ABSTRACT
INTIMATE SPACES IN FRANÇOIS OZON’S SWIMMING POOL
by Tamara Tasevska

This study examines the construction of intimate spaces in François Ozon’s cinema and how transgressions in those spaces cause unsettling ruptures in the distinction we normally make between private and public space. Ozon plays with the voyeuristic privilege of the cinema through different means, such as increased proximity of the camera gaze, close-ups of the body and the look as well as abrupt transgressions from one space to another. His characters often collaborate with the camera gaze by looking at it, thus breaking the fourth wall and performing, or by making us feel its gaze present within the visual field. The camera gaze, one of the most powerful chronicles for capturing reality, proves through his films how looking too closely can change what we see and can blur the lines that divide public life from private life.
INTIMATE SPACES IN FRANÇOIS OZON’S SWIMMING POOL

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by

Tamara Tasevska

Miami University

Oxford, Ohio

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Advisor : ____________________________________________

Dr. Elisabeth Hodges

Reader : ____________________________________________

Dr. Jonathan Strauss

Reader : ____________________________________________

Dr. Anna Klosowska
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Chapter 1

Introduction

François Ozon’s films seek to construct intimate spaces, very often through the representation of characters’ non-normative desire in an odd domestic-like setting. Ozon is fascinated with human bodies and the private, intimate spaces they occupy, such as the home or the bedroom. His films often cinematographically interrogate the distinction between these intimate spaces and the public representation, not only to trace the contours of a distinct visual poetics, but also to call into question the inwardness of others into those spaces, including the inwardness of camera’s gaze itself. Images where the camera gaze collaborates with the character’s look into intimacy are at the core of Ozon’s cinema. Consider the sequence early in Swimming Pool (2003) where the middle aged female writer glimpses a young naked blonde girl through a window who looks back and smiles while having sex with a man. The young Julie seems to enjoy when the camera captures her look towards Sarah and the camera, in a close-up thus breaking the fourth wall; whereas the older Sarah, her look captured in a close-up, is both fascinated and disturbed by Julie’s reciprocal look. Her figure, in the reflection of the window glass, is literary absorbed into the image of the couple’s sexual activity. Like in Swimming Pool, intimacy is, in Ozon’s cinema, a visual sensation, a concept revealed through the representation of desire in relation with space and proximity of the camera with the body and the look. This concept should not necessarily be associated with representation of sexual activity on screen, and sometimes it can be an incarnation of isolated static images of a sole character in a close-up of faces and body parts in a private setting. Characteristically about Ozon’s films is that these images preoccupy nearly as much as other absorbing images of clothes, water and food, and form intimate connections with his characters’ personal cosmos. Swimming Pool is the film I have chosen to for my analysis of Ozon’s representation of these family-oriented and intimacy-disrupting spaces on screen. In addition, this sixth Ozonian film, is not only revelatory for the filmmaker’s expression of intimacy on screen, it is also, as he has said in one interview, his personally “most intimate film”¹.

¹François Ozon for an interview with Thibaut Schilt; Schilt, Thibaut. François Ozon. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2011, p.103
Recently, a number of significant film journals, notably *Cahiers du cinéma*\(^2\) and *Positif*\(^3\) in France as well as the *Screen*\(^4\), *Film Quarterly*\(^5\) and *The New Yorker*\(^6\) have paid a great deal of attention to Ozon’s filmic oeuvre. Despite this recent critic interest in Ozon’s films, his work garnered little academic criticism until 2008. Since 2008, a cluster of work on Ozon has been published, culminating in two monographs on the director by Andrew Asibong (2008)\(^7\) and Thibaut Schilt (2011)\(^8\). Moreover, with the newest articles dedicated on Ozon’s work from May 5, 2014 in *The New Yorker*\(^9\) and December 2013 in the academic journal *Cineforum*\(^10\) interest in the director, both in the media and in academia, appears to be at its peak. According to critics Asibong and Schilt, François Ozon is considered one of a new generation of French filmmakers whose cinematic imagery is audacious and candid when tackling issues of gender, sexuality and identity. Celebrated as “the first French queer mainstream filmmaker”\(^11\), throughout his career, Ozon has received mixed critical reviews. Some accuse him of banality and consider his films as “utterly lacking in inventiveness”\(^12\), while others, such as Anthony Lane who writes for *The New Yorker*, proclaim him as the one of the brightest French filmmakers whose “story dances along at a rattling rate”\(^13\). For *The New York Times* online film database, Rebecca Flint Marx portrays Ozon as “one of the most provocative and vibrant filmmakers to emerge during the 1990s, who has distinguished himself with dark, mordantly psychological films that draw their impact from his frank and often disturbing explorations of transgression and sexuality”\(^14\). Most critics agree that, if nothing else, Ozon is a prolific filmmaker (Asibong, 1). Since his first feature film, he has directed at least one film a year, all of which have been distributed internationally. *Sous le sable* (2000), *8 femmes* (2002), *Swimming Pool* (2003), *5x2* (2004), and his most recent films, *Dans la maison* (2012) and *Jeune et jolie* (2013), were popular successes both in France and abroad and have made Ozon one of the most internationally recognizable contemporary

\(^{2}\) *Cahiers du cinéma*, recent issues : 692, 682, 662, 661, 653, 642, 621, 607

\(^{3}\) *Positif*, recent issues: 629-631, 620, 603, 597, 588, 576

\(^{4}\) *Screen*, LIII:1 (Spring 2012), XLVIII:3 (Autumn 2007)


\(^{6}\) Anthony Lane in *The New Yorker*, May 5, 2014


\(^{9}\) Lane, Anthony, *Trouble Calls*, in *The New Yorker*, May 5, 2004: 84

\(^{10}\) Rossello, Nicola. *Cineforum*, December 2013, 53(10):45-47


\(^{13}\) http://www.newyorker.com/arts/critics/cinema/2013/04/29/130429rcrci_cinema_lane?currentPage=all

\(^{14}\) http://www.nytimes.com/movies/person/534072/Fran-ois-Ozon/biography
French directors. His 2013 film *Jeune et Jolie* was nominated for the *Palme d'Or* at the 2013 *Cannes Film Festival* and Ozon was elected as best screenwriter at the 2013 *European Film Awards* for his 2012 film *Dans la maison*.15

Born and raised in Paris, Ozon had a fascination with cinema from an early age. “I am a cinephilic director,” he said in an interview with Schilt published in the same author’s book on Ozon(160). He earned his master's degree in film from the Université de Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne and began studying filmmaking in 1990 at the famous French cinema school, *La FEMIS*. Since then, he has shot many films in Super-8, video, 16mm and 35mm formats and many of his first short films have been in competition in various international festivals.16 In 1998, he made a number of short features (*courts métrages*), for example *Une robe d'été* (1996) and *Scènes de lit* (1998), films that brought him success among the cinephile circles. The same year, 1998, the French film historian Michel Marie grouped him together with directors of “le jeune cinema français” with directors like Olivier Assayas, Jean-Pierre Jeunet, Gaspar Noé, Mathieu Kassovitz and Cédric Klapisch17. In 1996, the fifteen-minute *Une robe d’été* was warmly received by critics and won a number of awards at festivals such as the Locarno Film festival, Geneva, Los Angeles, thus Ozon gained international recognition. In the first chapter of his book on the director Asibong asks if Ozon should be considered in the light of a specifically French history and culture of transgression and therefore compared with a handful of French literary precursors rather than with his cinematic contemporaries (13). Asibong believes that Ozon’s ideas around “unlawful” sexualities are often more reminiscent of writers like Marquis de Sade (*La Philosophie dans le boudoir*, 1794), the Comte de Lautréamont (*Les Chants de Maldoror*, 1869), and Georges Bataille (*Histoire de l’oeil*, 1928). I believe that as much as Ozon’s works are a prolongation, as Asibong states, of a French literary representation of illicit sexuality or desire, his imagery also awakens something that has its roots in the invention of the medium and cinematic tradition, both French and international. The use of irony as well as the long takes and the emphasis on deep focus recall the Lumière brothers who made the first steps towards cinema with their *La Sortie de l’Usine Lumièrée à Lyon* (1895).18 Moreover, Ozon in an interview has said that he

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15 Ibid
16 See more at http://www.francois-ozon.com/en/filmography
18 According to the French film theorist André Bazin, films were born as long-takes (ex: Lumière brothers). He also supports the idea that the long-take is linked to the depth of the shot; Bazin, Andre, and Hugh Gray. *What is cinema?*, Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.
loved when critics compare him to Alfred Hitchcock and Claude Chabrol, two great filmmakers who are a great inspiration for him\(^{19}\).

Since the beginning of his career, Ozon’s cinema often evokes the concept of “mise en abyme”. This concept, usually attributed to works of literature, describes the visual experience of standing between two mirrors and seeing an infinite reproduction of one’s image is present in Ozon cinema, notably when Ozon transitions the gaze of the camera and captures one image in a close-up between windows, doors or mirrors. This effect creates a network of relationships between subject, screen, other and objects. The “mise en abyme” is emphasized even more by the director’s predilection to situate his characters in proximity with the camera, mostly, in interior (closed) spaces where the inner (and the family) drama happens. In 1988, Ozon made his first short *Photo de famille*, a seven-minute film project, which revealed one of his recurrent themes: filming the family as the most private nucleus of society and as a protest against the mass common conceptions and ideas about photography and film. This short feature also displayed what would become characteristic of his cinematic imagery, a mix of wry humor and a fascination with theatrical artifice and performance. In this first film, the twenty-one-year-old Ozon cast his own real-life family and set it in the artificial environment of a domestic murder/thriller story. The artificiality of this setting is emphasized by his brother’s performance for the camera, a he turns towards its gaze and collaborates with it. Ozon’s real-life brother, who plays the son in the story, murders his sister and parents for unspecified reasons and arranges the three cadavers upright on the family sofa. Then he sits next to them and poses for the camera that he had set on the table. The film ends with a freeze frame that resembles a conventional family portrait. This short feature mixes genres by joining absurd comedy and crime thriller and defies categorization. He portrays familial space as a pathologically distorted environment where the brother-murderer turns toward the camera so as to perform for it and participate in “killing the family”. Moreover, by combining the real (his actual family members that cast in a familial plot) and the artificial context (the film and photography), Ozon reveals his fascination for the capacities of the medium to experiment with the cinematic real. He emphasizes the intrusive nature of the camera gaze with close-ups of the face of brother/ fratricide murderer and with a series of jump cuts that move from one family member to another captured in a close-up from an ironically absent camera’s gaze. In this short, Ozon isolates the features of the brother’s

\(^{19}\)http://www.indiewire.com/article/francois_ozon_teases_and_pleases_with_see_the_sea_and_a_summers_dress
face in a close-up and freezes on him, when he smiles for the camera, in order to portray his interiority as a form of isolation and disconnection from the conventional familial life (and the conventions of cinema, namely to be in movement). In addition, Ozon’s irony culminates with the last image of the family photograph which expresses desire to conserve the perverted private space created on screen as a macabre work of art. The last image of the film also pays homage to François Truffaut’s famous freeze frame at the end of 400 Blows (1959) and reveals a fascination with the quality of the medium for transgression.

While studying at the film academy La FEMIS, Ozon made Une robe d’été (1996) and Scènes de lit (1998). In these short films, he experiments with the representation of sexuality and with portraying unusual interior settings for the expression of implicit desire. This thesis will argue that desire is shown when Ozon films the body in these spaces through emphasis on the sound and light in his filmic imagery. Une robe d’été opens with the male (gay) protagonist singing and dancing on a tune from the gay icon singer Sheila while looking at the camera as if he was on theater stage. In this sequence, the natural lighting and the non-diegetic tune are challenging the cinematic real by (de)emphazing the artificiality of the imagery. Similarly, in Scènes de lit, Ozon portrays odd couplings and their “bed stories” while emphasizing the performative aspect of their visual dialogues.

Like Hitchcock, Ozon is what critics call a visual director20. For him, capturing the human body in proximity delineates contours that blur the relationship between outside and inside, outer and inner life, the private and the public, the subject’s body and the objective world. Furthermore, the human body in intimate proximity to other bodies and objects, especially anthropomorphic objects, obsessively reappears throughout Ozon’s films and relates to the expression of their desire. For example in Une robe d’été (1996), Ozon pays a great deal of attention to fabrics. After having sex with the woman, the young man takes her flowery summer dress as his clothes were stolen on the beach. The light fabric undulates gently in the wind, and a tracking shot records his cyclist’s, dressed as drag, journey back to the vacation bungalow. There, in the interior of the house, the dress stimulates his boyfriend and they end up making love on the kitchen table. The images of recurrent attention to the fabric and the contours of the protagonists’ bodies (in a close-up) and their warmth, serve to materialize desire on screen.

20The film critic Richard Brody who writes for The New Yorker explains that a visual director is concentrated on the visuality in the imagery rather than the dialogues and the plot. See more: http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/bios/richard_brody/search?contributorName=richard%20brody
In addition, not only does Ozon attend to the body using extreme close-ups of body parts and faces, but he also reuses the same bodies of actors (mostly of actresses) throughout his films. Thus, we find the Spanish actress Lucia Sanchez in three of his early films (*Une robe d’été*, 1996, *X2000*, 1998, *Scène du lit*, 1997) and in the key role of the maid Maria in his first feature, *Sitcom*, as well as, the French actress, screenwriter and director Marina de Van, in *Regarde la mer* (1997) and *Sitcom*. Another French actress, Ludivine Sagnier stars in three of Ozon’s features (*Goute d’eau sur pierres brûlantes* in 1999, *8 femmes* and *Swimming pool* in 2003, and as the voice of Angel in the dubbed French version of the film with the same name). In addition, the English actress Charlotte Rampling appears in four of Ozon’s feature films: *Sous le sable* (2000), *Swimming pool* (2003), *Angel* (2006), and *Jeune et jolie* (2013).

Ozon’s predilection for the same faces and bodies of actors clearly comes from his obsession to inspect intimately or scrutinize carefully their forms and features and to project their embodied sensation and thought on screen. Asked about the intimacy in French cinema, he has said in an interview:

> French cinema is about intimacy, this is bit of a cliché as well as a reality. Actually, this might be the limit of French cinema, that it needs to be larger than intimacy and to do what Americans do in going beyond that. French cinema shouldn't stay centered in that intransigent, inward look all the time. It should project out. It doesn't project out enough. So intimacy is both a strength and a limitation […] Actually, this intimacy becomes only interesting when it becomes almost obsessional.\(^2\)

Ozon assumes that French cinema looks inward and that filmic intimacy is an experience of that inwardness. I believe that Ozon’s wish to portray intimacy on screen is based rather on the attentiveness of camera gaze and its capacity to interfere with the intimate space and to project (reflect) it on the screen surface. The gaze therefore directs what is inward towards the surface of the screen (which also functions as a mirror) emphasizing its quality for transgression and also self-reflection. When asked about the frankness of representing intimate (sexual) moments on screen, Ozon has added:

\(^2\)http://www.indiewire.com/article/francois_ozon_teases_and_pleases_with_see_the_sea_and_a Summers_dresses
I find that sexuality is . . . This is where the challenge as a director becomes stronger, because there is always the question about where to put the camera, at what angle and where to set it. It's actually more fun to shoot a sex scene than lover's dialogue.

Therefore, his representation of intimacy is haptic, relating to the sense of touch and surface, relating to perception, and combining two trends present in contemporary French cinema. The first is the “cinema of the senses” or what Martine Beugnet describes in her book as a combination of sensation and thought and the second the “cinema of the body” (cinéma du corps), a form of cinematic expression where the thought is an idea made flesh or an idea that expressed visually through the body. François Ozon is also associated with the cinéma du corps (cinema of the body), together with other French filmmakers including Olivier Assayas, Catherine Breillat, and Claire Denis. Tim Palmer discusses the cinematographic style of the cinéma du corps as consisting in revealing the human body on screen through its sexual capacities. In his work entitled Brutal Intimacy: Analyzing Contemporary French Cinema, Palmer states:

This cinéma du corps consists of arthouse dramas and thrillers with deliberately discomfiting features: dispassionate physical encounters involving filmed sex that is sometimes unsimulated; physical desire embodied by the performances of actors or nonprofessionals as harshly insular; intimacy itself depicted as fundamentally aggressive, devoid of romance, lacking a nurturing instinct or empathy of any kind; and social relationships that disintegrate in the face of such violent compulsions. In comparison to the New Wave movement, the cinéma du corps is connected more loosely, through commonalities of content and technique. (57-58)

According to Palmer, filmmakers associated with the “cinema of the body” tend to deal with an on screen interrogation of physicality in brutally intimate terms (57). Asibong notes that Ozon defines cinematography as “preoccupied with pushing back the boundaries of sexual representation in mainstream cinema” and his films “often seem to delight in graphic images

22 See more: http://www.indiewire.com/article/francois_ozon_teases_and_pleases_with_see_the_sea_and_a_summers_dress
of unrestrained sexual activity” (10). Indeed, Ozon reconstructs these most intimate moments through provocative graphic representations of the body and sex itself and sometimes transform screen space into something so proximate that it becomes uncomfortable to view. In the short Victor (1993) the main character masturbates to climax, with the attention given to his semen spurring all over his chest and chin. In Action Vérité (1994) Ozon frames in an extreme close-up a teenage girl as she jokes by putting her hand between the legs of another girl, only to pull out a hand covered in menstrual blood. In Les amants criminels (1999) the camera pays attention to the micro-movements of the face of the male teenage protagonist as he is sodomized by a much older man. In Sitcom, Ozon frames in a medium-shot Stéphane Rideau’s erect penis pushed between the breasts of Lucia Sanchez.

His films often lack with dialogues and express meaning though the discourse of the body. When asked about his frequent recourse to wordless and often antagonistic sexual encounters, Ozon argued that:

For me, these are the moments when characters no longer project their discourse, but reveal themselves through their bodies. Like at the start of 5x2 when Stéphane Freiss interrupts his banal exchanges with Valeria Bruni-Tedeschi and rapes her. Right away his personality reveals itself, and there, he tells the truth…. Whether these bodies are moving to make love or to dance, these are always truthful moments. (Palmer 62-63)

In 2005’s Le Temps qui reste, truthful moments are revealed through extreme close-ups of the intimate world (real or imagined) and the attention given to the body and the face. The protagonist, Romain, speaks to his doctor and this image is conjured with the imagines of Romain dreaming making love with his own father. Later in the film, Romain will have sex with an unfamiliar waitress in order to get her pregnant, while her husband kisses and stimulates him. In his book on François Ozon, Andrew Asibong compares this scene to the “primal scene” where in Ozon’s imagery one’s copulating parents are not only witnessed by the child, but are in fact joined by him (12). The child participates in the primal scene and Asibong argues that this image could function as a quintessential Ozonian desire where the male protagonist enjoying sexual relations with both a man and a woman. The premise of Asibong’s book is that Ozonian characters embark on a process of self-realization, leading to sexual discovery and/or freedom by rebelling against the patriarch. Asibong proposes that such a change, usually prompted by a fantastic/extraordinary event, shakes the characters out
of a stale and repressive status quo and propels them into another way of being. In *Sous le sable* (2001), Charlotte Rampling’s character, middle-aged English academic named Marie, reveals her sexual liberation through her dreams and fantasies presented onscreen. Thus, Marie reveals her desire to mourn her missing husband in the famous scene where she masturbates in a close-up of her face caressed by several pairs of male hands, both of her husband and her lover.

François Ozon’s cinema is frequently discussed not only as being queer and sexual, but also as specifically homo- or bisexual. “With some notable exceptions, his films make visible images of homoeroticism, trajectories of gay psychological development, and vagaries of gay social experiences with both an unabashed frankness and a refreshing casualness” (Asibong 11). Ozon has been categorized among a set of recognized French gay filmmakers that might include Jean Cocteau (*Orphée*, 1950), Jean Genet (*Un Chant d’amour*, 1950), André Téchiné (*J’embrasse pas*, 1991), the team of Olivier Ducastel and Jacques Martineau (*Ma vraie vie à Rouen*, 2002), and also possibly Cyril Collard (*Les Nuits fauves*, 1993). Ozon’s films, like those of the filmmakers mentioned above, have appeared at international gay and lesbian festivals and much of his international praise is due to the association with the LGBT community (Asibong, 11).

As a mode of queer interrogation, Ozon’s films often question the nature of gender, desire, and the construction of sexualities. His representation of intimacy explores new territories of cinematic experience in order to reveal the shifting nature of gender identity and to underline the notion of gender as performance. Fascinated with artifice and theatricality, his characters often have sexual encounters with strangers and they are not afraid to reveal their nudity while looking at the camera and performing as if they were on stage. The short *Une robe d’été* opens with the male protagonist singing and dancing in a close-up wearing only a Speedo swimming suit, while looking at the camera. Similarly, in *8 femmes*, after the ladies sing and dance in couples, the film ends with all of them lining up, looking at the camera and bending over. Asibong concludes the first chapter of his book on Ozon with a definition of representation of sexual desire in Ozon’s work:

Ozon’s analysis of mutating sexual desire is layered and nuanced in a manner that sharply interrogates the ethics of relation tout court, and certainly moves well beyond the superficiality of mere sexual spectacle. (13)
Unafraid to explore these different aspects of intimacy, the originality of the *enfant terrible du cinéma français* (an expression used to describe Ozon after the release of his first short features) may be found in a cinematographic style that questions the boundaries of an intimate screen space. One of the central claims of this thesis will be to consider how Ozon’s filmic imagery questions the limits between private experiences and intrusiveness, and also reconceives cinema as an exclusively intimate experience. I will argue that not only does he reconstruct the intimate cosmos brutally, with the camera’s gaze invading and inspecting the private space, but also his artistry lies in the intimacy of his filmmaking, where the camera gaze collaborates with the protagonists’ actions and reactions. Ozon’s sixth film, *Swimming Pool* deserves a particular attention because one of the great questions that this film evokes among other is: What does it mean to be an artist and creator and how does intimacy interfere with the act of creating? Analyzing this film would also propose a reading of the Ozonian significance of *auteur* and the shifting nature of gender, since the filmmakers compares or “dresses” himself up as Charlotte Rampling, the author and man character in the film.
Chapter One. Framing Intimacy

1.1 Transformative Spaces

*Swimming Pool* is the sixth Ozon feature in five years, filmed three years after *Sous le sable* (2000) and two years before *Le Temps qui reste* (2005). Many film critics, including Schilt, consider these three Ozonian films as a part of a trilogy. This particular treatment is not due to the resemblance of the films’ plots, but rather, to Ozon’s use of similar visual tropes in each of the films: waterscape (rivers, oceans, pools) and the emphasis given to interior spaces, including the home (or vacation retreat in *Swimming Pool*) when depicting loss and mourning. In *Sous le sable* Ozon presents Marie Drillon’s (played by Charlotte Rampling) difficult mourning her husband’s death, whose disappearance in the sea has left her without tangible proof of his death. Marie takes refuge in her home mostly in non-romantic and insignificant sexual encounters. She evokes her husband and acts as if he is still alive even in moments when she makes love with her lover Vincent. Throughout the film, Ozon depicts Marie in close-ups in the space of her home and in her bed, alone or sometimes together with the spectral presence of her husband. In the famous sequence where Marie masturbates clothed, Ozon films her from the upside down in separate high-angle close-up shots of her feet, genitals, breasts, and face as she lies down on her bed. The camera’s gaze caresses her from her head until her toes while she is caressed on screen by a number of hands, including those of her husband and her lover. Marie’s difficulty mourning her missing husband results from the fact that she has not yet seen his lifeless body pulled out from the sea. When this moment finally arrives towards the end of film, Marie bursts out in laughter. The penultimate frame of Marie reveals her in close-up on the beach while she cries for the first time.

The other film from the trilogy released after *Swimming Pool*, is *Le Temps qui reste*. It is a film about Romain’s (Melvil Poupaud) self-mourning and isolation as he prepared for his own death. Diagnosed with incurable cancer, Romain decides to take refuge in solitude abandoning his lover and his closest family. However, Romain is a professional photographer and secretly takes and develops photographs of them. According to Roland Barthes photographers are also “agents of death” (91). Photography reveals something that has happened, “that-has-been” and in this sense it represents a “flat death”, a monument of a presence which is no longer there (Barthes 92-94). In *Le Temps qui reste*, it is Romain, who, through photography, metaphorically becomes the agent of his own death. He secretly takes photographs of his family members and lovers in order to commemorate their and his own
existence. However, throughout the film the camera never frames him in a photograph. Ozon chooses to film him in this way as if to anticipate his absence and (ironically) presents him as if he were already dead. One of the crucial visual and intimate elements of Romain’s self-mourning process is a periodically conjured image of his childhood self, shown in conjunction with the image of his current self. Ozon frames young Romain (Ugo Soussan Trabelsi) in a close-up, whether on his own near the ocean or in the company of his male crush in parallel montage, with Romain’s current projection of himself. Another element that suggests the protagonist’s isolation is Ozon’s use of widescreen shots. In images such as these, Ozon frames Romain alone in the middle of large portions of natural landscapes (beach, ocean, sky, and parks) in order to ironically, emphasize his isolation and refuge from the closest family.

In the context of the trilogy, *Swimming Pool* is a film that depicts isolation and mourning in relation to intimate space and the act of writing or creating. It is a film about Sarah Morton (Charlotte Rampling) a middle-aged English crime-novelist. Sarah’s rather unfulfilling life takes place in London between her work and home, where she has to deal with her publisher and occasional lover Charles Dance (John Bosload) and her feeble father with whom she shares the house. Childless and struggling to write, Sarah, mourns her youth and self-fulfillment. Once successful for writing the best-selling crime-fiction series called *Inspector Dorwell*, she has become an alcoholic and struggles with writer’s block under pressure by her editor-lover to complete another book in the popular series. She accepts her publisher’s offer to stay at his secluded vacation retreat in the Luberon, in southeastern France, where glorious weather and large swimming pool will surely inspire the struggling author. She settles in, but the tempestuous arrival of John’s daughter Julie (Ludivine Sagnier) impedes her creativity. Julie’s parties every night and brings home men, which annoys but also fascinates Sarah. The writer finds pleasure in looking at Julie sunning herself alongside the swimming pool. Inspired by the secret diary of the sensual blonde, Sarah abandons her *Dorwell on Holiday* project and begins to work obsessively on a new work entitled *Julie*. At dinner Sarah learns of Julie’s French mother who once wrote a romance novel that was never published. Upon discovering that Sarah has stolen her journal, Julie seeks revenge by bringing home and seducing local waiter Franck (Jean-Marie Lamour), whom she knows Sarah finds handsome. Sarah spies on the couple as Julie’s unsuccessfully attempts to convince Franck to sleep with her. The next morning Franck has disappeared and Sarah

begins to investigate in the local village. Franck has not gone to work and his house is empty. Sarah also learns that Julie’s mother has died in a terrible accident whose circumstances remain unclear. Sarah finds blood near the swimming pool and Julie eventually confesses in delusion to killing Franck “for Sarah, for the book” as she confesses. The two women bury the body in the garden near the swimming pool. The next day, Sarah offers herself to the gardener Marcel (Mac Fayolle) and sleeps with him in order to prevent him discovering Franck’s burying place. Julie leaves for Saint-Tropez and leaves a copy of her mother’s book for inspiration. Back in London, John rejects Sarah’s novel, *Swimming Pool*, but the cunning writer has already sold the rights to another publisher. As she leaves her former lover’s office, she catches a glimpse of John’s daughter Julia, whom she has never met. The film ends with a jump cut by the villa’s swimming pool, as Sarah waves successively at Julie and Julia.

Not surprisingly, critics have established links between Ozon’s portrayal of variety of transformations and his predilection for the waterscape. Both Asibong and Kate Ince interpret his waterscape as a queer space, queer because of the ambiguity of its surface, its transparency and reflection, which function as a metaphor for the shifting desire and sexual practices of his protagonists. Schilt sees the site of the water as a transformational space where the characters isolate themselves in order to reflect (literally and figuratively) on their fate. According to Schilt, these films “focus on lonesome characters who, because of various types of mourning sickness, have taken refuge in narcissistic isolation… Mirrors, rivers, pools, and oceans abound in the three stories, which all begin and end beside a body of water” (79). Ozon’s predilection for the waterscape clearly has a metaphorical function as a site of liquidity, fluidity, transformation, and reflection. From the beginning of the film, images of water prevail in order to evoke the senses. Moreover, the notes color blue which reappears in *Swimming Pool* through close-ups of the river Thames, the clear blue sky in Luberon, the blue painted walls in Sarah’s room in the vacation house and finally through frames of the swimming pool, functions as a visual trope or an alternative reflective and transparent surface. The attention given to these elements serves to evoke fluidity as well as transformation of the intimate space, since these elements appeal to the potential of the filmic imagery to trace links of the transformation of its protagonists. *Sous le sable* opens to a long-shot view of Notre-Dame Cathedral. The camera without cutting placed on the Pont

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26 Andrew Asibong, *François Ozon* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Kate Ince, ‘*François Ozon’s cinema of desire*’, in Kate Ince (ed.).
d’Austerlitz tilts down to a high-angle shot of the river Seine. The title of the film then appears in red characters superimposed over the surface of the rippling water, which occupies the entire frame. A horizontal pan shot reveals bathers lying on the river’s right bank and, even further right, cars whizzing by on a highway. The opening sequence of Swimming Pool echoes the opening of Sous le sable (2000) Ozon’s feature film that precedes Swimming Pool, also starring Charlotte Rampling in the main role. Swimming opens with a high-angle shot of the river Thames in London. In the Paris-based film, the camera pans down to the water after showing, as I already mentioned, a view of the French capital’s most famous cathedral. In Swimming Pool, however, the camera tilts up to the flowing river to reveal a panorama of Big Ben and the Parliament. In both sequences, the film’s title appears superimposed over the surface of the water, written in capital letters and in the same font. In addition, the imagery in both sequences is nourished by an originally composed melancholic soundtrack by the composer Philippe Rombi.27 These first seconds of the two films challenge our gaze with contradictory image in close-up of the written title over the moving imagery of water. What appeals to the spectator’s senses and incites his or her reverie is the infinite space coming from outside of the frame, evoked by the waves as they disappear in harmony. In his book on the philosophy of architecture and space The Poetics of Space (1958), Gaston Bachelard analyzes spaces in relation to intimate (lived) experiences and coins the term “intimate immensity” in order to describe the intersection between spaces and words. By analyzing poems in which architecture and space such as houses, forests, or cities are experienced as bodies, Bachelard explains how language opens up a gap in an infinite space of “immense intimacy” (195). In this sense, the effect of identifying the space as body leads to a transformation into an infinite space. Ozon’s opening sequence captures the floating water without borders or landmarks, thus suggesting a kind of reach into extra-diegetic space that one could describe in terms of immensity. However, while the water might look close, it is hard to discern if the image is a long shot or a close-up. In addition, representing a de-identified body of water, while associated through the montage with what came before (the city it is identified with), evokes a visually spare image, almost empty, not revealing anything but the title. However, the superimposition of the title over the water refers to a different space: that of the swimming pool, concealed and limited space unlike the open infinite space of the river, which joins the sea, the ocean and continues in infinity. The title both displaces the meaning of the image of the Thames, while it also nourishes its image. The written text in

27 http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0739151/
its capacity to be read as a sign communicates two meanings: first its nature as a signifier, that of static, unmoving letters written in blue color in large font; and second its signified concept, that of the swimming pool which evokes closed, concealed space, usually painted in blue and containing water, but also, an artificially constructed space designed for pleasure (to emulate something natural.

![Swimming Pool](image1.jpg)

Figure 1. Screen capture. Opening sequence of Swimming Pool (2003)

![Sous le sable](image2.jpg)

Figure 2. Screen capture. Opening sequence of Sous le sable (2000)

These images might suggest that immensity could only penetrable since when driven by one’s desire to connect with it intimately. Moreover, the desire to relate intimately with images of space and words is what Barthes named as “the third meaning” in *Image, Music, Text* while reading an image (52)\(^\text{28}\). The “third” or the “astute meaning” as Barthes writes, is

the meaning that goes beyond symbolic meaning that can be produced from watching an image. Therefore, it represents a more intimate and personal sense. In the image of the opening sequence, the third meaning is implied by the materiality of the image and the micro-movements of the water. It is contained in the image itself and it serves to evoke change and desire, as well as to anticipate the protagonists’ transformation.

Images of houses and homes, their walls, ornaments and gardens, are present in Ozon’s imagery as much as the characters themselves. Ozon usually introduces his characters on screen in spaces that in themselves evoke movement or spaces that are “in between two spaces”, such as the London metro in Swimming Pool or in a moving car when he introduces Marie and her husband in Sous le sable. In the three films from the trilogy about mourning, he uses long shots in order to frame the characters in their milieu and then shifts to fixed images of close-ups or extreme close-ups of faces. Ozon films his protagonist alone in the image, in a private setting such as the home or the bed or in spaces that imply movement. In Swimming Pool, Ozon films Sarah for the first time after several jump cuts that move through shots of anonymous people in the London metro. He films Sarah, first in a static image, which is in fact a photograph of her on a book jacket that another woman is reading in the metro. The photograph reveals her, smiling and facing the readers of her book as well as the camera. While the woman recognizes her and seems excited by this meeting, Sarah responds to her: “You must have mistaken me with someone else. I am not the person you think I am”. The effect of the transitioning between Sarah’s stasis – her photograph and the moving container of the tube car figures as a metaphor for transformation and shifting identity of the protagonist. Sarah’s portrait is also evoked with a static image that follows the cut and captures the real Sarah for the first time in interior medium framing with her reflection in the window. The cut from the photographic (static) image of Sarah to the filmic image of her “real” person (real within the context of the film’s diegesis) introduces continuity and rupture in Ozon’s initial representation of her. Firstly, she is captured in the photograph on the book jacket or that “other presence”29 that Barthes sees in every picture which evokes a “flat death” or represents characters within their final wish - to commemorate their life. Secondly, Ozon’s camera situates her in between the frames of the subway window and thus doubly frames her image. The multiple framing of her persona where Sarah is captured “in pieces”, evoke her possible interior disintegration. Moreover, in this sequence of introducing Sarah, Ozon never represents her in unity. Through this mode of address adopted by multiple

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framing in relation to the attentive gaze of camera, Ozon’s filmmaking suggests that there are alternative ways to present a character’s transformation and also to envisage the relationship between Sarah and objective world.

1.2 The Home in London

Ozon’s filmic intimacy, more than being associated only with a space or attention to faces and movements, could be defined rather as an effect, or sensation, integrated within the imagery and embodied through various visual and auditory tropes. As I argued previously, Ozon’s work features arthouse dramas where intimacy is conceived through the (closed) space, the body, the face and engaging looks and desires. What makes us, as viewers realize that what we are watching sometimes on screen is more intimate than something else? If we define the word “intimacy” according to the Oxford English Dictionary, we come upon the following definitions: “The state of being personally intimate; intimate friendship or acquaintance; familiar intercourse; close familiarity.” These definitions involve another person in addition to the intimate presence of the self. There are also implicit etymological links to the word “familial”, in the sense of “lineage” and “relation”, thus evoking ties among related persons belonging to the same household or living separately. By defining intimacy as “close familiarity”, this definition, in addition to being associated with persons, could also evoke closeness to an object, a subject, a topic, or a space. Furthermore, the word “intimacy” may also connote physical intimacy, or sexual intercourse. Filmic intimacy for Ozon is something, I would suggest, that is linked to proximity and to belonging to an enclosed domestic space, a place that has a form of huis clos, and, for Ozon, the home interior appears as the privileged space of construction and transformation of the characters. As I suggested earlier, Ozon’s camera shifts from a long shot to a medium or a close-up shot, when he introduces his characters in their setting within the filmic narrative. The sequence in Sarah’s home, which follows her first appearances in the city and in her publisher’s office, reveals this progression in Ozon’s work. In the sequence when Sarah is inside of her London home, Ozon depicts her in an alienated interaction with something that should be her most personal space. Sarah Morton lives in a big house shared with her father. Ozon’s use of the long shot here emphasizes Sarah’s inability to relate Sarah to something of personal importance. Within a little more than a one-minute time frame, Ozon presents Sarah in her home with three long takes, all of them in different rooms, where the camera tracks her from one room to another in medium shots. However, Ozon never frames her in relation to intimate

30 http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/98503?redirectedFrom=intimacy#eid
experiences and there are almost no close-ups of Sarah in her home, except for the one of her face at the end of this sequence. Read through the critical lens of Bachelard’s work, we might understand Ozon’s depiction of the house here as a space that “contains centers for condensation of intimacy, situations that have been experienced and discovers situations that have been dreamed” (29). Furthermore, as Bachelard observes, it is impossible to finding intimacy in big spaces which lack intimate experiences: “[I]n a palace, there is no place for intimacy” (34). In a similar fashion, the camera never approaches to reveal an object, a detail, or place of emotional attachment. Throughout the sequence, Ozon frames Sarah in movement and it is not until the last part of this sequence that he frames her in a close-up sitting when she leaves her computer and positions herself next to a window. Here, she faces the camera and gazes down melancholically. Ozon films her in a unique relation with her intimate space. The window behind her looks over a garden on a rainy afternoon. Ozon freezes this moment for a few seconds and then continues to film her in an extreme close-up. This is the only image where Sarah is in unity with her home. Bachelard defines the space of the home as a corner of our world: “For our house is our corner of the world” (4). The depth of field in this image of Sarah reminds us of Renaissance space and gives an almost painterly characteristic of her face, like a Mona Lisa, smiling with an enigmatic expression. The close-up freeze frame over her calm and meditative face reveals a visual rhetoric that provokes the viewer’s gaze and demands that he or she looks at the image of her face and that is to say, contemplate Sarah’s situation. . Sarah faces away from the closed window, which may be interpreted as indicating Sarah’s separation from the outside world and her wish to be preserved within her private space. However, since Ozon never reveals anything about Sarah’s emotional landscape in this sequence, the viewers can only scrutinizes the close-up of Sarah’s face and enjoy the spectacle that this image offers. By freezing the image over the contemplative expression of her face and moving towards it in a close-up, Ozon depicts her interiority in terms of an immobile image that shares the static qualities of a photograph. For the duration of the few seconds during which Ozon pauses over this image, the camera manages to break up the unity of Sarah’s representation in her home and adds artificiality to her portrait. Ozon emphasizes Sarah’s alienated relation to her own personal space. In theater, the actors rarely turn their back to the audience and the audience sees the magic of acting happening through character’s faces. In cinema, it is through the technique of freeze frame that Ozon evokes this element, which adds to the artificial theatricality of the image. Sarah’s positioning and how she faces the camera evokes notions of spectacle and of artificiality, two frequent motifs present throughout Ozon’s work when depicting privacy.
Similarly, in the short film Une robe d’été (1996) Ozon experiments with the proximity of the camera and the characters in order to artificiality evoke a couple’s private space. In the beginning of this short feature, the main character, Sébastien, is not looking at his boyfriend Luc, but instead, at the camera, thus violating the fourth wall. The film opens with a close-up of Sébastien wearing only a Speedo swimming suit while dancing and singing to the tune on the French version of song “Bang Bang” featuring the gay French pop icon Sheila. Sébastien’s sensual performance on the summerhouse’s terrace serves as a stage that temporarily interrupts the intimacy of the couple’s space. In Swimming Pool, the theatrical spectacle that similar imagery offers reveals Ozon’s attempt to depict characters as subjected to the curious gaze of the camera. In his feature 8 Femmes, which takes place in the private settings of the home, the ladies, after a sudden song and dance ballet, stand next to one another in a perfect line and break the fourth wall by looking at the camera. This final shot is as morbid as it is theatrical; it depicts intimacy as it takes place within the enclosed space of a fatherless home (his death is revealed immediately before), but at the same time it engages the camera’s gaze which operates outside of the narrative imagery.

While experimenting with artificiality in representing the intimate space, Ozon seems obsessed with blurring the boundaries between the real and the artificial. Cinema, as discussed by many critics, possesses a unique ability to depict the real even though the real is always a (cinematic) fiction. The French film theorist Christian Metz argues this in The Imaginary Signifier. Metz suggests that the “imaginary in cinema is not the imaginary that may happen to represent, but the imaginary that is from the start, the imaginary that constitutes it as a signifier […] The Imaginary, by definition, combines within it a certain presence and a certain absence. In the cinema, it is not just the fictional signified, if there is one, that is thus made present in the mode of absence, it is from the outset the signifier” (802). For Metz, what is perceived in imagery is a replica, a new kind of mirror. An Ozon experiments with the cinema’s potential to appeal to the dual characteristics of the signifier. With techniques such as breaking the fourth wall or freezing the characters in a close-up frame in intimate spaces, Ozon reconstructs a theatrical space which is at the same time a contradictory space, stamped with unreality to an unusual degree. Metz also explains that cinema can reveal something defined through magic and fetishism, and this is the particular fetishism of the cinema itself, of its techniques and apparatus. Metz suggests that the spectator-subject identifies himself with the camera gaze as he looks: “he can do no other than identify with the camera, too, which has looked before him at what he is looking at and
whose stationing (=framing) determines the vanishing point” (804). In *Swimming Pool*, when Ozon moves the camera toward Sarah in a close-up, we can say that the filmmaker’s point of view collaborates with that of the viewer’s, since the freeze-frame and the close-up evoke an almost intense looking. By freezing Sarah in a close-up and presenting her as a still image, Ozon also reminds us that we are watching a film, with pre-organized setting and movements, that in fact we are watching a fiction.

1.3 The Vacation Retreat in Luberon

When Sarah goes on vacation in Luberon, the camera first follows her facial expressions in a close-up, in moving places, such as a train and with the gardener, Marcel’s, car. By situating it in the moving train, this sequence evokes transformation. However, what is most enigmatic in the imagery of Sarah is her emotionless expression. Most of the sequences in Luberon take place within John’s (the publisher) vacation property, which echoes with Ozon’s fascination with representing his characters in a “huis clos”. Few sequences are filmed in the village, mostly in the café where Sarah meets Franck, the waiter for whom she develops a crush. Sarah tries to reconstruct her microcosmic paradise under the sun and in the presence of the swimming pool. Inside the house, she explores all the rooms, discovers the terrace with a view of the swimming pool and sets up a desk that will serve as a workspace for writing. What may seem surprising in this sequence is the gaze of the camera itself and how the camera frames and tracks Sarah throughout this sequence. In only two brief takes preceded by jump-cuts, the spectators see what is in the image without Sarah being framed in the image. This imagery can trick the spectator by letting him or her think that they are seeing from Sarah’s point of view. The first images reveal what looks like a children’s room whereas those that follow present a view of the swimming pool from the terrace. These two series of images present what is actually “absent” in them, and that is Julie. The point of view of the two shots also anticipates what would later become Sarah’s “voyeuristic vantage point” and the voyeuristic point of view of the cinema itself. Moreover, in the other shots of this sequence, Sarah’s movement through the rooms seems to be in contradiction to the movements of the camera. The camera maintains a distance from Sarah, staying fixed in one room instead of following her while she exits that same room. Sarah’s point of view is absent, but what is present is the desire to look and the emphasis on looking. The camera emphasizes its own presence as an invisible character. The feminist film theorist Kaja Silverman analyzes the camera gaze and its relation to the distance that separates it from the spectatorial eye. In situation when the camera functions as an Absent One, it occupies a site exterior to the
spectator eye, and the imagery emphasizes the distance, or gap between the camera’s gaze and the spectators, it “represents an Other or that which the subject can never be”(126). These visual representations detached from the character’s point of view, aim at the spectator and its sensorial receptivity by emphasizing the desire to look. By exploiting the potentials of the cinema to see through shifts in point of view and not revealing what Sarah actually sees in these images, Ozon evokes a tension created through the uncovering the intimate space and the actual gaze of the camera. Spectators bear that tension as the camera gaze unnaturally distances itself from the main character, thus occupying what seems to be an already experienced (intimate) space. By transitioning in between points of view and attaching itself to a space that is conceived as private, the camera makes unfold the desire to see and anticipates a foundational trope of the film, Sarah’s voyeurism. The emphasis given to the camera’s “voyeurism,” evokes tension when, after Sarah explores the house, she goes to the village to purchase food and drinks. Filmed first at the terrace of the café, the camera frames her in an extreme close-up while she enjoys the sun with her eyes closed and the fresh country air. In this little exploration of the village, the universe that surrounds her comes to inhabit Sarah’s desire to create. This image can be objective as well as subjective (seen from Franck’s point of view) and in this respect it would also anticipate “voyeuristic gaze” since Franck is also secretly desiring Sarah. After this exploration Sarah begins to write again, and this time, as she says to her publisher when calling him on the phone, she will be writing about something different. Before going to bed, she opens the window, which makes visible her longing to extend her intimate sphere. Sarah seems to be breaking down the distinction between inside and outside. Ozon frames the open window when Sarah leaves the frame thus emphasizing the importance that Sarah’s situation has in relation to the space. On a visual level, this image is in contrast to the image of Sarah in her home, where she was framed by the closed window.
Chapter Two. Framing desire: The Intimate Look and the Gaze

3.1 Pleasure from looking

As a filmmaker associated with the cinema du corps, Ozon constructs characters by framing their bodies and body parts, notably in close-ups and extreme close-ups. In addition, Ozon uses the same techniques to capture objects and especially anthropomorphic objects as embodied discourses which often, like the human bodies, are filmed in close-ups. In two sequences right after Julie’s arrival, the camera preceded by a jump cut, slowly moves in a tracking shot through Julie’s naked body in a bathtub, from feet to head, revealing only small portions at a time of her body with a high-angle and in an extreme close-up. After fixing the gaze at her face, the filmmaker with an abrupt cut, moves to a shot of the whole summerhouse from the exterior. This shot somehow echoes the previous sequence of Julie in the bathtub: a slowly moving tilt captures the house from the garden to the roof again revealing at the time only small parts of its architecture. Ozon’s visual aesthetics at this point is a kind of touch. As described by Martine Beugnet in her book about the Cinema and Sensation:

“Through the film’s own operations – framing, sound, camera movements and duration – the connection of subjective body to objective world materializes in the style of caress” (175). Ozon’s camera in these sequences is sensual. It moves through Julie’s and the house’s body in a style of caress. The camera is also intrusive as we can feel the its voyeuristic presence moving slowly over the bodies in an extreme close-up. The smooth camera gaze inspecting both Julie’s body and the house, evokes desire to look and situates the characters (and objects) within a spectacle. This technique also evokes tension since creates an effect that both Julie and the vacation retreat are under surveillance. However and more importantly, Ozon films these sequences undetermined point of view (absent camera) and do not reveal anything of crucial importance for the plot only to suggest that they could be product of Sarah’s imagination. Therefore, the camera gaze scrutinizing bodies could also be compared to Sarah’s look, revealing the writer’s desire to inspect the girl’s body as well as the house. Furthermore, in a sequence when Julie swims nude in the pool, Ozon captures her from the point of view of Sarah’s terrace in order to evoke desire to look at Julie, from a vantage point, as she swims naked in the pool. The camera here although absent, still posses ”consciousness” since can be identified with Sarah’s (imagined) point of view or it can also be felt as an intruder. Its dominant gaze comes closer to Julie and finally captures her in a

close-up again with a high angle, in a kind of spectacle. The cinematic apparatus in these sequences, which relies on the camera movements, is crucial for the perception of moving images. In *L’Image-mouvement*³², Gilles Deleuze explains that in cinema we find ourselves faced with a world where images are movement:

Le cinéma ne nous donne pas une image à la quelle il ajouterait du mouvement. Il nous donne immédiatement une *image-mouvement*. Il nous donne bien une coupe, mais une coupe mobile, et non pas une coupe immobile + du mouvement abstrait (11).

Deleuze, discussing the philosophy of Henri Bergson, dismisses the conception of cinema as a succession of still photographs. Instead, he argues that cinema immediately gives us *movement-image*. In the Deleuzian system, cinema is more than the camera, it is also *montage* or editing. Perception, subjective, semi-subjective or undermined, is an essential element in the construction of a movement-image. Deleuze names the first avatar of the movement image to be the *perception-image* where the focus in the image is what *is seen*, rather than what is felt (cf affection image). Deleuze challenges the notion that *perception – image* resembles a point of view, by showing how it can be both subjective and semi-subjective, sometimes adopting the point of view of characters and sometimes letting the camera float free “related to a center of indetermination”³³. Ozon’s tracking shot of objects and bodies in a close-up corresponds with what Deleuze calls “the liquid element” in the perception-image. The “liquid element” in Ozon’s sequences of Julie in the bathtub and the house, results from the multiplication of tracking shots that share the same framing and tracks that flow together, amplifying therefore the presence of the camera. Both sequences of Julie and the house embody the liquid qualities of a perception-image in which the images flow together with an unidentified point of view where the camera shows “consciousness”.

Deleuze also identifies situations of perception-images where the camera usually posses two poles-objective and subjective, real and imaginary, physical and mental. In this regard, we can feel that in these two sequences in *Swimming Pool*, the camera reveals both subjective and objective points of view, that is to say Sarah’s inner mental projection and the projection of the “absent” intrusive camera.

Ozon’s use of this technique which focus around Julie’s body implies that the body fuels a sense of wonder, recognizing that there is an intimate world that maybe fostered by

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obsessive looking or voyeurism. The site of conflict in the narrative is the vacation house and Julie is its driving force. In the house where the two women meet, they start to collide and obsessively “look” one another. In the diegesis there are multiple looks evoking voyeurism. There is Sarah’s look, facing herself, the camera, Marcel the gardener—and most obsessively—facing and looking at Julie; Julie’s look repeatedly oscillates between Sarah and Franck, and Franck and Marcel’s looks mediate between the two women. In one sequence that takes place in the house, Ozon captures them in the same framing, in a medium shot in order to emphasize this contradiction between the two women. Julie in the focus of the image dressed slutty, watching TV, her legs in the air on a high-angle shot. On the other hand, in a shot which rimes the precedent sequence, Sarah in a medium shot, sitting on the bed and reading with her body totally covered. The personalities of the two female protagonists are defined by specific movements and body types: Sarah is up-tight, sluggish, and her body movements often tend to be awkward and rigid. On the contrary, Julie is extroverted, seems reckless and even vulgar. In an interview about Ozon’s *Swimming pool*, Sagnier discussed the relationship that both Sarah and Julie have in relation to the narrative:

By choosing Charlotte and me, François has united two trends in his own filmmaking. I come from the artificial, conceptual and theatrical trend epitomized by *Gouttes d’eau sur pierres brûlantes* and *8 femmes*, while Charlotte emerges from *Sous le sable*, a much more naturalistic work. (Schilt; 95-96).

Ozon portrays this evident contradiction, by joining these two trends and placing them in the same framings. Initially, Julie’s presence seems to perturb the idealistic working paradise that Sarah’s was hoping to find in Luberon. The morning after Julie’s arrival, Sarah is occupied with her writing and Julie’s presence distracts her. In this sequence, Julie, who has left traces of her passage throughout the property – the kitchen table is filthy; a blood red inflatable mattress lies on the edge of the swimming pool – has not yet awakened. When Julie finally arises, Sarah observes from the terrace, the blond girl from the terrace while she walks down the steps leading to the swimming pool, while also collaborating with the camera gaze which at one moment distances from Sarah’s point of view and fixes Julie in a close-up. Later, Sarah comes back to the terrace and looks down toward the swimming pool where the tarpaulin has been partially uncovered, revealing water tainted with leaves. Then, from Sarah’s point of view, Julie emerges nude/naked from under the black pool cover, reaching the surfaces after an underwater swim. Schilt compares this image of Julie’s pose—her open arms and upward gaze—with Sir John Everett Millais’s Painting from 1852 *Ophelia*. Both Julie and Ophelia
float, singing, surrounded by leaves. According to Schilt, they are both on a threshold. “Ophelia is on the verge of death, while Julie metaphorically begins her life as Sarah’s muse” (98). The sequence where Sarah watches Julie swimming nude in the half-covered swimming pool introduces a rupture with the conventional looks between the middle-aged Sarah and the young Julie, daughter of her lover: looking in this case evokes fascination and desire. Schilt remarks that this sequence visually spells out the initial flow of Sarah’s creative juices. What Schilt does not remark in this sequence is the shift in point of view while framing Julie’s naked body in the swimming pool. At first, Ozon frames Sarah’s gaze as the one that initiates the looking, and then the camera cuts to reveal Julie more closely in a medium and finally in a close-up shot. Julie metaphorically becomes to Sarah what Emmanuèle Bernheim is to François Ozon: a script doctor who cures the director’s occasional writer’s block and who deflates the insecurities about the writing process and motivates his in his creation (99). In this regard, the swimming pool itself assumes a crucial role in the creative transformation. The image of its watery surface rimes with image of the computer screen and evokes a new kind of mirror, that of the filmic screen. As previously argued, the principle motor of the story is the definition of intimate transformational spaces in which the film is set. These spaces become both disrupted and nourished by Julie’s presence whose body becomes a site for conflict. Not only that Julie becomes an obsession and fascination for Sarah, she is also the magnetic force that attracts the camera gaze. Both Sarah’s and the camera’s looks are associated with the pleasure to look and this observation comes mostly from the numerous scenes where Julie exposes her body.

The question of pleasure and where does it derive from within the cinematic imagery has been central in cinema studies for a long time. As a number theorists have stated, the cinema offers a number of possible pleasures, and one of them is scopophilia or pleasure derived from looking. This aspect is nonetheless close linked with the paradigm of desire or in broader terms with psychoanalysis as a study of culture. Many theorists of film studies have included in their works the readings of the canonical psychoanalytical heritage of Sigmund Freud and Jacques Lacan. Further, works of more theorists, such as Christian

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34Emmanuèle Bernheim, French writer who won the Prix Médicis in 1993 with her book Sa femme. She wrote the screenplay of the movie Swimming Pool, Sous le sable and 5X2 with François Ozon, who is also her close friend: http://www.francois-ozon.com/


Metz, Laura Mulvey, and Kaja Silverman have developed their concepts about film criticism through a psychoanalytic frame and also engaged important debates in the study of visual as well as aural theory, if we recall Mary Ann Doane’s considerable analysis of the *Politics of the Voice*.

Furthermore, films that integrate female bodies and deal with the question of the woman-as-image, have been central to visual studies. The difficulty posed by this question, especially for female theorists, are rooted in theories of desire and identification. This observation calls for reading of Laura Muvey’s famous article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. Mulvey’s idea is that the experience spectators derive from classical Hollywood cinema is pleasure, the product of a male dominated regime of looking. By this, she describes a system of identification that integrates the spectator’s gaze upon the screen, the looks of the characters in the film at one another, and the camera’s gaze as well. According to Mulvey, all of these modes of looking are organized through various cinematographic techniques that privilege the male look or the “male gaze” as she calls it. As a medium which offers both visual and audible representation, cinema represents a true spectacle for the eye, and promotes the illusion of voyeuristic engagement. Mulvey argues that films “portray a hermetically sealed world which unwinds magically, indifferent to the presence of the audience, producing for them a sense of separation and playing on them on their voyeuristic phantasy” (2). She states that:

> Although the film is really being shown, is there to be seen, conditions of screening and narrative conventions give the spectator an illusion of looking in on a private world. Among other things, the position of the spectators in the cinema is blatantly one of repression of their exhibitionism and projection of the repressed desire on to the performer. (3)

While enjoying the experience of spectacle, viewers of *Swimming pool* are made especially sensitive to the powerful tension which envelops framed subjects on screen. This tension originates from the desire to look at the subject in an intimate space, but in doing so, Ozon

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reminds them that there is always something that provokes the desire to look, something that is hidden and should be revealed.

Sigmund Freud suggests that scopophilia is associated with viewing other people as objects and subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze. Following Freud’s concept of scopophilia, Mulvey argues that cinema satisfies a primordial wish for pleasurable looking. She also goes further, explaining scopophilia through the paradigm of narcissism. The theories that Mulvey evokes throughout her work oscillate between the Freudian analyses of repressed forms of desires and the Lacanian “split subject” which is result of the production of the symbolic and of language. Both theories underscore the phallus as crucial in the social and cultural process of construction of gender and sexuality. Women on screen, as Mulvey concludes, embody an essential lack and symbolize castration through the real absence of penis. By looking at human bodies and faces on screen, the subject’s look “intermingles with a fascination and with likeness and recognition: the human face, the human body..etc” (11). This is crucial for the constitution of the ego in the same way as when a child recognizes its own image in the mirror. In the Lacanian mirror phase, the image that the child beholds is more perfect, more complete than what he or she experiences in his or her own body. Recognition is overlaid with misrecognition, since the image projected is an ego ideal, an alienated subject. In the cinema, two contradictory aspects of pleasurable structures of looking thus emerge. The first is the scopophilic, in which pleasure arises in seeing another person as an object of sexual stimulation. The second could be said to be developed through the constitution of the ego and identification with an image seen as an expression of narcissism.

Silverman develops her theory of visuality out of psychoanalytic concepts borrowed from Lacan, Freud, Paul Schilder, Henri Wallon, and Max Scheler. She uses one of the Lacanian metaphors - the threshold of the visible world- through which Lacan developed his visual theory of identification, in order to define a feminist version of visual theory. She concludes in Threshold of the Visible that the concept of loving is an active process which involves looking and idealizing of images. The Lacanian gaze in is different from Silverman’s notion of the look and depends on a visual level of perception of others in the process of constitution of the subject. In this sense, the gaze designates the visual variant of the symbolic order. It is comprised by the looks of others, and can be produced by any conceivable object including the screen. It is thus independent of any individual look, situated

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outside the subject in its subject-constituting effect. The *look* on the other hand, as Silverman explains, always remains within the spectacle and it is thus, both psychic and visual. In its psychic quality the look is marked by lack and hence propelled by desire to fill that lack.

How do these concepts help us understand the function and gendering of the *gaze* in *Swimming pool*? Could we say that in this film Ozon’s imagery favors the masculine gaze? What is the nature of the camera’s gaze in this film?

Julie inhabits this film less as a character in the story than as a “spectacle”, or a sort of fantasm Sarah projects into the environment. She is a site that provokes a desire to look as well as a site for conflict; to quote Mulvey, “women-as-spectacles are “simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness” (4). As Sarah slowly integrates Julie into her intimate space, her desire to look at her and also to write (about her) evolves. Julie’s openness to experiment either by exposing her body by the swimming pool or by having sex with different men while being watched contributes to Ozon’s representation of desire and pleasurable looking in the film. In an interview Ozon gave to the magazine *Positif* in 2004 for a special issue on sex and eroticism in cinema, he declared humorously that women and gay directors have contributed a great deal to the representation of desire on screen. I propose interpreting Ozon’s remark about the curious collaboration between gay filmmakers and women as a representation of a different desire – the desire *to see*, that is to look at the woman’s body through a different optic. In favoring the representation of the female body as a site for looking, Ozon manages to present it in a different light, as a site that fosters and exchanges multiple looks, often with tension and conflict, a kind of multiplicity that is a feature of “queer” looking. All of these acts of looking lead to a development of fetish images and voyeurism. The sequence where the Sarah and Julie sit by the swimming pool, where Julie is only wearing shorts, is an excellent example of this observation as it anticipates the obsessive looking as well as the collision of the two characters.

### 3.2 Body Space

While I have previously analyzed a crucial scene in Ozon’s *Swimming Pool* where Sarah’s creative forces are sparked when Julie is reborn as the writer’s muse, the one that sparks their relationship and collision is also worth pause. In this sequence, Sarah falls asleep by the swimming pool while working on her book when Julie’s arrival wakes her up. Julie, half-naked, sits next to Sarah and initiates a conversation. The camera presents the two
women looking at each other. Julie is positioned on the right and subjected to a hyperbolic visibility, both because of the nudity, which emphasizes the contrast between the two women, and also due to the light that radiates from behind her form, making her visibility problematic and hard to see. Julie is also a creator of forms of visibility—a site that becomes available and attracts the camera as well Sarah’s gaze. Julie radiates a visual power that provokes the consumption, metaphorically speaking, of her body.

Metaphors of light and radiation recur throughout Barthes’s work on photography in *Camera Lucida*. Film has the same power as photography that is to be sensitive to light and to sensitize the eye, which receives the light emitted from the photographed or the filmed object.

From a real body, which was there, proceed radiations which ultimately touch me, who am here; the duration of the transmission is insignificant; the photograph of the missing being, as Sontag says, will touch me like the delayed rays of a star. A sort of umbilical cord links the body of the photographed thing to my gaze: light, though impalpable, is here a carnal medium, a skin I share with anyone who has been photographed (80-81).

By juxtaposing an illuminated body to another body, Ozon creates an image-shock, to adopt Barthes’ definition of photography that portrays something new and radical. Julie’s naked body is an image that is new: the image of a potentially radical Other. Sarah’s desire to look at Julie situated her much more emphatically within the spectacle. Sarah is the one who controls the look and the camera shifts point of view in order to determine how the spectators experience the gaze. By positioning Julie to the right side of the screen, from which the light emanates, (and following Silverman, that is to say not from the eye or the spectator (Sarah), but from the object of vision, Ozon presents Julie as a spectacle, as a point from which light irradiates. Detached from all human perspective, perhaps what she emanates in the end is a fantasmatic projection of Sarah’s desire to be different. Ozon thus provides us with a completely artificial fabricated and new point of view for the camera.
Julie’s body is a product of the desires addressed through touch. This observation calls again for Barthes’ definition of a light that the body can transmit physically. Sarah could metaphorically “touch” Julie’s body since she embodies a relation constituted by desire. The camera’s shifting from shot/reverse shot is controlled by Sarah’s desire and this becomes even more evident in one of the jump-cuts that cuts to the scar above Julie’s navel. Silverman reminds us about spectatorial pleasure in which the technique of shot/reverse shot is central. This technique consists of successive images in which one of the characters first looks at something, and then of what that character presumably sees. She explains that this technique serves to stimulate identification and pleasure from the “seeming boundlessness of the image.” (126)

Theorists of suture also thematize the camera as an Absent One, by emphasizing the distance that separates it from the spectatorial eye. Through the image of Julie’s umbilical scar, which again is detached from a human point of view, the viewers witness a brief interruption of the filmic narration constituted by shot/reverse shot, which then elicits a broader reflection about the nature of identification and the distance of the camera implied in the ways Ozon depicts Julie as a spectacle. The eye can see more dramatically through the camera, and with this rupture of the filmic narrative, the image of the navel scar might come as a shock. Silverman observes:

And at the moment when the frame becomes apparent, the viewer realizes that he or she is only seeing a pre-given spectacle, and the jouissance of the original relation to the image is lost. (126)
The “umbilical cord” is also a material form that Barthes uses as a metaphor to link the body to the gaze. Ozon visually focuses on this materiality by framing Julie’s navel in a close-up. Viewers become aware of the navel scar because it is tangible and evokes physical traces of bodily aggression. In addition, the image of the navel inspires a reflection upon the mother/daughter relationship and familial processes. It also links the bodies of the two women. Sarah may be childless, as Schilt remarks but, Julie’s mother is also absent from the film. As the viewers discover later in the film, Julie—in a delusional episode—mistakes Sarah for her mother after the narrative reveals that her mother has died. The scar can, in addition to representing bodily harm, also symbolizes this significant loss, the cutting of the umbilical cord from the mother, and its restoration through the filmic imagery. In this sense, we might think of the scar is a *punctum*, as Barthes defines it: the detail that pierces us and evokes that “other presence” which haunts an image as a ghost. Films are also the material evidence of a past, of a *narrative* that happened, a “that has been” (or *ça a été*) in Barthes’ conception of photographic presence. In this sense, the film anticipates something that is present, but that is already absent, and this is probably Julie’s fantasmatic presence. Therefore, film can constitute a powerful weapon of identification as well as an ideological reproduction through the social.

This sequence might be, as I mentioned above, the beginning of the mutual collision of the two women haunted by the absent father/mother figure, as Sarah starts to integrate Julie into her intimate space. On the visual level it is the first image in which the two characters occupy the same frame. In this way, Ozon troubles ways of understanding visuality and sexual difference. The body on screen is not only eroticized and distant, but it also bears the material evidence of violence. With this self-conscious violation of visual narratives, Ozon disrupts a familiar narrative about intimacy and its representation, and breaks down the conventional notions of the eroticized female body on screen.

### 3.3 Intimate faces / Intimate stories

The obsession with the body appears throughout *Swimming Pool*, and intersects with another obsession, the depiction of objects and settings [milieux] that take on an autonomous, material quality. When Sarah watches Julie having sex through the transparent window, the camera constructs a milieu through the gaze. Framed both by the window frame and by the camera in a close-up, again with an expressionless face, Sarah’s inner life is reflected through
her voyeuristic image in the window while she watches Julie in the act of sexual intercourse. In one moment during this sequence Julie looks at Sarah and subtly smiles at her and at the camera breaking the forth wall. Ozon frames her in an intimate moment through the voyeuristic filters of the artist as well as through the eyes of the camera. By framing her look in this way, the filmmaker emphasizes the Julie’s domination over Sarah and over the controlling gaze of the camera. Julie becomes the sensory-motor of the narration, and of Sarah’s new novel.

One of the ways in which Ozon depicts intimacy is through the proximity of the camera’s gaze not only with the protagonists but also with the objects on screen, notably through the use of close-ups and extreme close-ups. These objects are often filmed repetitively and serve symbolsthat bind the story. Ozon uses close-ups in provocative way when framing human faces and body parts, and also when framing objects that evoke emotions or refer to human-like, anthropomorphic forms. These images incorporate human and anthropomorphic forms as a separate and nonetheless dependent discourse within the filmic narrative. They also serve to evoke symbols of desire on screen as a guiding thread throughout the narrative.

A lavish moment of cinematic desire follows the first sequence when the two women are together in the frame. Unlike the popular fiction Dorwell series, Sarah’s new project sparks her creativity and gives her a second wind as a novelist, a transformational process that fills her with satisfaction. What does it mean to be a writer and how does that creative practice interferes with the intimate space? For Sarah, composing a story about Julie frees her from closed spaces and means coming out of her comfort zone. The filmic narrative follows this transformation with Julie being its motor for progression. Sarah trades her Diet Cokes and fat free yogurts for French wine, sausages and cheese which she steals secretly from Julie when she is not watching. She swims in the pool despite her aversion for human-made bodies of water. Her clothes are becoming more and more loosely undone and she gets undressed when she seduces Marcel the gardener in order to keep Julie’s murderous act a secret. Finally, she frees herself from her publisher’s greedy domination under pressure and switches publishers at the film’s conclusion. Although originally perceived as an invasion, Julie’s arrival engenders a profound sense of fulfillment and fascination.

When discussing her character in the film, Charlotte Rampling said: “My character suffers from an identity crisis. She feels a void within her and has no idea how to fill it in” (Ciment and Tobin 10). The void question is multiform, says Schilt. He writes that the sense
of non-fulfillment is a consequence of Sarah’s inability to maintain stable relationships with others, the waning of her career as a successful novelist, the looming reality of her father’s imminent death, the vacuity of a life without a child of her own. Ozon’s intention in *Swimming Pool* was to create a character in opposition to Marie for the English actress:

In *Sous le sable*, the character was Charlotte Rampling herself. The project consisted in filming her as she was, in daily situations. Whereas in *Swimming Pool*, she had to incarnate someone completely different from who she is. It is only later that I realized the connection between the two films, a similar effort to represent fantasy. (Marvier 15)

Surprisingly, as it turns out, the similarities between Sarah Morton and Charlotte Rampling, both in terms of her private life and her on screen incarnation, are more present then Ozon may have imagined. Ginette Vincendeau discusses the British actress’s longtime struggle with depression, the end of her marriage in the mid-90s with the French musician Jean-Michel Jarre to whom she was married for more than twenty years, and the decline of her acting career until her sparkling encounter with Ozon, the only filmmaker with whom she has worked more than once.

Rampling’s quest for fulfillment through art comes after the numerous family tragedies of her young adult year (her sister commits a suicide at the age of twenty) and this is something that the actress has freely discussed in interviews, particularly related to Ozon’s films. She has also uncovered the origin of her character’s first name:

In *Swimming Pool*, we have a woman who had an upbringing similar to mine, very harsh, severe, with no tenderness. As a consequence, she quickly sought refuge in writing, to protect herself. When you meet Sarah, you feel a desperate solitude within her… I know I have that in me too. My father had it, he gave it to me, and up until now I managed to avoid dealing with it. I’m glad I did it [thanks to Ozon]. Sarah is the name of my sister, who committed suicide. In *Sous le sable*, I mourned her death; here I borrowed her first name. Every creative act helps you. Acting can really help you. (Ciment and Tobin 15)

The generational distance Ozon depicts by contrasting Sarah with Julie (the name of Ozon’s younger sister, who appears in *Photo de famille*) evokes a desire for what Vincendeau calls Rampling’s “aging beauty”: shots of Sarah gazing at Julie semi-naked at the swimming pool
suggest “Rampling contemplating her distant youth” (28). If we consider Ozon’s cinema we could notice that his representation of psychology is an idea made flesh. Both Sarah and Julie express their discourses through their bodies and also through their looks. Sarah’s desire to create is revived by Julie’s bodily presence. On a visual level, this observation translates into affection-images, or close-ups of body parts and objects. In the Deleuzian system, the “affection image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face…” (87). Deleuze also analyses close-ups of images that do not necessarily representing a human face. He explains how these images have two poles – a series of micro-movements on an immobilized plate of nerve and that produces their power and quality. Close-ups, he explains, show how, the “moving body has lost its movement of extension, and movement has become movement of expression. It is this combination of a reflecting, immobile unity and intensive expressive movements which constitutes the affect.” (87) Deleuze develops how affection-image of objects as well as faces and other parts of the body emerge:

Each time we discover these two poles in something – reflecting surface and intensive micro-movements- we can say that this thing has been treated as a face [visage]; it has been ‘envisage’ or rather ‘faceified’ [visagéifiée], and in turn it stares at us [dévisgé], it looks at us… even if it doesn’t resemble a face. As for the face itself, we will not say that the close-up deals with [traite] it or subject it to some kind of treatment: there is no close-up of the face, the face is in itself a close-up, the close-up is by itself face and both are affect, affection-image.(88)

Ozon uses this technique to evoke movement and fluidity in the representation of his ideas. Sometimes his framing grasps the face, like in the sequence of Sarah in her home. This image and marks minimum of movement for a maximum of unity. What Deleuze calls admiration is precisely the degree zero of movement and they consider admiration to be the origin of passions and desire because of the little solicitations or impulsions, which make up an intensive series expressed by the face. In Swimming Pool, Ozon’s affection-images frame objects as well as faces and body parts in order to evoke desire. Ozon’s artistry lies in capturing these moments and giving them attention so that they become an important part of the filmic narrative. When Sarah starts writing about Julie, Ozon frames her in an extreme close up and then slowly pans to her right and then to her left revealing her bed also in a close-up. This image evokes the artistic and literary conception since the bed (in this case

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unmade, witnessing an act that has happened) is also a symbol of conception. In another moment when Sarah writes, Ozon frames her from behind in a close-up with her computer in from of her. Then with a pan shot he frames in close up a round vase standing on a chest of drawers. In this case, it is an object which becomes distinguishable, almost a face looking at us and calls to our reflection. Its form and color (the vase is colorful) is also appealing since it may evoke something artistic, something linked with the act of creation and something that evokes desire, given the fact that Sarah has already started to be prolific regarding her new work.

I have previously mentioned the shots where Ozon evokes desire in movement through tilt shots caressing a body or a house. In three sequences in the film, Ozon frames Julie’s body in unity, images of her entire body, not fragmented as the camera slowly tilts down while revealing her in swimming suit by the pool. These images pair with the images where Ozon frames Julie or her lovers naked (or half-naked) in her bed. Both are objective and subjective images, it is never made clear in the filmic narrative whether some of them are filmed from Sarah’s point of view. Nevertheless, they evoke desire, they are images that violate intimacy and emphasize the intrusiveness of the camera when representing intimacy on screen. Ozon’s artistic invention lies in his representation of the creative juices produced by these images of fascination and obsession. Happening by the edge of the swimming pool, these images show in close-up Julie’s body sometimes in wholeness and sometimes in pieces, like in the cases when Ozon wants to evoke sexual desire. In the sequence when Julie is asleep masturbating and Franck stands next to her, the camera first focuses on Julie’s body parts (the breasts, the legs, the mouth) and then on her hands touching herself and then slowly tilts from Franck’s legs to his Speedo swimming suit visibly showing his erect penis and then his face. Franck looks at Julie and the close up of his face with its micro-movements evoke desire. This is an image which also breaks with the linear filmic narration since it is never made clear whether it happens within the diegesis or it is only in Sarah’s head. Another example of this is when Sarah frees herself and starts swimming, she then sits by the pool and fall asleep. This time her body also framed in consecutive close-ups is being watched by Marcel, the gardener. The camera tilts up to his face in the same way than it does when framing Franck.

A crucial moment when Sarah becomes dominant within the narrative is the sequence when Julie invites Franck to the house. Julie unexpectedly brings Franck into the house one night after suspecting Sarah’s attraction for him. She convinces Sarah to stay with them and
have fun, even after Sarah’s politely excuses herself and wants to leave in order to leave the
two of them alone. At that point Julie has discovered that Sarah has stolen her journal. The
viewers can suspect that Julie intends to bring Sarah to this situation, and that her motivation
is probably not a harmless intention. During the conversation, Franck seems more interested
in Sarah than in Julie, a moment that makes Julie aware and create a diversion by dancing.
Steve Everitt’s sexual dance tune *Mirrorball (Let’s do it)* and the three of them smoking
marijuana and drinking whiskey adds to the sensual tension in the sequence. Julie drags
Franck away from Sarah and the two engage in a luscious dance. While the two of them
dance behind Sarah, Ozon frames her looking in close-up and captures her subtle smile again
in a freeze frame. Her alluring eyes evoke a desire and mark a transformation. This sequence
could translate as a ritual of initiation for Sarah’s artistic and bodily liberation. Julie invites
Sarah to join them and her stiff movements and rigid demeanor seem to attract Franck more
than the Julie’s provocative dancing. What is also present in this sequence is the desire that
the Franck and Sarah show each other through the look and the touch. For the first time,
Sarah’s body actually touches another body and Ozon captures this image again with a close-
up and static take. This moment is transitional as it could be read as a shift in power
dynamics previously governed by Julie. According to Schilt, the dance segment may also be
read as an effort for Julie to seduce both Franck and Sarah. In fact, in the original screenplay,
Ozon envisaged a lesbian sex scene in which Franck would also participate (Marvier 19).
Ozon’s decision to suppress the possibility of a ménage-à-trois privileges a more maternal
relationship between the two women, given Julie’s later mistaking of Sarah for her own
mother and their (sisterly or mother/daughter) contrivance in getting rid of Franck’s body.

*Swimming Pool* is a Hitchcockian murder story in which the Hitchcockian elements—
style as well as content—particularly seduces the public. In the next sequence by the
swimming pool, Julie tries to have sex with Franck. Sarah interrupts them standing on her
voyeuristic spot in a long shot by throwing a stone in the water. Franck wants to leave and
Julie kills him but the murder remains off-screen until a flashback later reveals Julie’s vicious
pounding of Franck’s head with a massive rock. As in Hitchcock’s films, the movie’s
attributes are its gradual tension building, single location setting, various cases of mistaken
identity and twist ending. In the United States alone box offices profits exceeded ten million
dollars and the film showed in theaters for three and a half months which is a significant
success for a French-produces work. However, the opinion of film critics varied from lauding
the film to calling it an unconvincing work whose ‘lone good idea’ is to merge reality and
fantasy (Asibong48). The French film expert Charles Tesson in an article for *Les Cahiers du cinéma* referred to the film by naming his text “Eau plate” (Flat Water) and accused Ozon of “surfing on the unexpected and well deserved success of *Sous le sable*” (48). The title of the American Stephen Rebello’s Advocate review, “The Shallow End”, echoes Tesson’s reasoning and claimed that the film was simply too bland for his tastes. “Herein lies the irony of Ozon’s critical reception over the years: while chastised at the dawn of his career for being too extreme, he is now incriminated (on both sides of the Atlantic) for being too dull and, for not being gay enough” (48). While Tesson’s particularly dislike focused on the end of film, Rebello sees it as a noteworthy redeeming quality (57). Shilt also argues that the extraordinary success of the film comes precisely form its startling epilogue (104). Back in London, when Sarah sees John’s daughter Julia for the first time, the spectators notice immediately the similarities between Julie and Julia’s ages, first names, as well as length, as well as the texture and color of their hair. From this, Shilt concludes that: “As a fantasy sequence stages, presumably from Sarah’s perspective, the blond women’s joint, chimerical return to the pool area in Luberon, the viewer realizes suddenly realizes that that Julie (a prettier, sexier version of Julia) may simply be a fragment of Sarah’s imagination” (104).

Many critics have described *Swimming Pool* as being the most intimate film in Ozon’s oeuvre. Ozon himself willingly reveals in interviews that *Swimming Pool* is his most personal film and that it is a film about his own creative method. “*Swimming Pool* reflects my personal obsession about creating and, since it’s a film about inspiration, contains many references to my other work” (97). Among the number of references we can notice the caressing shot in which the camera pans up slowly from a character’s feet to face which is also in *Sous le sable*. The relationship between Ludivine and Charlotte refers back to 8 femmes. *Swimming pool* also resembles *Sous le sable*, since both women live in their heads (Abeel) (97). What distinguishes *Swimming Pool* from other Ozonian films is also that this film functions as a metaphor for the Ozonian filmmaking process. Ozon reveals many techniques about his filmmaking process by comparing himself to the writer Sarah Morton. Sarah’s meticulous routine is highlighted as she prepares for writing: she sets up her desk, places a small lamp on it and takes her laptop, her printer, a power strip, an adaptor, sheets of paper and a small pencil out of a big bag. Once everything is in place, she takes steps back and observes, satisfied her installation (98). In many images Sarah is framed from behind sitting in front of her computer whether in her bedroom or in her patio. Nonetheless, the image of the swimming pool and the title itself reveal a lot about Ozon’s conception of
cinematic experience. The swimming pool area is the place which will nourish the most Sarah’s imagination and will inspire her. It is also an area of a voyeuristic fascination toward Julie and this evokes artist’s obsession for visually challenging sources. By looking obsessively at Julie, her new muse near the pool, Sarah’s character reveals Ozon’s creative method which includes constant looking and transformation. In this regard, the swimming pool could be used as a metaphor for the filmic screen and its transparency can signify a mode for penetrable intimacy both in the world of fiction or in the real (Ozonian professional creative) life.
Conclusion

*Swimming Pool* is, of the three films of the Ozonian trilogy of mourning mentioned above, the closest in genre to crime-thriller. Tim Palmer describes Ozon’s oeuvre as “uncomfortably poised between farce and horror, brutal intimacy, incorporating graphic representations of hetero- and homosexual desire” (62). Indeed, this definition echoes in *Swimming Pool*, which is a film that joins together sex and death while framing the body graphically as well as humorously. As I have previously mentioned, many of Ozon’s films deal with transgendered and queer characters. However, *Swimming pool* is one of the rare films where Ozon does not give attention to same sex coupling. Nevertheless, since Ozon frames close-up naked bodies, whether they move to make love, to dance or simply to pose for the camera, he also depicts them on screen in order to represent or evoke desire, whether it is homo, bisexual or heterosexual. Through the recurrent use of Ozon’s camera work and the provocative repetition of certain visual tropes relevant to its understanding, we as viewers question the particulars of the self within its intimate space while enjoying the fluidity of color, movement and “caressing shots” that are crucial to Ozon’s artistry. *Swimming Pool* is a film, which translates the Ozonian definition of intimacy. He manages to reconstruct intimate space as form of transformational movement, a fluidity which envelops both the characters on screen and their story, the filmic narration. His intimate spaces are always creational, revealed through the intimacy between the camera gaze and the characters, their bodies and their looks. His recurrent use of close-ups of bodies and objects gives another additional meaning of space in relation with self thus constructing an exclusively intimate space on screen and outside the narrative where desire and pleasure are crucial.

In this sense, *Swimming Pool* is a film that is also political. It represent a constant struggle for a new space of intimacy where people are not threatened, literary and metaphorically, by religious, ethnic, sexual or political exclusion.
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