brothers, Flaubert and Mirbeau, have effectively enriched the representational corpus of domestic servants and how they were to continue to be perceived in the social and cultural imaginary.<sup>21</sup>

During the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, along with the concurrent processes of modernity and massive urban reconstruction, the industrial revolution was precipitating the growth of the bourgeoisie as a class in need of self-definition and status projection – a socio-economic group with economic and political power, but lacking the social and cultural cachet of the aristocracy. The bourgeoisie cultivated their employment of domestic help as a way of projecting themselves as a dominant class, quite aside from the material labour the maid provided. Petitfrère (1986, p. 214) goes so far as to argue for the greater importance of the possession of a domestic servant(s) for the purposes of the '*désir de paraître*' over that of '*les nécessités du travail*': '[l]e domestique sert d'abord la gloire de son maître.' Indeed, the persistence of many bourgeois families in parlous circumstances in employing a maid up until the 1920s,<sup>22</sup> testifies to the importance of the employment of 'help' in preserving one's social status. For all the maid's usefulness in promoting the master's status, and in allowing for the bourgeoisie's

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And in terms of twentieth century autobiographical narratives of servitude, in 1975 Maria Arondo, an '*employée de maison*' (the twentieth-century term for '*bonne*') published her memoirs of a life in service, *Moi, la bonne*, complemented with a series of interviews with Max Chaleil.

<sup>20</sup> *The Diaries of Hannah Cullwick*, edited by Liz Stanley in 1984. See Rust (1994) for a discussion of Cullwick's diaries.

<sup>21</sup> Concurrent to these realist and naturalist literary representations, the latter period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century equally envisioned the maid within the context of the theatrical farce, with Georges Feydeau, one of the genre's most notable proponents, writing several maid and manservant protagonists into his many farces.

<sup>22</sup> Simone de Beauvoir's family, for example, though impoverished, held on to their maid for as long as they could. Recounted in *Mémoires d'une jeune fille rangée* (1958).

devotion to the rituals of domestic living to be freed from the unsightly paraphernalia of cooking, laundry, and slop disposal, however, the maid's servitude was accompanied by a concomitant level of bourgeois anxiety toward this foreign body.

Although the primary focus of this thesis is not the historical and sociological conditions of domestic servants, my study of the maid figure in recent French film requires an understanding of this subject in order to fully comprehend the constructedness of the maid figure as a conceptual category at the service of her masters. The maid was a figure whose rebelliousness was based more on the masters' anxiety than in any sense of historical accuracy. This chapter examines certain 19<sup>th</sup> century texts that characterised the maid as criminal: texts by judges and respected public figures that purported to accurately describe the contemporary context of servitude, and texts that narrativised the served/servant relationship. These characterisations contributed to the latent construct of the cultural figure of the rebellious maid figure across time.

### **Historical contextualisation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure**

In order to appreciate the specificity of the *bonne à tout faire* as a social and cultural protagonist within a clear historical and representational context, it is necessary to account, in the briefest way, for her precursor during the Ancien Régime. The dramatic changes that took place in the composition and condition of the servant body between the pre- and post-revolutionary periods helps to explain the framing of the maid in such a particular way during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

Given that the feminisation of domestic service was a 19<sup>th</sup> century phenomenon (see McBride 1976 and Fauve-Chamoux 1998), only a small proportion of this scholarship whose focus is the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> century is concerned with the particular subject of female domestic servants. The research on this earlier era sheds light on precisely how different the perception and characterisation of female domestic servants were under the aristocracy as opposed to those held by the socially dominant bourgeoisie of the period on which I focus. Fairchild's (1984, p. 20)<sup>23</sup> summarises the changes that occurred in domestic service at the end of the 18<sup>th</sup> century thus:

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<sup>23</sup> See also Fairchild's (1984, pp. 10-2) and Maza (1983, pp. 7-9; p. 166).

In the last half of the [eighteenth] century domestic service changed from public to private, noble to bourgeois, masculine to feminine, patriarchal to egalitarian: in short, it lost the characteristics that had marked it since the late Middle Ages and began to take on instead the form it would have in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries.<sup>24</sup>

In addition to these modifications defined by Fairchilds (1984, p. 20), the proliferation of domestic servants in the 19<sup>th</sup> century makes this period of particular interest. Mass rural to urban geographical relocation, caused partly by the industrial revolution, saw extensive numbers of young provincial women (and men) flocking to major cities, and to Paris in particular. Figures vary according to the sources, but there seems to be consensus that throughout the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, numbers fluctuated between 900,000 and 1,000,000 domestic servants in France (approximately 8% of the active population), three-quarters of whom were women.<sup>25</sup>

According to Martin-Fugier (1979) the maid's culturally conceived rebelliousness essentially coincides with the aftermath of the period in French history most associated with conflict between masters and subordinates.<sup>26</sup> Once the 'feudal code' of the Ancien Régime had been broken, the relationship between master and servant irrevocably changed: '*le domestique émerge en tant que corps et corps étranger qui, si l'on n'y prête garde, peut pourrir l'ensemble du corps familial.*' (Martin-Fugier, 1979, p. 39) The maid's conception as 'foreign body' in the 19<sup>th</sup> century imagination was thus one that disrupted the family order and that could lead to catastrophe.

The feminisation of domestic service was to lend itself to the establishment of patently gendered characterisations of the domestic servant. The growing demand for service labour by the increasingly dominant bourgeoisie as the century progressed, combined with the gradual

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<sup>24</sup> The aristocracy moreover had female servants who were themselves not necessarily from the labouring classes, literate governesses and lady's maids, but often themselves poorer members of the noblesse. Gradually, upper and middle class domestic servants disappeared, as did lower class households that employed a servant, leaving in their wake the standard maid of all work employed by the middle class as the most common model. See Sarti (2005, p. 202).

<sup>25</sup> See Martin-Fugier (1979, pp. 34-6) and Eleb & Debarre (1995).

<sup>26</sup> This of course must be nuanced with the knowledge that the Revolution is understood as having been bourgeois-led, and the successive political regimes of the following century were at the service of this emerging class who required the employment of servants in order to assert itself. Indeed, as Petitfrère (1986, p. 214) writes, '*Au siècle des Lumières, alors que tant de voix s'élèvent pour contester toutes sortes de hiérarchies, il ne s'en trouve guère pour demander la suppression du service domestique.*'

And Valérie Piette (2000, p. 68) underlines this point clearly: '*La Révolution française aurait dû, sinon abolir la domesticité, du moins redéfinir un mode de travail domestique qui se démarquait de l'ancienne aliénation servile et qui se rapprochait des théories égalitaires qu'elle prônait... 1789 ne fut pas pour les domestiques une rupture entre deux systèmes.*'

opening up of alternate avenues of employment for working-class women (shop assistants, factory work), eventually led to a situation in which demand outstripped the supply of domestic servants. The climax of this period known as the '*crise de la domesticité*' straddles the last decade of the 19th and the first decade of the 20th centuries.<sup>27</sup> From the 1900s onwards, the status of the *bonne à tout faire* underwent some changes: increased worker status definition, defined wages, and a decreased use of the maid's paraphernalia – aprons and uniforms that had contributed to the generification of the maid, and thus, her intense social and cultural inscription.

The *crise de la domesticité* is important not only for chronologically framing the period of crystallisation of the maid figure, but for accounting for the maid's negatively viewed placelessness and her perceived attempted social mobility (viewed as flitting from job to job in search of more advantageous conditions and pay – and, hence, in a sense rebelling against the social order, rejecting her given spatial and social station). Fraisse (2009, p. 30) quotes Victor Clerq's article '*La crise de la domesticité*' in *l'Enseignement ménager* (Décembre 1908):

*Quels que soient les défauts des maîtresses, ils ne suffisent évidemment pas à expliquer l'attitude des domestiques, celle notamment des "bonnes à tout faire". Comment! Voilà à Paris de toutes jeunes filles qui sont logées, nourries, blanchies, qui n'ont aucune besogne pénible, qui reçoivent des gages de 45 à 50 francs sans compter le "sou du franc"<sup>28</sup> des fournisseurs! Elles devraient considérer leur sort comme privilégié et prouver par leur travail combien elles sont heureuses de ne pas mener la dure vie des ouvrières. Tout au contraire, elles ne songent qu'à travailler le moins possible, à cancaner et à médire et n'ont aucun goût à ce qu'elles font. Elles vont de maison en maison toujours à la fantastique recherche d'une place où l'on serait bien payé pour ne rien faire.*

The *crise de la domesticité* marks a time frame where the disjuncture of supply and demand in servants' favour endowed them with an element of power that also had the effect of increasing bourgeois anxiety towards them. But it also marks the decline of live-in service that would follow in the twentieth century, gradually to be replaced by more fragmented forms of domestic labour, in which the condition of servitude would become somewhat diluted. This

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<sup>27</sup> See Victor de Clerq, '*La crise de la domesticité*', *L'Enseignement ménager*, décembre 1908 (in Fraisse 2009, p. 30) for a contemporary account of the perceived 'crisis'. See also Martin-Fugier (1979, pp. 33-9); and Fraisse (2009, pp. 28-30), for whom the '*crise de la domesticité*' forms the basis for a discussion of relations between maid and masters; see also Piette's discussion of this crisis in a Belgian context (2000, troisième partie); and Michelle Perrot's 'Figures et rôles' in *Histoire de la Vie privée* t.4 (1985-7).

<sup>28</sup> The *sou du franc* refers to a 5% discount apportioned to servants by suppliers during transactions on food and household orders, where the servant would generally be able to keep 5% on each transaction – a wage supplement commonly paraded to justify the servant's good lot in life. (Cusenier, 1912, p. 212)

crisis however, in its twenty or so years time-frame, was such an important social topic that it inspired extensive conversation on the ills of female servants, in a way that would continue to influence social and cultural perceptions of the rebelliousness of maids.

### **The dualistic maid figure – the ‘*perle*’ and the ‘*souillon*’**

In 19<sup>th</sup> century France, the maid was particularly associated with conflicting categories of purity and filth that derived their symbolic resonance from her material dealings with dirt – categories that continue to inscribe cinematic depictions of women serving figures, as my subsequent film analysis will show. This metaphor of purity and filth corresponds to notions of the ideal and the reviled maid in bourgeois perception. The ideal maid has long possessed the qualities of ‘humility, lowliness, meekness and gentleness, fearfulness, respectfulness, loyalty and good temper.’ (Davidoff, 1995, p. 27)<sup>29</sup> Alongside this impossibly self-effacing and docile image of the ideal servant, hovered the shadowy presence of her opposite: the wretched, promiscuous, dirty, slovenly and lazy thief.

The maid’s association with either one (or sometimes alternating between) of the ‘*perle*’ and ‘*souillon*’ character-types goes back hundreds of years<sup>30</sup>, though the 19th century brought with it the requisite conditions to entrench this dualistic character of the maid figure. The dualistic portrayal of the good and evil maid is one that continues to this day in masters’ speech and in cinematic representation<sup>31</sup>, and is a central and formative feature of the rebellious maid’s presence that I isolate in current French cinema.

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<sup>29</sup> This ‘good servant’ model was extant elsewhere in Europe. Sarti (2001, pp. 8-10; p. 19) writes of the prominence of Saint Zita, the patron saint of servants, in an Italian context since the end of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, a place that would become more prominent in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in line with the feminization of domestic service. Zita’s enshrinement in the socially prescribed behaviour of ‘good’ female servants was, Sarti writes, re-affirmed in 1955 by Pope Pius XII, who proclaimed Zita as the ‘universal patron saint of women-servant’ who would contribute to fighting secularization by providing servants with a model of ‘Christian meekness, obedience, correct conduct, scrupulousness and patience.’ This papal intervention in the conduct of female servants was designed to stem the flow of the ‘danger’ that threatened social values. (Sarti, 2001, pp. 18-19) See also Sarti (1994, pp. 307-59) for more on Saint Zita.

<sup>30</sup> Yates (1988, p. 12) suggests that this dualistic maid is traceable to the middle ages, where the ‘*servante fidèle*’ coexisted with the ‘*jolie servante*’.

<sup>31</sup> This is equally true for common parlance in contemporary France. Sarah Lecomte (2001, pp. 319-20) recalls a conversation with an academic in 1999, who referred to the cleaning lady that came to her home ten hours per week as ‘une *perle rare*’. (Italics are Lecomte’s)

Sophie in Chabrol’s film *La Cérémonie* is described by the mistress as ‘une *vraie perle*’. Of course the duality of the maid finds itself represented in more ways than in dialogue, and the film analysis that I will provide in the case studies will go to the heart of this.



The *perle/souillon* dichotomy in the context of 19<sup>th</sup> century French literary texts has been the subject of Susan Yates's book *Maid and Mistress: Feminine Solidarity and Class Difference in Five Nineteenth-Century French Texts* (1991)<sup>32</sup>, and prior to that the maid's good and evil duality in representation was addressed in Anne Martin-Fugier's 1979 book *La Place des Bonnes: La Domesticité Féminine en 1900*.<sup>33</sup> The condition of servitude that the *bonne à tout faire* most expertly embodies is to be seen as a hybrid condition, the *perle* and the *souillon* consisting in concentrated anxieties surrounding the cohabitation of disparate classes under the one roof. Mirbeau's (2003, p. 169) fictional diary-keeping maid, Céléstine, expertly expresses the dualism of the condition of servitude: '*Un domestique, ce n'est pas un être normal, un être social... [...] C'est quelque chose de pire : un monstrueux hybride humain... Il n'est plus du peuple, d'où il sort ; il n'est pas, non plus, de la bourgeoisie où il vit et où il tend...*'<sup>34</sup> The maid figure, this 'monstrous hybrid' inhabiting the fringes of society is, Mirbeau implies, prone to rebellion in that her subjectivity is under constant threat as she wrestles to find a tenable position within the space of the home.

Martin-Fugier and Yates both hold up Flaubert's Félicité (*Un Coeur simple*, 1877)<sup>35</sup> as typical of the good and pure maid, the prized *perle*. The story's opening line can leave no doubt as to Félicité's virtue, and moreover to the servant as status symbol: '*Pendant un demi-siècle, les bourgeoises de Pont l'Evêque envièrent à Mme Aubain sa servante Félicité.*' The *perle*'s qualities are nominally conveyed through both the novella's title, and the protagonist's name. Félicité's devotedness and her ultimately selfless love, unrequited by her mistress, however left the maid character to succumb to madness and infirmity.

The Goncourt brothers' *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865) offers a literary example of the coexistence of the two key traits – good and bad; *perle* and *souillon* – that defined the 19<sup>th</sup> century conception of the *bonne à tout faire*. The sexually rapacious maid Germinie, based on

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<sup>32</sup> A subject first expounded in Yates's PhD thesis '*Perle and 'souillon': The maid as obverse image of the mistress in five nineteenth century French texts.* (1988) Yates sought to employ the *perle/souillon* category with regard to isolating the instances of difference and rapprochement between the maid and the mistress.

<sup>33</sup> In an American context, Inness (1999) has investigated Edith Wharton's representation of servants as 'loyal saints' and 'devious rascals', proving that this binary categorisation of the maid was not exclusive to France.

<sup>34</sup> Genet's play *Les Bonnes* (1976, p. 100) half a century later reprises Mirbeau's 'monstrous hybrid' in a manner that injects the maid's spatialized capacity for contamination: '*Les domestiques n'appartiennent pas à l'humanité. Ils coulent. Ils sont une exhalaison qui traîne dans nos chambres, dans nos corridors, qui nous pénètre, nous entre par la bouche, qui nous corrompt. Moi, je vous vomis.*'

<sup>35</sup> *Un Coeur simple* was recently adapted for the cinema by Marion Laine (2008), starring Sandrine Bonnaire, who previously played another maid, Sophie, in Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995)

the Goncourt brothers' actual servant, leads a double life, an ideal maid to her masters, but not so out of their sight. And like the majority of maids represented as transgressing social norms by straying from their duties within the domestic sphere, an occurrence that will hold deep significance in the analysis of films portraying contemporary servitude and rebellion, Germinie is punished at the end of the story.

The *perle* and the *souillon* can thus very well, and often do, co-exist within a represented maid figure, as exemplified in the Goncourts' *Germinie Lacerteux* (1865), and equally so in Lamartine's *Geneviève* (1850).<sup>36</sup> This duality of the good and evil maid, the '*couple éternel, du criminel et de la sainte*' (Genet 1976, p. 60), is a virtually intrinsic factor in many maid representations, including those cinematic examples that will be surveyed. The *perle/souillon* binary will be explored in more depth for its role in the spatial construction of the maid figure in chapter 2.

While the *perle* and the *souillon* are symbolic categories for ideal and reviled servitude, they are equally tied into the maid's labour within a domestic setting, reflecting both the maid's ordering role and her capacity to induce chaos. But dirt is, as Mary Douglas (2002a, p. 50) wrote, simply 'matter out of place.' If the maid is constructed as *souillon*, as dirty, it is also because she is, herself, out of place.

More broadly, the home, and specifically domestic labour, have long been analysed by social anthropologists for their dualistic containment of moral and social codes that juxtapose cleanliness and filth, order and disorder, purity and taboo.<sup>37</sup> Furthermore, the maid's essential occupation – that of housework – is in its essence a boundary-based structuring process. As Anne McClintock states in *Imperial Leather: race, gender and sexuality in the colonial contest* (1995, p. 170), 'Housework is a semiotics of boundary maintenance. Cleaning is not inherently meaningful; it creates meaning through the demarcation of boundaries.' The maid's labour can thus be seen as an effort to maintain the social order by means of the organisation of space, in a paradigm that will be referred back to in a regular manner throughout this thesis. Ger and Yenicioğlu (2004, p. 1) moreover maintain that 'cleanliness and dirt' have been found to have held an important historical role 'in setting up, obliterating, or shifting boundaries between the savage and the civilized, peasant and bourgeois, and the lower and the upper classes in the

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<sup>36</sup> See Yates (1991) for detailed analyses of these novels in light of the *perle/souillon* trope.

<sup>37</sup> Cleanliness has ancient associations with moral purity and holiness, just as dirt has long been associated with sexuality.

Western world during the civilization and industrialization process'.<sup>38</sup> The *perle/souillon* trope must therefore be understood within the social construction of the home, the symbolic and spatial boundaries erected within it, as well as the material and symbolic functions of filth.

If the maid was generally associated with sexual promiscuity in her characterisation and perception as *souillon*, it was in great part due to the time-honoured custom of masters ensuring that the maid of all work's labour extended to the provision of sexual services, consenting or not. The '*droit de cuissage*', generally translated as 'the lord's first night' refers to a disputed 'custom' (see the accounts by Louis, 1994; Boureau, 1995; and Fraisse, 1996).<sup>39</sup> By the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the term '*droit de cuissage*' had evolved to signify in particular the (usually non-consensual) sexual act with a maid living under the roof of her masters, more commonly referred to as the '*troussage de domestique*'.<sup>40</sup> Seen as a rite of passage in the sexual awakening of young bourgeois men<sup>41</sup> and as an outlet for their fathers' sexual desires<sup>42</sup>, the maid was conveniently located and less likely than a prostitute to be afflicted by a sexually transmitted infection, and ultimately powerless to contest the attack.<sup>43</sup>

Zola, the Goncourts and Mirbeau expressed this double duty of the maid in their fiction, with the maid's sexuality being associated with the filth of the *souillon*. Mirbeau's *Journal d'une femme de chambre* (and Bunuel's adaptation of it<sup>44</sup>) associates the element of filth as

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<sup>38</sup> See also Davidoff (1995), Elias (2000), Ross (1996) and Vigarello (1985).

<sup>39</sup> The dispute is nevertheless semantic since it relies, in Boureau's case, on the absence of this principle being an actual '*droit*', enshrined in some sort of early modern edict. Whether or not lords were legally entitled to ravish a subject's bride on the wedding night before the married couple's coupling, the sexual procurement of lower class women by men of higher class is an immemorial occurrence.

<sup>40</sup> This language that connotes the rape of a maid by her master continues to form part of the current French vocabulary, recently and clumsily re-popularised by Jean-François Kahn dismissing the alleged rape of Nafissatou Diallo by Dominique Strauss-Kahn, decrying the latter's judicial and mediatic 'persecution' for what was simply a '*troussage de domestique*', an indiscretion that caused such a stir that the widely respected journalist had to resign from *Marianne*.

<sup>41</sup> This characteristic infringement upon the maid's body by the master or the master's son was signalled by Flaubert in the *Dictionnaire des idées reçues*, under the entry for '*femmes de chambres*': '*Toujours déshonorées par le fils de la maison.*' (Flaubert, 1913, in Martin-Fugier 1979, p. 321)

<sup>42</sup> The bourgeois wife, strictly constructed as pure, was not a suitable object for bourgeois male sexuality.

<sup>43</sup> Theresa McBride (1976, p. 103) states that around 45% of single women giving birth out of wedlock between 1883 and 1886 in Parisian hospitals were servants. Given maids' unrelenting work timetables, the paucity of time off, and the interdictions regarding their leaving the domestic sphere, one could surmise that a great number of these pregnancies were caused by male employers.

<sup>44</sup> '*Mais enfin chérie, une fille comme Céléstine, qui vient de Paris, Dieu sait ce qu'elle a pu faire, elle a dû rouler un peu partout, attraper de sales maladies et tu voudrais que moi, je...*' (in Bunuel's *Journal d'une femme de chambre*, 1965).

seemingly incompatible with the master's *troussage de domestiques*.<sup>45</sup> The master disingenuously defends himself against accusations by his wife of his preying on Céléstine on the grounds that, coming from the corrupting influence of Paris, she would be infected with 'filthy diseases':

*Après le dîner, au salon, Monsieur et Madame eurent une forte pique.*

*Madame disait:*

*—Je te dis que tu fais attention à cette fille...*

*Monsieur répondait:*

*—Moi?... Ah! par exemple!... En voilà une idée!... Voyons, mignonne... Une rou lure pareille... une sale fille qui a peut-être de mauvaises maladies... Ah! celle-là est trop forte!...*

*Madame reprenait:*

*—Avec ça que je ne connais pas ta conduite... et tes goûts.*

*—Permits... ah! permits!...*

*—Et tous les sales torchons... et tous les derrières crottés que tu trousses dans la campagne!... (Mirbeau, 2003, pp. 123-4)*

The motif of the *perle* and the *souillon* seen above, is as I will discuss, closely related to the maid's spatialisation. This dualism will be referred to for its constitutive power in the representation of the maid's servitude and rebellion.

The preceding discussion of the maid's historical association with filth and abjection and the concomitant purity that symbolically defined the utility of her presence within the home has been necessary in order to account for what is, in essence, the bi-polarity and the profoundly political nature of the maid's representation. The *perle/souillon* trope at once justified and reinforced negative perceptions of the maid that had the ultimate, implicit aim of promoting employers' wariness of the foreign bodies they admitted into their homes.<sup>46</sup> And were male employers to violate these foreign bodies, the trope exculpated them from blame. The latent image of the filthy and promiscuous maid that hid behind even the most pure-seeming servants functioned as a reminder of the underlying rebellion that the served/servant relationship invited. That is, the maid's oppressive servitude in the 19<sup>th</sup> century invited the

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<sup>45</sup> The maid Adèle in Zola's *Pot-Bouille* (1957, p. 299) also exemplifies this well, moreover injecting the element of filth as attempted prophylactic into the masters' ritualistic visits to her attic room, simultaneously enshrining this character as a *souillon* through her physical and moral filth:

*Quel péché avait-elle donc pu commettre pour que le bon Dieu laissât les hommes s'acharner sur elle? Après celui-là, un autre: ça ne finissait pas. Elle ne les agaçait guère cependant, leurs bêtises lui causaient si peu de plaisir qu'elle restait sale exprès, afin de ne pas leur donner des idées. Ah! ouiche! Ils s'enrageaient davantage, et continuellement c'était de l'ouvrage en plus.*

<sup>46</sup> The overarching fear was that of murder, as will be seen below.

expectation, among masters, that the maid could, given the circumstances, rebel against this imposed social order, the condition of servitude.

### **Negative perceptions of the female domestic servant: criminality and the rebellious maid figure**

*Je dis que, du moment où quelqu'un installe, sous son toit, fût-ce le dernier des pauvres diables, fût-ce la dernière des filles, je dis qu'il leur doit de la protection, qu'il leur doit du bonheur... Je dis aussi que si le maître ne nous le donne pas, nous avons le droit de le prendre, à même son coffre, à même son sang... (Mirbeau, 2003, p. 255)*

Bouniceau-Gesmon (1885, p. 73) romanticises the master-servant relationship that existed in the households of the ‘*vieilles familles*’ during the Ancien Régime, where ‘*le serviteur pénétrait ainsi jusque dans les secrets de ses maîtres, et la confiance affectueuse que ceux-ci lui témoignaient l’attachait en l’honorant et eût, au besoin, redressé sa conscience hésitante*’. Intimate communication between the two classes had thus allayed any potential transgressions by servants through instilling ‘*loyauté*’ or ‘*fidélité*’, terms that are frequently employed in the characterisation of Ancien Régime master-servant relations. Accordingly, during the Ancien Régime, the servant figure was most commonly represented in cultural production as the loyal – if occasionally cheeky (*fourbe*) – and ever-present companion to his or her master or mistress. This is shown for example in Molière and Marivaux’s light-hearted depictions of master/servant entente.

This protection against ancillary rebellion afforded by the conception of the servant as confidant was replaced by a freezing of communication during what Hobsbawm referred to as the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, or the period from the French revolution to the outbreak of the first world war. Perceptions of domestic servants became more negative, whereas the Ancien Régime displayed a certain ambivalence towards servants.<sup>47</sup> More and more, domestic service treatises

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<sup>47</sup> See Maza (1983) and Fairchilds (1984).

insisted on the social, sexual, and moral threat posed by servants.<sup>48</sup> This threat is one that was materialised through architectural segregation, as the chapter 2 will explain.

The publication of Raymond de Ryckère's *La servante criminelle: étude de criminologie professionnelle* (1908) attests to the contemporary recognition of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid's obsession with the maid's criminal – and thus arguably rebellious – persona in a French-speaking context. In this work, Ryckère detailed maids' mental illness, theft (the most widespread of crimes by maids)<sup>49</sup>, crimes against childhood (to be understood as abortion and disposal of unwanted babies), acts of vengeance against masters (of particular interest for this thesis, and the second most common crime of maids after theft), crimes of passion, political crimes, poisoning, prostitution, alcoholism and suicide, as well as measures of prevention and remedy that lawmakers and masters should undertake.<sup>50</sup> '*La criminalité ancillaire*' – was, in Ryckère's opinion, the most important criminal category to plague France at that time: '*Parmi les différentes criminalités professionnelles, il n'en est aucune qui possède à tous les points de vue une importance aussi considérable et qui exerce des ravages aussi étendus que la criminalité ancillaire.*' (1908, p. 1) Ryckère's book called for concerted action on the part of the authorities ('*pouvoirs publics*') – 'sociologists', criminologists, and philanthropists – in order to stem ancillary criminality's '*augmentation toujours croissante*' and the '*graves dangers sociaux qu'elle entraîne.*' (1908, p. 400) The servant problem was thus a societal one

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<sup>48</sup> See Petitfrère's (1986, pp. 149-76 and pp. 177-211) extensive discussion of the '*manuels pédagogiques*' of Abbé Grégoire (1814) and Bailleul (1812), and the various means of legislative and personal control proffered and employed in order to contain this threat.

<sup>49</sup> See also Petitfrère (1986, pp. 160-3) for a description of this '*obsession du vol domestique*' throughout the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, something which he argues increased in the wake of the Revolution (p. 161). He cites, among others, Abbé Grégoire's complaint (1814, p. 175): '*Autrefois ils servaient pour vivre, à présent c'est pour s'enrichir.*'

Ancillary theft was equally an obsession of French novelists, who inserted it into both their fiction and non-fiction writing.

Balzac (1846) wrote about ancillary theft in a vehement manner in *La cousine Bette* (in Martin-Fugier, 1979, p. 245):

*Dans tous les ménages, la plaie des domestiques est aujourd'hui la plus vive de toutes les plaies financières. A de très rares exceptions près, et qui mériteraient le prix Montyon, un cuisinier et une cuisinière sont des voleurs domestiques, des voleurs gagés, effrontés, de qui le gouvernement s'est complaisamment fait le receleur, en développant ainsi la pente au vol, presque autorisée chez les cuisiniers par l'antique plaisanterie sur « l'anse du panier » ... La statistique est muette sur le nombre effrayant d'ouvriers de vingt ans qui épousent des cuisinières de quarante et de cinquante ans enrichies par le vol.*

See Martin-Fugier (1979, pp. 245-55 ; and note 13 pp. 396-7) for further literary depictions of servant theft by 19<sup>th</sup> century novelists (Zola, Huysmans, Goncourt brothers).

<sup>50</sup> See also Bouniceau-Gesmon, *Domestiques et Maîtres: A propos de quelques crimes récents, par un magistrat* (1885) for a study of (non-gender specific) servant criminality, and his later book, *Domestiques et maîtres: question sociale* (1896), further lists a series of crimes by servants at the beginning.

that demanded to be addressed beyond the confines of the private sphere of the employers of maids, in order to prevent wider contamination of the maid's broad-spectrum criminality.

Late 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship describes murder by maids as a much-exaggerated phenomenon, citing on the contrary the murder of maids by masters to be more widespread. (Martin-Fugier, 1979, pp. 260-2; Maza, 1983, p. 113) According to Martin-Fugier (1979, p. 262), rather than consisting in the murder of masters, the bulk of maids' prosecution matters before the courts involved self-induced miscarriage or infanticide of their own new-born unwanted babies, pregnancies that were often, conceivably, the product of the infamous '*troussage de domestique*'. Maids, states Martin-Fugier (1979, pp. 9-10), were by and large innocent of their masters' accusations of rampant theft and murder:

*En face de l'oppression qu'elles subissent, on est tenté de penser révolte, organisation collective. Il n'en est rien. ... Ce ne sont pas des révoltées, ni des militantes. Elles commettent peu de crimes contre la personne de leurs maîtres, peu de vols à leurs dépens. ... Leurs « révoltes » prennent plutôt la forme de mini-résistances quotidiennes : refus de répondre à la sonnette, petits profits sur les achats au marché. Les résistances sont affaire individuelle.*

If maids did not on the whole commit many crimes, the few that happened had a massive effect on the bourgeois imagination. The maid was not only duplicitous and polluting, she was now also murderous. Though, as Martin-Fugier (1979, p. 262) describes, maids' murders of masters were uncommon, the rare examples of such criminality received disproportionate publicity and promoted an enduring anxiety of the threat inherent to the *bonne à tout faire*: '*le public ... ressentait [les meurtres commis par des domestiques] comme directement représentatifs des menaces que les domestiques faisaient planer sur les maîtres et par là même sur l'ordre social.*'

It is however significant that accounts of *faits divers* in Ryckère and Bouniceau-Gesmon to be seen below are virulently paraded in order to alert the population of masters to the need for responding to this threat posed by maids. These public prophecies regarding the essentialised deviance of female servants can be seen as integral in shaping the future of representing the maid figure as rebellious. Examples of this vengefulness of the servant, plotting to escape her condition are equally found in 19<sup>th</sup> century realist and naturalistic

literature,<sup>51</sup> representations that would add to the latent construct of the rebellious maid in their canonical status within French literature.<sup>52</sup> Traces of the particular characterisation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid as reviled and prone to unmitigated rebellion will find themselves carried through in contemporary cinematic representations of female servitude.

One discovers, from reading Ryckère's tome, that the maid's rebellion and/or revenge was constructed as on the whole unjustified or exaggerated, something that will hold significance for future cinematic representations:

*La servante se venge souvent de ses maîtres ou de leurs enfants de la manière la plus cruelle, la plus atroce, pour le motif le plus futile, parfois pour une simple réprimande. Ce défaut de proportion entre le mobile et l'acte, entre le besoin et les moyens mis en œuvre pour l'apaiser, est, comme le remarque Corre, la marque d'une intelligence malade ou à peine ébauchée, mais il est aussi la conséquence du médiocre développement de la sensibilité.* (Ryckère 1908, p. 194)

Ryckère provides examples of the disproportionality between servitude and revenge that are worth listing here for the understanding they provide of the ways in which rebellion in servitude was feared and seen as lacking justification in the 19<sup>th</sup> century imaginary. For example, he cites the case of Hélène Closset in 1891, a servant in Verviers, who laced her

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<sup>51</sup> In Mirbeau (2003, pp. 254-5), Célestine recounts a conversation in her 'diary' that presents the servant's desire to inflict vengeful pain and annihilation on the master:

*'Je demandais à Baptiste, le valet de chambre, en manière de rigolade :*

- *Eh bien, Baptiste... et vous ?... votre cadeau ? [The master's daughter has just married, and Célestine jokes to Baptiste, the valet, about whether he has a gift for the married couple]*
- *... Un bidon de pétrole allumé sous leur lit... le v'là, mon cadeau...*

*C'était chouettelement répondre. Du reste, ce Baptiste était un homme épatant dans la politique.*

- *Et le vôtre, Célestine ?...*

*... Je crispai mes deux mains en forme de serres, et faisant le geste de griffer, féroce, un visage :*

- *Mes ongles... dans les yeux ! répondis-je.*

*Le maître d'hôtel à qui l'on ne demandait rien et qui, de ses doigts méticuleux, arrangeait des fleurs et des fruits dans une coupe de cristal dit sur un ton tranquille :*

- *Moi, je me contenterais de leur asperger la gueule, à l'église, avec un flacon de bon vitriol...*

*Et il piqua une rose entre deux poires.'*

<sup>52</sup> Mirbeau, while representing the maid's rebelliousness as essentialised, nevertheless sees it as a justified response to the state of servitude, in a manner that differs greatly from the public commentators of his time and remains to this day a subversive conception of the legitimacy of servant rebellion. For Mirbeau's literary protagonist Célestine, revenge is a logical and legitimate consequence of masters' dehumanising treatment of their servants (2003, p. 254):

*'Avez-vous réfléchi, un instant, à ce que nous pouvons ressentir de haines mortelles et légitimes, de désirs de meurtre, oui, de meurtre, lorsque pour exprimer quelque chose de bas, d'ignoble, nous entendons nos maîtres s'écrier devant nous, avec un dégoût qui nous rejette si violemment hors l'humanité: "Il a une âme de domestique... c'est du sentiment de domestique..."? Alors que voulez-vous que nous devenions dans ces enfers ? [...] Elles nous parlent de dévouement, de probité, de fidélité.... Non, mais vous vous en feriez mourir, mes petites vaches !...'*



mistress's coffee with poison following a series of reproaches, with the supposed motive being '*afin d'éviter de nouvelles gronderies*' (p. 197), something that hardly seems to justify murder.

In 1906, Augustine R., an orphan of seventeen years of age serving as a maid in a rural home, accused a travelling knife-sharpener of rape, an accusation that was dismissed by the police, with Ryckère (p. 202) stating that '*on n'avait pas tardé à acquérir la certitude que la jeune fille avait menti*'. Soon thereafter, Augustine R. set fire to her employers' farm. Ryckère's description of the case simultaneously denies the precariousness of young servant women both in terms of opportunistic rape and in the legal system, while pointing to the target of the maid's vengeance as being transferrable to her masters. This is important with regard to the consideration of the maid's rebellion as being indiscriminate in its retribution against persons other than those who directly oppressed her. In Augustine R.'s case, she exacted revenge against her direct masters instead of her rapist, as the most tangible representatives of her systemic servitude, and as those who quite probably did nothing to support her claim to the police.

In January of 1898, Léonie D. of Roubaix took a revolver and fired at her mistress, without hitting her – '*fort heureusement*', writes Ryckère (p. 206) – before smashing some windows and running off. The only explanatory context that Ryckère provides to his readers is that this was a woman with an axe to grind ('*ayant à se plaindre de sa patronne Mme B.*').

And in 1891, in Le Mans, the very town that was to set the stage for the Papin case four decades later, Marie Chausson, aged 30, stabbed her master in the chest with a carving knife. According to Ryckère (p. 209), the maid and her master's elderly mother had been bickering for some time, and the master had finally dismissed her. This allegedly provoked in the maid a '*fureur épouvantable*', after which she withdrew to the kitchen, removed her corset, and proceeded to riddle her own body with knife wounds, later dying in hospital.

In 1899, a twenty-year-old maid in Tourcoing, Denise Dubruque, stabbed her elderly mistress one hundred and thirty times. Police found the mistress on the floor of her bedroom in a pool of blood, disfigured from the multiple stab wounds, '*la tête pour ainsi dire tailladée à coups de couteau*' (Ryckère, p. 210). The maid initially tried to cast suspicion on intruders, using burglary as a decoy, before eventually confessing that she had been the killer, and further stating that there was no motive, according to Ryckère (p. 211): '*Elle ne put expliquer son propre acharnement, car sa maîtresse avait toujours été bonne pour elle.*' During her trial, she

is said to have offered up only the following reason for her crime: *‘Je ne sais pas, je ne me souviens plus’*, a linguistic indeterminacy that is later replicated in the words of Christine and Léa Papin on trial, and again, in cinematic representation, by Sophie in *La Cérémonie*. This effaced manner of speech is of course one that is synonymous with the dutiful servant. Here, however, Ryckère uncharacteristically does seek to identify some mitigating factor to this murderous act by a maid, a factor that nevertheless points to a diagnosis of madness – or, ‘hysterical blindness’, to be precise: *‘Cette criminelle avait souffert dans son jeune âge de troubles de la vue. Elle eut en prison un retour de cette affection. [...] On se demanda si ce n’étaient pas là des cas de cécité hystérique.’* (p. 211) One wonders, however, if Ryckère’s efforts to discern the causes of this particular maid’s crime lie within the context of her particular beauty, given that he also comments on her elegant appearance and her beautiful eyes. (p. 211)

Rarely, thus, is the maid’s rebellion accounted for by any mitigating circumstances relating to the context of servitude, by the judge Ryckère. He is willing to designate madness as a motive, but conceiving of the maid’s rebellion as a political act against the condition of servitude seems out of reach. Yet in some cases, the maid’s madness is seen to co-exist with the element of class war, such as in the case of Anna G., a seventeen-year-old maid from Boulogne-sur-Mer sent to work for a family in Wimbledon (in Ryckère, pp. 201-2). This maid set fire to the family home in 1894, citing multiple grievances as her defence: *‘J’étais si misérable, je voulais mourir!’*, a statement by the maid that seemingly attributes her rebellion to an oppressive servitude; but also the homesickness of a young woman far from home: *‘J’avais si fort le mal du pays que je ne savais plus ce que je faisais!’*; and, in addition to this, in a note she left in the letterbox of the house that she set fire to, Anna G. juxtaposes her foreignness with a political revenge that seeks to destroy the very relationship of served and servant, albeit one expressed with rambling incoherence that ultimately foils this purportedly political act:

*Ah! Vous n’aimez pas les Français? Eh bien, je n’aime pas non plus les Anglais! Serviteurs et maîtres doivent disparaître... Prenez garde, j’irai où vous irez... Vivent les anarchistes! Nous sommes ceux qui ont vu Caserio à Lyon; nous sommes quatre et nul ne nous peut trouver (?).*

From the above cases (and the hundred or so others recounted in both Ryckère's study, and in a more general manner in Bouniceau-Gesmon's dismissal of servant protest), it is plain to see that there is generally no connection made between context and crime, no desire to investigate the problems inherent in this servitude that was clearly untenable.<sup>53</sup> In the 19<sup>th</sup> century (dominant) imaginary, maids appear as ungrateful and whining, ready to brandish the carving knife at the slightest hint of a reproach on the part of their mistress. In all of these cases, the families that employ these criminally rebellious maids, at least according to the accounts given by those such as Ryckère and Bouniceau-Gesmon who were both involved in the administration of justice, are portrayed as the innocent victims of irrational rage. The maid's rebellion, executed '*pour le motif le plus futile, parfois pour une simple réprimande*' (Ryckère, p. 194), exists in a vacuum in the 19<sup>th</sup> century commentator's mind. And though contemporary French filmmakers clearly represent servitude as intolerable, as the case study chapters will explain, they nevertheless reproduce this 19<sup>th</sup> century tension between servitude and rebellion as being not wholly logical, as a '*défait de proportion*', as Ryckère had seen it a century earlier.

The other salient manner through which the maid was constructed as an anxiety-inducing figure during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and one that relates tangentially to her constructed criminality described above, insofar as it is a strategy of rebellion against servitude, was her attempted social mobility. When the maid was not seen to be plotting to murder her masters in all kinds of horrid ways, she was seen to attempt to accede to a served status through cunning means, and in a manner that is inextricable from the conquest of space. The way that this played out in cultural representation was through the image of the maid aping her masters – '*singer les maîtres*'. The social perception of the maid's desired social mobility and the cultural trope of '*singer les maîtres*' or that which Petitfrère (1986, pp. 143-7) refers to as '*le mimétisme ancillaire*', are intricately related.

The maid's attempted upward social mobility was integral to the social anxiety of masters during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The idea that the maid, up in her loft at night or in stolen moments during the day in the mistress's room, would be impersonating the latter and parodying her gestures and trying on her clothes, signified the threat of servant rebellion

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<sup>53</sup> To name only the material circumstances of the maid's labour: sixteen-hour workdays, no compulsory rostered days off until the very end of the 19th century, rationed food (generally the left-overs), insalubrious living conditions, sexual prey to masters, etc.

against their station in life and against those who immediately benefit from her servitude. The maid's social mobility, perhaps more so than that of other, more (spatially) distant members of the working classes, was a threat at close quarters to the social order upon which the dominance of the bourgeoisie rested. Petitfrère (1986, p. 141) cites Abbé Grégoire's (1814, p. 171) demonstration of the reality of this supposed threat of ambitious maids by reproducing an advertisement placed in *Petites Affiches* of a '*Jeune fille, ayant des talents agréables, voudrait se placer chez un homme seul.*' Young women were thus, according to the public commentators of the time, engineering their social ascension through the provision of domestic, and, crucially, sexual service – insidiously making their way into a served, bourgeoisie status through behaviour considered inappropriate to the propriety of women of that class. Fundamentally, this perceived attempted social mobility is associated with the maid's ingress into masters' space.

In turn, the aspect of the maid impersonating the mistress pervaded the cultural iconography of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebellious maid figure. It took on a specifically threatening characteristic, whereas it had previously been, during the Ancien Régime when the social segregation between masters and servants had yet to be architecturally enacted, a comic narrative in cultural representation. The servant as mistress theme was already extant during the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries in comic opera (*opéra bouffe*) and in Molière and Marivaux's plays, where narratives of maids' and masters' love would inevitably be abandoned in favour of the respect of the '*convenances sociales*' (Petitfrère, 1986, p. 142). But the 19<sup>th</sup> century came to see this aping of the masters, this attempted upward mobility, as a threat to the social order, an attitude that was mirrored in the literature of the period<sup>54</sup> and that continues, as the case studies in chapters 4 and 5 will show, to constitute an element of the maid's represented rebelliousness in cinema.

The above discussion, that has juxtaposed the maid's real and represented struggle as conceived by her masters, points to a clear disjuncture between the perception of servants by their masters and lawmakers on the one hand, and the reality of their behaviour as a social group on the other. Far from being inconsequential, it is both causative and symptomatic of the reviled status of servants. This disjuncture between reality and perception and representation

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<sup>54</sup> See Martin-Fugier's (1979, pp. 186-196) discussion of the '*servante-maitresse*' and the '*servante ambitieuse*' in literature of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, where tales abound of men as victims being overrun by ambitious maids after having usurped the mistress's position.

equally provides the context for the opportunistic and pragmatic social construction of the rebellious servant type that has had such an enduring representational existence. And it is one that has been successfully transferred through to contemporary French cinematic production, albeit with modified authorial impetus, as chapter 6 will elaborate on. The active myth-making in relation to servants historically, and more pointedly during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in terms of the *bonne à tout faire*, must in conclusion be understood as serving the purposes of social control, of keeping servants in their place.

### **The Papin sisters (or the rebirth of the rebellious maid in France)**

In this section, I account for what I consider to be a post-script to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's fascination with the rebellious maid, and one that contributes to the persistence of the latent construct of the maid in cinema to this day, the 1933 murder of Mme Lancelin and her adult daughter by their two young maids Christine and Léa Papin.

By the time of the double murder of a mistress and her daughter by the Papin sisters, the transformation of domestic service was well underway, with more and more middle-class households employing externalised *femmes de ménage* rather than a live-in *bonne à tout faire*, increasingly from beyond national borders during the interwar years (Spain and Portugal mostly). Yet the Papin sisters presented an immemorial image of domestic service, working class girls who had relocated to an urban centre, Le Mans, from a nearby village. They conformed to a social type that everyone could relate to, either from the perspective of serving, or being served. In photos pre-dating the crime, Christine and Léa Papin presented physically as the stereotype of the uniform-wearing, dutiful, self-effacing maid – the *perle*. These images were juxtaposed in a stark fashion with the sisters' haggard and lifeless stare in widely published photographs taken of them at their arrest. In the public consciousness of interwar France, Christine and Léa Papin were confirmation that the maid had always been inherently evil in their devoted service – the synthesis of a century's worth of tenacious critiques and romanticised depictions of this dualistic character ideally positioned to corrupt and potentially destroy the class she served. This is not to say, however, that critical and scholarly writing has ventured down this path of inquiry, this image being reserved mostly to the popular media and to a handful of references that I will discuss below.

At the time of the sisters' trial, material regarding the intricacies of the case filtered through to the populace via the media, in particular rumours of their alleged sexual relationship and the extreme violence of the double murder where eyes were gouged out, skulls crushed with a pewter jug, and limbs slashed with a carving knife. But the former detail of their taboo (lesbian and incestuous) sexuality referenced the maid as *souillon*, as the perpetrator of polluting and promiscuous sexual behaviour. The spatial components of their murder of Mme and Mlle Lancelin find themselves latently transmitted into cinematic representations of rebellious maids. For example, that it was on the staircase that the first blow was struck on Madame's skull is significant; so too is the fact that one of them retreated to the kitchen to fetch the carving knife with which to slice the flesh of the women's legs; and so too is the fact that police had to break down the door to their *chambre de bonne* where they had barricaded themselves in and were allegedly found huddled together in each other's arms.

Their crime provided enduring discussion material for psychoanalysis (Lacan and Le Guillant) through to the 1960s. After Lacan's (1933) elaboration of the '*motifs du crime paranoïaque*' on the basis of this case, Le Guillant reprised the Papin case both in *Evolution psychiatrique* (1963a) and in *Les Temps Modernes* (1963b).

Genet's famed play *Les Bonnes*, first performed in 1947, despite ultimately conceiving of the Papin *fait divers* as but a convenient vehicle for an alternative subversive narrative<sup>55</sup>, nevertheless in a significant though not openly acknowledged way draws a link between Christine and Léa Papin and their *perle/souillon* figurative ancestress. In naming his protagonists Solange and Claire, Genet etymologically references the filthy *souillon* and the pure *perle*.

The Papin sisters' rebellious maid narrative has been repeatedly staged in cinema. Nikos Papatakis' controversial film *Les Abysses*, a surrealist piece inspired by the *affaire Papin* was screened at Cannes in 1963. The past twenty years have furthermore seen a British

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<sup>55</sup> Genet's use of the Papin maids as a vehicle for other preoccupations somewhat problematizes any possible political interpretation. Indeed, Edwards and Reader remind us that Genet, in *Comment jouer 'Les Bonnes'*, 'had been at pains to stress that his play was not a committed plea on their behalf: "Je suppose qu'il existe un syndicat des gens de maison – cela ne nous regarde pas." (Genet, 1976, p. 10 in Edwards & Reader, 2001, pp. 49-50) Rather, according to Edwards and Reader (2001, p. 67), Genet's interest in the maids was based on a narrative of personal affinity: 'The marginality, the same-sex attraction, the dysfunctional or non-existent relationship with parents were obvious factors in Genet's fascination with the Papin case.'

adaptation by Nancy Meckler, *Sister my sister* (1994), Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*<sup>56</sup> (1995), Jean-Pierre Denis's *Les Blessures assassines* (2000), to mention the most widely recognised. In a sense, the Papin sisters' crime was never truly eclipsed from general French perceptions of domestic service and the problem that the insertion of a working class woman into the bourgeois private sphere entailed. The links between the Papin sisters' crime and their servitude have generally been obscured in favour of an interpretive strategy that sees the Papin sisters as an aberration, on the one hand, and in terms of the *fait divers*, on the other.<sup>57</sup> Yet their represented madness, their alleged taboo sexuality and the fascination with the gruesome nature of the murder in fact find their sources in the intertextual representation of female servants that crystallised during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

In a case that has been widely discussed throughout the twentieth century and beyond, there are but few commentators that read the Papin sisters crime as centrally mitigated by Christine and Léa's servitude. A. Memmi, in *l'Homme dominé* (1968), associates the Papin sisters' *domestique* status in a rollcall of usual victims of oppression with '*le noir, le colonisé, le prolétaire, le juif [et] la femme*'. A. Memmi's isolation of the servant as a dominated subject, according to Fraisse (2009, p. 206), went on to inform psychiatrist Le Guillant's '*psychopathologie*' of the maid of all work, which used the Papin sisters as a case-study for the '*esprit de vengeance*' (1963b, p. 896) that characterised the murder of masters by their employees. For Le Guillant (1963b, p. 912), '*la condition des domestiques constitue la persistance la plus significative, à notre époque, des rapports du maître et de l'esclave.*'<sup>58</sup> Le Guillant (1963b, p. 909) sought to re-centre Christine and Léa Papin's servitude in order to understand what led to their murder of their mistresses, seeking out the '*pouvoir pathogène*' of the domestic condition, one that leads to an overwhelming resentment:

*Pour elles, ce fut vraisemblablement leur condition domestique, tirant des frustrations de leur enfance une résonance particulière, qui a pesé du poids le plus lourd sur leur destin. On a vu à quel point le ressentiment qu'elle éveille chez la plupart des serviteurs avait*

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<sup>56</sup> Chabrol's reference to the Papin sisters is not openly acknowledged, his film instead alludes officially to Ruth Rendell's *A Judgement in stone* (1977), which itself, however, alluded to Genet's *Les Bonnes* – a play in turn inspired by the Papin case. This is an interesting cross-border example of transtextuality in the rebellious maid's representability.

<sup>57</sup> See Edwards and Reader's (2001, pp. 20-4) reading of the contemporary interest in the Papin sisters' case in relation to a broader fascination with *faits divers* in French society.

<sup>58</sup> Although Le Guillant's book predates A. Memmi's, it is apparent that they communicated to one another their conceptions of *la condition domestique* (Memmi) and *la condition servile* (Le Guillant) and their ideas about domination in servitude and its potential repercussions. (See note in A. Memmi 1968, p. 183)

*été méconnu tout au long de leur procès. On le voit ou on le devine, cependant, s'exaltant progressivement chez elles au cours des sept années de leur service chez les Lancelin.* (1963b, p. 906)

A. Memmi (1968), Le Guillant (1963a; 1963b) and Fraisse (2009, pp. 204-13) have been the only ones to consider in any lengthy manner the Papin sisters' murders as conditioned by their servanthood, and the public obsession with the case as being consistent with historical perceptions of the maid's rebelliousness. Apart from these contributors, there has been no broader dissection of Christine and Léa Papin's double murder that takes into account, in any meaningful way, the historical paradigm of servitude and rebellion, with most criticisms centering on a psychoanalytic discussion of the merged identities and the '*folie à deux*' of the sisters. More recently, however, Molinier (2012), a psychologist of work, has turned to the specifics of the Papin sisters' labour particularly in its objects – their relationship with the pressing iron or the carving knife, for example – in order to bring to light the ways in which this was a crime intrinsically related to its perpetrators' occupation.

My interest in the Papin sisters thus sits with this collection of critical insights into the Papin sisters' crime as thoroughly conditioned by the condition of servitude, where discussion is centred not on their exceptionalism as murderesses, nor as a case-study of identity-merging. I see the Papin sisters as the belated grand realisation of the full potential of the 19<sup>th</sup> century criminally rebellious maid figure, the acting-out of the mostly paranoid history of the bourgeois obsession with mad and bad servants.

## **Conclusion**

The rebellious maid emerged as a conceptual category bound in discourses of purity and filth during the long 19<sup>th</sup> century. Women servants, on the whole, were represented as being inherently rebellious, though not in a way that many 19<sup>th</sup> century commentators could justify as being a logical consequence of the state of servitude. The maid's characterisation as mad and bad by bourgeois commentators had certain motivations that essentially reside in the idea that women servants posed a social threat that needed to be contained.

The historical contextualisation of the social and cultural place of the maid figure in the 19<sup>th</sup> century imaginary has provided the background within which to develop the argument in the following chapters that the maid is a spatially constructed figure whose representation in



cinema will be articulated through spatial means. But to understand this historically vexed figure's cinematic translation, we must begin in the place of her birth: the bourgeois home of 19<sup>th</sup> century France.

## Chapter 2: Putting the maid in her place – The spatial and architectural construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure

Social classes do not exist ... What exists is a social space, a space of differences, in which classes exist in some sense in a state of virtuality, not as something given but as *something to be done*. (Bourdieu, 1986, in Calhoun et al 2002, p. 343)

### Introduction

The previous chapter explained in what sense the 19<sup>th</sup> century constitutes the key period for the establishment of the iconography of the rebellious maid figure as a construct formulated on class and gender-based social control. This chapter, with that knowledge, now turns to an explanation of the spatial optic through which this thesis intends to link this 19<sup>th</sup> century figure with a series of cinematic representations of women in positions of servitude who rebel over a century later.

Prior to the great reconfigurations of French society following the Revolution, there had been a larger level of social interaction between master and servant. The social distance and spatial proximity between servant and served before the long 19<sup>th</sup> century was accompanied by a domestic architecture that enabled such relations.<sup>59</sup> The 19<sup>th</sup> century's requirement that servants be neither seen nor heard was, in turn, matched by a spatial mirroring and modelling<sup>60</sup> of these newfound social relations of distance under the same roof. The result was the construction of physical barriers through architecture in order to materialise the symbolic distantiation between the classes. This material enactment of social boundaries, and the relationship of influence that the *spatial* and the *social* exert upon one another have in part prompted the adoption, in this thesis, of a spatial methodology.

Before the long 19<sup>th</sup> century, servants had already been viewed as suspect due to their predominantly rural origins that posited them as 'migrant paupers'. (Maza 1983, p. 112)

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<sup>59</sup> See Maza (1983, p. 15, pp. 47-8; p. 108, p. 166, and pp. 203-5) and Fairchilds (1984, pp. 12-3, p. 15, p. 27, p. 33, pp. 40-1 and pp. 51-3) who refer to the correlation between physical proximity and 'psychological' distance between masters and servants during the 17<sup>th</sup> and most of the 18<sup>th</sup> centuries, a relationship that would gradually evolve to embody both physical and social distance at the close of the Ancien Régime period.

<sup>60</sup> Space both reflects social relations as well as affects them, as will be seen below.

Ryckère (1908, p. 230) echoes this conception of the maid's nefariousness partly caused by the geographical excentration of maids' origins<sup>61</sup> in his study on *'la servante criminelle'*:

*Fréquemment originaire de la campagne, la servante se trouve être ainsi une "déracinée", une "transplantée". Elle perd rapidement les qualités de son origine et, sans acquérir la plupart du temps aucune des qualités propres aux centres urbains, elle s'assimile en revanche très aisément toutes leurs imperfections, tous leurs défauts et tous leurs vices. [...] Elle se sent désorientée, perdue, et elle souffre.*

Towards the close of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Des Essarts (quoted in Petitfrère 1986, p. 149) wrote, in *Domestiques ou serviteurs*, that *'la classe des serviteurs n'est composée que de l'écume des campagnes'*, providing a scum-like, polluting image of the servant body. In the country, continues Des Essarts, one finds *'non seulement tous les vices qui peuvent flétrir l'humanité, mais encore tous les crimes qui la déshonorent: ... la perfidie, la débauche, la corruption, la cupidité et l'oubli de toutes les vertus sociales.'* The threat posed by servants is thus understood as having an inherently spatial origin: their predominantly rural origins situate them as a menace to morality. It was within the home, however, that the maid's menacing character was carved out and architecturally enshrined during the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

The recognition of the maid's ambiguous association with domestic space is not new, yet it has tended to be rarely more than a passing comment in histories of domestic service. This thesis will attempt to explain the full social and representational force of this spatiality. Martin-Fugier (1979, p. 9) signalled that *'la question de son identité se joue dans l'ambiguïté de son rapport à l'espace familial. Elle est l'extérieur qu'on introduit à l'intérieur.'* As such, the maid represents that threatening public sphere that negatively defines the domestic sphere through a complex set of public-private binary associations emphasised throughout the course of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Furthermore, Petitfrère (1986, pp. 217-8), in an ambiguously spatial and social expression, stated that the bourgeoisie, the *'nouvelles élites'* of post-revolutionary France, attempted to 'increase the distance' from those that served them.<sup>62</sup> Additionally, with regard to the period preceding that of this thesis's interest, Maza (1988, p. 157) foregrounds the importance of domestic space in locating relations between served and servant, in saying that

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<sup>61</sup> The question of the maid's rural to urban relocation has been addressed for predominantly quantitative purposes by McBride (1973; 1974; 1976) during the first wave of domestic service scholarship but not in a sense that harnesses the theoretical underpinnings of the *spatial* for the *social*. These studies, on the contrary, limit their interest in the maid's geographical situation and mobility to demographic quantitative analysis, mainly within the context of industrialising Europe in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, excluding the maid in representation from their ambit.

<sup>62</sup> (*'augmentant la distance qui les sépare de ceux qui les servent, [les nouvelles élites] croient trouver à la fois le moyen de se faire respecter et celui d'éloigner le danger.'*)

‘[it] is in the hallways, the antechambers, the bedrooms and kitchens of eighteenth-century households that we must go looking for the roots of *fidélité* [between master and servant].’<sup>63</sup>

Despite this professed interest in the servant’s space by Maza in relation to the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and by Martin-Fugier and Petitfrère with the 19<sup>th</sup>, one can only conclude that not much analysis has eventuated. Historians and social scientists looking at both the past and the present have remained content with simply stating the maid’s ambiguous relation to space as some sort of truism while nonetheless enigmatically hinting at some deeper significance. In this thesis, I propose to build upon these insights into the significance of the maid’s ‘place’ and her relation to space as it impacted on the construction of the conceptual category of the rebellious maid figure.

The cataloguing of the maid’s space, in this chapter, in a socio-architectural paradigm, will enable the subsequent classification of cinematic maid figures according to precise spatial criteria. To be clear, my overarching argument here is that the spatial construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid’s servitude and rebellion permits the transference of this character-type through time and space into the medium of cinema. And this is possible even when the film’s protagonist does not directly fulfil the function of the maid of all work. The spatialisation of this figure retains ample power, I argue, to elicit the maid figure in updated cinematic representations of servitude and rebellion, namely that of turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century France. The present chapter, while focussing on the pre-cinematic spatial construction of the maid figure, will, where relevant, draw the reader’s attention to the implications that this spatial elaboration will carry for the maid’s cinematic representation to follow.

The first section of this chapter explains the spatial theoretical underpinnings of this thesis, firstly situating my spatial approach to the study of the maid against previous scholarship, then defining the spatial concepts that I will employ in my discussion of the topic, and finally working towards a theory of the maid’s space syntax that I argue to be the means through which this 19<sup>th</sup> century figure is cinematically translated. The second section situates the establishment of the maid figure’s iconography within 19<sup>th</sup> century French architecture, explaining in what sense the maid can be considered to be a spatially constructed figure. The third section concentrates on the two socio-architectural categories that most distinctly shape

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<sup>63</sup> Maza’s approach is contrary to mine, partly due to our different epochs of study. She presents (without following through with any corresponding spatial analysis) the spaces of the home as settings for the construction of loyalty between servants and masters during the Ancien Régime.

the maid's space syntax: that of liminal space, which constructs the maid as a marginal social figure whose presence is out of place; and that of the *chambre de bonne*, the most archetypal locale of the maid's space in cultural symbolism, and one that elicits the power relations at play in the domestic sphere's social and spatial segregation.

This contextualisation of the maid's space will prefigure chapter 3's integration of this spatial history and the theoretical implications drawn from it into a space-centred approach to film, within which this thesis analyses the maid figure and her contemporary avatars in servitude.

## **1 – Theoretical concepts of space and architecture: towards a space syntax of the maid figure**

The selection of space as the primary analytical frame of reference for the rebellious maid figure in this thesis is informed by an extensive collection of theoretical writing on space as it intersects with social analysis (and with cinematic representation, as the following chapter will discuss). This scholarship can be situated in a cross-disciplinary theoretical push encompassed within what has been widely referred to as the 'spatial turn' in the humanities.<sup>64</sup> The spatial turn has sought to study space from the perspective of issues of class, race and gender. The 'turn' in the spatial turn points to a break with – or a 'displacement [of]' – the 'primacy of time and history as the distinctively interpretative dimension of the contemporary period.'<sup>65</sup> (Soja, 1987, p. 289)

Cosgrove (1999, p. 7) explains the spatial turn in a way that might cast light on the usefulness of a spatial perspective in the study of historically obscured social subjects such as female domestic servants:

[A] widely acknowledged 'spatial turn' across the arts and sciences corresponds to post-structuralist agnosticism about both naturalistic and universal explanations and about

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<sup>64</sup> The spatial turn has spawned its own recent field of inquiry, with Warf and Arias (Eds.) publishing *The Spatial Turn: Interdisciplinary Perspectives* (2009), a collection of chapters by eminent scholars including Edward Soja. Most recently, Conley has published *Spatial Ecologies: Urban sites, state and world-space in French critical theory* (2012), addressing the ways in which French theorists have undergone a spatial turn since the 1960s, with chapters devoted to Lefèbvre, de Certeau, Baudrillard, Augé, Virilio, Deleuze and Guattari, Latour, and Balibar.

<sup>65</sup> Soja, in *Postmodern geographies* (1993, p. 140 in Warf and Arias, 2009, p. 2), has further criticised the historicist conception as 'an overdeveloped historical contextualization of social life and social theory that actively submerges and peripheralises the geographical or spatial imagination.'

single-voiced historical narratives, and to the concomitant recognition that position and context are centrally and inescapably implicated in all constructions of knowledge.

A perspective that gives weight to ‘position’ and ‘context’ – and thus eminently spatial concerns – appears, in this light, especially apposite in the consideration of such a marginalised social and cultural figure as the maid.

Shirley Ardener (1981, pp. 11-34) provides a useful account of the literature relating to the partitioning of space with an emphasis on sociology and anthropology. She cites Goffman’s (1976, p. 1) suggestion that ‘the divisions and hierarchies of social structure are depicted microecologically, that is, through the use of small-scale spatial metaphors.’ (in Ardener 1981, p. 12) In this way, we can see the conception of space, and its organisation according to its occupants’ status and patterns of occupation, as a materialisation of unequal power relations. This proves useful in the study of the ecology of the bourgeois home later in this chapter, where the distribution of space along social lines will be analysed in relation to one another for their capacity to produce servant and served relations. Ardener (1981, p. 12) however furthers this understanding of the spatial as producing the social by insisting on the influence the former can exert, where the “‘theatre of action” to some extent determines the action.’ Ardener (1981, p. 12) concludes that ‘behaviour and space are mutually dependent’, in that ‘the environment imposes certain restraints on our mobility, and, in turn, our perceptions of space are shaped by our capacity to move about ...’

Ardener (1981) has also referred to a ‘social map’ of patriarchy that is a determinant of gendered behaviour and that designates some spaces as feminine, and others as masculine. The private, domestic sphere has of course, particularly since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, been associated with a feminine, maternal space. While it is this feminine, maternal space that is the founding locus for the maid figure, when it comes to the servant within the home, the symbolic and occupational femininity of this space is to some extent overshadowed by the aspect of the maid’s class position. In this light, much of the (extensive) literature on women and the home fails to provide an adequate framework of analysis for the maid’s place within domestic space. Rather than a system of stereotypical masculine/feminine, public/private binaries, the maid figure requires a more nuanced understanding of the divisions of space according to status. The maid’s spatiality must be thought of in terms not only of gender, but equally significantly of class. This is not to say that the maid truly remains a member of any supposed homogeneous

working class upon her insertion into the bourgeois home. As previously referred to, the maid is a ‘monstrous hybrid’ (Célestine in Mirbeau 2003, p. 169), and must be conceived of in all of her social and spatial ambiguities.

While the debate about space and place and that which separates and assimilates them has developed into an expansive field of inquiry in its own right, one that is beyond the scope of my research, it is necessary to account for this debate briefly here, in order to render clear my intentions in the use of the two terms. This discussion will inform my conception of the maid’s particular spatiality from which I derive the concept of her space syntax.

‘Place’ (*lieu*) has generally been seen as the more definite, localised version of ‘space’ (*espace*). Lefèvbre (1991), one of the foremost spatial theorists, differentiates ‘place’ from the wide-reaching and potentially excessively abstract entity of ‘space’ by defining it as ‘socially produced’ space. ‘Place’ is thus space that has been invested with human behaviours, much more so than ‘space’. Gardies (1993, p. 71 in Konstantarakos, 2000, p. 2) provides a useful Saussurian analogy for the setting apart of place from space that likens space to ‘*langue*’ and place to ‘*parole*’, where place becomes ‘the textual manifestation of a latent order which is that of space.’<sup>66</sup> Whereas place was long interpreted as a static entity fixed in a pinpointed geographical location, recent scholarship has insisted on the notion of movement in place.<sup>67</sup> This potential for ‘place’ to be mobile, for it to be able to shift through ‘space’, is important in the interpretation of the maid’s represented servitude and rebellion, in ways that will be seen in the case studies in chapters 4 and 5. Servitude geographically situates the maid in a specific and socially defined ‘place’ (the bourgeois home, typically) in which she is herself *out of place* while being exhorted to *know her place* in the prescriptions of the served/servant relationship. And rebellion readily involves the transgression of boundaries both spatial and social – making place, taking place, or vacating place, for example.

This discussion of space and place in regard to the maid figure thus points to the maid being ‘out of place’ through her servitude, and undergoing renegotiations of space and place throughout the process of rebellion. Consequently, one of the overarching spatial characteristics

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<sup>66</sup> Konstantarakos’ translation of ‘*La manifestation textuelle d’un ordre latent qui est celui de l’espace*’.

<sup>67</sup> As Cresswell (2004, p. 7) explains, a ship may, despite its changing location, ‘become a special kind of place for people who share it on a long voyage.’

of the maid figure that I identify here is that of her placelessness<sup>68</sup> – the extent to which she is out of place while simultaneously occupying space. The English ‘place’ of course encompasses more spatial meaning than the French ‘*place*’, which is a far more sociological term – ‘*lieu*’ being the most direct equivalent of ‘place’. Yet ‘placelessness’ succeeds in connoting the social as well as the spatial on an equivalent level. If this thesis refers to ‘space’ far more than it does to ‘place’ in the context of the maid, it is partly because place is not a given with this social and cultural figure. The maid’s occupation of bourgeois domestic space does not necessarily allow for the investment of location with the social rituals that ‘place’ entails. The fact that the maid is out of place within the bourgeois domestic sphere and its syntactical translations necessarily conditions her occupation of physical space; it structures her servitude, and it provides the impetus for her rebellion while at the same time shaping it.

The concept of placelessness will, in this way, be of particular importance in the discussion of the maid’s spatiality in the following chapters. Indeed, that which most pertinently marks the maid in space is her tenuous occupation of space both according to and in contravention of her function. The maid exists both functionally and symbolically<sup>69</sup> within the bourgeois architectural structure without belonging socially. Her place is the object of prescription but also of proscription that in turn creates the potential for a locus of rebellion against the spatio-social plan as established by the controlled social design of architectural determinism, as aspect of constructed space that will be explained below.

Laws enacted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought to control the servant body through the regulation of space that put maids in a position of placelessness. The decree of the 3<sup>rd</sup> of October 1810, for example, required servants to register with the police ‘*sous peine d’emprisonnement et d’amende*’ (Bouniceau-Gesmon, 1885, p. 157) – much like another reviled social group, prostitutes – and to prove financial means and a fixed address.<sup>70</sup> Servants who could not justify these means and a residence were to be considered as vagabonds, arrested and punished as such. (Bouniceau-Gesmon, 1885, p. 157) In what is a reflection of the maid’s problematic spatial and social positioning, servants were forbidden from renting ‘*aucune*

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<sup>68</sup> Placelessness is a concept most notably associated with the work of Edward Relph, *Place and Placelessness* (1976), in which it was addressed in terms of ‘authentic’ and ‘inauthentic’ experience of place, referencing phenomenological philosophy.

<sup>69</sup> One of the maid’s essential purposes is to signify and uphold her masters’ bourgeois status, as explained in chapter 1.

<sup>70</sup> This state control over the maid’s movements was also extended to other members of the working classes under Napoleon.



*chambre ou cabinet à l'insu de leurs maîtres et sans avoir prévenu le commissaire de police, à peine d'une incarcération qui ne pouvait être moindre de huit jours mais pouvait être de trois mois.*' (pp. 157-8) As Bouniceau-Gesmon (p. 158) writes, the regulation of domestic servants' lodgings, to be seen within the mechanics of control of the maid's access to space, permitted their surveillance from place to place, from employer to employer – '*de se fixer aisément sur leurs antécédents*', lest a criminal maid be allowed to penetrate a dignified household.

Along with placelessness, liminality in a particularly spatial sense<sup>71</sup> will constitute a spatial focal point of this study. As Victor Turner (1995, p. 95), an anthropologist who took up the concept of liminality in his work on rites of passage writes:

Liminal entities are neither here nor there; they are betwixt and between the positions assigned and arrayed by law, custom, convention, and ceremonial. ... liminality is frequently likened to death, to being in the womb, to invisibility, to darkness, to bisexuality, to the wilderness, and to an eclipse of the sun or moon.

Liminality is as such best described as a transitional state of being, and with regard to the maid figure, it encompasses her typological 'betwixt and between' spatio-social position. My study is interested in liminality for its architectural and geographical manifestations and its narrative role in the cinematic representation of the maid figure.<sup>72</sup>

The importance of threshold, liminal space will be seen both in terms of the bourgeois interior's framing of the iconographic maid in this chapter's discussion of 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic architecture to follow, as well as in the case study chapters' analysis of the cinematic translation of the maid's space syntax. Liminal space functions in a narrative and cinematic sense to elicit the ambiguous 'place' of the maid, a working class figure that has been transplanted into bourgeois-controlled space. Liminality will further be of importance in the maid figure's subsequent transposition to extra-domestic space in recent French cinema, where interstitial zones will be analysed against the backdrop of the maid's space syntax of the foundational period of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

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<sup>71</sup> Liminality is equally referred to in conceptions of time, psychic states, and rituals, particularly within the field of anthropology.

<sup>72</sup> This in-between space in relation to the maid figure has most recently been addressed in Mary Wilson's PhD thesis *On the threshold: Placing servants in modernist domesticity* (2009). Whereas Wilson (2009) on the whole conceives of liminality as a psychological state brought on by the presence of thresholds (doorways, for example), I focus on liminal represented space as a narrative elicitation of the ambiguous social place of the maid figure, among other material space-related narrative impulses that define and articulate the maid's servitude and rebellion. This thesis cannot claim complete originality in interpreting the maid's in-between social condition in spatial terms, yet this particular trait of the maid's representation has not been explored in relation to the specific narrative capabilities it affords to the cinematic medium.

According to a widely emulated architectural principle first signalled by modernist architect Louis Kahn (2003), and one was cemented in the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois segregated architectural plan, there are essentially two types of space within a built structure. These consist of ‘served space’, and of ‘servant space’, where served space is the legitimate space that is enabled to function by the existence of the latter, servant space, which in turn is designed to be hidden.<sup>73</sup>

Beyond the constructed space of domesticity that encompasses the maid’s archetypal servitude and rebellion to be addressed in the case study of chapter 4, the (avatar) maid figure in recent French film is increasingly represented as occupying post-modern spaces that have come to be referred to as ‘non-places’, a concept associated with Augé’s work (2000). In chapter 5, the concept of the ‘non-place’ will be of importance in locating the maid beyond the confines of the private sphere. In the maid films under analysis in ‘The translation of the maid’s space syntax in transposed contemporary cinematic narratives of servitude and rebellion’, significant scenes that construct the maid character’s servitude and rebellion have as their setting transient spaces that Augé would describe as being ‘non-places’: supermarkets/shopping centres, car parks, train stations, and hotels, for example. These are typically ‘spaces of circulation, communication and consumption, where solitudes coexist without creating any social bond or even a social emotion.’ (Augé, 1996 p. 178) These particular settings, that are conceivably divested of history and meaningful identity, are employed when cinematically framing the maid’s servitude and rebellion. They convey the historical maid’s typical propensity for de-centred and liminal spaces, on the one hand, and intermediary and transitional spaces, on the other. In relation to the maid figure, a discussion of these so-called non-places will yield paradoxical results that will at times diverge from their negative portrayal in Augé’s anthropology of ‘supermodernity’.

After having set out the various theoretical spatial elements that concern the maid’s space and place, it is now possible to observe in some depth the significance of what I contend to be the means through which the maid figure will be seen to be translated in cinema: space

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<sup>73</sup> Kahn’s served and servant space has equally been referred to by later architects as ‘major’ and ‘minor’ zones. According to Blanc and Blanc (2012, p. 47), ‘the minor zones are associated with stairs, bathrooms, kitchens, utility areas as well as small single bedrooms or studies, while major zones are made up of the living rooms and the larger bedrooms.’ The appellations of both served and servant space, and major and minor zones reflect the inherent hierarchy between the various components that constitute domestic architecture.

syntax.<sup>74</sup> Space syntax is a concept originating in the field of architecture and that was devised in order to study and perfect spatial configurations, with applications concentrated in mass building projects. Its founding theorists are Bill Hillier and Julienne Hanson.<sup>75</sup> Hanson (1998) broadened the applications of space syntax to be of interest in anthropological research into homes and houses, or the mapping of zones of use, in a way that is fundamentally useful for my approach to decoding the maid's space and place. Hanson's ethnographic subject matter, in its sweeping cross-cultural comparisons, at first glance bears little resemblance to the architectural model that spatially defines the maid figure. However, her insistence on the occupation of space and the interrelations between different spaces resonated in a deep way with my analysis of the maid in space. Though space syntax's employment of diagrams and graphs – a product of its industry use in the construction of large-scale buildings such as airports – will not be of use to this study, I retain the following premise of architectural space syntax:

The important thing about a house is not that it is a list of activities or rooms but that it is a pattern of space, governed by intricate conventions about what spaces there are, how they are connected together and sequenced, which activities go together and which are separated out, how the interior is decorated, and even what kinds of household objects should be displayed in the different parts of the home. (Hanson, 1998, p. 2)<sup>76</sup>

This conception of the importance of the often-overlooked arrangement of domestic space, the grammar of how rooms are 'sequenced' in order to create an optimum order, holds particular significance in such a socially stratified environment as the bourgeois dwelling. The maid is present in the home for functional purposes that are at once material (ordering domestic space) and symbolic (signifying her masters' served status). The maid has prescribed trajectories throughout the domestic structure that arise through her labour – a space syntax that is functional to the running of the home. The 19<sup>th</sup> century French architectural model that I will refer to below embodies these patterns and tensions particularly strongly in its distribution of space according to served and servant relations.

The manner in which constructed space is arranged can facilitate and inhibit certain kinds of relations between people simply by virtue of bringing them together or keeping them apart. However, people rebel against allocated spatial arrangements and prescribed patterns of

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<sup>74</sup> Chapter 3 will discuss more precisely the potential for this space syntax to be translated in cinema, this section limits itself to a theoretical explanation.

<sup>75</sup> Hillier & Hanson (1984) and Hanson (1998).

<sup>76</sup> This is an idea that bears parallels to Scott's conception of functionalism in architecture. For Scott (2008, p. 5), 'the function of buildings in human affairs is more correctly described through patterns or rituals of occupation.'

behaviour within a given space, as architecture theorists have shown.<sup>77</sup> The social and spatial segregation of the servant within the home is an aspect of the master's control that was seen as the subject of potential rebellion during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Therefore, in addition to this designed spatialisation of the maid, there exists the very real potential for the maid to rewrite space, to transgress imposed boundaries<sup>78</sup>, and to claim space. I would thus like to broaden the conception of the maid's space syntax to encompass not only her prescribed occupational patterns of space, but also her contravention of this ordering of behaviour through rebellion, and indeed, *as* rebellion.

Having established the theoretical background to the study of space and place, this chapter will now turn to the foundational locus of the socio-cultural construction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure: bourgeois domestic architecture. The space syntax of the maid as established within this particular territory will be the basis upon which the case study chapters will analyse the cinematic representation of servitude and rebellion through the archetypal maid figure and her modern-day avatar.

## **2 – 19<sup>th</sup> century French architecture, conceptions of home, and the social and cultural construction of the maid's place**

The architecture of the bourgeois home functions as a mechanism for the definition of served and servant roles and the shaping of social relations as they will eventually be represented in present-day cinematic narratives of servitude and rebellion. The enduring space syntax of the maid in French cinema, I will ultimately demonstrate, is in great part underpinned by the shift in domestic space that occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and more precisely during the Second Empire and the beginning of the Third Republic. The segregation of space within this domestic architectural model is of utmost importance in the spatial construction of the maid figure.

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<sup>77</sup> See Broady (2009), for example.

<sup>78</sup> As Cresswell (1992, p. 50) reminds us, on the most basic level, to transgress means to cross a geographical boundary.

## Hausmann's reconstruction of Paris

The foundational and enduring spatial model of the maid figure is that of the Haussmannian architectural style whose construction period began in 1851 and continued for some thirty years. Architecture associated with Haussmann's reconstruction of Paris under Napoleon III underwent extensive cultural inscription (notably in realist and naturalistic literature, but equally in visual culture), and is generally studied for its association with new forms of urban planning<sup>79</sup> and with modernity.<sup>80</sup> Marcus (2001, p. 723) nuances the association of Haussmann's renovation of Paris with modernity, however, writing that, although this relationship is temporally evident, 'to study Paris from the vantage point of the apartment house' – from the private sphere – 'uncovers the surprising *anti-modernity* of Haussmannization.'<sup>81</sup> She sees the Haussmannian building as an 'anti-modern reaction against new conditions of city life', the latter centred on 'the promotion of social spaces that foster ... transparency, spectacle, mobility and exchange' (2001, p. 724), or Baudelaire's (1995, p. 13) famed expression of 'the transitory, the fugitive, the contingent.' The private sphere then became a refuge of order and stability against the turbulence of the changing outside world.<sup>82</sup> It is partly within this context that the maid's role, in its ordering function, became so important.

Hausmann's redesign of Paris (1853-70) included a new type of dwelling model for its urban planning based around boulevards lined with apartment buildings occasionally four but

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<sup>79</sup> The domestic architectural model of the 19<sup>th</sup> century resulted in part from Napoleon III's appointment of the baron Haussmann to oversee the reconstruction of Paris in what is widely recognised as a strategic move with political and social control at its heart. Napoleon III sought to prevent popular uprisings by clearing the old town to replace much of the city with a series of grand boulevards that crossed the city, converging at key points. For a broader discussion of the changes in urban space occurring in Paris in this period, see Harvey (2003, pp. 102-12).

<sup>80</sup> Much has been written about the relationship between the Haussmannisation of Paris and modernity, with many historians seeking to establish a conditional reciprocity whereby architecture and urbanism on the one hand, and ethos on the other, are considered co-dependant in their fostering of modernity and the cultivation of the public sphere.

<sup>81</sup> Indeed, as the public sphere was the privileged topic of discussion within the context of modernity and the literature it spawned then and since, there has been a certain overlooking of the private sphere that is traditionally and negatively associated with femininity.

<sup>82</sup> Greaney (2008, p. 148) discusses Walter Benjamin's critique of the Parisian bourgeois interior as 'a symptom of Hausmannization', where the bourgeoisie 'no longer feel at home in [the city] and start to become conscious of the inhuman character of the metropolis', of which the effect is the cultivation of the interior: 'the bourgeois has shown a tendency to compensate for the absence of any trace of private life in the big city. He tries to do this within the four walls of his apartment.' (Benjamin in Greaney 2008, p. 148)

For a further critique of the bourgeoisie's cultivation of the private, see Habermas (1991) where he necessarily addresses the private sphere for its relation to the public sphere (*Öffentlichkeit*), which is the subject of his research. For a broader history of the private sphere during the 19<sup>th</sup> century see Perrot, Duby and Ariès (eds.), tome 4 of *Histoire de la vie privée* (1985-7).

classically six storeys high, the latter figure of course explaining the ubiquitous ‘*sixième étage*’ appellation for the servants’ quarters.<sup>83</sup> Following the end of Haussmannism with the demise of the Second Empire, the *Belle Époque*’s architectural innovations during the middle period of the Third Republic were to be primarily decorative.<sup>84</sup> The thirty-year period following Haussmann and leading to the end of the long 19<sup>th</sup> century merely continued the architectural innovations of the previous period.

The Haussmannian apartment is a style that, in terms of the layout of the interior, enshrined the segregation of domestic space according to class to a level that had never been seen before, and that did so in response to the social changes that followed the Revolution. In studying the history of this architectural model and its social and cultural repercussions, I seek to establish how this physical structure both influenced the representation of women servants and how it has continued to act as a kind of spatial receptacle for the maid figure’s iconography. It is in the newly configured spaces within the bourgeois dwelling of the Haussmannian structure that the maid’s persona underwent iconographic inscription. I am interested first in how this constructed space was seen to prescribe and proscribe interpersonal relations between the maid and her masters within the home, and ultimately how this new organisation of space affected the ongoing representation of maids. The elucidation of these historical antecedents will offer a deeper understanding of the complex spatial system at work in the cinematic translation of the archetypal maid figure’s space syntax in contemporary narratives of servitude and rebellion.<sup>85</sup>

## **The maid at home**

The idea of ‘home’ is a complex and much contested concept, going beyond material space and taking on affective social meaning. It may therefore be necessary to unpack this

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<sup>83</sup> However, it is true that the construction of new apartment buildings predates Haussmann’s appointment by Napoleon III. Indeed, as Sharon Marcus insists (1999, pp. 17-50), from the 1820s through to the 1840s, during the Restoration and the July Monarchy, a great number of multi-storeyed buildings were constructed. These pre-Haussmannian structures however were not as clear in their separation of the private sphere from the public, containing shop-fronts on the ground floor that facilitated a merging of spheres. (Marcus, 1999, pp. 20-1)

<sup>84</sup> See Loyer (1987) and Eleb & Debarre (1995)

<sup>85</sup> When it comes to the maid, which spaces are privileged on screen, the social segregation of space, the corporeal posture of servitude and rebellion in space, unseen/off-screen space.

concept specifically as it relates to the maid. Short writes in his forward to *At Home: an Anthropology of Domestic Space* (Cieraad, Ed., 1999, p. x):

The home is a key site in the social organization of space. It is where space becomes place, and where family relations and gendered and class identities are negotiated, contested, and transformed. The home is an active moment in both time and space in the creation of individual identity, social relations, and collective meaning. The home is an important site of ideological meanings...

The home has been established and recognised as a site of utmost importance in its capacity to contain a complex network of social and gendered relations.<sup>86</sup> A large body of work has been undertaken by feminist historians, sociologists, anthropologists, and geographers with particular regard to women's space within the home. Friedman (1998, p. 113) has shown that:

Feminist work on power relations within the home of the domestic ... has usefully troubled the concept of home, denaturalizing domestic space and showing that it is anything but 'stable', and is frequently a site of intense alterity, oppression, marginalization, and resistance for women.

It is the maid above all who finds in the home what Friedman describes as a 'site of ... alterity, oppression, marginalization and resistance'. The maid, beyond her obvious socio-economic alterity within this space, is forbidden access to certain spaces, and designated her own spaces that will turn out to be subject to invasion. Exhorted to be neither seen nor heard, the maid must in effect adopt the contradictory posture of being there while, however, remaining invisible.

The idea of home conjures up other dualities when it comes to the maid figure. Indeed, for the maid, the home is a workplace more than a home, something that will have significant repercussions in the representation of the maid figure as out of place. Her mixed status as guest (invited across the threshold of the house and often nominally 'part of the family' in paternalist conceptions of domesticity<sup>87</sup>), creator of order, and purveyor of filth, will predicate her ambivalent posture between subservience and rebellion. While for the maid, the house is not, therefore, a home, her positioning inside the house and remedying of disorder and dirt is indeed designed to signify and uphold the idea of home.

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<sup>86</sup> See also Heynen & Baydar (eds. 2005).

<sup>87</sup> See Bouniceau-Gesmon (1885, p. 151). For a recent critical discussion of the family metaphor employed by employers of servants in order to cloak the rapport of servitude in affective sentiment, see Romero (2002) and Anderson (2000, chapter 9; and 2001).

bell hooks' work on marginality and the home with regard to Black women's history proves useful in attempting to locate the French maid within the bourgeois home. hooks (2008, pp. 175-83) politicises location by designating margins as sites of resistance. For hooks (1990, p. 149), who phrases space as a state, marginality has the potential to be a 'site of radical possibility, a space of resistance.' This is something that will be found to be enacted in the maid's rebellion on screen. In film, the maid's designation of the liminal spaces of the home, and the power relations that structure this tenuous occupation of space will be narratively construed as spatial causes for rebellion. But these specific marginal 'servant' spaces, along with the masters' 'served' spaces in Kahn's aforementioned architectural theory, will equally prove to harbour the maid's appropriation of space, her investment of place, and will actively constitute a territory to be claimed in her rebellious project.

Border zones, margins, the periphery, as well as the liminal and the interstitial are all concepts that employ spatial excentration to signify socially decentred and in-between states and conditions. This calls for a conception of the social, and implicitly spatial, margins as not only sites of exclusion, but as ones where the reinvention of alternative trajectories and modes of being are possible. I view the bourgeois home as a whole for its levels of (in)accessibility to the maid, and within this, its subdivisions of space according to rank and to notions of served and servant space.

I have isolated two main categories for the analysis of domestic space as it relates to the maid's place within the bourgeois home. These two space-types are emblematic products of the 19<sup>th</sup> century's segregation of domestic architectural space enacted to affirm the social and spatial distance between served and servant, and that have become part of 'cinema's archive of place' (Cf. Gorfinkel and Rhodes 2011, pp. xi-xii) regarding the maid figure. These are its liminal spaces, on the one hand, and the *chambre de bonne* on the other. In the discussion of these categories, the maid's occupation of space according to the parameters of servitude will become clear. These spatial categories will, at the same time, explain the role of the segregated organisation of domestic space in propelling and articulating the maid's represented rebellion. While the film analyses in the case study chapters (4 and 5) will equally make reference to the masters' space and to the maid's 'domain' of the kitchen (in chapter 4) in the *mise en scène* of servitude and rebellion, the following study of the maid's architectural place confines itself to



these two most characteristic spatial zones of the *chambre de bonne* and liminal space in their formative contribution to the historical construction of the rebellious maid figure.

### **Doorways, Staircases and Corridors: architectural liminality and the maid**

Evans (1997, p. 64) stated in his influential essay ‘Translations from Drawing to Building’ (first published in 1978), that ‘the systematic application of independent access’ in the 19<sup>th</sup> century was aimed at ‘minimizing the necessary intercourse between the various members of a household’.<sup>88</sup> As previously explained, the great increase in numbers of the bourgeoisie in 19<sup>th</sup> century France, coinciding with the industrial revolution and the cultivation of privacy, called for structural changes to control access to space within the home. The solution was the application of a series of dividing architectural elements including the construction of service doors, parallel service stairs, and a corridor system that prevented spatio-social contamination between the classes. The efforts of the bourgeoisie and architects at containment and separation were (in part) designed to control the ways in which servants interacted with their masters, where the spatial mimicked the social in a deterministic organisation of space. That is, the segregation of the domestic sphere was a spatial enactment of the bourgeoisie’s social fear of servants that the 19<sup>th</sup> century accentuated in a major way. This relationship between the spatial and the social must, however, also be seen conversely. This newfound architectural schema concurrently led to the border zones of the home taking on threatening symbolic characteristics due to their occupation by the servant class, with staircases and corridors for example provoking anxious sentiment, in ways to be discussed below.

Scholarship that is concerned with the period of the 17<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> centuries has shown the significance of the entry point of the masters’ home during the Ancien Régime. As status symbols, a suite of servants were regularly required to position themselves at doorway entrances in full garb, in order to ‘[provide] ceremonial access to the private quarters’ (Benhamou, 1994, p. 2) to both the masters and their guests. As Fairchilds (1984, pp. 36-7) notes, servants in the 18<sup>th</sup> century ‘functioned as public proclamations of their [masters’] place at the apex of the social hierarchy.’ The assignment of servants to the main threshold space of

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<sup>88</sup> Indeed, Evans (1997, p. 65) continues, referring to previous European architectural forms, ‘men, women, children, servants and visitors ... were obliged to pass through a matrix of connecting rooms where the day-to-day business of life was carried on. It was inevitable that paths would intersect, ... every activity was liable to intercession...’

the front entrance prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century was thereafter architecturally extended inwards through the segregation of space and the closing-off of rooms that created an increased number of threshold points throughout the home. The increased use of corridors and service staircases in architectural design responded to the bourgeois occupants' desire to socially distance themselves from servant(s) by consigning their occupation of the domestic sphere to the connecting, hidden transition points.

The bourgeoisie, with its strategic display of accoutrements of its newfound wealth, thus adapted elements of this pre-Revolution visibility of servants as status enablers while concealing them in other private domestic spatial practices. One can see confirmation here of the precarious posture of the maid within the bourgeois home: she was a necessary symbolic and material ordering agent, while simultaneously needing to appear as effaced; as invisible as possible. Thus, if front doorways, in their connection to the public sphere, present the maid as an accoutrement of the bourgeoisie – one that is rendered generic with the use of uniforms and serving rituals – the remaining liminal zones of the domestic sphere function to dissimulate the maid from her superiors' sight. I now turn to these spaces.

François Loyer (1987, pp. 218-19) describes the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century's establishment of two co-existing staircases (one for the bourgeoisie, and the other for the servants and visiting tradespeople and delivery people) as further separating the classes within domestic architecture. Stairways thus became both symbolic and material representations of the social distinctions between the building's occupants, enacting the social hierarchy on a spatially vertical level. In design, the ground floor sheltered the concierge's loge, the first floor accommodated the petite bourgeoisie whereas the second floor contained the haute bourgeoisie's apartment, with the third, fourth, and fifth gradually decreasing in social and economic value, culminating vertically with the sixth floor's servants' rooms. The interior decoration of the staircase matched this pattern, gradually becoming less ornate as it progressed vertically, with luxurious red carpets giving way to foot-worn steps, and solid wood banisters transforming into thin metal railings as one moved upwards from the richest floor.<sup>89</sup>

The separation of the classes on two levels (vertically, on the one hand, and in a parallel sense with the construction of dual staircases) contributed to the spatial widening of the social gulf within bourgeois domestic architecture. Stairways were thus always, in this type of

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<sup>89</sup> See Zola's such description of the staircase in *Pot-Bouille* (1822)

structure, a clear indication of occupants' status, revealed by which staircase they used, and at what floor they joined it. It is then easy to see why threatening imagery came to become associated with staircases, because of the relegation of the lower social echelons to particular spaces on a vertical scale.

Stairways are, furthermore, servant spaces in the sense intended by Louis Kahn, their existence *serves* other 'served' spaces. Staircases enable the distribution of labour and objects. In the context of the bourgeois home in possession of domestic help, it is the maid who is the primary occupant of these liminal zones of transition, navigating the vertical artery in order to properly distribute food and waste – to create order. Yet despite the functional role of stairways in the creation of order, they were, during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, perceived to be spaces of threat and disease and thus inherently *disordered* spaces, reinforcing the paradoxical dual signification of liminal space.

Staircases and corridors as spaces of threat necessitating moralist and hygienist control are mentioned in *The foul and the fragrant* by Corbin (1986, p. 165):

Corridors, like staircases, demanded particular attention, because they often impeded proper regulation of the flow. The air in them bred its menaces in stagnation, stench, and darkness or else rushed aimlessly through, causing deadly drafts.

Corbin (1986, p. 165) goes on to define staircases as promoting encounters between the sexes, 'which were the first stage in the immorality of the recesses', and which 'had to be controlled.'

Corridors in domestic settings were not always common when one looks at the history of European architecture. (Evans, 1997, p. 70) The seventeenth and eighteenth century privileged the *enfilade*, the lining up of doorways in a straight line penetrating the whole floor. *Enfilades* can be compared with corridors in the sense that they create an artificial (non-sealed) passageway through a series of rooms, without however acting to separate social groups from one another. Stairways and the increased construction of corridors offered the bourgeoisie a way in which to spatio-socially confine their subordinates' reviled position within the domestic sphere. Conversely, this bourgeois anxiety regarding transition zones could be seen to have contributed to an enduring understanding of the prime occupants of these spaces – servants – as equated with the transmission of filth and perversity.

The segregation of space predicated on rendering servants invisible became institutionalised in 19<sup>th</sup> century French domestic models, and shifting domestic architectural

forms since have retained these spatial distinctions. The liminal space that accompanies such a segregation of space, in the form of corridors and separate staircases, and the increased threshold points they necessarily create within the structure, encrypted the maid in the 19<sup>th</sup> century imagination, as an intermediary, liminal social figure that would be, in turn, represented as such in the literature of the time. The maid's occupation of these liminal spaces in the context of her labour that the 19<sup>th</sup> century sought to conceal from view is a trait that has been readily translated into the cinematic form. Staircases, doorways and corridors will be shown in the coming chapters to be privileged settings in the cinematic *mise en scène* of narratives of servitude and rebellion. These spaces will also function to symbolically and materially elicit the maid's placelessness within the home, as being confined to the functional arteries and liminal zones of the architectural whole.

### **The chambre de bonne and the spatio-social segregation of the maid**

The *chambre de bonne* was perhaps the most striking spatial actualisation of the segregation between served and servant in domestic architecture, and is a space that encapsulated much of the bourgeois anxiety towards maids during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *sixième étage*, housing the series of *chambres de bonnes* that serve the individual apartments of a 19<sup>th</sup> century apartment building constitutes, in Léon Frapié's geographically inflected words, '*un pays séparé, une région sans mélange avec les autres localités environnantes.*' (*La Figurante*, 1908, in Glaser 1909, p. 21) The maid's occupation of this separate living quarter at the topmost extremity of the Haussmannian structure gave rise to a social and cultural inscription of this space that geographically materialised the social and moral threat that the maid was thought to pose. The *chambre de bonne* and its *sixième étage* is also the space with which the maid figure will most enduringly be identified a century later, in the cinematic corpus that will be discussed in chapters 4, and in a translated manner in the films discussed in chapter 5.

Prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century, maids habitually slept in closer proximity to their masters, in an adjacent space (usually in a cupboard-type room or in the kitchen).<sup>90</sup> If some less well-off bourgeois households continued to assign their maid a lumpy mat under the kitchen table, in the

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<sup>90</sup> Fairchilds (1984, p. 40) notes that it was common in the 18<sup>th</sup> century for servants in noble households to sleep in *cabinets* or *antichambres* in proximity to their masters. Present-day reports of domestic slavery in France and other developed states include such stories of demeaning accommodation.

bath tub, beside the fireplace<sup>91</sup>, or at the end of a corridor<sup>92</sup> after the advent of the great architectural shift I refer to, it is however the *chambre de bonne* on the *sixième étage* that came to constitute the accepted cultural designation of the maid's 'living' quarters.<sup>93</sup>

The lodging of maids in attic rooms began in earnest in the first half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, and became prevalent in the second part (Martin-Fugier, 1979, p. 125). This chronology is confirmed by architectural historian François Loyer (1987, pp. 218-9) who situates the generalisation of maid lodgings on the attic floor in newly constructed Haussmannian buildings as occurring from 1860, and as precipitating an 'apartheid' in social relations between servants and masters. The separation engendered by the generalisation of the *chambre de bonne* in architecture is a central historical tenet of the maid's ongoing representation as spatially and socially marginal.

The *chambre de bonne*'s particular spatial positioning contributed to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's association of the maid with filth. This space up in the attic, with shared sanitation seldom cleaned, poor ventilation and scant insulation, was a breeding ground for tuberculosis, typhoid, and syphilis. As described by the philosopher and statesman Jules Simon, during the late 19<sup>th</sup> century, albeit writing in defence of the sixth floor's occupants: '*Vous prenez, aux étages inférieurs, toutes vos précautions contre la peste; mais elle est là-haut; vous la portez inconsciemment sur vos épaules.*' (Simon, *Nouveau Texte sur le logement des domestiques*, in Martin-Fugier, 1979, p. 133) The contagion imagery associated with the maid's locale posits disease and parasitic filth as spatially mediated, with the threat of its downward migration to the masters' quarters: '*... ces colonies de punaises que les domestiques font ... émigrer jusque dans les chambres des maîtres.*' (Jean Berton, architecte, lettre à l'Eclair, 21 septembre 1904, in Martin-Fugier, 1979, p. 133) In an extension of the maid's physical filth that emanated from her quarters on the sixth floor, this locale also elicited clear and related anxieties pertaining to the maid's transmissible sexual 'depravity', in its description by Lucien Descaves as '*l'odieux*

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<sup>91</sup> See Cusenier (1912) in Guiral and Thuillier (1978, pp. 37-8) – '*D'autres ... ne lui donnent même pas un lit, mais un simple matelas que l'on étale dans ces grands placards placés entre deux murs. Des maîtres ont poussé l'ingéniosité et l'art d'utiliser les moindres choses jusqu'à placer dans le fond de la baignoire une paillasse, couche toute désignée pour la domestique.*'

<sup>92</sup> Balzac's Nanon in *Eugénie Grandet* (1833) was lodged in such a corridor, '*dans un bouge éclairé par un jour de souffrance ... un espèce de trou*'. (In Petitfrère, 1986, p. 69)

<sup>93</sup> The attic was concurrently, in Victorian England, the location for the gothic literary trope of the madwoman, as discussed in Gilbert & Gubar's (2000) *The madwoman in the attic: the woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. Servants in the Victorian house are associated with 'below stairs' rather than attics. (See Huggett 1977)

*sixième, l'école d'immoralité où se dépravent la plupart des bonnes.*' (*Le Journal*, cited in the *Moniteur des gens de maison*, 15 août 1907, in Martin-Fugier 1979, p. 137) There was a perceived spatial progression in the maid's downfall from *perle* to *souillon*, with the *chambre de bonne* constituting the uncontrolled intermediary space separating the maid from the brothel. Corbin (1990, p. 47) tells us in *Women for hire (Les Filles de noce)*, that the *chambre de bonne* was also known in common parlance during the 19<sup>th</sup> century as 'the antechamber to the brothel' (*l'antichambre du bordel*). This is a spatialised metaphor for the conceptualisation of the maid's transition from honest and dutiful purity to her eventual expulsion from the home, out on to the street where she would inevitably, in her masters' minds, fall into prostitution.

Jean Genet, in his play *Les Bonnes* (1976, p. 22), inspired by the Papin sisters' *fait divers*, encapsulated the bourgeois anxiety toward the *fin de siècle* maid figure and her space under the roof: '*Évitez de me frôler. Reculez-vous. Vous sentez le fauve. De quelle infecte soupente où la nuit les valets vous visitent rapportez-vous ces odeurs? La soupente! La chambre des bonnes! La mansarde!*' (Claire – a maid – playing the role of Madame) The woman servant, here, is equated with the by-now familiar elements of stench, filth, disease, and sexual depravity that threaten to contaminate the mistress. Importantly, these traits are designated as having a decidedly spatial, vertical, origin – that of the *chambre de bonne* in the attic, insistently asserted with three synonymous terms.

According to Bouniceau-Gesmon (1885:151) the lodging of servants in the attic caused them to consider themselves '*une caste à part*' and as '*mercenaire[s]*', a sentiment that rendered the sixth floor '*une sorte de cité domestique, ... une nouvelle école de corruption*', a kind of parallel society imbricated in bourgeois domesticity. The sixth floor became the location, in the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois imaginary, for orgies and for gossip about masters, where servants would corrupt one another, as Bouniceau-Gesmon's descriptions inform us (1885, pp. 151-2). He also holds masters as indirectly responsible for the perversion that occurs in the servant quarters and the risk that it presents:

*En ne retenant donc pas leurs serviteurs auprès d'eux sous le toit domestique, les maîtres ont, par cette imprudente abdication de toute surveillance à leur endroit, prêté d'eux-mêmes la main au développement de leurs plus mauvais instincts!* (p. 152)

Hygienists too, including the doctor Héricourt (1907, p. 140 in Eleb & Debarre 1995, p. 210), spoke out somewhat sympathetically about the maid's unsanitary and inhumane living conditions in the attic:

*Il est impossible de ne pas protester contre le logement des domestiques, qui est une des hontes de notre civilisation, un des plus gros scandales de l'hygiène. Ces petits réduits de 10m au plus de capacité, mansardés, non aérés, non chauffés, glacières en hiver, étuves en été, où l'on envoie les domestiques passer la nuit, ne seraient pas acceptés pour loger des animaux de quelque prix... Mais les plus coupables sont certainement les propriétaires et les architectes, qui paraissent avoir oublié que les domestiques sont des êtres humains. Que la maison de l'avenir échappe à cette honte et à ce scandale.*

In pointing the finger at architects, Héricourt insisted on the social responsibility of these designers and thereby acknowledged domestic architecture's capacity to produce dehumanising living conditions for servants. Héricourt suggests too in his statement the role of architecture in constructing and constraining social relations.

The maid's perceived and represented physical and moral filth, as it had begun to be conceived in the decades preceding Haussmann's appointment, was reinforced by this organisation of space that pushed the nefarious maid up to the vertical extremity of the global structure. Moreover, the sixth floor and its infamous *chambres de bonne*, the location of sexual 'depravity', a space in which airborne and sexually transmitted diseases could spread downward to the legitimate spaces of bourgeois occupants, came to reinforce the negative perceptions of maids. This space can in a sense be conceived of as a locale of heavy semiotic charge upon which recent French cinema will draw in order to evoke the threatening character of its historical occupants. The *chambre de bonne* will be analysed initially for its formal reproduction in Chabrol and Dercourt's films in chapter 4. It will then be the subject of a reading of what I contend to be its cinematically translated spaces in chapter 5.

## **Conclusion**

Krafl (2010, p. 404) writes that 'buildings can be a point of articulation for complex contestation over the meaning of and access to certain places', an observation which is at the heart of this thesis. The rigid spatialisation of women servants within a deterministic domestic architecture during the 19<sup>th</sup> century mirrored in a powerful manner the social perception and cultural representation of the maid figure as tenebrous, dangerous, and as warranting constraint.

In order to demonstrate the links between the social and the spatial in the construction of the potentially rebellious maid figure, this chapter has presented the theoretical framework for the analysis of space and representation, and will now move, in chapter 3, to integrating this knowledge into a framework for the analysis of space in film.



## **Chapter 3: Cinema, space, and the servitude and rebellion narrative**

### **Introduction**

This chapter will first construct an analytical framework for the consideration of the translation of the maid's space syntax in contemporary cinematic narratives of servitude and rebellion. To this end, I will further draw on the work of critical theorists who have studied the intersection of space, cinema, and narrative representation, and how space is best understood in the analysis of film. The representability of the maid figure in contemporary cinema will then be established, with the delineation of what I postulate as the 'ideal type' of the maid in film. In that context, I will explain the reasons behind the selection of films that comprise the cinematic corpus under analysis and how these films are prefigured by the archetypal maid figure and her spatial construction that was accounted for in the preceding chapters.

### **Cinematic antecedents of the maid figure in contemporary French film**

Although this thesis is primarily interested in current cinematic representations, the 20<sup>th</sup> century of course offers a considerable corpus of films that frame the archetypal maid figure according to the 19<sup>th</sup> century construct that are worth mentioning here. I will offer a concise survey of the 20<sup>th</sup> century cinematic maid, up until my key period of the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century that sheds light on the ways in which the maid figure has been deployed for specific aesthetic and political concerns.

From the 1920s onward, as the state of servitude undergoes modification following the *crise de la domesticité*, representations of maids generally subscribe to one of the two following categories. Films that present a central maid character either stage period representations of anterior domestic service narratives (such as Renoir and Buñuel's adaptations of Mirbeau's novel) or adaptations of the Papin case, on the one hand. Alternatively, they recontextualise servitude according to the social realities of the time, in which domestic service is fragmented and no longer tied to one domestic setting. The corpus of films under analysis in the case studies subscribe to this second category of representation, while simultaneously drawing on the latent construct of the 19<sup>th</sup> century model. The first two

films (*La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages*), however, interestingly stage an almost antiquated model of servitude and attendant (domestic) space syntax that is nevertheless set contemporaneously.

What unites film history's various types of representation of maids is the extent to which this figure has been employed to narrativise the private lives of the bourgeoisie, a class that filmmakers, like the novelists of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have sought to virulently critique. And what differentiates contemporary film production, in the films that I have selected for in-depth analysis, is the ways in which they stand apart from this historical utilitarian co-optation of the maid figure at the service of the representation of the bourgeoisie. The treatment of the maid figure by these filmmakers can be, however, manifestly linked to the opportunistic negative portrayal of female servants during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. This issue of the politics that inscribe the *mise en scène* of servitude and rebellion will be investigated in chapter 6, and so the following historical contextualisation of the cinematic maid figure emphasises, in a preliminary manner, this question of the maid's representation at the service of a political aesthetic.

Alice Guy, the first woman filmmaker and one of the earliest practitioners of narrative cinema, had several maid figures in her early films with, for example, *La Hiérarchie dans l'amour* (*The Maid and the Officers*) (circa 1906), and *Une héroïne de quatre ans* (1907), referenced in McMahan (2002, p. 284).<sup>94</sup> From the 1920s, Jean Renoir offers up several servant characters and some servant protagonists in his films. Renoir's *Catherine* (*Une vie sans joie*) (1924)<sup>95</sup> and *La Règle du jeu* (1939), as well as his post-war Hollywood adaptation of Mirbeau's *Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1948), foreground a critique of the bourgeoisie through the maid figure rather than any effort to create a multi-dimensional female servant character. Cinematic representations of maids by filmmakers such as Renoir and Buñuel<sup>96</sup> were more focussed on the bourgeoisie and a critique of this class, with narrative interest in the servant essentially contributing to a negative portrait of the bourgeoisie, whose hypocrisy was exposed via the intimate perspective afforded to the servant. This intimate perspective into the intricacies of bourgeois domesticity permitted by the maid character was further employed by

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<sup>94</sup> No copies of these films survive and I am therefore unable to offer any interpretation regarding Guy's maid representations.

<sup>95</sup> This film was co-directed by Jean Renoir and Albert Dieudonné, who at some point during the editing process had a disagreement. Renoir released the film under the title of *Catherine*, the name of his wife and the star of the film, in 1924. Dieudonné re-edited his own version, released in 1927 with the title *Une vie sans joie*. It is Renoir's version that is generally projected, and the film is attributed to his creative vision.

<sup>96</sup> *Susana, demonio y carne* (1951, made in Mexico) and *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1965)

Carlos Rim in *L'escalier de service* (1954), which presents Marie-Lou as the hapless and naïve Bretonne maid from Lorient drifting from dwelling to dwelling, her character portrayed in a one-dimensional manner, almost as an excuse to voyeuristically penetrate the different bourgeois dwellings, despite the film's title professing interest in the servant figure via spatial metaphor. The 1950s saw the production of many comedies featuring servant characters, both male and female. For example, Jean-Paul Le Chanois's *Papa, Maman, la Bonne et moi* (1954), presents a light-hearted comedy set in a petit bourgeois household living on the 5<sup>th</sup> floor of an apartment building in Montmartre. Le Chanois's film, in comedic form, makes light of bourgeois sensibilities, and the maid figure serves this purpose through her narrative proximity to the class of interest.

As a transition point in the cinematic representation of maid figures in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, Nelly Kaplan's film *La fiancée du pirate* (1969) stands apart from the films that precede it and those that follow. While offering a manifest critique of bourgeois hypocrisy – in the vein of Renoir and Buñuel – through the depiction of a series of village notaries' exploitation of a young female servant, Marie (Bernadette Lafont), Kaplan's film nevertheless re-centres the maid protagonist as a figure of primary interest, and not merely the vessel for the underlying class critique. This maid figure's desires and suffering are communicated in a much more intense manner, and she is allowed the rare feat of a successful rebellion, one in which she is unshackled from the bondage of servitude at the close of the film, rather than punished as is the usual fate of servant protagonists. Marie furthermore manages to compromise her oppressors' served status, fleecing them of their money and destabilising the social structure of the village through various means.

During the 1980s, a period particularly identified with historical dramas and comedies that generally lack a political conviction, the maid figure receded into the shadows, both symbolically and numerically in terms of the scarcity of maid characters in films throughout that decade. In Tavernier's *Un dimanche à la campagne* (1984), the maid figure, Mercédès (Monique Chaumette), despite narrating in voiceover the opening sequence, thereby leading spectators to expect a subjective vision by the servant, plays no pivotal role in this portrait of bourgeois familial tensions, otherwise remaining a silent background figure, with her character essentially providing a silent disapproval of her master's relations and to signify, through her mere presence, their served status. In the comedies *Romuald et Juliette* (Serreau, 1989) and

*Tatie Danielle* (Chatiliez, 1990), the maid is endowed with somewhat more spirit, actively intervening in the film's plot, yet still principally serving as a comic narrative device to point out the hypocrisy and exploitative nature of the served.<sup>97</sup>

In contemporary French cinematic representations of the maid figure however, this character is represented in a manner that goes beyond that of a vessel for critiquing the bourgeoisie. The representations serving women in the films in the central corpus of this thesis interrogate the poetics and politics of servitude and rebellion, and succeed in carving out new spaces of representation for this social figure who becomes an agent, rather than a mere vehicle for representing her masters.

While my reading of the contemporary female protagonist in a position of servitude who enacts rebellion is heavily informed by the 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptual category of the rebellious *bonne à tout faire*, the authorial tendency has greatly shifted between then and now, as is readily surmisable. Contemporary French cinema, coming after the great social movements of the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, evidently has a different impetus for representing the maid figure, something that will be assessed in chapter 6. This representation nevertheless relies on the currency of latent social and cultural stereotypes that are associated with the negative portrayal of the female servant by a socially dominant class. These recent cinematic examples, however, reframe these stereotypes and this spatialised iconography, in order to narrativise contemporary contexts of social exclusion that sit alongside the representation of servitude. This brief history of the instrumentalised cinematic representation of the maid figure in the 20<sup>th</sup> century accounted for – a representation that mirrors the co-optation of the maid figure for political purposes during the 19<sup>th</sup> century – I now move to the establishment of a framework for the analysis of the maid in film/space.

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<sup>97</sup> Chatiliez's film in fact presents two maid figures: the long-suffering old *bonne à tout faire* in *Tatie Danielle*'s provincial home, whose untimely death the mistress precipitates; and the spirited young woman hired to look after her while her nephew's family have gone on holiday. The latter maid figure refuses *Tatie Danielle*'s absolute domination in a manner that the earlier maid could not, and yet the film remains centred on the mistress figure in the most patent way, as the title reminds us.

As an aside, *Tatie Danielle*'s formula has recently been reprised, in more sober terms, by Ilmar Raag with *Une Estonienne à Paris* (2012), which stars Jeanne Moreau as the grumpy old mistress who seeks to make her good maid's life hell, but becomes enlightened, along the way, to the fact that there is more to life than persecuting the help.

## 1 - Cinema and Space – towards a methodology of film analysis

Film can be understood as a medium that is able to digest the maid figure's iconographic corpus and reproduce it spatio-temporally in a way that elicits the involvement of multiple senses. Christian Metz (1991, p. 4) accounts for the cinematic medium's problematic potential for creating the '*impression of reality*', by referring to its ability to arouse 'affective and perceptual *participation* in the spectator...',<sup>98</sup> to a far greater extent than literature, theatre or painting can (referring to Albert Laffay's article 'L'évocation du monde au cinéma', *Les Temps Modernes*, 1946). The 'impression of reality' (Metz 1991, p. 4) afforded to cinematic representation might in turn affect audiences' social perceptions of servitude, with representations of the consequent rebellion of the maid protagonist being in a sense legitimised in a contemporary social context.<sup>99</sup>

In film, there is a great potential to translate the maid's complex character in all of its dualisms and interstitiality. Elements such as the maid's invisibility and her abiding silence can be dealt with in ways that contradict the social edicts that sustained her servitude, all the while narratively acknowledging them. In essence cinema can bring the maid into visibility, not only through the accentuation of this figure through plot and narrative importance, but equally through its technical mechanisms and its aspects of *mise en scène*, particularly with regard to the staging of space and setting. Cinema can, in a heightened manner, lend the maid's ambiguous spatio-social place a high degree of verisimilitude. It can portray the maid's social invisibility within the home while maintaining her (visible) presence within the frame. The maid figure's cinematic representability has yet to be critically explored, and not only in a specifically French context. I aim in the following chapters to do so through a study that adopts the formal and narrative spatiality of the cinematic medium as the perspective from which to consider the cinematic translation of the maid figure's servitude and rebellion narrative. As I will subsequently demonstrate through the analysis of specific films, and as I will theoretically foreground here, cinema as a medium, through its formal spatial capabilities, has been able to reflexively harness and employ the iconography of the maid in both form and content. The politics of this cinematic representation, one that weaves a historically opportunistic and vexing

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<sup>98</sup> Metz's italics.

<sup>99</sup> See also Landsberg (2004; 2009) on prosthetic memory, identification, and empathy as mediated by the audio-visual experience.

iconography into contemporary and sympathetic portrayals of female servitude and rebellion, can be problematic, in a way that will be assessed in the final chapter.

I refer to ‘space’ as cinematically mediated space, but it is also represented material space endowed with semiotic charge according to function and occupation – or setting. Given that ‘space’ is intended in such a plural way in this thesis, the question of how space can best be conceptualised in cinema must be addressed. A large amount of research has been undertaken in the past two decades on the subject of space in cinema. This research investigates the ways in which space can be theoretically explored in the filmic medium, and makes use of the corpus of spatial theory offered by critics such as Bachelard, Lefèbvre, Soja, and Bourdieu.

The 1990s saw several key works published on the subject of film and space, in a sense integrating the broader ‘spatial turn’ with scholarship concerned with a fundamentally spatial medium – cinema. The major works include Jameson’s *The Geopolitical Aesthetic: Cinema and Space in the World System* (1995), and Aitken and Zonn (eds.), *Place, power, situation, and spectacle: A geography of film* (1994). In a French context, André Gardies published *L’Espace au Cinéma* (1993), a work that boldly posits the value of space as being equal to that of characters in a film’s narrative. Elaborating his study of space in its ‘structural’ and ‘systematic’ dimension (*‘dans sa dimension structurelle et systématique’* 1993, p. 12), Gardies frames his book around four different space-types: cinematographic space, diegetic space, narrative space, and the spectator’s space, with the first three being of greatest interest to my thesis’s study.

Over the past decade or so, several more studies have emerged to link the increasingly discussed framework of space to film studies. Two of these focus on European cinema specifically: Konstantarakos (ed., 2000) and Everett and Goodbody (eds., 2005). Everett and Goodbody’s book *Revisiting space: space and place in European cinema* (2005, p. 9) contributes to:

... the ongoing reassessment of the fundamental relationship between film and space, by exploring new ways in which the analysis and application of spatial theories have contributed to new critical understanding, and inspired fresh insight into the language and construct of filmic narrative.

In a similar vein to Gardies’ work, Konstantarakos’s (2001, p. 1) book emphasises the importance of space as ‘not merely the setting of stories, but actually [generating] the narrative

both in prose and films, assuming the status of a character and becoming the fabric of the narrative itself.’ Furthermore, space in Konstantarakos (ed., 2001) and Everett & Goodbody (eds., 2005), in line with other contemporary scholarship in the humanities that chooses space as its entry point and structuring analytic framework, is seen as a multi-faceted and multi-disciplinary avenue of enquiry. The contributions within these two edited volumes cover a broad cross-section of the work being undertaken in film studies in relation to space, notably: urban and rural space; questions of race, identity and sexuality; and the much-discussed concept of border-crossings. Space thus appears as a proven, cogent optic through which to view geographically, socially, sexually and ethnically marginalised characters on film. Thus far, it is evident that space is increasingly regarded by those writing about film as not merely the setting for the action unfolding, but as a fundamental narrative element in the film product. I see the maid’s servitude and rebellion as articulated and projected through the various elements of space that exist within the cinematic medium’s narrative capacity and *mise en scène*, elements that will now be detailed.

First, the film’s setting and the various locations figured within it are of fundamental importance. Indeed, while space theory’s application in cinema has endeavoured to make clear that the implications of ‘space’ go far beyond the simple stage or location that encompasses action, this aspect may not always receive due attention. The significance of location – the importance of something happening *there* and not elsewhere – should not be overlooked. Gorfinkel and Rhodes (eds. 2011) have recently described the relationship between the moving image and location (both screened location and the location of screening). Their emphasis on location (more precisely the first type) is something that I share, and it need not detract from a more global and diverse understanding of space and place. Ultimately, to quote Warf and Arias (2009, p. 1), ‘geography matters, not for the simplistic and overly used reason that everything happens in space, but because *where* things happen is critical to knowing *how* and *why* they happen.’ Or, as Bernard Tschumi (1996, p. 122) wrote in his essay on the ‘violence of architecture’, ‘actions qualify spaces as much as spaces qualify actions; ... space and action are inseparable and ... no proper interpretation of architecture ... can refuse to consider this fact.’ Tschumi thus stresses the importance of considering events and architecture as closely intertwined, something that the medium of cinema necessarily does in its creation of meaning, and an analysis of cinematic representation requires such a critical consideration. In that

context, various spaces and the functional and occupational categories to which they belong take on an iconographic character. These spaces, such as the *chambre de bonne* or the doorway, for example, have become intrinsic to the representation of the maid figure, modulating the servitude and rebellion narrative itself through their semiotic charge. It will be the contention of this thesis to show the ways in which this cinematic ‘archive of place’ might serve to conjure the archetypal maid figure in representations of updated contexts of female servitude.

Secondly, there is a sociological aspect to cinematically represented space that is crucial to my investigation of the maid figure in film. The maid figure, on the most basic level, exists in a spatial construction that opposes her social status with that of those she serves. Sonia Assa (2009, p. 25) points out that ‘films ... are articulated around spatial oppositions: center and periphery, interior and exterior, town and country, public and private space, movement and stasis.’ The maid figure in cinema particularly exemplifies these spatial oppositions, as the film analyses in the case studies will show. Her marginality, I will argue, is construed in social, gendered, sometimes racial terms that are always structured around the organisation of space. It will be shown that the maid figure occupies spaces that belie her social status, yet she does not fully inhabit them. She is consigned to the extremities of the domestic sphere and its translations (a concept that I will explain in further detail below), lurking in the liminal spaces from where her rebellion will be enacted. The maid’s rebellion on screen involves the insubordinate encroachment upon those spaces socially denied to her through her condition of servitude. In addition to this narrative conception of access to space, access also operates on a cinematographic level in a way that I will now explain.

The third important aspect of spatial inquiry that I treat is that of the camera’s space, cinematography. Inseparable from any discussion of film narrative, cinematography is an essential component of the spatial construction of the maid figure in film. The camera’s space and represented space integrally frame the maid figure’s servitude and rebellion. One can distinguish within the spatial aspects of cinematography the imaginary space that cinema constructs, and the re-constitution of this narrative space to be projected on screen in terms of a number of elements. From the aspects of angle, depth, lighting, focus, pan, zoom, and tracking shots, the way that the camera represents space and the figures within it is central to the way that audiences will read the film. In the editing process, construction of the filmic space is refined through use of the shot reverse shot and montage, so that the construction and



delimitation of space should consist with the narration. The spatial mechanics involved in cinematography induce audience identification with one character above others, thereby rendering, in a technical manner, the narrative implications of space as setting that were discussed above. The film object, in presenting the maid character from a high or low angle, close up, or in a medium or long shot, well-lit or shadowed, necessarily creates important narrative meaning. It is through cinematography that the maid figure is brought into visibility. Whereas the two aspects discussed above function to confirm archetypal ways of representing the maid figure through typical setting, on the one hand, and through sociological access to space on the other, cinematography permits a remodelling of the maid figure, paradoxically confirming, yet denying her typical invisibility. The technical and structural elements of cinema are essential to a spatial analysis of the maid figure, as are the ways in which space is represented with the cinematic apparatus. Through the sequential montage of various spaces, for example within the segregated domestic location, the film object directs a narrative that uses filmed space in order to create meaning. In that context, spaces become events: narrative elements that vitally contribute to carrying the narrative of servitude and rebellion forward.

Architecture plays a pivotal role in cinema as the set upon which the action takes place, on the one hand, and as an integral part of the *mise en scène*, on the other. Furthermore, there are similarities to be found in the ways that architecture and cinema, as expressive media, organise social relations through space and create meaning. Cinema is comparable to architecture in that they both deal with space, time, and movement,<sup>100</sup> and this is something that has been frequently commented upon in recent film and architecture scholarship.<sup>101</sup> This association is not, however, new: Eisenstein insisted on the fact that ‘[film’s] undoubted ancestor ... is architecture’, referring more precisely to montage.<sup>102</sup> However, this relationship of mutual influence between the two art forms<sup>103</sup> was perhaps first synthesised by the celebrated French architect Mallet-Stevens (1925, p. 288 in Vidler 2002, pp. 100-1):

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<sup>100</sup> Famed architect Jean Nouvel (in Bruno 2002, p. 69) wrote that:

Architecture exists, like cinema, in the dimension of time and movement. One conceives and reads a building in terms of sequences. To erect a building is to predict and seek effects of contrasts and linkage through which one passes. ... In the continuous shot/sequence that a building is, the architect works with cuts and edits, framings and openings ... screens, planes legible from obligatory points of passage.

<sup>101</sup> See Maggie Toy (Ed., 1994), Matheou (1999), Bruno (2002), Lamster (2000), Pallasmaa (2001), Shonfield (2000), Vidler (2002), Penz & Thomas (Eds. 1997; 2003), and Penz & Lu (Eds. 2011).

<sup>102</sup> Eisenstein, ‘Montage and Architecture’, a late 1930s article, cited in Bruno (2002, pp. 55-6).

<sup>103</sup> Architecture is of course more than just an art form; yet cinema, too, extends into everyday life. This is, however, a subject that falls outside the scope of this thesis.

It is undeniable that the cinema has a marked influence on modern architecture; in turn, modern architecture brings its artistic side to the cinema. Modern architecture does not only serve the cinematographic set [*décor*], but imprints its stamp on the staging [*mise en scène*], it breaks out of its frame; architecture ‘plays’.

Here, we gain the sense that architecture is not only a setting in film, but also intervenes in the *mise en scène* of the film – ‘play[ing]’, in Mallet-Stevens’ expression. Filmed architectural space and the manipulations of the architectural setting that are made possible through both set design and editing are an essential narrative element. The recurrence of specific spaces within a film’s diegesis, the maid’s positioning and posture within these spaces, and the cinematic styling of space according to a 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural model will be shown to produce specific expectations regarding the maid’s servitude and rebellion.

Having located the architectural origins of the maid’s space syntax, it is now possible to approach the spatial processes that define the maid figure in contemporary French cinematic representations of female servitude and rebellion. In my analysis of the maid in space, I extend the concept of space syntax to encompass the represented mapping of the place of the maid in the home in cinema. This concerns both her servitude, which involves an imposed occupational syntax of space premised on her labour; as well as her rebellion, in which she actively re-maps her occupation of space against the strictures of her condition. It is indeed through a reorganisation of her prescribed occupation of space that the maid claims power, disrupts the social order, and enacts her various forms of rebellion.

It is the maid’s archetypal space syntax, established during the 19<sup>th</sup> century within a specific social and architectural ambit, that I see as being the vehicle through which this maid figure is narratively elicited in contemporary representations of servitude and rebellion on screen. I have identified two spatial processes that separately underpin the analysis of the two types of representations of maid figures that I address in the case study chapters 4 and 5. Both spatial processes are encompassed within the polysemic term ‘translation’. I will outline the two types of maid figure representation that I have identified in my research, and then apply the concept of translation as a spatial process to each of these.

The first type of representation consists in the formalist construction of the maid figure that reproduces the maid’s space syntax in a typological manner, framing the maid figure firmly within the foundational setting of the domestic sphere (chapter 4, ‘The formalist maid film and the cinematic translation of the bourgeois home’). The two films considered within

this model, *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages*, closely follow the typical *bonne à tout faire*'s narrative of servitude and rebellion according to the 19<sup>th</sup> century social and cultural construct explicated in chapter 1. This type of maid figure representation reproduces the archetypal maid figure's space syntax by the cinematic translation of the architectural principles through which this figure was iconographically established.

The second representational type consists in films that offer transformed incarnations of the maid figure. These representations transpose the rebellion plot onto contemporary contexts of female servitude that move towards the maid figure's externalisation from the foundational space of the bourgeois home (chapter 5, 'The translation of the maid's space syntax in transposed contemporary cinematic narratives of servitude and rebellion). Here the potentiality of the maid's space syntax assumes its full strength in the elicitation the archetypal maid figure as framed in spatio-social contexts of servitude and rebellion that are emblematic of contemporary France, and thus patently transformed from that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *bonne à tout faire*.

The spatial processes that belong to each of these two types of maid figure representations, and that conform to a greater or lesser degree with the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid model, are described by a single though polysemic term: translation. On one level, translation of course most commonly refers to the transference of semantic meaning into another language. If one considers both architecture and cinema as having the capacity to create social and cultural meaning by constructing spatial systems that function as languages, then one can readily conceive of the passage from the maid's architectural grammar to a cinematic grammar, one that uses space in order to create meaning.

The films *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages* operate the translation of the maid's space syntax in the most iconographic manner. They both construct the maid's servitude as being modulated through an architecture that segregates served and servant within the domestic sphere, and that is narratively represented as materialising the maid figure's oppression. This is a represented architectural space that is rewritten in the course of the maid's rebellion. Designated patterns of occupation according to status are undermined, and the maid figure, spatio-socially constructed as being out of place, claims territory. This spatialised rebellion reflects 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptions of the maid's threat that were geographically materialised in the bourgeois home.

I argue, within this translation of the maid's space syntax from architecture to cinema, that the ways in which the maid figure is constructed as a threatening and rebellious figure to be kept at bay are represented through the organisation of space, which dictates her operation within the various micro spaces that constitute the domestic sphere. In this type of formalist representation, cinema takes architecture as both model and medium. That is to say, Chabrol and Dercourt's films on the one hand employ bourgeois domestic architecture as a setting whose various components supply semiotic meaning with regard to the maid figure. This occurs, for instance, through a focus on certain socially and culturally locatable spaces (such as the *chambre de bonne*) that are framed in particular ways in the cinematic construction of the maid figure's servitude and rebellion. On the other hand, architecture is taken beyond its status as a material location replete with sociological and cultural connotations, and is employed to narratively signify the mechanisms by which servitude is portrayed on screen. A particular type of architecture – that associated with bourgeois domesticity – is employed as an expressive tool, its planes, shapes and divisions contributing either to constrain the maid protagonist, or to help show her being as in control of space and place through rebellion.

Thus, in the film analysis of chapter 4, 'translation' is employed as a theoretical concept underpinning my demonstration that *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages* present archetypal maid figures. I contend that this takes place through the reproduction of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid's space syntax by cinematic *mise en scène* employing the formal setting of bourgeois domestic architecture. In this conception of translation, the spatiality of the maid figure is seen to be transferred from one spatial language (architecture) to another (cinema). In chapter 4's case study, translation is thus a spatial process that functions through the understanding of architecture and cinema as media that depend on a 'language.' (See Metz 1991)

Secondly, translation in the non-linguistic sense refers more archaically to the spatial transference of something from one place to another. This operates in the films studied in chapter 5 (*Le Hérisson*, *Ma part du gâteau*, *Marie-Line*, *Louise Wimmer*) as the relocation of the maid figure away from the strict domestic architecture within which her servitude and rebellion were enacted during the golden age of the *bonne à tout faire* in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. In practice, this means that updated contexts of female servitude are cinematically framed in alternative and usually decentred physical settings. States of being that are iconographic to the

maid figure, such as placelessness, are grafted – *translated* – onto updated social spaces that typify this state, such as hotel rooms, car parks, and supermarkets. The archetypal maid figure’s association with purity and filth equally finds itself conveyed through the selection of particular spaces in the *mise en scène* of the servitude and rebellion plot. Nevertheless, this type of maid representation that is embodied by translated and (often) extra-domestic space<sup>104</sup> re-creates the tensions inherent in the maid’s space syntax within domestic architecture. Issues of legitimate, illegitimate, and liminal space that were established in relation to the maid figure in the master’s dwelling, therefore remain central to the narrative construction of servitude and rebellion in these recent French films that are analysed in chapter 5’s case studies.

The homonymic ‘translation’, as both a language and space transferral, is apposite to the core purpose of this thesis: to demonstrate the iconographic maid’s presence in contemporary cinematic representations of female characters in positions of servitude that enact rebellion. It caters for the investigation of more formal, faithful cinematic embodiments of the archetypal maid figure’s servitude and rebellion, as well as for the study of that iconography’s integration into updated contemporary contexts that model female servitude and rebellion in alternative settings.

## **2 - The rebellious maid figure and her avatar in contemporary French cinema: an ideal type**

The historiographical explanation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century rebellious maid figure undertaken in chapter 1 drew attention to the key strands of representation that will be employed to locate the maid figure and her avatar’s servitude and rebellion in contemporary French cinema. The 19<sup>th</sup> century rebellious maid figure emerged as a complex archetype that, I argue, continues to permeate cultural production as a latent social construct. This is not to say, however, that the films under study here blatantly and transparently reproduce the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure. Indeed, I will also show the ways in which these films stage the rebellious maid narrative in ways that are nuanced, presenting protagonists whose servitude and rebellion are articulated in a number of ways that are typologically connected to the 19<sup>th</sup> century model but that equally

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<sup>104</sup> *Le Hérisson* and *Ma part du gâteau* still hold domestic space as a structuring locale for the maid’s space syntax in translation, however as will be seen, in a way that diverges from the more formal representations on offer in *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages*.

and importantly adapt this historical dialectic to contemporary politics and poetics. As mentioned in the introduction to this thesis, the films that comprise the corpus under analysis vary in terms of genre and style in a way that points to the translatability and wide-reaching potential of the rebellious maid narrative.

Against the backdrop of this historical characterisation of the maid figure I now set out my criteria for the contemporary cinematic maid figure. I will first position each film in terms of this preliminary definition of the contemporary cinematic maid figure, the comprehensive exploration of which will take place in the analysis of the case studies to follow.

The film analysis that I will accomplish in the case studies in chapters 4 and 5 will test the hypothesis that space, as a grammar of social relations, acts as a receptacle of representational criteria regarding the maid figure that transcends time, location, medium, and genre. This chapter turns in a preliminary way to the more categorical, plot-centred elements in which I identify the film protagonists' readability as maid figures. This is viewed from a number of perspectives, all of which will subsequently be treated for their spatial dimension in following chapters. First, it will be viewed through a description of the maid's domestic labour as continued in contemporary female service labour, the intimate and generic nature of which will be noted. I will then consider the defining trait of the film protagonists whom I read as incarnations of the maid figure, being that of the plot element of rebellion against the state of servitude, in which I account for the different levels of resistance offered by the protagonist against her condition. I begin now to formulate systematically the criteria for what this thesis identifies as a contemporary maid figure. Having set up this framework, it will be possible to discuss protagonists from the selected films to be analysed in the following chapters in relation to the various traits integral to the iconographic 19<sup>th</sup> century *bonne à tout faire*.

### **The maid's labour: intimacy and service in and beyond the home**

*'Etre domestique, c'est d'abord louer son corps, c'est faire qu'un rythme de vie étranger se substitue à son propre rythme.'* (Martin-Fugier, 1979, p. 28)

The archetypal maid's labour is one that is predicated on the duality of purity and filth. Her presence within the home is designed to remediate dirt and disorder and to install cleanliness and order. The maid is she who nourishes the occupants of the home, and who

evacuates their waste outside the confines of the domestic sphere. Her labour is menial and repetitive, non-productive, feminised, and performed in isolation from the broader economy. All of these factors that relate to the maid's servitude on a basic and material level have symbolic repercussions on how service work is (de)valued in the wider economy, and how it is consequently represented as reviled. The maid's labour is an intensely corporeal one, where her everyday movements and gestures must perfectly synchronise with the needs and demands of her employer in order to seamlessly enable their nourishment, cleansing, clothing and leisure. It is an intimate labour that, being aimed at facilitating the domestic lives of others, places her in a fundamentally ambiguous position.<sup>105</sup>

In Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*, Sophie Bonhomme (Sandrine Bonnaire) is newly engaged to be the live-in maid for the Lelièvres, a re-composed nuclear family residing in a stately home near Saint-Malo. Sophie is almost mute, extremely self-effacing, and harbours two secrets. The first secret is her illiteracy, the other being the death of her father in mysterious circumstances in which she may have been involved, though '*on n'a rien pu prouver*'. Sophie, to her bourgeois employers, is the ideal maid (replete with a series of maid appellations including '*bonne à tout faire*', '*bonniche*', '*robot*', and '*perle*') who, coming after the household's lack of reliable domestic help in the recent past, quickly proves indispensable to the smooth running of the home. These appellations diegetically reinforce the intimate, facilitating labour that Sophie performs for the Lelièvre family. Freed from the constraints of food preparation and cleaning, the family are able to devote themselves to leisure, and their served status that they project to the world is upheld through Sophie's presence. Within the first sequences of the film, audiences are also introduced to another equally important figure, Jeanne (Isabelle Huppert) the village postal worker, a character who will have a nefarious influence on Sophie's ideal servility. While Chabrol's film is not a direct representation of the Papin case, Sophie and Jeanne's *folie à deux* nevertheless references that of the Christine and Léa Papin. The public servant Jeanne embodies a much more modern vision of rebellious femininity, not least through her access to the public sphere, while Sophie conforms much more closely to the 19<sup>th</sup> century model through

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<sup>105</sup> The live-in maid's labour is characterised by the intimate nature of social relations it establishes within the domestic sphere. Recent work on transnational domestic servants by Anderson (2000, pp. 159-174) and Näre (2011) has considered the 'moral economy' within paid domestic labour. Moral economy has been defined by Sayer (2004, p. 2 in Näre, 2011, p. 400) as the 'study of how economic activities of all kinds are influenced and structured by moral dispositions and norms, and how in turn those norms may be compromised, overridden or reinforced by economic pressures.' In essence, the maid's labour, in dealing with the corporeal and the affective, is highly distinguishable from other forms of labour.

her illiteracy, her distaste for machines, and her containment within the private sphere. As Sophie and Jeanne's sexually ambiguous friendship progresses and their respective secrets are unveiled, the ideal maid gives way to the '*répugnante*', contrary, filthy, and increasingly reviled *souillon*. The folie-à-deux that takes place in the Lelièvre household between the maid and her guest culminates in the quadruple murder of the bourgeois family.

Beginning in flashback, Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de pages* first narrates an interaction between Mélanie (Déborah François) as a child with musical ambitions, and Ariane Fauchécourt (Catherine Frot), a successful concert pianist, recounting the original offense that will prompt the revenge narrative during the diegetic time-frame of the film.<sup>106</sup> In *La Tourneuse de pages*, the typical live-in model is in place, as it was in *La Cérémonie*. The protagonist, Mélanie, however, is most basically defined as a nanny and page-turner, with this last occupation of course inspiring the title of the film.<sup>107</sup> Despite the fact that Mélanie is shown performing domestic duties that are typically the maid's domain, such as cooking and laying the table, for instance, there are several additional ways of likening her role as page-turner to that of the archetypal maid. In Dercourt's film, turning pages for Ariane Fauchécourt is indeed an intimate labour that is one of served and servant. Page turning is a task that renders the pianist vulnerable, as is diegetically insisted upon in the film, and it is one that necessitates a complex corporeal choreography, where the page turner's 'rhythm' must model itself on the demands of the pianist in a way that elicits the maid's role that Martin-Fugier (1979, p. 28) describes as '*faire qu'un rythme de vie étranger se substitue à son propre rythme.*'

To read *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages* in light of this functional aspect of the maid figure's servitude in its intimate labour is thus reasonable. The remaining four films, however, require elucidation in terms of their assimilation of servant labour's particular modalities.

The argument that these films portray avatars of the maid figure depends on recognising the evolution in the role of the live-in maid of all work. It is clear that domestic labour, in the

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<sup>106</sup> Ariane had committed the sin, ten years earlier, of signing an autograph while assessing Mélanie's audition at the Conservatoire, a distraction that destabilised the child's performance and prompted a dramatic cessation of her music studies.

<sup>107</sup> The adult Mélanie is first presented as a secretarial intern at a law firm, that of Ariane's husband. In her role as secretary to M. Fauchécourt (Pascal Greggory), Mélanie's tasks are described thus by the senior secretary: '*D'abord s'assurer du classement informatique, et ensuite il y a l'archivage. L'important, c'est d'être méticuleux. Mais je ne me fais pas de soucis, vous avez l'air d'être méticuleuse.*' Mélanie's role is thus already – prior even to having crossed the threshold into the home – one of creating order.



decades following the *crise de la domesticité*, came to be performed by an atomised workforce. Increasingly, following the Second World War, domestic labour was the task of *employées de maison*, *aides ménagères*, and *femmes de ménage* who were less and less tied to the symbolic and material ecology of a single bourgeois dwelling than their predecessors, and this work was increasingly performed by migrant women from nearby European countries (Spain, Portugal), and more recently from further afar (Eastern Europe, South-East Asia, Africa), in a sense replacing the 19<sup>th</sup> century's *bretonne* and the *auvergnate* as internal migrants in servitude. Fraisse (2009, p. 11) has mentioned how the gradual transformation of '*le service domestique*' or '*la domesticité*' throughout the twentieth century into '*les services à la personne*' constitutes a semantic abstraction of the nature of the servant's labour. This can be seen to conceal the transaction at hand, as well as the power relations contained within the transaction between master and servant, something which Fraisse (2009), among others, has commented on.<sup>108</sup> This fractioning and re-labelling of service labour has necessarily acted to widen social and cultural conceptions of service, and of servitude as a condition.

Contemporary service work has a clear functional link to the labour of the archetypal maid. Feminised, unskilled, and generally low-paid, the type of service work performed by the protagonists of these films is an occupational translation of domestic service. Contemporary maid figures may be engaged, in the films that have been selected, in various forms of service work ranging from the cleaning of a hypermarket (*Marie-Line*), to the caretaking of an apartment block (*Le Hérisson*), to *femme de ménage* activity (*Ma part du gâteau*), to precarious hotel room cleaning (*Louise Wimmer*). These types of labour that fall under the umbrella of service work, are not productive work as defined by Adam Smith in *The Wealth of Nations* (1776),<sup>109</sup> and are characterised by predictable trajectories and repetitive gestures that

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<sup>108</sup> Ouvrier-Bonnaz (2006, p. 598) also states the semantic transformation of broader service roles in contemporary France and the insidious obscuring of the power relations between served and servant: '*Les emplois de service se développent rapidement sous des appellations: techniciens de surface, auxiliaires de vie ou agent d'embellissement dont l'euphémisation masque mal le rapport de subordination qui lie souvent le travailleur à son employeur.*'

<sup>109</sup> Smith singled out the labour of 'menial servants' in order to illustrate the concept of non-productive labour, with productive labour consisting in manufacturing and trade:

The labour of menial servants does not continue the existence of the fund which maintains and employs them. Their maintenance and employment is altogether at the expense of their masters, and the work which they perform is not of a nature to repay that expense. That work consists in services which perish generally in the very instant of their performance, and does not fix or realize itself in any vendible commodity which can replace the value of their wages and maintenance. ... I have classed artificers, manufacturers and

invariably deal with material or symbolic filth. But more essentially, the ways in which these kinds of service, servile labour are represented on screen draw in fundamental ways on servitude as a condition, as a form of domination by served over servant. That is to say, though the protagonists of the films selected for analysis perform service labour, it is not solely this labour that contributes to their characterised servitude. The case studies will draw out the ways in which servitude as a condition and a state is conjured in these films.

Klapisch's *Ma part du gâteau* and Achache's *Le Hérisson* conform more closely, however differing in key ways that will be analysed, to the live-in maid of all work model that takes the domestic sphere as its locus and that is exemplified in a particularly formulaic way in Chabrol's and Dercourt's films.

*Le Hérisson* presents a concierge protagonist, Renée Michel (Josiane Balasko) who, though she lives in the same building as the bourgeois families she serves, does not share in the domestic life of the building's occupants. However, although the concierge is historically of higher social standing than the maid, Mona Achache's film offers up a protagonist who is broadly defined in a served/servant relationship with others that transcends the simple transaction of labour to become a social and culturally connoted condition. Two of the building's served occupants nevertheless participate in undermining this (self-)imposed condition, in a sense contributing to the representation of a rebellion that is not as obvious in the previous films. Renée's caretaking duties will be mapped within the ecology of the domestic Haussmannian structure in such a way that brings to light the categorical similarities between the concierge and the archetypal *bonne à tout faire* in the cinematic expression of servitude and resistance.

*Ma part du gâteau* presents the protagonist's labour as closely confined within the parameters of the maid of all work. After losing her job in a shipping company in Dunkerque, France Initially hired as a *femme de ménage*, she is rapidly called on to spend nights at her workplace in order to care for her employer Steve's son, making the transition into a functionally live-in domestic worker in its extended intimate labour. She is portrayed as an

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merchants among the productive labourers, and menial servants among the barren or unproductive.' (Smith, 1776, p. 63 in Sarasúa, 2005, p. 519)

See also McBride (1976), who has written about the implications of domestic work's categorisation as non-productive, as conceived of in neo-classical economic theory, as well as a discussion of Marx's continuation of this conception of domestic service. Labour historian Sarasúa (2005), however, has written the most recent and complete survey of the question in 'Were servants paid according to their productivity?'

intrusive presence in Steve's sterile high-rise apartment. Her leisure practices are deemed to be out of place, her sleeping quarters are typically marginal (she is consigned to the gym equipment room), and her engagement as live-in maid and the assumption of all-encompassing servitude comes at the price of the sacrifice of her own personal life and her status as mother to her own children. She is narratively rendered invisible through her serving role and is relegated to pure functionality during the master's social events; and she consensually engages in sex with the master that is subsequently portrayed as a type of *troussage de domestique*.

*Ma part du gâteau* contains a large number of iconographic elements in its representation of the rebellious maid plot within the domestic sphere in a manner that could earn it a position in the corpus of chapter 4. Yet Klapisch's film equally renovates the genre, transposing the maid's servitude and rebellion narrative onto an almost caricatured portrait of contemporary France in the grips of 'la crise', and engaging with current demographics of domestic service, justifies its place in chapter 5's exploration of the translation of the maid's space syntax to updated contexts of servitude and social space.

*Marie-Line* and *Louise Wimmer* offer significantly new modes of representation of the extreme marginality of the maid figure's servitude, situating their protagonists within credible narrative contexts of cleaning service labour and the economic and social malaise that characterises this servitude.

The hypermarket in *Marie-Line* can hardly be likened, at first glance, to the domestic sphere, yet Charef's film indeed imbues its characters' cleaning of this space with elements of intimate labour that were present with the *bonne à tout faire*. The women's constant and renewed ordering of the symbolic and material chaos that characterises their melded work and personal lives in turn evokes the interminable non-productive labour of the maid in the domestic sphere. The case-study on Charef's film in chapter 5 will cover a series of plot elements beyond (albeit related to) the cinematic construction of space that will assist a critical understanding of *Marie-Line*'s characters as avatars of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *bonne à tout faire*.

*Louise Wimmer*, a first feature-length narrative film by Cyril Mennegun, in portraying a woman who cleans hotel rooms, transposes the maid's traditional servitude onto a location that, like the hypermarket in *Marie-Line*, is one of transience and sterility, a space that is uneasily situated between the public and the private, but one that she nevertheless inscribes with rituals of intimacy and repose. *Louise Wimmer*, like *Marie-Line*, maintains a strong tension between

order and chaos, and between purity and filth, where the protagonist's servitude, accompanied and informed by her homelessness, extends beyond the labour performed and becomes a social condition and a state, as Duras defined it in *Le Square* (1955, pp. 18-9). In this film, service labour and the spaces it consigns the protagonist to, combined with the narrative of homelessness, produce the context of placelessness of the maid figure as an all-encompassing condition and state that requires rectification.

'Menial' domestic labour, through its non-skilled status and its association with those who have few employment prospects, positions its subject as a replaceable and generic commodity. '*Personne n'est irremplaçable*' – this same sentence is uttered in both Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* and Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de pages*. In both cases, the phrase, pronounced to warn the mistress of the threat posed by the maid, underlines the individual maid as but an exemplar of her function within the home. Both *La Cérémonie*'s Sophie and *La Tourneuse de pages*' Mélanie are represented as reviled when they stray from their generic and self-effacing appearance and attitude.

Marie-Line's colleagues in Charef's film are undocumented non-skilled workers who are quickly hired and fired – replaceable commodities referred to by the managers as '*bétail*'. '*Tu m'en trouves une autre pour demain*', Marie-Line orders Meriem when Sara quits over a pay dispute early in the film. When Malika is arrested, Maïna is swiftly brought in, but does not initially appear set to last, given that her pregnancy makes her unsuitable for intensive labour.<sup>110</sup>

*Louise Wimmer* foregrounds the precariousness of its protagonist's position at the hotel with the manager's frequent castigation of Louise's lateness and unkempt appearance, which are a result of her homelessness, behaviours that prevent her from obtaining more shifts at the expense of another employee, Sandrine, who more closely conforms to the *perle* through her ideal service.

*Le Hérisson*'s Renée strives without cease to conform to the generic image of her concierge function, which she interprets as the necessity to efface her presence through nondescript clothes and hair and a subdued persona, as well as to hide her erudition. As she

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<sup>110</sup> This is a plot element that simultaneously alludes to the incompatibility of pregnancy and children with domestic service historically, and that is further narratively compounded by the dissimulation of Lagos and Bergère's children.

says to M. Ozu: ‘*Je tiens à rester discrète. Je ne veux pas d’histoires. Personne ne veut d’une concierge qui a des prétentions.*’

Furthermore, *Ma part du gâteau*’s France is not so subtly informed straight away by her employer that if she does not perform precisely as he desires, she will be dismissed, as was the other cleaning lady sent by the agency days prior. The master in *Ma part du gâteau* will subsequently stage a fetishistic spectacle of served/servant relations on the occasion of a cocktail party where France and her homologues will be required to dress up in French maid garb.

Maids are disposable figures: they *are* their function, and when they are seen to transgress the parameters of the ideal and generic maid’s servitude, which involves domination in affective labour in a way that differentiates them from other employees, they are at risk of being dismissed and/or punished. I will contend that the translation of the maid’s space syntax into updated contexts of servitude that are defined around modified service labour constitutes a narrative opportunity for filmmakers to engage with the servitude and rebellion narrative that endures in the French social and cultural imagination, while drawing on a set of binary associations that problematise and contest this relation of domination.

### **Narratives of servitude and rebellion**

The maid’s rebellion is a powerful cultural metaphor that questions class-based and gendered hierarchies, and increasingly, though often problematically, race-based ones too. The presence of the narrative of rebellion that springs from a context of servitude is a pre-condition, in this thesis, for the inclusion of each film in the corpus, although, as will be shown, this rebellion is translated in a manner of ways that sometimes finds itself attenuated to more subtle forms of resistance, away from the more extreme murderous rebellion that preoccupied the 19<sup>th</sup> century imagination.<sup>111</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> There are other films that depict maid protagonists who fit the model of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid’s space syntax, yet are not rebellious in the sense that the heroines included in this corpus are. For example, Bertrand Jacquot’s *La fille seule* (1995), and, in an anterior Ancien Régime spatio-social context with *Les adieux à la reine* (2012); Bertrand Tavernier’s *Un dimanche à la champagne* (1984); Claude Berri’s *Une femme de ménage* (2002). These films do not on the whole offer any narrative critique of servitude as a condition and social relation, or they do so in normative and safe terms that diverge from the spirit of resistance in the films that comprise the corpus of this thesis.

The case studies will show that the maid's rebellion is one that is articulated through space, and is one that contravenes the imposed space syntax of servitude. The maid figure's rebellion is shown, throughout the films that comprise the case studies, as being varied in levels of violence and transgression, from outright murder, to extreme psychological violence, to a more subdued rebellion that can best be described as refusal and resistance. These various modes of rebellion are united by their induction of chaos into the ordered system of control that imposes the protagonists' servitude.

A defining characteristic of these maid figures/avatars is that they undergo various types of oppression within the course of their duties, and their servitude within the context of their employment is often mirrored in their personal lives, if indeed their personal lives are accorded any narrative space. In fact, more frequently, these maid characters are socially isolated, solitary figures, in an arrangement that replicates the image of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure, an isolated and invisible figure (*La Tourneuse de pages*, *Louise Wimmer* and *Le Hérisson* in particular). In some cases (*Louise Wimmer* in particular, but also *Marie-Line* and *Ma part du gâteau*), the characters' servitude is a condition that goes far beyond the service labour performed. It comes to represent other related forms of spatio-social marginality and exclusion that I will account for in their readability in terms of the *bonne à tout faire* archetype.

This oppression and repression in servitude combines class and gender elements in all cases, and in some cases (*Marie-Line*, and *Ma part du gâteau* in a peripheral manner) race-based oppression equally features. However, the servitude that is portrayed in the corpus of films is not always cut-and-dried exploitation and oppression. This servitude is not a mirror image of that of the 19<sup>th</sup> century *bonne à tout faire*, which is self-evident given the changes in labour law that the 20<sup>th</sup> century brought with it and the fact that these films all stage contemporary narratives of servitude and rebellion.<sup>112</sup> These women do not work sixteen-hour

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<sup>112</sup> This is not to say that cases of modern-day slavery do not exist in contemporary France, and *faits divers* of French households keeping domestic staff in atrocious conditions regularly emerge in the media. In one notorious case, Ivorian maid Véronique Akobé, in 1987, killed her master's son and attempted to kill her master after suffering repeated physical and sexual violence, and sentenced to twenty years in a case that was the subject of a miscarriage of justice. (See Louis 1996)

In the late 1990s, Chantal Nsamirizi and her sister, Tutsi orphans from Burundi, were enslaved and tortured in Versailles by their aunt and her diplomat husband, who for years were protected by diplomatic immunity. (See Renterghem 2012)

And more recently, in February 2013, a fourteen-year-old Ivorian girl *bought* by her French/Ivorian masters for the price of 4500 euro turned up at the police station in Cavillon, describing herself as a *jeune fille au pair*, asking for

days handling bedpans and washing clothes in freezing water, nor are they raped by their employers, or forced to sleep in bathtubs or under kitchen tables.

While none of these women are raped by their masters, some experience sexual coercion (*Marie-Line*); in other cases (*La Cérémonie*, *La Tourneuse de pages*, *Ma part du gâteau*), the *troussage de domestique* is elicited, even if it is not realised, with the master/s making reference to a sexual encounter in the context of the clear power imbalance between servant and served.

In *Marie-Line*, the women labour in backbreaking conditions doing shift-work that we know to be a source of physical and psychological damage. In Charef's film, it is implied that the *sans papiers* characters work off the books for less than the SMIC,<sup>113</sup> thereby presenting a somewhat equivalent vision of the archetypal maid's exploitative labour, despite its extra-domestic relocation. Some are homeless, as in the case of Lagos in *Marie-Line* and Louise Wimmer in the film of the same title; and another sleeps in a gym equipment room, in the case of France in *Ma part du gâteau*, thereby emulating in some way the precarious living arrangements of the maid figure.

The other representations of servitude in this thesis, however, escape such exploitative labour conditions. While Sophie in *La Cérémonie* is portrayed as being relegated the masters' leftovers on her first night in the home, in a *mise en scène* of the inequality between served and servant, she is nevertheless paid adequately, is well-housed, and her masters express consideration for her up to a point. Similarly, Renée Michel in *Le Hérisson* has reasonable work conditions. Although Louise Wimmer works for minimum wage and is under-employed, and though she is homeless, with all the misery that accompanies this state, she is also shown as having formerly lived a middle-class existence; the material vestiges of her former life and the encounter with her ex-husband showing that her current state is partly a self-imposed one.<sup>114</sup> And in the case of Mélanie in *La Tourneuse de pages*, although she is working class,

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help against those who had regularly beaten her in what soon came to light as an outrageous example of slave trade. (See Rieublanc 2013)

Every year, on average three hundred such cases are reported to the *Comité contre l'esclavage moderne*. (<http://www.esclavagemoderne.org/1-accueil.htm>)

See Anderson (1997; 2000, pp. 126-58) for a discussion of this slavery-like servitude in real terms. Cinematic representation, however, somewhat perversely steers clear of these cases.

<sup>113</sup> SMIC (*Salaires Minimum Interprofessionnel de Croissance*) – minimum wage.

<sup>114</sup> Mennegun's film is elusive about what preceded Louise's current state, but the director suggests in an interview (Tuffery 2012) that one possible interpretation is that she left her husband and home after she caught him having an affair. In any case, it is implied that her previous circumstances were untenable and that her displacement was

she is educated, and servant labour is far from being her only option, unlike for Sophie in *La Cérémonie*, whose servitude seems a natural avenue given her illiteracy; indeed, Mélanie's servitude is an opportunistically acquired condition that she has long planned – a pretext for revenge rather than a context for rebellion, as I will explain.

From the above it is plain to see that servitude is represented as nuanced in these films, with the oppression and exploitation that accompanies the image of the 19<sup>th</sup> century condition not always translated to the same degree, although traces of its parameters do survive. That which perhaps best characterises the servitude that is represented in these films is the overarching sense of misery that accompanies it – a misery that isn't necessarily a direct result of the servile labour of the protagonists, but that is linked to their gender, class and sometimes race that are intrinsic to their condition of servitude. All of these characters have had an unfair lot in life, and are damaged and embittered in various ways. This is not to say that these films are irremediably pessimistic and joyless. Indeed, while this is about servitude, it is equally about rebellion, about a seizing of control. Each film variously makes room for the staging of solidarity, hilarity, delectable cruelty, and ultimately empowerment.

*La Tourneuse de pages'* Mélanie is scarred and embittered by her mistress's previous sabotage of her musical aspirations. *La Cérémonie's* Sophie, it is hinted at, has had a horrid upbringing, being slave to her infirm father and prevented from accessing education. *Le Hérisson's* Renée Michel is jaded by her lack of opportunities in life, and by the callous disregard of the building's occupants when her husband died of cancer. France in *Ma part du gâteau* has been dealt a blow with her redundancy from the company that she has always worked for and defined her identity through, and at the beginning of the film she is so hopeless as to attempt suicide. The characters of *Marie-Line* are variously dominated by their families, by the state, or by their community; all are poor, uneducated or unable to use their education given their lack of citizenship, and for all of them, unemployment is the worse of two bad options. For all of these characters, servitude is closely connected to class position and social exclusion. Even if those who benefit from these maid figures' and avatars' contextual servitude are not their immediate oppressors, with their oppression pre-dating their servitude, it is those who they currently serve who will bear the brunt of their rebellion against servitude. Servitude

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necessary. 'Moi ce que je me raconte c'est que c'est une femme trompée qui a choisi de ne pas accepter et de partir. ... Elle a juste fait le choix de ne pas fermer les yeux et de se dire, « je n'ai plus ma place ici, donc je m'en vais. »' (in Tuffery, 2012)



as a social condition and state is depicted, in these films, as something inherently inspiring rebellion. It is servitude itself – this condition based on a visible relation of domination and spatio-social exclusion, regardless of the conditions under which it is practised – that appears as an abomination ripe for the enactment of rebellion.

The maid figure and her avatars under analysis are those who break with the role of order-creator, invisible secret-keeper and sometime sexual prey of the ruling class. They are those who upend their servitude, provoking something that goes beyond role-reversal. These maids do not ultimately seek to usurp the position of their rulers, even though the archetypal element of the maid figure's attempted social mobility may be present to varying degrees. Rather, they seek to and generally succeed in bringing about the destruction of the parameters of their present context of servitude. Unlike their American sisters, these French servant characters thus on the whole reject integration into a so-called mainstream, destabilising the social order and sometimes leaving a trail of destruction in their wake before, almost inevitably, being punished for their transgression.<sup>115</sup> This punishment of the maid figure is a pattern that chapter 6 will examine further for its implications in the politics and poetics of the maid's rebellion on screen.

The maid's rebellion in French film is notable for its individualistic nature as opposed to any collectivised struggle, a model that reflects what we know of the historical perception and representation of servant rebellion in a 19<sup>th</sup> century French context.<sup>116</sup> This individualistic rebellion does not necessarily imply that the maid acts alone: she is indeed also represented as part of a duo that recalls the Papin sisters' *folie à deux* (*La Cérémonie*), or as part of a group (*Marie-Line*), even though singular maid figures remain the norm, true to the 19<sup>th</sup> century domestic model of the *bonne à tout faire*. Rather, the individualism of the maid's rebellion is characterised by its marginality, its chaos, its denunciation of bourgeois hypocrisy, and the

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<sup>115</sup> See films such as *Maid in Manhattan* (Wang 2002) and *Spanglish* (Brooks 2004) for the representation of the Latina maid aspiring to the role of middle/upper-class wife. A central characteristic of these maids is that they are 'better' wives than their mistress counterparts (more feminine, better at the finer touches of a harmonious domesticity, they flatter their would-be husband as they should). See Leonard (2009) for a discussion of how racialised maids are narratively employed in American romantic comedies to undermine middle-class femininity in a 'postfeminist' manner. See also Kim (1997; 1999)

<sup>116</sup> Gaston Picard, the director of the *Chambre syndicale des gens de maison*, insisted on what he saw as servants' incapacity for collective organisation: '*La solidarité est étrangère aux gens de maison, ce sont de grands enfant indifférents, ils n'ont pas le sens des revendications collectives.*' (*L'Éclair*, 18 septembre 1904, in Martin-Fugier 1979, p. 272) Cultural representation of rebelling maids was about individualistic forms of resistance – theft, murder etc, rather than politicised collective avenues of protest, something that her condition as 'monstrous hybrid' must be seen to affect.

absence of any conventional (collectivist) political project. Maids, though they may flirt with the prospect of social mobility, are ultimately portrayed as knowing that their servitude cannot successfully transform into a served position.<sup>117</sup>

Above all, that which unites the different forms of rebellion that are staged in the corpus of films is the motivation of place – the resistance and rebellion against spatio-social exclusion through place-making and the conquest of territory. Polack's (2001, p. 88) statement in relation to *La Cérémonie* rings true for all of the films to be analysed in the case studies: 'she who takes possession of space, as in war, holds the other in her power and has no further need of victory.'

## Conclusion

This chapter has presented the rebellious maid figure and the accompanying narrative of servitude and rebellion as an object of inquiry through the lens of space in the medium of cinema. It has sought to bring to light the mechanics behind the construction of narrative meaning through a language common to both architecture and cinema, that of space.

This chapter thus began by demonstrating the applicability of the spatial optic to the cinematic medium in relation to the representation of the maid figure's servitude and rebellion. It drew links between the architectural construction of the maid figure that was the subject of chapter 2 and cinema's potential to *translate* this space syntax. It then turned to the criteria through which it is possible to delineate the rebellious maid figure and/through her avatar, with a preliminary discussion that anticipates the spatial analyses of the films to follow in chapters 4 and 5. These criteria will remain central to the film analysis to follow in those chapters, and I will demonstrate their spatialised elicitation in cinematic representation.

The maid figure appears as a latent construct in French cinema, a figure that, while being applied to modern contexts of servitude and rebellion, nevertheless retains the specific spatial and architectural iconography with which she was established in 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse and literature. I now move to the study of *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages* in order to demonstrate the first process of translation of the maid's space syntax, mapping the

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<sup>117</sup> It might be interesting to point out here that a highly significant earlier maid film, Buñuel's *Journal d'une femme de chambre*, portrayed Céléstine as being a served figure at the close of the film. This reversal in her status and fortunes, however, is not narrativised as a desirable outcome in the film. Instead, Céléstine is figured languishing in bed, married to a man she does not love, a bored and dissatisfied neo-bourgeoise.

spatialisation of their protagonists' servitude and rebellion in the foundational locale of the bourgeois domestic sphere.

## Chapter 4: Formalist cinematic translation of rebellion and servitude in bourgeois domesticity

### Introduction

Typical geographies of the bourgeois home and its occupation according to status, as well as trajectories between different spaces within the home are the focus of my analysis of *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages* in this chapter, where I will demonstrate how the system of spaces constitutes at once a setting and a necessary actor in the mise en scène of servitude and rebellion. Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* is the most faithful of these to the blueprint of the rebellious maid plot, partly due to its protagonist's more typological domestic servant role. Dercourt's film *La Tourneuse de pages*, a Chabrolian psychological thriller, however presents a very similar mise en scène of the maid's servitude and rebellion despite the protagonist's service labour being somewhat modified from that of the traditional *bonne à tout faire* and notwithstanding the fact that servitude is represented as a pretext rather than a context to rebellion.

The film analysis in this chapter will trace the representation of the narrative of servitude and rebellion according to three categories of space that are emblematic and formative of the representation of spatio-social relations between served and servant within the bourgeois home. These are the maid's space, the masters' space, and the liminal space that connects the two. The grammar through which they are organised according to the prescriptions and proscriptions of function and occupation in the served/servant relationship constitutes what I refer to as the maid's space syntax. By reference to these three categories of space, I draw out the maid's servitude and rebellion as they are materially embodied in and mediated by constructed space. This chapter's reading of the cinematic translation of the maid's space syntax in two films that present this spatialisation in a manner that is iconographically faithful to the 19<sup>th</sup> century model will then lead to chapter 5's study of the translation of the maid's space syntax onto analogous spaces that will be shown to present a comparable spatio-social organisation.

## **La Cérémonie (Chabrol 1995) – Translating the archetypal maid’s space syntax**

*La Cérémonie* is an adaptation of Ruth Rendell’s novel *A Judgement in Stone* (1977), a work that was in turn based on Genet’s *Les Bonnes* and the originating Papin sisters’ case. This case study will demonstrate the ways in which Chabrol’s film translates the archetypal 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure’s space syntax in a manner that closely follows the conventions of the servitude and rebellion narrative to which this conceptual category is attached.

### **The mise en scène of servitude**

Sophie Bonhomme (Sandrine Bonnaire), an illiterate maid with a questionable past that she will do her utmost to hide becomes engaged as the domestic servant to the Lelièvre family, a stereotype of modern-day reconstructed bourgeoisie, who inhabit a grand malouinière in Brittany. An early scene prior to the maid’s integration of the home, a scene that functions to highlight the essential need for domestic help of this family who simply cannot cope without, foreshadows how the maid’s presence will materially and symbolically affect the syntax of space of bourgeois domesticity.

Before the maid’s arrival at the house, Chabrol shows the family consuming a meal not in the dining room, but in the kitchen, thereby occupying the absent maid’s space and inscribing it with their domestic practice. It is an informal affair; the family is casually dressed, the mistress has tucked a napkin into the front of her shirt in unrefined style not to be seen for the rest of the film, where her mistress status with its finery will be complimented by the presence of the maid. During this kitchen/dining scene early in the film, the maid’s absence is patent: she is the sole focus of conversation as the son enquires as to her appearance and her culinary skills, and tries to situate her worth compared to ‘*la gravos de la semaine dernière*’. The son’s remarks about the maid’s appearance (‘*elle est pas trop moche au moins?*’), and their justification by the father (‘*tu ne peux pas reprocher à un garçon d’aimer les belles choses*’), as well as the sister’s reproach (‘*Pourquoi? Tu veux te déniaiser avec elle?*’), allude to the archetypal *bonne à tout faire* including the time-worn image of the maid as sexual initiator of the young master of the house. This dehumanising discussion of the maid in absentia (as a mere ‘*chose*’) is counterbalanced by the daughter’s benevolent condescension as she objects to this

reductive characterisation of the maid and voices the power imbalance in the served/servant relationship that can and will eventuate in violent rebellion.

In short, this dining-room scene that is in fact transposed onto the space of the kitchen, signals that the maid will be a generic figure to this family, nameless (*'la bonniche'*) and faceless (*'en tout cas, elle n'est pas monstrueuse'*). The focus of the dinnertime conversation on the subject of the ideal maid (a good cook, pretty but not too pretty, and self-effacing) also, importantly, signals the drama that Sophie's introduction into the home will precipitate, despite her exceptional ordering and cleaning skills that will put the family in their rightful served place. But if the maid is alluded to in stereotypical terms, so too is the family, with Chabrol offering a critique of these characters' various responses to servitude in this tableau that stages the historically repugnant attitudes of the served regarding those who serve. In a sense, this scene prefigures the identification that the filmmaker seeks to align with the servant figure by construing her as the victim of this family's ruling class righteousness even before the assumption of her serving role to them.

After passing muster at her job interview in a café in Saint Malo, and a lift from the train station a few days later to take up her new position (a lift in which the mistress tells Sophie to sit in the front and Jeanne, who has wrangled a ride, to sit in the back, with the mistress from the outset asserting her spatial control), Sophie arrives at the stately home set on a large parcel of land overlooking woods and a small lake. As the car drives toward the home, the tense non-diegetic music that accompanies maid and mistress leaves no doubt that Sophie's hiring will not end well.

As the first intra-domestic space in which Chabrol places his maid protagonist, the *chambre de bonne* is significant in spatially situating this maid figure within the global ecology of the home. There is a spatial and temporal jump from the maid's initial entrance through the main doors of the home, the image cutting precisely at the moment that she has crossed the front door's threshold; we next see the mistress and the maid entering the *chambre de bonne* directly, without any diegetic transition throughout the rest of the home. This cut is significant and emphasises the narrative action of putting the maid in her place within the home's 'normative landscape' (See Cresswell 1992; 1996). Positioned from within the space of the *chambre de bonne*, the camera is trained on the important object of the television, its bulk commanding half of the screen and providing light reflected from the window in an otherwise

sombre room, as the mistress opening the door occupies the left side of the screen during this short tableau. The mistress induces movement into the space, traversing the length of the room to the window, asserting her command over this room that is nominally the maid's. She diegetically comments on the geography of the attic floor, situating the shower in relation to the *chambre de bonne*, and proves herself to be at confident ease within the maid's designated space. '*Installez-vous, prenez votre temps, et je vous ferai visiter la maison plus tard*', she announces, asserting her spatio-social supremacy within the home, and directing the maid's sequential occupation of its spaces. Here, the maid, perhaps out of a keen sense of duty, or perhaps as a preliminary hint of her future refusal to comply with her dictated occupation of domestic space, calls for an alternative spatial practice: '*Je peux venir tout de suite – je rangerai après*' – a joust over the time/space programming that the mistress is intent on dominating: '*Euh non non, je vais prendre un café en vous attendant.*' The mistress, as she is poised to exit the room, appears to have a lingering thought related to her dominant position, turns back around, puts her hand on Sophie's shoulder in a benign gesture of care and asks her if the room is suitable. This is a yes/no question to which the maid initially responds with what will be her characteristic linguistic indeterminacy: '*Je ne sais pas Madame*', before deploying her learned linguistic cover designed to reassure the mistress – '*Enfin, si, bien sûr, ça va*', delivered with a smile, in validation of the subordinate position of the *perle* maid.

Once the mistress is gone, Sophie crosses the room to seal the space from the outside world by closing the door, then the curtains. This containment of the *chambre de bonne* from the broader domestic sphere is a recurrent spatio-narrative event throughout Chabrol's film. It can be understood as the representation of the attempted demarcation of space for herself by the maid (in a sense, a re-tracing of the segregation of domestic space that emphasises the privacy-induced boundaries inherent to 19<sup>th</sup> century architecture) and as a visual signifier for her restricted experience of the world. Sophie then attempts to make a place for herself in the space of the *chambre de bonne*, as the mistress awaits her downstairs, inscribing it with what will be her sole leisure activity by switching on the television. The screen reveals a typescript quote by Vauvenargues: '*On ne peut pas être juste si l'on n'est humain.*' This quote is typically associated with the need for the justice system to be humane, but it takes on an ominous tone when considered in the light of the murderous and almost motiveless revenge to be undertaken by the maid – that 'monstrous hybrid' who is no longer human, in Célestine's words (Mirbeau

2003, p. 169). As Mirbeau's (2003, p. 76) maid had moreover opined, '*On n'a pas le temps d'être juste avec ses maîtres... Il faut que les bons paient pour les mauvais*', whereby justice is secondary to righteousness in the maid's rebellion against servitude. Vauvenargues' warning message on the television screen gives way to reveal the opening scene of a legal drama picturing a female magistrate filmed from a very low angle, ascending a set of stairs leading toward a court. Chabrol's framing of the scene with this image heavily and ironically contrasts with Sophie's lowly spatial and social posture on the floor against her bed looking up towards the television. In essence, this first staging of Sophie within the home shows at once her condition that is expressed through her subordinate physical posture, and the potentially murderous rebellion that this social domination invokes.

Along with the *chambre de bonne*, the kitchen is one of the spaces within the bourgeois home that most patently characterises the maid's persona and labour. Genet (1976, p. 87) insisted on the kitchen being the maid's domain: '*C'est votre domaine. Vous en êtes les souveraines*', highlighting Solange and Claire's supposedly sovereignty over this humble space, in a dimension that foregrounds the home as a battle zone between master and servant. The kitchen has further been used as a metaphor for eliciting the spatio-social hierarchy within the larger structure, by Zola (1882) in *Pot-Bouille*, as well as in Genet (1976, p. 31), with Solange declaring: '*Je retourne à ma cuisine. J'y retrouve mes gants et l'odeur de mes dents. Le rot silencieux de l'évier. Je suis la bonne.*' Elsewhere in *Les Bonnes* (p. 16), Claire, impersonating the mistress, designates the kitchen as a source of contamination: '*Tout, mais tout! ce qui vient de la cuisine est crachat.*' In Genet's play, the kitchen is at once spatially possessed by the maid at least (pro)nominally ('*ma*'), and is also the repository for the malodour of the maid's labour that becomes symbolically attached to her persona. Here, as elsewhere, space and the maid figure co-exist and cross-fertilise in a rapport that is inflected with abjection.

Chronologically, in *La Cérémonie*, the kitchen is the second room that we are presented with upon the maid's insertion into the home, immediately following her introduction into the *chambre de bonne*. In Chabrol's film, the kitchen is the maid's 'domain' within the bourgeois home, and is proudly presented as such to Sophie during this early scene. Descending the service staircase, Sophie penetrates the kitchen that the former transit zone feeds into to find the mistress at the centre of the room, casually seated atop the kitchen table drinking coffee. The



mistress's posture here acts to annul the maid's supposed sovereignty over this space, thereby signalling the power struggle premised upon access to and ownership of space that is set to continue throughout the film. From the base of the kitchen, the spatial centre of the maid's labour within the home, in which the mistress does not seem to want to dwell ('*On verra ça tout à l'heure*'), Sophie is taken on a guided tour through the greater domestic sphere via a series of corridors and stairs whose importance will be considered shortly. This spatio-chronological moment that characterises the kitchen within the narrative – as point of departure and arrival, meeting point, and ultimately as zone of ambiguous social categorisation – will also be found in Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de Pages*.

The two first spaces within the home that are staged in the film are thus those that functionally belong to the maid through her servitude: the first, personal; the second, the location for one of her primary duties – cooking. The kitchen equally becomes the location for the placing of written instructions directed at the maid by the mistress. This space, in taking on the narrative status of depot of the masters' written orders communicated to their illiterate maid, becomes a threatening zone where the maid is at constant risk of her secret being uncovered, and where her ideal servitude is challenged. In the first of such instances, Sophie's panic at finding the note on the kitchen table sees her run upstairs, her displacement to the left of the screen briefly revealing a pewter jug set atop a side-board, to be seen as a reference to the murder weapon famously used in the Papin sisters' murder – an object that has entered maid iconology. Fraisse (2009, p. 171) reminds us, after all, that the kitchen does not belong to the servant; it being designated as her domain does not mean she is independent in that space. Rather, as Fraisse insists, the kitchen is '*le lieu même de la subordination à ceux qui décident et commandent.*' Throughout Chabrol's film, the kitchen as the maid's space is repeatedly represented as threatened territory, much like the *chambre de bonne* allocated to her. From the mistress's notes, to the master consuming his breakfast while querying Sophie's avoidance of modern domestic appliances, cleaning and oiling his rifles, or lecturing her about her friendship with Jeanne and forbidding the latter's access to the home, to Mélinda's invasive do-gooder attempted conversations, to the master's final incursion into the space that I will examine below, the kitchen, in its poly-functional and poly-occupied status appears as a highly contested zone that is essential in Chabrol's staging of servitude and its contestation by the maid.

With the presence of the maid within the home, the family are free to restore their practice of domesticity to its rightful syntax of space, which designates the dining room as the served space of the kitchen's servant status. The maid's presence within the home justifies the performance of the bourgeoisie's established domestic rituals, including formal dinners in a dining room – a space that is mono-functional. The dining room, though the masters' space per se, exists and is functionalised through the presence of the maid, and is narrativised as such in the *mise en scène* of *La Cérémonie*.

Architecturally and diegetically, the kitchen is always close enough to the dining room that the maid can overhear all that is said about her at the dinner table, precipitating scenes that depict the maid as invisible while auditorily present. This configuration of space is integral to the representation of served and servant relations within the home. Scenes abound transnationally in film of maids waiting in the (servant) kitchen during masters' meal times, alert to any potential call for assistance in the full enjoyment of the bourgeois family's legitimate occupation of the (served) dining room.<sup>118</sup> In the kitchen, during the masters' mealtimes, the maid is on a physical and symbolic border within the home. She is neither seen nor heard unless called upon – often through the mediation of a bell, so as to symbolically decrease the communicative contamination and to reassert demarcation – yet she is receptive, deliberately or not, to her masters' vocal emissions. Within this spatial schema, in *La Cérémonie*, the maid's first evening within the Lelièvres' home is spatio-narratively constructed as a type of test to evaluate the maid's worthiness, and can be understood as a sister-scene to the first one I described in this case study, prior to the maid's arrival.

The maid is shown to assume her functionally tenuous place within the dining room on the occasion of her first evening within the home, serving dinner to the family members, who are equitably positioned at a round table. In this tableau, shot from a high and narrow angle, the maid, whose white shirt catches the light to reveal her against the others' more sombre attire<sup>119</sup>, bows at the table of her masters, offering up a dish of chicken. In the sombre background, it becomes apparent that the tapestry on the wall depicts the scene of a feast with servants busying themselves in the foreground in front of a long table, a *mise en abyme* of the

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<sup>118</sup> These dinnertime scenes in maid films recur transnationally. Silva's *La Nana* (2009) contains one, as does Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995) and Im Sang-soo's *The Housemaid* (2010).

<sup>119</sup> Catherine Lelièvre, too, is wearing white in this scene, in a tonal arrangement that draws a visual connection between maid and mistress.

served/servant relations that are taking place within this scene. The staging of this dinner thus conjures a timeless representation of served and servant relations, inscribing the narrative underway within a historic continuum by injecting into the dining room setting an anterior, two-dimensional representational equivalent that invites a reflection on servitude as an immemorial social relation.



Sophie then retreats to the adjacent kitchen to fetch the steamed vegetables as requested by the mistress, and the family takes the opportunity to enquire about her performance – ‘*Alors? Elle est bien?*’, asks Mélinda. The mistress responds with the adjective ‘*épatante*’ while crossing her fingers and then verbalising this action ‘*je croise les doigts*’ – which, aside from just narrativising the mistress’s desire that the maid be competent, can be seen as a symbolic engagement by the director with the 19<sup>th</sup> century conception of the ambivalence of feelings by masters for their maids, conjuring the potential threat of the maid. The dining room scene which makes visible the maid’s formal labour however reveals Sophie to be the archetypal ‘*perle*’ – that invisible, silent, generic maid figure, or, in Mélinda’s semi-politically conscious student words: ‘*un robot*’.<sup>120</sup>

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<sup>120</sup> Petitfrère (1986, p. 208) considers the long-held desire to replace servants with machines – to keep them separate on a physical level, with the invention, for example, of the dumb waiter – the pulley system that carries food between floors, which appeared in England in 1769. See also Hecht (1981, p. 120)

Once the family have been served in the dining room, Chabrol offers up a conventional scene of the maid in the kitchen picking over the chicken carcass that has been spoliated of its flesh for the socially superior and spatially legitimate members of the household. The camera set from hip-height is directly in line with Sophie in a medium shot (the foreground containing cutlery and crockery neatly stacked), seated at the table picking at skerricks of chicken still in its baking dish with her fingers. This posture of the maid, with which the camera through its straight-on angle leads us to empathise with, stages both the maid's servitude and signifies her rebellion to come, a rebellion that, by force of this sense of injustice contained within the consumption of served and servant meals, we are invited to sympathise with. This image first situates the maid as an excluded figure who is bestowed the leftovers as a symptom of the broader marginalisation she faces within the home; and secondly, the glinting cutlery reflecting the light in the foreground of this shot along with the chicken carcass foreshadow the hunt that will take place later on, with the *Lelièvres* as prey.



The maid, however, is not left to linger for long at her modest repast in the kitchen. The mistress's voice resonates clear and close from the dining room off-screen almost as if she were in the same space, underlining the fact that the maid would thus have heard every word uttered about her during their meal: '*Sophie. Vous pouvez débarrasser.*' In Chabrol's staging of the

mistress's call to the maid in the next room, the family's evaluation of the maid and her labour is aurally witnessed by Sophie in the next room – the kitchen, through the juxtaposition of frames focussing on these referent 'served' and 'servant' spaces, and the superimposition of the dining room's sound against the visual space of the kitchen. This acts as another affront of served unto servant that is designed to elicit audience identification with Sophie, paving the way for a sympathetic understanding of the maid's revolt.

The dining room scenes in maid films are a narrative element that serves to provide a diegetic assessment of the maid's labour and her marginal situation within the home. The maid character in this space cannot be anything other than a maid, given that the room's entire purpose is the performance of the diametrically opposed roles of servant and served. Nor can the two classes under the one roof seamlessly cohabit this same space, as Chabrol implies: as the family exits the dining room to pass through an ante-room to the living-room, the maid discreetly swaps place with them to go and clear the table. In this swift exchange of occupant from family to maid, the mores of bourgeois domesticity lie undisturbed: the bourgeoisie need not set sight on the maid's remedying of disorder.

The mise en scène of Sophie's servitude is contingent on narrativising the extent to which she is out of place within the master's home. The space that most acutely frames this spatio-social posture is that of the library/study, a location most precisely associated with the master and the apex of the hierarchy within the home. *La Cérémonie* shows Sophie being introduced to the library/study adjacent to the living room during her initial whirlwind tour of the bourgeois home during which the mistress defines her tasks. As the mistress precedes the maid, opening up the double-panelled doors onto this room, they are both filmed on the threshold in a medium shot from within the room. As the mistress moves into the space, Sophie freezes and the image jump cuts to a closer shot of her head, from behind, as we share her viewpoint across the threshold into the library/study. She is unable to cross the border of the library/study, with the sight of piled-up books repelling her. She then moves to the right, to the margin of the frame, and the shot cuts to an inside-view of the room, the camera panning across the book-lined walls to reveal Sophie, still lurking at the threshold. The camera settles once Sophie is in her place, at the edge of the space and frame, while the mistress occupies the centre of the room and frame. The library/study, and the manner in which it is cinematically staged by Chabrol, materialises the maid's marginality, rendering her cultural exclusion in three-

dimensional, architectural terms within the film's space. The library in *La Cérémonie* is a space that Sophie will be seen to scrupulously avoid, its inscription with higher intellectual pursuits acting as a forbidding force in the context of her illiteracy. Her employers note amongst themselves her avoidance of the library in her cleaning routine, without giving too much heed to it, given that she is such a 'perle' in her treatment of all other spaces within the home. Chabrol, in narrativising the family's cognisance of Sophie's avoidance of the library/study hints to the significance of this particular space in its exclusion of the maid and the role this exclusion will play in Sophie's rebellion.



*La Cérémonie* contains expected scenes of Sophie vacuuming and dusting within the space of the living room. These represent the maid's imposition of surface order within the home and the cleansing of this space while simultaneously eliciting, in a latent manner, the disordering revenge that the parameters of her servitude will call for. In Chabrol's film, when Jeanne, the postal worker that has befriended the maid, moves through the masters' space with ease, observing their accoutrements and speculating about their private affairs, Sophie is out of place within this same space. She must take her cue from her friend, whose geographical distanciation from the Lelièvres' house (and her capacity to conceptualise and verbalise her class difference) re-maps the boundaries that exist within domestic space, in essence licensing Sophie's tentative occupation of the masters' space in a preliminary manner. On these

occasions of initially unrequited visitation, unlatching the second pane of the door leading into the living room, as if to ensure more open access, Jeanne moves through the living room with exclamations of envious admiration (*'Ah la laaa... Ça c'est la classe... Oh cette télé! Ben dis donc ça rapporte, la conserve'*<sup>121</sup>) taking possession of the space and its contents as she reaches for the remote control – an object that confers power onto its holder. It is with palpable discomfort that Sophie sits on the sofa and watches the masters' huge television screen – a posture at odds with her performance of the same activity two floors above in her *chambre de bonne*. Jeanne's self-assured occupation of the living room, as an outsider to the bourgeois home, contrasts with Sophie's inability to invest this space with the same domestic behaviour. It reveals that the claiming of space is a political act that seeks to subvert the power relations between served and servant that depend on the maid being always 'out of place'.

The *mise en scène* of servitude equally designates the maid's occupation of the liminal spaces within the home, these transitory passages that facilitate the maid's ordering and purification domestic space. These liminal spaces equally function to narrativise the spatio-social segregation between served and servant. In the architectural setting of Chabrol's film, two separate staircases coexist and are employed to functionally separate the two classes. Sophie's bedroom in the attic is syntactically connected to her 'domain' of the kitchen by a service staircase. Sophie is seen multiple times ascending to the top floor via the service staircase, a poorly lit and narrower, twisting sister-space (and therefore, of a symbolically unpredictable nature) to the right-angled (rational and legitimate) staircase that services the masters' domestic space. The main staircase too services the attic floor, however modifying as it progresses upwards, narrowing from the point of the masters' bedrooms' floor. The staircase thus anticipates and is in line with the poverty of the space that it is vertically leading to. This same graduation of rich to poor materials and decreasing proportions as the attic is neared will equally be present in Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de pages*.

Corridors in domestic architecture are integral to the cinematic representation of maid figures. Bunuel's *Journal d'une femme de chambre*, for example, made significant use of this space-type in order to convey Céléstine's tenuous position within the home. It is in the corridor that Céléstine is intercepted by the mistress and remonstrated with for nothing in particular, but in such a way as to delegitimise her occupation of this space; it is also within the corridor that

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<sup>121</sup> M. Lelièvre owns a canning factory.

she is co-opted into the mistress's father's foot fetish antics in his bedroom, and where the master on several occasions attempts to initiate a sexual encounter.

The corridor into which one enters through the front door, in *La Cérémonie*, is a space of acclimatisation as well as a transitional space preceding an exit movement. The corridor is a point of communication within the architecture of the home and the social relations it houses and is designated, in this film, as a repository of written communication from mistress/master to maid, as is the kitchen.<sup>122</sup> The placement of a telephone in this central corridor moreover accrues this space's communicative status with the outside world, and so the master, from without the home, retains spatio-social control over the maid by being able to call on her via the telephone. The kitchen where Sophie is rolling out pastry, wearing an apron in a posture of ideal servitude, resounds with the ringing of the telephone from its place in the entrance corridor. Its sound permeates not only through to the maid's domain in the kitchen but also up into her *chambre de bonne* where she takes refuge from the master's call. Chabrol thus employs the corridor in an typical manner in its capacity to convey the flow of communication between master and servant, situating it as a communication point both between the outside world and the domestic sphere and between individual spaces and characters within the home. The flow, however, remains unidirectional – from masters to maid.

Another, bisecting corridor exists off this entrance corridor: a passage that connects the kitchen, the maid's 'domain', to bourgeois living space. And yet these are the only architecturally accurate corridors that exist within the setting for Chabrol's film, the paucity of which is a result of the structure dating prior to the 19<sup>th</sup> century at which time the uniformisation of corridor systems occurred. Chabrol however extends the corridor capacity of this architectural structure that is based on what Evans (1997) describes as a 'matrix of rooms' by way of cinematography. Antechambers are staged in such a way as to cinematically morph into corridor spaces, and enfilades are filmed at an angle that gives the illusion of a sealed-off passage.

When we view Sophie hovering at the doorway leading into the library/study, the space that appears behind her, the living room, takes on the appearance of a corridor from the long and narrow section afforded to our eyes. This acts to further enshrine the maid as a liminal figure. The same optical illusion occurs from the dining room's connectivity through to the

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<sup>122</sup> The first note is left on the kitchen table, while the second is deposited on the side table in the hallway.



living room. The demarcation of domestic space with the use of corridors that characterises the conceptual category of the maid figure within the 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural model is thus translated in *La Cérémonie*. An iconographic floor plan is in essence translated through cinematic framing onto a space that does not in fact contain these precise spatial divisions. That Chabrol insists on fabricating corridors in the masters' space through his choice of angles and spatial composition foregrounds the contribution of liminal space to the mise en scène of servitude.



Sophie's servitude within the home is equally staged through the repartition of two objects within maid space and master space that serve the purpose of highlighting the place of served and servant within the spatial grammar of the home. Objects, including Sophie's television, are rarely without significance in *La Cérémonie*, as in cinema more generally. On an anthropological level, as Goffman wrote (1976, p. 6 in Ardener, 1981, p. 13):

Objects are thought to structure the environment immediately around themselves; they cast a shadow, heat up the surround, strew indications, leave an imprint, they impress a part of themselves, a portrait that is unintended and not dependent on being attended, yet, of course, informing nonetheless to whomsoever is properly placed, trained and inclined.

Of course in the imaginary space of cinema, no object is insignificant in set design, and the television's primacy in Sophie's space constitutes an important indicator of the lines that divide

master and servant in the images transmitted through this device. The television in Sophie's *chambre de bonne* must first be contrasted as a material object with the one that occupies the space of the library, and that will eventually be a key plot element during the 'ceremony' at the close of the film. The first is old and quite small, and has been discarded by the Lelièvre family. It is a rejected and undesirable object that has been assigned to the home's lesser occupant, the maid. The latter is extremely large and brand-new in a manner that is diegetically stressed at least twice during the film.

In addition to the meaning conveyed through the material object's worth and the location of the dual televisions, *what* they project supplies additional narrative meaning. As Polack (2001, p. 89) writes, the television is, for Sophie, 'a position of withdrawal, a line of defence'; 'for the bourgeois, a continual expansion.' But Sophie's television equally becomes, in Chabrol's narrative, a catalyst for the practise of social relations with Jeanne, as they surreptitiously spend evenings watching game shows and popular films in each other's company, a shared activity that mimics the family's watching of television together as a social activity.

Whether it screens a representation of a woman magistrate, a Paul Newman film, or children's shows, the various projections of the maid's television must be taken to invest the maid's space with considerable class signifying information. This information is then contrasted with the masters' television connected to a satellite which beams in content from around the world, and that will fatefully screen an opera (Mozart's *Don Giovanni*) within the space of the library during the 'ceremony'. Shields (1997, p. 198) defines 'spatialization' as:

The process by which "space" is socially constructed, with codes of spatial performance, expectation, and definition which transcend the purely physical realm of action to defend and define whole conceptual and cultural "worlds", as a materially produced phenomenon.

The television object, in its capacity to conjure other 'worlds' (albeit two-dimensional) both social and spatial – to in a sense inject a second, controllable space into 'given' space –, plays an important part in spatialising characters within specific *milieux* or social spaces. That is to say that the television acts not only as a leisure pursuit serving to inscribe the space of the *chambre de bonne* as a 'place'; it equally, and more subtly, is narratively employed to elicit supplementary information regarding the maid's social standing, to situate her socially, and to

paradoxically represent Sophie in a position of dominance as she has the means to control the information that is emitted from this object with the click of a button.

The repartition of television sets in *La Cérémonie*'s representation of Sophie's servitude and rebellion semiotically highlights the social hierarchy within the home in a very clear manner through the added dimension of their spatial assignation. These polysemic objects serve to sequentially link various spaces and scenes. They act as repositories for narrative meaning, and their geographical location and diegetic relocation<sup>123</sup> is integral to the *mise en scène* of the maid figure's servitude and rebellion.

As seen previously, 19<sup>th</sup> century masters held significant anxieties regarding the *chambre de bonne*, from where they perceived the maid to be plotting against them. Although Sophie is not a plotter, unlike Mélanie in *La Tourneuse de pages*, who uses this space for such behaviour, Sophie displays, in her room, the rage that masters for so long feared. Apart from the *chambre de bonne* being the location for leisure with the television, it is also the only space within the domestic structure in which Sophie's illiteracy can be expressed as social suffering, as a state and a condition just like servitude is. In the first scene in which Sophie retreats to her *chambre de bonne* to try and decipher the mistress's hand-written instructions, everything in the scene contributes to conveying the maid's marginality and subservience. In a sense, Sophie's illiteracy is integral to her servitude and rebellion. It is quite clear from the Lacanian psychoanalytical framework around which the narrative is plotted, that Sophie would not have murdered the Lelièvres had she had access to language. The psychoanalyst Caroline Eliacheff, who co-wrote the screenplay, speaks of a state of '*sidération*' brought on by the protagonist's exclusion from language, implying that Sophie's illiteracy is the condition for her murder, if not necessarily the sole cause.<sup>124</sup> On her knees, crouched over her single bed and viewed from a higher angle, she grapples with the images in her phonetics and sign book designed for deaf children. As she struggles to vocalise the opaque typography in order to match it against the script of the mistress's note, her frustration mounts and her hand, used to perform the signs, flexes in and out of a claw, shaking, before a cut reveals a close-up of the fist smacking down against the impenetrable book. This scene forewarns of the maid's potential for violence (both towards her masters and the written language that excludes her), with the hand-as-claw imagery

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<sup>123</sup> On the evening of the 'ceremony', the family will relocate the television from the living room to the adjacent library/study, as I will further discuss below.

<sup>124</sup> See interview with Eliacheff on the DVD of *La Cérémonie*.

referencing Christine and Léa Papin's gouging of their mistresses' eyes, as well as Célestine's fantasised method in *Journal d'une femme de chambre* prior to that, a rage against the all-encompassing machine of servitude.

The above has shown the ways in which domestic space in *La Cérémonie* is staged in an archetypal manner to signify Sophie's servitude that is premised on the exclusion from certain spaces, the assignment of others, and an uneasy occupation of the global space of the home that designates her relegation to the liminal spaces of the home. Yet the geography of the home equally provides for Sophie's transgression against her prescribed syntax of space, as will now be shown.

### **Place-making, spatial evasion, and the conquest of territory**

Certain locations provide instances of place-making, where the maid figure is permitted to inscribe space in ways that both contravene the stereotypical prescription of invisibility and placelessness of the maid, while conforming to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's anxieties regarding the maid's appropriation of space. The most obvious location for the maid's place-making is evidently the room designated to her at the outset, that of the *chambre de bonne*. While geographically symbolising her maid status, it is also the location for the performance of various activities that contribute to representing her subjectivity as not solely defined through her servitude. It is also a space that, historically and culturally, has signified the maid's relative leisure in comparison to her labour in the rest of the domestic sphere. Genet's Solange in *Les Bonnes* (1976, p. 38) phrased the relative repose of the 'mansarde' thus:

*J'ai aimé la mansarde parce que sa pauvreté m'obligeait à de pauvres gestes. Pas de tentures à soulever, pas de tapis à fouler, de meubles à caresser... de l'œil ou du torchon, pas de glaces, pas de balcon. Rien ne nous forçait à un geste trop beau.*

The *chambre de bonne* is the one space in the home where the maid is free to determine her actions and postures, the one locale in which she can inscribe and invest space.<sup>125</sup> Up in the

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<sup>125</sup> Buñuel's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* showed Célestine decorating her shared *chambre de bonne* with Parisian fineries and trinkets to the admiration of her roommate, the provincial maid who has not worked in Paris. Such scenes help to narratively establish the maid's place-making and ultimate placelessness. Objects take on added value when their proprietor is characterised by their mobility. They are a way of inscribing identity onto space and taking social power. This is evidenced by the popular imagery of expressions such as 'to pack one's bags'/'faire sa valise' etc. in situations of eviction from a social space. Geographical dislocation is made tangible

*chambre de bonne* is the closest the maid figure can get to Bachelard's famed 'benefaction' of the house in *La Poétique de l'espace* (1957): 'the house accommodates dreaming, the house protects the dreamer, the house allows us to dream in peace.' (in Jacobs 2007, p. 4)

The *chambre de bonne* equally serves the maid's evasion, a contravention of her servile duty to be always at the beck and call of her masters. Sophie takes refuge in the *chambre de bonne* to escape M. Lelièvre's phone calls, which she perceives as a threat that may unmask her secret; and so she exiles herself to this small territory, switches on the television and increases the volume on *Les Mini-keums* (a children's show) to drown out the persistent ringing of the telephone. Later, when the master reprimands her in his study for this evasion of his calls, she re-deploys this element of the maid's control that is to remove herself from her post: excusing herself to the kitchen, she leaves the master fuming as she refuses to engage with his approaches and reproaches.

The Lelièvre family forgive Sophie this quirk once, supposing that '*il y a des choses qu'il ne faut pas lui demander*', especially given the near impossibility of acquiring good domestic help these days, which is of course a recall of the discourse of the days of the *crise de la domesticité*. Sophie's flight to the *chambre de bonne* as ruse will not work twice however, and the master will appear at the threshold of this space following the threat she makes to his daughter Mélinda in the kitchen.<sup>126</sup> It is in Sophie's *chambre de bonne* that the master, after silencing her television (and thereby over-writing her inscription of the space of the *chambre de bonne*), announces her dismissal and exclusion from the home.

The introduction of Sophie's friend Jeanne into the home modifies the maid's uncertain occupation of space. The first time Jeanne visits Sophie at the house, she knocks on the kitchen window and then climbs through it, by-passing the door, presaging her problematic occupation of space that goes against architectural rules of function and distribution. This clandestine mode of entry into a space that she has no right to access suggests to the viewer that Jeanne is no ordinary guest who can expect bourgeois hospitality within the Lelièvres' home, placing her on the same level of spatio-social exclusion as that of the maid. And yet Jeanne is not a maid, and is as such not restricted to the tenuous occupation of master-dominated space given that she is

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by the removal of one's personal objects, and the reverse is also true – that successful relocation to another place and its qualification depends on the laying down of one's objects, a marking of territory.

<sup>126</sup> Sophie threatens to reveal to the master and mistress Mélinda's pregnancy after the latter has discovered Sophie's fiercely kept secret – her illiteracy.

not bound in a direct relationship of subordination to the bourgeoisie. Her visit to the house to deliver a postcard from Mélinda in person is of course a pretext to snoop around the house of these wealthy people that she envies. She rapidly edges towards the doorway that separates the kitchen from the rest of the house, taking Sophie along with her on her tour of inspection of the space of bourgeois domesticity. Jeanne's intromission into bourgeois space equally affects and emboldens Sophie's own occupation of space, and as Jeanne switches on the masters' television set, Sophie hesitates only briefly before seating herself on the leather sofa to watch the soap opera, an inscription of master-space that would previously have been unthinkable for the maid.

Jeanne is shown as being drawn to the space of the masters' bedroom, a space much larger than her studio in the village, and is replete with desirable objects and clothes. Here, Jeanne performatively apes the mistress while de-classing her. As she yanks an expensive evening dress from the cupboard and sashays over to the mirror holding it in front of her, Jeanne talks about how Mme Lelièvre was a model/actress before, making allusions to her supposed sexual promiscuity. Jeanne's impersonation and denigration of the mistress in her bedroom in Chabrol's film is an intertextual integration of the same element in Genet's play *Les Bonnes*.

The maid's transgression against her prescribed occupation in the spatial programming of the home equally occurs through her evasion of her servile place. It is in the context of Mélinda's birthday celebrations taking place in the living room (incidentally it is Sophie's birthday too) one Sunday that Sophie's fall from 'perle' to 'souillon' in the eyes of the bourgeois family is first enacted in earnest. In this scene, the maid abandons her post at a time when her function is to uphold publicly the Lelièvres' status. The maid's function, after all, is not just to cook and clean: it is also, very significantly, to signify her masters' served status. As the family reaps compliments and a boost in social status over the food prepared by the maid, the maid's rebellion is already under way.

The family's perception of Sophie as an ideal maid dramatically changes to outrage as she abandons her role which demands that she hover at the margins of the space, attentive to the party's needs for ice-refills and mini-quiche replenishments – '*C'est insensé! Elle s'est tirée.*' Here, as will be seen in Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de Pages* below and in the films to be analysed in the following chapter, one of the ways in which the maid structures her rebellion

against the condition and relations of servitude is through the abandonment of space, a re-mapping of predictable trajectories that delineate the maid's labour and that geographically encase her servitude. That the *mise en scène* of Sophie's rebellious truancy is staged in the living room (that semi-public arena within which the bourgeoisie displays its wealth and socialises) serves to present the act as potent and political. After this transgression, Sophie is pictured running from the house, advancing into the centre of the frame and leaving her marginal place in her wake.

After Sophie's day spent with Jeanne having lunch and volunteering at the *Secours Catholique* following her abandonment of her service post during Mélinda's birthday celebrations, Sophie invites Jeanne to enter the masters' home after dark, guiding her around the back of the house to the service door. In this situation, the service door exists as the maid's secret entrance, a way of reintegrating the bourgeois home without being noticed by her masters. This is a paradigm which, paradoxically, at once confirms the maid's dutiful invisibility as architecturally determined, while asserting the segregation of the home for its potential to provide space for subjective being to the maid. It is also a means of inscribing the bourgeois home, even tenuously, as a *place* in which she can provide hospitality to her friend in the context of the rapport of servitude that is premised upon the fact that the house is not a home for the maid. In this light, the architecture of the bourgeois home as evoked in the preceding and current chapters is transmuted from its original functionality, with the maid figure gaining social traction through the same organisation of space that served to genericise and socially segregate her. As Sophie guides Jeanne toward the service staircase, the postal worker, in jest, goes to open the door to the masters' space from which classical music is emanating, before stopping in her tracks. Both women cackle at this mockingly attempted occupation of master-dominated space, a preliminary and tentative act that foreshadows the conquest of territory that will ensue from the ceremony to come.

From the point of Jeanne's introduction within the home, with her assertive occupation of the various spaces of domesticity, Sophie's qualification of the kitchen becomes equally assertive. Rather than simply answering the masters' questions with an indeterminate '*Je ne sais pas*' and obeying their orders with submissive acquiescence, Sophie begins to reject the master's invectives that take place in the kitchen. As she serves him breakfast one morning, and as he rules that Jeanne shall not be granted access to the space of the home in the future, the

maid drops/smashes a plate on the kitchen tiles and displaces the blame onto the master: ‘*Regardez ce que vous m’avez fait faire*’ – taking control of her immediate surrounds by inscribing them with violence, speaking up and nominating blame, a posture usually reserved for the masters. A parallel could be made between this crockery-smashing incident and Céléstine’s semi-accidental smashing of an expensive oil-lamp shade in Buñuel’s adaption of *Journal d’une femme de chambre*. These breakings that produce a visual and aural shock that is dramatised by the way in which the smash is cinematically staged in a rapid cut can be read as narrative signals of the maid’s potential violence, be it psychological or physical. In this scene, the maid stands tall over the master, and while there is still evidently a rapport of servitude, the characters’ respective postures and the angles from which they are filmed (high-angle for the master, low-angle for the maid) act to accentuate Sophie’s spatio-social control in this scene underway in her domain. Furthermore, Sophie’s active displacement of blame onto M. Lelièvre in this instance presages the masters’ culpability in what will eventuate. In attempting to control the maid’s movements within the home, especially in regard to her associations during her leisure time, the master makes a grave mistake. And in precipitating this control within the diegetic space of the kitchen, nominally the maid’s domain, the master brings havoc upon himself by his misplaced display of authority. The forbidding of Jeanne in the home, however, this affirmation of the masters’ domination and dominion, strengthens the maid’s resolve to contravene her designated place. Sophie will continue to invite Jeanne across the threshold, and as she does so, she opens up the masters’ space for acts of place-making performed in unison with Jeanne, who by her position as outsider takes on a type of maid figure surrogacy in the enactment of rebellion.

While the corridor’s communicativity favours served over servant in its design within the space syntax of bourgeois domesticity, Sophie, however, is able to subvert this order of the flow in her opportunistic use of the corridor to access family communications that are not directed at her. As the relationship between maid and masters begins to sour, coinciding with the post-office worker Jeanne’s clandestine introduction into the home,<sup>127</sup> Sophie intercepts an important private phone conversation between Mélinda and her boyfriend Jérémie regarding an unplanned pregnancy. By surreptitiously picking up the receiver situated in the intermediary

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<sup>127</sup> Jeanne is characterised by her indiscretion, her spying on others’ private communications by the opening of letters, her penchant for gossip and her encouragement of Sophie to gather information on the family dynamics.



space of the corridor, the maid is shown to gain access to the conversation in the library/study and, symbolically, access to that space itself. In doing so, she gleans information from which she will gain power over the family. In this instance, Sophie is represented as employing the corridor as a space of passage and communication in order to obtain power in the economy of information within the home and to begin to claim space from which she is excluded. She thereby contravenes the corridor's function in the spatio-social control of passage and communication.

In the lead-up to the murder scene in Chabrol's film, the family relocate the wide-screened television from the living room to the adjacent space of the library/study. This displacement of the television in the space syntax of the home further emphasises the high cultural status of the Mozart opera (*Don Giovanni*) that they are about to watch by staging it in a space of erudition, from which the maid is, we well understand by now, patently excluded.<sup>128</sup> The family is formally dressed for the occasion, inscribing the space with an air of ceremony, hinting at the murderous act that is imminent. Framed from above, they settle in a tightly packed row onto the comfortable brown sofa to watch the credits roll on the television screen. The film then cuts to Sophie and Jeanne driving to the house in Jeanne's beat-up 2CV to come and disrupt this carefully staged picture of modern bourgeois domesticity. A panning shot rotates around from the television screen showing a melancholy scene from the opera, to reveal the window giving onto the front of the property, before capturing the maids running covertly towards the house. This juxtaposition of the action taking place outside the home overlays this serene picture of nuclear family domesticity with Sophie and Jeanne's ominous approach. By now, the family have fired the maid and so have conceivably banished the threat she posed and that became evident to them through her attempted blackmail of Mélinda. However, the master's allowing of Sophie to continue to occupy the *chambre de bonne* for another week before permanently vacating the space gives her ample opportunity to escalate her nefarious influence in the bourgeois home. This is but another of the many ways in which Chabrol frames the maid's rebellion as being partly occasioned by the masters' supreme confidence in their ongoing served status so as to blindly ignore the threat of the maid.

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<sup>128</sup> See Edwards and Reader's (2001, 108-11) reading of *Don Giovanni* in relation to the ceremony in Chabrol's film. See also Polack (2001, p. 90), Thomas (2005), and Citron (2010).

Disobeying the masters' injunction forbidding Jeanne access to the home in *La Cérémonie*, Jeanne and Sophie occupy the kitchen in the lead-up to their murder spree. They prepare a jug of hot chocolate and some biscuits to take up to Sophie's room, although they will deviate to the masters' bedroom. In the meantime, however, Sophie busies herself preparing the snack in the kitchen, complete with an apron to narratively cement her functional position within this space (despite the fact that she has, at this point, already been dismissed). Jeanne, in turn, plays with the master's hunting rifles that are housed in the antechamber adjacent to and in clear view from the kitchen – the '*lièvres*' are about to become real prey. Once the snack is prepared, Jeanne eagerly takes over Sophie's serving role, insisting on carrying the tray upstairs. The kitchen is thus, even after Sophie's termination of employment, ever the vehicle for the performance of the maid's servitude. This can be envisaged as a kind of authorial insistence on the fact that this is not any old crime about to take place. It is the murder of masters by their maid, thereby inscribing this story within the parameters of the representational and narrative culture surrounding historical characterisations of female domestic workers.

The logical spatial progression of the maids from kitchen to *chambre de bonne* – the two tenuous maid's spaces – is then diverted towards an occupation of the masters' space that takes on a strategic aspect in the maid's spatialised rebellion as represented in *La Cérémonie*. Such a deviation from the accepted mapping of the domestic sphere foregrounds the maid's rebellion as spatially signified and mediated. Judging the masters' unmade bed to be disgusting ('*Ah dis donc ils ont baisé c'est pas possible*'), Jeanne reverses the historical abject association of female servitude and sexuality by suggesting that on the contrary it is the bourgeoisie's sexuality that is problematic and '*dégueulasse*'. This is another example of how Chabrol consistently seeks to re-frame socio-cultural perceptions of the maid figure, playing with and challenging this latent construct while nevertheless staying close to the conventions of maid representability.

In this space Jeanne rewrites through her movements and behaviour the inequitable social order materially exemplified in the hereditary ownership of a luxury house that she judges to be unfair. The intimate space of the bedroom is the prime location for the aping and destruction of the mistress's social identity in particular. She manically and gleefully moves about the space, smashing framed photos of the couple, shredding the mistress's clothing, and

using the jug of warm hot chocolate as a prosthetic penis simulating urination in a literal and symbolic marking of territory.



The maid and her proxy in this scene contravene every tenet of ideal servitude, replacing purifying and ordering labour with acts of sullyng, chaos, and sexualised behaviour that lie firmly within the parameters of the vengeful *souillon* in a staging that references Papatakis' *Les Abysses* (1963).<sup>129</sup> After claiming the masters' bedroom, Sophie and Jeanne survey, from above, the soon to be conquered territory of the expansive study/library from the mezzanine, overlooking the family engrossed in the opera.

After occupying the stairway and the masters' bedroom, it is to the kitchen that the maids are shown to retreat to in order to engage in the next part of their territorialisation, and it is in this space that the inevitability of murder is cemented in Chabrol's narrative. Jeanne cuts the phone line in the kitchen, thereby impeding the flow of communication between the house and the outside world, and isolating the family from salvation against the maids' impending rage. The kitchen has undergone a profound change in status. It is no longer a 'servant' space to

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<sup>129</sup> The maids in *Les Abysses* are equally framed within the type of the *folie à deux* inspired by the Papin case, with hysterical laughter, crying, the stabbing and smashing of objects, and the tearing of wallpaper from the walls all contributing to this transgressive marking of territory. As an aside, upon its screening at Cannes in 1963, a national newspaper reportedly pronounced the headline '*Deux souillons vont représenter la France à Cannes.*' (Murat 2010)

the ‘served’ dining room in Louis Kahn’s conception of constructed space. At this point in the servant rebellion narrative, the kitchen remains a ‘servant space’, not however, for the bourgeoisie, but as a means for the maids’ imminent appropriation of the masters’ domestic space. Downing black coffee and strutting around the kitchen with their rifles, pointing and pretend-shooting with childish mouth-induced sound effects, Sophie and Jeanne assume another generic character. The result is the performance of a pastiche of television-inspired gun-wielding and gender-crossing hip-forward strutting movements that Edwards and Reader (2001, p. 111) read as a parody of the genre of the western. They are no longer servile figures and the kitchen has become the antechamber of the ceremony to take place in the library/study. Chabrol thus re-frames the kitchen as still a servant space, but one that in a marked way differs from its initial servant space characterisation, and it now materialises the destabilisation of the social order that is taking place with the maid’s rebellion rather than upholding servitude.

Alerted by Jeanne’s delirious shrieks during the intermission of the opera, the mistress sends the master to go and investigate: ‘*Georges, j’ai l’impression que la postière est là.*’ The master passes through the connecting space separating served and servant territory and arrives at the threshold of the kitchen and in centre-frame. He is confident and assertive over his potential to retain control, even despite the two rifles trained on his mid-section: ‘*Qu’est-ce que c’est que ce bordel? Vous allez me faire le plaisir de poser ça tout de suite et de déguerpir au plus vite.*’ To the right of the master, the frame reveals a still life of a strung-up hare and the glinting pewter jug above it to the centre-right of the screen, a sign of the impending mayhem in its reference to the Papin sisters’ weapon of choice.<sup>130</sup> If objects are integral in shaping the physical environment that encloses them, as well as adding a layer of semiotic meaning, the pewter jug placed above ‘*le lièvre*’ serves to introduce within this space the spectre of the Papin sisters’ murder and the inevitable conclusion that this scene will have.

Jeanne continues to edge closer to the master, shoving the rifle in his direction and making whizzing bullet sounds with her mouth, while Sophie holds her calm and determined position with the barrel of her weapon aimed at the master’s heart. In this scene, the camera is very mobile, presenting the scene from several angles, but not in a shot reverse shot schema, so as to lessen any easy identification and to create increasing energy to match the dynamics of the

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<sup>130</sup> Christine and Léa Papin pulverized their mistresses’ skulls with a pewter jug in a gesture that was repeatedly referenced throughout discussions of the murder.

folie à deux taking place. As the master grabs the barrel of Jeanne's gun, and as she cackles with fearless glee, Sophie takes a few fast steps backwards and shoots a bullet into the master's neck, whose body is sent backwards by the force of the shot to slump in the corner of the kitchen. As blood spatter soils the white shirt of his tuxedo, Sophie fires again at closer range in the centre of his chest, with this last bullet halting the twitches of the master's body and grinding him further into the ground and against the wall, as the women look on with a satisfied expression. Jeanne's one-liner '*Ben en voilà un qui [n']aura plus mal aux dents*' is a strategy employed by the director to decrease the tension momentarily, and we then shift back to Catherine, Mélinda and Gilles watching the second act of *Don Giovanni*. Unnerved, the mistress begs her son to go and check on her husband, persuaded she heard a gun shot. Regrouping after their first casualty, Sophie and Jeanne reload their guns and down some more caffeine before the next battle which they will fight not in the safe space of the kitchen that they now hold, but in the library/study. Sophie leads the next advance in terrain ('*Allez, on y va*') and Jeanne follows in her trail as they unceremoniously step over the lifeless body of the master on their way. It is however significant that the maids opened fire only once the master crossed the threshold into their 'domain' of the kitchen. As much as Chabrol's narrative is about the conquest of space and place, it is equally about the defence of conquered territory.<sup>131</sup>

Back in the study/library, the mistress's increasing anxiety contrasts with the delicate mandolin serenade emitted from the television as she paces around, checking the grounds from the window, finally imploring Gilles to go and see what is wrong. As the young master obliges, pushing through the double-panelled door that contains the space, he finds himself face to face with Jeanne and Sophie striding forwards, towards the camera, rifles poised at the hip. Faced with this onslaught, Gilles must abandon his served control over space and retreat back into the room, with his hands flying up in the air as the force of Jeanne's bullet hits him. In quick succession, Jeanne and Sophie aim straight for Catherine and Mélinda's mid-section, with their bodies falling backwards onto the sofa in a way that clearly shows the maid's capacity to control her employers' posture within this previously forbidden territory. More bullets are emptied into their already immobile bodies so that they rise and sink from the impact exerted by the two young women's fingers.

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<sup>131</sup> This rebellion as defense of territory recalls *Les Abysses*' Michèle and Marie-Louise defending their acquired territory of the chicken coop: '*Nous sommes chez nous. Sortez d'ici. Nous sommes ici en toute propriété. C'est vous qui êtes pas à votre place.*'

As Edwards and Reader point out (2001, p. 109), the murder of the Lelièvres is just as much a ‘clash between low and high culture as it is about one class wreaking revenge on the other.’ It logically ensues, then, that the fifth casualty in this space, significantly, are the books on their shelves, which, for the illiterate Sophie, represented the peak of her alienation within the house, and in this space in particular. Sophie thus aims her rifle at the leather-bound tomes that cover the walls, with Jeanne joining in without question.



Once the murder is over, Sophie and Jeanne are seen to qualify this space for themselves. They move about the room and survey their deadly handiwork, inscribing the space with their own intimate behaviour and symbolically erasing that of the previous occupants. Jeanne will further appropriate the space by helping herself to an object that takes her fancy – ‘*Tiens, je prends ça. Ça me tente*’ – (the tape recorder, which will be their undoing – the ‘proof’ that was lacking at the time of their previous crimes). The sterilisation of the crime scene, however, falls to the domestic servant, and Sophie is charged with setting up the scene to look as though she walked in to find the family dead. This narrative element reframes the murder as specifically related to the maid’s servanthood, in a sense deviating from the *folie à deux* explanation conveyed elsewhere throughout the ‘ceremony’.

As Jeanne makes her exit from the library/study, both women are framed on the threshold and share a lingering embrace. It is implied that they plan on cohabiting after this

shared experience, with the expectation that their outsiderliness will be more bearable in unison.<sup>132</sup> As Jeanne makes her way through the living room, away from our view, the stretch of space separating the study/library from the living room and the entrance to the house illusorily appears as a corridor, in a re-positioning of the maid figure in liminal space, but within the previously master-dominated space rather than from without, as was the case in an earlier scene. Sophie lingers at the threshold, viewed from behind with her apron still tied around her waist, before moving to the window to watch Jeanne walking through the grounds to her treacherous car. Moments later, Jeanne will instantly die when the parish priest and his secret girlfriend – both characters who were the object of her ridicule earlier in the film – crash into her stalled vehicle.

Unaware of the drama that has taken place on the boundary of the property, Sophie resumes her ordering and cleaning duties, wiping fingerprints off surfaces, replacing the guns on their racks, and vacuuming. This last task takes place off-screen and exists only within the soundtrack as a casual background noise, adding to the perversity of this denouement that nevertheless constantly reframes servitude and service labour as the context for rebellion. Sophie then removes her apron and vacates her post with utter nonchalance, an expression that she will maintain as the camera fixates on her spectral visage at the scene of the car accident moments later, completely immutable at the realisation that their murder will not go unpunished.

## Conclusion

Though it was Jeanne who had first reached for the rifles, it is Sophie who had observed the master assembling and loading them. It is Sophie who is designated as having pulled the trigger first and whose calm collectedness, contrasted with Jeanne's unbridled folly, presents a far more chilling and calculated representation of the murder of masters. As Chabrol says, commenting the kitchen murder scene in the special features on the DVD: '*c'est la plus humiliée qui tire, finalement, qui tire deux fois. Jusqu'à maintenant, la postière n'a pas tiré, et c'est Sandrine [Sophie] qui a tiré les deux fois.*' It is important that for Chabrol, the most

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<sup>132</sup> Mayne (2000, pp. 23-39) has read *La Cérémonie* in terms of lesbianism and criminality. Jeanne and Sophie's lesbianism is a significant element in the film, and it is one that relates to the supposed sexuality of the Papin sisters, which has in turn been the subject of discussion in Coffman (1999; 2003) and Cixous (2006). This aspect does, however, lie outside of the scope of my project.

‘humiliated’ and ‘subjugated’ of the two women, be the first to pull the trigger. It re-centres the crime back to one of rebellion against the context of servitude. This murder of masters by the maid is one that is inherently logical on one level – the oppression of servitude entails violent rebellion, as A. Memmi (1968) has stipulated – while the act nevertheless remains at odds with the particular context of servitude in this film. This is a context in which the masters are represented as benign on the whole, where dust-tests and reprimands are scarce, and where the *troussage de domestique* is never actualised. This is a rebellion that is framed as part class-war, part folly, with the only discernable narrative trigger being the daughter’s discovery of the maid’s illiteracy.

Chabrol’s film thus leaves unanswered questions arising from the representation of rebellion in servitude. He represents its modalities as an exaggerated response to the realistically mild ills inflicted on the maid through servitude. And yet the film significantly does not deny the validity of this rebellion against the condition of servitude. While Sophie and Jeanne are seemingly mad and bad, there is an effort made to situate their murderous acts against a context of servitude that is one of untenable social domination where one class toils in menial and repetitive labour to facilitate the leisurely lives of another. The maid’s rebellion is represented by Chabrol as the conquest of territory, the claiming of master-dominated space from which the maid, through her servitude, is spatio-socially excluded. This film can be said to constitute the realisation of the sum of the previously described historical fears held by masters that their carefully cultivated private sphere be contaminated and ultimately ravaged by the dualistic maid turned from *perle* to *souillon*. It is, in essence, the cinematic translation of the archetypal rebellious maid’s syntax of space. Chabrol thus employs the iconographic and spatial aspects of the latent construct of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure in order to offer a critique of servitude as a condition; he deploys the historical fears surrounding the maid’s rebellion and incorporates them into a cinematic validation of the act of rebellion against the condition of servitude.



## ***La Tourneuse de pages* (Dercourt 2006) – The cinematic translation of the maid’s space syntax in the mise en scène of ‘pretextual’ servitude and revenge**

*La Tourneuse de pages*, as I will show, is a cinematic narrativisation of the rebellious maid plot in its translation of the archetypal space syntax of this historical figure. It is also, however, a tale of revenge wrought against a famous pianist who distracted a young girl ten years earlier during a piano audition. This underlying plot element indelibly marks this rebellious maid narrative, and it will ensue that the contextual servitude of the maid protagonist, Mélanie Provost, is a contrived and opportunistic one designed to allow her access into the intimate space of her enemy in order to dismantle her carefully constructed served status. In this way, rather than servitude constituting a context for rebellion in Dercourt’s *La Tourneuse de pages*, it might best be described as a pretext.

Whereas *La Cérémonie*’s Sophie had been a domestic servant well before she integrated the Lelièvres’ house, Mélanie’s servitude can be considered somewhat opportunistic, given that prior to her posting within the home, she occupies the function of secretary – a role that she is represented as having actively sought out as part of her revenge plan. And in light of the nature of this particular mode of servitude that is a means to an end more so than a social condition or a state, as it was for Sophie, it follows that her occupation of domestic space will take on a strategic nature from the outset. Mélanie’s occupation of domestic space according to the prescriptions of the served/servant relationship and the syntax of space that it is inscribed by, is thus one in which the power dynamics are reversed. Sophie’s servile posture within certain spaces of the home as she immaculately assumes the maid’s place is represented by Dercourt as conniving rather than subservient.

Mélanie strategically takes up the opportunity to work as a nanny for the child of her employer, M. Fauchécourt, during the Easter holidays, entering a caring domestic role within a bourgeois country house, a role that will then mutate into incorporating the important task of turning pages for the mistress while she plays the piano, an activity that gives the film its title. The maid’s musical literacy allows her to cross spatial and social boundaries, offering her a privileged status and spatio-social control. The role of page-turner is arguably a step up from

that of nanny/domestic servant, in that it momentarily takes her away from domestic tasks and it assumes a higher level of expertise. It remains, however, menial and repetitive non-productive labour, the mere facilitation of Ariane Fauchécourt's creative practice. And, importantly, this role requires that its subject remain self-effacing, a shadow figure operating in the sidelines and taking her cue from her mistress's directions. Page turning can thereby be assimilated to the service labour of the maid in several key aspects and Dercourt expresses their commonality in a precise manner. Excelling in each task she is given and tending to the masters' every need, Mélanie's character at once feeds into the stereotype of the maid as *perle*, and its counterpart – the scheming *souillon*, manipulative keeper of secrets who threatens to inject chaos into the bourgeoisie's controlled domestic life. Dercourt, presenting a Hitchcockian ice-blond character in Mélanie, extends the *souillon*'s purview away from a dominant representational association with material filth and towards a disorder induced into the bourgeois home by means of bisexual seductiveness and interference in communications in the household.

Dercourt stages Mélanie's introduction into the Fauchécourt's house in a manner similar to that of Sophie in Chabrol's film, thereby straight away locating her as a maid figure. The mistress meets her at the train station where Mélanie has already been waiting for some time, and equally eerie music accompanies the trajectory toward the stately house in the Yvelines. Dercourt presents the viewer with a similar long shot of the mansion to gauge its multiple levels including a mansarde. Like Sophie, Mélanie's passage across the threshold of the home is cut to show her directly on her appropriate attic floor, with the mistress showing her to her room. Clearly the spatial grammar of hospitality involves welcoming a guest to their sleeping quarters first of all, in a general sense. However the allocation of the *chambre de bonne* to she who serves is a particular occurrence based not so much on the rules of hospitality, as on the space syntax between served and servant within the domestic sphere. In this instance, as in *La Cérémonie*, the cut between front-door threshold and *chambre de bonne* in the sequentiality of the diegesis of space and time is notable for how it puts the maid in her place.

Ariane then takes Mélanie on a tour of the house, passing through the 'matrix of rooms' (see Loyer 1997) that form this pre-19<sup>th</sup> century floor plan – an organisation of space that is nevertheless staged to offer the same segregative qualities as the inceptive architectural model I

have referred to. In *La Tourneuse de Pages*, the importance of the master's study for the diegesis of the narrative of rebellion to follow is established early on and it is one of the first spaces within which Mélanie is represented following her introduction into the home. '*C'est là qu'il faut déposer son courrier*', advises Ariane at the threshold of the space before closing the door. The mistress's actions here, while laying out Mélanie's service labour, ultimately consist in the offering up of the location for the undoing of the carefully contained bourgeois family structure at the hands of the maid.<sup>133</sup> As in *La Cérémonie*, with the representation of the bourgeois family's repeated and naive narrative contributions to their own death, the mistress in *La Tourneuse de Pages* is shown to endow the maid with the key to her own social demise through this invitation of the maid into the master's study.<sup>134</sup> The home is cinematically constructed as contested territory in which servitude, even Mélanie's strategic version of it, is vanquished through spatial control.

Mélanie will continue to occupy the space of the library/study in the course of her labour (depositing mail) in a calculating, menacing way, running her fingers over the spines of leather-bound tomes, and pulling open a drawer to remove and read love letters exchanged between the Fauchécourt couple. Her incursion into this space signals her control of the economy of information within the home and the means through which to entrap her mistress.

The success of Mélanie's plan relies on her capacity to gain access to and make herself indispensable within the mistress's space of the blue music room on the first floor, in which Ariane practises. Ariane is a renowned concert pianist fading from glory following a car accident two years prior, in which she incurred significant anxiety that threatens to damage her ongoing career. Her ascension to the haute bourgeoisie through marriage was, we are to understand, at least in part due to M. Fauchécourt's admiration of her musical talent. She seeks to perpetuate her musicality through her son, who assiduously practises on his grand piano on the ground floor in the living room adjacent to the master's study. The social and cultural life of this family appears from early on as being dependent on the practice and enjoyment of music. The primacy of the music spaces in the social life of the family is immediately asserted when in

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<sup>133</sup> Mélanie will unveil Ariane's infidelity to her husband by leaving the photograph/love declaration in the stack of mail on his desk in the study.

<sup>134</sup> As Bailleul (1812, pp. 70-1 in Petitfrère 1986, pp. 159) had warned, on the matter of the servant's problematic occupation of the master's study:

*[le serviteur] ne doit pas même jeter les yeux [sur un papier], ni ouvrir un livre, ni toucher à un carton: tous les objets qui sont dans ces lieux doivent être sacrés pour lui; la plus légère indiscretion est un crime qui ne serait pas pardonné, et qu'il ne devrait jamais se pardonner à lui-même.*

the first scene to take place within the home that features the blue piano room (while Mélanie is still outside the front of the home receiving instructions from the master).

In this preliminary staging of the Fauchécourt's domesticity, the blue piano room is filmed in an observatory depth shot where the off-screen mistress's piano-playing is the real, though unseen presence. The music room is framed in a way as to position the viewpoint from without the room, gazing across the threshold. Half of the frame on the left is taken up by the background of the blue-painted wall of the music room, and the other half displays, in the foreground, the shelving of the extensive sheet music collection, in a way that references Chabrol's representation of the primacy of written material in the staging of servitude and rebellion. This initial shot of the music room filmed from outside the threshold, signals from the outset the importance of this space and its function in the drama to unfold. The extra-threshold placement of the viewpoint moreover signifies that it is not immediately accessible. The depth and angle from which this shot is taken, and the space both revealed and hidden from view represents the narrative element of access to space as key to the maid's rebellion, or in this case, revenge. Throughout the film, the diegetic piano music emanating from the music room and spreading through the rest of the home constantly draws the imagination back to this locale, with the camera in a sense following the trail of the music, leading us through the matrix of rooms and the enfilades-as-corridors to constantly return the viewpoint to this space.



Soon after her guided tour of the house, Mélanie is framed standing in the doorway, at the threshold to this space, observing Ariane practising. Ariane, pausing to annotate her score, notices the maid lingering at the margins, and invites her in. This question of the narrative granting of access of master-dominated space to Mélanie is important in signifying her servant status with its tenuous access to space within the spatial grammar of the home. It is within this space, too, that the rebellious maid Mélanie can establish her *'perle'* status in the eyes of her employers. Once granted access, Mélanie enters and traverses the room to settle onto a chair behind and to the side of her mistress playing. Slowly, the maid rises and approaches, serpent-like as the film image seems imperceptibly to slow down, and expertly turns the page for the mistress, whose expression turns to calm approval. Dercourt thus stages the maid's accession to space as a strategy, an exercise in rendering her services indispensable to the facilitation of bourgeois domesticity.



Mélanie equally invests this room's sister-space (the downstairs living/piano room) with another strand of her revenge plan: the destruction of the son's musical potential. Knowing that performing pieces that are too difficult for an immature pianist can cause hand and wrist injury, a career-ending one for a pianist, Mélanie strongly encourages him within this space to attempt a complicated Bach prelude. She describes this act as *'un secret'*, a phrase that recalls the maid's traditionally manipulative influence within bourgeois domesticity. The maid thus takes

a carefully planned proxy revenge upon the child, damaging his future piano playing as she perceived hers to have been over ten years before. In these ‘secret’ piano-tutoring scenes with the young master in the expansive and luxurious downstairs living/piano-room, the diminutive and modest living room of Mélanie’s childhood home is recalled. Tristan’s struggle with this difficult prelude recalls the sombre living room of the maid figure’s nocturnal practice as she struggled to perfect the piece that she would perform unsuccessfully during her audition in Ariane Fauchécourt’s presence and that is at the source of this elaborate delayed revenge.

We saw how, when alone in her *chambre de bonne*, *La Cérémonie*’s Sophie would invest her space with her own brand of low culture in the form of children’s television shows – cartoons, animations – or popular game/variety shows. Mélanie in Dercourt’s film, despite being educated and musically literate, is shown as investing her personal *chambre de bonne* with the consumption of similarly culturally dissonant products that contrast with the worship of high art by the other occupants of the home. Within this space, she is dressed in an oversized t-shirt, reclining on her bed chatting to her parents on the phone with an Anime magazine in front of her. This is a symbol of popular culture, yet not one that we would associate with Mélanie’s habitually austere and plain demeanour, prompting audiences to ponder the metaphorical maid uniform she is seen to vest herself in within master-dominated space throughout the film. Her representation within this archetypally servant space highlights the performativity of her servitude, a strategic pretext for engaging the proximity to the served class needed in order to wreak revenge against her one-time childhood tormentor. It is only within the confines of her *chambre de bonne* that she can be stylised as anything other than the (superficially) dutiful and performative generic maid. Here, literally and metaphorically, the maid lets down her usually drawn-back and controlled hair, assumes a reclined posture, and occupies herself with leisure pursuits very different from the elite musical performance that underwrites the masters’ space. This scene is subtly lit, in contrast with the scenes that take place in most of the other spaces within the home, casting shadows across Mélanie’s body, and hinting at the tenebrosity of her character. Dercourt in this way conveys the duality of the archetypal maid figure in its spatial origin – that which is represented to the masters, and that which remains hidden, with the *chambre de bonne*’s geographical extremity and social alterity providing the narrative space for the representation of the latter.



*La Tourneuse de Pages*, despite presenting a maid figure whose occupation is more accurately that of child-minder turned page-turner – and not strictly that of *bonne à tout faire* in the vein of *La Cérémonie*'s Sophie – nevertheless features the maid's apron-clad labour within the kitchen from early on, confirming her functional maid status according to space occupation. The early scene of Mélanie in the kitchen asserts this location as significant in the representation of rebellion in servitude, with her maid status further conjured through the placement of a key object with connotations to the archetype of the maid's rebellion (the carving knife). The kitchen here provides a setting for Mélanie to demonstrate her maid positioning as '*perle*', nourishing the home's inhabitants with her cooking as the mistress stands idle. It too underlines her potential to embody the reviled figure and the threat that the maid poses within the bourgeois home. Her agility with a carving knife upon the carcass of a rabbit (an animal symbolically linked to *La Cérémonie*'s Lelièvre family), transtextually hints at murderous proclivities. In this scene, a medium shot framing Mélanie in the centre, chopping meat, while Ariane lingers at the edge of the room, rapidly cuts to a close shot of the flayed and disembowelled rabbit in order to express the maid figure's symbolic control and threat. Her ease with meat and knives is a trait inherited from her father, a butcher, whose violent and visceral manipulation of meat was ominously staged in the film's opening scene and diegetically recalled here.



It is in this kitchen scene that Ariane officially offers Mélanie the metaphorical key to a more extensive occupation of space, by proposing that the maid fulfil the function of page-turner in supplement to her other domestic work. Dercourt frames the maid in a position of power here: the page-turning role is requested as a favour and not as an order. Here, the mistress and maid's postures are reversed from the similar early kitchen scene that took place in Chabrol's *La Cérémonie*. Whereas Sophie's domain was clearly compromised by the mistress's confident occupation of the kitchen, here the maid is represented as truly governing her 'domain', moving throughout the space freely as the mistress dwells uncomfortably at the edge of the room.





Dercourt's film, in presenting a maid figure that is not strictly a *bonne à tout faire* – although her characterisation substantially conforms to that model – grants Mélanie access to the dining room during mealtimes, rather than relegating her to its servant space, the kitchen. It affords the director the opportunity to stage the tensions that exist within the bourgeois family as a result of the maid's presence, as well as to suggest that the maid/page-turner is a potentially dangerous agent. In the dining room the maid shares an equal occupation of space with the bourgeois family, austere seated around the expansive dining room table. In the first such scene with the master of the house present, the mistress announces that Mélanie will perform the important task of page turning at the coming performance at Radio France's studios. Here the master naively discourses about the significant power afforded to a page-turner, an ambivalent ability to bring either success or failure to a pianist's performance: '*Ça, c'est une responsabilité. Une tourneuse c'est quelqu'un qui peut mettre en danger tout un équilibre, n'est-ce pas? C'est pas moi qui le dit, c'est Horowitz, et il savait de quoi il parlait.*' His presentation of the threat posed by the page-turner as a proven, referenced principle places the page-turner's threat on a par with that traditionally perceived to pose by the maid, that ambivalent *perle/souillon* who facilitates the public and private life of the bourgeoisie while remaining a menacing presence. While the function of the maid is to create order, it is also expected that she will induce chaos, and this is something that is perpetuated in Mélanie's page turning role. The page-turner, standing behind and to the side of the pianist in their shadow,

facilitating performance, metaphorically mirrors the maid's posture in relation to the mistress: nurturing and imposing order on the private sphere from an invisible posture so that bourgeois domesticity may be practised – as a kind of guardian angel, a *fée du logis*, or more threateningly as an angel of death.

*La Tourneuse de Pages* features a scene of rapprochement between maid and mistress in the masters' bedroom that is imbued with the strategic nature of Mélanie's servitude and rebellion. As Ariane readies herself for the all important concert at Radio France, we view her seated at her dressing table in a three-quarter angle close-up and are alerted to the maid's presence at the threshold by Ariane's eyes shifting and a minor movement of the head followed by a slight, flattered smile at being the object of Mélanie's gaze. The camera switches perspective by ninety degrees to reveal Ariane blurred in the foreground to the side, and Mélanie, crisply defined and centre-framed, standing in the doorway of the marital bedroom. As with the other master-specific spaces within the home, the maid must be granted patronal access which takes the form of an engagement in conversation regarding a shade of lipstick: '*Lequel vous préférez?*' As Mélanie crosses the threshold and moves into the space, pausing near the dressing table, the camera pivots in the opposite direction, resting on a shot of the two women reflected in the mirror. Here, Mélanie assumes her maid/page-turner stance, behind and to the side of the mistress's shoulder.



The scene is imbued with intimacy: the mistress compliments the maid on her complexion, their gaze mediated by the mirror, and she bestows a gift of expensive skin cream on her social inferior. The mistress then touches the maid's face in a gesture that takes on a sense of seductive foreboding by the music that accompanies it in a minor key. Whereas the blue piano room is where the maid is shown to gain the mistress's confidence by facilitating her performance, the bedroom fosters a highly strategic deeper rapprochement between maid and mistress. In this intimate setting, one of the facets of the maid's revenge – her seduction of the mistress – is initiated. From this space, the psychosexual manipulation of the mistress will extend outwards to various spaces within and beyond the home. These include the grounds of the property (the tennis courts, the hedge maze), and the underground corridors of the Radio France recording studio. Dercourt in this way spatio-narratively constructs the maid figure's rebellion as one that involves the gradual claiming of territory, with certain key master-dominated spaces such as the music room and the marital bedroom constituting key points that accord the servant protagonist the means through which to geographically extend her spatio-social control.

As in Chabrol's film which is set in a pre-19<sup>th</sup> century structure, the house in *La Tourneuse de Pages*, along with some sealed corridors, contains a walk-through *enfilade* system, whereby to get to one room several rooms away, one must travel through doors in interceding rooms. Dercourt has the same recourse to corridor-construction via cinematographic framing. This takes place through the use of shots that stare through the doorways of several inter-connecting rooms in order to create the visual effect of an uninterrupted corridor.



Where Dercourt diverges from Chabrol's model is in providing us with accompanying lateral cross-section shots that reveal the protagonists' transit through individual rooms. In this sense, the maid, while occupying the liminal spaces of the home that abide with the space syntax of servitude, is simultaneously represented through her ability to move through space unhindered, a level of spatio-social control that was not evident in Chabrol's mise en scène of Sophie's servitude and rebellion.



Dercourt explores the segregation of space on social lines between the different levels of the home via a vertically organised colour spectrum. In the lower depths of the house, the basement corridor leading to the swimming pool (a location where Mélanie half-attempts to drown Tristan) is systematically poorly lit, with the brown walls contributing to the sombreness and danger that this space invokes. The masters' space on the ground and first floors – legitimate domestic space – appositely appears in light, bright tonalities. And the attic floor, the maid's allocated space, is ambivalently lit to convey the duality of her presence within the home. That is, upon Mélanie's arrival, the attic floor appears in an over-exposed lighting scheme that symbolises Mélanie's ideal, *perle* categorisation, a tonality soon to be replaced by subdued lighting that makes visible the shadowy nature of the maid's presence. There is effectively a vertical decoupage of the house from bottom to top: Dark – Light – Very Light. Or: Dark – Light – Dark. In this pattern, the depths of the home are immutable in their darkness, while the family space on the first and second floors remains steadily lit – except on the eve of Mélanie's departure, as I will explain below. The attic level, however, shifts from light to darkness, thereby invoking the dualistic good and evil that qualify the maid figure in representation. Though individual spaces within the home are accorded particular codes in the form of colour/light characterisation, the interest of these associations made by the director/cinematographer/set-designer is that they can then be subverted through *mise en scène* in order to signify change in occupation and functionality of space.

The service door is narratively employed in Dercourt's film to remind us that Mélanie, despite the increasing spatial control she exerts within the home, remains a servant figure bound by the prescribed space syntax of that role, which includes the occupation of threshold spaces in the facilitation of bourgeois domesticity and leisure. On one particular occasion, Mélanie is stationed at the threshold to this service entrance, positioned to welcome Ariane's trio members Virginie (Clotilde Mollet) and Laurent (Xavier de Guillebon). This liminal point at an extremity of the structure of the bourgeois dwelling is the natural location to highlight the complex class structure at play in the film. As practitioners and performers of an elite language – classical music – with a status that is elevated though currently tenuous (the trio's agent is threatening to drop them after a series of poor performances due to Ariane's anxiety), Virginie and Laurent possess cultural capital but are not on an equal par with Ariane's elevated status through her marriage to Jean Fauchécourt. This ambiguous status warrants their entry through

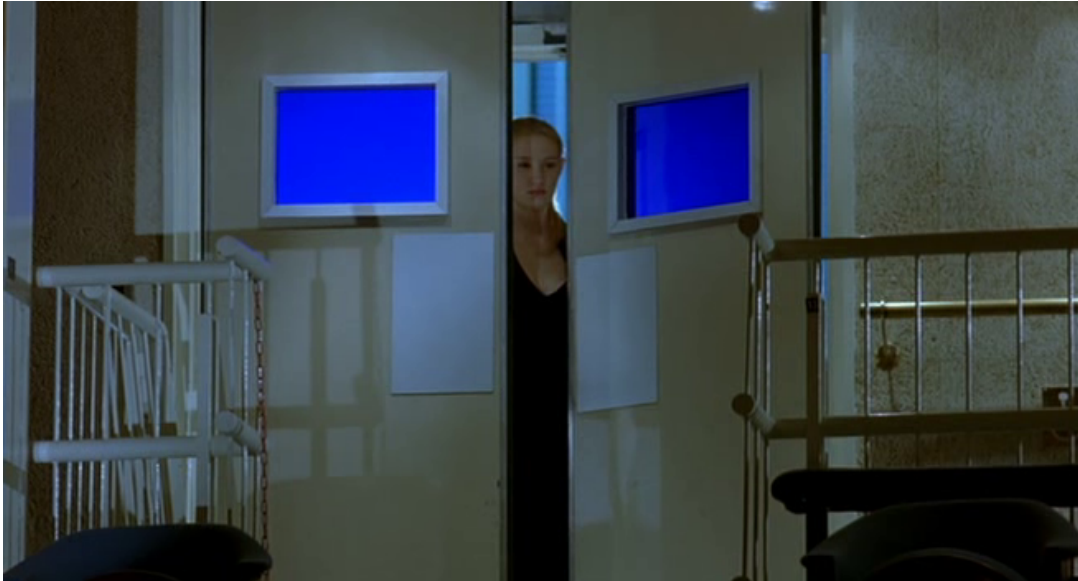
the service door rather than the front door. Dercourt chooses to show us just the male member, Laurent, crossing the threshold physically occupied by the maid – Virginie the violinist having gone ahead with Ariane, off-screen. The idea of the maid as status symbol, sentinel and facilitator of passage within the bourgeois home is made explicit in this scene as the cellist pauses at the maid's height, visually addresses her chest with some words uttered that are concealed from our ears through the soundtrack's music, and then penetrates the kitchen, her 'domain'. Though the maid is physically and verbally passive to the cellist's lecherous invasion of her personal space on the threshold and his subsequent crossing over into the maid's space of the kitchen, the viewer is drawn to her gaze that expresses undeniable hatred. To ensure that audiences register Mélanie's facial expression of seething rage, Dercourt shows the maid finally crossing over into the kitchen, and turning back around to the camera to seal the door shut with her surly expression unchanged, leaving no doubt as to the reprisals she will undertake against this threatened *troussage*.

In this extended sequence, the camera continues its movement by travelling upwards to rest at the open window frame of the music room. In this scene, Mélanie occupies the frame, dutifully creating order amongst Ariane's sheet music alongside the cellist, whose application of resin to the strings of his bow mimics an aestheticised masturbatory movement, which signals his intent toward the maid. After travelling down to the space of the kitchen to locate Virginie and Ariane, the camera cuts back to the music room. As Mélanie is positioned near the threshold of the room finishing tidying up, the cellist approaches, stands behind her, and opportunistically encircles and then gropes her under the pretence of explaining an element of the music piece to her. Her response is a cold-blooded raising and slamming down of the cello's endpin through the top of his foot in what is the only bloody representation of the maid's wrath in the film, with the psychological damage she inflicts on the mistress remaining the true rebellious project.

This parallel narrative between Laurent and Mélanie, while seemingly not essential to the narrative of revenge between maid and mistress, nevertheless functions to up the ante in the representation of Mélanie as capable of extreme but calculated violence in the image of the archetypal rebellious maid figure. The camera's constant shifting in the narration of this sequence between the space of the kitchen on the ground floor where the mistress dwells, and the upper-level music room where the exaction of retaliatory violence against a type of *droit de*

*cuissage* is underway, acts to symbolically extend the breadth of this localised violence throughout the geography of the Fauchécourts' house. Laurent's sexual harassment of Mélanie furthermore functions to induce audience empathy with the wronged maid character, something that will facilitate the ongoing cinematic justification of the maid's rebellion.

Mélanie, as did Sophie, is represented as engaging in evasion in order to transgress the space syntax of her prescribed servitude. After having made herself indispensable to Ariane as her page-turner, inspiring in her a false sense of confidence that she will be able to perform well enough to meet her husband and agent's expectations, Mélanie abandons her post at the mistress's side minutes prior to the second concert. Here, before the recital, Mélanie walks off down the underground corridors of the studio, away from the green room, leaving Ariane in the lurch when her services are most needed. The trio must, however, perform and Mélanie is replaced by one of the other (unsatisfactory) page-turners employed by the agent. The mistress is destabilised by the maid's abandonment of her post, and is unable to play, to the scorn of the American and the agent, who subsequently drops the trio, thereby signalling the end of Ariane's career. During the failed performance that echoes the initial drama of Mélanie's audition at the conservatorium where Ariane neglected her duties in favour of the flattery of signing an autograph, the maid reappears on the scene. Mélanie appears here in a low-angled shot, towering high above Ariane at a door opening at the top of the auditorium. She surveys the damage done through her evasion of her spatio-social place of servitude, before leaving and closing the door behind her as the mistress continues to pelt out wrong notes.



There is an almost sado-masochistic aspect to this rebellious act in the way that its result is played out in the car park immediately after. Walking from the studio, dishevelled after her failure, the mistress finds the maid standing near the parked car. Mélanie provides no explanation and simply follows Ariane into the car and places her hand on hers, at which point the mistress submits to the maid's power by kissing her hand. This scene fades to black with the maid's level of spatio-social control having reached new heights: the mistress has become subjugated to the desire that Mélanie has connivingly fabricated. Dercourt has up until this point framed the maid's calculated rebellion through a schema of spaces that Mélanie must progressively obtain access to and eventually control. All of these spatialised stages, in which Mélanie has made herself indispensable to Ariane to the point where the latter's survival is contingent upon the former's benevolent actions, have contributed to this act of sabotage. The conquest of territory through which the maid rebels in this film is thus conducted by way of insidious invasion cloaked in the dynamics of care and duty, in a manner that quite clearly ties into the historical anxiety regarding female domestic servants' ambivalent goodness and evil.

On the eve of Mélanie's departure and before her slow-cooked plan is unveiled to the Fauchécourts, Ariane, her son, and Mélanie gather in the dining room for a farewell dinner. The mistress and maid roles are briefly switched during the passage from the kitchen through to the corridor, with Ariane carrying dishes of food, 'serving' in a sense, the maid. As outlined above, the home in Dercourt's film tends to be brightly lit in the masters' quarters (and therefore



legitimate bourgeois space) on the one hand, with subdued lighting tending to a chiaroscuro effect within the attic and cellar spaces on the other. In this final dining room scene, however, the ceremonial dinner's candle-lighting sets a tenebrous tone which we associate by now in the film with the maid's space, thereby signalling a shift in the domination of master-space. It is in the ceremonial location marking Mélanie's imminent departure that she bestows a gift on the young master of the house – her plaster bust of Beethoven. This miniature bust had featured in her childhood scenes, and again in her studio apartment before her admission into the bourgeois home, in a way that connects these significant spaces in the maid's personal history to the space of the bourgeois home where this object is destined to rest. This object has been previously represented throughout the film as holding deep significance for Mélanie: it is an icon of the cultural class to which she once hoped to be admitted; but it is equally, in this scene, a way in which to establish further power over the mistress in the gift economy which had previously been swayed in Ariane's favour through the gifts of a jar of face cream and evening dress.

According to socio-cultural procedures of gift giving, the bestowal of a gift increases the social power of the person performing the giving and is never a simple transference of object ownership.<sup>135</sup> Furthermore, there is no such a thing as a free gift, as the sociologist Mauss (1990) famously established in *The gift* (first published in French in 1923). The gift economy is central to the power relations between mistress and maid. Sartre (1952, p. 17) shows, in his book *Saint Genet*, that the playwright had a good understanding of the establishment of power through the gift-giving ceremonies that take place between maid and mistress, with the mistress almost invariably reaping the benefits of being the one in position to be the giver: '*Une dame lui disait [à Genet]: Ma bonne doit être heureuse, je lui donne mes robes. Très bien, répondit-il, vous donne-t-elle les siennes?*' In Genet's *Les Bonnes*, Madame gives Claire a red dress, and her furs to Solange, accoutrements of bourgeois femininity that are also of venal connotation.<sup>136</sup> Bourdieu (1976, p. 130) wrote that we possess/own in order to give, but that we possess by giving too, laying bare the symbolic power afforded to the giver over the receiver through debt:

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<sup>135</sup> See Mauss (1990), Hyde (1999), Baudrillard (1978), Douglas (2002b), Bourdieu (1976), and Carrier (1995).

<sup>136</sup> Here as elsewhere throughout the filmography of this thesis, any gift of the mistress to the maid needs to be seen as part of the cultural imagination of the bourgeoisie's projected benevolence onto its servants and its corresponding utilitarian purpose of cultivating loyalty. Coser (1973, p. 36) hinted at this in his article on the 'obsolescence' of domestic servants. This was particularly evident in *La Cérémonie*, with the offers of reading glasses and driving lessons.

*On possède pour donner... on possède aussi en donnant (un don qui n'est pas restitué crée un lien durable, une obligation, limitant la liberté du débiteur qui est condamné à une attitude pacifique, coopérative, prudente); parce qu'en l'absence de toute garantie juridique et de toute force de coercition externe, une des seules manières de « tenir quelqu'un » durablement consiste à faire durer une relation dissymétrique telle que la dette ; parce que la seule possession reconnue, légitime, est celle que l'on s'assure en se dépossédant, c'est-à-dire l'obligation, la reconnaissance, le prestige ou la fidélité personnelle.*

To balance power in a relationship, a reciprocation of the gift is therefore required. In this dining room scene, the mistress is shown as experiencing a moment of embarrassment at the maid's gift to her son, since she had not prepared anything for Mélanie in return and thus finds herself indebted. At this stage, the maid is in a position of power, an atypical occurrence in the cinematic representation of maids within the masters' space of the dining room in particular and in the wider home generally. However, while reproducing the maid's prescribed space syntax on a schematic level,<sup>137</sup> Dercourt always transgresses this syntax by endowing the maid with ultimate control over space in the diegesis of the rebellion plot.

That the gift of the little Beethoven bust is given as part of a ceremonial context in the dining room is significant in representing the maid's power within the bourgeois home in this particularly master-connoted space. It is also significant that the gift Mélanie gives to Tristan the son (and by extension to Ariane) is a mass-produced and probably inexpensive second hand object, while the gifts of expensive face cream and a new dress given by the mistress to the maid hold power in terms of market value. It is however Mélanie's gift, paradoxically, that detains the most worth through the weight of its personal history and talismanic investment, and that symbolises the maid's destruction masked as favour.

In *La Cérémonie*, the bourgeois family must die before the maid can physically occupy master-connoted space in a manner that is not entirely defined by her servitude, while Dercourt bestows his maid protagonist with the keys to the social structure that has both reflected and dictated her function in the spaces of the bourgeois home. With calculating grace, the maid offers to redress the power discrepancy by asking the mistress for something in return: an autographed photograph. The mistress, filmed close-up, is clearly flattered and further seduced, returning the gaze of Mélanie who is narratively positioned as if just over to the side of our

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<sup>137</sup> For example, Mélanie's assignation of the maid's space of the *chambre de bonne* and kitchen, the rituals surrounding access to space, and the nefarious connotations with the maid's occupation of master-dominated space.

right shoulder. This camera positioning (our view-point) is a reference to Mélanie's common posture throughout the film – slightly behind and to the side of the mistress – in a sense transposing the audience to the spatial position of the maid's victim. Dercourt thus shifts the process of audience identification from maid to mistress, thereby heightening the sensation of the threat posed by the maid.

The combined elements of the transformation of space functionality in the representation of the dining room (mistress serving), the gift, and the ceremonial aspect to the maid's imminent departure act to put the mistress out of place in the spatio-social economy of the home. This character is by now fundamentally disoriented by conflicting and incompatible social positions and desires (heteronormative wife and pianist Vs. homosexual lover). Dercourt then stages her attempts to recreate order and resume control within her home by temporally mapping out the coming events within the domestic space and beyond: *'Demain c'est moi qui préparera le petit-déjeuner. Vous pourrez vous reposer. Tristan viendra vous réveiller. Je vous accompagnerai à la gare. Ensuite Jean reviendra.'*

Ariane's declaration of the restoration of spatio-social order is accompanied by the musical theme earlier encountered when Mélanie was a child, a signal to the audience to locate Mélanie back in her butcher parents' modest home and the drama instigated by Ariane's fateful behaviour the day of the recital. Sound is employed as a way of narratively linking significant spaces on a temporal level, where the anterior causal setting of Mélanie's pretextual servitude is introduced via a musical refrain into the masters' space where the final stages of the maid's rebellious project are unfolding. The dining room scene offers further evidence that the relations of power and affect induced by the maid's presence within the home are devised along spatial lines and that the maid's rebellion entails the conquest of space.

Mélanie's departure from the home will not, however, obey Ariane's spatio-temporal plan. In a final act of rebellious evasion, she retraces the spaces of her servitude at the liminal timeframe of dawn, after having secured the proof required to socially undo her mistress, a signed photo with a love declaration on the back:

*Mélanie*  
*Je veux vous revoir*  
*Je vous aime*  
*Maintenant ma vie recommence*  
*Ariane*

A long shot of the house viewed from the exterior in the twilight reveals the *chambre de bonne* illuminated, before cutting to the sombre attic. Mélanie quietly closes the *chambre de bonne*'s door behind her and creaks down the narrow spiral staircase with her bag, passing by Tristan's room, who lies awake and can hear the creaking of the steps as the threatening figure descends.<sup>138</sup> En route, she makes a fateful detour to the master's study, depositing the photo in the pile of mail as her servitude dutifully required, before passing through the over-sized metal gate encasing the property.



It is in the kitchen, a few hours later, that the mistress, dismayed, becomes aware of Mélanie's evasion from her post, but still suspects nothing of what is to come, obsessed as she is with keeping up appearances, and so she goes about establishing order, telling Tristan to go and prepare for his recital of the mutilatory Bach prelude for the master.

In the final scene of the film, upon the master's return from a business trip, the nuclear family is reunited in the ground-floor living/music space to witness their own unravelling at the hands of the absent maid. The exchange of gazes between the husband and wife with the mediating object of the signed photograph/love declaration takes place in this setting of bourgeois domesticity, a room that initially eluded Mélanie through her serving position before

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<sup>138</sup> Stairways are furthermore, in the history of cinema, spatial signifiers for danger, and are readily employed in genre films, particularly thrillers, with for example Hitchcock's films making extensive use of stair motifs in the staging of danger and tension. For a discussion of stairs in cinema see Babineau (2004) and Jacobs (2007).

she gained access to it through ruse. During this devastating event staged by the maid, the mistress, realising the betrayal and her imminent social disgrace, collapses onto the floor, her body lying limply as her son plays in pain. The camera cuts to Mélanie triumphantly walking along the country road leading her away from the Fauchécourts' house, in an emancipation from servitude that was, unsettlingly, a pretext for revenge rather than a social condition that lead to rebellion.

## Conclusion

The social order between served and servant is narrativised in *La Tourneuse de pages* by the segregation of space and its stratified occupation. This order is subverted through the reorganisation of space in cinematic *mise en scène* according to occupation and function on the one hand, and the elicitation of anterior narrative space on the other. Dercourt can thus be seen to apply the space syntax of the maid's narrative of servitude and rebellion in a typological manner while nevertheless manipulating the motivations of servitude and rebellion, in which his protagonist opportunistically takes up servitude by choice in order to justify this intimate spatio-social position for the purposes of rectifying an ancient wrong.

## Case study conclusions

The spaces of the bourgeois home as they are cinematically constructed in both Chabrol and Dercourt's films as they pertain to the maid's space, the masters' space and liminal space were discussed in this chapter for their inscription within the archetypal maid's space syntax and their capacity to typologically stage the narrative of the maid's servitude and rebellion. This chapter illustrated the site of the bourgeois home and all its spatial divisions and crossovers as the particular environment in which the maid's servitude and rebellion are expressed in cinema, and did so in light of pertinent elements of the floor plan of the predominant 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural model. The analyses have demonstrated that even when both films had pre-19<sup>th</sup> century architectural film sets, these structures were cinematically staged in such a way as to invoke the specific space syntax that is attached to the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure.

When a two-dimensional medium (cinema) attempts to represent a three-dimensional space (architecture) against the necessities of narrative, a type of abstraction of space occurs

where the material becomes symbolic, representational, and subject to modification through cinematography. The cinematic representational necessity to at once confirm and disobey the segregation of the 19<sup>th</sup> century architectural model – in revealing the maid in her designated spaces and conveying those from which she is forbidden access all the while offering her the possibility to alternatively inscribe space and rebel – hint at the complex relationship between material space, social relations, and the representation of their intersection in cinematic *mise en scène*. How cinematography responds to a socio-architectural model and modulates it in order to increase tension, induce audience empathy, and above all, spatio-narratively induce the maid's rebellion through sequential arrangements of segregated space that situate the maid's servitude as ripe for rebellion, has been a key inquiry throughout this chapter.

Lefèbvre (1991, p. 33; pp. 38-9) wrote that 'representations of space' designed by the elites can be contested by the less powerful who carve out within them their own 'spaces of representation.' Through these two case studies, I have sought to interrogate the schema through which the maid is cinematically represented as seizing power through rebellion in a spatio-social organisation of domestic space in which she is in many ways out of place while bearing the burden of facilitating this same place. Just as the maid's space was never entirely hers in the maid's socio-culturally determined syntax of space, so too the master's space is subject to the maid's 'contamination'; and this despite the bourgeoisie's efforts at constructing for itself segregated spaces in order to avoid physical and psychological proximity with the maid.

This tension in the maid's prescribed and proscribed occupation of space that is historically located in the 19<sup>th</sup> century imaginary remains integral in the cinematic *mise en scène* of the rebellious maid narrative as Chabrol and Dercourt have typologically staged it. The maid's rebellion is represented as the conquest of space. The claiming of the masters' territory and the re-mapping of prescribed space is integral to the exaction of corporeal and psychological revenge in *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages*. The chapter to will analyse the ways in which such concerns and spatial patterns survive the maid figure's externalisation from the traditional domestic sphere in cinematic representations of updated contexts of servitude.



## Chapter 5: The translation of the maid's space syntax in transposed contemporary cinematic narratives of servitude and rebellion

### Introduction

The *femme de ménage* largely replaced the live-in *bonne à tout faire* over the course of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The characterisation of the maid figure's spatial ambiguity as being 'out of place' and 'in-between' has been complicated by the social externalisation of the purveyors of domestic service from their traditional and symbolic locale of the bourgeois home.<sup>139</sup> In addition to this, the second half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century saw women's increased participation in the labour force, with service professions becoming dominated by female workers, in a continuation of their traditionally allocated role as carers. These professions – generally low-paid, unskilled, and precarious – are to be seen as the occupational avatars of domestic service, as chapter 3 explained. Taking examples of films that are not typical representations of the *bonne à tout faire*, chapter 5 seeks to prove, in what is a test case, that the maid's space syntax<sup>140</sup> is extendable – *translatable* – to updated contexts of servitude and rebellion. That is to say, I will demonstrate here that the archetypal maid figure is conjured, in avatar form, in contemporary French cinematic representations through the spatial staging of servitude and rebellion.

The film analyses of *Le Hérisson*, *Ma part du gâteau*, *Marie-Line*, and *Louise Wimmer* will focus on the spatial elements that serve to portray their protagonists as serving figures and all the social characterisations that are attached to the distribution of space. These include the tenuous access to space within the context of service labour; the sense that these avatars of the

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<sup>139</sup> There has been significant sociological research accomplished since the late 1990s on the different conceptions of domestic labour as it is performed in contemporary France, mostly centred on a fragmented model where non-live-in domestic workers' hours are split over multiple households, in a way that could be seen to complicate relations of servitude. See Fraisse (1998), Mozere (1999), and Lecomte (2001). This externalisation of the domestic worker from the singular home to a large extent has offered up its own set of problems for the consideration of those who serve. Their labour becomes even more hidden, undeclared, and precarious, in a continuation of their ancestors' socially prescribed and architecturally constructed invisibility.

<sup>140</sup> As previously defined, the maid's space syntax is a spatial and architectural iconography that is premised on the social distribution of space according to served and servant, with prescriptions and proscriptions according to the maid's access to, occupation of and function within these types of space. Margins, liminal zones, and transitory spaces were all central to this syntax of space that frames the maid's servitude through exclusion and invisibility on the one hand, and rebellion through the claiming of territory on the other.



maid figure are out of place within the spaces of their servitude, and that they are ultimately placeless figures. Further, I argue that their resistance to servitude involves acts of place-making, as well as the claiming of space socially denied them.

This chapter will draw attention to the alternative spatial and social settings within which contemporary female characters in positions of servitude are staged. It will analyse their represented occupation of space according to that which was determined to be the maid figure's space syntax. Illustrating my case with spatial analyses of the selected films, I will argue for the translation of the maid figure's iconographic space syntax onto alternative spatio-social contexts that replicate, in ways that I will account for, the relations of domination between served and servant that emerged from the inceptive architectural model associated with the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid figure.

The films analysed fall broadly into two camps, as mentioned earlier. *Le Hérisson* (Achache 2009) and *Ma part du gâteau* (Klapisch 2011) maintain the primacy of the domestic location in the representation of female servitude and rebellion, despite diverging from the more iconographic representations of space found in Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1995) and Dercourt's *La Tourneuse de pages* (2006). The discussion of Achache and Klapisch's films as a conceptual bridge between the archetypal *bonne à tout faire* and more radical spatial staging of female servitude will constitute the first part of this chapter ('Residual domesticity – continuity and change in the translation of the maid's space syntax').

The remaining two films, *Marie-Line* (Charef 2001) and *Louise Wimmer* (Mennegun 2012), studied within the second part of this chapter ('Leaving home – translating the rebellious maid narrative in transposed spaces of servitude'), offer transposed contexts of female servitude divorced from the foundational domestic location. These two films present contexts of servitude that diverge significantly from that of the *bonne à tout faire*, where servant labour is performed in a hotel (*Louise Wimmer*) and in a hypermarket (*Marie-Line*). Both films present parallel narratives to that of servitude in the strictest sense. *Marie-Line*'s characters' parallel narrative is that of individual and structural racism, where migrant women's bodies are deemed foreign and are constructed as out of place. I will make clear the ways in which this parallel narrative is constructed within the parameters of the spatialisation of servitude and rebellion. *Louise Wimmer*'s protagonist is homeless, a condition that inevitably influences the film's spatial construction. I will, however, argue that the spatial staging of Louise's homelessness

functions within the context of the representation of servitude and rebellion according to the maid's space syntax.

## **Part 1: Residual domesticity – continuity and change in the translation of the maid's space syntax**

### ***Le Hérisson* (Achache 2009) – a room of one's own: the reluctant claiming of space**

Achache's *Le Hérisson* presents daily life inside an upmarket Haussmannian building on the left bank. Centred on the servant existence of the concierge protagonist Renée Michel, and on her interactions with two of the building's occupants (Paloma Josse, a young girl, and Kakuro Ozu, a retired Japanese man new to the building), the film presents a particularly spatialised staging of social relations of served and servant, as well as a subtle questioning of the social distribution of space and the politics of place. While the maid's labour is performed within private space, the concierge's labour, which involves, as does the maid's, cleaning and ordering, occurs in the public zones in and in-front of a building. Despite the differences between maid and concierge on a social and spatial level, with the concierge indeed constituting its own archetype, I will argue that Achache's adaptation of Muriel Barbery's novel stages its protagonist's service and servitude in a way that bears significant parallels with the space syntax of the maid figure.

### **Invisibility, concealment, and the cultivation of the self**

*Le Hérisson* conforms to the maid figure's space syntax initially through the narrative importance placed on the concierge character's invisibility. As this thesis has already insisted upon elsewhere, the spatial and the social are heavily entwined in the prescription of invisibility of the maid figure, dictated by the social and architectural segregation that occurred during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Josiane Balasko's character Renée Michel functionally reproduces the *bonne à tout faire*'s spatio-social position within the Haussmannian building for which she is the caretaker. As the custodian of the building's communal spaces and transitional zones, and as the agent responsible for evacuating waste and creating order, she is represented as seamlessly

facilitating the occupants' daily lives in the most dutiful and discrete manner possible. As I will explain, however, this prescribed invisibility can equally be understood in Achache's *mise en scène* as a strategy of concealment that is integral to the representation of the protagonist's resistance in servitude. In this way, invisibility is represented as going beyond a spatio-social posture that is imposed on the serving figure, and becomes a narrative element in the active assertion over space and place.

The served and servant relations between the building's well-to-do occupants and their concierge, Renée Michel, are represented as being rigidly maintained through the distribution of space.<sup>141</sup> In the ecology of this building, the concierge's duty is to remain unobtrusive, dutiful, and polite. Her labour must be performed at specific times during the day so as not to pollute the communal spaces at certain key times of passage by residents. For example, the bins must be brought in early, before the residents walk out onto the street, and the floor must be mopped during a period of low frequentation of the foyer in the narration of Renée's quotidian labour. These are of course all very practical dictates of time, space and occupation, and yet they inevitably help to construct, in their repetitious cinematic *mise en scène*, the power relations within the building dependant as they are on a syntax of space, a choreography of served and servant bodies passing through space and taking up place. The tasks that Renée performs narrativise socio-cultural perceptions of legitimate and illegitimate occupation of space, as well as the ultimately placeless situation of the serving figure within the served environment. And even when the concierge finds herself within view of the residents, even as they address her, her invisibility is so entrenched that they see only a generic presence. Renée is addressed by the residents in a matter of fact tone that dispenses with any polite linguistic construction in their direction of her occupation of space, with for example, the use of the programmatic future tense rather than the conditional mood: '*Vous montrerez les communs à M. Ozu. Vous lui donnerez également une clé de la boîte aux lettres. Les déménageurs viennent très tôt demain matin. Vous veillerez à ce que le porche soit grand ouvert.*'

Aside from the strictures of her servitude, the building's occupants expect Renée Michel to *be* a certain way, ascribing imagined socio-cultural values to her space. As she tells

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<sup>141</sup> This is a particularly opulent building, with only very wealthy inhabitants, and with each floor constituting a whole dwelling. In a sense, it precludes the kind of socially stratified living seen in other Haussmannian structures. If there is a mansarde in this building, it remains unseen, as do its prospective inhabitants, with the only serving figures being Renée the concierge and Manuela the cleaning lady, who resides elsewhere.

Paloma when being interviewed on the young girl's Super 8 camera, the residents expect odours of cassoulet to emanate from her loge, or for the television to be blaring. And yet Paloma suspects that Renée's use of the space of the loge is radically different. As she deviates the object of her camera's gaze away from Renée's verbal commentary on the idea of the stereotypical concierge, fixing our twice-mediated viewpoint on the image of the door that separates the front room of the loge from the back room, she asks: '*Qu'est-ce que vous cachez derrière cette porte?*'

The hedgehog of the film's title, the concierge, is not, as Paloma and Kakuro suspect, '*ce qu'on croît*', her symbolic spines (or the qualifying architectural metaphor of '*une vraie forteresse*' used by Paloma) shielding a refined intelligence that we are to understand is at odds with her station in life in Achache's representation. Renée Michel's character centres on the disjuncture between the private and public identity of the servant figure. The film is at pains to depict her as an exceptional concierge, with Paloma, for example, saying that '*Vous êtes pas une concierge ordinaire.*' And yet for all of her cultural divergences from the expected servile figure, Renée Michel embodies the posture of typological servitude to the letter, presenting to her masters as the '*archétype de la concierge d'immeuble – vilaine, vieille, revêche*', in the character's own words. And while the concierge invokes a certain degree of apprehension in the building's occupants with her humourless façade ('*Je suis rarement aimable*'), she remains invariably polite and submissive as her role requires. Her erudition is framed as a resistance against the social prescriptions and cultural expectations of her condition. And yet it is such an infinitely subtle rebellion, one that has nothing to do with the exaction of physical or psychological revenge against masters seen in Chabrol and Dercourt's films, but one that nevertheless undermines the social and spatial prescriptions of absolute servitude.

Renée's ambivalent concierge identity is staged within the film through the use of liminal space. Threshold architectural features become essential in framing both her indeterminate status, and in facilitating her passage from servant space/status to master space/status, in ways that I will address in the subsequent section. But first and foremost, the concierge's servitude that I liken to that of the *bonne à tout faire* and to that figure's particular spatial specificity, is architecturally framed through the essential space of the loge.

Achache's *Le Hérisson* presents a relocated *chambre de bonne* for its concierge protagonist Mme Michel, a ground-floor space that is endowed throughout the film with great

narrative importance. The loge, similarly to the *chambre de bonne* for the maid, constitutes the typological place of the concierge, and induces a similar set of spatio-social characterisations of this servant figure's space and place within the building that I will investigate. Although situated at the opposite vertical extremity of this classical Haussmannian structure, the loge reproduces in this film a great number of syntactical similarities with the *chambre de bonne* as a refuge and location for the cultivation of the maid figure's subjectivity. The loge's susceptibility to invasion by others characterises the servant figure's absolute servitude within the global space of the building.

Renée Michel's loge consists of two distinct spaces. The first, which opens onto the entrance hall of the building, is the main living space. Its relatively public status is reinforced by its glass panel covered only by a thin lacy curtain that affords the residents a certain level of visual control over the loge and its occupant. This first room contains a rudimentary kitchen with a small all-purpose table, a tiny bathroom, and a sofa bed that she unfolds every night and replaces every morning. This set-up is the only part of her loge that is visible to outsiders, and in which a chosen few (Manuela the cleaning lady with whom she gossips over tea, and Paloma, after seeking permission) are permitted to physically enter. This first, more public part of the loge is consistent with the cultural stereotype and space syntax of the concierge figure in general. The second space, however, bears syntactical similarities with the *chambre de bonne* in the manner in which she invests it.

The more important, and eminently secret second space that comprises the loge is an adjoining room, separated from the former by a solid wood door. This space is represented as sheltering the maid avatar's leisure practise that she is keen to hide from her masters. Especially as what she gets up to in there is at odds with their perception of her as a one-dimensional and subservient concierge figure whom they can only conceive of through her stereotypical function. Within this hermetic space, with its book-lined walls, comfortable armchair, and dimmed lighting, Renée devotes herself to the extensive reading of classical literature both French and foreign. She drinks exotic teas, nibbles on high-grade dark chocolate, and dedicates herself to a life of the mind that is at polar odds with her menial labour on the other side of the threshold to her loge. Though the concierge is prescriptively invisible, she is equally and importantly an active agent in the concealment process, which she strategically uses to shield her leisure activities that are anomalous to the stereotype of her servitude.



The two conjoined spaces of the loge cinematically frame a dualistic serving figure whose opposing incarnations are spatially subdivided: one acknowledged, and symbolic of the servant's cramped multi-functional living space at the extremity of the Haussmannian structure; the other hidden, and the receptacle of high culture in a way that narratively subverts the masters' conception of the concierge figure. Renée's character has internalised the invisible posture required of her role within the building, and has deepened it in such a way as to embody two distinct identities. Her encounters with Kakuro and Paloma will precipitate a tentative merging of these identities, at last – however reluctantly – allowed to coexist within her persona that need no longer conform to the strictures of absolute servitude. As the film progresses, through her encounters with these two anomalous served residents, the conception of her servitude as an all-encompassing condition gives way to one in which her duties and occupation of space appear as labour rather than condition.

Just as the *chambre de bonne* is subject to invasion within the served/servant dynamic, so too is the concierge's loge subject to a more nuanced intromission that corresponds to the subtle tone of *Le Hérisson*'s narrative of rebellion in servitude. Some residents see it as their inalienable right to request something of Renée at any hour of the day or night, capriciously knocking on the loge door until she attends to their calls. She is, however, represented as conserving the power to refuse access to the undesirable, submitting to their threshold encounters but only inviting Paloma and Manuela across and into the first room of her loge. Nor are all incursions on the serving figure's personal space malignant or representative of the relations of servitude. Kakuro, respectfully and with great interest, regularly presents himself at

the entrance to the loge, instigating a one-sided gift economy in his attempts to coax Renée out of her shell. And Paloma, with the curiosity of her age, is equally keen to penetrate what she suspects to be a mysterious place to her liking. In a sense, though the loge is a space that remains contingent on Renée's servant function within the building, and the served occupants regularly attempt intrusions into that space, unlike the maid figure in *La Cérémonie*, Renée is doted with the power to refuse access and to grant it. This concierge, whom I read as an avatar of the maid figure, retains a level of spatial control not witnessed in Chabrol's more typological representation of servitude.

On the day of the death of one of the building's occupants early in the film's diegesis, as the concierge, stationed in her position at the threshold of the building, busies herself with the admission of people into the building, she accidentally leaves her door open and her cat escapes into the entrance hall. Paloma, directed by Manuela, herds Léon the cat back inside, and takes this opportunity to look around the loge with curiosity, before she has been officially granted access by its rightful occupant. Paloma surreptitiously films the objects on the kitchen table, gathering hints to unlock the mysterious persona of the concierge that lie in this space: an essay on Japanese aesthetics by Junichiro Tanizaki significantly entitled *Eloge de l'ombre*, a cup and pot of tea, dark chocolate.

As previously seen, objects are integral in structuring a given environment, they 'cast a shadow, heat up the surround, strew indications [and] leave an imprint' (Goffman, 1976, p. 6 in Ardener, 1981, p. 13). The presence of this book in this early scene on the one hand signifies Renée's erudition, and is furthermore emblematic of her experience in the shadows, her approach to aesthetics and her intensely private and reflective worldview. Tanizaki's essay, first published in 1933, praises the shadows and subtlety of Asian cultures that he contrasts with the Western obsession with light and clarity. In this way, Renée's reading of Tanizaki associates her character with an aesthetics of shadows and subtlety, and as a presence of alterity within the dominant aesthetics and occupation of this classical Haussmannian building that is emblematic of Western modernity. Renée's appreciation of Japanese aesthetics, literature and cinema of course narratively facilitates a rapprochement between her and Kakuro Ozu (whose surname he shares with the famous filmmaker), with their affinity defined through their positive alterity within the structure of the building.

Renée has so successfully embodied the archetype of the concierge and so thoroughly concealed herself in her cultivation of the shadows, that, in the manner of other servile figures, her individual identity is subsumed by this generic persona in the eyes of those she serves. Renée's generic serving social position is reinforced when, after her fairly mild physical transformation that consists only of a haircut and a new dress, one of the residents does not realise who she is, greeting her as she would a member of her own class. As Kakuro explains, '*c'est parce qu'elle ne vous a jamais vue*'. Through the adoption of the accoutrements of the served class, Renée becomes a visible presence worthy of address, and yet she remains simultaneously invisible given that she goes unrecognised.

Renée's strategy of concealment is something that draws Paloma to her and her loge, as she too has her own need for physical withdrawal. The same sacred intensity with which Renée's interior life is represented is replicated in the scenes of Paloma in her bedroom: drawing, painting, and plotting her suicide.<sup>142</sup> The prospect of being able to spend time in the loge with Renée delights Paloma, whose hiding places have all been discovered by her family. '*Vous, vous avez trouvé la bonne cachette*', says Paloma to Renée, with the idea that exile is a privileged spatio-social state, one that permits the cultivation of subjectivity in withdrawing from the banal hypocrisy of life in this specific milieu.

### **Liminal space: social status and spatio-social mobility**

Renée Michel's servitude confines her to certain spaces, such as her loge, as seen above. Her servant status equally prohibits her access to other spaces designated as master space within the global structure of the building, and prescribes her occupation of threshold spatial zones that signify her social alterity within the bourgeois environment in a mapping of this serving figure according to the archetypal maid's space syntax.

Liminal space within the Haussmannian structure frames Renée's servitude. These are spaces such as the footpath out the front of the building, where she goes every evening and morning to take the bins out and bring them in. In that space that physically separates the building from the street and the private from the public, her body is sprayed by one of the building's residents, Mme Josse, who waters the plants on her balcony without regard for those

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<sup>142</sup> Paloma does not want to go on living if her destiny is to be that of every socially entrapped person she knows, that of '*un poisson rouge dans un bocal*', a spatialised metaphor for limited experience.



walking below. This is portrayed as a regular occurrence and signifies the quotidian micro-aggressions of the served on the serving that are materialised through a spatial grammar. The vertical distance separating Mme Josse and Renée Michel, with the former's practice of domesticity making the latter's service occupation of space precarious in ways that can be seen to reflect the archetypal maid's space syntax.

The transition zones comprised within the building too bear the mark of Renée's servitude. We see her lifting a doormat outside an apartment where M. Josse has hidden a collection of cigarette butts for her disposal. Further scenes depict Renée's daily cleaning and ordering tasks and punctuate the narration. This is exemplified in shots of her mopping the entrance hall, cleaning the glass on the front doors, polishing the brass fittings, vacuuming the stairs or distributing mail recurring throughout. The direct rapport between this labour and its beneficiaries – the sense that this is an affective service rendered directly by one party to another in the way particular to servitude – is maintained through the passing presence of various residents as she performs it, in the transition spaces where served and servant trajectories intersect.

But perhaps the most salient liminal space within which Renée is framed is that of the doorway. This ambivalent micro-space is capable of sealing off or opening up spaces and represents an important zone of spatio-social indeterminacy. This indeterminacy is characteristic of servant figures, whose social place is always tenuous. Renée's character is also represented through the doorway motif in Paloma's drawings. In a flipbook drawing of Renée by Paloma, in which she is totemistically anthropomorphised, a hedgehog comes through a gradually opening door, and then crawls down a burrow. Paloma's representations of Renée in threshold motifs act to reinforce the space syntax of the serving figure as one that is tenuously placed in social terms. But unlike the archetypal maid figure's hybridity being drawn from her ambiguous position betwixt and between the bourgeoisie that she serves and the working classes from which she originated, in *Le Hérisson*, Renée's liminal spatio-social status lies at the interstice of the social environment of her servitude and her concealed space of retreat and erudition.

Paloma too is repeatedly represented through the prism of liminal space. She is frequently framed within the transitional zones of the building – travelling in the lift, sitting on steps, entering and exiting the building. Kakuro, too, is a regular occupant of the liminal zones

of the building, particularly through his frequent attempts at rapprochement with the concierge that take place at the doorway to her loge. And while Renée's consistent occupation of doorways and other thresholds is functional to her servitude, unlike for the aforementioned served characters, the extension of this spatial metaphor to them spatio-narratively conveys their affinity with the servant protagonist. This threshold framing of Renée and Paloma and Kakuro manifests, in an architectural sense, the fact that they are all essentially marginalised within their environment, materialising their social and cultural alterity through dwelling in zones of passage and hidden spaces. Importantly, Renée, Kakuro and Paloma are all border-crossers, negotiating spatio-social passage in a way that disrupts their given social position, and this is integral to the underlying representation of resistance against Renée's servitude. Renée's capacity to cross between served and servant space is not a given, however, and her accession to place is a tenuous and painstaking process.



As these transition spaces of the building are the place of Renée's labour, her occupation of them in a way that is external to that servant function is framed as a transgression. For example, on the night of her dinner at Kakuro Ozu's place, their first date, Renée uncharacteristically kitted out in the dress sourced by Manuela from the drycleaner's and after her very first trip to a hairdresser, she surveys the territory of the communal entrance hall before venturing beyond her loge. She pulls the curtain on the door to the side, checking that the coast is clear before opening the door a fraction and slipping furtively into the entrance hall and travelling upwards in the lift. As she spatio-socially ascends, she spies M. Josse (Paloma's

father) through the grate of the lift as he hides a cigarette butt under the doormat that will fall on her to clean up – a subtle reminder of her servant status.

The same tentative spatial relocation imbued with risk and apprehension from the loge to Kakuro's apartment occurs once more, the next time she has a date with Kakuro, to go and watch an old Japanese film in his apartment. The lift is out of order, a disruption that can be seen to materialise the problematical social mobility implied in Renée's burgeoning relationship with Kakuro. In the stairwell, during her puffing, arduous ascension to the topmost floor, she unhappily runs into another obstacle in the form of an elderly bourgeoisie accompanied by her pug dog, who is patiently waiting for no one in particular on the first floor landing, and who invokes the served/servant relationship through a reproach directed at Renée.

One day, Renée is directed up to the Josses' apartment in order to deliver an eagerly awaited letter to Paloma's sister Colombe. Mme Josse answers the door, takes the package, and a conversation on the threshold between mistress and concierge ensues regarding Paloma's request to be allowed to spend time in the loge. Throughout their interaction, each woman remains on either side of the threshold to the bourgeois dwelling. Renée is restricted to the stairwell side, as it is unthinkable for the mistress to grant passage to the serving figure that she literally stands over. This scene is mediated by Paloma's capturing of the interaction with her camera; the resultant grainy projection accentuates the contrast between light and dark in a way that formally signifies the polaric opposition between these two women.



The threshold interaction is interrupted when one of the Josses' cats tries to get out of the apartment. In order to prevent this, Mme Josse, instead of inviting Mme Michel inside and

closing the door, externalises herself from the apartment, closing the door behind her. This is a choreography that implies the engrained exclusion of the serving figure of the concierge from the bourgeois home. Paloma, filming this scene, provides a whispered commentary that documents the spatial economy of social relations and the interdictions relating to access by the serving figure: *'Ne pas laisser sortir le chat. Ne pas laisser entrer la concierge.'* This rigid grammar of spatial and social relations evidently recalls the 19<sup>th</sup> century's deterministic organisation of space and relations between served and servant, where the maid was to be kept at bay and confined to servant space.

### **A reluctant claiming of space and place**

This thesis has foregrounded the claiming of territory in the spatialised narrative of servitude and rebellion. This is an intrinsic aspect of the power that the servant figure is represented as wielding in her destruction of the parameters of servitude, whether the rebellion resides on a violent scale or on the more nuanced resistant side of things, as in *Le Hérisson*.

Renée is seen as tentatively and only reluctantly engaging in the claiming of space not socially prescribed to her servant status within the building. It is significant that Kakuro's apartment to which she gains access is not spatially distributed like the others that are comprised within the global Haussmannian structure. In those more traditional organisations of space, such as that of Paloma's family that is segregated for specific types of functionality, the concierge is forbidden access, as discussed above. Before moving in, as narrated by Manuela the cleaning lady, Kakuro Ozu had all the internal walls knocked down in such a way as to create an open-plan space of domesticity governed by minimalist aesthetics. Kakuro's apartment, while being served space, nevertheless has a different socio-cultural conception of the mapping of domesticity and social relations, and Renée's occupation of this space will consequently differ greatly from the pattern of exclusion and confinement in which she is represented through her servitude within the global structure of the building. The foreignness of Kakuro's organisation of domestic space in a sense opens itself up to the occupation by this serving protagonist, who, despite her intrinsic functional place within the building, is ultimately a foreign body. On the evening of her dinner invitation to Kakuro's dwelling, Renée Michel ceases to be a servant from the point of her crossing of the threshold into this open space. That night, she is served by another, a reversal of roles in which she feels out of place. And yet her

interactions with Kakuro and his hospitality signify a breaking down of the barriers between served and servant, and an indication that the servant function need not be irremediably absolute. After serving her, Kakuro positions himself at the kitchen counter by Renée's side in a way that undermines the space syntax of their respective social positions, but that is also an alternative spatial arrangement to the western model of dining which places bodies in opposition. This same spatial alignment is upheld on their subsequent dates, where Kakuro and Renée are consistently positioned next to one another rather than in opposition.

From the point at which Renée is given access to M. Ozu's domestic space, she is then invited to occupy external spaces of leisure habitually associated with a certain, higher, class. He invites her to another dinner, this time in a sashimi restaurant where they are personally served by a chef who prepares their food in front of them, in a syntactical arrangement of bodies in space that acutely foregrounds the fact that the serving concierge character is now socially permitted to be served. It appears that Renée, this serving figure, has acceded to a served position in an image of the maid's spatio-social mobility that 19<sup>th</sup> century masters so feared.



Following their third and final date, they walk home, with Kakuro offering Renée his arm, and they re-enter the building as a prospective couple. In the entrance hall, they are framed in a medium shot, facing one another. The scene then cuts to a long shot in which he kisses her hand. Within this long shot, the couple are positioned at equidistance from the front, main door with its grand wrought iron flourishes, to the right of the frame, and the loge's diminutive narrow doorframe to the left. Renée is at a transition point in this scene. She can be

a serving figure within the building and simultaneously maintain her intellectual curiosity and her relationship with Kakuro, a served figure. Renée thus maintains the hybrid spatio-social place within the bourgeois environment, but in a way that differs markedly from her earlier status.



As she goes back into her loge, she finds a card from Paloma. On the front cover, there is a drawn-on door handle on the right hand side, and when she opens the card, and thus symbolically opening the represented door, the shot reveals a pop-up three-dimensional ink drawing of Renée in her secret room, surrounded by her books, as yet unseen by anyone else, a space imagined by Paloma to a high level of accuracy. In this way, the servant figure's accession to served space is mirrored by the converse served accession to servant space in a way that re-maps spatio-social segregation in order to instil the spatio-social proximity so feared in traditional conceptions of servitude. This re-mapping of spatio-social relations equally occurs within the cinematic manipulation of domestic space. The agent of this blurring of spatio-social boundaries is again Paloma. When the young girl provocatively declares that she wants to be a concierge when she grows up, and her parents mockingly indulge her, she storms off from the kitchen table within their apartment and within a continuous shot, she opens the door to a room which reveals itself to be Renée's secret room, where the concierge is seated surrounded by her books. In this scene, served space is geographically joined up with servant space, and vertical spatial distance and social distance are collapsed. Cinema's capacity for artifice in the re-mapping of space, and in the narrativisation of the transgression of spatial and social boundaries is patent here.

On the morning of her death Renée wakes up with a smile on her face, after her date and after having spent the night re-reading Kakuro's copy of *Anna Karenina*, an image that contrasts with her usual bleary-eyed, dreary posture that precedes the start of her labour on a daily basis. As she starts her workday, there is a brief spatial merging of her multiple existences. She opens the door to her loge before having closed the door to her secret room. And so for a short moment, before she seals off the space, there is a spatial connect between Renée's once segregated private literary life, her domestic life which now appears set to involve time spent with Kakuro, and her public life as concierge. These three spaces, from the entrance hall to the first room of the loge and the second hidden room, appear layered in a front-on shot, with each imbricated threshold being visible. This shot provides physical and symbolic depth to the multiple existences that Renée appears set to combine, after overcoming her exilic, invisible condition.



Ultimately, however, it is in the line of duty, within the parameters of her service, that Renée Michel's death is staged, at the close of the film. Renée is run over by the dry-cleaner's truck while bringing the bins back in to the building, ironically trying to prevent Jean-Pierre, the drunk SDF, from getting run over. Her death occurs in a most public space of thoroughfare, in stark contrast to her prior occupation of mostly enclosed and threshold space, with Achache in a sense narratively bringing the invisible servant figure into visibility through the use of this setting. And though Renée's death occurs within the context of her labour, it is perhaps significant that this accident is staged as stemming from her transgression of the spatial boundaries of her servitude. Indeed, in moving off the footpath and onto the road in order to

apprehend Jean-Pierre, she is performing a gesture of amity and care for a person that she is not in a service relationship with.

If Renée has been a particularly invisible presence in her environment, her death brings her into stark visibility with the scene of the accident offering up a spectacle to the residents and passers-by. At the scene of her death, our viewpoint is in line with Renée's in a subjective shot as she lies on the road face-up next to the truck, with others looking down over the body. Here, the pug-owning bourgeoisie resident *sees* Renée, for once (nevertheless observing her curiously and without any semblance of grief, allowing her dog to climb up onto Renée's body as if it were a non-descript object). This scene contains the longest monologue by Renée of the entire film, breaking, in death, from the general economy of speech of her servanthood. This death is an absurd punishment that Renée attributes, half-jokingly, to her wearing the dress of a bourgeoisie borrowed from the drycleaner's: '*Si je pouvais, je rirais. Mais je pense à Manuela, qui s'en voudra jusqu'à la fin de ses jours, que le camion du pressing m'ait renversé. C'est le châtiment du vol de la robe.*'<sup>143</sup> The serving figure's transvestism – her daring to wear served accoutrements and occupy served space, her symbolic social mobility – is ostensibly the cause of her death.<sup>144</sup>



As Renée lies there dead-but-talking, off-screen given that this is a subjective shot, she continues her musings on those who face her in the hour of her death. Kakuro comes in from the distance, gently moving past the others and arriving close up: '*Kakuro. J'ai le cœur serré*

<sup>143</sup> Manuela was the one to organise the loan of the dress from the drycleaner's.

<sup>144</sup> Chapter 6 will address the significance of the maid's punishment further.



*comme un chaton roulé en boule. Je prendrais bien un dernier verre de saké avec vous.*' Kakuro moves the pug off Renée's chest, kneeling down at her body, front-on to the camera, and removes his jacket to cover her body. This is a gesture that hides the spectacle of the concierge's lifeless body from the prying eyes of others, and that simultaneously cuts off the audience's view of the scene, turning the screen to darkness. In Kakuro's covering of Renée, the servant figure who had been brought into tentative visibility through her relationships with Kakuro and Paloma (not least through the latter's filmed documentary of her existence), is once more rendered invisible. Her death, like that of her husband fifteen years prior, is set to constitute a '*léger creux dans le cours du quotidien*' of the building's occupants. Renée will retain her place in the minds of those who sought to know her beyond her functional presence as concierge, who came to her loge seeking affective relations rather than served/servant ones.

Though Paloma accessed Renée's hidden room on a secondary, imaginary level during the latter's life (in the scene in which the architecture is re-mapped to situate the bourgeois apartment as attached to the secret room; and in the case of her drawing of this space), after her death she and Kakuro physically occupy both rooms of the loge. They pack up all of her possessions, mostly books, Kakuro exits, and Paloma pulls the door shut behind her, looking front-on at the camera as she does so, leaving us in this hidden subjective space. In ending on this evacuation of the maid avatar's space, *Le Hérisson* provides a lasting comment on the tenuous place accorded to serving figures. This scene, in which the viewpoint is situated from within this dark and empty locale that was once the repository for a rich interior life, lingers with the audience. Though the loge is for the concierge, like the *chambre de bonne* for the maid, a space that is theoretically her own, Renée's occupation of this personal space remains contingent on her function. That the film's final scene is devoted to the packing up of her belongings by Kakuro and Paloma is essential. This space must be vacated for a subsequent functional occupant who will slip into Renée's generic role.

## Conclusion

Achache's film represents servitude and rebellion in a way that, while employing the archetypal environment of the *bonne à tout faire*, the Haussmannian structure, significantly remaps the servant's space syntax in line with the occupation of that other serving figure within this typically served space: the concierge. The tensions between the different socially allocated

space types and their occupation by served and servant are cinematically staged in a typological manner. The challenging of the protagonist's servitude passes through the remapping of space and the occupation of socially proscribed space.

In *Le Hérisson*, Renée's occupation of the marginal spaces of the building, first constituting a dictate of her servile function, gradually appears to equally be a form of resistance against the one-dimensionality required of the concierge figure by the residents. Her invisibility can be likened to a strategy of concealment – an active use of space, a claiming of place, which reconfigures the power dynamics in the social prescription of the occupation of space according to served/servant relations.

### ***Ma part du gâteau* (Klapisch 2011) – ‘*Monter à Paris*’, descent into servitude**

France Leroy (Karin Viard) is a single mother of three recently made redundant from her blue-collar job in Dunkerque who travels to Paris to seek domestic service work. Though this move initially constitutes a social and financial windfall for France and her family, her ideal servitude begins to wane as the cracks in the ‘system’ appear, a system of served and servant that extends beyond her master's domestic locale, back to France's hometown and the economically ruined post-industrial port zone.

Klapisch's film stages servitude and rebellion within the parameters of the archetypal maid's space syntax, focussing on the elements of spatio-social exclusion and access to space in albeit modified domestic space. It also, however broadens this syntax of space in its protagonist's attempted control of the master's occupation of space, enforcing spatial relocation in the dynamics of servitude and rebellion.

### **The maid as foreign body: integrating the new domestic sphere**

As Klapisch's film opens, a cake bedecked with candles is paraded around a birthday celebration in a home, the audience in tow, until the camera settles on an above-view close shot of the cake being sliced up, referencing the film's title, which we already suspect to be a tale of haves and have-nots, of served and servant, of the inequitable distribution of wealth and power symbolised by the pie imagery. The film's opening credits then play out against fast and

fleeting mobile scenes of that hover between the easy imagery of Dunkerque's industrial port-side landscapes (rigs, cranes, smoky towers, graffitied and postered walls, black men and women in hijab waiting at bus stops, and *cité* towers) and the obvious visual symbols of the global finance system (graphs and charts on computer screens, white-collar workers' fingers clicking mice and tapping at keyboards, panoramas of London and Paris's financial districts, traders gesticulating, and numbers flickering). We are then transported back to the initial domestic scene in which the joyful occasion is disrupted by the family's realisation that France, a forty-something mother of three who was recently made unemployed by the closing of the freighting company that she has served for her entire working life, has swallowed a bottle of pills.

Klapisch's film seeks to represent contemporary social and economic problems, and the tension between individualism and collectivism, through the particular and highly appropriate narrative of the female servant figure.<sup>145</sup> Having hit rock bottom with her suicide attempt, France decides to fight, using a contact in Paris to regain employment in a sector populated by mostly migrant, ethnically other women, who, like her, have undertaken this lasting spatial and social trajectory of foreign (in a broad sense) domestic servants 'up' to Paris. This relocation is one that is diegetically debated amongst France's unemployed colleagues at the local bar: *'Qu'est-ce tu vas aller te perdre à Paris?'; 'Tu dis que tu vas te casser, que tu vas régler tous tes problèmes toute seule. Et après?... Toute seule c'est pas la bonne solution. Il faut rester soudé si on veut gagner.'* Klapisch in this way verbalises the question of the protagonist's relocation into a position of servitude, from the outset signalling its perilous prospects and the marginalising effect it can have on the worker separated from her community. France thus chooses an individualistic response to their collective misery in seeking domestic work in Paris. And though she is initially surrounded by a group of women at the training centre, this type of labour is ultimately one that is performed in isolation. The question of individual and collective political responses will re-emerge in the final rebellious act.

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<sup>145</sup> In an interview on the film's promotion website ([www.mapartdugateau-lefilm.com](http://www.mapartdugateau-lefilm.com)) discusses the genesis of the film's plot, citing influences such as Hegel's master-slave dialectic, historical philosophical conceptions of power from Plato to Marx, as well as Molière's use of the servant character and the Cinderella narrative of *Pretty Woman*. These are all sources that are related to the rebellious maid narrative in obvious ways. For example, Roy Orbison's song is the soundtrack to France's newfound wealth as Klapisch (nauseatingly) stages a dance scene in the supermarket, where the protagonist is for once able to buy anything that her daughters desire.

In Paris, France finds herself in a domestic service training session with a coterie of foreign women with whom she is told to assimilate by adopting a foreign accent, a Russian/eastern-European one to match her blond hair and blue eyes. Given that she is culturally out of place within this setting, France jarringly adopts a farcical Russian matron persona in order to conform to a stereotypical image of the servant.



She is counselled by her contact at the employment agency in the art of ideal servitude: *‘Il faut pas trop sourire pour avoir l’air professionnelle. Il faut parler le moins possible. Il faut que le client sente que vous êtes à l’écoute, que vous êtes prête à lui rendre des services. Mais, attention, faut pas en faire trop.’* This advice of course reproduces the requisites of the *bonne à tout faire* who is a *perle* – she who stays dutifully silent and effaced, caring but not promiscuous. These are strictures that France initially adheres to once she is engaged by Stéphane Delarue (Gilles Lellouche), a trader who has recently relocated to Paris from London to set up a hedge fund.

As the master greets the maid at the front door, France is revealed centre screen in a relatively close shot, poised on the threshold, with Stéphane’s body to the left of the frame finding itself reproduced in the reflection of multiple mirrors. This brief shot creates the illusion of the master’s figure and its three reflections as spatially surrounding the maid figure’s body, symbolising the spatio-social omnipotence of the master over the maid.



As he takes his new cleaning lady on a fast-paced tour of his lofty 30<sup>th</sup> floor apartment (in distinct contrast to her modest ground-floor dwelling in Dunkerque), arrogantly clicking his fingers to get her to follow him, he lays out his requirements of her service: that everything be ‘*nickel*’, and that she keep out of his way (‘*moins on se parle, mieux je me porte*’), to which France dutifully and simply replies: ‘*Moi, j’aime bien quand ça brille*’. Stéphane and France thus incarnate the stereotypical roles of master and servant, with his assertion of spatial and social distance, and her dutiful acquiescence to her prescribed occupation and functionalisation of domestic space.

France’s domestic labour within Stéphane’s apartment is staged as obeying the strictures of the maid’s space syntax. She must refrain from investing this space with leisure activities of her own, a fact highlighted in a scene in which she is ironing. As she irons in the open-plan apartment’s living room section, she turns up the volume on her transistor radio that is playing a rock anthem to which she emphatically sings along.<sup>146</sup> This is a significant transgression that the master interrupts by bounding up to her, invading her corporeal space, clicking in her face, and shouting that this behaviour will not stand. In *Ma part du gâteau*’s mise en scène, France’s movements and gestures are policed in domestic space, and her cultural preferences are constructed as out of place in a manner that recalls the previously discussed films’ juxtaposition of high and low culture in the maid’s occupation and investment of bourgeois domestic space.

Typically of served figures in cinema, the master is shown to be inept at domesticity, unable to cope without the presence of a servant to facilitate his domestic and familial

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<sup>146</sup> Berri’s *Une femme de ménage* (2002) stages this same occurrence in a repeated manner.

activities.<sup>147</sup> As Stéphane's ex-girlfriend drops their son Alban off for a month-long stay, he is incapable of making room for his child in his life, something which finds itself spatially materialised through the absence of a room (or even a bed) for him or of any toys. France is then called on to extend her duties to that of child-minder, an occupation that will transform her presence in the apartment to a round-the-clock live-in occurrence, extending her role to that of a *bonne à tout faire*.

The master's construction of his professional and social life as that of a self-serving and responsibility-shirking bachelor is fundamentally imprinted on his domestic space. The distribution of space in this apartment is designed so that everything is at hand in the one space, and yet everyone but him (France, Alban, his girlfriend) is out of place within this space. It is a glorified studio, with the sleeping quarters functionally coexisting with the living, office, and kitchen zones. There is as such no place within this space for a live-in maid. The apartment does however comprise an enormous gym on a lower floor, a locale that is, by default, re-functionalised to house France and Alban's sleeping quarters. One can see how, even in this ultra-modern organisation of domestic space that in some ways ironically reproduces the multi-functionality of the *chambre de bonne* on a grander scale, the same confinement of the maid figure to the extremity of the home that existed in 19<sup>th</sup> century geographical and architectural conceptions of servitude is actualised. The reconfiguration of the gym, that is typically considered to be an attribute of the wealthy, impoverishes it through its occupation by the maid figure. The gym is no longer a space of leisure for the upper classes; it is one of bodily repose combined with absolute and round the clock servitude for the maid figure. Brand-new albeit disused exercise machines are tensely juxtaposed with the rollout futon on which the maid figure sleeps beside her young charge, objects that imprint on the space this imbrication of the foreign body of the maid figure within the master's home.

Through her newfound servitude, France's purchase power increases, and she triumphantly returns home on weekends to Dunkerque as economically and socially empowered. Scenes of her ironing, vacuuming and mopping are counterweighed with those of her showing off her comparatively bountiful situation to her family by way of sharing photos of Stéphane's luxury apartment in La Défense. This long-distance evocation of the master's space

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<sup>147</sup> A similar representation is on offer in Berri's *Une femme de ménage* (2002), in addition to in *La Cérémonie*, *La Tourneuse de pages*.

invariably asserts the association between power and space, with France's spatial proximity to the master in a sense translating to social proximity with the served classes. The film's description of France's servitude, as it did in the opening credits, crosses between Dunkerque and Paris, attributing different symbolism to each place, with La Défense's sterile and capitalistic glass and metal landscapes losing out to the solidarity and familial warmth of the port town, however impoverished it appears.

And yet the distinction between France and Stéphane's social and economic power is most potently expressed through their dual occupation of the apartment. As France performs domestic labour round the clock for 100 euro a day – an admittedly higher figure than the SMIC, and one that she seems more than content with –, within this same place, Stéphane makes 68 000 euro in the space of two hours from buying and selling shares online. Social differences are highlighted within this dually occupied and poly-functional space, and the distinctions between the haves and the have-nots, between the value of speculative finance and of so-called non-productive menial labour are laid bare. The film calls into question the social and economic valuation of these different forms of labour, pointing to the trading business's inordinate power to affect the livelihood of workers, closing down factories with a couple of clicks of a mouse, and, we are to understand from Klapisch's narration, forcing workers into an antiquated relationship of servitude. Stéphane's breadth of space and dominance in this sense appears inordinate: from his London office, after a few phone calls and keystrokes, he was able to permanently affect the lives of hundreds of people in Dunkerque, expelling them from their place of work, disrupting their family and social lives, and forcing some to relocate in search of a livelihood, as was the case for France. France (the character) is symbolic of what Klapisch represents as the (perhaps slightly mythical) rightful old France (the nation) rendered servile, foreign, and ultimately placeless in globalised capitalism. In incarnating a provincial woman travelling to Paris for better opportunities, the maid figure here signifies the long history of the servant narrative of spatial and difficult social mobility, of the foreignness of the servant's space and place.

Klapisch's film enshrines France as an archetypal *bonne à tout faire* stereotypically so during a party scene that is central to the narrative. Here, the full purpose of the maid figure to uphold her master's social status will be realised. Stéphane holds a cocktail party for his acquaintances in his apartment one night, hiring extra service personnel to supplement France's

labour. All of them are bedecked in classical servant garb consisting of black dress, white apron, and white headpiece. The butler, dressed in a white suit, commands the suite of maids from his post in the kitchen area. France and the other maids busy themselves handing around such dishes as *macarons salés* and verrines of *soupe froide de courgettes avec émulsion de truffes noires et un précipité de lardons* to people of Stéphane's milieu. At once fetishistically on display with their uniforms, playing their part in the served/servant relations in this setting, these women are also patently rendered invisible through this generic attire. As France holds out platters to groups of men, none of them notice her, ignoring her explanations of the dish being served up, looking right through her. France remains invisible through her servitude up until the point at which she hears one of the men joking about how he's been to the ports in northern France and seen the little toy figures (Playmobil men) at work driving trucks and manoeuvring cranes.<sup>148</sup> For the man and his audience, this vision is one of wild hilarity, but it causes France to drop the platter in shock, with courgette/truffle/lardon soup sullyng the perpetrator's suit. This perception of Dunkerque's port workers – France's former colleagues – as mere pawns in the game at which Stéphane and his ilk are playing at is a resounding motive for France's grievance. That her reaction occasions dirt and disorder within the home necessarily elicits the image of the rebellious maid, the *souillon*, and yet for now she excuses the accident and keeps up the act of dutiful maid.



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<sup>148</sup> Aside from this deriding of the working classes that Klapisch stages, there is equally an example of racism and ableism that is designed to narrativise the rapprochement between excluded social categories against the business world of rich white men. As one of the other members of the hired help (Aminata, a young black woman) approaches the same group of men shortly beforehand with a tray of food held out, Steve's acquaintance authoritatively states that: '*En France, l'ascenseur social fonctionne parfaitement. Aujourd'hui dans le monde de l'entreprise, [si] t'es noir ou handicapé t'as presque plus aucun problème.*'



The diegesis of this party scene in the high-rise apartment, where acquaintances mingle and boast of their financial success, is spliced with the staging of a party of another kind taking place back in Dunkerque. This alternative social gathering is that of a carnival taking place in public space, at which France's daughters are in attendance. This carnival scene can be read, in its chaotic counterpoint status to Stéphane's ruling class cocktail party, in relation to Bakhtin's (1984) work on the carnival and the carnivalesque in his study of Rabelais. The carnivalesque is representative of a spatio-temporally defined zone (Bakhtin's 'chronotope') in which the poor are permitted to abolish hierarchies and their servitude, deambulating and taking up public space in Rabelaisian excess. As Bakhtin (1984, p. 10) defines it, 'carnival celebrated temporary liberation from the prevailing truth and from the established order; it marked the suspension of all hierarchical rank, privileges, norms and prohibitions.' The carnival snippets inserted into the space of the narration of the cocktail party scene and its rigorous served/servant relations acts to increase the perception that there is rebellion underway, that chaotic carnivalesque spatial practice threatens to upset controlled domesticity, and that the relation of domination between served and servant will soon be upset.

And yet the carnival, given its spatio-temporal finitude, must give way to the restoration of the served/servant social order, with France dutifully performing her cleaning and ordering tasks for those she serves that evening. The carnivalesque allows for exceptionally short-term variations in social status only. This sentiment of the ephemeral nature of the maid figure's divagation from the bonds of servitude will now be addressed in the context of the maid figure's rebellion proper in *Ma part du gâteau*.

### **Access to space and the reconfiguration of spatio-social control**

Through her service in Stéphane's household, France develops a friendship-like relationship with her employer. He trusts her with his son, pays her well, and she is glad for the opportunity to better her family's circumstances, even though her daughters are beginning to resent her continued absence. The social and spatial distance between served and servant have slowly given way to a certain level of proximity.

France is excited at the prospect of accompanying her employer on a business trip to London to care for his son while he works. Arriving in London, she is treated to the

Cinderella/*Pretty Woman* act including limousine, a five star hotel and an umbrella-wielding doorman to shelter her from the rain between exiting the car and entering the hotel. Through her service to Stéphane, France has briefly acceded to a served position that is spatially connoted. In going to Paris to become a servant, she has gradually broadened her breadth of space to include the possibility of travelling abroad and occupying first class social space. This is a position that is reinforced when a babysitter is hired to look after the child as she accompanies him to a dinner party. In this social setting, of financial traders and their wives and girlfriends, France is assimilated to a served figure, on one level. And yet in adopting (or being told to adopt – it is unclear<sup>149</sup>) a ditzy Russian identity, fluent in neither English, nor Russian, for that matter, she marginalises herself from the group, adopting another, assimilable model of social and cultural alterity to that of the servant. The maid as mistress thus remains foreign and categorically out of place within served social space. Moreover, while her servitude is briefly suspended, her presence at the dinner with Stéphane narratively remains functional and within the bounds of service, with the master requiring a female companion at the event, and the choice of France was a secondary one after his attempt to co-opt his ex-girlfriend failed.

This dinner ends in a romanticised sexual encounter between maid and master. In the hotel suite, in the corridor separating their bedrooms, they embrace and fumble their way into Stéphane's bedroom – and significantly not into France's. That the sex takes place within master-space imbues the relationship as a seemingly legitimate social encounter, whereas had it taken place in the servant's abode, it would have lent itself to a characteristic *troussage de domestique*.<sup>150</sup> Although the perception of this will soon change, and as the scene cuts to the following morning, with France languishing in Stéphane's four-poster bed, it is clear that the master has no intention for this affair to continue, casually talking about possibly reuniting with his ex.

During the pillow talk that takes place in this intimate setting, with the use of the pronoun 'tu', in which Stéphane enquires as to France's existence outside the parameters of her

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<sup>149</sup> For Aeschmann (2011) writing in *Libération*, it is probably the latter, a strategic command by the master to the maid, as, in Stéphane's world, '*mieux vaut avoir l'air d'une pute que d'une plouc*'. Klapisch's recurrent references to *Pretty Woman* certainly seems to corroborate this.

<sup>150</sup> While the *troussage de domestique* might not be entirely valid for this represented relationship, given the clear display of consent on the part of France, Stéphane was previously represented as having a fairly primitive conception of consent earlier in the film, in the unsettling quasi-rape of the young model Tessa, that Aeschmann (2011) even described as an expression of the *droit de cuissage*.

service role to him, they learn that they are both connected to the shipping company for which France had worked. Upon discovering that France used to work for Sifranor, Stéphane graphically and insensitively explains how he was integral in sabotaging the company by manipulating its share prices. While for the master, this anecdote brings them into spatio-social proximity (*‘Le monde est petit, hein?’*), for France, who remains speechless, this discovery reinforces the gulf that separates them, framed as they are by the curtains and the his and hers lamps on the four-poster bed. As the babysitter appears at the threshold, stating that she really must go, France is put back in her place, and must vacate served space to silently reassume servant duties.

The following scene presents France exiting the hotel with Alban to take him to the park. France is then once more reinforced in her servitude, in her typological position of the *bonne à tout faire*. In this threshold space in front of the hotel, that materially enacts her ejection from the luxury of served space, France bears witness, auditorily, to another heinous monologue by her employer. Stéphane is positioned on the balcony of the hotel suite, looking out at the park across the road, in the same direction that France faces, with their two figures vertically segregated on a spatial level that is symbolic of their social difference. Stéphane then turns back towards the building, away from his shared view with France, and leans against the railing to have a phone conversation with his friend Edouard about a one thousand pound bet they had made. The camera then presents a long shot of the hotel building, first revealing France and the child walking down the stairs, and then panning upwards, in a low-angle shot, to rest on the rich and powerful master. Despite the physical distance that separates them in this scene, France hears Stéphane’s wounding words about their encounter perfectly: *‘Tu vois, le truc que je t’ai raconté sur la femme de ménage? Ben voilà, je viens de me la taper. ... J’en avais trop envie là, fallait y aller. [...] figure-toi, vachement bien. Super, même. Je te raconterai dans les détails plus tard.’* During this scene’s telephone conversation, the camera shifts from France to Steve and back again several times. Both are represented from several alternating angles and distances in a way that constantly refocusses the subject of interest being discussed in a smutty manner, presenting it from his perspective and hers, and signifying the power imbalance between served and servant through a spatial translation of this dynamic, with Stéphane towering over France. France is left to suffer the bond of her servitude in silence, and walks to the park with Alban in a daze, with the realisation that Stéphane was having sex with

the cleaning lady rather than her subjective self. This narratively re-centres their encounter as the representation of a smutty *troussage de domestique*, irrevocably negating any fantasy that France might have held regarding her potential social mobility in the form of the maid becoming mistress.

France briefly loses sight of the child while she is distracted by a teary phone call to her daughter in which she tells her that ‘Monsieur Stéphane’ – distancing herself from him – played a role in closing the shipping company in Dunkerque. Terrified, France runs down the paths in the park shouting Alban’s name, with menacing sound both diegetic and non-diegetic, and frequent camera angle switches contributing to the anxiety of this scene. In this state of panic, she phones Stéphane, that she once again addresses as ‘vous’ in a narrative reassertion of the apartheid between master and servant. The phone line is maintained throughout the process of France locating the child, and yet she unexpectedly deviates from her duties to Stéphane here, ignoring his demands to know whether she has found Alban by terminating the call and failing to answer subsequent calls. Through this rupture in the flow of communication between master and maid in her rebellious evasion, the power dynamic significantly shifts in this scene. This signals the interruption of France’s servitude and her capacity to wield of power over her (now former) master through the detention of his son.

The shift in power relations between maid and master is met by a modification to the type of space that is screened. The luxurious high-rise apartment, the five star hotel, and the lush English park are replaced in the cinematic *mise en scène* of the maid’s rebellion in favour of the industrial landscapes of port towns. France, in her rebellion, imposes that the battle between served and servant be played out on home ground. A long shot set from a high angle reveals a grey landscape constituting a series of overlapping roads and overpasses, with oilrigs, commercial ferries, and trucks punctuating the undulating network of roads that is presumed to be Calais. As frontier zones on national borders, subject to complex inward and outward-bound mercantile and human trajectories, ports assume a liminal character. This space-type can be assimilated, in its status as point of passage and symbolic shifts of power, to the liminal spaces within the domestic setting that were found to be integral in the *mise en scène* of servitude and rebellion in the previous films analysed previously. As a red lorry comes to a stop, the long shot gives way to a medium one, showing France disembarking with Alban, before reverting to the long shot in order to present their tiny human figures within this industrial *limitrophe*

landscape. In Klapisch's mise en scène of this space that is representative of the development of global capitalism, we are to understand that this is a system in which France and her kind produce, and where Stéphane and his cronies speculate.



Crucially, in this port scene, while the kidnapped child is patently out of place, France is not. The return to the border zone of the port, even if it is not that of her hometown, signals a level of spatial and social control on the part of this ex-servant figure. As Stéphane breaks down in his hotel, comforted by Mélody the girlfriend as he awaits news of his son, France is represented as authoritatively moving through space, directing her trajectory on her own terms rather than in accordance with the syntax of her servitude to Stéphane. Passing through customs – transgressing a boundary – in her daughter's boyfriend's car with her two eldest accompanying her, she brings Alban into the country under the false identity of her youngest daughter. As their car inches forward to the immigration checkpoint, the gravity of the situation is raised by the eldest, a diegetic announcement of the potentially criminal nature of this rebellious act: *'Tu crois pas que t'as fait une énorme connerie, là?'* Klapisch here diegetically frames the spatial transgression of a border as a political and social transgression. France, who had been up until now quite vacant and dazed in this transgressive trajectory, now surrounded by her own in this intimate space as they are about to officially re-enter French borders, is able to openly and adamantly articulate the political justification for this act:

*Et lui? Tu crois pas qu'il a fait une plus grosse connerie encore? En mettant mille deux cent personnes au chômage du jour au lendemain? ... Moi je voudrais qu'il vienne à Dunkerque et qu'il se rende compte de certains trucs. Et je voudrais qu'il paie.*

In her claim of grievances, it is his actions prior to their meeting that she is seeking justice for. In referencing the plight of the 1200 people made redundant, and in directing his movements by summoning him to the scene of his crime, France in effect broadens the political scope of this rebellion.

Klapisch stages his protagonist's rebellion as a vengeance against wrongs done to a collective of people in a servile relationship to the financial and political powers, but one that is however anchored in an individualistic reprisal against the master's sexual humiliation of the maid within the context of servitude. In this sequence, Klapisch's *mise en scène* of the maid's rebellion is structured by the physical transgression of spatial boundaries, an evasion against the space of servitude, and a reversal of spatio-social control that sees the maid commanding the master's geographical movements. This is clearly an unnatural posture for the master, who is reaffirmed in his served righteousness by Mélody who implores him to recapture his position of authority over the servant figure: *'Il faut pas la laisser te donner des ordres comme ça.'* Stéphane will nevertheless cede to France's direction of his spatial movements, setting off for Dunkerque in a sports car at full throttle.

In the meantime, France and her family, with Alban in tow, arrive in time for the hip-hop dance show performed by local youth at the *salle des fêtes*, an archetypal social space associated with community and the collective, and at polaric odds with the intimate sphere of domestic servitude. In this way, the ceremony of rebellion against servitude is to be staged in a space that reasserts the collective over the individual, in what Klapisch clearly articulates as the true place for the protest of the subjugated against those who dominate them.

As the lights dim and the teenagers begin to move around the stage, France remains on the threshold of the hall up the back, not yet fully resuming her place in the group. This liminal spatial position clearly echoes her intermediary state, no longer a servant but not quite yet rid of the bonds of servitude. As she observes the stage from her liminal place, the camera shifts between her joyful and empowered gaze and the set that is composed of miniature skyscrapers. This represented space on the stage is of course part of the urban aesthetics of the hip hop dance genre, but equally a spatial reminder of the architecture of the city as the holder of financial and social capital associated with the individual. The film thus constantly draws parallels, through spatialisation, between France's servitude and the broader economic exploitation of the working class.

Despite this show of community strength and cohesion, the law remains on the side of the rich and powerful, as Klapisch is keen to remind us throughout the film, with the state siding in the latter's camp. As he pulls into the car park of the *salle des fêtes* in the portside town, Stéphane is met by a cavalry of riot police who will conduct an overblown assault on France. She is grabbed while on the threshold, shocked and silent as four policemen pin her against a wall, pat her down, and cuff her, while valiantly rescuing the kidnapped child who lies, peacefully sleeping, on a sofa in the foyer. France is frogmarched out to the front of the building where her former master and Mélody, victim-like, hover in front of the Porsche as the authority of their social class is restored. France, who had sought to challenge Stéphane's spatio-social control in calling him to Dunkerque to bear witness to the laid off workers, has had her rebellious act interrupted before her *mise en scène* of the cathartic encounter between dominant and dominated could occur. As France is being dragged away in silence from the *salle des fêtes*, it appears that her rebellious act will remain invisible, with the community still watching the hip-hop show inside, unaware of the spectacle of France's rebellion against servitude playing out in the forecourt of the community hall.

The servant figure must pay for her transgression, as Mélody, incarnating the mistress in this eleventh-hour recomposed nuclear family judges. As the police van moves off, with France held under lock and key in its sealed-off compartment, a long shot reveals her youngest daughter walking from right to left across the frame – a direction that Smith (1998, p. 15), in reference to Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (1985), has famously defined as being 'in the wrong direction, against the culture, against the tide.' For Smith, this right to left direction in which the female protagonist moves is symbolic of the expression of refusal.<sup>151</sup> In *Ma part du gâteau*, Klapisch employs the same cinematic grammar of space in representing the little girl advancing against the grain, placing her body in front of the police van's path in an eminent act of physical resistance. In so doing, France's daughter narratively foils the trajectory imposed on her mother by the structural masters (the police as Stéphane's representatives).

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<sup>151</sup> See also Tuncer (2012) for a discussion of the politics of walking in cinema, with a focus on Varda's cinema.



As the people spill out of the *salle des fêtes* and are made aware of the presence of the mastermind behind their social and economic misery, a mob forms, strengthening France's daughter's individual stance with their collective force, encircling the police van, and blocking its forward movement's effort to put France in her dominated place. Within this brief moment, the community identify collectively with France's individual state of servitude that operated within the bounds of a relationship between two singular parties. A group breaks off, chasing Stéphane down to the beach, stopping at the tide wall to mock him as he fearfully stumbles across the sand towards the shore, and is pushed into liminal space. France's efforts at retaliation against her master, to put him in a position in which he is out of place and where his corporeal control is eroded have thus succeeded. As the film ends, France nevertheless remains confined inside the cramped space of the police van, presumably to be eventually charged with her particular rebellious act, the kidnapping offence. Her social and spatial mobility is stalled and moreover punished, but her attempt at spatial control over her master is not fully vanquished, and the collective solidarity surrounding her detention lightens this injustice in which the served dominate.





## Conclusion

Similarly to the previously discussed *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages*, as well as *Le Hérisson* treated above, Klapisch's *Ma part du gâteau* maintains domesticity as a primary spatio-social setting for the representation of its servant protagonist. While it adheres to the maid's space syntax in constructing her as out of place within the master's space, it equally importantly reconfigures this foundational setting; its presentation of an open-plan apartment and the location of the luxury hotel, in which the spatio-social segregation of served and servant is complicated, act to reframe the maid's space syntax in translated spaces of servitude. The film succeeds in representing the relations of domination between the master and the maid figures on a spatial level through a more macroscopic geography of served and servant that opposes wider geographical locations and trajectories in addition to the focus on domestic space. Through the parallel cities of Paris and Dunkerque and the trajectories encompassed within these two polaric places via London, Klapisch translates the typical space syntax of the maid figure, adapting this grammar of social relations to updated social spaces that house contemporary patterns of social domination and servitude.

Klapisch maintains the centrality of spatial control in the exaction of the maid's rebellion. While France does not seek to claim the master's space as conquered territory like the maid figures previously discussed in chapter 4, she does seek to limit her master's spatio-social control by forcing his relocation to servant space, succeeding to do so up to a certain point, though nevertheless suffering punishment against this audacious challenging of the master's control, in a somewhat typical manner that chapter 6 will further investigate.

## **Part 2: Leaving home – translating the rebellious maid narrative in transposed spaces of servitude**

### ***Marie-Line* (Charef 2001) - Placelessness and place-making**

In *Marie-Line*, the maid's space syntax as it relates to the condition of servitude is translated through a mapping of service labour onto the space of a shopping centre (and in particular the hypermarket contained within it) according to relations of domination between served and servant that are premised upon the segregation of space, tenuous access to space by the maid, and threatened space. The maid's rebellion is framed through a number of transgressive trajectories that deviate from the maid's prescribed mobility, and through the hijacking of master-dominated space.

### **Servitude and solidarity on the margins**

*Marie-Line* frames a collectivised vision of female servitude in the shape of a fluctuating group of cleaning workers in the space of a shopping centre at night-time. The cleaning team is composed of a multicultural set of women whose service labour comes to represent their broader social exclusion and placelessness by way of class, race and gender. This cleaning company Europa Nettoyage that employs a series of teams that operate in various shopping centres on the outskirts of Paris is controlled by FN office-bearers and staffed by those willing or desperate enough to perform foot-soldier duties for the party, which is the case for the titular protagonist Marie-Line (Muriel Robin). The company's slogan, '*Pour une Europe Propre*', unambiguously recalls racist discourse and the racialised metaphor of purity and filth, while equally offering the potential to be read in light of the maid's particular association with this same binary. Despite advocating racism and wanting to keep North African and Eastern-European migrants out of national borders, the company's direction recognises that this group's vulnerability justifies cheap labour, and thereby opportunistically welcomes them across the threshold into this space of the hypermarket. These workers must however remain hidden from the immigration police, and the masters thus charge Marie-Line with 'dirty work', in her capacity as team leader, who is made responsible for policing her 'illegal' co-workers' servitude and hiding their bodies from view during the repeated police raids.

Female servitude in Charef's film can be likened in several respects to that of the *bonne à tout faire* construct as *perle* and *souillon* of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. These women are intensely characterised by the sense of duty, invisibility and silence of the ideal maid. Every night, they purify and restore order to their workplace after the day's hordes have passed through its arteries. They labour arduously and suffer their conditions in silence.

Alongside this clear representation of oppressive servitude performed by ideal maid figures, the characters are, simultaneously, constructed within the parameters of the 19<sup>th</sup> century conceptual category of the reviled maid, the *souillon*. They are constructed as thief (Sara, Meriem, Marie-Line), as sexually promiscuous (Bergère) and as a sexual fetish (Malika), as socially illegitimate (Marnia, Maïna, Malika and Lagos are undocumented), as filthy (Malika), as a pregnant single woman giving birth in a marginal location (Maïna going into labour in an elevator – a cramped location suspended up high that recalls the *chambre de bonne*), and as undergoing psychological breakdown tinged with performative madness (Marnia, Marie-Line). These characters individually and collectively thereby reproduce, in a broad sense, the characteristics of the criminally rebellious maid laid out by Ryckère (1908). Yet it is through the prism of space that I read these servant characters as avatars of the *bonne à tout faire*, in the film's translation of the maid's space syntax that encompasses the spatio-social prescriptions and proscriptions of servitude and rebellion.

The most central space of interest in Charef's film is that of the hypermarket located within the shopping centre. Hypermarkets – designed as one-stop 'places' where average people can buy everything they require – are a French-originating concept, the first of which was built in 1963 in the Essonne department.<sup>152</sup> Their sheer size and scope prompt multiple discussions with regard to consumer behaviours and marketing,<sup>153</sup> the impact these structures have on smaller businesses,<sup>154</sup> as well as their semiotic charge<sup>155</sup> and how they function within capitalism from a gendered perspective.<sup>156</sup> Yet their geographical location and internal distribution are also of the utmost importance. These issues have predominantly been

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<sup>152</sup> However the French origins of locations of mass consumption go back to the middle of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with department stores such as *Le Bon Marché* and *La Samaritaine*, famously narrativised by Zola in *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883) as part of his *Rougon-Macquart* series that contained *Pot-Bouille*, in which Zola turns to the Haussmannian apartment building and the maid.

<sup>153</sup> Villermet (1991), Marseille (1997), and Lombart & Labbé-Pinlon (2007).

<sup>154</sup> Courson (1990)

<sup>155</sup> See Floch (1988)

<sup>156</sup> See Morris (2001) and van Eeden (2006).

addressed by research that seeks to optimise sales for the conglomerates that own the hypermarkets,<sup>157</sup> although there is a sizeable strand that views these structures for non-commercial purposes,<sup>158</sup> and more generally in the broader context of the ‘shopping mall/centre’, which is slightly different to the hypermarket.

My interest, however, lies not in the public functionality and occupation of the hypermarket, but in the hidden time/space zone contained within it. *Marie-Line* presents this space uncharacteristically, devoid of the swarm of people and trolleys performing complex and intersecting trajectories across the ‘*grande surface*’, and without the consumerist connotations habitually associated with this space.<sup>159</sup> In presenting this space with such strong ‘public’ connotations in an extremely different ‘private’ light, from the outset, Charef hints at the ambiguity that characterises the maid’s occupation of space from which she is socially excluded. The characters’ occupation of this space is prescribed according to the invisible facilitation of daytime consumption, with their occupation restricted to the temporal margins, in the dead of the night. That their labour is performed according to this antisocial timetable further entrenches their invisibility and marginality, positioning them as separate from the rest of the social sphere that they labour to facilitate.

The way in which the space of the maid’s labour in Charef’s film – that is, the shopping centre and its hypermarket at night-time – is constructed, is intensely descriptive of servitude in its invisibility, liminality, and its upholding of served/servant domination. This film presents its characters as almost constantly cleaning, with their purification of the hypermarket being a quotidian, monotonous, and interminable task. This labour, performed at night in a dimly lit hypermarket on the northern periphery of Paris near the historically working class area of Bobigny, evokes the archetypal maid’s prescription of invisibility. However, the same space that houses these maid figures’ servitude is also conceived of as a location for solidarity and for rebellion against the oppressive and divisive techniques of those who profit from their servitude.

This global space of the hypermarket is initially envisaged as an expansive hangar in the opening scene, through a straight-angle panoramic shot from up high. However, it quickly

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<sup>157</sup> See for example Khalifa, El Kamel & Barfety (2010)

<sup>158</sup> For example, Goss (1993) and Backes (1997).

<sup>159</sup> Van Eeden (2006, p. 39) suggests that shopping centres worldwide have taken the place of the previous town square in social life. These locations of conspicuous consumption are indeed widely understood to have taken over from other public forums in urban settings. (See also Goss 1993)

appears in its cinematic *mise en scène* as a tightly compartmentalised and segregated hive in which the maid's space syntax, paradoxically and despite this environment's radical divergence from the domestic setting, remains in place. As the camera travels downward, the demarcated aisles that structure the women's servitude come into visibility.

The camera continues its descent to rest behind Marie-Line on her motorised cleaning machine as she works her way down one of the central aisles surveying the other women's work as they statically occupy narrower perpendicular aisles, scrubbing display shelves. In this syntax of space, Marie-Line is endowed with mobility and control over the hypermarket's surface; her trajectory down a central aisle allows her to survey with relative comfort her underlings' scrubbing as they kneel and bend in arduous labour. The first scene of the film thus establishes a significant relationship of domination between Marie-Line and the other women, a dynamic that will, however, appear increasingly illusory, with the film gradually establishing their collective servility both to the employer and to the state.

In *Marie-Line*'s spatial staging of female servitude, the aisles of the hypermarket might usefully be read in light of the space of the corridor in domestic architecture's modelling of the maid figure's servitude and rebellion in representation. In previous chapters, the corridor appeared as a fundamental element in the social distribution of space and in the structuring of servitude and rebellion. Chapter 2 explained the ways in which corridors and passageways were seen to foster the secretive investment of space by the maid and how, in their liminal status, they were conceived of as promoting servant resistance against the power relations that govern the global domestic structure. There was thus a disjuncture between their utility to the bourgeoisie and its architects in segregating served and servant space, and the threatening aspect they took on in their liminal status and their occupation by servants. Functionally designed space thus became imbued with the anxiety-inducing persona of the maid figure; and in turn the maid figure's threat increased as a result of her occupation of this liminal, and thus intrinsically threatening, space. Chapter 4 studied the corridor's structuring role according to this historical ambivalence in the *mise en scène* of the rebellious maid narrative in *La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages*. In *Marie-Line*, the artificial corridor of the aisle functions in a similar manner to that earlier, domestic segregative element, integrally framing the maid figure's servitude and rebellion in cinematic *mise en scène*. The aisles of the hypermarket selectively divide and reunite space, and they are staged as sheltering the

characters' transgressive behaviour. Yet the particular form that aisles take, as not being vertically sealed-off, and as converging at cross-points, equally inserts risk into the maid's occupation of this space-type, something that Charef carefully stages.

In *Marie-Line*'s introductory spatial surveying of the hypermarket, audiences are privy to the cleaning staff's small acts of resistance that undermine the condition of servitude by investing the space with subjective activities and rituals that problematise their generic and ideal servility. For example, Sara (Veronica Novak) is shown contravening *perle* notions of strict cleanliness and devotion in her labour that consists in ordering and purifying by smoking a cigarette while scrubbing, a behaviour not tolerated by Marie-Line. Lagos (Mbembo) and Marnia (Selma Kouchy) nestle in the niche afforded by an aisle's shelter to enjoy a forbidden break and snack with food taken from the shelves. Malika (Aïssa Maïga) ogles the jewellery cabinet, the repository of served accoutrements that her meagre wage cannot support while she is meant to be mopping. Marnia, who was a student of child psychology in her homeland, manages to steal moments for herself in the book aisle. And even Marie-Line has a bottle of alcohol stashed behind a shelf that she swigs from in moments of stress. In this sense, these functionally segregated aisles provide space for the individual maid figures to indulge in subjective activities that are not part of their duties and that actively subvert the parameters of ideal servitude. These acts are staged as acts of micro-resistance against their prescribed occupation of space according to serving function.



And yet these moments of repose in the shelter of the aisles are subject to risk and are policed by the cleaning team leader (initially Marie-Line and subsequently Bergère). The women remain vulnerable to others' eyes as the aisles intersect with one another. Sara must put out her cigarette, even if she does so defiantly by plopping it into the pail of water, with the singeing sound of the water extinguishing the fire being rendered on the soundtrack. Marnia is not left to peruse psychology books for long, with Marie-Line and subsequently Bergère reprimanding her actions. The latter two, acting within the roles of team-leader, take on mistress-type behaviour in their inspection of the space of the maid's labour: running a finger along a shelf and then rubbing the index finger and thumb together in the time-worn image of the mistress inspecting the maid's labour for traces of dust. This is performed in a manner that stages the stereotypical notions of purity and filth that describe ideal and reviled servitude.

The women's movements through the aisles are watched by Léonard (Yan Epstein) from the vantage point of his office positioned above – a space affording him a bird's eye view of the hypermarket in a spatial materialisation of the social control of his position as master. From this position up high, he can control the women's movements throughout the *grande* surface, summoning them with the aid of a buzzer and a loudspeaker that magnify his control. Marie-Line is the main target of his calls for the type of *droit de cuissage* that he exerts over her, before Bergère supplants her in her desire for power, however insignificant it may be, over her fellow subservient women. Each time the bell rings, the women look up from their tasks, exchanging apprehensive glances with one another, observing the elected sexual servant making her way down the aisle to attend to her duties on the master's desk that fall squarely within the tawdry parameters of the *droit de cuissage*.



Danger lurks within the arteries of the *grande surface* at other times of Léonard's passage. The women must create a diversion one night so that Léonard doesn't see Lagos' children playing in the aisles and become alert to the fact that the women have introduced their personal life into the workplace, thereby transgressing a central tenet of servitude in which the maid must remain out of place. This diversion, the auto-objectification of a topless Malika parading in the bakery section with a bucket on her head, offers an exotic and fetishised spectacle that diverts the master's gaze for long enough that Lagos can hide her children in the safety of the change room. Once the children are safely out of view of the lecherous Léonard, Malika cancels out this spectacle for the master's pleasure by spitting and walking away. In the diegesis of this rebellious act, Malika is represented as incarnating the negative stereotypes attached to the *souillon* maid, as both sexually available and repugnant, while employing these same attributes in order to mislead her master in an act of solidarity with Lagos.

The greatest policing of the maid figures' occupation of the aisles/corridors, however, is done by the authorities. The temporary intimacy and repose provided from the reduced visibility of the aisle is, one night, interrupted by Bergère's harried announcement that the immigration police are here to inspect the hypermarket. Lagos and Marnia are quickly located in their aisle niche by Bergère and manage to conceal themselves. But Malika is not so lucky within this liminal space-type that at once shelters and brings into visibility. Insouciantly careering down one of the aisles with her mop and bucket while listening to music on her headphones, she comes into the field of vision of the immigration police who chase her down



kicking and screaming. This struggle between the police and Malika takes place off-screen, with her shrieks and calling for Marie-Line constituting a harrowing soundtrack to the view of the resigned looks on Marie-Line, Meriem and Bergère's faces. Malika is arrested because she is out of place, on the most basic level, being an undocumented worker. But the narrative of Malika's apprehension is also connected to her contextual condition of servitude. Charef stages this event in terms of the space syntax of the maid figure where Malika, who had contravened her ideal servitude by listening to music and straying from her dictated hidden labour, finds herself in open view of the masters in the cinematic grammar of space and suffers the consequences of this transgression. This is one of the ways in which Charef links the rebellious maid narrative, as did Klapisch, to another narrative of exploitation and exclusion – that of migrant women workers under repressive immigration laws in contemporary France.



Corridors in the form of supermarket aisles in *Marie-Line* thus present both protection and leisure on the one hand, and risk on the other. They permit servant figures' sheltering postures in their grid-like arrangement, in a distribution of space that simultaneously obstructs the maid's visibility in certain instances, and that brings her into stark visibility in others.

The space that will lead to the women's solidarity and challenging of the state of servitude is not, however, to be found in the hypermarket's surface itself, where the cleaners perform their labour, but rather the interstitial space where they are systematically represented

before and at the end of their shift. This is a transitional space that they cram into between exiting the van and being spat forth into the hypermarket, and vice-versa in the early hours following their shift. Along with the van that will be treated in the following section, the change-room is a transitional space of diverted gazes, resignation and silent suffering. This cramped space acts as a replacement for any greater depiction of the characters' lives beyond work, lives that have been for the most part subsumed by their near absolute condition of servitude.

The change-room is a tight, narrow, and claustrophobic space that is presented from a high angle, in such a way as to permit a visual understanding of its cramped nature, presenting its occupants as boxed-in figurines, generic serving subjects who exist to facilitate the lives of their masters. The change-room shelters the women's before and after-work rituals – changing, applying make-up, and praying. This space is not as such one of labour, and yet it characteristically represents the characters' servitude, in the small rituals and gestures that comprise the servants' existence, and for whom the lack of personal space, bar their individual lockers, is patent.



In Charef's spatial staging of the rebellious maid narrative, the change-room acts as a safe haven on several occasions. It is where Marie-Line reluctantly agrees to let Malika's husband and children take refuge when the police are conducting raids on their apartment

building in search of *sans papiers*. After an initial refusal of asylum in which Marie-Line upholds the boundaries of dutiful servitude from her relative position of authority,<sup>160</sup> she cedes, empathising with those shivering in the doorway. Marie-Line leaves the door ajar, rather than openly offering hospitality, so that Lagos' husband and children's entry into the sheltered space of the hypermarket change-room remains a reluctant concession of territory by Marie-Line, for whom the spatio-social boundaries that oppress her too are not as yet fully recognised at this point in the diegesis. In allowing this refuge, she introduces a seed of disorder into the space of servitude. She symbolically introduces the reviled (in anti-immigration FN discourse) into the ordered place of purity and order as designated by the management's politics. The admission of Lagos' husband and children into the workplace that night (and Marie-Line and Meriem's subsequent sheltering of them in their homes and cellar) signals a symbolic claiming of space by the maid figure against the masters in Charef's film. It constitutes the *mise en scène* of the maid figure's transgression of the spatio-social restrictions of servitude, where some bodies are determined to be out of place, constructed as a foreign and undesirable presence that poses a threat to the social order.

The change-room, in its nature as a transition point between the private and the public within the spatial grammar of the shopping centre, is an important place with regards to the politics of access to space. After passing the threshold of the service door, and gaining access to the liminal change-room, Lagos' children are permitted to transition into the wider space of the shopping centre. The children are framed as inscribing this space as a location of leisure, freely riding merchandise tricycles up and down the aisles as their mother works.

The change-room as refuge, however, like the public space of the shop floor, is threatened by the control of the State's immigration police, who are aligned with Europa Nettoyage in their oppression of the film's servant characters, as in the scene described above. One night, as the workers are about to cross the threshold out of the change-room at the beginning of their shift, Marie-Line notices that the lights switchboard situated in the change-room appear to show that there are people out in the floor space of the hypermarket, and guesses that yet another raid is being held by the immigration police.

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<sup>160</sup> She responds to Lagos' request for shelter for her husband and children with '*Pas question. Tu viens bosser et ta tribu reste dehors.*'

The space that was, up until now, safe, is under siege and Marie-Line must find a way to hide her clandestine counterparts. Where she hides them is not rendered to the viewer, though one assumes that it is out in the private (servant) space of the hypermarket where the change room and storeroom are located. The illegitimate characters are rendered invisible both from the authorities and from our viewpoint in a way that narratively aligns the audience's identification with the masters' position. Once they are hidden, Marie-Line and the two other official employees (Bergère and Meriem) walk out to face inspection.

It seems as though they will all be safe for now, as the immigration police walk towards the hidden section of the hypermarket to find, ostensibly, no trace of the illegitimate servant characters. But the diegetic sound of Algerian plaintive music suddenly resounds throughout the hypermarket, interrupting the playing-out of Marie-Line's staged concealment. The declared workers and the inspectors make their way to the audio-visual section of the store to find Marnia slumped next to a CD player in tears. Here, Charef stages this act of rebellion as a performance by the maid figure; a second and eminently more public attempt at rebellion against servitude after her failed hanging attempt performed in solitude. It is in fact a staged ceremony, replete with a diegetic soundtrack, an emergence from her concealed position in the shadows, and a summoning of the masters to a location of her choosing, in which she offers up a spectacle of suffering. Marnia surrenders to the State in a final act of self-determined despair, not coping with the harshness of life in exile on the margins and the servitude that has become her all-encompassing condition. Marnia's self-sabotaging act is a complex act of rebellion that has space and place at its heart. In crying '*Je veux rentrer chez moi*', she is lamenting her placelessness within France, while equally expressing pain at the fact that she will no doubt face renewed persecution back in Algeria, a country in which she is out of place.<sup>161</sup> And yet by setting this spectacle in full view of her colleagues, her masters, and the police in the centre of the hypermarket floor, she is claiming space that she is excluded from through her clandestine servitude. She is mandating an end to servitude and the invisibility it bestows on its subject – demanding to be seen and heard, a political act of rebellion for which she will pay dearly. In this scene, Charef renders in a clear manner the relation of space and place to the characters' servitude, and how the maid in turn transgresses her prescribed occupation of space in rebellion.

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<sup>161</sup> Marnia describes herself as a '*réfugiée religieuse*' to Marie-Line.

As the losses of women to outside forces accumulate, with Marie-Line powerless to intervene, the cleaning team gets bolder. Marie-Line's relative authority that was previously harnessed in order to dominate her co-workers now finds itself allied with those women against the real masters. Her spatio-social control over the other women is equally conducted through the trajectories that she embarks on with them, and this ritual mobility that is part of their servitude will be subject to deviation in the process of rebellion.

### **Mobility and transgressive trajectories**

Two types of trajectories contribute to spatially framing and narrativising servitude and rebellion in *Marie-Line*: one routine-based in servitude, and the other a rebellious form of spatial control. The van that Marie-Line uses to transport her co-workers to and from work becomes a recognisable place that houses certain types of social relations between a group of women; its nature will vary according to the particular route it takes and the time it does so.

The characters' labour is structured by a series of displacements in the form of repetitive journeys in the van departing in the evening from the *cité* that houses Marie-Line, Meriem and Bergère, with pit stops along the *périphérique* to pick up the other women on the way to the hypermarket. The cinematic repetition of this same rigid trajectory and its stable destination occurs in reverse in the early hours, mirroring, in a sense, the repetitive and menial nature of the characters' service labour. As Marie-Line chauffeurs the five women home in the early hours in the van, no words are exchanged; some doze off while others avert their gaze. The active subject of the gaze, in these scenes, is Marie-Line. In its repetitious *mise en scène* that follows a distinct formula, this vehicle incarnates a kind of place for this group of conceivably placeless women. Each time the team loses a member to the immigration police, their absence is cinematically insisted on, with the camera trained on their vacant seat that has arisen from the masters' rule over who has access to social space and place.



The second type of mobility consists in a reaction to the women's ritual trajectory of servitude and propels a deviation from the scripted cité-hypermarket-cité route in favour of unexpected destinations that have cultural associations with leisure, but that are equally border-zones, spaces that cinematically narrativise the maid's tenuous spatial control and their attempts to intervene and invest place.

One night, with Marie-Line as usual at the wheel, the van takes a different route, deviating to the unexpected location of the seaside. She cites Léonard's absence that night, and management's general inability to distinguish between '*le propre et le sale*', to Meriem as justification for the change of direction the van takes. The viewpoint in this shot is positioned from behind the front seat, looking over Marie-Line's shoulder into the dots of colour reflecting off the windscreen in the dark, before panning over to Meriem, whose gaze directs the viewpoint backwards to Marnia, Bergère, Lagos and the new recruit Maïna (Antonia Malinova), in a hierarchical grammar of representation. The women's exchanged glances in this instance connote gleeful complicity in this act of rebellion accomplished in steering the liminal van away from professional duties. This habitual zone of transit usually associated with dreariness and alienation is now reframed, in Charef's *mise en scène*, as the facilitator for the expression of solidarity between the protagonists. It comes to shelter occasions for pleasure in the transgression of servitude's control over the maid's occupation of space and her

movements, and it takes them away from the space of servitude to a location associated with leisure.

In *Marie-Line*, the seaside is a sought after location, providing an opposing spatial setting to the suburban concrete environment of the protagonists' work and living spaces. Charef presents us with two such occasions during the film. We will see that both of these voyages provide catharsis in, albeit, unexpected ways. Northern France's windswept grey-blue coastline constitutes a catalyst for the maid's rebellion in this film, which is typified by the refusal of the prescribed spatial parameters of servitude. The maid figure's temporary externalisation from her habitual location (the hypermarket and the cité on the periphery of Paris) to another boundary space of a natural kind is represented as affording her the perspective and means through which to overthrow her servitude, to rebel. However, it is also this narrative element of the act of spatial evasion and relocation in itself that constitutes an important aspect in the representation of the maid's rebellion, something that was also seen in previously discussed films.

Webb (2003, p. 78) has discussed the liminality of the beach, a space situated between opposing social and cultural categories, in a way that might enlighten an understanding of the serving figure's tenuous and in-between social and spatial posture, between space and place:

The beach is neither land nor sea, but has some characteristics of both. It therefore carries the meanings of both and is thus almost 'overloaded' with potential meanings. It is, as structural anthropologists call it, an 'anomalous category,' in the middle of basic oppositions of the culture from which we construct our meanings – such as 'them' and 'us,' 'good' and 'bad,' the land and the sea.

Importantly, the beach in Charef's film is constructed in an altogether divergent light to its association with leisure and summertime, with the women's off-season occupation of the beach replicating the particular timetabling of their occupation of the hypermarket. The beach in *Marie-Line* is a foreboding space, and yet it does allow for the necessary expression of solidarity in servitude, a collective posture that will be instrumental in these characters' rebellion.

As the women arrive at the beach at the liminal timeframe of dawn, a brief instance of collective glee at their present geographical location rapidly fades to contemplative meditation. This collective emotion is then disrupted when the heavily pregnant Maina runs manically towards the water laughing, and then crying hysterically as she clutches her abdomen. This is

an episode of psychosis brought on by contact with the liminal space of the shore and the sea beyond, a border zone that triggers the memory of the suffering induced by her migration to France.



In the following scene in a café, Maïna tells the tragic-comic story, in broken French, of her husband remaining stuck on the other side of the border between France and Italy, '*le grillage très haut. Et mon mari, très gros*', to which her counterparts, after a moment's pause, respond with laughter, choosing to focus on the surface slapstick value of what Maïna said, rather than on the deeper signification of the separation from her husband at the border. The very real injustices experienced by this group of women, for whom displacement and illegitimate occupation of social space are for the most part a unifying characteristic, are thus momentarily purged in a collective recognition of the absurdity of the geopolitical barriers that govern their existences. There is, in the narration of Maïna's hapless situation, a moment of collective rebelliousness that is the culmination of their trajectory to the sea for a moment's respite.

In that particular trajectory, the women do not dwell for long at their destination: the seaside is fleetingly accessed, a solitary punctuation in the women's servile existence. And it is so again in the second occurrence where Marie-Line travels to a farm on the windswept Breton coast by train to meet a man she has come into contact with via a personals ad. Dreaming of



another less laborious existence (her relationship breaking down; conditions and morale at the hypermarché having deteriorated so much), Marie-Line undertakes the journey to this farm attractively set behind some dunes on the Atlantic coast, as a passenger this time, a far more passive mode of travelling, but also one that places her within public space and time in a rare occurrence. In the course of this trajectory, Marie-Line is framed externally from the paraphernalia of servitude; and this spatial mobility is staged within the context of potential social mobility too.

This peaceful landscape and initially charming farm turns out to be the furthest from what Marie-Line desires, and she leaves before unpacking her bags. Here, Charef cinematically constructs Marie-Line's refusal to stay in a wordless manner that is dependent on creating a sense of unease within this spatial setting. As Marie-Line walks out into the farmyard, every noise seems disquieting as the camera pans the buildings, the hills, and the ocean. This time the seaside holds no cathartic or servitude-interrupting qualities. Here, Marie-Line has no affinity with this natural setting, despite seemingly liking the man, with her subjectivity being conditioned by the outer-urban existence she has carved out for herself within the perimeter of the hypermarket and the ring road that connects her to the cité. In the latter concrete-laden, socio-economically excluded location, Marie-Line is more at home, despite the precarious reality of her servitude, a realisation that occurs to her within the context of the seaside retreat in which, for other reasons, she remains out of place. Within the constructed confines of outer Paris, Marie-Line dominates space (if only to a relative degree), creating order where there is disorder, and containing filth. When transported to the expansive and untamable rural landscape, however, she is lost, unable to appropriate space and invest place. And so she walks back along the beach, in a scene that cuts to her framed in the section between two carriages on the train, as she returns with a heavy heart to the liminal existence of her servitude.



Wendy Everett (2009, p. 170), referring to the road movie, notes the narrative importance of the sea in a way that proves useful to my analysis of the maid's relationship to space:

The sea plays a key role, with its waters signifying both the possibility and the impossibility of escape or return, and major shifts in the protagonists' lives are frequently signalled by a period at sea during which all contact with the land is severed and the enormity of the experience of exile is addressed.

While *Marie-Line*'s maid figures never sever contact with the land, in a way that is symbolic of the limitations imposed on their breadth of space by the servant condition, the narrative importance of the seaside as either destination or deviation is undeniable. The seaside and its liminal shoreline alternate between offering respite and exile, and above all, in this film, they signify the primacy of spatial boundaries in the structuring of social relations. However, the seaside as destination is ultimately supplanted by the itinerary itself, with mobility, the power to control one's agency through spatial relocation, appearing to be the most potent form of spatialised rebellion.

The maid's subversive power by way of spatial relocation also, however, lies in her capacity to refuse certain trajectories. Another transgressive trajectory – or rather a transgression against a prescribed trajectory – takes place half-way through the film, after Léonard has made a threat against Marie-Line's 'place' within the company, cornering her

against a wall under a staircase in a dark and dank section of the shopping centre.<sup>162</sup> She says nothing and walks away in clear disregard for his ultimatum regarding her sexual servitude and her participation in the Front National party. In the following scene, Marie-Line's rebellion takes the form of a refused trajectory. Marie-Line is next shown huddled in the corner of a bus stop with her coat pulled up over her ears, picking at some chips and averting her gaze from her husband Paul. A bus bedecked with French national flags pulls up by the side of the road, with Paul walking towards its doors. The bus has been commandeered by the Front National for the most anticipated event in the party's social calendar, the first of May (in which they commemorate/co-opt Joan of Arc as a nationalist symbol). Léonard, a high-ranking member, gets off the bus and greets Paul (an increasingly more fervent activist) with open arms: *'J'suis heureux que tu viennes fêter Jeanne d'Arc avec nous'*. The two men occupy the foreground on the right, with Marie-Line's figure remaining in the background, still under the shelter, taking only a couple of small and reluctant steps towards the bus. Once Paul has embarked, Léonard looks over to Marie-Line, keeping her distance several metres away, seemingly unexcited at the prospect of joining the group on their ambulant celebration. Her refusal to embark on this particular trajectory further socially marginalises her from the power structures of her community in which the FN dominates, and upon which she is reliant for her livelihood. In so doing, she aligns herself with the socially invisible, mostly migrant women, in relation to whom she long sought to assert her domination, and for whom her racism overruled an identification based on their shared servitude.

Charef's film stages all these subtle acts of spatial subversion by his servant characters in response to the prescribed limitations on their occupation of space. These incidences of micro-resistance culminate in the final scene in which the women take their rebellion through the currency of space to a higher level. In the closing scene, as Marie-Line's team is awarded Europa Nettoyage's prize for best cleaning team, she and her counterparts occupy and claim master-dominated space on a much more overt level.<sup>163</sup> As applause resounds throughout the hall at the news that Marie-Line's team-leading effort has earned her a promotion to the level of cleaning inspector (a non-servant role that will free her from menial labour), Marie-Line

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<sup>162</sup> *'Tu paies pas tes cotisations au parti. Tu m'oublies. N'oublie pas qu'il y a plein de filles chez nous qui voudraient prendre ta place.'*

<sup>163</sup> Only Meriem and Bergère, however, are in attendance, with the others remaining spatially excluded through their social illegitimacy.

nervously leaves her seat between Meriem and Bergère to ascend to the stage where the managers/masters preside. After her acceptance speech, with the spectators awaiting her annual impersonation of pop star Joe Dassin, Marie-Line decides to occupy her privileged position on the stage in an alternative manner. In investing the space of the community hall with a cultural sign that is antithetical to the FN sensibilities, in the form of the audio transmission of an Arabic song, she commits a political act that claims public space for the marginalised, for those who have been repeatedly denied space and been constructed as out of place, and who have been concealed through their servitude. In this particular investment of place by the maid figure, the FN audience must vacate the hall and have their own spatial control compromised.



Charef thus frames this final scene as a ceremony in a similar manner to the previously discussed films' *mise en scène* of the final rebellious act. The ceremony and the spectacle provide the narrative framework for the staging of the maid's conquest of space and her assertion of social place. It brings the maid into the visibility of her masters, who must recognise her claim to space or remove themselves from this space, as happens in Charef's narration.

## Conclusion

In *Marie-Line*, while the maid characters' workplace is evidently a sinister space that encompasses their tiring manual labour and in which they are subject to the harassment of their master and the authorities, it comes to represent, at the same time, a setting for solidarity. In Charef's mise en scène, the segregated space of the hypermarket is underwritten by their servitude, with a staging of space that frames the characters' existence as: confined (cramped shots of the change room and van); hidden (notably through the use of off-screen space); relegated to the margins (service entrance, night shift on the periphery); and dominated (Léonard's position up high permitting omnipotent visual control). But these avatars of the archetypal rebellious maid figure are equally portrayed as finding space for resistance and stolen moments of repose within that same structure – remapping space in a way that transgresses the bondage and boundaries of servitude in the manner typical of rebellious maid figures in cinema. In their subtle investment of the workplace with rituals that contravene the relentless edicts of their service labour, the women are represented as subversively eroding the spatio-social control wielded by those that their servitude benefits.

Charef cinematically conveys this narrative remapping of space against the strictures of servitude in the strongest way by taking his characters away from the place of the hypermarket, presenting space-types and geographical mobility that contrast in significant ways with that initial environment. The trajectories and destinations of this transgression against servitude nevertheless maintain the characteristics of liminality and placelessness that are associated with the maid figure (for example, the beach at dawn, being out of place at the farmhouse, and travelling between train carriages). Nevertheless, through this series of trajectories that deviate from the prescribed route of their servitude, *Marie-Line*'s characters are shown to further assert rebellious spatial control. These are trajectories that will empower them to claim space and place for themselves on home ground, prising spatio-social control from their masters through the expression of solidarity, something which culminates in the final scene's ceremony.

Charef, like Achache, does not narratively endow his characters with the same successful conquest of territory that was seen in some of the earlier films discussed. Indeed, it is conceivable that Marie-Line's subversive act in front of the Front National managers will lead to collective unemployment for the women. Their claiming of space and place is ultimately fleeting, and they seem destined to remain out of place. But Charef equally

narrativises the state of being out of place as one of power. In a sense, Marie-Line is represented as claiming her out of place status as one of ‘radical possibility’ in the manner intended by hooks (1990, p. 149), with the spatio-social margins being seen to act as the ‘site of resistance’ that hooks (2008) described. This rewriting of the significance of the maid figure’s prescribed space and place in *Marie-Line* is paralleled by Achache’s *Le Hérisson*, where Renée Michel’s prescribed invisibility was equally and importantly framed as a strategy of concealment that enabled the cultivation of the self and the resistance against servitude.

As do Klapisch and Mennegun, Charef employs the spatial iconography of servitude and rebellion, the maid’s space syntax, in order to cinematically narrativise another, eminently current, form of spatio-social exclusion: the fate of *sans papiers* in contemporary France. As I explained, Charef’s characters’ labour conforms in key ways to the domestic service of the archetypal maid figure in its remedying of, and association with, filth and disorder. But he also maps this enduring narrative of servitude and rebellion onto the narrative of spatio-social exclusion at the intersection of class, race and gender in contemporary France. Indeed, whereas Chabrol and Dercourt’s protagonists were exclusively defined by their class-based domestic servitude, Charef’s characters are equally rendered servile through their racial alterity in a profound manner.

In reprising the rebellious maid plot that historically presents a white French maid, and applying it to this specific contemporary context of female servitude that more accurately than most describes the current-day demographic of servitude, this film comes closer than many to bringing the invisible maid into visibility.

### ***Louise Wimmer* (Mennegun 2012) – Homelessness, servitude and the spatialised posture of resistance**

*Louise Wimmer* takes the externalisation of servitude from the bourgeois home to a heightened level in its representation of a cleaning lady who is homeless, a condition that produces other tangible marginalising social effects that contribute to her broader placelessness. The plot progresses on the basis of her battle against entrenched homelessness, in her quest for a room of her own.

The maid's servitude and rebellion in this film are more diffuse than in the previous films discussed. While Louise has a master (the hotel manager) who reprimands and surveils her, and who features in several scenes, her rebellion is not directly targeted at the domination he exerts, even though she expresses insubordination to him more than once. Her rebellion is, in a more general manner, one that is waged against 'the system', with resistance against her condition equally being directed at representatives of the state (the social workers who hold her access to an apartment in their hands), her ex-husband, and those she comes into contact with more generally. In *Louise Wimmer*, resistance is a sustained posture that accompanies homelessness and servitude, rather than a delayed consequence to a context of servitude, as it was framed in the previous films. Although homelessness lies at the centre of Mennegun's film, I will argue that traces of the archetypal representation of the maid's servitude and rebellion are nevertheless present in the portrayal of Louise Wimmer, and that the maid's space syntax, while diffused, remains in trace form. This study of *Louise Wimmer* can therefore be seen to constitute a limit case that tests the translatability of the archetypal maid figure's particulars in radically modified narrative and spatial contexts.

In constructing this narrative of servitude and rebellion around the condition of homelessness, Mennegun can be said to push the maid's placelessness to new extremes. Indeed, for the maid, the house was never a home, and homelessness appears in *Louise Wimmer* as a spatio-narrative extension of this out of place feature of the maid figure. Moreover, if the maid figure has long been seen as rebellious, with servitude essentially seen to precipitate rebellion, homelessness too, bears historical social and cultural connotations as a subversive state and condition.<sup>164</sup>

Homelessness in Mennegun's film is narrativised as a condition and a state in a similar fashion to Sophie's illiteracy in Chabrol's film. It is a condition with clear cultural associations that situates the protagonist in a position of marginality and exclusion. It accompanies the protagonist's servitude, narratively increasing the cause for rebellion by contributing to the cinematic construction of the maid figure/avatar as being out of place and relegating her to the spatio-social margins. Through the *mise en scène* of a complex system of spatial settings and postures, Louise's homelessness, her consequent attempts at domestic practice, and her efforts

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<sup>164</sup> The Code pénal of 1810 classified '*le vagabondage*' and '*la mendicité*' as an offence. This was only removed from the Code pénal in 1994. (Marliac-Negrier, 2002, p. 184)

to acquire a place of her own, clearly suggest the spatiality of the maid's servitude and rebellion.

The town plays an integral role in the staging of this narrative of servitude. Mennegun is careful to cinematically represent the medium-sized town in his film in the most generic manner possible, as a place that remains unnamed and that bears no identifying markers.<sup>165</sup> The film instead depicts this town as a canvas on which to project the ordinary injustices of social exclusion, where social figures like Louise Wimmer occupy a spectral, ghostly existence at the margins of the frame of contemporary France, capable of vanishing, as it were, without a trace.

Key social spaces within the standard French (provincial) urban landscape form the spatial grammar of setting in Mennegun's film – the fragmented pit stops that frame Louise's placeless condition, connecting her between the spaces of her homeless existence and those of her servant labour. Examples of these recurring urban spaces that structure the non-labouring hours of Louise's condition of servitude are the PMU bar,<sup>166</sup> the train station, petrol stations and their amenities, and the town hall. These spaces appear cyclically, temporally framing Louise Wimmer's six-month-long battle for place and against the grinding effects of her interim homeless situation.

Louise's servitude is firstly identified through her cleaning labour that she performs in a mid-range hotel, a location that straddles the public/private divide, and that produces narrative possibilities with regard to representing the maid – this liminal figure of indeterminate spatiality. The hotel – 'the traveller's space' (Augé 2000, p. 86) – is in many ways the archetypal non-place within Augé's theory of supermodernity, according to which a non-place is 'a space which cannot be defined as relational, or historical, or concerned with identity.' (Augé 2000, pp. 77-8) While this characterisation of the space of the hotel may apply quite happily to the hotel's ideal occupant, the travelling client, the definition of the hotel as a non-place is complicated when occupied by other social figures who do not fit into this role. For example, the hotel is conceivably a workplace for a sex worker, a place that may provide safety as well as a comfortable and safer working environment. It is evidently so for hotel cleaners, as seen in the representation of Louise Wimmer, who develops 'relational' occupation patterns, as well as investing certain spaces within the hotel (namely the hotel room) with place-making

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<sup>165</sup> *Louise Wimmer* was shot in Belfort, the director's hometown, an economically disadvantaged 'zone frontalière' in Franche-Comté, near the Swiss border.

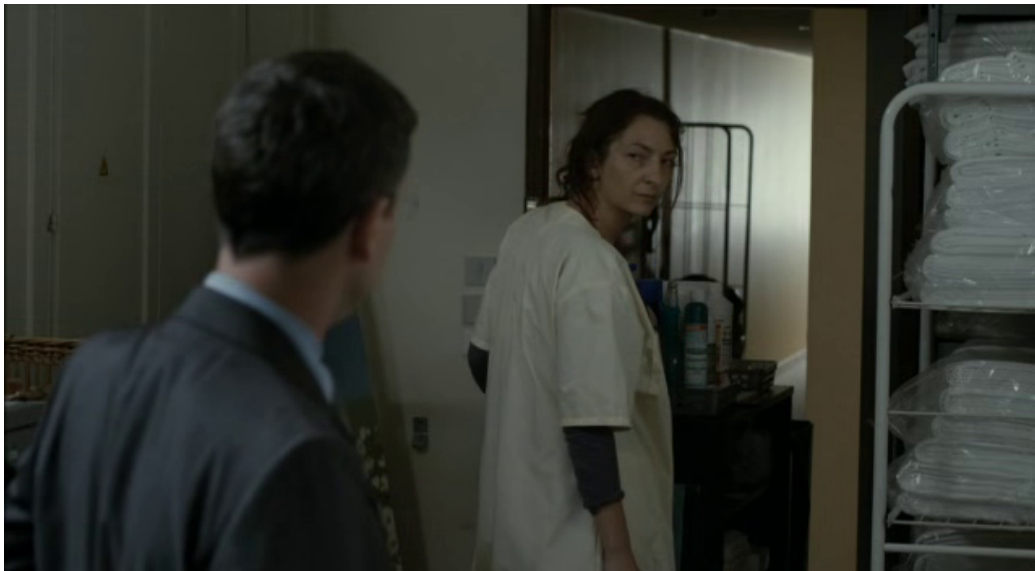
<sup>166</sup> The PMU is a betting bar.



behaviour that is *a priori* denied her through her service. As Gregory (2009, p. 15) points out, using the example of the shopping centre:

For Augé it is the very fact that the non-place is uninhabitable that gives it its defining characteristics. This position ignores the workers within the malls; the security guards, cleaners and retail staff, who have a very different experience of the mall from consumers (likewise the toll collector on a freeway and the receptionist at a motel).<sup>167</sup>

In *Louise Wimmer*, the hotel has three distinct narrative functions in the spatialised representation of servitude and rebellion: location of labour, location of labour avoidance and domestic practice, and location of sex). It is initially the location for her material servitude, her labour that consists in purifying this replacement domestic space for others. The mise en scène of this labour clearly signifies Louise's servitude, a spatio-social condition that I will ultimately demonstrate goes beyond the bounds of this service labour. In her rounds of the rooms, Louise removes stray hairs from the bathroom floor, wipes the surfaces, vacuums the floor and makes the bed, restoring this non-place to its neutral state. Within this performative servitude, Louise is represented in the typical spatial thresholds associated with servant labour (doorways, corridors and stairways), and the liminal temporal zones within the timetabling of the location of the hotel (mornings after check-out and before check-in). This liminal space and time of course constructs Louise as invisible from those she serves, in a staging of servitude that is indebted to the archetypal maid's prescribed syntax of space.



<sup>167</sup> This criticism of Augé's conception of the non-place also features in Morley (2000) and Cresswell (2004).

However, these cleaning tasks are not the focus of the scenes that take place in the hotel. Instead, as she completes these duties, Louise is primarily represented as subversively investing the space in ways that diverge from the parameters of the ideal, dutiful servant. In the bathrooms of the hotel rooms, Louise performs small rituals of self-renewal, mainly in the form of ablutions. She sprays herself with a client's perfume and dabs it in her hair: a narrative recall of her homelessness, a reminder that she may not be able to wash everyday, and that she must make the most of access to spaces of purification and privacy.

In these scenes, there is a heightened degree of contemplation, with mirrors taking on a great importance on both a practical level (giving Louise a chance to adjust her appearance so as to keep up appearances and hide her homelessness) as well as on a metaphysical level of reflection. This opportunity for reflection is made clear additionally in the sustained shot in which Louise is framed by a doorway, half-slumped against the vacuum cleaner in an image that is accompanied by the white noise of the appliance blaring. In the background, a bed beckons, counterposed by the shelves of cleaning products in the foreground that recall her labour imperatives. Mennegun lingers on this shot of Louise, who, in not moving the machine in its designed functionality to aspire the particles of dirt, and occupying servant space with lazy behaviour, commits a transgression against the disciplinary practices of her labour.



Employing this space for herself rather than solely cleaning up after others is an act of resistance that can be read in light of the archetypal maid's disruption of the occupation of space prescribed by her masters.<sup>168</sup> It is a practice of domesticity and the avoidance of labour, a subjective inscription of space rather than a dutiful enabling of the domestic life of others that hotels seek to replicate. A similar qualification of space exists within Louise's domestic labour in a bourgeois dwelling in a nice, tree-lined suburb, where scenes of Louise mopping stairs are counterposed with those of her showering and applying make-up in the mistress's bathroom.

The hotel moreover functions as the location for small instances of solidarity with another servant figure, Séverine (Marie Kremer), a younger woman who reminds Louise of her estranged daughter Jessica (Maud Wyler). Together, Louise and Séverine smoke a cigarette at the service entrance at the back of the building, framed by a double threshold formed by the service door and the open gate of the fence surrounding the hotel. This is a scene of intimacy and repose, out of view of the disapproving eyes of the manager, where few words are said and the exchange operates on the basis of glances; it is an occupation of space that contravenes the menial labour of the maid.



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<sup>168</sup> Jacquot's film *La fille seule* (1995), starring Virginie Ledoyen as a hotel maid (in an opposing role from that which she played in Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* that same year) offers up a similar subversive occupation of the hotel room, where the maid, straying from her room service duties, uses the space to make telephone calls.

The third narrative function of the space of the hotel in the representation of servitude and rebellion consists in the sex scenes that take place in (presumably a different) hotel with a nameless and mostly faceless man. The hotel room as a non-place provides the indeterminacy required for Louise's refusal to submit and engage. In this context and space, she is not out of place; she is an occupant/customer like any other, and her presence is not one of servility. These scenes constitute a purely corporeal expression of rebellion, where sex is the expression of a refusal of complete social domination, a front and centre posturing of the body that eschews its prescribed subservient threshold positioning and the arduous posture of cleaning labour. Sex here is a proclamation of the right to pleasure denied to those who exist outside of conventional social and economic frameworks. It is a transgressive act<sup>169</sup> performed exterior to any normative affective relationship; it is a basic corporeal need akin to shelter, food and warmth, currencies that Louise's placeless servitude renders difficult. Louise's condition, which she is at pains to conceal, means that she erects emotional barriers between herself and others, living out this condition in isolation. It also means that this is sex without intimacy, and it is represented as such by the paucity of information that is cinematically conveyed about her lover, whose face the camera avoids, whose body is projected in shadows, whose name is never uttered, and whose attempts at conversation are stalled by Louise's refusal to submit to the creation of affective bonds. The hotel room's non-place status is essential in staging this affective absence. This sterile location, devoid of history, and which precludes its occupants' investment of the space with sentiment and habit, actively structures the playing out of relations between Louise and her lover.

Mennegun thus exploits the location of the hotel in order to construct the narrative of his protagonist's particular condition of servitude and the resistance she exerts, which is in accordance with the maid figure's space syntax in its prescriptions and proscriptions. He maps onto this space the various facets of Louise's context of servant labour and homelessness.

Within the spaces of the PMU bar, a cafeteria, and the amenities of various petrol stations – publically connoted social spaces that Louise's homelessness draws her to – she replicates the purification rituals and the acts of domesticity with which she invested the space of the hotel and that of the house she cleaned. Louise is represented as qualifying these places

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<sup>169</sup> Many viewers have focused on the 'transgressive' *mise en scène* of Corinne Masiero's body (Louise), with predictable shock and awe expressed at the fact that Mennegun dared to film a fifty year old woman's body replete with underarm hair and wrinkles, and a close shot of her face and body during the representation of orgasm.

with sustaining activities that are aimed, on the one hand, at hiding her homelessness, but in them she equally gains a sense of place, however tenuous it may be.

At the PMU bar, Louise achieves a limited sense of place, as the owner Nicole (Anne Benoît) allows her to have her mail sent there. This offers her a proxy home that connects her to her creditors, on the one hand and to the social workers who hold her future space and place in their hands. It also complicates the conception of Louise as homeless, as *sans domicile fixe*; it affords her a semblance of a fixed address, allowing her to symbolically anchor herself to a pin-pointed geographical place. This establishes the protagonist as '*fixe sans domicile*', as in Fleuret and Zeneidi-Henry's (2007) critical study, which complicates the association of conceptions of homelessness and mobility, where the wandering ('*errance*') that is historically associated with the homeless gives way to a cultivation of place, in spite of the absence of a fixed abode. The PMU's hospitality is, however, conditional. Louise's long '*ardoise*' and her disruptive behaviour at a party one night wear Nicole's patience thin and she threatens to refuse Louise access to her bar in a way that parallels the tenuous allocation of space and place to the servant woman character.

But Louise also occupies the toilets of the PMU, private quarters that remain inherently public through their location within the whole. The PMU's cramped washroom sink serves as the location for a purification scene, where Louise lingers, observing herself in the mirror's reflection as she splashes and towels herself. At the same time, these moments of intimacy are made difficult by the ultimately public nature of the space. Louise is interrupted in her ablutions and changing by clients and the bar-owner pulling at the handle and knocking on the door, both wanting to enter, and questioning Louise's activities in there. '*Faudra que tu m'expliques ce que tu trafiques là-dedans, un de ces quatre, hein*', pesters Nicole, with the verb '*trafiquer*' hinting to a suspect use of space by the maid figure. Keeping clean requires momentous efforts for the homeless servant figure in *Louise Wimmer* who, in continuation from the 19<sup>th</sup> century *bonne à tout faire*, remains out of place, with any subjective occupation of space remaining prone to invasion by others.



Louise's ablutions in these public/private washrooms are constructed as physically arduous too. The architecture of these spaces is staged in Mennegun's film as participating in the representation of the difficult occupation of space by the servant figure. A frosted glass pane acts as the door to the toilet in the PMU – a semi-opaque barrier that compromises the space's privacy and connects it to public space. The grimy truck-stop bathroom and its public showers and sinks are designed with more consideration for cost-effectiveness than for ease of use.<sup>170</sup> Taps and driers have to be repeatedly pressed in order to keep the water and air flowing, they are placed at an awkward height and angle, suitable for washing and drying hands, but difficult for teeth-brushing and hair-drying. Louise's body must contort to accomplish these cleansing rituals, in a way that evokes the difficult corporeality of the maid figure, bending and twisting through her purifying labour, out of place through function.

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<sup>170</sup> The design of such spaces is governed by ease of maintenance and cost effectiveness rather for the accommodation of hospitable functionality and aesthetics. It is an example of how architecture can be hostile and exclusionary of undesirable social subjects, particularly towards the homeless, in a manner of keeping them out of place.

A French art collective called Survival Group staged an exhibition of photos at Ars Longa gallery in Paris in 2009, photos that documented public architectural infractions against the occupation of space by homeless people. These physical impediments that are often perversely decorative involve spikes, glass shards, metal grills, rock 'gardens', overlapping bricks, sectioned benches, etc – anything to prevent an SDF from taking up place. (See Elfort & Schaller 2009)

One cannot help but think of the functionalist architecture of the maid's place within the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois dwelling, in its segregation and relegation of the maid to the vertical extremity of the building and to the dark and dank interstices.



Mennegun equally stages these ablution scenes in order to narrativise the importance of Louise maintaining her physical appearance in order to avoid further social exclusion. Through the repetitious *mise en scène* of these cleansing rituals, Mennegun insists on Louise's association with the purification process. Its repeated association with her homelessness and her servitude is designed to represent narrative resistance against her condition, which is characterised by the prospect of filth. By constantly cleaning herself and keeping filth at bay, Louise is fighting a battle against indigence and the symbolic and material filth imputed to the

SDF. As Varda recounted in an interview about the making of *Sans toit ni loi*,<sup>171</sup> she was at pains to convey the filth and stench of Mona through cinematography, notably through the scene in which the protagonist's grimy fingers excavate tuna from a tin. Making the association of filth with the homeless and the placeless is important, Varda insists, as it is this stench of the unwashed body that constitutes one of the more marginalising effects of this condition, in which odour and filth prevent contact with others, spatially and socially distancing the subject from others. It is perhaps in light of this important cinematic moment in Varda's *Sans toit ni loi*, that Mennegun's insistence on the cleansing of the self by Louise ought to be read – as an integrational act of resistance, a rebellion against spatio-social exclusion, and a prerequisite for obtaining spatio-social *place*. In this purity/filth binary that characterises the homeless condition in Mennegun's *mise en scène*, attention is equally drawn to the condition of servitude and its intrinsic inscription within this same binary.

The only fixed private locale that 'belongs' to Louise is her storage container, which houses the vestiges of her past married life: some pieces of furniture, the silverware, some clothes, and bric-à-brac that her condition forces her to gradually pawn for cash. The storage container is in itself an interesting space type, one that houses the accoutrements of domesticity without, however, permitting a domestic occupation by its lessee. Louise's ongoing access to this space and her connection to the memory of place is contingent on the monthly fees that she must come up with to pay to the storage facility manager. As she struggles to obtain enough shifts at the hotel to pay for food, petrol, rolling tobacco, and her rapidly growing debts, her access to this one remaining fixed space becomes fraught. She must access this space in an increasingly surreptitious manner, concealing her presence from the manager, who seeks payment. The third time that Louise travels to her storage lock-up, she finds that her access has been barred, her space forcibly vacated, with her furniture carelessly stacked under a plastic sheet outside, ruined by the wet weather. From this point, Louise's *déracinement* is complete, her placelessness cemented, and her future appears even more bleak. In this escalating staging of Louise's access to and exclusion from the storage lock-up that is the repository for the objects of potential domesticity, Mennegun narrativises the entrenchment of the protagonist's condition of homelessness as it relates to the space syntax of servitude. After all, the archetype

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<sup>171</sup> Interview included in the 'boni' (Varda-speak for bonuses/special features) of the DVD of *Sans toit ni loi*.



of the maid figure's servitude is partly premised on exclusion from domestic space and the difficult practice of domesticity.

Louise retains, however, one 'place' of her own, a beat-up Volvo station wagon in which she transports herself from place to place – a mobile space that she renders fixed at night-time, in a rotating suite of streetscapes and car parks. My analysis of the space of the car will draw out the ways in which it corresponds to a translated space of the archetypal maid figure's *chambre de bonne*. The car is constructed as place and remains at risk of outside invasion and confiscation.

Early in the film, an alarm clock sounds, symbolising the start of the working day. It is spatially associated with the location of the bedroom. A front-on medium shot reveals Louise's car, which is also her cramped and marginally located bedroom, parked-in on either side by other vehicles so that its doors have no space to open up, in a manner that stages the spatio-social constriction of Louise's movements. The diegetic sound of cars zooming past in the background reveals the location to be the car park of a truck stop on the side of a highway on the periphery of the town. Everything in this shot conspires to accentuate the marginalising spatio-social positioning of Louise's existence.



Louise nevertheless establishes place-making strategies of homeliness in her mobile place that she parks in car parks, this type of non-place that her homelessness confines her to.

The car being laterally parked in, she creates passage through this space by opening the boot and propping it up with a wooden pole, a makeshift doorway for access that endows this space with a semblance of domestic architectural functionality. The superfluous backseats have been removed in order to make space for a thin mattress, and pieces of fabric have been installed on the side windows in order to offer a modicum of privacy. Mennegun thus narrativises Louise's placelessness as one that she actively resists via place-making strategies. His detailed staging of these spatial negotiations in inhospitable territory is integral to the *mise en scène* of the protagonist's servitude, homelessness and resistance.

The car's relegation to public space, and in particular to the non-places of car parks, presents significant barriers to domesticity substitution. Sleep is made difficult by the ambient car noise invading the space of her shelter. When parked near the train station, a space that epitomises transit and modernity, but that is also associated with the homeless and the placeless as Zeneidi-Henry (2002, pp. 237-245) has commented on, the SNCF jingle on loop between departure announcements rings into Louise's space of the car. Headlights shine into the car windows, an ingress that the thin pieces of fabric cannot fully shield against, a physical sensation that is rendered by the camera's positioning close to Louise's body. These spatialised vicissitudes contribute to the representation of Louise as sleeping restlessly at night, in a liminal state between consciousness and slumber.

These public, peripheral spaces in which the car positions her assume threatening agendas at specific times of the day. Car parks, as spaces of transience commonly conceived of as lacking in meaningful social relations, present moments of ambiguity and threat where the protagonist is out of place. One night, a roaming sex worker briefly positions herself near Louise's car, mistaking Louise for a potential (male) client in a manner that highlights the nature that this space takes on at anti-social times. This scene in the car park foregrounds the timetabling of space that is particular to female servitude. As explained in *Marie-Line*, for example, the maid avatars occupied social space at anti-social times, at periods when its legitimate occupants have vacated it (for example the hypermarket at night and the beach at dawn in winter). In *Louise Wimmer*, the car park on the *aire d'autoroute* is, during the daytime, associated with travellers and commuters – people with jobs and homes – and at night-time gives way to long-distance truck drivers, sex workers, loitering youth and shady deals. Louise is, through her nocturnal occupation of this space, socially aligned with marginal sections of the

population whose functionalisation of space is commonly considered to transgress social and cultural norms, in a spatio-narrative elicitation of her otherness.

This one remaining place accorded to Louise is at risk of being seized by a bailiff, but the car is equally a compromised place through its running and motor problems. She must steal to keep it running, as staged in a scene in which she siphons off petrol from the tank of a truck at night, gagging on the toxic liquid as she aspires through a tube, rendering to audiences the arduousness and abjection of her condition. Scenes multiply of Louise trying to start the car, with the time spent engaging the clutch gradually increasing as the narrative progresses, threatening to disrupt the protagonist's mobility, which is required for maintaining her precarious employment. Having no money to pay a mechanic, Louise is reliant on the kindness of others, in this case Didier (Jérôme Kircher), a patron of the PMU, organising repairs through a friend. This is an event that requires Louise to loosen the barriers she has erected between herself and those around her. The repairing of her car is integral to the protagonist escaping her condition. Renewed spatial mobility, in Mennegun's narrativisation, will precipitate social mobility.

The maid figure avatar in *Louise Wimmer* must maintain her mobility in the form of her car to survive, in order to stave off a worsening of her condition of homelessness. This mobility is equally essential to her continued employment which, while servile, will eventually offer her the possibility of attaining spatial and social place.

Louise's renewed mobility sees her head straight for the hills that overlook the town, spatially dominating the urban landscape from above as she dances jerkily to the soundtrack of her servitude, *Sinnerman* by Nina Simone, which has been stuck in her car stereo since the start of the film. Louise Wimmer is, here, allowed to physically express her exasperation and simultaneously joy – the subversive expression of a refusal to be completely subjugated to her condition. This scene is cathartic, both through the manic dancing, but also through the silencing of this soundtrack and its divorce from her condition, achieved by her ripping out the car stereo and hurling it down the hill. Mennegun's staging of Louise's displacement to a natural location situated in a dominant position over the town can be seen to replicate the transgressive trajectories seen in *Marie-Line*, where deviation from the predictable routes of servitude provided the psychological and geographical perspective with which to sustain resistance against the oppressive condition of servitude. Here, as in other cinematic narratives

of servitude and rebellion, Mennegun stages his heroine's resistance against her condition through the seizing of spatial control, and this is particularly evident in this hilltop domination of the town in which she is constructed as placeless.

The dance that Louise performs up there, in its anarchic and jerky movements, corporeally expresses the idea of a rebellion against the closeting and constricting effect her condition exerts on her body within space. This scene is a culmination of Louise Wimmer's frustrations from the ordinary injustices that she has been exposed to on a personal and institutional level; it is a massive letting off of steam, a scream that nobody will hear, but one from which she will gain resolve in staving off moral fatigue and complete destitution until she is accorded a room of her own, an event that will soon follow.



Louise's accession to her own place comes in the midst of her routine (PMU bar, after sex, after dance, after pawning her watch etc) in the form of another letter sent to her proxy forwarding address at the PMU. The final scene is a joyful one, and while her victory may seem a modest one, Mennegun stages a rare happy ending for a protagonist in a position of servitude.<sup>172</sup> Louise is being driven by Didier through the town to the flat on the fifteenth floor of a tower building that she has been allocated. Here, she is in a passenger posture in which she can let herself be carried, with the weight of her servile condition finally alleviated. As the car

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<sup>172</sup> Chapter 6 will turn to this question in more depth in regard to the total corpus.

rolls on, having been restored to its function of vehicle rather than home-substitute, they are laughing and singing along to a song that is not the soundtrack to her servitude (*Sinnerman*). From the car window, the shots of the exterior are low-angled, presenting the cité towers in a monumental way, with the tree-lined avenue providing contrasting dappled green flourishes to the concrete towers that are reflected on the windscreen of the car in motion. Mennegun films the towers in a flattering light; there is none of the dreary sense usually attributed to collective social housing on the periphery. The final frame shows Louise with her head out the window smiling looking upwards as they approach her new home, with the reflection of the buildings on the windscreen aligning built space of a domestic kind with her face in the space of the frame. However, this accession to a room of her own does not occur on screen; it is merely conjured as the destination of her final car trip across town. Mennegun chooses not to stage Louise Wimmer's domestic victory in the final cut of the film, thereby maintaining the elusiveness in the representation of access to space and place-making in servitude.<sup>173</sup>



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<sup>173</sup> Interestingly, on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January 2013, the day after the announcement of *Louise Wimmer's* nomination for best film and best actress at the Césars, and two years after the making of this low-budget film considered to be an outsider in a mainstream race, Cyril Mennegun shared two film stills on social media (Facebook site for 'Louise Wimmer de Cyril Mennegun' <https://www.facebook.com/LWLeFilm>). These stills frame Louise's concluding accession to domestic space of her own and did not make the final cut. The first film still frames Louise in a moment of intimacy and repose, reclined on a single bed in her new apartment, holding a key on a string above her with the caption '*Enfin chez elle...*'. The second features Louise shot in rear view on her fifteenth floor balcony, surveying the cité in the foreground, and the town in the distance, separated by parklands, with finally in the horizon, the hills on which she earlier danced.

Mennegun refuses to fetishise homelessness on screen. In *Louise Wimmer*, homelessness has very little to do with notions of vagabondage, flâneurism, and other expressions of liberty and spatio-social control. There has been a certain romanticisation of the vagrant in cinema, typically associated with masculinity and youth, but equally explored in even rarer examples of female homelessness such as Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (1985), a film that *Louise Wimmer*, however, shares a significant amount of parallels with.<sup>174</sup> Her homelessness, which forces her constant shuffling from (non-)place to (non-)place, is not the subject of unexpected encounters, observation, and transformation. Furthermore, Louise is homeless despite being a worker, this being an altogether atypical occurrence in French cinema, placing homelessness as narratively compatible with the working poor, with the film as such reframing homelessness away from its Vardian positive marginality, into a social emergency.<sup>175</sup> Mennegun represents Louise Wimmer's homelessness as involuntary and utterly unromantic; it is not in any way a revendication in a political or aesthetic sense. It is, however, a patent exclusion from space and place that prompts in the heroine a sustained resistance that is, itself, the subject of a political aesthetic in Mennegun's *mise en scène*.

## Conclusion

The rebellious maid's space syntax is translated in *Louise Wimmer* through the exploration of homelessness in and as servitude, with Louise's service labour and her urban placeless wandering precipitating the occupation of marginal spatial settings. The spatial grammar of these settings, in the presence of the narrative insistence on the purity and filth binary associated with servitude, act to construct the protagonist within the representational parameters of the archetypal maid figure. The spatial and social exclusion associated with the maid figure is firmly ingrained in this film. The protagonist is constructed as spatially

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<sup>174</sup> Hardwick (2007, pp. 219-20) and Beugnet (2000, p. 50), whom he references, have foregrounded the influential nature of Varda's film not only on cinematic representations of homelessness and women, but on cinematic production of the 1990s in general, and arguably beyond.

Other examples of women and homelessness in French cinema include the much-discussed *La Vie rêvée des anges* (Zonca 1998); *No et moi* (Breitman 2010); and in a more minor manner in *Versailles* (Schoeller 2008). Beyond narrative cinema, Varda has explored homelessness (though not exclusively feminine homelessness) through her documentary *Les Glâneurs et la glâneuse* (2000) as well as its follow up, *Deux ans après* (2003).

<sup>175</sup> *Sans toit ni loi* does indeed account for the pains and risks of Mona's vagabondage, including sexual assault, the cold, and hunger – factors that are ultimately the cause of her death from the elements in a ditch. The film however also gives significant weight to exploring Mona's destiny as one that was chosen, as a political stance and proclamation of self-determination.

indeterminate, as fringe dwelling, and as being out of place. Louise's rebellion is enacted through a determined cultivation of personal space, however tenuous this space is, while she battles to find a room of one's own.

My analysis of *Louise Wimmer*, a film that albeit displaces its protagonist from any recognisable setting associated with the archetypal maid figure, has attempted to show this archetype's trace presence in the way that space and place are cinematically constructed and narrativised by Mennegun. This film stages an eminently contemporary context of servitude, where service labour is fragmented and performed across multiple locations; where the servant is exteriorised from the domestic sphere; and where the typically direct and personal master/servant relationship is abstracted. Like two of the other films discussed in this chapter, *Ma part du gâteau* and *Marie-Line*, Mennegun's *Louise Wimmer*, alongside the narrative of servitude, sustains a concomitant narrative that exists in a parallel construction of space, that of homelessness.

### **Case study conclusions**

As the first chapters of this thesis explained, domestic space of a certain historically located kind was the foundational location for the construction of the rebellious maid figure. The case studies of chapter 4 studied the cinematic translation of the maid figure's space syntax in light of that particular model in the representation of servitude and rebellion. The discussion of the films analysed in this chapter sought to show the representational endurance of that space syntax in cinematic translation onto updated settings – spatial and social contexts – of servitude and rebellion. In these four films, *Le Hérisson*, *Ma part du gâteau*, *Marie-Line* and *Louise Wimmer*, the environment of domestic space as it was earlier envisaged was no longer the sole constitutive ecology of the maid figure in representation. Though, as I demonstrated, the space syntax of the archetypal rebellious maid figure was maintained in the representation of constructed space according to the central tenets of the maid in space: spatio-social exclusion through segregation; the idea of served and servant space; prescriptive invisibility and fringe-dwelling; and the re-mapping of prescribed occupation and functionality of space by the maid figure in the rebellious process.

The maid figures/avatars of *Le Hérisson*, *Ma part du gâteau*, *Marie-Line* and *Louise Wimmer* are cinematically constructed according to the archetypal maid figure's spatio-social

exclusion, liminality, and rebellion through the conquest of space. These are characteristics that were grafted onto the maid figure during the 19<sup>th</sup> century within the context of the anxiety surrounding the presence of the maid in the carefully constructed bourgeois private sphere, this foreign body who threatened to corrupt and pollute, to enact social mobility, or to murder.

The first part of this chapter, with the discussion of residual domesticity in the representation of the avatar maid figures of *Le Hérisson* and *Ma part du gâteau*, showed how these two films stage servitude and rebellion within the latent spatial paradigm of bourgeois domestic space.

*Le Hérisson*, while setting its narrative within the confines of the archetypal environment of Haussmannian architecture, nevertheless presents audiences with a different servant figure, the concierge, whose functionality calls for different spaces of servitude, but who nevertheless is constructed according to the maid's space syntax. That particular case study showed the ways in which prescribed spatio-social invisibility was concomitantly reframed in terms of an active strategy of concealment by its subject in the representation of rebellion. It furthermore showed how the typical occupation of liminal space was shown to materialise exclusion in servitude as well as resistance in the form of social mobility through the ingression into master-dominated space – a type of rebellion that was envisaged as a subtle one tinged with reluctance.

*Ma part du gâteau*, in presenting a live-in maid figure in a modified domestic architectural space that is notably non-segregated, offers up new representational possibilities with regard to the maid figure. It maintained the segregation between served and servant by cinematically constructing other narrative border zones and zones of exclusion. However, significantly, Klapisch's film equally broadened the spatial scope of servitude and rebellion by narrativising geographical oppositions based on Paris versus the provinces, individualistic versus collectivistic responses to spatio-social exclusion, and the exertion of the maid's spatio-social control via the enforced relocation of the master to maid-dominated space, rather than the maid's conquest of his space.

The second part of this chapter turned to the more radical re-envisionings of servitude and rebellion where the maid has 'left home'. Divorced from domestic space proper, *Marie-Line* and *Louise Wimmer* nevertheless contain the requisite space syntax of the maid figure.



These films played, in various ways, with this absence of domestic space in their recreation of the maid's placelessness.

*Louise Wimmer*, in representing a homeless woman, paradoxically held (the desired access to) domestic space as the central spatio-narrative push in its protagonist's battle for spatial insertion into a place of her own. Mennegun's film equally extended the narrativisation of servitude to encompass homelessness as a condition and a state of spatio-social exclusion in a manner similar to servitude proper, and as one that legitimately calls for rebellion. Louise's homelessness accompanied her servitude, but equally appeared as inextricably embedded within it. Despite this radical deviation from the typical space of servitude, the maid's space syntax is translated in Mennegun's film through the mapping of servitude and homelessness, and resistance against this dual condition, onto a series of non-places that cinematically structure Louise's spatial and social exclusion.

*Marie-Line*'s servant characters occupied a space divorced from the domestic sphere, a postmodern social space associated with mass consumption that was, nevertheless, cinematically staged in an alternative timeframe that functioned to narrativise the maid figure's liminality and complex occupation of space. Charef cinematically framed the hypermarket in a manner that reproduced many of the dualisms of segregated domestic space. As with the other films that exteriorise the maid figure/avatar from domestic space, *Marie-Line* posits geographical mobility as an important element in the narrativisation of servitude and rebellion, where extended trajectories both within and without service labour come to signify the maid's placelessness and her attempt to conquer space and place.

This chapter has therefore demonstrated the representational continuity, but also the evolution in relation to the historical archetype of the maid figure and her space syntax in the representation of servitude and rebellion on screen. The following and final chapter will now move to a more global assessment of the politics and poetics of representing servitude and rebellion according to this historically located conceptual category. I will address how this bringing of the maid figure into visibility in the cinematic medium attempts to create complex female characters who undertake a rebellion that can be considered to be political, where previously conceived of illegitimate rebellion is cinematically framed as legitimate. Following these case study chapters' more purely spatial film analysis, space will remain a central frame

of reference, but will be harnessed for an extended discussion of the politics and poetics of the representation of servitude and rebellion in relation to the archetypal maid figure.

## Chapter 6: The poetics and politics of representing the rebellious maid figure and avatar in contemporary French cinema

*Ce qui est extraordinaire, c'est que ces vengeances-là n'arrivent pas plus souvent. Quand je pense qu'une cuisinière tient, chaque jour, dans ses mains, la vie de ses maîtres... une pincée d'arsenic à la place de sel... un petit filet de strychnine au lieu de vinaigre...* (Mirbeau, 2003, p. 255)

### Introduction

The maid figure/avatar in contemporary French cinema is undoubtedly inflected with her 19<sup>th</sup> century antecedent's representational criteria, and the latter's constructed rebelliousness has continuing repercussions on the contemporary cinematic representation of female servitude and its resultant rebellion, as I have shown through spatial film analysis. After the preceding case studies' consideration of the spatial system at work in the cinematic construction of the maid figure, this chapter now turns to a more global discussion of the particular modalities of the maid's represented rebellion, its historicity, and the implications of this transtextual depiction for the framing of contemporary scenarios of female servitude and rebellion in French film. This chapter will discuss the ways in which the spatial construction of the maid figure, in a more global manner, translates a political conception of rebellion in servitude.

The first section ('The maid's rebellion – between violence and refusal') will discuss how the maid's rebellion is articulated between violence, normatively conceived of as an active revolt that references historical characterisations of the maid as murderous, and refusal, a reframing of the ideal maid's constructed docility in order to represent rebellion. This opens up a discussion between the more formalist representations of servitude and rebellion by Chabrol and Dercourt (chapter 4) and the transformed settings of servitude and rebellion represented in Achache, Klapisch, Mennegun and Charef's films (in chapter 5). The second section ('Social mobility, the destruction of servitude, and punishment') will address the continued presence of

the co-existing narratives of social mobility and of the destruction of servitude in the corpus of films, and the maid's punishment for her transgressions.

### **The maid's rebellion – between violence and refusal**

*'Tu sens approcher l'instant où tu ne seras plus la bonne. Tu vas te venger. Tu t'apprêtes? Tu aiguises tes ongles? La haine te réveille?'* – Claire, in Genet, 1976, p. 26)

*'On sait bien qu'on n'a pas le droit de tout dire, qu'on ne peut pas parler de tout dans n'importe quelle circonstance, que n'importe qui, enfin, ne peut pas parler de n'importe quoi.'* (Foucault, *Ordre du Discours*, 1971, p. 11)

This section will discuss how the maid's rebellion is politically articulated within the six films that have been the subject of a more purely spatial analysis in chapters 4 and 5. This rebellion lies at the intersection of violence and refusal, two seemingly opposing strategies of rebellion that will, however, be shown to be closely linked in their spatialised cinematic mise en scène. The maid's rebellion as violence and refusal, one 'active' and the other 'passive', are closely intertwined with the reviled (*souillon*) and ideal (*perle*) maid figure of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. As I will contend, there is a crossover in these two forms of rebellion, with traces of the maid's violence lying latent in the staging of refusal in current cinematic representations of servitude and rebellion. Moreover, both modes of action contravene the maid's prescribed place.

First, however, it is necessary to turn briefly back to the constructed criminality of the maid figure during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in order to conceptualise the politics and poetics with which contemporary cinema represents rebellion in servitude. Ryckère (1908, pp. 194-231) listed a series of modes of violent rebellion by maids against their masters. These included house fires, strangulation, hostage-taking, bludgeoning, stabbing, and, in more conniving premeditated instances, poisoning: *'La servante, avide de vengeance, étrangle, assomme ou séquestre ses maîtres, les tue à coups de couteau ou les maltraite de toutes les manières imaginables.'* (Ryckère, 1908, p. 208)

While Ryckère offered some possible reasons for these crimes – for example rape, unfair dismissal, or nagging – these were never interpreted as adequately mitigating the maid’s rebellion. He, along with his contemporaries including Bouniceau-Gesmon (1885) most pointedly, judged these reactions to servitude as irrational, evil, and utterly unjustified. The overwhelming sentiment regarding Ryckère’s judgement of (female) ancillary crime is that it is, notwithstanding the often contradictory adjectives he employs to describe it,<sup>176</sup> overwhelmingly illegitimate, essentialised, historically enduring (*‘immuable et stationnaire’*), and a product of the maid’s so-called inferior intelligence (*‘l’infériorité de leur développement intellectuel et moral, ... psychologie peu compliquée, ... incorrigibilité ou incurabilité’*) (Ryckère, 1908, p. 18) Such vehemence evidently leaves little room for conceptualising the conditions of the maid’s rebellion, conditions that are of course *a condition* – that of servitude. Literary representation, particularly that of Mirbeau, showed a much keener interest in conceptualising servant rebellion within its context, even if it remained overblown and romanticised compared to the actual proportion of crime committed by maids compared with the rest of the population. *Le Journal d’une femme de chambre* is replete with such poetic descriptions of the maid’s fantasised revenge against the ordinary injustices of her condition as:

*Chaque mot vous méprise, chaque geste vous ravale plus bas qu’une bête... Et il ne faut rien dire, il faut sourire et remercier, sous peine de passer pour une ingratitude ou un mauvais cœur... Quelquefois, en coiffant mes maîtresses, j’ai eu l’envie folle de leur déchirer la nuque, de leur fouiller les seins avec mes ongles...* (Mirbeau, 2003, p. 119)

By the time the Papin sisters murdered their mistresses, there was somewhat more willingness to interrogate the condition of the crime, partly due to the existentialists’ and the surrealists’ interest in these heroines of class war.<sup>177</sup> The Papin sisters, the *fait divers* that I considered in chapter 1 as the rebirth of the rebellious maid figure in inter-war France, decades after the *crise de la domesticité*, made famous the image of the maid’s violence exacted with a carving knife and a pewter jug, further enshrining these weapons within the murderous maid’s iconology. As Molinier (2012, p. 86) writes, alluding to the condition that precedes the act by

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<sup>176</sup> Ryckère’s qualification of the maid’s criminality is often completely contradictory, he is at pains to show how little it is worth even compared to other criminal categories (it is not just that maids are mad and bad, it is that they are bad at being bad), in what appears to the modern sensibility as comically defamatory:

*La criminalité ancillaire se distingue par son caractère fruste, simpliste, brutal, sa pauvreté d’imagination, son misonéisme, ses procédés peu compliqués et toujours les mêmes, d’une naïveté et d’une monotonie désespérantes. ... sournoise, paisible, calme, hypocrite et lâche, mais cruelle et sauvage, irréfléchie, vulgaire, sans grands éclats, sans coups de tonnerre, sans beaux crimes.* (Ryckère, 1908, p. 18)

<sup>177</sup> See Ward Jouve (1993) and Kamenish (1996).

describing its labour specificity, the Papin sisters' violence is maid-specific and their murder could not have been perpetrated in the same manner by a duchess or a teacher:

*Par le choix des instruments, du mode opératoire et de ses techniques, le crime des sœurs Papin est bien un crime de bonnes. Leur mode opératoire est domestique, Dupré a raison de dire qu'elles ont "paré" leurs victimes comme pour les enfourner<sup>178</sup> et que l'arrachage des yeux (des lapins, des poulets, des poissons) est un geste banal pour une cuisinière.*

The maid's violence culminating in murder is the expected form that her rebellion takes in representation. As explained in chapter 1, her supposed propensity towards violence against her masters received much attention in 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse and literature, in fact to an unwarranted extent when compared with the actual incidence of the murder by maids of masters in court records, as Martin-Fugier (1979) has emphasised. Nevertheless, the Papin sisters' gruesome murder of their mistress and her daughter with no convincing motive demonstrated the full extent of the maid's potential for revenge, reinforcing the exaggerated notions about maid criminality that had circulated in the previous century.

This particular *fait divers* has served as the inspiration and narrative framework for cultural, including cinematic, representations of the maid's violent rebellion. And the representation of violent rebellion by the maid figure, in the case of the Papin sisters, as Beauvoir has suggested, encourages understanding of the 'atrocities' of servitude. For Beauvoir (in Le Guillant 1963b, p. 911), writing in relation to Papatakis' controversial cinematic adaptation of the Papin case (*Les Abysses* 1963), to represent the maid's violence brings into visibility the atrocity of servitude's violence: '*Seule la violence de leur crime ... nous fait mesurer l'atrocité du crime invisible.*' In this way, while the social and cultural representation of maids as violent murderesses during the 19<sup>th</sup> century served to incite wariness among the employers of servants, it can be seen, a century later, to bring to light the abomination of servitude as a social relationship.

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<sup>178</sup> A journalist from *La Sarthe*, wrote at the time of the crime, '*Qu'on nous pardonne cette comparaison, mais les jambes ressemblaient à des pains portant les traces transversales du couteau du Boulanger.*' (in Molinier, 2012, p. 86)

D. Memmi (2003, p. 219) has written that the maid's revenge in cinema<sup>179</sup> tends to be violent in the extreme:

... *quelle que soit l'arme employée, la mise à mort tend à s'opérer de manière spectaculaire, violente et radicale – et non de façon silencieuse, subreptice et progressive – alors que l'empoisonnement, par exemple, serait si facile aux domestiques!*

This is true only to a limited degree in recent French cinematic representations of the maid figure and her avatar's rebellion in contemporary contexts of servitude. *La Cérémonie* certainly does conform to this bloody stereotype of the maid figure, portraying its protagonists wielding hunting rifles in a fetishistic and performative manner. The mise en scène of the maid's violence in Chabrol's film is unrestrained. Sophie and Jeanne shoot into the bodies of each of the Lelièvres several times, except for the son Gilles, who warrants only one bullet. As the bullets rip into the masters' flesh, their bodies arch and jolt at each impact, with the camera then lingering on their inert figures in order to heighten the sensation of this violence. *La Cérémonie* fashions the narrative of the maid's rebellion as being extreme, as taking her beyond the point of no return. There can be no viable existence for Sophie and Jeanne after their nihilistic acts. The ceremonial murder of master figures in this film is indeed 'spectacular', 'violent' and 'radical' under D. Memmi's definition (2003, p. 219).

The maid's violent rebellion also finds itself transmitted in ways that diverge from the sheer physical violence found in *La Cérémonie*. In particular, the maid's physical violence finds itself sublimated into psychological form. In *La Tourneuse de pages*, for example (despite its substantial recourse to thriller generics,<sup>180</sup> which induces audience expectations of a culmination in physical violence), Mélanie's revenge against her mistress is ultimately a bloodless, psychological attack, that I have shown to be performed through the conquest of territory in line with the maid's space syntax. Despite the fact that the maid figure in this film adeptly wields a carving knife – one of the stereotypical weapons of choice of the rebellious maid figure –, this object is used in the context of food preparation and thus of her servile

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<sup>179</sup> D. Memmi's chosen filmography of 27 titles spans the 1930s until 2002 and comprises British as well as French films, representing both male and female servants, few of which can be classified – outside of those that are representations of the Papin sisters – as rebellious.

<sup>180</sup> This is done through sound in particular, with a menacing tune in a minor scale occurring at tense moments. The thriller genre is also evoked with a complex choreography of protagonists' gazes, with Mélanie's eyes in particular, with their cool stare surveying her prey, acting to infuse the narrative with a simmering threat; and of course, Dercourt's predilection for staircases and corridors in the mise en scène of the maid narrative in this film refers back to Hitchcockian thriller aesthetics.

function, rather than in the context of her revenge. And though Mélanie may enact violence in stabbing the cellist's foot with his instrument's spike, this scene – much like the kitchen knife scene, the drowning scene, and the chicken/chase scene – principally functions to increase suspense and the expectation of bloody violence on the part of the maid against her masters. In *La Tourneuse de pages*, therefore, these hints to the maid's potential for violence function to heighten the chilling effect of the bloodless and essentially psychological revenge that will, through seduction, depose the mistress from her served social position. The mistress is shown in the final scene to be collapsed on the floor, in a posture that is readily identified with the infliction of bodily violence. It remains, however, a posture that is merely psychologically conjured by the maid, and not physically inflicted by her.

Mélanie's revenge conforms more closely to the pattern that D. Memmi (2003, p. 219) described as untypical of maids as she considers it to be represented in film history: '*de façon silencieuse, subreptice et progressive.*' Indeed, chapter 4's analysis of this film highlighted the extent to which Mélanie's servitude and rebellion are cinematically constructed through the elicitation of the dutiful and effaced maid figure, carefully preparing the ground for the decade-long plan to unfold. As Ryckère (1908, p. 230) had written in reference to the incidence of maid revenge, there are '*mille façons différentes, tantôt violentes et sauvages, tantôt sournoises et dissimulées*' for the maid to take revenge against her masters.

While I will subsequently turn to a discussion of Charef's film in terms of the non-violence of the represented rebellion of the maid figure/avatar, *Marie-Line* nonetheless bears a trace of the maid's violent rebellion. Despite presenting an on the whole more subtle representation of rebellion in servitude, where no blood of masters is spilled, the spectre of the maid's violence lingers close to the surface. One night towards the end of the film's diegesis, after Bergère has been fired because Léonard's wife found out he was sleeping with her (one of many casualties amongst the servant body), Marie-Line cracks. As the boss's bell call resounds throughout the hypermarket, Marie-Line comes out from the warehouse into the hypermarket, and strides down the pasta aisle with an axe, furiously and repeatedly sobbing '*Je vais le tuer.*' And though Meriem convinces her not to kill the master, the aforementioned potential for the maid's violent revenge is sustained, within this brief scene, in Charef's representation.

In the films that were discussed in chapter 5, the fetishistic typology of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid's (constructed) violence and that was immortalised by her heiresses, the Papin sisters, is



subdued in ways that make it more compatible with contemporary representational contexts. The rebellion represented in these transposed contexts of servitude bears some level of verisimilitude – a believable (and therefore politically conceivable) form of rebellion against servitude, as opposed to the more spectacular violence that Chabrol represented. What occurs in these transformed representations of the maid figure's servitude and rebellion, is the retention of the spatial parameters of the rebellious maid in the *mise en scène* without, however, the inclusion of actualised physical violence as a necessary plot element. The maid's archetypal rebellion is thus conveyed through the organisation of on-screen (and off-screen) space, in such a way as to narratively evoke the threat posed by the maid figure as the case study chapters demonstrated, hinting at the potential for physical violence, and yet avoiding a playing out of the maid's rebellion at its murderous extreme.

Though the maid figures and avatars in the corpus of contemporary films do not necessarily enact violent rebellion, neither, however, do they resort only to the '*mini-résistances*' that Martin-Fugier (1979, p. 9; pp. 241-55) described in relation to the social and literary history of maids. The rebellious acts staged in the films discussed are more ambitious than petty theft and laziness. However non-violent the acts of rebellion narrated in the corpus of films may be (*La Cérémonie* excluded), they are acts that directly challenge the social distribution of space and, therefore, the dominance of the masters. These acts function to break down the geographical and social boundaries upon which the relation of served and servant is predicated. It is decidedly the spatialisation of these rebellious acts that renders to audiences their potency, even when they are conveyed by refusal rather than violence.

This subdued rebellion was equally elicited in Mirbeau's *Journal d'une femme de chambre*. While Mirbeau's diarised novel repeatedly poses violent ways to exact revenge on masters, in a manner that echoes the general sentiment in 19<sup>th</sup> century discourse, no such acts are perpetrated by its narrator. Instead a more pragmatic way of manipulating this relationship is voiced to Célestine by the valet, William:

*Quand je pense qu'il est des domestiques qui passent leur vie à débîner leurs maîtres, à les embêter, à les menacer... Quelles brutes!... Quand je pense qu'il en est qui voudraient les tuer... Les tuer?... Et puis après?... Est-ce qu'on tue la vache qui nous donne du lait, et le mouton de la laine? On trait la vache... on tond le mouton... adroitement... en douceur... (Mirbeau, 2003, p. 331)*

From this description of the best way to manage one's masters, we can see that the maid's rebellion need not necessarily be enacted through murder, and that more subtle techniques may yield a better result: shears – or knives – can be used to fleece the sheep, rather than to slay it. The maid's power can lie in her servitude itself, in a relationship that mirrors Hegel's master/slave dialectic, with the slave rendering the master subservient.<sup>181</sup> Though the protagonists in the films that this thesis has focused on do not wholly share Célestine's social ambition, they nevertheless replicate her subtle, behind-the-scenes acts of subversion.

This more subdued, passive form of rebellion is that of refusal. Refusal in the rebellious maid narrative, is a highly significant method, and this posture is particularly evident in the films analysed in chapter 5's case studies (*Le Hérisson*, *Ma part du gâteau*, *Marie-Line* and *Louise Wimmer*). In these films, rather than bloody confrontation with the masters, the maid figure/avatar privileges the act of refusal, a posture that variously involves evasion, work avoidance, and silence. These are all features that were found to be present to a significant degree in the case studies of chapter 4 (*La Cérémonie* and *La Tourneuse de pages*), but that are extended in the transposed contexts of servitude where rebellion is non-violent. Refusal appears as a powerful political posture in the representation of rebellion in servitude, despite its seeming attenuation from the more violent model.

Considerable research has been conducted in the field of ethnography and cultural anthropology regarding the concepts of resistance and refusal (see Ortner, 1995 and Seymour, 2006). Billow (2007, p. 419) has requalified the concept of 'refusal' in the field of psychotherapy as 'wilful nonparticipation'. Gural-Migdal (2001, p. 204), although not strictly referring to Sophie's status as domestic servant, has noted the presence of a '*pouvoir subversif*' attained through the heroines' expression of refusal in *La Cérémonie*.<sup>182</sup> These successive qualifications of the concept of refusal lend a certain level of nuance to the consideration of the maid's represented rebellion by focussing on 'passive' modes of being, according equal weight to evasion, silence, and refusal, as to more confrontational postures. Representing rebellion through refusal challenges commonly held conceptions of passivity as an agency-bereft posture. Le Guillant had referred, in his 1963 article in *Evolution psychiatrique*, to the maid's

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<sup>181</sup> The reversal of served and servant roles has been cinematically explored in Losey's *The servant* (1963) and in Gantillon's *Servante et Maîtresse* (1977). See Marklund (2001) for a discussion of the master/slave dialectic in relation to Losey's film.

<sup>182</sup> Gural-Migdal's is a comparative study of Chabrol's *La Cérémonie* (1985), Varda's *Sans toit ni loi* (1985), and Sautet's *Nelly et M. Arnaud* (1995).

submissiveness, in its passivity, as hiding a more defensive act. As Clot (2001, p. 35) writes, in reference to Le Guillant (1963a):

*Dans l'étude du métier des bonnes à tout faire, la soumission, rapportée à l'offense et à l'humiliation est regardée non pas comme l'acceptation de la situation mais comme la forme inverse d'une impuissance à agir. ... Le Guillant identifie dans la passivité d'une conduite un acte psychique défensif.*

The ideal maid has historically been conceived of as passive, as the invisible facilitator of the material and symbolic needs of her masters through the typology of the *perle*. In the rebellious process, this passivity might then be transformed into a posture that fits Billow's (2007, p. 419) 'wilful nonparticipation', the subversively powerful refusal (Gural-Migdal, 2001, p. 204) that disrupts the social mechanics that uphold the maid's servitude.

The political posture of refusal is a psychological one and a physical one that is cinematically articulated through the representation of space. Indeed, the maid figures and avatars under study in this thesis physically enact this refusal by absenting themselves, by spatially relocating away from the space of their servitude. In abandoning her post, in evading her masters' calls, the maid, who must remain unobtrusively present, commits a significant transgression.

Silence has long been recognised by linguists as a legitimate means of communication that may in fact express a certain power (Jaworski, ed. 1997). This section now turns to a discussion of how the maid's prescribed silence is subverted within the course of her rebellion, and how the films in this corpus relate this typological feature in their representations of servitude and rebellion. It will be shown that the maid's silence and its connection with a rebellion that is characterised by refusal has a markedly spatial aspect to it.

As was seen in Chapter 2, the maid's tenuous spatial situation, and her resulting oppression, are largely characterised by her prescribed invisibility, where she was evidently required to remain unseen, but equally significantly *unheard* – something that is inscribed within the dictate that the maid *know her place*.<sup>183</sup> Chapter 4 mentioned how Sophie in *La Cérémonie* was characteristically silent through her disconnect from language. This is a trait

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<sup>183</sup> One of the biggest barriers faced by young women going to work as domestic servants in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries – the formative years of maid representational typology in line with their prominent numbers amongst the working population in urban centres – would have been linguistic, for young women coming from areas where local languages had not yet been quashed by republican centralisation. Indeed, the maid population's exclusion from the French language has most certainly contributed to representations of maids as at once silent and deaf to the language spoken by the employers.

that Dercourt's film reprised with Mélanie, who would not initiate dialogue, invariably speaking only when spoken to, and in so doing, demonstrating that she knew her place.<sup>184</sup> Other maid avatars from Louise Wimmer, to *Marie-Line*'s characters, to Renée Michel in *Le Hérisson* were silenced in the context of their servitude. The fact that through their servitude, these figures are out of place, means that they have limited access to speech, and thus very little means of self-assertion within their environment.

These maid figures' and avatars' represented silence corresponds to the image of traditional servitude, where silence is prescribed – inflicted on servants through their very condition. Yet there is something more to this silence in these films' representation. There is a patent defiance expressed in these cinematic maid figures' silence and invisibility. These films reframe this prescription as a refusal by the maid figure to engage with and a rejection of the spatio-social stratification that at once excludes them and utilises them. The servile posture of silence translates, in this light, to an affirmation of dissent. It becomes both a way of withholding information from those that the maid serves, as well as constituting a type of resistance. In cinema, a medium heavily reliant on dialogue, the maid's silence becomes palpable, and the *mise en scène* of this silence, both when it is a represented servile dictate and when it is narratively harnessed as a form of refusal, involves a spatial staging that was explained in the individual case studies in chapters 4 and 5.

In *La Cérémonie* there is a complex psychoanalytical framework surrounding exclusion from the symbolic order of language, which was devised by Caroline Eliacheff in collaboration with Chabrol, and based on Ruth Rendell's novel, whose plot already featured the maid's illiteracy as narratively precipitating the murder of her employers.<sup>185</sup> The maid's silence in *La Cérémonie* then becomes more than a mere symbol of the maid's marginalisation within the bourgeois household: it becomes a trigger for her rebellion against servitude, for the violent implosion against injustices suffered in silence; a rebellion unarticulated through language and yet significantly caused by the social parameters of language.

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<sup>184</sup> Mélanie's page turning, her facilitation of another's expression rather than her own, equally points to such a self-effacement.

<sup>185</sup> In an interview with Eliacheff in the features of the DVD of *La Cérémonie*, she speaks extensively about illiteracy as an absolutely necessary '*ingrédient*' for this crime to take place and the '*sidération*' it inflicts on the character.

See Ross (1997, pp. 20-3) for a discussion of the psychoanalytic underpinnings that connect *La Cérémonie* with a lacanian interpretation of the Papin case as being underscored by exclusion from language.

Sophie shoots at the books on the shelves, objects that remain unattainable for her, a repository for a knowledge that has always been out of reach. She does not try to conquer this knowledge; instead, she aims to destroy it. She does not seek integration; she instead asserts the validity of her marginal existence. The books' illustrious residence in the library – a location much more dignified than her own *chambre de bonne* in the attic – undergoes a spatial conquest as explained in chapter 4. Sophie's assertion over the space forbidden to her through its very function and semiotic content is accomplished through the riddling with bullets of its contents and occupiers. This is a killing method where the whole body/book is rendered redundant by the perforation of its surface with deadly holes that effectively silence the masters' language. The books are rendered illegible; the Lelièvres' bodies are silenced. Sophie thereby imposes silence upon the means of communication that functioned to exclude her, in effect reversing the silencing behaviour traditionally inflicted upon the maid.

In *La Tourneuse de Pages*, the maid's access to and deployment of language is addressed in a particularly nuanced manner. Mélanie, the maid character, is invariably economical with words, speaking almost only when spoken to, as befits traditional prescriptions of the maid's behaviour. Her secretarial internship at the law firm that precedes her integration of the home involves recording and mediating other people's language. This is framed in a manner that prefigures her page-turning servitude in terms of the facilitation of others' language, but that equally hints at her manipulation of the economy of information that will be a significant aspect of her rebellion.<sup>186</sup>

The language with which she feels most comfortable as a child at the beginning of the film is that of music. Music as an elite language is overwhelmingly evident in Dercourt's mise en scène of the early scene of Mélanie and her mother dressed in their Sunday best. They walk carefully and awkwardly, filmed from above initially, into the courtyard of the conservatorium building, up the stairs, passing scores of parents and children at ease and in their rightful place. Mélanie's desire to gain entry to this place, and consequent failure which she attributes to Ariane Fauchécourt, is narrativised as a silencing act, one that she will attempt to inflict on

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<sup>186</sup> Chapter 4 referred to Mélanie's détournement of Ariane's letter – geographically replacing it from her *chambre de bonne* to the master's study, and perverting the mistress's intended language output.

This format for revenge is equally present in Kaplan's *La fiancée du pirate* (1969), where Marie's translation and transmission of her oppressors' verbal utterances from her forest shack to the location of bienséance – the parish Church – articulated a revenge that employed the masters' language in their ultimate demise, with the maid's revenge implying only a passive transmission technique and her own silence.

another innocent child (and that will later be replicated onto Ariane's son). As she stoically walks from the auditorium, destined to remain out of place within this space, she runs her fingers over the timber of an upright piano that is being played by another girl whose expressive capacity is allowed within this space, and dramatically slams the lid down. From this pre-servitude childhood narrative in *La Tourneuse de pages* (the pretext for Mélanie's servitude and the context for her rebellion), in addition to Mélanie's page turner service accounted for in chapter 4,<sup>187</sup> one can see how the archetypal maid figure's prescribed silence, that is inextricable from her dictated invisibility and marginal spatio-social place, narratively contributes both to the representation of servitude, and to that of rebellion.

*Le Hérisson's* protagonist Renée Michel has a particular relationship to language. On the one hand, she matches and exceeds her masters' erudition, but her condition requires that this talent remain out of sight and out of place, something that Achache stages through the spatio-narrative construction of the loge, as seen previously. Renée seeks at all costs to hide this aspect of her identity, as, she later reveals to Kakuro Ozu, '*Personne ne veut d'une concierge qui a des prétentions.*' Prior to allowing herself to have a friendship with Kakuro, Renée Michel devises ways to linguistically shield the secret life that she cultivates in the privacy of the hidden room in her loge. In composing a thank-you note to the new tenant who has left an early edition of Tolstoy's *Anna Karenina* outside her doorway, she composes several drafts, each in falsely infantile handwriting and simple language in order to throw the master off her scent ('*Je ne comprends pas*'; '*Je ne sais pas lire*'; '*Merci il ne fallait pas.*') Each note is significantly signed off with her titular function – 'la concierge', rather than with her name, in a way that transmits to the audience the generic nature of servitude, which precludes individual identity, forcing its subject into a non-descript posture. There is a linguistic resistance here in Renée Michel's actions – one that refuses engagement with the master figure by conforming to the silent, invisible, and ultimately generic codes of the ideal servant figure.

*Ma part du gâteau* equally plays with the archetypal maid's imposed dutiful silence and linguistic alterity in a manner that is narrativised as the expression of refusal. Klapisch's film stages the maid's dissimulation of identity through language, with France twice impersonating

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<sup>187</sup> Chapter 4's case study described how the maid figure was invariably silent in her page-turning spatio-social posture, and how her revenge was wordless and simply involved the détournement of the mistress's language and spatial evasion.

a Russian woman in the context of her servitude. First, this takes place during a training session, where she is the only white French maid present, and her manager has advised her to be less French, as it would clash with her credibility as a domestic worker. In this initial instance, France's alterity with regard to the foreign domestic workers must be paradoxically shielded through linguistic and cultural performance in order to accurately embody the stereotype of the foreign maid figure. With somewhat offensive panache, Klapisch stages this parody of the Russian cleaning lady, ranting and raving, attempting to communicate in a disabled and accented French. This is an imposed control over the maid's verbal expression by her employer that can be seen to reference the typically silenced and out of place maid figure. In a second instance, within the context of her servitude to Stéphane in London at a business dinner as his date (where her place is somewhat ambiguously that of a mistress), France reprises this disconnect from language. Here, rather than assuming alterity in order to integrate into the foreign servant body, France reprises her Russian persona in order to hide the fact that she is of a different class – something that her conversation would inevitably signal to her interlocutors should she be permitted to speak in her native tongue. Her linguistic alterity and silencing here is reinforced through the fact that she cannot actually be seen to speak any French, accented or not.

Similarly to the previously discussed maid figures and avatars, France harnesses prescriptive silence in order to rebel, a rebellion that takes the form of a refusal. In Klapisch's *mise en scène* of the bedroom scene in London, Stéphane's insensitive monologue regarding his dismantling of France's former company, France meets this news with silence. While this silence is initially attributed to shock, and to the reinstatement of her servitude upon the babysitter's departure, France's silence is subsequently framed as refusal of the served/servant relationship of domination. It is this silence to the master's calls that gives France the power to spatially evade Stéphane's grip and assert spatial control over him.

In the final scene in Charef's *Marie-Line*, where the ceremony of rebellion is staged, it is significant that this refusal of servitude is expressed through the upholding of the maid figure's silence. In this powerful scene, which sees the titular character up on the stage, facing her symbolic masters from a position of power, she addresses them only cursorily and timidly, before surrendering this position of discursive power (*'donner la parole'*) to the silent and the invisible. The maid's dissent, her refusal of servitude, is expressed (by way of an Arabic song)

through another's words and in another language that only some of her co-workers can understand, and that probably none of their superiors can. This rebellious act consists in the insertion of language that is culturally and socially out of place in this context, in order for the maid figures to symbolically take over place.

Mennegun's *Louise Wimmer* makes integral use of this typical silence as refusal in its *mise en scène*. The economy of words that is demonstrated by Louise, her refusal to engage in conversation with others, her supply of a fake name to a man at the bar, and of course her refusal to be berated by her employer at the hotel by simply walking off, are all narrative elements that serve to express Louise's resistance. Her silence is framed as pride and dignity against the subjugation of her servitude and homelessness, and is also, crucially, a manner of creating spatial and social distance between her and others. In a sense, the 19<sup>th</sup> century prescription of the maid's social and spatial distance is reclaimed by Louise, who enforces it, through silence, as the expression of refusal.

The maid's rebellion as articulated through silence and the *détournement* of language output is equally reflected in the evasion of the master's call. The widespread implementation of communicative pull-cords positioned in the masters' space that would direct a bell to sound in the kitchen or the scullery, and later on in the *chambre de bonne*, occurred in line with the growing privatisation of domestic space during the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The cord bell, and its subsequent electric version, in their unidirectionality, emphasise the power relations that take shape through space and place. A master or mistress may summon their maid by auditory device, directing a physical displacement through space, essentially designating the latter as a puppet whose movements are manipulated by the master who remains in his rightful and dominant place. The unidirectionality of this communicative strategy acts to silence the maid's right of reply as the bell cannot be rung reciprocally.

Popular cinematic and televisual representations of flustered mistresses tugging at their bell cords summoning absent and/or resistant maids who have strayed from their kitchen post are common enough and serve to depict servant unruliness through dislocation within the bourgeois home.<sup>188</sup> This power-wielding summons and the refusal of the maid to respond occurs in most of the films I analyse, even those that are dislocated from the classical domestic setting. These films, produced and situated contemporarily, merely modify the method of

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<sup>188</sup> See for example, *Escalier de Service* (1954) by Carlo Rim



interpellation. Whereas the 19<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> centuries enforced the bell-cord system, affordable and widespread modern technology introduced the telephone as the masters' medium of choice for the summoning of their subordinates.

Recent French film adheres to this communicativity between master/mistress and maid. The greater geographical distance that is permitted by telephonic communication enables the masters' commandeering of the maid's occupation of space from afar, thereby greatly broadening their spatial control. But the maid figure and her avatar retain the capacity to contravene this summoning by letting the phone ring out or by interrupting the call.

This is notably the case in *La Cérémonie*. Though Sophie's employers do not employ a bell system to direct her movements through space and her corresponding gestures, she does get summoned, both orally from an adjacent room initially ('*Sophie, vous pouvez débarrasser*') and via telephone subsequently. During a scene analysed in Chapter 4, Sophie warily picks up the phone to hear the master's voice directing her to locate a folder on his desk in the study. Though the master has the social power to dictate Sophie's relocation to the study in search of this object, ultimately Sophie can and will cut short his demands by simply putting the receiver back on its hook and ignoring subsequent calls. A delegated attempt at contact made by M. Lelièvre's envoy, the chauffeur sent to collect the file from the house, goes unanswered, as Sophie has defiantly retreated to her attic *chambre de bonne*. This narrative occurrence in *La Cérémonie* is in conformity with the stereotypical image of the recalcitrant maid's evasion from petulant masters ringing bells in vain. This refusal to be directed to move through space in response to a master's bell/telephone-mediated command can be read as a spatialised and spatially reproducible rebellion plot element that is readily understood by film audiences. It furthermore brings to light the relationship between space, communication, power, and rebellion in the rebellious maid plot.

*Marie-Line* employs this feature too, with the more localised bell ringing, an instrument that resounds throughout the hypermarket and that is used by the night manager Léonard to summon Marie-Line, and subsequently Bergère, to his top-floor office for sex. While the maid avatars in this film remain under the tight bonds of servitude, they respond to the bell's call in a dutiful if reluctant manner. As these bonds are gradually severed, however, their response in turn slows and ceases (in a way that foregrounds their rebellion through space), to the frustration of their master. Léonard's reproaches to Marie-Line are met with a determined

silence and a refusal to explain herself, similar to that displayed by Sophie in *La Cérémonie* when the master reprimands her for evasive behaviour. And we saw how Le Hérisson's Renée repeatedly evaded masters' knocks at her door, hiding out of sight on the side of the threshold, in what can be considered to be a strong expression of refusal in that film.

This refusal to engage physically and verbally with the internal world of the master/servant relationship, of which the evasion of object-mediated summoning (bell-cord, telephone, knocking, door-bell) is a central motif, is echoed in many of the films under study, and is accomplished through evasion in the form of a spatial relocation or corporeal concealment.

Therefore, while the rebellious maid as perpetrator of violent crime subsists in recent French cinematic representations of female servitude, with much of the imagery stemming from the media-saturated Papin case and its cultural representations, as well as from the latent construct of the 19<sup>th</sup> century maid's violent rebellion upheld in bourgeois discourse and literature, cinema equally employs one of the components of ideal female servitude – silence – in order to stage rebellion in a contemporary context. These maid figures' and avatars' silence and evasion in refusal, despite the absence of violence, remain nevertheless a potent expression of rebellion in servitude. The inherently spatial characteristic of this refusal – a refusal to know one's place, a desire to stray from this place – can be clearly likened to spatial conquest.

The disengagement enacted by the heroines of the films in this corpus, born of a refusal of servitude, is fundamental to the representation of servitude and rebellion in contemporary French cinema. In many cases, the heroines' resistance takes on a passive form that proves to be no less effective than the active rebellion enacted by others. The films I analyse engage with this complex linguistic aspect of the maid figure, one that is indicative of the ideal maid on the one hand, the silent *perle*, and of the evasive and recalcitrant *souillon*, on the other. It effectively goes to the heart of the relationship between servitude and rebellion, between how the maid must be, and how she is expected and represented as subverting the dynamics of her bondage.

### **Social mobility, the destruction of servitude, and punishment**

The preceding discussion of the modalities of the maid's rebellion is inseparable from the consideration of the maid's reaction against the condition of servitude as being inscribed by

ideas of social mobility, on the one hand, and by separatist destruction, on the other. This tension, between the maid's represented aspirations to a served status, and a rebellion so definitive that she will be rendered even more marginal and be punished, is integral to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's social and cultural construction of the maid's rebelliousness. Both postures are indicative of a maid who refuses her place (both social and spatial), and both pose a threat to the established social order.

Fraisse (2009, p. 206) describes the ambivalence to the servant's rebellion: '*Cette ambivalence, c'est à la fois le désir de se révolter et de reconquérir son identité, et l'inévitable identification à l'opresseur, mélange d'envie et de haine.*'<sup>189</sup> This '*mélange d'envie et de haine*' – whether to identify with and covet the served position, or, on the contrary, to revile it – is at the core of the tension that exists within the represented motivations behind the maid's rebellion in contemporary French cinema. This ambivalence counterposes the idea of the maid's desired social mobility with that of the complete destruction of servitude. Both of these conflicting motivations and methods of rebellion, however, remain subject to the same narrative culmination in the punishment of the maid's rebellion.

The by now familiar 19<sup>th</sup> century public commentators saw no cause for servant protest, calling for hygienist and legal measures to respond to this supposed pandemic of ancillary crime, with their literary contemporaries equally narrativising the many miserable consequences of the maid's rebellion. Contemporary French filmmakers, despite their very different historical context, nonetheless reference this historical perception and representation in the manner with which their servant protagonists' rebellion is narratively punished.

The films briefly accounted for in chapter 3's discussion of the cinematic antecedents of the rebellious maid figure and avatar, by the likes of Renoir and Buñuel, showed the extent to which this punishment of the maid's transgressions was maintained, in spite of their overarching critique of the bourgeoisie, and hence arguably of the condition of servitude. The servant was not generally permitted successful social mobility in these representations, lest she become a reviled bourgeoisie.<sup>190</sup>

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<sup>189</sup> Fraisse is referring here to the servant within the context of Albert Memmi's discussion of dominated subjects in *L'Homme dominé* (1968).

<sup>190</sup> Though there are examples in the history of French cinema of the maid who becomes mistress, she rarely lives out her social ascension successfully. In Bruno Gantillon's *Servante et maîtresse* (1977), though Maria (Andrea Ferreol) inherits her master's fortune upon his death, and uses this newfound wealth to elicit the desire of the disinherited nephew, plunging the latter into the servility that was once hers, she kills herself once this eventuates.

Punishing the maid in representation of course has roots in the societal condemnation of historical rebellious maids, of which the Papin sisters are the most widely recognised. Christine Papin was given the death penalty, while Léa was punished with ten years imprisonment. Christine's sentence was commuted to life in prison, and she died four years later, having starved herself, in a psychiatric facility where she was often physically restrained against her bouts of rage. As Beauvoir wrote in *La Force de l'Age* (1960, p. 137), '*pour deux bourgeoises mises en pièces, il fallait a priori et en tout cas une expiation sanglante.*'<sup>191</sup> For Beauvoir, it is thus imperative for mainstream society that maids be held accountable for their rebellion, even when they are unfit to stand trial for psychological reasons, as was quite clearly the case for the Papin sisters, and even when the condition of the crime is one of exploitative servitude preceded by a traumatic upbringing.

Maid figures and avatars continue to be, in various ways, denied a happy ending, and are left to bear the full brunt of their transgressions against the dynamics of servitude, with efforts at social mobility most often denied. This narrative element, while not necessarily representative of the politics of the individual filmmakers whose works I have studied in this thesis, is nevertheless employed in their exploration of servitude and rebellion.

D. Memmi (2003, p. 213) suggests that filmmakers '*se refusent à libérer le domestique de sa condition*', something that, within her sociological framework, she sees as symptomatic of the élite's gaze over the social horizon of dominated subjects ('*l'horizon social des dominés vu du côté [des] élites*').<sup>192</sup> She thus suggests that it is the 'élite' class position of filmmakers that informs their narrative refusal of the social mobility of their represented servant characters. Given the long time-frame of her corpus (1930s to the 2000s), and her interest in both male and female servant characters, with no differentiation made between period film, literary and *fait divers* adaptation, and contemporaneous representation, the argument of the élite's narrative denial of an end to servitude appears somewhat ambitious. While the films that are under analysis in this thesis certainly do conform to the denial of social mobility and the punishment of the maid figure, it is not out of any underlying class domination over their represented

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In Bunuel's adaptation of *Journal d'une femme de chambre* (1964), Célestine's accession to a served status through her marriage to the wealthy retired captain is not happily portrayed, and the film closes with a scene of Jeanne Moreau's character languishing in bed, painfully bored and depressed.

<sup>191</sup> See also Beauvoir's article in *l'Humanité* (1933) for a further critique of the punishment meted out to the Papin sisters, where she calls for the bourgeois family to be judged for the wrongs done to those who serve them.

<sup>192</sup> This is something that she contrasts with the British context, in which cinematic servants are narratively permitted to render their masters servile, referring namely to Losey's *The Servant*.

subjects. Chabrol, Dercourt, Achache, Klapisch, Charef and Mennegun can undoubtedly be seen to denounce servitude and socio-spatial exclusion in general, while, however, narratively reproducing the perceived motivations and punishment of the archetypal maid figure.

In Chabrol's film, Jeanne's character on several occasions expresses a wish to have had a chance to be among the served, for whom opportunities abound, and Sophie's illiteracy – a social condition whose class connotations are evident – is not an anodyne plot element. In a film that Chabrol himself jokingly described as '*le dernier film marxiste*',<sup>193</sup> Jeanne regrets that her class position has prevented her from fulfilling modelling, acting, or literary pursuits, and in doing so, she symbolically speaks for Sophie, too, whose illiteracy precludes her from interacting fully with the social world, placing her at a net disadvantage. Jeanne holds the mistress's dresses up to her body, admiring her allure, before eventually shredding them with Sophie, thereby symbolically rejecting upward mobility. Similarly, the protagonists' gun-toting in the kitchen before the murder, in particular Jeanne's pelvis-thrusting gestures with the rifle of the master whom we know to be an avid hunter, offer up a clear performance of '*singer les maîtres*' that is closely linked to the rebellious act to follow. Yet the parodic aspect to the maid impersonating her employers cannot be adequately read as a facile indication of desired social mobility. The irony and jest with which Sophie and Jeanne ape the Lelièvres posits the masters' served status as ridiculous, and therefore ultimately not desirable. The maid does not ape the mistress in order to be like her in *La Cérémonie*; these characters are shown as being aware of the impossibility of their ascension to a higher class; the represented performance of these acts rather functions to denounce the masters and to undermine the very condition of servitude in Chabrol's film. And so class war supersedes integration into society, prompting the violent rebellion that will see Jeanne killed and Sophie destined to be found out for her crime.<sup>194</sup> In *La Cérémonie*, the maid's rebellion is so nihilistic that there can be no viable place in society, something that the film's final sequence of the providential aftermath of the ceremony suggests.

*La Tourneuse de pages* presents the maid's desired social mobility and its negation in an eminently clear manner. While Mélanie is represented as coveting the mistress's

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<sup>194</sup> Austin (1999, p. 164) is of the opinion that, in Chabrol's unfinished narration of the outcome for Sophie at the scene of the crash, the protagonist evades punishment, when he writes of 'Sophie's escape from the crime scene.' While the ending is certainly ambiguous, with Chabrol leaving the film image on Sophie's face prior to any potential arrest, the logics of the recorded murder playing out on the cassette machine strongly point to the imminent understanding by the police of her involvement in the as yet undiscovered murder of the Lelièvres.

accoutrements, this appears as merely a ploy in order to enact the rapprochement necessary for her destructive plan to unfold. Mélanie's recognition of the impossibility of her own social mobility following the childhood slight and the revenge inflicted on the bourgeois family is evidenced by her vacating their home after her destructive act. Though she may not suffer criminal proceedings or death, Mélanie is destined, through her rebellious act, to wander, out of place, much as Kaplan's protagonist Marie in *La fiancée du pirate*, but without the optimism of Kaplan's ending.

In *Le Hérisson*, much is made of Renée's paradoxical pleasures that seem at odds with her station in life. Her consumption of dark chocolate<sup>195</sup>, her solitary appreciation of Russian literature (which has prompted the naming of her cat Léon after Tolstoy), classical music and Japanese cinema, is employed to situate this character as socially ambiguous. And while Renée does not appear to have any clearly articulated ambition for social mobility, and she hides this cultural consumption away from the eyes of the building's occupants in the secret room off her loge, the new tenant Kakuro Ozu narratively induces this prospect through his invitation for her to occupy certain social spaces that both she and her condition denied herself. Kakuro shows her that they can be friends – '*et même tout ce que nous voulons*' – despite their social situation of master and servant which prescribes social and spatial distance. From this burgeoning romantic encounter, Renée begins to occupy social space previously denied, changes her appearance, and can display, albeit in a timid manner, her cultural capital that she previously felt as an interdiction within the context of her servitude. The protagonist in *Le Hérisson* however pays the price for her investment of a mistress's accoutrements with her life ('*le châtement de la robe volée*'). Achache's mise en scène of the second last sequence, in which Renée is endowed with the capacity to socially ascend, makes her absurd death seem even more punishing, and it frames this punishment as the direct narrative consequence of the maid figure/avatar daring to aspire to higher social space and place.

*Ma part du gâteau* paints France's transition into domestic service as an attempt at social mobility and, importantly, as a mobility that is also spatial in its enactment: from Dunkerque's post-industrial wasteland to the financial epicentre of France, La Défense in Paris. Her entry into service brings with it increased income that she lavishly spends on her children,

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<sup>195</sup> Corbin (1980, p. 599) writes that maids (as were prostitutes), throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century, were perceived to be obsessed with the sweets reserved for their masters. The illegitimate consumption of these items from the larder symbolized broader perceptions of the maid's theft and attempted social mobility.

and this new role at first signals the end of her family's financial hardship. Her children however call her and her lofty dreams of social mobility to order through a critique of her spatial dislocation. Klapisch's references to *Pretty Woman* and the broader Cinderella narrative serve only to intensify the denial of social mobility for the maid avatar in this film. The final demonstration and negation of France's aspirations comes with her romantic night with Stéphane, where she is briefly allowed to fantasise about life among those who are served rather than serving, before this illusion vanishes when she overhears Stéphane bragging to a friend about having bedded '*la femme de ménage*'. This sets in motion a chain of events that was described in chapter 5 that culminates in the final scene that shows her alone in the back of a police wagon, caged and confined, presumably to suffer legal ramifications for her transgression, with even less social and economic potential than before her entry into service. According to Stéphane's girlfriend, France must be held accountable for her actions: '*il faut qu'elle paie*' – however justified they may appear in Klapisch's narration.

Despite the relative pessimism of *Ma part du gâteau*'s ending in terms of the outcome of the maid's rebellion, initial versions of Klapisch's screenplay destined France to an even worse fate – one that the director describes as '*une vraie fin tragique, et assez horrible. Elle s'en sortait mal et il s'en sortait bien.*'<sup>196</sup> One can see, from this directorial discussion of the importance of an ending – a decision that ultimately, however, confirms the primacy of punishment in the narrative of rebellion against servitude – that this is a central representational concern in the cinematic representation of servitude and rebellion. However, Klapisch, like the other filmmakers discussed, does not mete out this diegetic punishment out of any moral concern to keep the maid in her place. Rather, the narrative element of the maid's punishment serves to further engrain the sentiment of injustice that characterises servitude, where the maid's oppression is upheld not only by her master, but also by *les forces de l'ordre* in their punishment of her spatial and social transgression.

In *Marie-Line*, the character of the titular protagonist is dominated by her professional ambitions, for which she consented to joining the FN. Marie-Line's desire to win the best team leader prize is narratively employed to underline her ruthlessness and mistreatment of her fellow workers in order to preserve her title and further her status. This refusal of social mobility is reflected in her rejection of a relationship with the farmer by the seaside, returning

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<sup>196</sup> Klapisch interviewed on the film's promo site [www.mapartdugateau-lefilm.com](http://www.mapartdugateau-lefilm.com)

to her cité and to the company of her fellow struggling women. Marie-Line's rejection of social mobility – the promotion to the cleaning inspection team – is further seen in the ceremony that she stages at the close of the film, where she forsakes this ambition for a rebellion that involves outright refusal rather than assimilation and upward mobility. This act cannot possibly lead to her continued employment at the hypermarket and her retention of her meagre social status as leader of the best cleaning team, and she seems destined, at the close of the film, to fall victim to further class-based social suffering in the context of France in the grip of *la crise*, dragging her loyal colleagues down with her.

Mennegun's film diverges somewhat from the others. *Louise Wimmer* is a film that implies the downward mobility of its protagonist, and her struggle to rise again, but resolutely not in the same format of her previously petit bourgeois married life. There is perhaps above all, in *Louise Wimmer*, a dissident narrative that is the broader expression of a politics and poetics of social exclusion that is narrativised through servitude and homelessness.

Social mobility in this film is not defined around the desire to accede to a higher social status. It is framed purely through the desired access to space and place. Louise's *déclassement*, however, is a constant reminder in the protagonist's efforts at reasserting herself in space and place. Her endless wanderings around town, from the hotel job to the house she cleans, to the social worker's office, to the PMU bar where she uses her small but valuable change to bet on the horses in the vain hope of a windfall, are all expressions of this increasingly unattainable goal. The stolen moments during her service at the hotel and the bourgeois dwelling see her momentarily functionalising space as if it were hers, and not merely the space of servitude. The clients' perfume becomes hers to spray; she lingers under the strong and constant hot water pressure of a shower and then contemplates herself as she applies lipstick and mascara in the mistress's absence. All of these grooming routines are performed in order to hide her homelessness and to maintain the illusion of her pre-destitute status. Her trips to the storage lock-up permit the staging of scenes of Louise holding garments up against her, accoutrements of her previous, non-precarious existence, and the hope that she might soon be able to retain such items close to her.

But there is equally a resistance portrayed in Louise's refusal to completely play the game. She expresses a sense of pride and dignity in her usual refusal of charity and intimacy. In a sense, though her enduring search for a viable spatio-social place effectively conjures the



image of social mobility, her attitude appears to resist its swift accomplishment. She does not inform her social workers, who merely think she is staying with a friend, that she is in fact sleeping in her car. There is also a refusal to conform to social and cultural expectations of the SDF, even though her proclamation of this fact would surely speed up her outcome. And though *Louise Wimmer*, perhaps the most optimistic of the films contained within my corpus in this regard, does eventually accord its protagonist space and (a modest) place and a happy ending, her accession to a room of her own is not in fact screened, maintaining the elusiveness of place that was mirrored in the previously discussed films.

In all of these films except for the last one, there is a narrative and spatial judgement of the maid figure/avatar that occurs. There is a cinematic refusal to narrativise blind optimism in the maid acceding to place in a Hollywood sense. This mode of representation, while reproducing the characteristic 19<sup>th</sup> century punishment of the maid,<sup>197</sup> does so equally out of the refusal of redemptive narratives and out of a commitment to realism. The denial of the maid's social mobility, and the punishment she often meets, are significant for what they reveal about the representational politics of films that portray servitude and rebellion. They reflect a certain way of conceptualising (class, race and gender-based) social exclusion in contemporary French cinema that at times appears bleak. The final film discussed, *Louise Wimmer*, in many ways sets itself apart from this historically located representational outcome of the maid figure that the first five films followed. While its representation of servitude and homelessness is indeed at times bleak, this film equally contains at its core an irrepressible expression of resistance and rebellious joy that find their place in the dance scene and to a certain extent the sex scenes, and again most resolutely in the final scene.

## Conclusion

This chapter has argued for the indebtedness of contemporary French film to the 19<sup>th</sup> century construction of the rebellious maid figure. It has shown how filmmakers reinterpret the various modalities of this rebellion in order to contextualise and protest contemporary situations of female servitude, both in and beyond the foundational space of bourgeois domesticity.

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<sup>197</sup> And while equally continuing on from earlier films in the 20<sup>th</sup> century where the maid's rebellion as social mobility was denied or heavily compromised in order to better critique the class of the bourgeoisie.

I have demonstrated the ways in which the maid's servitude and rebellion, as an archetype of social suffering and transgression, are deployed in cinema in order to express a political aesthetics of rebellion along a broad spectrum ranging from violence to more subtle forms of resistance. Filmmakers who represent servitude on screen posit maid figures as having nothing to lose. Their servitude is intolerable, so much so that complete destruction of this relationship is the only solution. Where they escape punishment, the future of serving women remains nevertheless uncertain, and the attainment of social mobility, through transgressive and sometimes violent rebellion, appears mostly impossible. In French cinematic representations of rebellion in servitude, maids are destined to remain marginal figures whose attempts to overhaul their situation generally fail to properly free them from servitude. And yet, as I have attempted to highlight where relevant, though these characters are collectively subject to exploitation in the context of their servitude, these are not miserable films. Rebellion is persistently present, and is articulated in pluralistic ways that engage with the historicity of the rebellious maid figure, while anchoring the narrative in contemporary cinematic political aesthetics that denounce servitude in the various forms in which it is experienced in modern-day France.

## General conclusions and further inquiry

19<sup>th</sup> century literature surrounding the female domestic servant's social, cultural, and pointedly spatio-architectural inscription conspired to construct the maid figure as inherently rebellious, and associated her with ambivalent discourses of good and evil, and of purity and filth, that describe in complex ways both servitude and rebellion. There were certain methods and motivations behind the architectural construction of the maid figure, a representation consumed with the spectre of ancillary crime and the prospect of the maid's usurpation of her masters' class position. This construction of the maid in space was integral to keeping her in her place – and *out of place* – in the 19<sup>th</sup> century bourgeois imagination.

From this historical study into the maid's space and place, I derived the concept of the maid's typical space syntax, a theoretical tool appropriated from the field of architecture and associated with functionalist ideas surrounding the internal distribution of the built environment. I adapted space syntax as a framework for the analysis of the representation of contemporary contexts of servitude and rebellion in cinema through the social and cultural antecedent of the rebellious maid figure. Space syntax provided a framework of analysis for discerning both the adherence to, and deviation from, the archetypal rebellious maid plot in contemporary French cinematic *mise en scène*. Furthermore, the potential found within this framework to conceive of space as a grammar of social relations beyond a given architectural setting enabled an extended analysis of servitude and rebellion when translated in alternative, updated spatial settings and social contexts in film. The adoption and adaptation of this theory permitted an investigation of the maid's place in cinematic representation, a place that remains intricately tied to the social construction of space. The adaptation of space syntax theory to the analysis of film for this project has constituted an interdisciplinary and enriching exercise. The use of this theory for the further investigation of other stock cinematic characters that are historically connected with particular types of space could prove fruitful.

The thrust of this thesis has been to investigate the extent to which the rebellious *bonne à tout faire* continues to shape representations of female servitude and rebellion in contemporary French film. Such an undertaking evidently leads to a questioning of the continued recourse to this model, a model that was largely fantasised and that had the servant body's control and the maintenance of the social order as its underlying motivations. One can reasonably query the translation of this opportunistically devised model to contemporary

contexts of female servitude and rebellion on screen that clearly do not conceive of servant protest in the same cautionary light as it had been conceived of throughout the 19<sup>th</sup> century.

I have argued that the employment of this character-type, a so-called ‘relic’ of the past long thought superseded as a result of the fragmentation of servant labour and its partial exteriorisation from the domestic sphere (Martin-Fugier 1979 and Fraisse 1979), is a way for contemporary French cinema to interrogate the politics of servitude and rebellion in other, broader, contexts of retaliation against domination and exclusion. The inherent rebelliousness of the typological maid figure can be understood as narratively triggering, in a latent manner, the recourse to rebellion in represented contexts of servitude as a matter of course.

Chabrol’s *La Cérémonie*, while closely conforming to the archetypal space syntax of the maid figure and presenting in a clear manner the context of servitude and consequent rebellion, equally contains an underlying narrative of class war that is related to the epoch in which the film was made. Chabrol, interviewed by Berthomieu, Colas & Vasset (1995, p. 9) describes what he sees as the ‘implosion’ that the contemporary social, economic, and political crisis could precipitate, and that he sought to represent and legitimise in *La Cérémonie*.

Dercourt’s *La Tourneuse de pages* reframes the condition of servitude as a pretext rather than a context, in order to present an imposter maid figure whose rebellion is narratively justified, and to an extent legitimised, through this adopted condition of servitude. This film, while containing little of the politicised thrust of such films as *La Cérémonie*, *Marie-Line*, and *Ma part du gâteau*, for example, nevertheless adopts and adapts, in a similar manner, the rebellious maid plot in order to narratively legitimise rebellion to audiences who may not initially empathise with the plight of the protagonist.

Klapisch designates Karin Viard’s character France, in *Ma part du gâteau*, as symbolic of *la France d’en bas*, that section of society that has been trampled on by neo-liberal economic policy with factory closures, the erosion of social security provisions, and attacks on the syndicalist movement. The maid figure’s servitude appears, in Klapisch’s film, as an ideal vehicle for representing social inequality. It allows access by an outsider into the environment of luxury and financial speculation of those at the top of the food chain. In this sense, Klapisch can be said to reprise the adoption of the maid protagonist in order to narratively access ruling class social space in order to better critique its inhabitants, as the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century films by the likes of Buñuel had done, while, however, retaining the focus on the servant character.

*Marie-Line* paralleled servitude and rebellion with the situation of the *sans-papiers* in spatial terms, where the invisible and out of place enact visibilisation strategies through the claiming of space. *Le Hérisson* and *Louise Wimmer*, in more diffuse ways, also present servitude in a causal relationship with the contestation of socially defined access to power through space and place. Mennegun's *Louise Wimmer* does this through the spatio-syntactical rapprochement between servitude and homelessness, while Achache's film transposes the maid narrative onto that of the concierge, another albeit increasingly antiquated posture of servitude.

Prior to these films under study, Papatakis' *Les Abysses* (1963) had been read as a metaphor for the Algerian war that was raging at the time (see Fraisse, 2009, p. 205), where the maids' reprisals against their masters were seen to constitute a metaphor for the uprising of the colonised against the colonisers. The rebellious maid plot might therefore be conceived of as an enduring heuristic device employed in order to trigger and to signify the validity of the posture of rebellion in broader contexts of domination and exclusion that spatio-socially relate to that of servitude.

However, while Papatakis' film, in its status as a '*texte à clé*' for the Algerian war, threatens to obscure the rebellious maid narrative, the films that have been studied here retain the maid figure's particular servitude and rebellion at the fore. In these films, parallel narratives of domination and spatio-social exclusion co-exist with and qualify the represented contexts of servitude, but do not supersede the principal narrative of servitude and rebellion at hand. In this way, while the rebellious maid plot *is* a heuristic device, it is not *only* that. There is, after all, a clear desire, in these films, to bring the long-invisible and fantasised social category of female servants into the frame of cinematic visibility.

However, and this has been an underlying point throughout this thesis, the continued recourse to the 19<sup>th</sup> century typology of the maid figure might simultaneously, in fact, obscure or render in a superficial manner the actual servant body in contemporary France that many of these films purport to represent, to varying degrees. There is a significant lack of films that seek to cinematically frame the contemporary servant body, a demographic that has shifted considerably throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> and into the 21<sup>st</sup> centuries. The service labour of the provincial French young woman of the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries went on to be performed predominantly by Southern European and subsequently by African, Asian, and Eastern-European migrant women workers. The lack of representation of this particular servant class is

of course predominantly a question of race. While contemporary French filmmakers have no difficulty in translating the archetypal maid figure, through space syntax, to sometimes incredibly divergent contexts of servitude and rebellion, non-white maids, even as their service labour in modern-day France corresponds in significant ways to that of the live-in *bonne à tout faire*, on the contrary, are denied representation – excluded from screen space.

*Les femmes du sixième étage* (Le Guay 2011), set in the 1960s, engages with the history of Spanish migrant women who performed the service work in France, and alludes to the Portuguese to come subsequently. But this is a period film, and these maids are not seen to contest their situation beyond seeking new toilets and slightly better pay, and they do so through collective organisation, which differs greatly from the archetypal individualism of the maid's rebellion. *Le Hérisson*, interestingly, has a Portuguese cleaning lady character, Manuela (Ariane Ascaride), and yet she functions only to draw out Renée Michel's character, we do not see her labour, and she appears in only three scenes. Walter Salles and Daniela Thomas, Brazilian filmmakers, made a short film set in Paris, *Loin du 16ème*, in which a Brazilian maid is represented as leaving her own baby in an industrial-sized crèche at dawn in the suburbs before going to tend to a white baby in the wealthy 16<sup>th</sup> arrondissement. This short film was included in *Paris, je t'aime* (2007) – an internationally successful compilation that aimed to show a multi-faceted Paris reflexively engaging with tired Parisian stereotypes. Serreau's *Romuald et Juliette* (1989), a romantic comedy/drama, framed the relationship between a rich white master and a poor black cleaning lady. Serreau, as an exception, does, to an extent, engage with the racialisation of service labour and the maid figure, and this film could warrant further study in a broadening of the period of study to include cinema from the 1980s. On the whole, however, the migrant and racialised maid has yet to be given due representation on screen in France, and this is something that is quite evident in the corpus of films that have been the subject of analysis in this thesis.

Although *Marie-Line* represents the existence of a group of migrant woman performing servant labour, they are, after all, led by a *française de souche* who holds the title role. Tarr (2005, p. 158) has written that the centrality of the white French protagonist in this film 'risks relegating the other disadvantaged women to the sidelines.' Indeed, Tarr (p. 158) continues, 'apart from Meriem ... the ethnic minority women themselves are given little interiority, ...

and they are important mainly as they impact on Marie-Line's life and are validated by her interest in them.'

And while *Ma part du gâteau* briefly places the character France in the same frame as a room of migrant, black women who are training, like her, to gain domestic employment, she is conspicuously out of place within that setting. This alterity, constructed as a farcical interrogation of the new depths that France (both country and character) has attained during '*la crise*', sees the white woman stooping to (racialised) servility and having to efface her Frenchness by putting on a foreign accent. This is the only scene in which a more realistic portrayal of maids in contemporary France takes place. It is a grossly unflattering one that reveals nothing of these women's subjectivity, and the camera quickly turns its focus back to France for the rest of the film with little further questioning of the racialisation of servant labour and the further domination and spatio-social exclusion it brings.

The cinematic failure to represent or properly engage with the non-white, contemporary servant demographic is counterposed by the continued cultural obsession with the Papin sisters' *fait divers* and their 19<sup>th</sup> century ancestors encountered in *Ryckère* (1908). The near-complete absence of mainstream narrative representations of the 'real' maid in favour of the 'white' maid, in recent French film, can perhaps be linked back to the 19<sup>th</sup> century's problematic (pre-cinematic) representation of female domestic servants.

The question of the representability of female servitude and rebellion, and of the maid figure, therefore endures, and it remains a question of the space and place accorded and denied to maids. It may be fair to surmise that the invisibilisation that the maid underwent during the 19<sup>th</sup> century, a process that was eminently spatial, and whose spatiality continues to be employed in the cinematic *mise en scène* of servitude and rebellion in French cinema, survives in cinema's incapacity to represent the maid in a manner freed from the mythology surrounding this historical figure, and at the expense of a representation of those doing the 'dirty work'.

# Filmography

## Central corpus

Achache, M. *Le Hérisson*, 2009.  
Chabrol, C. *La Cérémonie*, 1995.  
Charef, M. *Marie-Line*, 2000.  
Dercourt, D. *The Page Turner*, 2006.  
Klapisch, C. *Ma Part Du Gâteau*, 2011.  
Menegun, C. *Louise Wimmer*, 2012.

## Secondary films

Berri, C. *Une Femme De Ménage*, 2002.  
Brooks, J. L. *Spanglish*, 2004.  
Buñuel, L. *Susana (demonio y carne)*, 1951.  
Buñuel, L. *Journal D'une Femme De Chambre*, 1965.  
Chatiliez, E. *Tatie Danielle*, 1991.  
Denis, J.-P. *Les Blessures Assassines*, 2000.  
Guy, A. *La Hiérarchie dans l'amour*, circa 1906  
Guy, A. *Une héroïne de quatre ans*, 1907  
Jacquot, B. *La Fille Seule*, 1996.  
Jacquot, B. *Les Adieux à La Reine*, 2012.  
Kaplan, N. *La Fiancée Du Pirate*, 1969.  
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