

A Ceiling of Blue: Swimming Pools, Movie Stars and Manifest Destiny

Julie Anne Pattee
Department of Art History and Communication Studies
McGill University, Montreal

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Abstract

This thesis explores the relationship between the social history and the filmic history of the swimming pool. The history of the swimming pool and the history of the movies wove themselves together during the first half of the twentieth century. By 1950, the image of the swimming pool and the image of the movie star were connected in the social imaginary. Discourses about gender, health, discipline and the body were moulded by the architectural environment of the swimming pool, when the movies translated the image of the swimming pool, they carried these ideas along with them. These ideas affected the formation of modern subjectivities. This thesis attempts to demonstrate one of the means by which a particular set of ideas infiltrated the collective psyche.

Cette thèse examine le rapport entre l'histoire sociale et l'histoire filmique de la piscine. Elle tente de démontrer le moyen par lequel une tendance particulier c'est infiltré dans la psyché collective. L'histoire de la piscine et l'histoire du cinema se sont entrelacé au cours de la première moitié du vingtième siècle. Par l'année 1950, l'image de la piscine et l'image de la vedette étaient liés dans l'imagination sociale. Les discours au sujet de sexe, la santé, la discipline et le corps étaient façonné par l'environnement architecturale de la piscine. Lorsque le cinéma traduit l'image de la piscine, il emporte ces idées avec. Ces idées affectent la formation des subjectivités moderne. Cette thèse tente de démontrer le moyen par lequel une tendance particulier c'est infiltré dans la psyché collective.

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Introduction

The history of the swimming pool and the history of the movies wove themselves together over the course of the twentieth century. By 1950, the image of the swimming pool and the image of the movie star were linked in the social imaginary. As Ma Clampett observed, Hollywood was all “swimming pools and movie stars.” The period between 1920 and 1940 saw the greatest growth in municipal swimming pool construction in North America. During cinema’s golden era, when the medium of film was trying to establish its identity, it borrowed the image of the swimming pool because the swimming pool, like film itself, represented the new spaces and new visual imagery of a changing world.

The public stage of the swimming pool became an increasingly mediated site for ritual as the century unfolded. Discourses about gender, health, beauty, discipline and the body were moulded by the environment of the swimming pool. The relationship between the real life space of the pool and its representational space impacted the formation of modern subjectivities. This paper combines the social history and the filmic history of the swimming pool to demonstrate the means by which a particular set of ideas and associations infiltrated the collective psyche.

The modern swimming pool was developed by the military and by the medical profession; it began its journey in the late 1700s and made its debut during the period when the public sphere was entering a key developmental stage. The dominant discourses of modernity structured the objects form and influenced its function. When the image of the swimming pool was translated into film it carried particular ideas and

associations along with it. The ideas that debuted with the object at its birth are evident in early filmic representations of the swimming pool.

In film, the swimming pool began to represent the effects of the transformation of private space into public space. Early translations of the object into image demonstrate an emphasis on destabilized bodies. These images were reflections of the changing notions of subjectivity that were being moulded by the public space of the swimming pool. The medical and military legacies of the swimming pool infused it with an aura and formed the contours of its translation into film. As a result, concerns about gendered identities, health and discipline collided with ideas about the beauty, leisure and the body. The confluence of these ideas fueled the partnership between the advertising industries and the film industry. As bathing beauties began to populate filmic images, the concerns that film makers had raised about the shifting boundaries between private space and public space were silenced by the race for sensation.

By the 1930s, governments had recognized the powerful influence that architectural environments and visual images had on shaping behaviour. Swimming pools became vehicles for political propaganda. Filmmakers recognized that the relationship between the real life space of the swimming pool and its representational space had aided in the rise of the culture of consumption. The image of the swimming pool was glamorized in the 1930s by artists like Busby Berkley, who attempted to reveal the links between the successes of the film industry and the public space of the swimming pool. Berkley's pool scenes were full of warnings about the dominant ideologies of modernism, however they succeeded in increasing the symbolic power of

swimming pools.

By the 1940s, the swimming pool had come to represent 'the vitality of American life'. Esther Williams' movies capitalized on this idea. Her movies and the marketing campaigns that surrounded them were to a great extent responsible for the swimming pool craze. In the 1950s, with the rise of the suburbs, the swimming pool became the ultimate accessory for the modern home. During this period, in certain films, the symbol of the swimming pool began to voice a eulogy for modernity. In *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) and *Les Diaboliques* (1954) the swimming pool became a locale for corpses. The death of the body in the swimming pool expressed a recognition of the complicity between the public space of the swimming pools and filmic images and the particular effects that this partnership had on the construction of modern subjectivities.

Chapter 1

La Maladie Imaginaire: A Brief History of Early Swimming Pools

“Cleanliness is next to godliness” (John Wesley 1778).

A genealogy of the swimming pool unearths the themes that haunt the representation of swimming pool scenes in film. Early filmic representations of the swimming pool performed overtures to its social history. Particular historical moments formed strings of associative meaning around the swimming pool; these associations formed the underside of its filmic image. Gilles Deleuze suggests that filmic images are “incommensurate sheets of the past” (as cited in Herzog, 2009, p. 166). This chapter will provide snapshots of significant moments in the modern history of the swimming pool in order to lay the foundation for an analysis of its filmic representations.

The swimming pool began its journey into modernity as a medical instrument and a military training device. Michel Foucault (1965) demonstrates how Western medical theory was translated into sociopolitical discourses through architectural constructions. The history of the swimming pool demonstrates one of the means by which medical and military discourses mingled and infiltrated the collective psyche.

1.1 The Medicalization and Militarization of the Public Sphere.

The earliest swimming pools in recorded western history were built in ancient Rome (Van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 17). Swimming pools were redrawn into the cultural landscape during the classical revival of the enlightenment. Their reemergence coincided with the period when the medicalized, scientific gaze became the hegemonic way of seeing. Medical doctors were responsible for the construction of the earliest

‘public’ swimming pools. Dr. Potevin had a floating dock constructed on the Seine in 1762, and a floating dock was built in Frankfurt in 1781 by Dr. Pascal. Shortly thereafter prominent physicians in other major European cities had floating docks constructed. These pools, which bore formal resemblances to contemporary swimming pools, were used by the upper classes and the aristocracy (Van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 20). A variety of ailments were thought to be cured by submerging the body in swimming pools. Michel Foucault (1961) explains that water began to be seen as a curative device because it mimicked the body's internal state of circulating fluids. He has suggested that water cures emerged as a theme in medicine when the external world was beginning to be seen as a cause of disease. Water provided the link between the internal world and the external world (pp. 130-167). Swimming pools became one of the spaces where the link between the internal world and the external world was articulated by the medical community.

The lower classes had a less curative and more survival based form of swimming pool in late eighteenth century Europe. During the period that led to the Napoleonic wars the Roman era military exercise of swimming was revived. Swimming schools were established in France in order to train soldiers, and soon after Napoleon's defeat, Prussia and Austria established military training pools (Van Leeuwen, 1998, p. 21). Ideas were flowing with relative freedom between Europe and the colonies in the eighteenth century. In still largely puritan America, notions concerning the body differed from European ideas. It is in America where the swimming pool eventually gained an unparalleled status as a commodity and a symbol in film. The swimming

pool's emergence in the colonies will be therefore be the primary focus for the rest of this chapter.

By the late 1700s in America, it was mainly working class men and boys who swam and they did so in the rivers and waters that surrounded urban centers (Wiltse, 2007, p.10). Swimming formed part of rural, white, working class, masculine culture. Lower class men and boys swam naked, swore and rough-housed in the waters that surrounded newly-founded cities (p. 10). Swimmer's bodies became increasingly visible due to urban sprawl and these "rough" lower class swimmers offended the sensibilities of the ruling classes. Swimming became an increasingly taboo activity. For instance, by 1786, swimming in natural waterways was outlawed on the Sabbath in Boston. In 1808, daytime swimming was banned in New York's East River (p. 10). In the nineteenth century, however, discourses surrounding swimming underwent drastic changes, as city officials moved from banning swimming to promoting it.

The body of the swimmer was re-inscribed with changing notions of subjectivity. When the material conditions of daily life in the nineteenth century became increasingly visible in the crowded spaces of the city, new scientific notions about disease informed ideas about social reform. The gendered and classed body of the swimmer was simultaneously constructed as a site of scientific knowledge about disease. Elizabeth Grosz (1992) suggests that "corporeality in its sexual specificity may be seen as the material condition of subjectivity, that is, the body itself may be regarded as the locus and site of inscription for specific modes of subjectivity" (p. 241). In the mid-nineteenth century, the body of the male swimmer became one of the locations

where ideological debates surrounding notions of class, gender, work, leisure and disease were manifested.

The proto-modern pool side was in part the result of the commonly-held notion that tuberculosis was a byproduct of a rapidly industrializing nation. The main concern of the medical community in the nineteenth century was tuberculosis, commonly referred to as consumption or the ‘white plague.’ It was the leading cause of death in industrialized countries (Harvard Libraries, 2009, “Tuberculosis”). Dirty crowded slums, poor air quality and lack of sunlight were blamed for the spread of the disease. Rest, sunlight (heliotherapy), fresh air, cleanliness and moving away from the city and back to the country were touted as the cure for tuberculosis. Cholera was recognized as a water-borne disease by the mid-1800s; access to clean water was regarded as a crucial factor in stopping epidemics. Ideas about both of these diseases shaped the aesthetic design of the sanatorium. These cottage-like alpine-styled retreats were often situated beside lakes. They were painted white to capture sunlight and featured reclining chairs and sliding glass doors (Campbell, 2005, pp. 463-469). They constituted an upper-middle class alternative to life in the city. These therapeutic alternative environments to city life helped shape modern aesthetics and, in turn, these new habitats influenced ideas about the function of the citified environment of the swimming pool.

As industrialization started to be ascribed a host of negative qualities, a nostalgic yearning for preindustrial culture began to take hold of the social imaginary. In the 1840s, the advent of paid vacations commingled notions of health with notions of social reform. The seaside became an increasingly popular place for the new industrial class to

spend their newfound leisure time. The seaside was seen as a curative environment for tuberculosis and as a leisure space. When families began to vacation together, water play became a more acceptable pass time for women (Wiltse, 2007, p.15). As the middle and upper classes began to locate their leisure activities at the periphery of the city, the urban poor were increasingly cordoned into the interior of the city. Swimming pools were constructed for them.

The Lower East Side people's bath was built in 1852, by the New York Association for Improving the Conditions of the Poor. This organization was composed of merchants, manufacturers and other professionals. Access to the pool involved an entrance fee which the group assumed would promote 'self-respect' and 'self-reliance' amongst the poor. The pool closed in 1861 due to low attendance, since poor communities could not afford to swim in the pool (Wiltse, 2007, p.19).

This misguided attempt on part of progressive era social reformers mimics the ideology that Foucault (1961) explains occurred when early modern hospitals were constructed. The leper was initially the excluded 'other', confined to the exterior of the city. When the madman replaced the leper and hospitals were built, the madman was defined as an invalid due to his inability to work. Beggars were placed in hospitals (p. 45). With early pool construction, a similar psycho-geographic movement occurred; as the wealthier classes began to vacation at the edges cities, the poor were designated pools located in the city's interior. The pool was invested with ideological significations that highlighted values associated with work.

Early instances of public swimming pool construction demonstrate the psycho-

geography of nineteenth century cities. Ideas about class and gender were physically imposed on bodies through the regulation of habitats and gestures. Beaches were not gender segregated, but early swimming pools were. For instance, upper class women and men were allowed to frolic together in the waters that lapped public beaches since upper class sensibilities about modesty – in fashion and behavior – would maintain the status quo. Conversely, lower class women and men were not allowed to swim together in swimming pools (Wiltse, 2007, p.76). Jeff Wiltse's social history of swimming pools indicates that early swimming pools were constructed with the intent to "tame" the working class culture of swimming and enforce gender segregation and modest behavior through an architectural environment.

A significant moment for swimming pools and the discursive construction of swimming bodies occurred in the 1850s, with the appearance of the Muscular Christianity movement in England. Muscular Christianity stressed the idea that competitive sports and physical education were a means to further imperialism (Putney, 2001, p. 4). Swimming was promoted because it strengthened the whole body. The Muscular Christianity movement combined medical and religious discourses with the military legacy of swimming and, in doing so, helped overturn class prejudices surrounding swimming. This movement reinforced the ideologically comforting link between the body of citizens and the body of the state. This idea was re-articulated by institutionalized discourses in the mid-eighteen hundreds, as a reaction to a mid century period ripe with a sense of disenfranchisement.

The Muscular Christianity movement articulated the difference with regard to

notions of national identity and the body in England and America. In England, the sport of swimming was ideologically-linked to imperialism. The United States, for the most part, had attempted to follow the isolationist doctrine developed during the revolutionary period. A philosophical rejection of imperialism was one of the core sentiments upon which the nation was founded. The Muscular Christianity movement spread from England to America, during the period that lead up to the civil war, because it mingled nationalist sentiments with a key value of the revolutionary period: the self-made man. Muscular Christianity redefined discourses about gender and class through the intermediary of the swimming pool. Swimming divorced itself from its lower class associations by mixing itself with the revolutionary era ideal of the middle class.

In America, the Muscular Christianity movement was dubbed “the businessman's awakening” (Putney, 2001, p. 2). YMCA's and private fitness clubs started to be built in the mid-1850s. These clubs featured swimming pools. They were places where mostly white, mostly middle class men converged to work out and socialize. The Muscular Christianity movement caught hold in America, despite its ties with the British Empire, because it occurred when “an extraordinary amount of talk focused on the need to rescue American manhood from sloth and effeminacy” (Putney, 2001, p. 7). Specifically, the movement was primarily designed to bring men back to the Protestant church, which had become overly associated with femininity (Putney, 2001, p.4). A connection between masculinity and the culture of swimming was forged through this movement, as demonstrated by the YMCA, which initially sought to rescue ‘manhood.’ However, this focus became diluted as the YMCA’s association with the

church led to the inclusion of women within its culture. With the advent of the YWCA movement in 1855, then, swimming pools became an increasingly acceptable locale for middle class women's bodies.

The cultural significance of the swimming pool was harnessed and institutionalized through its incorporation into medical, religious and military discourses. City officials began to construct swimming pools. In 1868, the city of Boston opened its first municipal pool as an 'experiment' (Wiltse, 2007, p. 22). City officials developed a series of rules to govern the pools' usage. Smoking was banned, as well as profanity and 'noisy conversations.' The city stationed a police officer at the pool. The pool was barely used by its intended recipients, working class men. By 1869, 97% of the swimmers who attended the pool were children (Wiltse, 2007, p. 23). When city officials tried to tame the body's movements and contain and control its behavior through the architectural environment of the swimming pool, working class men and women responded with acts of rebellion. This pool became a play space, a reversal of its intended use. The city closed the pool eight years after it was opened (Wiltse, 2007, p. 23).

By the 1890s, swimming pools were regarded by city officials as spaces with the potential to cure social strife because they could merge the values and ideologies of the workers with those of the ruling classes (Wiltse, 2007, p.5). City officials changed the locations of municipal swimming pools. Mini-oases were constructed in the city in the form of parks and playgrounds. These manufactured translations of natural environments started to include swimming pools. These pools were centrally located

and were intended for use by a cross-section of society (Wiltse, 2007, p. 36). These early pool experiments resulted in failure. The working classes continued to disrupt these spaces with rowdy behavior. Public swimming pools in many cities began to charge entrance fees to discourage the lower classes from attending pools (Wiltse, 2007, p. 37).

1.2 Disciplining Bodies and Dunking Fools

While municipal pools were a site where city officials attempted to discipline lower class masculine behaviour, the medical profession used the pool as a site for disciplining (what were constructed as) feminine behaviours. Michel Foucault (1961) explains that swimming pools were built in the basements of insane asylums (p. 172). Foucault's chronology indicates that appearance of pools in asylums coincided with an increased emphasis on classifying mental illnesses as well as with the emergence of hysteria and hypochondria as a single diagnostic category. These diseases were thought of as feminine and masculine versions of the same 'nervous' condition (p. 142). Hysteria and hypochondria were diseases of 'sympathy' and 'sensibility.' The body's organs were thought to respond with sympathy to the mind, which produced an excess of 'sensitivity' because it had led a disabling life of ease (p. 126). Hysterics and hypochondriacs were essentially viewed as too feminine. The pools that were built in asylums were thought to shock and "harden" the body, thus bringing the feeble-minded to their senses.

Medical literature from the asylum period indicates that psychiatric patients were cured 'miraculously' of their symptoms, after being thrown, pushed (by surprise)

or forcibly submerged in pools of water (Foucault, 1961, p. 172). The pools built in asylums functioned as a site for a particularly modern sort of baptism against the forces of the external world (p. 172). Water cures emerged at the moment when medicine began to envision not only the external world as the cause of somatic diseases, but also a punishment for diseases of the mind (p. 177). The effects of city life were thought to “feminize” the psyche, resulting in the excessive bodily gestures of the hysteric. These gestures were thought to be cured by water’s ‘hardening’ effects.

When the internal world was seen as the cause of disease, water was frequently used as a method of torture. Starting in the Middle Ages, water torture persisted through the Renaissance (and, certain variations such as “water-boarding,” persist to the present day). In earlier times, women in particular were victimized by water torture. For example, water was used to punish suspected witches. These women would be strapped into chairs and dunked in water. H. Bruce Franklin (2002) has suggested a correlation between the witch craze and the institutionalization of the medical profession. After the Black Plague, one of the means by which medicine professionalized itself was through outlawing the practice of midwifery and accusing its practitioners of witch craft (Franklin, 2002, p. 12). In the nineteenth century, when psychiatry began to formalize its practices, water torture was re-characterized as a “cure.”

The swimming pool’s social function was infused with ideas about discipline and ideas about the unstable gendered identities occasioned by modern life during the asylum period. Hysteria, hypochondria and the practice of water torture formed the ideological backdrop to early filmic images of the swimming pool and swimmers. The

gestures of the hysteric were replicated in early pool scenes, imposed on male bodies, while symbolism conveying witchcraft/madness during the Renaissance period was recuperated and enacted by the body of the female swimmer.

1.3 Swimming Pools and the Idea of Modern Culture

Several key notions emerged out of nineteenth century experiments with swimming pools. The middle and upper classes associated swimming with Christian ideology, discipline, male bonding and business culture. Social reformers and the medical community viewed swimming pools as spaces that could heal the ills of industrialization. The pools built in asylums formed the shadow that linked these ideas. Swimming pools were places where unruly, overly feminized minds could be cured through professionalized forms of torture. The idea of a dangerous hybridity between genders, which the hysteric and the hypochondriac symbolized, informed ideas about the role of water in modernity.

In 1898, architect Adolph Loos wrote a satirical essay on the importance of plumbers in the nineteenth century. The essay describes the plumber as “the pillar of the Germanic idea of culture” (para. 2). German culture needed to be taken back from the English, who inherited lead pipes from the Romans. This, suggests Loos, would result in the renewal of German military prowess (para.10). The main difference between America and Austria, he notes, lies in plumbing technology, noting that “Germany needs a good bath.” Loos continues, imploring his reader:

...let's consider this seriously. We really do not need art at all. We do not have a culture yet. Here is where the state might come to the rescue.

Instead of putting the cart before the horse, instead of putting their money into the production of art, they should first try to produce a culture. Next to the academies we should build baths, and along with the professors, we should appoint bath attendants. A higher standard of culture will have a better art as its consequence, an art that, when it comes to the fore, will do so without the help of the state... The state does have a certain interest in increasing desire for cleanliness in its people. For only that people which approaches the English in water use can keep step with them economically, only that people which surpasses the English in water use is destined to wrest from them the sovereignty of the world. (para. 11)

(Loos concludes by suggesting that German plumbers should adopt the rotary valve, a feature of American showers).

The themes that Loos' essay touches upon are revealing. His essay captures hygienic modernism, the British born Muscular Christianity movement and the new association of water with modern culture. Loos' essay links ideas about water consumption with nationalist sentiment, military power, cleanliness and culture, and identifies the connections made between citizens' physical bodies, the body of the state, and built environments. He highlights themes that informed the last half of the nineteenth century and laid the foundation for the twentieth century ideologies of the individual, of the state and of capitalism. As Susan Buck-Morse notes, social utopian philosophy and capitalist ideology are mutually dependent. She argues that:

The construction of mass utopia was the dream of the twentieth century. It was the driving ideological force of industrial modernization in both its capitalist and socialist forms. The dream was itself an immense material power that transformed the natural world, investing industrially produced objects and built environments with collective political desire...this collective dream dared to imagine a social world in alliance with personal happiness, and promised to adults that its realization would be in harmony with the overcoming of scarcity for all. (Buck-Morse, 2000, p.1)

The swimming pool was invested with political desire. Water became, as Paul Clerkin (1996) has suggested, the bridge between the spaces of medicine and architecture. In modern architecture, water signified environmental sterilization (“Eileen Grey”). Clean water became one of the first real commodities of the twentieth century. The associations that were made in the nineteenth century between water, gendered identities, nationalism, imperialism and culture are identifiable in early twentieth century cinematic representations of swimming pools. What emerged out of nineteenth century experiments with swimming pools was the notion that leisure spaces, sports, and popular amusements had the potential to “knit a heterogeneous audience into a cohesive whole” (Wiltse, 2007, p. 3).

Amy Herzog (2009) suggests in her discussion of water images in Tsai Ming Liang’s films that “disease forges a link between the physical body and the body of the city ” (p. 196). The social history of the swimming pool reveals the themes of disease,

class, gender and discipline that manifest themselves in early filmic images of the swimming pool. Unavoidably, swimmers – and the film stars who portrayed them – became implicated within these ideological meanings, as the next chapter will demonstrate. As my discussion has demonstrated, water is not always a therapeutic or “natural” domain for the human body. Early filmic images of the pool replicate these dominant discourses. On screen, as in reality, the bodies that inhabit these pools demonstrate the dark potential of watery discourses, such as the madness occasioned when the body is transplanted into unnatural environments.

Chapter 2: 1900-1920

The Front Crawl and the Breast Stroke: Swimming Pools and the Psychophysiological Landscape

Swimming Pool in Harlem (1905) is one of the first films produced to feature a swimming pool as a central trope. The filmmaker depicts the scene with a wide angle shot. Bodies leap from balconies and then splash into a crowded indoor pool. No particular body is distinguished from another. The pool is a place for falling, splashing male bodies. This short film is characteristic of what Tom Gunning (1989) has described as the early “cinema of attractions” (pp. 230-235). The pool is shot in the same style as amusement parks or street scenes had been. Moreover, these early scenes of pools, as Gunning suggests, were deemed to be as fascinating to audiences as the new medium which captured and displayed the images. Like the early cinema itself, the swimming pool is modern and reflective of the new and exciting spaces of the city.

Swimming Pool in Harlem does not depict women swimming or a private swimming club. Instead, the filmmaker chose to frame the newly tamed male working class swimming culture, characterized by the architectural environment of the municipal swimming pool, as his subject. This early depiction of the swimming pool is non-narrative, in accordance with cinema conventions at this point. The filmmaker’s stationary camera facilitates an objective, journalistic portrait of swimming pool culture. The scene replicates institutionalized discourses, such as the dictates of city officials, lending the new medium an authority.

2.1 The Million Dollar Mermaid and the Bathing Beauties

The story of film star and professional swimmer Annette Kellerman illustrates

what occurred to the image when film moved into the realm of fiction. Film combined contemporary discourses with historical discourses and wrote them onto the body of the swimmer. Annette Kellerman's body was interpreted by cinema and invested with the same themes that appeared in the pool's social history. While Kellerman's off-screen persona pushed the female body forward in time, her on-screen (or filmic) image moved it backwards, by framing her body in a particular way.

Annette Kellerman was the first among many professional swimmers, whose career was transformed by the film industry. In the early twentieth century, she became achieved celebrity due to her heroic, yet failed attempts to swim across the English Channel. Fuelling her fame, in 1908 she was arrested on indecency charges for wearing her modified version of a bathing suit – stockings stitched to a one piece men's swimsuit – on a public beach. Kellerman's arrest and her trial garnered a massive amount of media coverage. The swimmer defended her outfit, arguing that women's cumbersome bathing costumes were unsuitable for athletic endeavors. Shortly after her trial, she was offered a contract from a Hollywood film company (Catapano, 2008, pp. 23-27).

Advertisements for Kellerman's film, *Daughter of the Gods* (1916), in which she performs what is widely believed to be the film industry's first nude scene, billed the budding star as "the perfect woman" (Catapano, 2008, p. 25; M. Cade, personal communication, January 10, 2009). On-screen, however, Kellerman is never "just" a woman. Indeed, with her move from the newspaper headlines to the water-soaked images of the film screen, Kellerman's star persona was that of a changeling: the

“million dollar mermaid.” Kellerman’s public persona and her filmic identity came together in a particular way that demonstrates the results of a confluence of discourses.

In public appearances, Kellerman advocated for women’s participation in sports, but in the movies she was consistently cast as a sea nymph or a mermaid – an otherworldly creature tied to the mythical realm of the ancient gods. On a connotative level, infectious madness is invoked by the mermaid figure. During the Renaissance, for instance, madness was often represented by half-human, half-animal hybrids (Foucault, 1961, pp. 19-21). Sorcery was also associated with animal spirits. As “the million dollar mermaid,” the image of the sea siren infused Kellerman’s persona with a particular set of ideas about the dangers of femininity. Although the film industry adopted the swimmer for her “modern” athletic build (and despite her publicized outspokenness on women’s role in sports), Kellerman’s on-screen image emphasizes Victorian artistic traditions, mythology, and medical discourses. Her beauty was symbolically linked to discourses of female duplicity, dangerous enchantment and madness. As embodied by Kellerman, the siren served as the archetype of cinema’s “bathing beauties.”

In 1916, Mack Sennett replaced his Keystone cops with bathing beauties (King, 2009, p. 210). Sennett’s bathing beauties had dangerous siren-like qualities. They caused men to fall into swimming pools. One of Sennett's favorite visual gags was men falling into swimming pools fully dressed (Bowser, 1969, p. 8, 108). This joke recurs in filmed pool scenes throughout the twentieth century and constitutes one of cinema’s most enduring clichés. In the early 1900s, this joke articulated the idea that newly revealed feminine bodies had the dangerous power to destabilize masculinity. In these

films, the surprise fall-into-water gag – punctuated by a big splash – functions much the way asylum therapies did: to break the “spell” of feminine influences and bring male characters to their senses.

Keystone’s substitution of authority figures for bathing beauties reveals an acute recognition of the notions of subjectivity that were being challenged by people like Annette Kellerman and by environments like the swimming pool. This substitution also articulates the role the bathing beauties were playing in the development of consumer culture, and the powerful influence they had begun to wield. Police officers were stationed at municipal swimming pools during this period to enforce regulations about clothing and behavior. By the mid 1920s, however, women’s swimsuits had shrunk considerably; a far skimpier version of the “Annette Kellerman” had become women’s standard swimwear (Wiltse, 2007, p.110). Kellerman’s costume had a positive effect on emancipatory struggles. According to Foster Reah Dulles:

‘The modern bathing suit...symbolized the new status of women even more than the short skirts and bobbed hair of the jazz age or the athleticism of the devotees of tennis and golf. It was the final proof of their successful assertion of the right to enjoy whatever recreation they chose, costumed to the demands of the sport rather than the tabus of an outworn prudery, and to enjoy it in free and natural association with men.’ (as cited in King, 2009, p.210)

Modern femininity became defined, in part, by the bathing suit, but Sennett used his bathing beauties in a particular way. According to Rob King

(2009):

At a time when cultural formations of femininity were being redefined through the figure of 'the new woman,' Keystone's bathing girl publicity translated changing paradigms of female behavior into a commercial spectacle and relegated women's modernity to the realm of beauty and fashion aids. (p. 211)

The bathing beauties were not only featured in film, they were also sent to promote beauty products. The partnership between the commercial industries and the film industry debuted with the bathing beauties and transformed the image of the swimming pool into a site of commodity exchange. The effects of this transformation were evident in movie star's publicity photos.

2.2 Swimming Pools, Status Symbols and Masculinity

Class status anxiety started to manifest itself in representations of swimming pools during this period. In the late teens and early 1920s, movie stars began to appear beside their home swimming pools in architectural magazines and periodicals (Van Leeuwen, 1989, p. 238). Douglas Fairbanks is one among many male film stars who was photographed in a canoe in his home swimming pool (in a shot most likely used to demonstrate the scale of his pool (p. 243)). This particular image of a man in a canoe in a pool reflects the undertone of masculinity and virility that asserted itself around the swimming pool as it became a new American status symbol. Studies of paleolithic art demonstrate that phallic symbolism emerged when images became a currency (Marshack, 1995, pp. 10-20). Publicity photos from the 1920s demonstrate that this

same process occurred when the image of the swimming pool gained a cultural currency. The status anxiety that manifested itself in publicity photos manifested itself in a different way on the bodies that inhabited filmic swimming pools.

2.3 Swimming Pools and Forces beyond our Control

In the 1919 film, *When Doctors Disagree*, a Bolshevik protester pushes an heiress into a pool during a Mayday celebration. This scene characterizes pool scenes in the 1920s, wherein bodies are destabilized around swimming pools, showing tendencies of falling (or being pushed) into them. This type of gesture and movement of the body spanned genres, and was not unique to slapstick. It reflects the recognition of the destabilizing effects that swimming pools were having on traditional categories of class and gender. Destabilized notions of subjectivity were translated by film into depictions of literally destabilized bodies.

In 1920, the film *Love, Honor and Obey*, ushers in the trope of the pool as a death trap. In the film, the male lead, Stuart (the author of a book “containing radical sexual theories”), is hurt in a car crash and rescued by Constance, who brings him to her home to recuperate. Inevitably, Constance and Stuart fall in love. After Constance's father reads excerpts from Stuart's book, however, he banishes Stuart from his property. The couple writes love letters, which are intercepted by Eben, Constance's suitor. Forlorn, Constance reluctantly agrees to marry Eben. When Constance discovers that her fiancé had intercepted the letters, she calls Stuart. The two men fight and Eben falls into the swimming pool and drowns (AFI catalogue, 2009, “Love Honor and Obey”). The pool in this film liberates the heroine from a traditional, loveless marriage and

allows her to marry her more progressive suitor.

The deadly pool is figuratively connected to the suffragette movement, which was making headway, in part, by challenging Victorian notions about fashion and public decency. The pool became a site of death in film, during this era when intense pressures were being exerted on traditional definitions of subjectivity. While the film promotes emancipatory causes through its plot, the image of the pool is tainted by death. Manslaughter is not quite murder, but it is an act of violence that causes the death of the body. The pool in this film conveys the idea of a deadly mistake.

When pools were first translated into images, they illustrated the ideological shifts between Victorianism, which had strictly segregated spheres of public and private life, and the new ideology of modernism, which placed a greater emphasis on the public sphere and on the public life of the body. Early swimming pool scenes in film demonstrate the relationship between bodies and cities as these ideologies clashed with each other. According to Elizabeth Grosz (1992) the body is ‘amorphous’ and needs ‘social triggering,’ while “The city divides cultural life into public and private domains, geographically dividing and defining the particular social positions and locations occupied by individuals and groups” (p. 250). Swimming pools scenes in these early films function like triggers for the body. They stand in for the transitional phase between ideologies and as a result pool scenes are surrounded by an aura of danger, they function as a symbolic crossroad in film. In early filmic pool scenes, the tipsiness of the body, the swooning, fainting, falling and force imposed upon the body suggests the edgy sense of subjectivity occasioned by this transitional phase.

Elizabeth Grosz (1992) states that “...different sociocultural environments actively produce the bodies of their inhabitants as particular and distinctive types of bodies, as bodies with particular physiologies, affective lives and concrete behaviors” (p. 250). Grosz explains that filmic images form part of the city. Early pool scenes demonstrate the way the ideologies of the city and those of film mimicked each other. In Sennett’s films, the swooning gestures of the hysterical women are transferred onto men’s bodies, whereupon men’s bodies are subsequently punished. In *Love Honor and Obey* and in *When Doctors Disagree*, discourses conveyed through pool imagery discipline bodies teetering on the edge of modernity; they are being pushed into swimming pools and dying in them. The filmic swimming pool produces bodies whose gestures indicate a destabilized sense of gendered identities and uneasiness with new modern spaces. Filmic images of the swimming pool replicated the medicalized, militarized function the early architectural environment of the swimming pool.

Chapter 3: 1921-1930

Mixed States and the Swimming Pool

In the 1920s, in the real world space of the municipal swimming pool, bodies were re-inscribed, racialized and sexualized. In the north of the United States, as Jeff Wiltse (2007) points out, early pools divided class and gender but did not reinforce racial distinctions (p. 3). In the 1920s, as the effects of the great migration were felt, in many northern cities, gender desegregation coincided with racial segregation. Concerns about bodily intimacy and sexuality that were prevalent during the gender segregation period were reignited as race issues (p. 4). Pools were, as Wiltse suggests, contested sites during this period: they were places where white people “literally beat black people out of the water” (p. 4). Against the backdrop of public swimming’s racialized brutality and gender desegregation, a white man attempted suicide by diving into the shallow end of a swimming pool – on film.

Hard Luck (1921) opens on a note of despair. Buster is trying to commit suicide because he is “lonely and penniless.” After a series of misadventures, the distraught bachelor ends up at a county club. In the film’s first pool scene, bathing beauties frolic around the pool’s edges as another man appears to walk across the water’s surface. Buster falls in because he mistakes the deep end of the pool for the shallow end. The next shot reveals that the man walking across the water is actually on stilts. Near the end of the film, Buster has succeeded in rescuing a girl from bandits only to find out she’s married; a revelation that takes place pool-side. “A final souvenir, before I dive into eternity,” states Buster by way of the inter-title. After Buster handing the girl a cigar

stub, which he has used to foil bandits in a previous scene, Buster climbs the diving board, intent on suicide. He aims himself toward the shallow end of the pool. The camera cuts to an overhead shot of distressed, swimsuit-ed women. Buster makes his swan dive, but misses the pool and falls through the pool's concrete deck, leaving a large hole in his wake. "Several years later," Buster emerges. Sporting an "oriental" style cap, he climbs out of the hole in the ground, pulling a dark haired wife and several children along with him. The pool is empty, the estate is abandoned, and vines climb the sides of the high walls that surround the swimming pool. Buster points towards the diving board and tells his family, "This is where I came from." The film ends.

This film serves to unite the discordant emotions and anxieties of the period by situating them around the swimming pool. Class, race and gender hold hands in the final pool scene. Buster's suicide attempt is caused by alienation. He simply doesn't fit into any social group in this film. He is similarly ill-at-ease among the beggars on the street and the wealthy, and uncomfortable in the company of new modern women. On a connotative level, Buster, the everyman is threatened by the intrusive character of the city's new public spaces, which are symbolized by the swimming pool. Through his character's misadventures, Buster Keaton comments on gender desegregation and the resultant uneasiness it brought forth. Race issues are disguised. Just as it was then considered unsightly for black people to appear in swimming pools alongside women, it would be unfathomable to portray them in filmic pool waters. The pool-side appearance of Buster's Asian wife suggests the race issues that were appearing in the real life space of the swimming pool. Buster's suicide attempt fails on a literal level, but succeeds on a

symbolic one as an articulation of the psychological effects that changing notions of subjectivity were having on white men.

The movement to the other side of the world through the medium of the swimming pool demonstrates that the swimming pool had come to stand in for the space of the city in film. 'Transition' and 'transit' characterizes early movie images and links the space of film to the space of the city (Webber and Wilson, 2008, p.1). The pool in this scene functions as a medium through which transit and transition are made possible:

A key part of the transition that characterizes the city in moving images is that between the outside and the inside, the conversion of external surface into interior and vice versa...this transition from public to private space, in its turn tends to involve a move from public time to private time, and an amplification of temporal as well as spatial representation. (Webber and Wilson, 2008, p. 4)

Keaton's final pool scene depicts a two-fold movement from the public space of the swimming pool into the inward turning psychological movement of suicide as well as from the public space of the pool into the interior private time of family life. The pool causes Buster to regress. It moves him backward in time.

Andrew Webber and Emma Wilson (2008) argue that:

Cities, in their external dynamics, present dense spatiotemporal activity, but their interiors extend such time zones further... The media of moving images exercise mobility in time and space, and between those

dimensions. In these media, spatial transit is dialectically bound up with temporal transition; geographical development with historical development, space with narrative line. (p. 4-5)

The passage through time zones, surfaces, across geographic zones and into interior private time, is highlighted by the final swimming pool scene.

Buster Keaton capitalized on popular anxieties. He recognized and used the swimming pool as a space that encapsulated them. On a denotative level, the film's pool scene allies itself with conservative forces. Buster goes to the other side of the world because of the diving board and emerges with an Asian wife, a stereotyped figure associated with notions of obedience, docility and servitude – a marked contrast to the bold, flirtatious bathing beauties. Happily married Buster has no distractingly empowered women (he emerges in 1921, when women can vote) and no feminized spaces to confuse him. He had to go all the way to the other side of the world to get a wife, but the film suggests that 'all's well that ends well.' The bathing beauties are at ease in the pool, while Buster is a bumbling figure who can't even distinguish the deep end from the shallow end. The walking on water of the stilt-wearing man evokes the model of a Christ-like figure that Buster cannot imitate due to the distracting presence and misdirections of the bathing beauties. This is possibly a semi-veiled comment on the YWCA movement. When Buster emerges from the ground beside the pool, it is now devoid of bathing beauties and the wealthy club patrons who caused him so much distress.

The pool is a simulacrum of the female body in the film's final scene. This

illustrates that the spaces of the city that the pool represented were beginning to be viewed as a feminized spaces in the social imaginary. Buster states that he is diving “into eternity.” Water and the womb share transhistorical and cross-cultural symbolism in art, literature and mythology. In this film, the pool becomes as a womb-like space. According to Angela Carter (1979) the womb is “...the physical location for an everlasting present tense that can usefully serve as a symbol of eternity, a concept that has always presented some difficulties in visualization. The hypothetical dream time seems to be the best we can do” (p. 108). The final scene in Buster Keaton's film is a representation of a 'hypothetical dream-time.'

The abandoned swimming pool to which Keaton gestures provides the final pool scene with a more subversive reading. The decaying pool functions as an image which depicts a utopian vision of the future by resuscitating a sense of the past. It capitalizes on socialist ideas about a workers' paradise, which would dissolve the class and gender distinctions that leave Buster penniless and distraught. Walter Benjamin's concept of the “wish image” – the organically-styled surface ornamentation that attaches onto new technological forms – illuminates the connotative implications of the swimming pool in this final scene. Benjamin thought that vines and leaf designs in turn of the century iron work indicated a collective unconscious desire for a return to the golden age of a classless society as well as a repressed desire for a peaceful state of coexistence with nature. For Benjamin, unconscious desires run counter to the force of culture, the repetition of and recuperation of organic motifs are indications of progress, at least in the social imaginary, toward a utopian society (Buck Morse, 1989). The pool takes on

the quality of a wish image in its aesthetic design.

Buster Keaton's next film featuring a swimming pool furthers the associations made in *Hard Luck*. *The Camera Man* (1928) replaces the wealthy estate pool of *Hard Luck* with a municipal pool. Through the figure of Sally, the film industry is symbolically tied to the environment of the swimming pool. The swimming pool, in turn, is tied to the disabling forces of the modern city. The swimming pool scene in this film begins with Buster Keaton ("Buster") and his love interest, Sally, entering a pool. Buster fumbles in his pockets for money as the crowd flickers by him. After Buster enters the building he accidentally follows Sally into the women's change room. For the next few minutes, changing into swimsuits becomes part of his comic routine. He ends up in the men's change room, finally, but shares it with another man. "Will you keep out of my undershirt," grumbles the businessman. As they fumble with their clothes, the tight space of the change room squishes Keaton and the businessman together. The businessman ends up taking Buster's pants from him. After this confusion, Buster enters the pool dressed in a comically oversized swimsuit.

A long shot of the pool shows it is occupied by a mass of bodies. Sally enters the pool and as she walks by, a cluster of men follows her. When Buster manages to extract her from them, the men faint in unison. The next shot shows the group of men diving into the pool together. The following scenes emphasize Buster's awkwardness; his gauche athletics are contrasted with the elegance of the other male swimmers. Games, such as tossing balls, are played, though Buster is not even adept at this. We are shown a series of successful dives off performed off a high diving board. Buster's dive,

naturally, is a bust. By the end of the swim, Buster has lost not only his swim suit (his modesty held intact only by a pair of women's heavy pantaloons), but Sally as well (who has found another man). As the water of the pool undulates in the background, Buster manages to push the new suitor into the pool. "Let's get out of here and walk on the beach," he states by way of the inter-title.

The film industry, the swimming pool and the spaces of the city are tied together in this scene through the figure of Sally. The plot indicates that she is employed by the film industry and she ultimately emerges as the empowered figure in this scene due, in large part, to her bathing suited body. Buster, who is out of work, doesn't have a proper bathing suit, can barely dress himself, and has a hard time keeping his clothes on at all. The pool is a confusing environment for Buster, who is distressed and frantic in his (failed) attempts to impress Sally.

Dressing and undressing the body serve as a vehicle for the most humorous and revealing sequences in this scene. Grosz's (1992) theorization of the relationship between bodies and cities helps explain the significance of Keaton's dressing scenes. Grosz explains that "the subject's exteriority is psychically constructed...the process of social inscription of the body's surface constructs for it a psychical interior" (p. 2). Keaton's extended clothes fumbling sequence in the change room and his cross-dressing in the pool suggests the way the male body and the male psyche have been transformed by women's changing fashions. The male body is undressed in the swimming pool, and it loses its facade. This results in chaotic behavior.

Following the bathing beauty tradition, Sally's pool-side power is siren-like.

Men faint around her and exhibit symptoms of hysteria. The bourgeois man is effectively feminized by the appearance of a beautiful bathing-suited woman; her power to feminize these moneyed men is viral, as they are depicted as a powerless cluster. Buster's working class everyman and the bourgeoisie are disempowered by her presence at the swimming pool. Meanwhile, Sally displays a comfort level in the swimming pool. The overriding mood of the scene is that the pool is a crowded, confusing, and awkward space, not really a place where anyone but Sally, a modern woman employed by the film industry, feels at home. The beach is offered up as an alternative to the confining environment of the swimming pool.

Elizabeth Grosz (1992) explains that:

The city is one of the crucial factors in the social production of sexed corporeality: the built environments provide the contexts and coordinates for most contemporary western and, today eastern forms of the body, even for rural bodies insofar as the twentieth century defines the countryside, 'the rural,' as the raw material of urban development. (p. 242)

When the old swimming hole became part of the city, the dynamics surrounding its use changed dramatically. It moved from a space where men and boys played into a site where men and women displayed themselves. Grosz suggests that the transformation of the landscape affects the psychical construction of the body and as a result, subjectivity (p. 241-252). In *Hard Luck*, the space of the city, the space of the film industry and the space of the pool are tied together. The pool, the city and the film

industry are feminized spaces, surrounded by an aura of danger. The artificial landscape infected male identity with insecurity, foolishness and fear. Former emperors, like Keaton, paraded around swimming pools without proper clothing, the accoutrements that defined their status and helped shape their identities.

By the late 1920s, the basis of the long lasting partnership between swimming pools and the film industry had been formed. Bathing beauty contests were born at municipal pools. The modern bathing suit transformed the space of the swimming pool into a stage for working class girls. These contests were so popular that the city of Wilmington considered constructing ‘bleachers’ around its pool (Wiltse, 2007, pp. 114-116). Beauty pageants helped working class women dream the Cinderella dream. This myth, nurtured by the chorus girl, emphasized that the city was a place where dreams could come true, and it spilled itself with ferocity into film’s musical pool scenes in the 1930s. In 1927, a magazine entitled *The Swimming Pool Age* appeared (Wiltse, 2007, p. 93). The development of mass culture comprised of a “multi faceted set of interactions across socioeconomic spheres, drawing energies from different centers of gravity within different class cultures” (King, 2007, p. 215). By the end of the 1920s, the swimming pool and the movies had become integral parts of mass culture.

Chapter 4: 1930-1940

Fallen Angels and the Butterfly: Swimming Pools and Depression Era Cinema

“The sky is falling” (Chicken Little, date unknown).

The hum that had begun in the early part of the century around swimming pools had built itself into a refrain by 1930. After the American stock markets crashed in 1929, the dream of mass utopia renewed itself by pouring its promises into swimming pools. Several overarching themes informed popular culture and political discourses in the 1930s, the most prominent of which was mass culture. The public space of the swimming pool had united the values of different classes and had helped shape the idea of the new woman. Due to its status as an object of mass culture, it became a vehicle for political propaganda and a visual image that filmmakers used to explore the idea of and implications of mass culture. The visual landscape of the 1930s was flooded with swimming pools. The symbolic shape of the swimming pool in the 1930s emerged out of a heightened dialogue between art, politics and popular culture. As a result, this era stands as one of the most interesting and complicated periods for the swimming pool as a symbol.

In lieu of the destabilized bodies that inhabited pool scenes in the previous decade, cinema’s swimming pool scenes of the 1930s are characterized by attempts to re-stabilize bodies and reinforce gendered identities. In the early 1930s, the symbol of the swimming pool was woven from the links between sports culture and politics. By 1932, filmmakers altered representations of swimming bodies and imbued them with

attributes that expressed the period's focus on mass culture. By 1936, when the world stage had begun to rearrange itself, the swimming pool in film started to speak about failure, becoming a symbol of lost utopias.

4.1 Sports in the Interwar Period

Historians have noted that sports became mass culture in the 1920s and that by the 1930s, international sporting competitions substituted for the battles that were no longer being waged in the trenches (Imphoof, 2009, p. 376). Sports and the heroes they produced functioned to assuage bruised egos by re-instilling a sense of national pride and patriotism into citizenries which had suffered personal and /or national defeats during World War One. Specifically, the popularity of swimming transcended national boundaries, but achieved particular prominence in America, France and Britain. It became a popular sport in Germany during the rise of National Socialism because of its perceived "Britishness" and consequent association with Aryan culture (Imphoof, 2009, p. 376). Swimming was popularized in Italy because it was thought to strengthen the whole body. Part of Mussolini's agenda in the 1930s was to strengthen his soldierly class through sports. He depicted himself in propaganda campaigns as an avid swimmer (Dogliani, 2001).

The struggle to understand the newly politicized symbol of the swimming pool is evident in Jean Vigo's film *Taris, Roi de L'eau* (1931), which begins by invoking nationalist sentiments and situating them around the pools borders. The film begins with a close-up shot of a megaphone. The narrator announces that French swimmer Taris is the world champion and record holder. Taris is shown poised on the edge of the pool

and ready to start racing. He dives into the pool to the sound of a starter's pistol. The racing scenes which follow use time lapse photography. The camera takes a bird's eye view as the swimmers move rapidly through the water. This footage is interspersed with several close-ups of Tatis himself. At the edge of the frame a cameraman runs beside the pool, trying in vain to catch up with the swimmers.

After the race, a medium shot depicts Tatis as he grips the pool's ladder and is set to climb out of the pool. The film cuts to a body floating on its back in the water. "L'eau est son domaine," says the narrator. The swimmer is likened to a fish. The voice-over continues, while swimmers play in the water: "On n'apprend pas à nager par chance," suggests the narrator. An overhead shot shows a woman demonstrating the breaststroke by the side of the pool: "Un, deux, trois, quatre," she intones. Her arm and leg movements are sharp and exact; punctuated by the sounds of the numbers, her exercises are performed with military precision.

The following scenes emphasize each part of Tatis' body and its movements. For "le depart," Tatis is poised on the edge of the pool, his arms are outstretched as though he were a bird about to take flight. He dives into the water. The film rewinds and we see Tatis' body move from its position in the water back to its original starting position. "Le depart" is emphasized and depicted by the cinematographer as though it were a false start. Tatis' legs are the next focus. They are separated from his body at the knee joint by the camera. Tatis' legs beat faster and faster, as the narrator describes their motions, his voice floats over the non-diegetic sounds of an airplane taking off. Arms are moved "systematically" and are likened by the narrator to airplane wings. Next, the

torso is examined. Taris performs a sidestroke and the back crawl. Taris demonstrates an underwater turn for the camera. Taris swims underwater in circles, as he swims towards the camera he smiles a wide smile. He rests on the bottom of the pool. He lies on his side, with his fist propping up his chin. In this contemplative pose, he resembles Rodin's *Thinker*. The film ends with Taris' body moving in a rewind motion out of the water and onto the pool deck. Taris is clothed, suddenly, and he is staring at the camera. He tips his hat to the camera and walks over the pool's dark murky water and disappears from sight. The film ends.

In the final scene, the pool water resembles an ocean; its most distant borders are absent. Taris, fully-dressed, walks Christ-like over the surface of the water. The body of this national champion swimmer symbolizes France's victories in international sporting competitions. In this film, Vigo depicts the surface of the pool as a space characterized by competition, while the underwater realm is a space of subconscious reflection. The pool functions as a symbol of the state itself and of the state of the national psyche. The cinematic play between surface and depth transforms the environment of the pool into a symbol of hope for a restored state and for a restored national psyche.

Through his exploration of movement, Vigo expresses hope that the medium of film can aid in this mending process. Vigo explores the movements of the swimmer in the same way he explores the various movements of the camera. Vigo uses every cinematic trick in the book for this film, from the rewind movement to time lapse photography. The camera slices the body of the swimmer into distinct parts. The

cinematographer creates his image through cuts, edits and montage in the same way that an assemblage of distinct movements creates the body of the swimmer. Vigo is likening the movements of the swimmer to the movements of the cinematographer. He uses the word “coule” to describe the body of the swimmer, which implies flowing or leaking. In this film, the body of the swimmer becomes one with its filmic environment and one with the French national psyche, it moves between solid and liquid states and wanders over undefined borders, like the territory of Alsace-Lorraine.

The nationalist sentiments, the false start, the airplane soundtrack and the film’s emphasis on precisely identifying the movements of the body suggest that the filmmaker is using the space of the pool to comment on the link between a growing sports culture in France amidst the aftermath of the First World War. In a sense, this film returns the swimming pool to its eighteenth century origins; the pool takes on the function of a therapeutic instrument, one that heals national psyches and a militarized space. This film exemplifies the new trajectory of the symbol of the swimming pool. The pool is a space that expresses the hope of a nation. It is a healing space.

The morphology of the symbol of the swimming pool into a hopeful place is evident in films produced in France and the United States during the 1930s. Like the bodies of swimming champions, the swimming pool’s new symbolic connotations permeated national borders, popular culture, and political discourses. In 1932, cinema altered the dominant representation of the male swimmer’s body. In 1933, the American government altered the symbol of the swimming pool. The same year, the bodies and gestures of swimming champions changed. In all three cases, the body of the male

swimmer became the site where the idea of hopefulness manifested itself. The super-lean body of the male champion swimmer, evident in Vigo's film, was temporarily altered in 1932 when visual culture in America and elsewhere began to demonstrate an obsession with heavily muscled male physiology, featuring rippling chest muscles. Hopefulness was expressed by an emphasized upper body, which conveyed the idea of mass and articulated the idea that masculine strength, bravery and brawn could navigate wounded psyches through the worst years of the depression.

4.2 Aquatic Apes and the Butterfly

In 1932, Olympic swimming champion Buster Crabbe starred in the first *Tarzan* film. Another Olympic swimming champion, Johnny Weissmuller took on the Tarzan role in 1933, when he began to appear in the weekly television serial. Crabbe and Weissmuller were athletic heroes whose exploits transitioned from newspaper headlines to the silver screen, like those of their female predecessor Annette Kellerman. Like Kellerman, these men were depicted as hybrid figures, half-human and half-animal. While the champion woman swimmer body in the 1920s expressed mythological and medical discourses, articulating ideas about hybridity, beauty and madness, the male champion swimmer body in the 1930s evoked scientific discourses, notably Darwinian theory. At the time, this theory was being used to justify racist ideas and the study of eugenics (Chambliss and Suitavsky, 2008, p. 9). As Kenneth Clark (1956) suggests, "The body is not one of those subjects that can be made into art by direct transcription, like a tiger in a snowy landscape...we do not wish to imitate, we wish to perfect" (p. 5-6). The male swimmer's body espoused the dangerous idea perfection, a theme that had

filtered itself into political discourses and film's images in the 1930s.

The Tarzan figure was popularized in comic strips in the 1920s. In 1924, a silent film was made. In carnivals and circus sideshows, the strong man figure had also been popularized. In 1933, however, the ape-man image took off and a new male body aesthetic began to dominate visual culture, as evidenced in both New Deal advertisements and Nazi propaganda. In 1933, the Japanese film, *King Kong* became a box office hit. This movie was Hitler's second favorite film (after *Snow White*). The ape-man body of the male champion swimmer, personified by Weissmuller and Crabbe in *Tarzan* was translated into a gesture in 1933 and written on the bodies of future male Olympic swimmers.

In 1933, Henry Myers performed the butterfly stroke during a competition at a Brooklyn YMCA. The butterfly stroke is a stroke that emphasizes the upper body motions of the swimmer. The butterfly stroke is the most difficult swimming stroke. The swimmer plunges through the water, churning their arms like a windmill while their legs move like a dolphin's tail. The name of the stroke suggests the motion of the upper body and implies the period's thematic focus, by invoking a need to return to 'nature' – that is, the ideologies propagated under industrial capitalism and patriarchy had been turned on their heads when the markets crashed. The butterfly swimmer's twisted mannerisms, the slightly inhuman agony its gestures display and the ape-man screech, which these motions replicate, expressed the zeitgeist of 1933, the worst year of the depression. It was the year that Roosevelt was elected president of the United States and the year that Hitler was elected chancellor of Germany. 1933 was an important year on

the political stage and the most fascinating year for swimming pools and swimming pool scenes in film.

4.3 The Sport of Swimming in 1933

In 1933, the Nazi's placed athletic clubs, including swimming clubs, directly under government control in a conscious attempt to weaken the power of local sports clubs which were affiliated with political parties. It was in part through sports that National Socialism gained its foothold. David Imhoof (2009) suggests that “as activities rooted in older, established notions of community, yet shaped by newer ideas about the body, machines and ‘modern’ society, sports helped Germans unite apparently contradictory notions in thought and practice” (p. 375). The middle class notion that sports were ‘apolitical,’ as Imhoof suggests, essentially made sports political, by “ignoring the party politics that had shaped working class sports since the nineteenth century” (p. 383). This transformed right-wing ideology into a ‘non-political virtue’ (p.383). The usage of swimming pools to unify national psyches, as vehicles for political propaganda and as a means to emphasize the right-wing aspect of left-leaning ideologies was not unique to totalitarian regimes. In the United States, swimming pools were heavily promoted by the government. President Roosevelt was a follower and proponent of the Muscular Christianity movement.

4.4 New Deal Pools

The first act that Roosevelt passed before Congress was the installation of a pool at the White House. Critics argued that it was an unnecessary luxury in a time when the vast majority of Americans were suffering. The White House pool, responded the

Democrats, was to be modest. It was to be built in the basement of the White House and was deemed necessary to maintain the President's health (New York Times, 1933, January 28). The White House pool was used frequently in news reels to showcase the president's vitality and happy family life. These news reels demonstrated that Roosevelt's body, twisted by polio, could persevere despite setbacks. His body, like the body of the nation could heal itself in swimming pools. The White House swimming pool scenes emphasized the idea that the pool was a curative space and that Roosevelt's promises of the return of leisure and happiness would soon materialize.

As Jacques Ellul (1965) suggests, propaganda is not overt, it operates on layers and levels. Ellul suggests that in the United States from 1920 until 1933, the "main emphasis was on the psychological; propaganda is the manipulation of psychological symbols having goals of which the listener is not conscious" (p. xi). Ellul states that for propaganda to succeed, a society "must be an individualist and a mass society" (p. 90). Mass society is characterized by "a certain uniformity of material conditions" (p. 93). Swimming was an individual sport and swimming pools were a location for the masses to gather. Municipal swimming pools were constructed by Roosevelt in order to equalize the material conditions of American citizens.

Under Roosevelt's guidance, a second wave of pool building began in 1933. Between 1933 and 1938, the federal government in the United States and the Civil Works Administration (whose work continued under the Works Progress Administration) built more than 1300 swimming pools, 1681 wading pools and remodeled hundreds of pools (Wiltse, 2007, p. 93). During Roosevelt's era, in cities like

New York, elaborate ceremonies opened municipal pools. Priests blessed the water and Olympic stars performed in them. A flood of lights over a night time pool signaled the announcement that ‘the pool is yours’ (p.94).

The athletic ceremonies that opened municipal pools provided support for the muscled male aesthetic of New Deal posters, which depicted strong able-bodied men, with emphasized and exaggerated upper torsos, rebuilding the nation. Varda Burstyn (1999) has borrowed Raymond Williams’ terminology to suggest that different sports operate on dominant, residual and emergent levels within a society. Olympic athletes, according to Burstyn, operate on dominant levels and dominant sports reinforce patriarchy, which Burstyn links to the ideology of industrial capitalism. On a symbolic level, patriarchal dominance and capitalist ideology was reinserted into the space of swimming pool during the depression, a place that had been feminized in the 1920s when gender desegregation had occurred. Burstyn states that:

More than any church, sport and its associations have become the great cultural unifiers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries... Sport's success lay in the development of a physical and mathematical language of meanings and loyalties, based on the gendered body, that superseded divisions of religion and culture. (p.19)

In the 1930s, swimmer’s bodies reflected yearnings for cultural unification through their altered and expressive shapes and gestures.

Tarzan was succeeding in his endeavors by performing feats of brute force and demonstrating his power over the natural landscape and its objects. His body expressed

the period's thematic focus on mass culture by reinforcing the capitalist ideology of strength through individual achievement. Meanwhile, women athletes in Busby Berkley's films were depicted as part of a choreographed mass. Women's bodies expressed the idea of mass culture through their multiplied numbers. Women's bodies moved through the water of swimming pools as though they were individual parts of one great machine. Women's bodies expressed the ideas of homogeneity and coordination which was necessary for the survival of capitalist ideology. Berkley used female champion swimmers in his films in 1932 and 1933; they were for the most part reduced to decorative objects, their athleticism and strength was denied as they twirled about and performed metaphors for sex in watery ballets.

4.5 A Musical Interlude: Sex and the Swimming Pool in American Cinema

Richard Maltby (1986) suggests that film responded to the economic crisis though the image of the woman:

The image of fetishized sexuality as consumerist pleasure became more threatening for a culture in recession, and the potential subversiveness of the image brought forth louder calls for its repression. In that sense it may be argued that the concern to suppress the image of female sexuality was concerned with its threatened exposure of the contradictions within patriarchal capitalism, but the contradictions arose, not around the representation of the independent woman – a figure who was continuously contained, recuperated and repressed within narrative – but around the representation of woman as an object of consumption, desire.

The depression interrupted the smooth development of a culture of consumption, and caused a temporary reconsideration of the iconography it had promulgated. The demand for the imposition of censorship was a rebellion against the image of consumption, and it gained public credibility because those images became too detached from available reality. A recurrent criticism of both Hollywood and the previous decade was that they were guilty of the sin of excess. (p. 83)

The bodies of women that inhabited most swimming pool scenes produced in the 1930s illustrate Maltby's points.

Busby Berkley's swimming pool scenes were wildly popular exceptions. His scenes linked the swimming pool and the female body, and made the swimming pool a site for fetishized sexuality. The swimming pool in Busby Berkley's films also became a screen within a screen, a reflective surface for the ideological struggles taking place within the industry and within American culture. Busby Berkley reacted to critics and to production code censorship in his swimming pool images, through the bodies of the women that inhabited them, as he struggled to understand and harness the power of a medium that lay somewhere between the world of art and the world of industry.

In Berkley's musicals sequences, the image of the swimming pool developed iconography that tied it directly to the film industry. The bodies of female swimmers form circles and star shapes as they float in the upside down skies of his swimming pools. On a connotative level, the geometric shapes formed by women's bodies suggest

a revolution and a renewal of the American dream through the power of the industry that best exemplified it. Through their narratives and imagery, these films also give voice to the centuries old debate between aesthetics and ethics that had been re-articulated by conservative critics. Berkley's swimming pools are a *Guernica*-like spaces, splattered with contesting forms and ideologies.

The Kid from Spain (1932) features an opening sequence choreographed by Busby Berkley. The film begins with close-up shots of individual faces as young women introduce themselves by way of song. The not-so-innocent inhabitants of a sleep-away school intone: "We are opening this story, by giving you a peek into a dormitory, where all the pretty coeds sleep." The girls relate that they do their homework with the boys and that they are good at math because they "show their figures" and their figures "never lie." The viewer is kindly asked to avert (his) gaze because "we can't put clothes on, before your eyes." The girls sit on the edges of their beds and put on high heels. The beds are arranged in a semi circle around a shiny, reflective dance floor which foreshadows the shiny surface of the pool that is about to appear. The girls dance around the star shaped staircase in the center of the room and then walk up it.

An overhead shot of the pool is shown. It is a rectangular, Olympic-sized pool with an arching dome. The dome shape echoes the semi circle motif we have seen in the arrangement of the girl's beds. An overhead shot depicts the girls' bodies as they move in straight, soldierly lines and position themselves around the pool edge. The girls unwrap the skirted portions of their lacy black French lingerie and place them on their

heads. Camera tricks depict this movement quickly and we are led to believe that their lingerie has been painlessly transformed into perfectly fitted bathing caps. The girls, still sporting high heels, dive into the pool one after the other. They are a chorus line again and their bodies arch and then dive into the pool in a domino effect.

As the girls swim into the middle of the pool, several close-ups of their smiling faces are shown. An overhead shot depicts the girls' bodies moving into a circle shape. The circle of girls expands and contracts for several seconds. Close-ups of several girls' buttocks are depicted as the girls plunge underwater. An overhead shot shows the girls' bodies forming the shape of an elaborate five pointed star, which then rotates for several seconds. The girls exit the pool by riding down a slide, which forms the balustrade of the star-shaped staircase. The camera follows several individual bathing-suited bodies as they ride down the slide. The girls' silhouettes are visible as they dress behind screens and dry themselves with towels. The camera "peeks" at them, swooping behind the screen to mimic the gaze of an ogling viewer. The girls scurry back to their beds, squealing and hiding behind their towels. They continue singing while they remove their high-heeled shoes and put stockings on. They are "fresh and dressed" and "ready for school." Their song is interrupted only by the voice of their schoolmaster. As the watery reverie is broken, the girls' faces fall and the film's plot commences.

The opening sequence in *The Kid from Spain* is the prototype for the pool scenes that Busby Berkley choreographs in later films. Berkley took the circle and star patterns from this scene and reintroduced them in numerous films. Circles are symbols suggestive of several connotations, including wombs, revolution and infinity. Like the

circle, the five pointed star shape has many connotations, it suggests astronomy, Judeo-Christian mythology and military hierarchies. Taken together, the star-shaped staircase leading to the pool, the swimming stars, and the star-shape formed by the bodies of the swimming stars indicate that the choreographer is making a direct link between the Hollywood stars and the swimming pool. The jump cuts from the women's faces to buttocks, the shots to circles and stars all link the female body, the space of the swimming pool and the film industry to glamorous, sexualized power. Gilles Deleuze suggests that:

In Berkley, the multiplied and reflected girls form an enchanted proletariat whose bodies, legs and faces are parts of a great transformational machine; the shapes are like Kaleidoscopic views which contract and dilate in an earthly or watery space, usually shot from above, turning around a vertical axis and changing into each other to end up as pure abstractions. (as cited in Herzog, 2009, p.161)

The star and the circle are not entirely abstract shapes; they are symbols. These images were produced in the age of pool-side bathing beauty contests. For working class women dreaming Cinderella chorus girl dreams, the star shape enacted in the pool by the swimmers is inflected with the dreamy possibility of social mobility, of turning rags to riches. Shots of buttocks and faces are knit together with bodies forming circle shapes. The sequence of these shots layers them with metaphorical sexual allusions and work on the viewer's kinesthetic sensibilities.

While spectators might have been lulled by the links between sexuality, swimming pools and the film industry, they were not sleepwalkers when they left the theatre in 1933 and walked past bread lines. Scenes like this one couldn't help but tickle their consciousness with an awareness of the falseness of dreamy promises and recognition of the surrealism of this sequence. The critical power of this scene lies in its complete detachment from reality. The over-the top decadence of the scene, wherein women swim in high heels, was produced at a time when the film industry was being criticized for its excesses.

Superficially, this scene shares little with Jean Vigo's pool scene. Upon closer examination, the symbolic meanings are remarkably similar. Both Vigo and Berkley use the pool as a hopeful, exciting space that functions to temporarily lift sorrows. Also, both filmmakers use their respective pool scenes to reinforce dominant ideologies. Here's how to live again, states Vigo metaphorically: "Il suffit de ce mettre a l'eau." Here's how to live again, says Berkley's pool scene: put on your hands on your hips girls, and smile. Visible in Vigo's film and Berkley's choreography, the pool is invested with curative properties; as such, the space of the pool replicates the political propaganda of the period.

Both Vigo and Berkley translate the economic system and write its ideologies on the body of the swimmer and on the swimmer's gestures. Surface level expressions expose, according to Ziegfried Kracauer, the rationale of precision and fragmentation at the heart of the capitalist system (Herzog, 2009, p. 154). Taris' body is likened to an airplane. The mechanical, choreographed movements of Berkley's chorus girls replicate

Fordist ideology. The gestures of the swimmer in Vigo's film and the gestures of the chorus girls in Berkley's film demonstrate precise patterned movements. By translating the economic system onto the gestures of the swimmer(s) both films call attention to ideologies that erase the individual and subsume it in a mass. By replicating dominant ideologies, both Berkley and Vigo help reveal them.

Gold Diggers (1933) is another Berkley film, in which he furthers the associations between the swimming pool and the film industry that he has made in *The Kid from Spain*. In this instance, Berkley reacts more heavily to criticism of the film industry through the image of the pool. This film demonstrates Berkley's complex understanding of spectacle. He uses the symbolic space of the swimming pool to investigate his ideas. This scene injects the swimming pool scene in *The Kid from Spain* with a more subversive reading.

During a song and dance number, ball-gowned chorus girls are soaked with rain water. They scamper behind a thin curtain, their silhouettes strip out of wet clothes. When the women emerge from behind the curtain, they are dressed as bathing beauties, wearing metal bathing suits. As the stage act continues, it seems as though the chorus girls are dancing around a large circular mirror on the ground. Near the end of the number, the camera pulls away from two lovers who are sitting beside the mirror singing a duet. The man dips his hand into the glass and it magically transforms into water. He sends a white rose towards the camera with a flick of a wrist. The scene ends as the darkness of the screen encloses the rose in a retracting circle, which mimics the motion of a closing camera lens.

Using the mirror/pool imagery, Berkley offers viewers both a spectacle and a critique of spectacle. The surface of the pool and the surface of the screen are linked together by the two lovers, who invoke the mythological figures of Narcissist and Echo. The pool in this scene is trope l'oeil, suggestive of the lovers' redoubled reflection and of the vanity of the industry itself. However, film is an innocent white rose, Berkley seems to suggest: images do not create reality. Berkley is reacting to criticism of the industry in this scene and is suggesting that the film industry, like the mirrored water of the pool, is merely a reflective surface. The metal bathing suits reinforce this idea; these are rather comically removed by the male lead with a pair of pliers, reminding audiences of Victorian corsets. A clear analogy is being drawn between costuming and the performance of gender roles. Wearing a bathing suit, Berkley seems to be saying, has nothing to do with promiscuity, since men still need to pry women out of their clothes. Berkley is commenting directly on the popular notion that the licentiousness of the film industry was the cause of the flamboyance of the Jazz Age, which in turn was thought to have caused the stock market crash. Berkley notes the vanity of the industry in this scene, but also absolves the film industry of blame for the crash.

In *Footlight Parade* (1933) Berkley reiterates his ideas about the film industry's innocence and he uses the space of the pool to do this. He furthers the notions developed in *Gold Diggers*, and places the blame for the crash on modernity and capitalism. The film's director articulates these ideas in the film's plot. The film's protagonist, the producer, is in charge of creating prologues, the stage numbers that often opened up for films. In order to thwart the efforts of the "corporate schmucks"

who are stealing his profits, and deal with a changing film industry that has begun to shed prologues and battle other prologue producers, who are stealing his ideas, the protagonist's challenge is to create the most spectacular prologues possible. His "Eureka!" moment occurs when he drives by a fire hydrant where black children are playing in the water. This shot is quick: a flash from the car window. "This is what we need," exclaims the producer, "beautiful white bodies, covered in water!" The image of black children playing in water is translated into the swimming pool prologue, featuring white women, the most glorious and lavish of all three prologues the producer creates.

The prologue starts with two lovers in a natural wood-like setting. The song *By a Waterfall* begins. Then male leads lines, "There's a magic melody, mother nature sings to me," are followed by the female leads lines: "We can share it all--beneath a ceiling of blue." Decked in a beautiful ball gown, the female lead wanders towards the waterfall. We see her hike up her dress. The camera follows her legs, as they walk. Two women, with loose and flowing hair evocative of the Victorian era, wave to her from the rocky borders of the waterfall. Close-ups of other women's faces are shown; they are wearing bathing caps. The women wave and smile at each other. The camera pans the scene. Hundreds of women are decorating the waterfall and sliding down its various crevices. It is a giant waterslide, with an amusement park-like atmosphere. Women dive from the rocky borders of the waterfall into the water. All of a sudden, through a camera trick, the image of a swimming pool appears. It is clearly delineated by concrete borders and lights.

Highly elaborate synchronized swimming sequences have been orchestrated for

this scene. Close-ups of women swimming underwater, their bodies chaotically swirling, dismembered by camera angles and obscured by bubbles are interspersed with shots which depict women's bodies connecting with each other and forming circles. Berkley alternates these images with bird's eye view shots. The swimmer's bodies form elaborate moving patterns: flowers, then stars, and afterwards snaky lines. Near the end of the scene, the women pile up to form a fountain. They smile gleefully as the fountain spurts water between their legs. Overhead shots show their legs opening and closing. The female lead wanders back through the natural landscape. The male lead is still lying on the banks of the waterfall, fast asleep. The woman splashes water on his face to wake him; it is his dream we have seen. The scene ends with a shot of a bird's nest, with chicks chirping for food until fed a worm by their mother.

This scene is Berkley's masterpiece pool scene. The patterns, which move from flowers to stars and into snaky lines, are heavily suggestive. Similarly, the fountain scene is a hyperbolic sexual metaphor. Berkley is snubbing critics with this scene, slapping them in the face with suggestive metaphors. Is the film industry really guilty of excess? Yes, but Berkley invites his audience to consider why.

Within this decadent scene the connections between the social history of swimming pools and the filmic history of swimming pools is revealed. With their loosely-styled, flowing hair, the women share a very close resemblance to Annette Kellerman, particularly in her publicity stills for *Daughter of the Gods* (1916). By cutting from the Annette Kellerman doppelgangers directly to the bathing-capped women, the scene suggests a transition between the old world and the new world of the

1930s. Berkley is commenting on the history of censorship, since the Annette Kellerman look is evoked by the filmmaker during the period when the production code was beginning to be enforced (and Kellerman's nude scene in *Daughter of the Gods* was cited by early censors as a reason for banning nudity in film). When women dive from the natural waterfall into the water, the pool appears. Berkley is depicting the movement from nature to civilization. The appearance of the swimming pool denotes this change and in the swimming pool the women's bodies form metaphors for sex. The sensationalism of the city's spaces, suggested by the amusement park atmosphere of the waterfall, articulates the idea that modernity sexualized female bodies. Berkley seems to be saying that censorship, much like prohibition, produced counter-intuitive reactions. The conservative forces of the city should be blamed for the sensationalist excesses associated with the film industry.

Dancing Lady (1933) is a film choreographed by Busby Berkley. The plot of the film revolves around the life of a show girl. In the pool scene, the show girl and her wealthy suitor sip martinis by the pool. The swimming sequences are sensual and suggestive. The show girl and her suitor perform a watery dance, slipping past each other, while exchanging witticisms. In the pool scene, the show girl receives a marriage proposal, but rejects her suitor. She'd rather dance and work for a living than marry wealthy. The pool is a winding indoor/outdoor pool. The spectacular architecture of this newly designed home pool emphasizes the wondrous possibilities of new cultural products. The show girl rejects this fantasy space, while articulating the American dream of individual achievement. By the end of the film, the show girl has managed to

marry her true love and pursue her stage career.

Ideologically, this film recaptures the feeling of the 1920s new womanhood and frames the possibility of choice by the pool's borders. The show girl is disciplined. She doesn't succumb to temptation. This scene is not demonstrating the discipline of choreographed female bodies--as other scenes in this film do. In the pool, women's dreams are disciplined. In this scene the filmmaker is reacting to criticism of the industry through the image of the woman in the pool. We aren't promoting consumption he seems to be saying, as the show girl rejects the spectacular pool and mansion that accompanies it. The object of desire does not allow herself to be captured in the pool or by the pool.

Dancing Lady's pool scene is more typical of depression-era pool imagery and it is likely that Berkley did not choreograph this particular scene. The pool is a site where female sexuality is reined in. There is no elaborate song and dance number laden with sexual innuendo or replete with counterintuitive reactions to the production code. Nor is it a complex examination of spectacle. The protagonist's power is reinforced in this scene by her refusal to succumb to temptation.

4.5 Swimming Pools, Women's Bodies and Contagious Ideas

In most pool scenes produced in the 1930s, the swimming pool was used as a space that expressed the typical reactions of depression era cinema toward the sexualized bodies of women. Women were reprimanded for displays of sexuality in film. In his study of skyscrapers in cinema, Merrill Schiller (2009) suggests that women were reprimanded for displays of sexuality in depression era office scenes because

promiscuity was connected with women's forays into the working world. In *The Road to Ruin* (1934):

The next day, Ann, whose parents are oblivious to her activities, joins Ralph, Eve and Zed at a friend's party, the climax of which is a strip crap game and a semi-nude dip in the host's swimming pool. Alerted by angry neighbors, the police raid the party and take Ann and Eve to the station's juvenile division...afterwards, Anne discovers that she has caught a sexually transmitted disease. (AFI Catalogue, 2009, "The Road to Ruin")

The pool in this film is a place characterized by dangerous behavior. In *Sailors Luck* (1934) the main character is forced to work at a swimming pool in order to pay her rent and then has to reject the sexual advances of the pool's philandering owner (AFI catalogue, 2009, "Sailor's Luck"). The swimming pool in both these films is a space characterized by worry and anxiety about women's bodies and sexuality. In *Sailor's Luck*, the pool is connected to women's employment opportunities. In the 1920s, swimming pool scenes express anxiety about gender through men's bodies, whereas in the 1930s, anxiety about sex is expressed by women's bodies.

4.6 Flying and Falling: The Dream of Modernism and the Swimming Pool

Club Des Femmes (1936) begins with a number of scenes which depict innocent young women arriving in Paris in order to find work, only to be taken advantage of and/or raped. A well-meaning matron creates a hostel for these women. She declares that this will be a safe place for women; no men will be allowed in the lodgings. The hostel has a swimming pool. It is a beautiful, modern, indoor space, bright, white and

clean. The swimming pool is used frequently in the film to depict the communal space. There are several scenes that take place in the cafeteria and the interiors of the girls' bedrooms are shown, but overall the film uses the swimming pool as the most frequent location for character interaction. The pool comes to signify a space of women's community. Women knit in the pool, they play sports in the pool, they share gossip in the pool and they also gaze at each other. The pool in this film is very much a space of the city. It is a particular type of city: a utopian socialist female city.

As the film progresses, this safe haven is infiltrated by men. The telegraph operator liaises between a predatory man in the outside world and the film's hard working women. Women are raped and become prostitutes. A chorus girl sneaks her lover into the lodgings and is impregnated. The film's climax occurs when a lesbian character murders the telegraph operator, who has duped her innocent love-interest. The murder is forgiven by the hostel's doctor who discovers the identity of the perpetrator. Rather than alert the authorities, the doctor sends the murderer to a lepers' colony.

The pool in this film, like the woman-only communal space it represents, expresses the idea of a lost utopia and failed ideologies. The pool in this film carries similar symbolic meanings as the pools in *The Road to Ruin* and *Sailors Luck*. The pool is a space that symbolizes modernity and the concomitant dangerous sexualization of public spaces. The pool is a throwback to early filmic representations, including *Sailors Luck* and in *The Road to Ruin*. The 1920s and the liberal attitudes that flourished during that period are being examined and condemned for their idealism. The pool becomes a simulacrum for the female body again in these films; however it is women, not men,

who are affected by its space. In *Club Des Femmes*, pool symbolism changes. It begins as a hopeful space, yet as the film progresses it expresses the idea that the dream of modernism is failing, pool-side. The pool, in fact, becomes a habitat for fallen angels.

In *Olympia*, Leni Reifenstahl's 1936 film about the Berlin Olympics, divers' bodies mingle with the clouds. Walter Benjamin said of this film that it was "the aestheticization of politics, not the politicization of art." This film captures the body centered discourses of the 1930s, which were associated with ideas about mass and perfection. The film articulates warnings about the dangers of these discourses through the bodies of the swimmers: bodies are beautiful failures. The swimmers' bodies repeat themselves on an endless loop, ephemeral against the background of the sky. They are flying and falling at the same time. The pool itself is barely visible in the diving scene. The sky, not the pool, is the background for swimmer's bodies. The divers are impossible angels.

In the 1930s, political ideologies and artistic images conversed with each other around the pool perimeter. In film, bodies that inhabited pools were molded and shaped into forms and into gestures that expressed the idea of perfection espoused by competing and complementary political ideologies. As the decade unfolded and the world stage began to unravel itself, these ideas were questioned.

At the beginning of the 1930s, the symbol of the pool was reinvested with the ideas that had originated when the object was born. The idea of the pool as a healing space made it a symbol of hope. Gendered identities were corrected and reinforced in the pool. It was a place where perfect female bodies displayed the choreography of

order. The male swimmer body was distanced from the filmic pool; it inhabited the jungle. Genders were separated by the swimming pool in film, just as they had originally been segregated by its architectural environment. The military legacy of the early swimming pool made it a perfect space to reestablish order, to discipline bodies and minds that had been affected by the frenetic psychic atmosphere of the depression.

Berkley's films voiced anxieties about modernism, sensationalism, sexuality and the film industry around the pool's borders. His successful understanding of the historical trajectory of the swimming pool and its entanglement with the history of film ultimately resulted in the failure of his ideas. Berkley glamorized and sexualized the space of the swimming pool. The sex-in-the-city-and-the-film-industry connection that Berkley forged in the pool scenes of his films ultimately bled over into similar representations produced in the 1940s. By the mid-1930s, films like *Club Des Femmes* and *Olympia* demonstrated an acknowledgment of the symbol's power. These movies added lyrics to the space of the pool and invested it with an atmosphere evoking the beautiful sadness of modernism's failures. This sense of nostalgia moved into representations of the swimming pool in the 1940s and combined itself with Berkley's sexualized pools.

Chapter 5: 1940- 1950

Swimming Pools, Movie Stars and Manifest Destiny

‘I can't act, I can't sing, I can't dance. My pictures are put together out of scraps they find in the producer's waste basket. I've never had a picture that was praised by *Time* or *Life*, but I'm one of the two women among the top money making stars and you've got to do articles about me, don't you?’ (Esther Williams as cited in Williamson, 1996, p.6)

By the 1940s swimming pools had become potent architectural symbols in the United States. They symbolized, as a 1940 *New York Times* article stated, “the vitality of American life.” The author, marveling at the number of swimming pools constructed in the United States since the early part of the century, notes that, “in this matter of swimming pools, Americans have good reason for doubting that our civilization is at the same pass as ancient Rome before its fall” (as cited in Wiltse, 2007, p. 90). Esther Williams’ movies, which dominated the filmic pool landscape in the 1940s (and constituted a swimming pool genre in and of themselves) articulated the idea that swimming pools represented the accomplishments of American civilization. In other films, the layers of meaning that had been built up around the cinematic pool were furthered. As the pool in film began to morph into an increasingly nostalgic space, it began to express the change that had taken place between meanings and objects.

5.1 Consumer Culture, Isolationism and the Objects of Ideology

During the first half of the twentieth century, the American economy had reshaped itself from a focus on the production of consumer goods to one of

consumption. Anna Klingman (2007) explains that, as the movement towards an ‘experience economy’ took shape, people’s identities became increasingly based on lifestyles and “self realization through consumption” (p. 44). Jean Baudrillard (1965) suggests that the marketing of domestic products led to an over-investment of meaning into objects. Objects were anthropomorphized because modernity had infused bourgeois culture with a change in its relationship to the object which no longer existed to be owned and used but to be produced and consumed. Objects began to be invested with meanings that substituted for relationships between people (p. 224). The swimming pool in film began to illustrate this idea in the 1940s, before the apex of the culture of consumption and the swimming pool craze, which began in the 1950s.

In *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), the swimming pool functions as a space that represents the main character’s inability to connect with people and form meaningful relationships. The pool in this film is surrounded by Greek columns and neoclassical statues. Its old world aesthetics invoke nostalgia. In the first pool scene, a series of interactions between the film’s protagonist, Tracy Lord, her husband to be, and her ex-fiancé culminates with an image of a small toy sailboat, “The True Love,” floating in the pool water. In the next scene it is night time. The camera pauses for a few minutes on Tracy as she stands beside the pool, draped in a neoclassical white robe. The Greek columns frame her. “The True Love” floats by her on the pool’s luminous surface. Tracy, as the plot has suggested, should in fact be marrying her ex-fiancé. In this scene, she watches ‘true love’ float past her on the water of the pool.

This particular image carries several powerful connotative associations that

cannot be divorced from the circumstances that surrounded the film's production. This film was Katherine Hepburn's comeback film. She had purchased the rights to the play and financed the film herself; it was meant to re-launch her flagging film career. This pool scene reinforces Hepburn's iconic star status. She is dressed like a goddess and appears beside a pool, she is the quintessential image of a movie star in this scene.

Dressed like the Statue of Liberty, while a tiny boat floats past her, Hepburn also represents America standing serene and alone on the banks of the River Lethe. The pool in this scene links the idea of the star and the isolationist ideals of the state. The lost connection between the old world and the new world is invoked by the image of the Statue of Liberty, by the pool's crumbling Greek statues and by the tiny sailboat. Tracy has lost her true love and her connections to her old world, like Hepburn herself, who is no longer the star she was, and like Roosevelt, who is refusing at this point to enter the war.

This scene demonstrates the layers of symbolic meaning that the swimming pool had accumulated by the 1940s. In the 1930s, the pool was used to represent the political ideologies of the state. It was also linked to the film industry itself. This scene combines both connotations and adds to them the nostalgic undertones that had begun to manifest themselves around the pool's borders by the mid-1930s. The 1930s had also added sexual metaphors to the pool's waters. In many other scenes in the film, swimming is alluded to as a metaphor for sex: "We used to go swimming after a party," winks Cary Grant's character, Tracy's true love. The pool in *The Philadelphia Story* is a succinct statement of its symbolism of the 1930s. New undertones of domestic malaise and lost

relationships, flirting pool-side in this film, were not fully developed until 1950. The outlines of this idea were sketched into swimming pool scenes in the 1940s. The twinned themes of sex and nostalgia form the contours of 1940s pool scenes.

5.2 Sex, Nostalgia and the Swimming Pool

I Wake Up Screaming (1941) follows *The Philadelphia Story* in its use of the pool as a space that invokes nostalgia. The pool scene in this film is also replete with sexual allusions. In the film, Jill and Frankie are about to finish their first date, and in order to prolong it, Frankie suggests they go swimming: “When I was a kid, every time I could save up a quarter, I'd go to the Lido...Anyways, it's healthy.” At the Lido plunge, Jill fumbles as she tries to fit a stretchy white bathing cap over her head. “Ouch, you hurt my eyes,” says Frankie. Jill smiles sweetly. They dive into the pool together. Frankie picks Jill up out of the water and places her on the fountain's ledge. “How do you like the ole swimming hole?” he inquires. Jill replies that it’s “wet and wonderful.” “Do you know,” Frankie continues, “if I ever inherit a golden mile, I'd have a swimming pool in every room and you could swim in every one of them.” Jill smiles and quips, “Do you tell that to all the girls you bring here?” Frankie retorts that he has “never brought a girl here in my life!” At that moment, however, a bathing beauty pops out of the water beside Frankie and says hello to him.

The pool scene in this film provides one of the few light hearted moments in the film’s somber shadows. The ole swimming hole is linked the pool's rural past, nostalgically invoking an idyllic time to nervous citizens whose country is on the verge of war. The swimming pool is linked to the ideal home. Frankie’s masculinity is

reinforced in the pool scene. Metaphoric allusions, which begin with the idea that swimming is an after-date activity and continue throughout the pool scene, demonstrate the way that Busby Berkley's swimming pool scenes carried themselves over into the 1940s. The pool had become a sexualized space, but one where allusions and metaphor were emphasized.

In *Cat People* (1942), the pool is a sexualized space, but one that reflects popularized Freudian ideas about the subconscious. In the swimming pool scene, the haunting panther shape of Irene flickers in eerie shadows across the walls of an indoor swimming pool; her sexual jealousy has transformed her into a shadowy cat-monster. The chaste, all-American heroine is seen in close-up shots, treading water and drenched in fear as the foreign-born Irene, haunted by "something evil inside her," circles the water. Through the figure of Irene, the old world, sex and nostalgia are invoked. "America" is portrayed as a threatened nation in this movie, which explores the power of the unconscious and symbolism.

In this scene, cinematic discourses about sexuality and the spaces of the city that were prevalent in the 1930s are re-articulated. Throughout the film, the spaces of the city are depicted as dangerous places for women. The pool represents one of these spaces. This scene articulates a traditional, patriarchal binary opposition between innocence and sexuality. The body of an American woman reconciled the duality portrayed in this scene in 1944. The body was desexualized and sexualized in the space of the pool and nostalgia was recuperated as a positive force, when MGM introduced the world to Esther Williams.

5.3 Esther Williams and the Marketing of Domestic Paradise

Esther Williams, a mother of five children and an Olympic swimming champion made her filmic debut in 1944. Spanning three decades, Williams starred in twenty-six films, most of which prominently featured swimming pool scenes. Esther Williams' movies refashioned the American dream and tailored it to the housewife. Catherine Williamson (1996) suggests that Esther Williams was to a large extent responsible for the home swimming pool craze. Esther Williams' films and their concomitant marketing campaigns demonstrate that the symbol of the swimming pool was readily co-opted by the advertising industries because of its filmic history. Esther Williams' films were marketed through invocations of sex and nostalgia.

MGM promoted their new star by reiterating the discourses that had surrounded the bathing beauties in the 1920s. MGM's publicity campaigns for Esther Williams heavily drew-upon Mack Sennett's bathing beauty publicity campaigns and Fox film's promotion of the Sunshine Girls. Esther Williams also starred in several remakes of Annette Kellerman films, a Kellerman biopic, and appropriated her industry nickname, "the million dollar mermaid." Esther Williams' public image recaptured the spirit of new womanhood that Annette Kellerman and the bathing beauties had embodied, but twisted it further by refashioning ideas about beauty and sexuality and containing them within the figure of the dutiful housewife and mother. Williams' pool scenes articulated traditional conservative family values under a veil of sexuality.

Esther Williams' first feature length film, *Bathing Beauty* (1944), opens with the line "We are not sure if a story like this ever happened, but if it did happen, it could

only happen in California.” The camera then lingers over a giant pool. It is a happy, bright, colourful scene: people toss balls back and forth, women lounge on the pool deck as musicians play Latin American music alongside, yet no one actually swims. As the camera moves in for a closer look at the pool, we are carefully shown the beautiful women who decorate its edges.

The modest Caroline (Williams) makes her way around the pool, weaving through the groups of bathing-suited women. She stands by the water; the camera uses the pool's surface to mirror her legs and the legs of the other women. Caroline performs a perfect front dive into the pool and she swims back and forth across the turquoise water in an exaggeratedly delicate front crawl. We learn that the male protagonist, Steve, is giving up his music career for Caroline. With a wink, a musician informs his producer (on his way to visit Steve) to “wait until you see what is in the pool!” The producer is outraged and exclaims that “Steve would never fall for a bathing suit!” Steve and his producer have an argument in Steve's office. They argue beside the swimming pool, which is seen through Steve's large window, perfectly framed. The swimming pool takes up more space than the figures of Steve and the producer in this shot. The pool is a bright turquoise blue and full of happy, splashing people. The plot of the film involves the producer's desperate attempts to separate Steve and Caroline so he can get Steve to write the music for his water ballet. Steve persuades his producer to star Caroline in his water ballet. The producer is uncertain. “She is unknown. Does she look good in a bathing suit?” Steve looks directly at the camera and rolls his eyes: “Is he kidding?”

During the water ballet show, Columbian dancers swirl their skirts on stage and Caroline appears behind them, emerging from a giant half-shell (in a clear nod to Botticelli's *The Birth of Venus*). She dives into the pool and the other swimmers appear around her. The camera takes a bird's eye view as the women's bodies shape themselves into a giant flower. After a cut away shot of Caroline, a wreath of water lilies appears in the pool and the camera moves to an underwater shot. Caroline swims underwater through the spiraling circles of women, whose legs and arms are linked in a confusion of bodies. When Caroline emerges, she touches the surface of the water, creating a fountain that spurts water high into the air. She repeats this process, setting off a series of fountains. She then returns to the first fountain and touches it – this time, fire appears in the centre of the water! The finale of the sequence involves a tuxedoed Steve jumping into the water. Looking directly into the camera, Steve realizes a problem: "Wait! What am I doing? I can't swim!" He sinks underwater and Caroline grabs him and kisses him. The film closes with this surreal and unexplained mixture of water ballet and the film's plot.

The synchronized swimming sequence was choreographed by Busby Berkley. Through the use of symbols, such as flowers and fountains, Williams' body is sexualized in the pool. The underwater scenes, which link women's bodies together into circles suggest a more fluid notion of sexuality. The wreath of water lilies and the Botticelli-styled *Venus* imagery adds a new dimension to Berkley's choreography in that both suggest a Madonna figure. Williams is sexualized and desexualized in the pool, she is as impossible and as ideal as this sequence is.

Williams' real life journey from an unknown star, who "looks good in a bathing suit" to a movie star, is suggested several times in the plot. In the office scene, the bright blue pool is a stage for good old fashioned family fun. The pool mirrors MGM's promotion of Williams' as a housewife and mother. The "exotic" dancers and musicians that are featured in this film became part of Williams' standard repertoire. They invoke the idea of fantastical holidays and cruise ships. Travel, leisure and the swimming pool are linked in a sort of unofficial strength-though-joy campaign. Steve, as the man who falls into the pool fully-dressed, harkens back to Mack Sennett's film conventions. The cliché ridden *Bathing Beauties* was one of the most popular films of 1944, second only to *Gone with the Wind*.

In Williams' next film, *Easy to Wed* (1946), the first pool scene in the film occurs because a newspaper employee has followed Williams' character and her father to Mexico. The first shot of the pool is a wide angle shot, followed by a pan up a giant water slide. Esther Williams slides down the slide and lands on the back of a man, who is on a boogie-board. Williams rolls off the man and into the water and swims her delicate swim until she reaches the edge of the pool. In order to gain the heiress' sympathy, the newspaper employee has his photographer snap a photo of her as she emerges from the pool and dries herself with a towel. Williams' character complains about the photograph, so the newspaper man "heroically" pushes the photographer into the pool. He struggles in the water, flailing about comically. We get another similar pool scene later in the film, where Williams' character is swimming as the newspaper man floats in a rubber dingy beside her. There is a close-up shot of Williams' toes,

which she manipulates in an effort to deflate the dingy. The newspaper man falls into the water fully dressed.

The amusement park-like atmosphere of the first pool scene seems to be a direct homage of Busy Berkley's waterfall sequence in *Footlight Parade*. However, this pool is also a site of playfulness and family fun. The foolish man in the water and the siren-like woman who accompanies him also replay popular scenes from the 1920s, only this scene lacks a sense of danger. The swimming pool is speaking in clichés that have lost their original meanings.

Neptune's Daughter (1949) begins with the line, "This is a story about a boy, a girl and a bathing suit." Its plot involves an even more conscious refashioning of Esther Williams' life story. Williams' character (Eve) is an Olympic swimmer, who is approached by a businessman and given an opportunity to design and manufacture bathing suits. The Cole of California swimsuits, which were being promoted by Williams in fashion magazines at the time of the picture's release, appear in Eve's office (Williamson, 1996, p.17). In this film, William also stars opposite her real life husband, Ricardo Montalban. The film concludes with what are now typical Williams' clichés: another water ballet and a finale featuring Williams' love interest falling into the pool.

This film alters the symbol of the swimming pool. A deliberate association is made between water ballet, the swimming pool and modern art. The film's opening credits have rolled over a Fauvist style painting of a swimming pool. During the water ballet, the swimmers float large strips of blue and red material across the length of the pool. These streams of colour are reminiscent of Barnett Newman's work and those of

other colour field painters. In this film, the swimming pool is transformed into a modernist canvas. The pool is modern art and related to paintings that deliberately expose surface to reveal the nature of the medium. The pool is perfectly suited, and now suitable for display in the home.

5.4 The Culture of Consumption and Bodies of Water

In 1956, Williams, Montalban, and businessman Dom Perez formed The International Swimming Pool Corporation. The company specialized in fabricating above-ground pools and became one of the top swimming pool corporations in the United States. By 1958, it had also become one of the top manufacturers of pools in Latin America. In 1954, there were 8000 home pools in the United States. By 1960, there were 250 000 home pools (Williamson, 1996, p.17).

Catherine Williamson (1996) has studied the marketing campaigns that surrounded Esther Williams. Her detailed study of MGM's publicity campaigns and her comparison of these campaigns with advertisements for hygienic products and home swimming pools reveals how intimately and closely the female star's body and the swimming pool were connected by the figure of Esther Williams. MGM did not promote Williams' athleticism in their campaigns. Williams was described as "a dish out of water" and "a cross between Lana Turner and a seal" (pp. 10, 22). Williamson argues that "By displacing gender anxieties onto genus, the film (and the publicity campaigns surrounding them) are able to focus an immense amount of attention on Williams' body while (for the most part) repressing cross-gender anxieties associated with the muscular female body" (p. 10). MGM sent Williams to promote hygienic

products such as soap and deodorant. As Williamson notes wryly, “desirability is linked to gender (femininity) which is then inextricably linked to cleanliness, which just happens to be available through the purchase of modern consumer products” (p.10).

Esther Williams’ body measurements were linked with pool dimensions in promotional material for the International Swimming Pool Corporation (p.17) and “not surprisingly, the same themes of sanitation and control that whirled around the star body permeate the pool industry in the early fifties” (p.18). Williamson suggests that advertisements for pool filters strongly resembled advertisements for feminine douches. Pool filters were described as “powerful germicides” that were “not strong enough to damage delicate lining” and had “zero tolerance for foreign materials” (p. 21-22). Women’s bodies, the isolationist ideals of the state and the swimming pool were linked in advertising much in the same way they had been linked in cinema in the 1940s.

Elizabeth Grosz (1992) theorizes that,

The body and its environment produce each other as forms of the hyperreal, as modes of simulation which have overtaken and transformed whatever reality each may have had into the image of the other: the city is made and made over into the simulacrum of the body, and the body, in its turn, is transformed, ‘citified,’ urbanized as a distinctively metropolitan body. (p. 242)

The swimming pool and the female body constructed each other through a dialectical relationship with the past. Williamson (1996) notes the connections between the marketing campaigns that surrounded Williams, in which she was portrayed as

hygienic, scripted and clean, and women in the 1940s who developed an overblown obsession with hygiene and cleanliness. In the 1940s and 1950s, Williams' films recuperated ideas and imagery from the 1920s and 1930s. Through nostalgic invocations, the woman's body – now personified by the star – was aligned with ideas that debuted at the swimming pool's birth and trapped by circular themes.

5.5 Swimming Pools and Suburban Life

By the end of the 1940s, swimming pools had transitioned from an instrument of social service, forged during Roosevelt's era, into middle class status symbols. They had become essential elements in the promotion of suburban life. Lynn Spigel demonstrates that with the rise of the suburbs, a definition of recreational space occurred (in Williamson, 1996). The evolution of the home involved a reinterpretation of public space and private space that combined those notions with the idea of homogeneity (Williamson, 1996, p. 18-19). Williamson notes, in her discussion of Lynn Spigel's theories, that "just as television redefined the average living room as a 'home theatre' the swimming pool recolonized the suburban back yard as 'a home resort' (p. 18). The ideas of homogeneity and segregation that had debuted around the pool's borders in the early part of the century had been fully realized by 1950.

Early pools had been invested with the notion of work, rather than leisure. This idea was reiterated when the home swimming pool craze began. As Williamson suggests, with the advent of suburban living,

...work became the price one paid for leisure. Leisure time assumed an important cultural status as a measure of our civilization; the quality of

life was now the quality of play... If the family is the unit upon which the entire nation is built, and recreation is the glue which holds the family together, then 'play' is essential to the future of the country. (p.19)

The ideal of the home with a swimming pool became the dream to which the nuclear family aspired because the film industry had associated the body of the star, the body of the nation, and fabricated bodies of water. Urban fables in the 1940s and 1950s also helped this idea gather steam; they revolved around the idea that the municipal swimming pool was a cause of polio. The idea of contagion allowed the symbol of the swimming pool to fully return to its origins in Esther Williams' films and reiterate the discourses about segregation and homogeneity that debuted with it.

All sorts of reasons were given for the swimming pool craze. In the popular press, the pool craze was attributed to the fact that, "Commuters were tired of sitting in traffic on weekend jaunts to the beach, the working man was weary of mowing his lawn, housewives craved their own form of Hollywood glamour" (Williamson, 1996, p.18). The movies, through their continuous copying of the image of the swimming pool made it easy for Williams to glamorize the idea of the "swimming housewife." The relationship between the swimming pool and the movies was to a large extent responsible for the pool craze and, as a result, the rise of the suburbs. Suburbanization, in part, contributed to the increased isolation of and segregation of social groups. While Esther Williams was twirling about in filmic swimming pools, several cinematographers were grappling with the monster they had helped create. Films produced between 1950

and 1954 demonstrate the way the symbol of the pool darkened in response to object's rise in popularity.

Conclusion: 1950-1954

Familiarity Breeds Contempt

We may need to have made an indelible mark on our lives, to have married the wrong person, pursued an unfulfilling career into middle age or lost a loved one before architecture can begin to have any perceptible impact on us, for when we speak of being moved by a building, we allude to a bittersweet feeling of contrast between the noble qualities written in the architecture and the sadder, wider realities within which we know them to exist. A lump rises in our throat at the sight of beauty from an implicit knowledge that the happiness it hints at is an exception. (De Botton, 2007, p. 22)

The 1950s begin with a dead body lying in a pool. *Sunset Boulevard* (1950) features perhaps the most well known swimming pool death scene. Joe Gillis' corpse floats in Norma Desmond's swimming pool amidst a flash of camera bulbs, with the comment that, "He always wanted a pool. Well, in the end, he got one." In the film, the pool symbolizes 1920s era Hollywood. It is an integral part of the architecture of the decaying "white elephant of a place," whose ivy-covered exterior and chipped white paint suggest both the decaying purity of the modern era and the golden era of film. After Joe says he'll stay at Norma's house, Norma promises that she'll "have the pool filled." Norma Desmond, played by former bathing beauty Gloria Swanson, tries unsuccessfully to seduce Joe through a performance of silent era bathing beauty follies. This action sets the tone for the swimming pool scenes in the film, by establishing a

symbolic connection between Norma Desmond's gothic estate, nostalgia, loss and decay.

The first time Joe sees the pool it is from the window of his room. It is night and the pool is teeming with rats. When Joe tries to say goodbye to Betty, he switches on the pool lights, foreshadowing the news cameras whose bulbs flash in splashes of light on the pool's water during his iconic death scene. Joe falls into the swimming pool and resumes his narrative "back at the beginning." The camera re-focuses on Joe's body; we are underneath it, underwater with it and impossible again. This film – a comment on the film industry – uses the pool as a symbolic space that represents the decline of cinema. The pool's decayed state as the film opens, its temporary revitalization in a scene in which a joyful Norma dries Joe with a towel on the pool deck, and its final resting place as a site of (and instrument for) murder, mirrors Norma's descent into madness and the perceived decline of the industry itself.

Rebel Without a Cause (1954) also features an empty pool. The pool scene in this film is located in the abandoned mansion to which Jim, Judy and Plato flee. It is the same pool that was used in the filming of *Sunset Boulevard*. Nicholas Ray, the film's director, was a student of architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Drawing on this background, Ray intended his filmic settings to reference iconic architecture. The first time we see the pool, Plato, who is carrying an operatic candelabra, leads the two lovers on a tour of the abandoned hillside mansion. Judy and Jim's banter parodies the affected accents of old Hollywood stars. As Plato leads the two lovers down the winding staircase towards the pool, some of the film's most revealing dialogue takes place:

Judy: Yes, oh, there's just one thing, what about ...

Plato: children? Right this way

Judy: Yes

Plato : See, we don't really encourage them. They're so noisy and troublesome. Don't you agree?

Jim : Ugh. Drown ' em like puppies.

Plato: This is a wonderful arrangement. They can carry on and you'll never even notice.

Jim: Oh, a sunken nursery (looking at the pool).

Plato: In fact, if you lock them in, you'll never have to see them again, much less talk to them.

Judy: Talk to them- heavens!

Jim: Nobody talks to children.

Judy: No, they just tell them.

Jim, Judy and Plato chase each other around the dry pool. Eventually, Jim says he'll "fill the pool" while standing king-like on the diving board (quoting Norma Desmond). A second pool scene occurs when a gang of thugs chases Plato. The empty pool provides an eerie, noir-ish backdrop for the culminating fight scene. In this film, the empty swimming pool represents a bygone era. Jim's characterization of the swimming pool as a "sunken nursery" highlights the way the object had come to stand in for the loss of meaningful relationships.

The film, *Les Diaboliques* (1955), expresses the theme of domestic malaise by alternating different images of the pool. At various times, the pool is filled with

sparkling water, empty, or filled with decaying plant life and algae. A murder victim's body is drowned in a bathtub and then dumped in a swimming pool. When the body disappears, the pool's murky waters are shown. The pool hesitates like a secret, pausing time as the protagonist waits for the body to be discovered.

These pool scenes are characterized by an absence of the body, an emptiness of the spirit and a type of bodily inertia. The body pauses, disappears and dies in the pool. The filmic pool is depleted at the moment when it becomes the ultimate middle class status symbol, and at a moment when, by some accounts, modernism gave way to a postmodern sensibility. The history of the swimming pool and the history of the screen image are intertwined; once this reality was reflected by the symbol, then new possibilities emerged and the pool became a productive space.

In the first few decades of the twentieth century, the swimming body moves through filmic pool scenes acquiring and accumulating different symbolic meanings: in the 1920s, bodies fell into pools; in the 1930s, they danced; in the 1940s, they stood still, treaded water and expressed nostalgic sadness; and in the 1950s, they died in the swimming pool. The trajectory of the swimming pool's symbolic meanings was not uniform and steady; however, we may conclude that the swimming body, as depicted in these films and through these decades, traces a complete life cycle.

Due to time and space limitations, a vast number of films and decades have been eliminated from this study. In the decades that follow, movies like *The Graduate* (1969) and *The Swimmer* (1971) use the space of the pool as a central metaphor to express the idea of an impossible innocence. By 2000, representations of empty pools and corpse-

filled pools began to appear with greater frequency in film and television. For instance, Francois Ozones's swimming pool in *La Piscine* (2003) replays the history of cinema and the history of swimming pools and, on the small screen, the departure of ducks living the backyard swimming pool featured in *The Sopranos* (1999-2007) prompt the series' anti-hero, Tony, to see a psychiatrist (significantly, the pool is also the watery medium of his son's failed suicide attempt). In *Lords of Dogtown* (2005) and *Wassup Rockers* (2005), empty pools are transformed into rebellious spaces that produce new identities. Ultimately, the symbolic trajectory of the life cycle persists in these representations, but it is altered by a deeper recognition of the relationship between people and their environments. This suggests that a moment beyond postmodernism might usher in a more positive era for individualism than we are often prone to contemplate.

Swimming pool scenes linger in the backgrounds of many films. They are often unnoticed and yet necessary elements to many films. Swimming pool scenes occur in romantic comedies, dramas, action films and horror films. They span genres and speak in shorthand form about the impact of culture on identity. Swimming pools whisper ideas to us and function, in George Steiner's words, as "vacant metaphors and eroded figures of speech [that] inhabit our vocabulary" (1929, p.1). The symbolic fluctuations in filmic representations of swimming pools speak to a constant struggle to make the old world new. Dream theorists posit that swimming pools are the most common dream had by people in therapy. We can only hope that this highlights a new change in our relation to the object; one which emphasizes introspection, rather than narcissism.

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