

La La Land (Chazelle, 2016)

Opening sequence analysis:

Another Day of Sun



- Diegetic radio announcements and images of the LA traffic establish place and the importance of the weather in Los Angeles: "It's another hot, sunny day today here in Southern California. Temperature is 84 for downtown Los Angeles, overnight lows of 75".
- The radio announcements then fade into the song Another Day of Sun, establishing the themes of fantasy and reality.
- The scene has the illusion of one take, mimicking Hollywood musical dance sequences, cleverly hiding three shots as whip-pans.
- The aesthetic of fantasy is created using bright primary colours, notably blues, reds and yellows.
- After the moment of musical fantasy, which ends on a wide shot of the dancers in symmetry on top of their cars, reality is re-established through the return to cars honking and people inside getting impatient.
- The cast is multicultural, however, once the dance sequence is over, we cut to Seb and Mia – white characters then dominate the narrative.

Representations, Spectatorship and Ideology:

Ethnicity:	Gender:	Age:
<p>Critic Geoff Nelson offers an oppositional reading of the film through the lens of racial politics. He argues that the film is an example of 'white nostalgia', where white characters hark back to a mythic past of segregation and pre-civil rights.</p> <p>Critics have also commented on Seb's 'white jazz saviour' narrative. Nelson argues that when Seb takes over the piano from a black musician, this erases black art.</p>	<p>A feminist interpretation of the film is that it is a male fantasy – there are many scenes where Mia watches Seb perform – he is the active one. However, an opposing feminist view is that the film shows us Mia's perspective rather than Seb's. During the audition scene, we are positioned with Mia through the use of close ups and the intensity of her performance.</p>	<p>Seb and Mia are young millennials trying to establish their careers. Some young people may identify with their situation – at first Mia is stuck working as a barista with dreams of becoming an actress. Growing up and the realities of adult hood are key themes. The final scenes portray a nostalgia yearning for your first love.</p>

Ideology: The American Dream

The notion that America is a land of opportunity – no matter who you are you can achieve your goals and aspirations with hard work. Seb and Mia achieve the American dream as Mia is a successful actress and Seb runs his own jazz club. However, Chazelle also criticises the 'dream' as it comes at a high personal cost for the characters.

"There something to be said for having even unrealistic dreams. Even if the dreams don't come true – that to me is what's beautiful about Los Angeles. It's full of these people who have moved there to chase these dreams. A lot of those people are told by people around them that they're crazy, or that they're living in la la land. I wanted to make a movie that saluted them a little bit, and that kind of unrealistic state of mind."

Damien Chazelle

Homages to classic films:

Rebel Without A Cause (Ray, 1955)

 Seb and Mia watch Rebel at the cinema then sing and dance at a key location in Rebel, the Griffith Observatory.

Singin in the Rain (Donen, 1952)

 This classic musical was a key inspiration for Chazelle who references it throughout La La Land. Both films have the same theme of reality vs fantasy.

Casablanca (Curtiz, 1942)

 Chazelle re-works the narrative of Casablanca – when Mia walks into Seb's club, it homages the scene where Ilsa walks into Rick's bar.

The Umbrellas of Cherbourg (Demy, 1964)

 Chazelle was inspired by this French New Wave musical's bright, primary colours, whimsical tone and heart-breaking story.

