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An Exploration of Representation throughout Hollywood in *Sunset Boulevard, Mulholland Drive & Hollywood*

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I declare that this Critical Cultures Research Project is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

Hollywood portrays itself as a utopia where dreams come true, however the Hollywood Dream has a dark mirror image. This research essay will be an exploration of Hollywood through the decades as represented by three texts, *Sunset Boulevard*, *Mulholland Drive*, and *Hollywood*.

In section one, I will be analysing *Sunset Boulevard* by Billy Wilder and its portrayal of an older, ageing actress. In section two, I will delve into *Mulholland Drive* by David Lynch and examine how it represents a rivalry between two female actresses. Finally, section three will involve an exploration of Ryan Murphy's television series *Hollywood* and its portrayal of closeted queer actors.

My analysis of *Sunset Boulevard* explores film noir as a genre and how the film depicts the effects of the male gaze on a woman whose career has been defined by it; its depiction of ageism, as well as how the industry can leave people scarred. For *Mulholland Drive*, I will look at the postmodern narrative it contains and the male vs female gaze. The director's disorienting, dreamlike, fragmented narrative and the deeper meaning behind it. For *Hollywood*, we will explore queer theory and the analysis of femininity and masculinity, and how queer actors are represented in this fictional world compared to the reality of the situation.

Chapter One- Sunset Boulevard

1.1 Introduction

Sunset Boulevard, the 1950 film directed by Billy Wilder, is an excellent study of Hollywood as it was in its Golden Age, as the film industry was reaching new heights of commercial success. After leaving the silent film era behind, Hollywood's allure burned brighter, and upcoming talent moved to Los Angeles for a chance of fame and fortune. However, there was a dark side to the bright lights and *Sunset Boulevard* exposes what happens to a star after they have come out of the other side of the Hollywood Dream. The movie was a huge commercial success and told a realistic portrayal of the Hollywood system which scared industry executives at the time.

“Sunset Boulevard simply hit too close to home for many film industry executives of the period, with MGM head Louis B. Mayer’s furious reaction still being cited as proof of the film’s authenticity and value. “*You bastard!*” Mayer allegedly yelled at Wilder, “*You have disgraced the industry that made and fed you!*” (Mikulec, 2017).

The film is narrated by Joe Gillis, who acts as a stand-in for the viewer. He is somewhat of an outsider to the industry, struggling to find consistent work, living paycheck to paycheck. Hollywood proves to be a difficult industry for him to break through to and find success in, no matter how many scripts he writes.

In the beginning, when we are first introduced to Norma Desmond, she is already very detached from reality. Norma is representative of the women who were cast aside with the introduction of sound in film, women who were especially valued just for their appearance, as their faces would be their defining feature in a silent film. The focus on being “The Face” and the pressure that was on her to be constantly ‘on’ is illustrated quite literally in Gloria Swanson’s performance, as Norma walks around making very exaggerated faces and dramatic poses, mugging for the camera. Desmond still believes that she is the star she was back in her 20s, and that she looks the same as she did then. Years of being defined by her appearance have completely warped her sense of self and her life’s work in the position as a Hollywood leading lady has left her with nothing but memories and she is left to relive her past through the old silent films she starred in. She is stuck in a loop, basking in her former glory, and not realising the world has moved on.

A flapper Vampire whose attempts to stay youthful into her fifties paradoxically makes her a thousand years old, Norma lives in a decaying mansion on Sunset Boulevard, holding a midnight funeral for her pet monkey, scrawling an unproductive script, and dreaming of an impossible comeback as Salome. (Smith, 2015, p. 251)

1.2 I'm Ready for My Close-Up

Sunset Boulevard is a horror story of fame gone wrong. Norma Desmond has been consumed by her vanity, but she is a product of her environment. She had been placed on

top of a pedestal for years and was the subject of a very unique and, at the time, novel kind of fame.

The ageism that is commonplace in society presents itself as an existential threat to Norma Desmond. She has a deeply ingrained fear of growing older, which was without a doubt made worse as a result of her career path. Desmond's ego grew to larger proportions after receiving such public adoration, leaving her mind permanently altered. Her mental state was too fragile to deal with her own decline in the public's eye and so, those around her kept her sheltered away from this harsh reality.

The 'male gaze' is a term used by Laura Mulvey in her essay '*Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*.' The male gaze is the depiction of women from a heterosexual, masculine perspective, where women are sexual objects, there for the pleasure of the male viewer.

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women 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. (Mulvey, 1973 ,p. 6)

Desmond is portrayed as some kind of a monster. She is a crazy old woman after losing her status as an object of desire. To the male viewer, she is an affront to the values that were held up as what was right in the 1950s. Norma Desmond's character was defined by the male gaze. As a silent film star, she was objectified and made into a commodity, her worth was defined by the value she holds in attracting men, that is attracting male audiences as well as being a standard of beauty that female audiences need to conform to in order to be desired by the male audiences. In '*Ways of Seeing*' by John Berger, he writes that "one might simplify this by saying: men act and women appear. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at."

This is not the case for Norma because she takes control and both as a woman watches herself and also watches Joe in a very commanding way. However, she was exploited for her value as a pretty face, and when she was no longer able to fulfil this purpose, she was

left to rot away at home. This reflects the exploitative capitalist system we live in, where people are treated as commodities to be used and discarded, not human beings.

After spending decades in Hollywood, Norma has grown to associate physical beauty with love, admiration, and respect. Understanding the utmost importance of youth and good looks in Hollywood, she values herself in accordance to her exterior image and how she is received by the general public. Norma's mental state has clearly been fractured as a result of life in the Hollywood rut. She has become so deeply tangled in this delusion that she can't detach herself from, that she must continue to live her life exactly as it always has been once she entered the film industry. She is paralysed by a fear of change, she had reached the top and had nowhere to go but down.

1.3 No One Leaves a Star

Sunset Boulevard is a film noir that represents the exploitative and deceiving dark side of Hollywood in a melodramatic story. The book *Me Jane: Masculinity, Movies and Women* offers an analysis of *Sunset Boulevard* that reveals a so-called 'male anxiety.' Desmond is the monster of the story, an existential threat to Joe's masculinity. "His ambition has been stripped of value and his masculinity humiliated by a dalliance with a wealthy, older woman who reclothes him and won't let him out of her sight" (Kirkham and Thumim, 1995 ,p. 225).

Joe experiences a drowning sense of claustrophobia, shame, and self-hate. He has been left to resort to becoming a glorified male escort as a result of his personal failings when it comes to his career. Although they see each other as a sort of kindred spirits in the beginning, there is a contrast between Desmond, who has had a successful career and was beloved as an actress, and with Gillis, who never broke through to Hollywood.

"Humiliation at career failure haunts him all over Norma's house. Evidence of her former stardom and talent is emphasised by pictures (and) film screenings... By contrast, Joe has

no successful past to look back on.” (Kirkham, P and Thumim, J 1995,p. 227) This makes the point that Joe is an unreliable narrator, that he is partially motivated by his own jealousy of Norma Desmond’s achievements. There is a subversion of typical gender roles in the relationship between Joe and Norma. He is in the submissive, kept man role, whereas Desmond is assertive, outgoing, larger than life and dominates the room.

Desmond is a caricature of the much feared ‘modern woman’, this could be interpreted as a satirical exaggeration of what women could turn into based on some conservative opinions of the time; she is overemotional, power obsessed, and deranged. As the midpoint of the century had made a lot of progress in terms of women’s rights and roles in society, the post-war period began to represent a turning point for the roles of women in society. In *Twilight of the Idols: Performance, Melodramatic Villainy, and Sunset Boulevard*, Aaron Taylor writes that “for a viewer may also regard Norma as a victim, recognising that is it not only her age but her commitment to an archaic mode of performance that keeps her from reentering the kingdom of Hollywood” (2007, p.13).

As Desmond pampers Gillis, he becomes more resentful of her. She buys him clothes and the scene in the suit store, where the clerk suggests he lets the lady treat him, was particularly damaging to his ego. He has become a kept man, a gigolo, which is an conflict to his fragile masculinity. Max’s version of masculinity is a huge contrast to Joe’s masculinity. He loves Norma and watches over her and is fiercely protective. He is secure in his role as one of Desmond’s servants and serves as her butler as an act of devotion. However, although he means well, he removes her her independence by shielding her from the outside world, basically encouraging her delusions.

Similarly, Betty is introduced as a contrast to Norma’s femininity. Betty is the woman who is held up as a shining example of what a woman should be. She is passionate, optimistic yet realistic. She modified her hopes to find her place in the industry. She adapts and finds what she’s good at behind the camera. This is something that she has over Joe, who persists with script writing to no success. Betty is only 22, and she ends up being a kind of anti-Norma. She is up and coming as opposed to Norma’s faded star. One could read into Joe’s relationship with her as, like Norma, chasing after youth.

Norma Desmond is an amalgamation of many things. She is ambitious, she is sensual, she is generous, she is determined and, of course, egotistical. She’s a mourning mother, a caring lover, an ambitious

actress, an ageing failure, and a cruel femme fatale all rolled into one (Aherne, 2020)

The climax of the film occurs after the New Year's Eve party. Norma confesses her love to Joe, who is disgusted and storms out. He goes to a different party to be around "people his age" and meets Betty there. He rushes back to Norma after her suicide attempt and chooses to commit to the lie. He feels trapped. After trying to seek his escape and embrace Betty's youth, he realises he is condemned to grow old, that his moment is over. Norma becomes increasingly paranoid around Joe, insecure knowing that she can never compete with Betty's youth. She finally loses her few remaining threads of sanity once Joe leaves to be with Betty. She shoots him three times and he dies in Norma's pool. In a cruel twist of fate, Joe dies in the pool he always wanted and had spent years of his life working towards. This really is a perfect metaphor for how Hollywood can be a lot darker than it looks on the surface.

The final scene of the film is Norma Desmond's farewell performance. In a way, she has killed her male oppressors, unshackled herself from the binds of ageism and received her big comeback. She believes the camera crews who have arrived are part of an imagined film production and gives a grand speech where she professes love for the crew and for Hollywood. She claims she is back for good and that she is ready for her close up. She walks down the stairs with a deranged look aimed right into the camera. She has lost all touch with reality, unable to accept anything about her current situation, and regresses into the studio product she was moulded into. Both Joe's and Norma's endings are ultimately a result of the restrictive life Norma has had to endure after her stardom as a result of the ageism and sexism in the industry, and how the trauma caused in this scenario eventually reached a boiling point.

Chapter Two - Mulholland Drive

2.1 Introduction to the Film

Mulholland Drive is a film that illustrates the struggle of an unknown female actress who tries to begin a career in film. *Mulholland Drive* is a complete departure from the typical Hollywood narrative, it is told in an unusual narrative structure, in the surreal and strange manner of filmmaking that director David Lynch has created. The film follows the story of a young woman named Betty who is an aspiring actress. She has just recently moved to Hollywood to follow her dream of becoming a movie star. She encounters a woman named Rita who was involved in a crash and has no recollection of who she is. The two embark on a film noir style journey to uncover more information about the amnesiac Rita.

The film has a dreamlike, abstract tone, with a large narrative shift in the second half of the film. It is as if the protagonist wakes from a dream that was the film up to this point and her identity has completely shifted. Scenes that occurred in the first half of the film now have different meanings, as the viewer is left to interpret what “actually” happened in the film, or whether or not any of it is happening. “Lynch establishes an aura of mystery that seems to be in keeping with the attitudes of desire” (McGowan, 2007, p. 197).

Stanley Kauffmann claims in his discussion of the film's opening that "sense is not the point: the responses are the point" (2001). There is an unsettling tone that is present throughout the film's runtime. The viewer has a sense of constant unease throughout the film, which is established through shaky camera movements, off-putting imagery, eerie lingering shots, and the dark and moody soundtrack. The film wraps loosely around the central plot of Betty and Rita, with shows throughout that are completely disconnected from this main storyline. There are random subplots of assassins, and shady backroom deals, and a dwarf studio executive or mob boss who sits sinisterly in a dark room, showing control over the director of the film Betty auditions for.

2.2 A Postmodern Version/Representation of Hollywood

Mulholland Drive can be seen as a postmodern version of/take on Hollywood.

Postmodernism is a movement that emerged as a reaction to modernism. Postmodernism rejects the assumption that there is an ultimate truth in art, social progress, and culture.

Postmodernism in film reverses set cinema contract and involves such techniques as pastiche and parody. In *Film History: An Introduction* it's said that the term postmodernism began in artists during the rise of pop art. "The term itself, initially applied to new style of architecture, spread quickly to the other arts and even through a name of the post-war era of finance capitalism" (Thompson and Bordwell, 1994, p. 694).

The weirdness of the film can be read as a commentary on the cliches and stereotypes of mainstream film writing. "The film rejects the realistic conventions of Hollywood movies far more thoroughly and effectively than do most other postmodernist examples, while nevertheless relying on its own deviations from realistic conventions to generate energy and interest" (Keith Booker, 2007, p. 25).

The film can be understood as a sort of meta-commentary on Hollywood itself. It is a pastiche of different genres, evoking old noir films for most of its running time, delving into more of a psychological thriller. The time or era it is set in is very hard to place. The noir styling is supposed to evoke a nostalgic response from the viewer, as if it is set in the past, yet certain elements bring it into the modern day, leaving it unclear, setting it in an almost floating timeline.

Indeed, it deconstructs the notion of narrative altogether, representing a key example of postmodern fragmentation in the way it is assembled from a series of highly compelling scenes but refuses ever to allow these scenes to come together to tell a coherent story (p. 25, Booker, 2007).

Lynch relies on existing stereotypes, cliches and a cultural knowledge of how film is typically structured and constructed. The viewer almost expects something from certain scenes that end up never connecting with the overall story or plot. The viewer's expectations are subverted. The vignettes throughout the film definitely contribute to the overall tone, and regardless of whether or not they connect or make sense when it comes to the plot itself, these are crucial in establishing the mood of the film, with these vignettes varying between a short comedic segment, like the botched assassination attempt, or an

very eerie scene of a monster behind the diner, which acts to make the viewer uncomfortable, and at unease. “Each element is important or else it wouldn’t be there” (roomroom6, 2011).

2.3 Identity/Losing One’s Identity in Hollywood

One of the most well-known themes in *Mulholland Drive* is exploring identity. The postmodernist change of the film can be read into through this theme. It’s a plot point for the first half of the film, when the central character who loses her identity and wanders lost throughout the film, then the switch occurs and we wonder who was really struggling with their identity, a role reversal. You could even go a step further and wonder if this switch itself is a commentary on identity itself and it being a social construct. Each of the characters from the first half of the film then appear in very different version in the second, in quite a bizarre way. For example, Betty’s landlord in the first half ends up showing up to a dinner in the second half of the film as the film director’s mother. “There is a qualitative discrepancy between the retrospective coding of the first section- it’s conversation into narrative information- and the unfolding experience of it and this is a part of the films meta cinematic argument” (Nieland, 2012, p. 99).

It emphasises this idea of identity as a social construct, which can be played with within the film. Rita’s loss of identity and adopting a new one, that develops into a person of its own, separate from her true identity as Camilla Rhodes is a really interesting situation to occur.

As Rita and Berry arrive at the same place Aunt Ruth’s apartment their lines repeat this quality of decried instability - each has made a disorienting arrival at an unstable “here: and a tenuous “I” these moments underscore how identities are fashioned from the abstract tissue of an impersonal semiotic network which Lynch repeatedly associated with processes of dreaming and fantasy (Nieland, 2012, p. 102).

Betty/Diane is shown to suffer from delusions of grandeur somewhat, as she is portrayed in her ‘dream’ as being such a magnificent actress, who glides effortlessly upwards into new and better acting roles, and having the luxury of running off mid-audition, how an actress may be portrayed in a romantic comedy. When the switch occurs, she is grounded

back in reality, and portrayed as bitter due to her acting career not taking off exactly as she had hoped, and to add insult to injury, Rita/Camilla receives the roles Diane sought after in her dream. In *The Strange World Of David Lynch* Eric G. Wilson writes “These dream visions suggest that the dreamer is a deceptive within his dreams, a presence attempting to understand his relationship to the Devine, to their sacred identity” (2007, p.138).

2.4 The Treatment of Women in Hollywood

As the director David Lynch is a man, we can of course understand that there is some element of the male gaze involved in how these women are portrayed. The male gaze is present through the film, yet it is somewhat aware of itself, as it is a commentary on Hollywood, the male gaze needs to be replicated and shown for what it is within the film. It can be seen from the casting of two women who are meant to be the conventional Hollywood beautiful leading ladies.

How Rita is portrayed is an interesting example of the male gaze too, she is a woman who is completely stripped of identity at the start, wandering through the forest like a lost deer while Betty is her knight in shining armour, who takes her in and takes care of her and nurses her back to safety, helping her uncover her own identity.

In Lynch’s film, Hollywood, as location and myth, constitutes the monster or the male gaze. Diane Selwyn constitutes the aspiring actress who gazes at the monster and sees fragmented pieces of herself. Subsequently, the Hollywood system, Diane’s refusal to adhere to its conventions of ladder-climbing, and her own submission to monstrosity combine to destroy her (Munoz, 2014).

The film makes some allusions to the casting couch situation from Hollywood, but does not address it directly, instead relying on the audience’s existing knowledge of it to understand the implications from certain scenes. Betty is shown to have a flirty spark with the casting directors of two separate auditions, alluding to the infamous casting couch situation in Hollywood, yet she is always depicted as running off or not engaging in what we are expecting to happen, as director David Lynch changes our expectations. Instead, Betty and Rita grow closer together as they try to get to the bottom of the mystery of who Rita truly is. They began a lesbian love affair, and there is a scene of them sharing an intimate moment in bed.

Later on in the film, after a narrative shift where characters roles are reversed, the two are shown to be living together and in a relationship. After this switch, Rita or Camilla Rhodes is the one who is successfully getting casted in the roles that Betty, now known as Diane Selwyn, previously went after. Rita's relation to the director on set is a lot more intimate than Betty's in the previous 'world', as Betty looks on at Rita and the director with envy. The viewer may work out that the previous timeline was an idealised dream world, and the current is the harsh reality, that Betty was too honest, and the reality is that Rita may have had to engage with the casting couch structure to get the roles that Betty dreamed of.

Both women end up being in competition with each other, and their intimate relationship falls apart as they conform to the patriarchal structures that are in place. We could perhaps interpret this shift as the hard reality of the situation coming to shatter the dreams of the young actress. The light-hearted fun they had is no more, replaced by a more serious tone, and the two are shown to be fighting when at home together. Nieland writes when examining Betty's audition scene that

Betty turns the bad dialogue of a hackneyed, B-movie script into a dangerous, sexually knowing performance and, within a space of hollow industry cliches, from her smarmy partner Woody, to the lame platitudes of her director, Bob; to the haughty young assistant with chunky dark glasses, just barely managing to condescend to her job(2012, p. 102).

The two leads' interactions with the male characters are also interesting. Betty kind of dances around the patriarchal structure, she loosely fits in and out, never exactly conforming to what is expected of someone who is in a highly competitive race to become a leading lady. She flirts with certain male figures, but never gives exactly what they want.

Chapter Three - The *Hollywood* Dream

3.1 Introduction to the Series

Hollywood by Ryan Murphy is a series about upcoming actors trying to make it big in Hollywood. The series deals with themes of racism, homophobia, and sexism. The show is based on the Hollywood film industry in the late 1940s, but instead of presenting a realistic

re-telling of events, Murphy changes the story's narrative to construct a vision of how things should have been in an ideal world.

The Gas Station is the setting of the first few episodes of the series. Ernie West, a pimp based on the real-life person Scotty Bowers, has a group of young male prostitutes working as attendants. Customers aware of the other services the gas station provides say they “want to go to Dreamland” to whichever worker they like. In this series, a fictionalised version of movie star Rock Hudson goes to the gas station and solicits a black man by the name of Archie Colman, who is also a screenwriter. The two fall in love and settle down together. Other characters include a black actress called Camille Washington, who experiences prejudice in landing movie roles because of her race. Camille was based on real-life actresses Lena Horne and Dorothy Dandridge.

When interviewed about the miniseries, Ryan Murphy explained why he was drawn to Hollywood. Murphy said:

I was always obsessed with the Golden Age of Hollywood. I think largely because of my grandmother, who showed me a lot of movies and gave me a lot of books [about it]. It wasn't until I got older, and I started in Hollywood that I realized why: It was because all three of those people had something in common, which was that they were fighting to be seen, and I felt that way. They were all underdog stories, and, tragically, they all had bad endings (Prakash, 2020).

3.2 Rewriting Hollywood History

While *Mulholland Drive* and *Sunset Boulevard* are about the death of the Hollywood dream, *Hollywood* presents a world where women, black actresses and most importantly queer actors can find their own Hollywood dream. For the purpose of this chapter, I will be exploring these queer actors throughout both *Hollywood* and Hollywood then and present.

Vito Russo says that the only way that queer character would be presented in Hollywood was through some great suffering. He writes “and so the very first gay man presented on the film ended in the obligatory suicide that would mark the fate of screen gays for years to come” (1987, p.21). In Ryan Murphy's *Hollywood*, however, their suffering is rewarded at the end of the series. Rock Hudson receives an apology from his publisher, and a film is

made based on the love story in the show itself – almost like a show within a show, which is a device that could be used to emphasise that this is fantasy, a story wrapped in a few layers of “what if”. The characters walk off into the sunset; they receive their Disney honeymoon ending where everything is perfect.

It could be said that *Hollywood* does a good job of subverting the stereotype of gay characters dying or suffering without reward in television and film. Some may view this series as a piece of media that could be held up as a positive example of gay representation in film for younger generations. *Hollywood* can be viewed as Ryan Murphy’s attempt to rewrite history as a legend or a myth to provide younger generations with hope. Ryan Murphy said

I think it's a very hopeful show. It's about the power of change. [It's] something that I really believe in: If you see it, you can become it. I think for many people, me included, growing up, we never saw ourselves or our lives projected in any way into entertainment (Prakash, 2020).

The show highlights the issue of traditional gender roles and masculinity. In order to become a successful actor, Rock Hudson must adopt a facade of exaggerated masculinity. He has to overcompensate for his sexuality and conform to the conservative gender roles of the time. This is true for Rock Hudson in real life as well. He was a closeted gay man, yet in films, he portrayed a charismatic, very masculine leading man. Richard Dyer writes in *The Culture Of Queers* that Hudson’s mannerisms were of classic Hollywood, and he is presented as “secure in his heterosexuality while comparison to James Dean, another upcoming actor, whose mannerisms were unsettled and queer.” (2002. p.162).

Hollywood can be viewed with some element of tragedy. These characters would not have to suffer the hurt they do in the show (or that they suffered in reality) if they were alive in modern times. Ryan Murphy transplants modern attitudes to homosexuality back into the 1940s, and these characters end up getting a lighter treatment than they would have in reality. At the end of the film, Rock Hudson is shown holding hands with his lover at the Oscars. This is the ending Rock Hudson, the character, deserves, but unfortunately not the one that Rock Hudson, the real person, got.

Hollywood has changed its approach to queer representation in the industry. It isn't perfect but it has moved to a place where progress has been made. *Moonlight*, a movie directed

by Barry Jenkins, tells the story of a young black man coming to grips with his attraction towards men. In 2017, *Moonlight* made history at the Oscars as it was the first LGBT movie to win best picture.

3.3 Was Hollywood that Oppressive?

In the 1940s, society was not as progressive or liberal as it is today, and people viewed homosexuality as being sinful and as a taboo subject. There was a lot of homophobia and racism at the time, and this is present throughout the series' run. While homosexual relationships weren't explicitly shown in Hollywood films in the 40s, it wasn't completely erased from films. Director James Whale had homosexual subtext throughout his films like *The Old Dark Horse* and *The Bride of Frankenstein*. Whale himself came out publicly during the 40s and was open about his relationship with another man. Unfortunately, Whale wasn't as successful as he was before he came out and he killed himself in 1961. It could be interpreted that his suicide in a dark reflection of *Sunset Boulevard*, as James Whale was found dead in his pool, a case of life mirroring art like the story of Joe Gillis.

James Whale was the first guy who was got blackballed because he refused to stay in the closet. Mitchell Leiden and all those other guys played it straight, and they were onboard, but Whale said, "fuck it, I'm a great director and I don't have to put up with this bullshit" (Russo, 1987, p.50).

You could accuse Ryan Murphy of whitewashing history in Hollywood, erasing the fight for gay rights and presenting an idealistic version of a world that never existed. Hollywood moves gay men in the film industry out from the background and shoves them in our faces, but this glosses over the rich history of queer subtext in the media. In *Queer Cinema: the Film Reader*, Harry Benshoff writes

While classical Hollywood narrative form usually encourages spectators to identify with "normal" characters and not with queer ones, some cinema forms invite audiences to glory in the chaotic extravagance that occurs when the rigid social conceptions of normality are overturned (2004, p.61).

They were double meanings and room for interpretation from behind the scenes of Hollywood and even in television and the music industry throughout the 20th century.

Many pieces of media were written by gay men or had gay men or women on the production team for projects. George Cukor was a legendary Hollywood director, and a fictionalised version of him is depicted in *Hollywood*; he directed movies like *Holiday* and *My Fair Lady*. Cukor was gay, and a few of his movies have an undertone of queer suggestions and are resistant to heteronormative relationships. In *A Double Life: George Cukor*, written by Patrick McIligan, they write that “Many film people, however, especially those with theatre backgrounds, recognised and accepted homosexuality. There was a continuation of the tradition of show business as an open door for all types of humanity” (1992, p.115).

Hollywood, in general, is very queer. All the shiny lights and fake sets, men and women were walking around wearing makeup and people putting on an act on and off the film set. Hollywood film stars, directors and producers weren't typically homophobic, so why were openly queer films not being made in Hollywood? In the early 1930s, new censorship called the production code or “The Hays Code” was created. “The Hays Code” was an outline of moral standards that rejected the depiction of crime, sex, violence or other controversial subjects.

The Hays Code outlined that any depiction queer relationships in Hollywood cinema are prohibited. “Provisions of the code demanded, for example, that methods of crime should not be explicitly presented and that ‘sexual perversion’ or any inference to it is forbidden.” (Thompson And Bordwell, 1994, p.239)

Roger Horrocks writes about the homoerotic films in early Hollywood in his book *Male Myths and Icons: Masculinity in Popular Culture*. Horrocks comments that many men were looking out for each other in a queer like manner throughout western films. He writes that

If the viewer is male, and the film presents a male object, then we have a homoerotic male/male nexus. This is troublesome for Hollywood, and therefore male/male looking and loving has to be displaced, for example into violence. (1995, p.54)

Ultimately, no piece of media covering gay history in the 20th century can avoid the devastating impact that the AIDS Epidemic in the 80s had on the lives of those in the gay community. Although this series is set three to four decades before the height of the AIDS crisis, it is lurking in the background, a shadow looming over the show. AIDS might not be addressed directly, but the fact that the series is based around the actor Rock Hudson, who is a central character, is a reference to the crisis as it is. On the one hand, the period

Hollywood is set in can be looked back upon as “better days” for the gay community; there is a lot of decadence, although, in secret, these men are able to explore and experiment freely at certain parties. Sexuality is shown to be celebrated in private, as opposed to being viewed as a death sentence in the 80s.

In *The Culture of Queers*, Richard Dyer talks about the public outing of Rock Hudson’s AIDS diagnosis throughout tabloid newspapers. Dyer explains that tabloids use comparison photos of a photoshopped touch-up of Rock Hudson before he had AIDS to a new updated photo of Hudson where he looks tired and old. Dyer explains that this was done to try to create a narrative that there are two sides to being homosexual. He writes that “If Rock’s death brought attention to AIDS, boosted fund-raising, and made people realise that ‘nice people’ get AIDS, it was also used to reinforce venerable myths about queers” (2002, p.173).

However, this era led to a newfound awareness of the gay community, and lead to such cult films as *But I'm a Cheerleader* and series like *Queer as Folk*, where gay people are treated as humans and deserving of respect, made not just for general audiences but for gay audiences too.

Conclusion

Hollywood has been revealed by the directors of these works to sometimes be a dark, twisted place. Although Hollywood is very much a mixed bag depending on who you are, and while it is not ideal, Hollywood is still a beacon of hope and the representation in Hollywood has been shown to have progressed, and it provides a valuable service to marginalised communities.

In section one, I analysed *Sunset Boulevard* and found it to be a cautionary metaphorical tale that shows the depths that certain systems of oppression can drive people to. In section two, I looked deeper into *Mulholland Drive* and how the director uses a postmodernist approach to give his critique of the industry and how all is not as it seems. And then in section three, from my study of the television series *Hollywood*, I discovered that its representation of gay men in the closet was like a poetic message of hope for

those who were trapped in the closet in Old Hollywood. It looks back and tells them that things will be alright.

As representation in Hollywood continues to evolve, if going forward there is a conscious effort on the part of directors, studio executives, and others in positions of power to improve representation, there is hope for more progress and therefore more acceptance in society.

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