

MARILYN MONROE E LE SUE "DANE" DEL RITMO

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PRODOTTO DA
**BILLY
WILDER**

**SOME LIKE
IT HOT**



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Sceneggiatura di **BILLY WILDER e I.A.L. DIAMOND** Regia di **BILLY WILDER**

UN FILM ASHTON · PRESENTATO DALLA MIRISCH COMPANY · REALIZZATO PER LA UNITED ARTISTS



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Why study Some like it Hot?



‘Not since Scarface so much action. Not since the Marx brother so much comedy. Not since The Seven year Itch so much Marilyn’

Some like it Hot film trailer.

Released in 1959 and condemned by the Catholic league for Decency for being “seriously offensive to Christian and traditional standards of morality and decency,” and banned outright in some US states. Wilder’s innuendo ridden *Some Like It Hot* pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable representations of gender and sexuality in 1950’s Hollywood and is seen as a milestone film in the challenge to the Motion Picture Production Code (popularly known as the Hays Code).

To fully understand the impact *Some Like it Hot* had on its audiences (or didn’t as some have argued) it is necessary to look at the history of regulation in the film industry and the culture of the times.

History and Context

America emerged from WW2 as the world's strongest military power. Its economy was booming, this new prosperity brought new cars, suburban houses and other consumer goods to more people than ever before. However, the 1950s were also an era of great conflict. The nascent civil rights movement and the crusade against communism at home exposed the underlying divisions in American society.

Between 1945 and 1960 the US economy grew from a national product of \$200 billion a year to over \$500 billion. This economic expansion saw various demographic changes the most significant was the growth of a consumer culture and something that was to have a detrimental effect on Hollywood the suburbs. The suburban expansions were driven by post war affluence and the offer of cheaper mortgages to returning service men. These movements from the cities resulted to a more privatised existence and the growth of television. Factors that contributed to declining rates of cinema attendances.

The 1950's was a time of increased affluence, social conservatism and conflict. During WW2 women had supported America's war effort and had worked in munitions factories or in the armed services. By 1945 there were 350,000 women in the American military and 35% of industrial production was the result of female labour.



After the war women were increasingly pressured to return to more domestic roles. Advice books and magazine articles (“Don’t Be Afraid to Marry Young,” “Cooking To Me Is Poetry,” “Femininity Begins At Home”) urged women to leave the workforce and embrace their roles as wives and mothers. These pressures placed on women and girls together with the confining effect of life in the suburbs it is not surprising that the 1950's has been described as the ‘era of the housewife’.

During the 1950's the campaign for civil rights entered the mainstream of American life. In 1954 the Supreme Court ruled that segregated education was 'inherently unequal' and in December 1955, a Montgomery activist named Rosa Parks was arrested for refusing to give her seat on a city bus to a white person. Her arrest sparked a 13-month boycott of the city's buses by its black citizens, which only ended when the bus companies stopped discriminating against African American passengers. Acts of "nonviolent resistance" like the boycott helped shape the civil rights movement of the next decade.

Fearing what the US saw as possible expansionistic intentions of the communist states, increased political tensions between the USA and the Soviet Union (USSR) occur during this period. This became known as the cold war a diplomatic and military standoff between the two countries that would dominate US foreign policy throughout the 1950's and last another thirty years. At home people in the United States were worried that communists, or "subversives," could destroy American society from the inside as well as from the outside. Investigations into suspected communists and their 'fellow travellers' lead to anti-communist 'witch hunts' resulting in many people losing their jobs and being black listed from future employment.

Research Task

In 1950's America;

Who was Senator Joe McCarthy?

What was the HUAC and who were the Hollywood ten?



Research Task

What was the studio system?

What and when was the Paramount decree?

How did the Paramount decree alter the studios relationship with their stars and cinema chains?



Hollywood in the 1950's



Hollywood in the 1950's was experiencing something of a transition. The end of the studio system had created a need to restructure, the growth of suburbs and the arrival of television led to declining cinema audiences. Hollywood dealt with this new competition from television by selling off its old back catalogues to the TV companies and producing lavish epic films that could not be fully appreciated on a small black and white television screen.

The biggest grossing live action films of the 1950's were Ben Hur (Wyler, 1959) (costing \$15 million the most expensive film ever made up to its time), The Ten Commandments (DeMille, 1956), The Robe (DeMille, 1953) and The Bridge On The River Kwai (Lean, 1957)

Overstated, spectacular epic films such as these typify this decade. More films were over three hours long with studio support for musicals and epics. Most of the Hollywood spectaculars were historical, Biblical, or otherwise war/ western adventures. All were expensive, lavish productions, with spectacular stunts and big name casts.

Fearful of losing audiences to the screens in their living rooms meant Hollywood used more than just expensive epics to lure its audience back. Hollywood enticed film goers with gimmicky 3D releases, stereo sound, enhanced colour technology and widescreen formats such as Cinemascope, VistaVision and Panavision.

Regulation in Hollywood at this time was still broadly governed by the Hays code and while most film theorists identify the end of the Hays code around 1967 by the late 1950's its authority over the film industry had begun to wane.

Getting you thinking

Download the slides on film censorship from the VLE and attempt the quiz questions; how many did you get right?

What seems to be the main arguments for and against censorship?

True or False



• In the 1931 screen adaptation of Dracula the count had a number of male victims, these were all removed from the film for fear that the film would be seen as homoerotic and therefore subject to censorship

Discussion Question

Research the history of censorship in the UK and the USA

From your experience, to what extent would you say regulation and censorship norms are determined by the historical period?

Give examples from each.

By the late 1950's the studios could no longer control what was seen in cinemas. European films were not covered by the Hays code and could be seen in American theatres. Also some American film makers (most notably Otto Preminger) released films without a certificate of approval making provocative and direct challenges to the code.

Preminger's films such as the Man with the Golden Arm (1955), The Moon is Blue (1953) and Anatomy of Murder (1959) were highly controversial but also successful. The public popularity of these films tended to signal a societal change, that by the 1950's certain representations or themes in film were no longer seen as taboo and possibly the Hays code was no longer relevant.

Wilder had previously come into conflict with the production code with his films Double Indemnity (1944) and the Lost Weekend (1945). Some Like it Hot (1959) because of its representations of gender, innuendo and sexualised language would be released without a certificate of approval.

Essay Question

'Films reflect aspects of the society in which they were made.' How does Do the Right Thing reflect its social contexts?

Production History



The demise of the studio system had left United Artists (the studio that had begun backing *Some like it Hot*) in such dire financial straits that the company's founders Chaplin and Pickford sold the company to a New York based legal company.

Under the auspices of its new owners United Artists began to simply fund and distribute independent productions. Benefiting from being smaller than their competition and not having studio overheads they were more flexible and able to get on with the business of making films.

United Artists brought in directors such as Huston, Preminger and Wilder who were placed on new types of contracts that were single or multiple film deals.

The film began production on October 1958 and was shot entirely in California. The Chicago scenes were all filmed on sound stages at the Metro Goldwyn studios as were the internal scenes. The Florida scenes filmed in San Diego.

Wilder was given final cut, control over the script and casting.

The film cost \$2.9 million to produce was released March 29th 1959 and took an estimated \$40 million in box office and is one of the most successful comedy films of all time.

Check your learning

What does the term final cut mean, which other film that we've studied also allowed the director this privilege?

Trivial Pursuits

Against Wilder's initial instincts the film was originally going to be shot in colour, but colour test shots of Lemon and Curtis in full make up made them look ridiculous and grotesque. Black and white photography made them look more pleasant and plausible when made up.

Critical Reception

The film was generally well received by critics and was nominated for six academy awards (although it only won one for costume design).

"Some Like It Hot," directed in masterly style by Billy Wilder, is probably the funniest picture of recent memory. It's a whacky, clever, farcical comedy that starts off like a firecracker and keeps on throwing off lively sparks till the very end... "Some Like It Hot" goes on the premise that a laugh is a laugh, regardless where you find it, and it knows that men dressed as women tickle the risibility's of male and female alike. Since much of it is also clever, the film should provide United Artists with one of its top grossers for the year.'

Variety 24th February 1959.

The film did generate controversy. The National Legion of Decency condemned it as "morally objectionable", claiming it promoted homosexuality, lesbianism and transvestitism. The film was banned outright in Kansas after the makers refused to cut the scene where Sugar attempts to seduce Joe disguised as the impotent Shell oil millionaire and the the film was given an adult only certificate by the local Memphis censorship board.



The film was marketed as a comedy and made extensive use of the presence of Marilyn Monroe as it main star selling pint. Although Monroe was struggling to find more serious roles in the films she did, audiences in the 1950's would have been familiar with her in a comedic lead and would have responded to the film as a Monroe comedy.

Essay Question

'Films always reflect how they were made and who made them.' How far does **Some Like It Hot** reflect its production contexts.

Representations

“It’s a film about sex – from the title to the final line... it’s about sexual attitudes, sexual roles and, of course, sexual identity.”

Curtis Hanson

Gender

Apart from the occasional reference to the ethnic origins of the gangsters (the funeral parlour/speak essay is called Mozzarella’s and the Florida conference they attend is for fans of Italian opera). The majority of representations in the film are of gender.

Monroe who was often studied on screen through her physicality. Her embodiment as a form of female perfection is a product of the way throughout her career the camera studies her physique, a prime example of this would be the subway vent scene in *Seven Year Itch* (Wilder 1955). In *Some Like It Hot* Monroe is physically presented as the conventional manifestation of male desire and placed against two male characters dressed in drag as a comic counter point.

The film is very conscious of how cinema objectifies women and some of the preposterousness of gender identities and explores attitudes and assumptions toward both.

Written activity

Read and annotate your hand-out on the Male Gaze, identifying the main points. Then examine the following sequence.



In this sequence we are introduced to the character of Sugar.

How does the camera track /reveal her to the audience?

Though who’s vantage point are we looking at her from?

How does this sequence illustrate the concept of the male gaze?

What do you understand by the term voyeuristic?

A lot of the ways in which the film plays with gender identities and representations is through the characters of Joe and Jerry as they struggle with their new costumes, identities and as male characters get used to the attentions of other men. Here they encounter the absurdity of the male gaze and unwanted physical contact from other men. The pair share conversations about sexism and much of the film's humour come from these juxtapositions of men as women experiencing the male dominated society of the times.

Look again at the scenes where Joe and Jerry interact with male characters when in their female personas.

How do these play with notions of gender?



If we look at Monroe's character sugar (she is never referred to by her real name a product of her 'dumb blonde' image) as possessing unbridled female sexuality as separate and part of her 'star persona' the majority of the other gendered representations can be said to be less absolute.

The film effectively blurs the boundary between what can be regarded as male or female suggesting that maybe such differences are not as binary as society thinks supposing that these could be social constructs of attire and manners. This is particularly emphasised in scenes where the boys, Jerry and Joe constantly have to jump in and out of their female alter egos.

The wide spread popularity of the film would indicate that audiences at the time were not at all offended by this theme of cross dressing. More than likely audiences at the time would have read both Jerry and Joe as heterosexual characters although as a modern audience we might interpret these characters differently.

Sexuality

Jerry

Have I got things to tell you.

Joe

- What happened?

Jerry

- I'm engaged.

Joe

Congratulations. Who's the lucky girl?

Jerry

I am.

Joe

What?

Jerry

Osgood proposed to me. We're planning a June wedding.

Joe

What are you talking about? You can't marry Osgood.

Jerry

- Do you think he's too old for me?

Joe

- Jerry, you can't be serious.

Jerry

Why not? He keeps marryin' girls all the time.

Joe

But... you're not a girl. You're a guy. And why would a guy wanna marry a guy?

Jerry

Security.

In the film we are expected to find the relationship between Osgood and Jerry as ridiculous, an object of humour something to laugh at. Certainly this is how it would have played out for audiences at the time. The scene where Jerry accepts Osgood's marriage proposal Joe has to go to great lengths to remind Jerry he is biologically a man. This scene re-establishes a heteronormative status quo as would be expected of a film of the time as is the fact the film never addresses sexuality head on although they are moments in the film that have homosexual implications.



Whilst in full drag Joe kisses Sugar followed by a reaction shot of a shocked sugar, but more significantly is the role of both Jerry and Osgood. Although he likens being on the train with an all-female band to being a child in a bakery and has to be reminded by Joe that he needs to stay in disguise, Jerry is never seen with a female character. Osgood is so enamoured by Daphne that he doesn't care that she is a man. This oblivious statement that 'Well nobody is perfect' is quite a subtle and subversive closing statement.



Some Like It Hot; Character Study.

In ten words or less describe the following characters from the film.

Joe

Jerry

Sugar

Osgood

Spats Colombo

Essay task

Compare how gender is represented in one sequence from *Some Like it hot*. Refer specifically to two characters from the film.

Notes on screening

Whilst watching any of the films in class it is important to take notes through-out the screening

This hand-out should be used as a guide in order to help you follow the film and identify the key areas you should focus on

You will need to refer to your class notes and handouts on cinematography, editing and mise-en-scene.

Uses of mise en scene;

How is mise en scene used to denote the two different locations in the narrative (Chicago and Florida), look at how different sets lighting and framing denote a different mood to each locality. Look also at the uses of lighting particularly in shots of Monroe. Costume is central to the identity of the characters, how do Joe and Jerry's female costumes differ from those of the other women in the film?

Generic content;

Does the films early stage indicate any generic content if so what elements are used?



Editing;

Wilder uses a number of differing editing techniques such as wipes and dissolves, how do you respond to these techniques?



Key Terms Test

What are the main elements of continuity editing?

What overall effect does continuity editing seek to achieve?



Representations;

How do you respond to the representations of gender in the film? What meanings can you take from the comedy based around these engendered representations? Think also of representations of Marilyn Monroe as it reflects her film star status.

Other Key Questions to consider while watching the film;

Wilder primarily saw himself as a writer rather than director how does the film visuals/ performance and dialogue reinforce this self-image?

Three songs performed by Sugar in the course of the film 'Running wild' , 'I wanna be loved by you' and 'I'm through with love' try to think about how do these three songs frame the film's narrative?

Discussion Question

Despite the film's risqué (for the time) representations of gender and sexuality 'Some Like It Hot' upholds many of the conventional values of its day'. To what extent do you agree with this statement?

The aesthetic of Some Like It Hot

Unlike some of the other films you study for film studies the films of Billy Wilder are less likely to feature what we could call expressionistic or experimental cinematic styles (see your notes on cinematography and auteur theory). Wilder is primarily concerned with story and conveying the comedic content through the dialogue and performance.

The film for Wilder must primarily grab the audience and involve them in the story, the worst thing a film could be is boring or unnecessarily complicated. Hence the importance of the development of the screenplay and his close direction of his cast, in particular a precise delivery of the dialogue are part of his signature style.

One aesthetic feature that does appear in the majority of his other films is the use of voice over but this is not evident in Some Like it Hot.

The one visual aesthetic that most definitely appealed to Wilder was the aesthetic quality of black and white photography. His previous film with Marylyn Monroe, The Seven Year Itch (1955) was made in colour but this was done as result of a contractual obligation to the film's star. The vast majority of Wilder's other works were all shot in monochrome black and white.

At the time Some Like it Hot was made over fifty percent of all films coming out of Hollywood were in colour. Wilder justified his use of black and white because of the films 1920's setting and the gangster movie generic content which he argued would mean the audiences would have been expecting to see such films without colour. Yet his following feature The Apartment (1960) was again in black and white despite its contemporary setting indicating a conscious aesthetic decision.



Discussion Question;

Does the use of monochrome photography suggest anything about the films theme of gender identities?

Develop your understanding

Look again at the following sequences and analyse them using your knowledge of film form.
You will need to refer to your notes and handouts on film form.

Opening scenes/ Chicago

Try to consider how mise-en-scene works to create a different mood for this location compared to later settings.



Mise en scene

How the two locations in the film are presented?

What does the uses of light and space suggest and what are the different meanings that are attached to each?





**Introduction to Josephine,
Daphne and Sugar Kane.**

**Look at the use of camera, in
particular uses of point of view
shots and audience positioning.**

Cinematography

There are several scenes where we are invited to look at Sugar.

From your notes on the gaze try to analyse these uses of camera work and what they reveal about representations. Specifically consider the use of POV shots and your own response as a spectator.





Joe and Jerry's 'dates'
Examine the uses of editing in these scenes.

Editing

In the scene where both Joe and Jerry are on 'dates' how does the editing conform to the conventional styles of the time?

Identify from the sequence the elements of continuity editing.

What other type of editing often associated with continuity editing is used and what is the effect of the transition?



Use of mise en scene;

Look at the use of mise en scene in the two musical numbers in the Miami hotel.



Mise en scene

In the musical number that Sugar performs in the Miami hotel examine closely the use of Mise en scene.

Think about the framing and lighting and how these may link to Monroe's star persona.

Look also at costume and what this says about attitudes toward gender in the 1950s (remember also the film is meant to be set in the 1920s)



