

# Coloring Outside the Lines

Exploring Narrative Structure and Visual Dynamics  
and Duality in *La La Land* (2016)



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## Abstract

This masterthesis examines how the modern movie musical *La La Land* (Damien Chazelle, 2016) integrates traditional elements from the musical genre with innovative narrative and visual techniques. *La La Land* is characterized by its striking use of color and its rich references to Hollywood's classic films and musicals, and tells the story of aspiring actress Mia and jazz musician Sebastian. The research question that was formulated for this masterthesis is: In what ways does *La La Land* combine traditional elements of the musical genre with innovative narrative and visual techniques to redefine the genre? Using a neoformalist approach, the devices within narrative structure and the mise-en-scène, particularly through the use of color, were examined and analyzed. The analysis reveals a dual-focus narrative that weaves themes of love and dreams in to a traditional three-act structure combined with parallels, highlighting the film's dominant: duality. A close examination of the mise-en-scène and visual style of the film unveils how a pattern is created where color usage echoes and enhances the narrative structure. The detailed analysis of the research object reveals the film's complexity, which unfolds through the interaction between the narrative structure and mise-en-scène and use of color, intensely engaging with the film's dominant concept of duality. This thesis underscores the film's contribution to the evolution of musicals, suggesting further research on contemporary musicals and audience reception to broaden understanding of the genre's progression and use of color in mise-en-scène.



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## Introduction

A group of people dressed in all colors of the rainbow bursting out into song and dance in the middle of a traffic jam is not something you see everyday. But in the world of *La La Land* (Damien Chazelle, 2016), it is only natural. The Technicolor spectacle of the opening scene encapsulates the essence of the film's allure and makes it immediately clear to the spectator what they're looking at: a whimsical, colorful and fantastical musical. The film is set in present-day Los Angeles, but the heart and soul of the film has its roots in the past, writes Owen Gleiberman in his review for *Variety*.<sup>1</sup> *La La Land* follows the story of young actress Mia (played by Emma Stone) and jazz musician Sebastian (played by Ryan Gosling). Their paths cross during their struggle to make their dreams come true in a city that is known for its harsh entertainment industry. With an incredible number of intertextual references from the opening shot to the ending, there is no doubt that *La La Land* pays homage to the Golden Age of Hollywood musicals and the old glory days of Hollywood in general.<sup>2</sup> Anthony Carew sums up how creating a contemporary musical requires acknowledging the rich history of the genre:

The musical is forever associated with Hollywood, musicals are the definitive form of mainstream movie entertainment in cinema's early days of sound. Anyone making a modern-day screen musical is, whether they want to be or not, involved in a dialogue with the past, charged with an act of revivalism. Every screen musical is made into a commentary on the state of its genre, in a way that a dramatic narrative or documentary feature is not.<sup>3</sup>

In the case of *La La Land*, it is obvious that the film was very aware of its predecessors in the genre, featuring countless intertextual references to iconic musicals like *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952) and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg* (Jacques Demy, 1964) throughout the film.

It is clear that musicals possess a unique trait: it is the only genre in which it is normal for characters to burst into song and dance out of nowhere. Nowadays, studio executives understand that this aspect is not universally adored. For instance, the promotional strategy for the latest *Mean Girls* (Samantha Jayne & Arturo Perez Jr., 2024) movie musical didn't emphasize its musical nature.<sup>4</sup> Similar approaches were taken with *The Color Purple* (Blitz Bazawule, 2023) and *Wonka* (Paul King, 2023), seemingly downplaying the musical elements in their marketing. But a few years ago, right before its release, *La La Land* did not seem to shy away from their musical character in the trailers.<sup>5</sup> When trailers aired for *La La Land*, it showed several scenes that made it clear you are watching a

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<sup>1</sup> Owen Gleiberman, "Film Review: *La La Land*," *Variety*, August 31, 2016, <https://variety.com/2016/film/reviews/la-la-land-review-venice-ryan-gosling-emma-stone-1201846576/>

<sup>2</sup> In the opening credits, the film announces it was shot in CinemaScope, a format that was widely used in the 1950's and 60's, and the epilogue that marks the end of the film is filled with references to well known musicals such as *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957), *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952), and *An American in Paris* (Vincente Minnelli, 1951).

<sup>3</sup> Anthony Carew, "Same Old Song: Nostalgia and Fantasy in *La La Land*," *Screen Education*, no 90 (2018): 10.

<sup>4</sup> Rebecca Rubin, "Why Paramount Didn't Market 'Mean Girls' as a Musical: 'People Tend to Treat' Them 'Differently'," *Variety*, January 15, 2024, <https://variety.com/2024/film/features/mean-girls-movie-musical-marketing-strategy-1235867996/>

<sup>5</sup> Lionsgate Movies, "La La Land (2016 Movie) Official Trailer – 'Dreamers'," November 3, 2016. YouTube video, 02:26. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0pdqf4P9MB8>

trailer for a musical film.<sup>6</sup> And it did not seem to scare any spectators; on the contrary, *La La Land* was the top-grossing Oscar film of its year.<sup>7</sup> The film was also awarded numerous awards, including several Oscars and Golden Globes.<sup>8</sup>

Kristin Thompson and David Bordwell mention in their book *Film Art*, which has a picture of *La La Land* on the cover of the twelfth edition, that while *La La Land* honors the tradition of the musical genre, it also innovates in various aspects such as technological applications and the development of the musical score.<sup>9</sup> On his blog, Bordwell calls *La La Land* both derivative and original at the same time.<sup>10</sup> Not only have academics recognized this contrast, the costume designer and the director of *La La Land* itself have stated that the film aims to blend old-school charm with modern elements.<sup>11</sup> This suggests that the film not only occupies a unique position within the musical genre but also influences and possibly redefines the genre. In the context of the musical genre, *La La Land* can be seen as a pivotal work and a compelling research object, because of its duality within the genre.

This master thesis aims to analyze the role of *La La Land* within the genre's evolution, with a specific focus on the narrative structure, the use of color in the mise-en-scène and the musical components. The following research question has been formulated: **In what ways does *La La Land* combine traditional elements of the musical genre with innovative narrative and visual techniques to redefine the genre?**

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<sup>6</sup> For example, we see many fantastical scenes such as Sebastian and Mia dancing in the sky and scenes from the epilogue, that are clearly not set in real life.

<sup>7</sup> Natalie Robehmed, "La La Land Is This Year's Top-Grossing Oscar Movie With \$340.5 Million Worldwide," *Forbes*, Accessed March 22, <https://www.forbes.com/sites/natalierobehmed/2017/02/21/la-la-land-is-this-years-top-grossing-oscar-movie-with-340-5-million-worldwide/?sh=9b5ab25953e3>

<sup>8</sup> *La La Land* won Oscar's in the categories Best Director, Best Cinematography, Best Production Design, Best Actress, Best Original Song and Best Original Score, and Golden Globes in the categories Best Screenplay, Best Actress in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy, Best Actor in a Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy, Best Original Score, Best Original Song, Best Director, and Best Motion Picture – Musical or Comedy. *La La Land*'s most memorable awards season moment was about how the film did not win one of the most coveted awards: the Academy Award for Best Picture. Now an unforgettable moment in Oscar history, the film was accidentally awarded the prestigious Oscar in 2017, only to have to return it to *Moonlight* (Barry Jenkins, 2016) after a few minutes. In the history of the Academy Awards, only ten musicals have ever won the top prize, and only one of them was released after 1968 (*Chicago*, Rob Marshall, 2002); (Scott Shilstone, "Oscars: Every Best Picture Winner Back To The Beginning In 1929," *Deadline*, Accessed March 20, 2024, <https://deadline.com/gallery/oscars-best-picture-winners/>).

<sup>9</sup> David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Jeff Smith, *Film Art: An Introduction* (New York: McGraw Hill, 2020), 5, 8.

<sup>10</sup> David Bordwell, "How La La Land is made," *David Bordwell's website on cinema*, Accessed January 27, 2024, <https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2017/01/23/how-la-la-land-is-made/>

<sup>11</sup> Archer Green, "when the director happens to be an expert in colour theory," January 15, 2024. YouTube video, 10:49. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YGRBXsMsyng>

## Theoretical framework

To analyze a film like *La La Land* and recognize the position of this film within the genre, some analysis and knowledge of the genre is necessary. The academic conversation surrounding movie musicals is extensive, and since it's not possible to analyze a whole genre, I will not be discussing every aspect of it. I have identified a few categories of concepts relevant to this thesis, which I will explain in this theoretical framework.

### *Evolution of the genre*

Musicals are one of the most complex artforms ever devised, according to Rick Altman, one of the most distinguished academic scholars writing about the genre.<sup>12</sup> It borrows elements from every other entertainment industry and form of art, like theatre, opera, ballet, and television, which makes it an “unprecedented challenge to the critic and historian”, Altman writes in his book *The American Film Musical*.<sup>13</sup> “When film first learned to speak, it sang instead,” states Altman, reflecting on the significant role of music and song in the early days of cinema. The musical movie has become a staple of the film industry ever since the release of *The Jazz Singer* (Alan Crosland, 1927), which is frequently acknowledged as the pioneer of film musicals.<sup>14</sup>

According to Dave Monahan and Richard Barsam, the genre was not born out of a specific political or cultural moment or literary genre. Musical performance, like opera and ballet, had already secured its place as a popular form of entertainment well before the film camera was invented. Monahan and Barsam mention that it was only a matter of time before “the dazzling movement, formal spectacle, and emotional eloquence inherent in musical performance would eventually join forces with the expressive power of cinema.”<sup>15</sup> Besides the obstacle of creating a workable system for recording and projecting sound, the genre was presented with another challenge. Because the emerging art of motion-picture was closely linked with documenting reality, and therefore naturalism, how were audiences suddenly going to accept the concept of characters bursting into song and dance in an otherwise normal setting within the film? The invention of the subgenre of the *backstage musical* was the answer to that question. This type of musical centered its action on singers and dancers who perform within the story.<sup>16</sup> Because of the performance setting of the story, where characters job it was to rehearse song and dance anyway, it did not feel out of place as much.<sup>17</sup> It was only a few years after the incorporation of the backstage musical when so-called *integrated musicals* broadened the genre.<sup>18</sup> As mentioned by Monahan and Barsam, this type of musical “assimilated singing and dancing with conventional spoken dramatic action; characters now could burst into song

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<sup>12</sup> Rick Altman, *The American Film Musical* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987), xi.

<sup>13</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, xi.

<sup>14</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 132.

<sup>15</sup> Dave Monahan and Richard Barsam, *Looking at Movies: An Introduction to Film* (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2022), 92.

<sup>16</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 344.

<sup>17</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 93.

<sup>18</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 93.

or dance as part of any situation.”<sup>19</sup> Most of the time, these performances were reserved for important dramatic moments in the film, and the songs can be delivered to another character but can also be directed inward, or aimed directly at the viewer.<sup>20</sup> Monahan and Barsam write that only in a musical can the drivers stuck in a Los Angeles traffic jam dance out of their cars to sing about moving to Hollywood to pursue show business dreams.<sup>21</sup> They categorize *La La Land* as an integrated musical.<sup>22</sup> Bordwell and Thompson call this type of musical a straight musical.<sup>23</sup> They write that straight musicals often are romantic comedies as well, so that the characters are able to express their emotions in song and dance.<sup>24</sup> According to Bordwell and Thompson, it’s unique for a straight musical to be set in a show-business setting, unlike backstage musicals, but *La La Land* is a film where that seems to be the case.<sup>25</sup>

### *Defining characteristics*

Music and dance are arguably the most prominent defining characteristics that distinguish the musical genre from other genres. Elements of song and choreography are often used by characters to express themselves. In some musical films, like *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, actors sing their entire dialogue, whereas other musicals, like the 1930’s films starring Ginger Rogers and Fred Astaire, focus more on dance and less on song.<sup>26</sup> In general, most musicals blend music, singing, dance and spoken dialogue to create their unique form of storytelling.

While the range of subject matter in musicals is broad, making it difficult to pin down certain iconography that is associated with the musical, Bordwell and Thompson mention several stable factors in the genre, besides the use of song and choreography.<sup>27</sup> The musical film often structures their narrative around two main characters, most likely a female lead and a male lead, which embraces the dualistic approach as devised by Rick Altman (which will be discussed later in this theoretical framework).<sup>28</sup> The female and male lead are more often than not romantically involved, making the romantic relationship a repeated theme in musicals. Another recurring theme in musical movies is dreams, goals and achieving them.<sup>29</sup> This does not always have to include a romantic relationship, but that is the case for *La La Land*, which uses the relationship of the two main characters as an important plot point, but also centers around their dreams and hopes and how they try to achieve their goals.

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<sup>19</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 93.

<sup>20</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 93, 94.

<sup>21</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 94.

<sup>22</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 94.

<sup>23</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 344.

<sup>24</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 344, 345.

<sup>25</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 345.

<sup>26</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 92.

<sup>27</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 346.

<sup>28</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 19.

<sup>29</sup> Richard Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia,” in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London; Routledge, 2002), 20.

In *The American Film Musical*, Altman discusses ten defining characteristics of the genre, dividing them into five semantic characteristics and five syntactic characteristics<sup>30</sup>. First, when dissecting the five semantic characteristics, he mentions format. According to Altman, a musical must be seen as a narrative genre, meaning that there is a story being told.<sup>31</sup> He also discusses length, saying musicals must come close to a what is called ‘feature length’ in industry terms.<sup>32</sup> The Screen Actors Guild defines feature-length as over sixty minutes in running time.<sup>33</sup> Another defining characteristic are the characters, who are traditionally a romantic couple.<sup>34</sup> When discussing acting, Altman writes that “only when a film combines rhythmic movement with a certain sense of realism can we call that film a musical”, underscoring the importance of the integration of song and dance in a story.<sup>35</sup> This also goes for the sound track, which must be a mixture of diegetic music (rhythmic movement) and dialogue (realism).<sup>36</sup> When arguing the five syntactic defining characters of musicals, Altman first states that the use of the dual-focus narrative structure is an important element of the narrative strategy of musicals.<sup>37</sup> I will elaborate further on this concept when discussing narrative and form in this theoretical framework. Mentioning the formation of the couple as another defining characteristic, Altman writes that this process “is linked either causally or through parallelism to success in the ventures which constitute the plot.”<sup>38</sup> This means that the plot development of the couple also serves purpose for and connects with the solution of the plot’s other storylines. The same goes for the music in relation to the plot, according to Altman. Music does not just provide an alternative to silence but becomes an active force in the production of meaning.<sup>39</sup> The second-last defining characteristic is how the musical creates continuity between aforementioned contrasting elements like realism and rhythmic movement, and dialogue and diegetic sounds.<sup>40</sup> Altman writes that its ability to assure continuity between contradictory tendencies is a unique element of the genre.<sup>41</sup> Lastly, Altman mentions the hierarchy-dynamic between image and sound. In musicals, the classic narrative hierarchy, image over sound, is reversed at climactic moments in the story.<sup>42</sup> When this switch happens, the audio dissolve does not only establish the continuity as mentioned above, but also introduces sections of the film where sound is privileged over image, writes Altman.<sup>43</sup>

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<sup>30</sup> Altman makes this distinction to explain the difference in the primary linguistic elements and their basic meaning (semantic) and secondary, textual meanings that are created through the relationship between the primary elements (syntactic). He argues that the distinction is “fundamental to a theory of how meaning of one kind contributes to and eventually established meaning of another.” (Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 100).

<sup>31</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 102.

<sup>32</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 103.

<sup>33</sup> “Eligibility criteria,” Screen Actors Guild, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://www.sagawards.org/awards/rules-eligibility/eligibility-criteria>

<sup>34</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 103.

<sup>35</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 106.

<sup>36</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 106.

<sup>37</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 107.

<sup>38</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 108, 109.

<sup>39</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 109.

<sup>40</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 109.

<sup>41</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 109.

<sup>42</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 109.

<sup>43</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 110.



When discussing musicals as entertainment, Richard Dyer writes that entertainment in general offers the image of “something better” to escape into: “Alternatives, hopes and wishes, these are the stuff of utopia, the sense that things could be better, that something other than what is can be imagined and maybe realized.”<sup>44</sup> The type of utopianism mentioned by Dyer does not present a model of a utopian world. He writes that that the type of utopia he describes is contained in the feelings it embodies.<sup>45</sup> I assert that Dyer would agree *La La Land* captures his essence of utopianism in musicals, through the contribution of what he writes are representational and non-representational elements.<sup>46</sup> The representational elements in the film would include the narrative and characters.<sup>47</sup> We follow Mia and Sebastian in their journey through challenges in their personal, romantic and professional lives, representing chasing dreams within the harsh entertainment industry. This notion of utopia, and accomplishing big goals and dreams, is a very clear theme in *La La Land*, taking place in the city of Los Angeles. The setting is seemingly romanticized by painting the city in vibrant colors, which contribute to the utopian vision of the setting. Non-representational elements, which include color, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, and camerawork, according to Dyer, can also evoke utopianism.<sup>48</sup> Non-representational elements do not literally tell the story, but enhance the utopianism in the narrative. The opening scene on the highway immediately transports the spectator into a world where an ordinary location becomes a stage for the expression of what I would call hopeful happiness. It is important to discuss the concept of utopianism in this thesis, because the film seems to challenge the idea of ‘something better’, by blending the real and ideal, which is set to be discussed in the first sub question.

Bordwell and Thompson write that while Westerns and horror films often delve into the dark nature of human behavior, musicals often highlight the positive. They write: “high ambitions are rewarded, (...), and the lovers are united in song and dance.”<sup>49</sup> The typicality in musicals is not just the use of song and dance, but also how these songs mirror the storyline. Bordwell and Thompson note that in both backstage and straight musicals, the songs often reflect the romantic relationship between the leading characters. According to them, this plot device has remained a staple of the genre.<sup>50</sup> But not all protagonists achieve their goals, as mentioned by Monahan and Barsam, because not all stories are meant to have a happy ending.<sup>51</sup> The ‘happy’ ending, which is commonly attributed to musicals, can sometimes be of a fairly tough and bitter nature, as mentioned by Dyer.<sup>52</sup>

Visually and technically, the musical genre also has some stable factors. The classic musicals usually had a vivid color scheme, often shot in Technicolor.<sup>53</sup> Musical are also often brightly lit,

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<sup>44</sup> Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia,” 20.

<sup>45</sup> Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia,” 20.

<sup>46</sup> Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia,” 20, 21, 27.

<sup>47</sup> Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia,” 20.

<sup>48</sup> Dyer, “Entertainment and Utopia,” 20.

<sup>49</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 346.

<sup>50</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 345.

<sup>51</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 121.

<sup>52</sup> Richard Dyer, “The Sound of Music,” in *Only Entertainment* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 59.

<sup>53</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 5.

which allows the usually cheerful costumes and sets to come forward on the screen and ensures that the choreography is visible enough.<sup>54</sup> Regarding the editing, Bordwell and Thompson note a difference between classical and contemporary musicals. The first often relies on long takes, while the latter tends to be cut more quickly. But, to show off the patterns formed by the dancers in song and dance numbers, crane shots and high angles are common in both classical and contemporary musicals.<sup>55</sup> Another technique widely used in this genre is not visible to the viewer, which is lip-synching to pre-recorded songs. Synchronizing with the playback of the recording instead of actually singing allows the actors to move freely and focus on acting.<sup>56</sup> While Bordwell and Thompson mention that *La La Land* made extensive use of playback, Mia's song "Audition (The Fools Who Dream)" was recorded live, following a trend seen in contemporary musicals like *Les Misérables* (Tom Hooper, 2012).<sup>57</sup>

### *Narrative & form*

Rick Altman sets the narrative mechanism in movie musicals apart from traditional film genres in his book *The American Film Musical*. He describes a storytelling technique where the story unfolds through a series of segments that are designed in pairs. These segments highlight the experience, emotion, and development of a female and male lead.<sup>58</sup> This contrasts with traditional notions of narrative structure, which assumes that chronological presentation implies causal relationships, Altman writes. In musicals, this structure tends to be ignored, especially during climactic moments. Instead of showing events in a chronological sequence, Altman mentions that musicals might present events happening simultaneously, or present similarity in scenes that mirror each other in terms of emotion or action.<sup>59</sup> According to Altman, "the sequence of scenes is determined not out of plot necessity, but in response to a more fundamental need: the spectator must sense the eventual lovers as a couple even when they are not together, even before they have met."<sup>60</sup> In other words, the narrative structure of the musical is needed to establish the strong connection between the two main characters, so the audience perceives them as a destined couple. This technique ensures that when the female and male lead eventually come together, the audience already understands the deep connection between these characters. Steven Cohan writes that Altman claims all musicals have this structure, called the dual focus narrative.<sup>61</sup> This dual focus, which privileges the romantic couple, downplays the linear progression of the plot by highlighting paralleled elements like comparable musical numbers, scenes, settings, values, etcetera.<sup>62</sup> Altman writes: "Whereas the traditional approach to narrative assumes that

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<sup>54</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 346.

<sup>55</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 346.

<sup>56</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 346.

<sup>57</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 8.

<sup>58</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 28.

<sup>59</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 28.

<sup>60</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 28.

<sup>61</sup> Steven Cohan, *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader* (London: Routledge, 2002), 17, 18.

<sup>62</sup> Cohan, *Hollywood Musicals*, 17.

structure grows out of the plot, the dual-focus structure of the American film musical derives from character.”<sup>63</sup> He explains the structure with the following examples: musical film often relies on the parallel structure following the pattern of A/B. C/C, whereas traditional Hollywood film typically adheres to the A>B>C pattern.<sup>64</sup>

The dual-focus narrative ties into one of Altman’s biggest semantic defining characteristics of the genre; the formation of the romantic couple. Altman writes that the American film musical seems to suggest that “the natural state of the adult human being is in the arms of an adult human being of the opposite sex.”<sup>65</sup> He writes that the tendency to form pairs is an inherent aspect of the musical genre:

Pairing-off is the natural impulse of the musical, whether it be in the representation of the plot, the splitting of the screen, the choreography of the dance, or even in the repetition of a melody. Image follows image according to the nearly iron-clad law requiring each sequence to uphold interest in male-female coupling by parallel scenes and shared activities. Each separate part of the film recapitulates the film’s overall duality.<sup>66</sup>

In other words, every element of the film, from its plot to visual style to its music and choreography, echoes the central theme of coupling, mirroring the film’s overarching focus on duality. Altman writes that almost any category can be used to underscore duality in a film: color, costume, age and background, national origin, and much more.<sup>67</sup>

Another narrative element that is important for this analysis is the act structure. There are different approaches to defining act structure in film. Syd Field suggests there are often three acts: the setup, the confrontation, and the resolution, with the second being a lot longer than the first and third.<sup>68</sup> Kristin Thompson suggests a different framework which consists of four acts: the setup (in which the goal is established), the complicating action (which requires the characters in question to make adjustments to the goal), the development (the struggle towards the goal) and the climax (usually achieving the goal), which often includes a short epilogue.<sup>69</sup> In *La La Land*, Chazelle uses the four seasons to divide the film into different parts. How this division functions in relation to the narrative will be discussed in the first sub question, where I will analyze the narrative structure of the film. Different arguments can be made about which act structure the film follows, which I will elaborate on in this part of the analysis.

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<sup>63</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 21.

<sup>64</sup> Rick Altman, “The American Film Musical as Dual-Focus Narrative,” in *Hollywood Musicals: The Film Reader*, ed. Steven Cohan (London: Routledge, 2002), 44.

<sup>65</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 32.

<sup>67</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 33.

<sup>68</sup> Syd Field, *Screenplay: The Foundations of Screenwriting*, rev. ed (New York: Delta Trade Paperbacks, 2005), 7, 8.

<sup>69</sup> Kristin Thompson. *Storytelling in the New Hollywood: Understanding Classical Narrative Technique* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), 27, 28.

### *Style, mise-en-scène, & color*

A film's experience and interpretation are guided by its style, a broad concept that usually describes the unique (audio)visual characteristic of a film, genre, or director. "Style assigns films to a tradition, distinguishes a classic, and signals the arrival of a pathbreaking innovation," writes Bordwell when discussing his book *On the History of Film Style*.<sup>70</sup> To analyze style, Bordwell outlines four broad functions of style as pillars for this analysis.<sup>71</sup> First, style serves to *denote*, signal and indicate a fictional or non-fictional realm of actions, agents, and circumstances.<sup>72</sup> In other words, style acts as a guide that helps the spectator navigate the setting of a film. When looking at *La La Land*'s visual style, for example, the use of vibrant color on all levels, which is not always how the 'real' world looks, can signal to the audience that they are entering a realm in which reality and dreams intertwine, creating a unique setting. Secondly, Bordwell mentions how style can display *expressive* qualities. He provides the example of musical style, which is often devoted to expressing someone's mental state. Bordwell also mentions how expressive qualities can be carried by light, color, performances, and certain camera movements, like how a blurry swirl can express vertigo. In the case of *La La Land*, a good example of expressive style is the use of color. Bordwell and Thompson briefly mention that during the first half of *La La Land* most scenes have brightly colored accents, in the second half the colors become less vivid because of what the characters are going through, and that the colors return for the fantastical epilogue.<sup>73</sup> The change of colors mirroring the narrative signals that the use of color in *La La Land* is not just for aesthetics and deserves further analysis. As will be analyzed further in the second sub question, the use of color seems to support the narrative and story arc of the characters and functions as an extra expression of the narrative, their state of mind or where they are in their personal or romantic journey. This example clearly underscores the importance of style and mise-en-scène, which is why I dedicated a sub question to this subject. Furthermore, Bordwell mentions that style can also be used to convey *symbolism*, the idea that something represents something else. Bordwell writes: "Films may evoke symbolic implications through color schemes, lighting design, setting and musical associations."<sup>74</sup> An example of symbolism in *La La Land*'s style is the opening sequence, where the singers of the song "Another Day Of Sun" seem to symbolize the main characters Mia and Sebastian (see analysis, figure 9, page 31). When this connection is made, the content of the song also relate to the main characters, which can be interpreted as a hint to what is to come for Mia and Sebastian's story (see analysis, page 31). Last, style serves a *decorative* purpose, according to Bordwell. In this case, decorative style does not simply mean a form of superficial decorations but should be considered as an invitation to the audience to appreciate the created pattern or arrangements

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<sup>70</sup> David Bordwell, "On the History of Film Style," *David Bordwell's website on cinema*, Accessed April 11, 2024, <https://www.davidbordwell.net/books/onthehistory.php>

<sup>71</sup> David Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light: On Cinematic Staging* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), 33.

<sup>72</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 33.

<sup>73</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 5.

<sup>74</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 33.

made in the film.<sup>75</sup> Film style is closely tied to mise-en-scène, because of how its elements shape a film's visual and narrative style.

A film's mise-en-scène is everything we see in every shot. Bordwell and Thompson note that, of all film techniques, mise-en-scène is the one that viewers notice most.<sup>76</sup> They write that mise-en-scène offers the filmmaker areas of choice and control: setting, costumes and makeup, lighting, and staging (which includes acting and movement in the shot).<sup>77</sup> The design of a setting does not only create a narrative expectation, but also influences the spectator's perception of the story setting, Bordwell and Thompson write.<sup>78</sup> *La La Land* is set in Los Angeles, a city that frames the theme of pursuing dreams, thus molding the storyline through its setting. Anthony Carew remarks: "Los Angeles [is] a city filled with dreamers hoping to make it, and thus serving as a graveyard for lost dreams. *La La Land*, as such, carries a natural connection to the endless films made about filmmaking, or in which budding starlets come to Hollywood, filled with hopes and ambition."<sup>79</sup> Like setting, costume and makeup can have many functions. Bordwell and Thompson write that costumes can play causal roles in film plots, but also be used purely for graphic qualities.<sup>80</sup> Especially with specific use of color in costumes, it can guide the attention to the spectator and contribute to narrative progression in a film.<sup>81</sup>

Monahan and Barsam write that mise-en-scène is made of four slightly different primary components: design, lighting, composition and movement.<sup>82</sup> They note that regarding the mise-en-scène, very little is left to chance and probably everything on screen was carefully selected and arranged.<sup>83</sup> The choices that are made are often driven by the maker's goal of creating a specific mood, conveying a character, or telling the story.<sup>84</sup> Monahan and Barsam encourage the viewer to think about if what you see in a scene is just nice-looking, or if the elements you see are influencing your understanding of the narrative, characters, and action of the film.<sup>85</sup>

A filmmaker can direct the focus of the audience through the principle of contrast: our eyes naturally gravitate towards differences and change. Contrast can be created with lighting, but also with color, as mentioned by Bordwell and Thompson.<sup>86</sup> Monahan and Barsam further emphasize that color is not solely used to give a film an overall look, but it also serves a functional purpose. It can be used to help convey mood and meaning appropriate for each moment.<sup>87</sup> When discussing colored lighting, Bordwell and Thompson write that using lighting instead of acting to convey emotions

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<sup>75</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 34.

<sup>76</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 112.

<sup>77</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 115.

<sup>78</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 115.

<sup>79</sup> Carew, *Same Old Song*, 12.

<sup>80</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 119.

<sup>81</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 121.

<sup>82</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 147.

<sup>83</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 146.

<sup>84</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 146.

<sup>85</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 147.

<sup>86</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 144.

<sup>87</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 190.

makes a scene more surprising and vivid.<sup>88</sup> Color can also be deployed as a motif, used to emphasize certain elements in a film.<sup>89</sup> Through elements of mise-en-scène like costume and setting, conscious use of color can contribute to narrative progression, like in the film *Women in Love* (Ken Russell, 1969) cited as an example in *Film Art*.<sup>90</sup>

Another way to shape an image and guide the spectator's attention is through lighting. According to Bordwell and Thompson, "in artistic filmmaking, lighting is more than just illumination that permits us to see the action. Lighter and darker areas within the frame help create the overall composition of each shot and guide our attention to certain objects and actions."<sup>91</sup> The lighting's quality, highlights and shadows, direction, source and color all provide ways to control the power of a shot.<sup>92</sup> Staging has been crucial to filmmaking in most of its history, writes David Bordwell in his book *Figures Traced in Light: On Cinematic Staging*.<sup>93</sup> Bordwell writes that from the early 1900's to the 1970's, directors were expected to turn a script into scenes, which involved plotting the dramatic interactions of the characters.<sup>94</sup> He writes that there were no film schools to teach this school, and learning staging, was a process of trial and error.<sup>95</sup> Bordwell and Thompson argue that the spectator tries to combine what they have seen and heard into a larger pattern, which starts at the level of the shot and thus the mise-en-scène: "Once we're caught up in following the interrelations among elements, we want the patterns to develop and conclude."<sup>96</sup> They continue to explain that to create this coherence, the filmmaker has to guide us to certain areas of the frame.<sup>97</sup> When analyzing a film, it is important to note the mise-en-scène because uncovering how these patterns are created guides us towards a better understanding of what is important to the filmmaker, and maybe discover some of the meaning or the message of the film. Within the context of the use of the film *La La Land*, there will be a specific focus on costumes, setting, and lighting, because the remarkable use of color in the film, which seems to support or guide the narrative, is primarily evident in these components.

Color, more specifically contrasting colors or colors that stand out, can be used in all elements of mise-en-scène to draw attention and create meaning. Scott Higgins recognizes that using a remarkable accent of color is quite a standard ploy for tying color to the task of direction attention.<sup>98</sup> In his article about *Meet Me in St. Louis* (Vincente Minnelli, 1944), Higgins discusses the color style of the film and how it offers an outstanding example of how color can serve the demands of classical filmmaking.<sup>99</sup> He argues that the color design of the film makes color a forceful element of film style,

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<sup>88</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 131.

<sup>89</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 120.

<sup>90</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 121, 122.

<sup>91</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 125.

<sup>92</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 131.

<sup>93</sup> David Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 7.

<sup>94</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 7, 8.

<sup>95</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 8.

<sup>96</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 54.

<sup>97</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 54.

<sup>98</sup> Scott Higgins, "Color at the Center: Minelli's Technicolor Style in 'Meet Me in St. Louis.'" *Style*, no. 3 (1998): 457.

<sup>99</sup> Higgins, "Color at the Center," 449.

and describes the function of color in this case as an “amplifier of drama”.<sup>100</sup> He praises the innovative nature of this use of color, writing:

Situated within the context of the Technicolor musical, *Meet Me in St. Louis* innovates by forcing the conventions for maintaining harmony and augmenting narrative tone to shoulder an assertive palette. In doing so, the film conspicuously relies on color to carry out an array of stylistic duties. Herbert Kalmus, head of Technicolor, was fond of justifying the price of his process by claiming that the effects of a color film “could not have been done in black-and-white at any cost”. Few Technicolor productions would support his assertion better than *Meet Me in St. Louis*.<sup>101</sup>

While *La La Land* was not shot in Technicolor, it does try to mimic the technique. Production designer David Wasco and set dresser Sandy Reynolds-Wasco mention in an interview with *Vanity Fair* that director Damien Chazelle held a weekly film night throughout the entire prep period of *La La Land*.<sup>102</sup> He showed the crew films like *Les Demoiselles de Rochefort* (Jacques Demy, 1967) and *Les Parapluies de Cherbourg*, both of which feature heavy use of (prime) colors, David Wasco mentions.

Marshall Deutelbaum writes that when discussing color, one needs to recognize its limitations regarding the use of color, mainly that certain use of color can be perceived as non-realistic, or too fake.<sup>103</sup> Using a genre that could justify colors that seemed “neither plausible nor realistic” was a way around this problem for filmmakers, Deutelbaum states: “Fantasy films like *The Wizard of Oz* (Victor Fleming, 1939), or *The Phantom of the Opera* (Arthur Lubin, 1943) and historical films like *Heaven Can Wait* (Ernst Lubitsch, 1943) or *The Black Swan* (Henry King, 1942), as well as many musicals of the period, were freed in varying degrees from the strict plausibility and natural appearance still demanded of contemporary dramas.”<sup>104</sup> This is yet another way in which the musical genre sets itself apart from other genres, because the audience's acceptance of non-realism of the musical film opens up a realm of possibilities in terms of filmmaking.

In their book *Color: The Film Reader* editors Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price included an essay by Sergei Eisenstein, a Soviet filmmaker and formalist, famous for his innovative montage.<sup>105</sup> In his essay *On Colour*, Eisenstein pleads for color to be seen as an equivalent to other elements that come into play when creating films:

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<sup>100</sup> Higgins, “Color at the Center,” 468.

<sup>101</sup> Higgins, “Color at the Center,” 468.

<sup>102</sup> Julie Miller, “The Clever Tricks That Made *La La Land* Look Technicolor and Timeless,” *Vanity Fair*, accessed March 22, 2024, <https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/02/la-la-land-production-design>

<sup>103</sup> Marshall Deutelbaum, “Costuming and the Color System of *Leave Her to Heaven*,” in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 161.

<sup>104</sup> Deutelbaum, “Costuming and the Color System,” 161.

<sup>105</sup> Since Eisenstein has passed away in 1948, his essay could not have been a conscious addition to the book on his part, but it does encapsulate a newer and more unconventional way of thinking about color in film, which is probably why the authors chose to include it in

On the question of colour, the aims of my article are very modest: I felt it important to establish the place of colour on an equal footing with the other elements of montage within film-making. We have identified it as the necessary and uniquely all-embracing precondition for achieving total and genuine synchronicity between the sonic and the visual image, between sound and depiction as separate functions.<sup>106</sup>

Eisenstein rejects the idea of a fixed correspondence between color and meaning: “How can anyone look for absolute correspondence with a colour, when you are not dealing with a total abstraction but with the actual, objective, reality, to say nothing of the emotional and intellectual reality, of an image!”<sup>107</sup> He states that what makes an image unique is entirely dependable of the context and the overall framework in which it exists, which complicates the analysis for color in film because the meaning depends on the context in which the image is presented.<sup>108</sup>

With this in mind, color is a difficult subject to assess and agree on when analyzing it, mentions Brian Price in the introduction of *Color: The Film Reader*. He writes that even if we succeed in agreeing on what to call a color, we might not be able to agree on what the color means: “How do we know what a particular use of red means if, in our culture, red can indicate multiple and often contradictory things: love *and* anger; revolution *and* madness.”<sup>109</sup> This tricky nature of color calls for order, a system that might contain or at least marginalize the ambiguity of color, Price writes.<sup>110</sup> He continues to say that this is especially true within film studies, and that nowhere this has been truer than within neoformalist film criticism.<sup>111</sup> According to Brian Price, Eisenstein calls for developing a theory of color that relies on narrative context as the generator of meaning, not on a fixed meaning.<sup>112</sup>

*La La Land* seems to create a certain system of color, which is executed on a higher level than just obvious color symbolism or visual style. In the second sub question, the use of color through mise-en-scène in relation to the narrative will be explored and analyzed.

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the book. (Sergei Eisenstein, “On Color,” in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 107).

<sup>106</sup> Sergei Eisenstein, “On Color,” in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 111.

<sup>107</sup> Eisenstein, “On Color,” 107.

<sup>108</sup> Eisenstein, “On Color,” 107.

<sup>109</sup> Brian Price, “Introduction,” in *Color: The Film Reader*, ed. Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price (New York: Routledge, 2006), 5.

<sup>110</sup> Price, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>111</sup> Price, “Introduction,” 5.

<sup>112</sup> Angela Dalle Vacche and Brian Price, ed., *Color: The Film Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006), 107.



## Method

This research will employ a neoformalist analysis as its primary methodological approach. As articulated by Kristin Thompson, neoformalism offers a set of general assumptions about how works of art, in this context specifically film, are structured and how they influence audience reactions. According to Thompson, these assumptions can be seen as fundamental principles that indicate how films generally function. But, she writes in her book *Breaking The Glass Armour*, neoformalism does not prescribe a fixed set of rules or steps to analyze an individual film.<sup>113</sup>

Neoformalism is rooted in the understanding that meaning is not fixed but is constructed through elements that Thompson calls *devices*.<sup>114</sup> There are various explanations for the presence of a device. For example, it can support the narrative, but it can also connect to devices recognized from other artworks or enhance realism.<sup>115</sup> Each film has its unique way of conveying meaning, which depends on how the devices are used. Thompson notes: “The word device indicates any single element or structure that plays a role in the artwork – a camera movement, a frame story, a repeated word, a costume, a theme, and so on.” According to Thompson, “all devices of the medium are equal in their potential for being used to build up a filmic system”.<sup>116</sup>

To analyze the devices in a film, the concepts of *function* and *motivation* can be used.<sup>117</sup> The function of a device can vary per film, Thompson mentions: “Any given device serves different functions according to the context of the work, and one of the analyst’s main jobs is to find the device’s functions in this or that context.”<sup>118</sup> For example, the use of the color red can have a completely different meaning in *La La Land* than in *2001: A Space Odyssey* (Stanley Kubrick, 1968), even though they both might use the same color to convey emotion or meaning. This is why the reasoning behind a device is also important to note during film analysis. “The reason the work suggests for the presence of any given device is its motivation”, Thompson notes to define the concept of motivation.<sup>119</sup> Motivation functions like a cue, giving by the work, that explains the inclusion of the specific device. It operates as an interaction between the works structures and the activity of the spectator, Thompson says. She mentions four basic types of motivation: compositional, realistic, transtextual and artistic.<sup>120</sup>

All devices structure themselves within what Thompson calls *the dominant*. Finding the dominant is an important step in analyzing any film, so the dominant is one of the most important tools for a neoformalist critic.<sup>121</sup> The definition of the term is explained as follows: “the dominant is a

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<sup>113</sup> Kristen Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor: Neoformalist Film Analysis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1988), 6.

<sup>114</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 15.

<sup>115</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 20.

<sup>116</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 15.

<sup>117</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 15.

<sup>118</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 15.

<sup>119</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 16.

<sup>120</sup> In summary, compositional motivation refers to the devices’ impact on the narrative structure, realistic motivation refers to enhancing reality and elements from the real world, transtextual motivation refers to devices referencing other films or genres, placing the film in broader cinematic context, and artistic motivation refers to how devices enrich the stylistic or expressive purpose of the film. (Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 15-20).

<sup>121</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 86, 89.

formal principle that controls the work at every level, from the local to the global, foregrounding some devices and subordinating others.”<sup>122</sup> The dominant refers to the element in a film that holds the central position in the structure of the artwork.<sup>123</sup> According to Thompson, the dominant can be seen as the defining factor that dictates how other elements in a film are interpreted and organized:

The dominant determines which devices and functions will come forward as important defamiliarizing traits, and which will be less important. The dominant will pervade the work, governing and linking small-scale devices to large-scale ones; through the dominant, the stylistic, narrative, and thematic levels will relate to each other.<sup>124</sup>

The dominant can bring coherence to a work, ensuring that all devices used contribute to the overall meaning or narrative of the film.<sup>125</sup> Thompson writes that the dominant is not just a summary of devices, but if a common structure or function can be found, one can assume that this structure relates to or forms the dominant.<sup>126</sup>

Considering neoformalist theory, within *La La Land* the narrative structure and specific elements in the mise-en-scène, like the costumes, lighting and set dressing and the overall use of color can be defined as devices. I argue that *duality* serves as the dominant in the film. This conclusion is based on how, on many levels, the film foregrounds the theme of duality. I will connect the concept of the dominant to the film more profoundly in the analysis, but to argue the dominant before the analysis starts, I will shortly explain how I came to this conclusion. At the core of *La La Land* lies a narrative drenched in duality, like the contrast between dreams or reality and love and personal ambitions. Mia and Sebastian both navigate these dual paths, demonstrating how the storyline itself becomes a device that foregrounds the film’s themes. Several elements of the mise-en-scène constantly reinforce duality as well. Specifically, the use of color within the mise-en-scène again and again highlights the contrast between dual themes like dreaming and realism, inner conflict, the past and the future and love and career, success and failing, and of course the two different characters and personal journeys. In the analysis chapter of this thesis, I will delve into the argument stated above and further illustrate how the dominant of duality is constantly reinforced on all levels of the film.

### *Corpus*

The film *La La Land* has been chosen as a research object for several reasons. *La La Land* is characterized by its lively and bright-colored visuals, and its look was recognized with an Oscar for Best Production Design. After watching the film several times, I was left intrigued by the contrasts (or, as defined in this thesis, the duality) that were created on several levels of the film. After

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<sup>122</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 89.

<sup>123</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 91.

<sup>124</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 43.

<sup>125</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 108.

<sup>126</sup> Thompson, *Breaking the Glass Armor*, 44.

researching the film online, it became apparent that the film incorporates meticulously crafted elements, such as the use of color, that confirm my perception of its uniqueness.

I have made a plot segmentation of the film, as illustrated by Bordwell and Thompson in *Film Art* (see page 51 to 55).<sup>127</sup> Besides a more general plot segmentation, I have also created a more detailed segmentation of all scenes in the film, focusing on a multifaceted set of categories that I believe are crucial for understanding the film's narrative structure and visual composition (see detailed segmentation on page 55 and further). These categories include the action of the scene, the location where the scene is set, the characters present, the dominant and or notable colors in the scene, the presence of music or song, and the use of choreography and dance.

Out of the entire film, I have selected three segments that I believe exemplify how the film employs narrative and visual structure. The segments were chosen based of their capacity to capture the interaction of aforementioned categories and their significance in the overall story of the film. The first sequence of the film that will be used for the analysis is the opening sequence. This includes the start of the film until scene 6 (see detailed segmentation, page 55), but also the scene when we are introduced to Sebastian on the highway, which takes place after Mia's introduction (see segmentation, scene 15, page 57). Even though this does not seem a part of the sequence in the chronological order of the film, it is the same event happening but from someone else's perspective which is important for the narrative structure and thus included in the selection of the sequence. I will elaborate on the selection and importance of analyzing this opening sequence in the first section of the analysis. The second sequence that will be used in the analysis is the sequence after the pool party, where Sebastian and Mia had their first proper interaction and conversation (see segmentation, scene 25 and 26, page 57, 57). This sequence marks an important turning point in the film, which is necessary to discuss in relation to the narrative structure, and also displays notable use of color in the *mise-en-scène*. The third sequence that will be used in the analysis is the ending of the film, from the moment Mia enters Seb's to the final scene where Mia and Sebastian share one final look. The epilogue and ending offers insight in how the film plays with the expectation of the audience, which it seems to subvert with the specific ending, making it important for answering the main question this thesis will answer.

It is difficult to only select three segments that will be used for the analysis, so when there are examples that underscore the statements made in the analysis of the selected segments, they will also be included in the analysis. For example, when discussing elements of the third sequence (the epilogue/ending), it is inevitable to include examples that are not from the three selected sequences, because the epilogue shows many scenes that connect to moments earlier in the film.

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<sup>127</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 102.

### *Sub questions*

In the first sub question, I will review the narrative structure in alignment with the concepts discussed in the theoretical framework: the act structure, traditional musical themes like dreams, romance and the ending, and the dual-focus narrative. Regarding the dual-focus structure as discussed by Altman, *La La Land* has a narrative structure that includes both events unfolding simultaneously as well as similarities and mirroring, and the latter category stands out in quantity. Therefore, more examples from this category within the dual-focus narrative will be discussed in the analysis. Structuring the analysis of the second sub question posed a bit more of a challenge, because, as discussed in the theoretical framework, it can be difficult to attach generalized meaning to color. As proposed by Brian Price, the use of color will be structured first, in order to analyze it later.<sup>128</sup> The structure of plotting the film schematically, as done in the detailed segmentation on page 56, allows for a possible pattern to appear. When a particular color or color scheme stood out, a screenshot was taken. Reviewing all the screenshots later, it was easier to identify similarities, contrasts, and other notable color-related elements compared to watching the entire film, as the focus could remain entirely on these visual features. When selecting examples from the mise-en-scène and style of the film, specific attention will be paid to the functions of color and subsequently style as discussed in the theoretical framework, like conveying emotions, signaling, and guiding attention, foreshadowing, creating symbolism and creating narrative connections. The following sub questions have been formulated:

1. What narrative techniques does *La La Land* employ to blend traditional storytelling with innovative plot developments, and how do these techniques fit into the musical genre?
2. In what ways does the mise-en-scène of *La La Land*, particularly through its use of color, echo the storytelling and challenge traditional conventions of the musical genre?

### *The relevance of La La Land*

This thesis aims to explain how *La La Land* positions itself within the genre of the musical, combining traditional and innovative elements in narrative structure and mise-en-scène. By analyzing this combination in a modern musical, my work aims to contribute to a broader understanding of how a genre can evolve in response to cultural and technological context. Because of its seemingly unique cinematic language, in narrative and visual elements, *La La Land* as an object for analysis demonstrates how a genre can be pushed forward, or at least in a new direction. By applying Thompson's concept of the dominant to the film, it is demonstrated how the film transcends simple genre structures by implementing an overarching theme (duality) that informs various aspects of the film (aspects that can be seen, like the mise-en-scène, but also 'invisible' aspects like the narrative structure and ending). This thesis aims to contribute to providing insight into the ever-evolving genre but also how films can transcend the foundations of its genre.

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<sup>128</sup> Price, "Introduction," 5.

## Analysis

### 1. What narrative techniques does *La La Land* employ to blend traditional storytelling with innovative plot developments, and how do these principles relate to the musical genre?

There are several techniques and principles to discuss when it comes to analyzing the narrative structure of a film. Based on the theoretical framework in chapter two, a few key principles have been identified as most present in the film and will thus be used to analyze the narrative structure of *La La Land*. I will start by trying to identify the act structure of the film. This will be followed up by discussing the story arc and the ending of the film and how it relates to the narrative of traditional musicals, as discussed by Altman. I will then explain the recurring theme of duality and the dual-focus narrative, which is central to the films' narrative structure.

#### *Act structure*

When analyzing the narrative structure of *La La Land*, it is important to take the act structure into account because it serves as a framework for organizing events in a story. At first sight, *La La Land* seems to be split up in four parts that are clearly marked by title cards with the four seasons: spring, summer, fall and winter. But the film does not start with Spring, the first title card, which means that if you follow the structure of the title cards the film has even more parts. It does not seem to have its own title card on screen, but after the opening sequence and the *La La Land* opening credits fade away, the subtitle says 'winter'. The four minutes and 42 seconds before the first 'winter' is on screen, are used to set up the world the story takes place in.



Figure 1 – Seasonal title cards

As discussed in the theoretical framework, academic literature proposes various ways to divide a film into acts. For reference, figure 3 visualizes the three-act structure based on Syd Field's work and the four-act structure based on Kristin Thompson's work. I will begin examining the film's adherence with the traditional three-act structure.

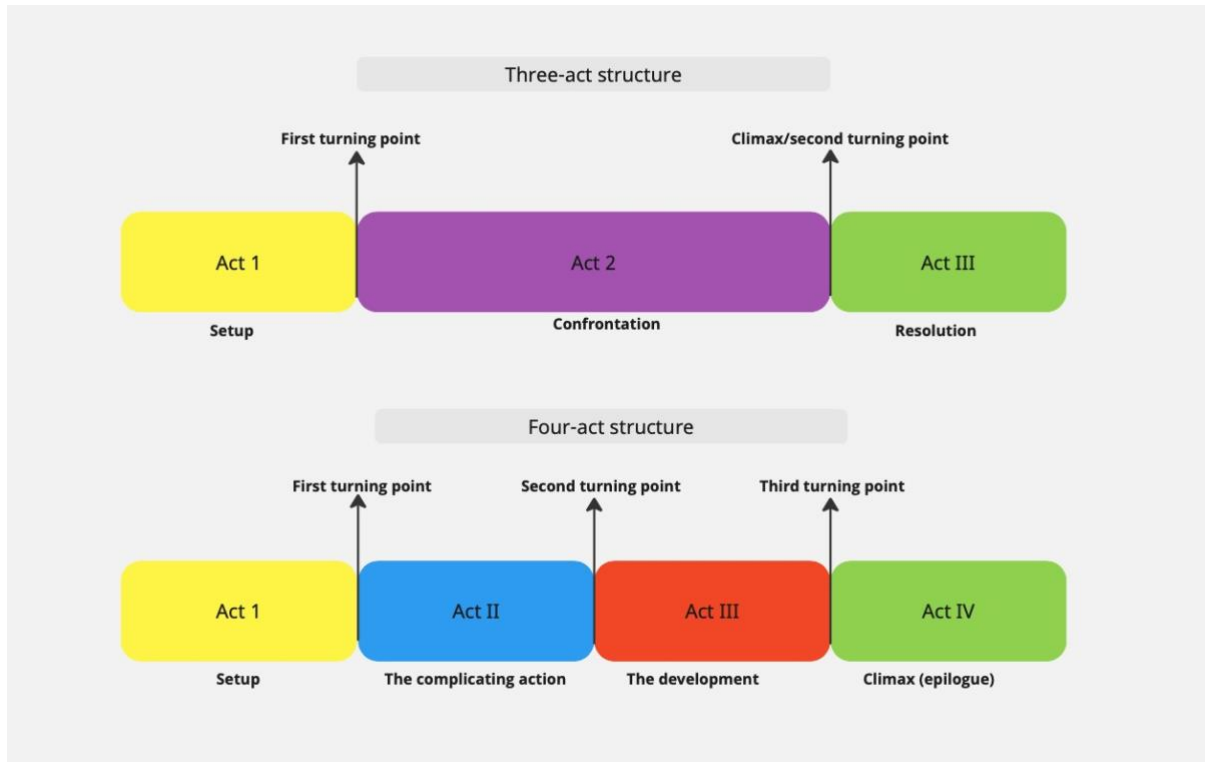


Figure 2 - Three-act structure and four-act structure

Syd Field's three-act structure consists of a setup, confrontation, and resolution.<sup>129</sup> Even though *La La Land* is divided into four seasons, which seems to be a clear division of the film's acts at first glance, the film easily fits the three-act structure. The first act, the setup, introduces us to the main characters Mia and Sebastian. The spectator witnesses the first interaction on the highway, the second interaction in the restaurant, the first proper conversation at the pool party and eventually the formation of their romantic connection when they leave the party together, looking for their cars. Their conversation while searching turns into a dance and song, in which they ironically sing about not liking each other. But after they get interrupted by a phone call from Mia's boyfriend, the romantic connection is clearly established for the spectator. After Mia finds her car and drives away, Sebastian is seen walking back to the party, where is parked right outside the house they just left, implying he walked along with Mia because he likes her.

This sequence is the first turning point in the film, which signifies the start of the second act, the confrontation, which is the largest act. Sebastian visits Mia at her barista job, and they leave and plan a date. Mia leaves her boyfriend to join Sebastian at the cinema, and after a visit to the Griffith

<sup>129</sup> Field, *Screenplay*, 7, 8.

Observatory (which is located close to where they had their first dance in Griffith Park) they have their first kiss. This moment, in which their relationship is explicitly proclaimed, is almost exactly in the middle of the film. Mia and Sebastian are clearly in love, and we watch their relationship develop. They share their hopes, dreams and goals and seem supportive of each other. Mia is practicing her one-woman play and quits her barista job and Sebastian decides to join his old friend Keith in a jazz band. Mia is present during their first performance and is taken back by the style of the music, which is not traditional jazz that Sebastian loves so much, but more modern and pop-style music with backup dancers and flashing lights. The mood changes, which becomes evident when Sebastian surprises Mia with a dinner that ends up in them fighting over their respective dreams.

This fighting scene could be identified as a second turning point, but because there is not a clear change in the story yet, it will not be identified as a turning point. The real turning point is introduced by Sebastian forgetting a photoshoot with his band, which result in him missing Mia’s play. When he arrives at the theatre, way too late, Mia walks out and tells him she is done with acting and is leaving Los Angeles to stay with her parents for a while.

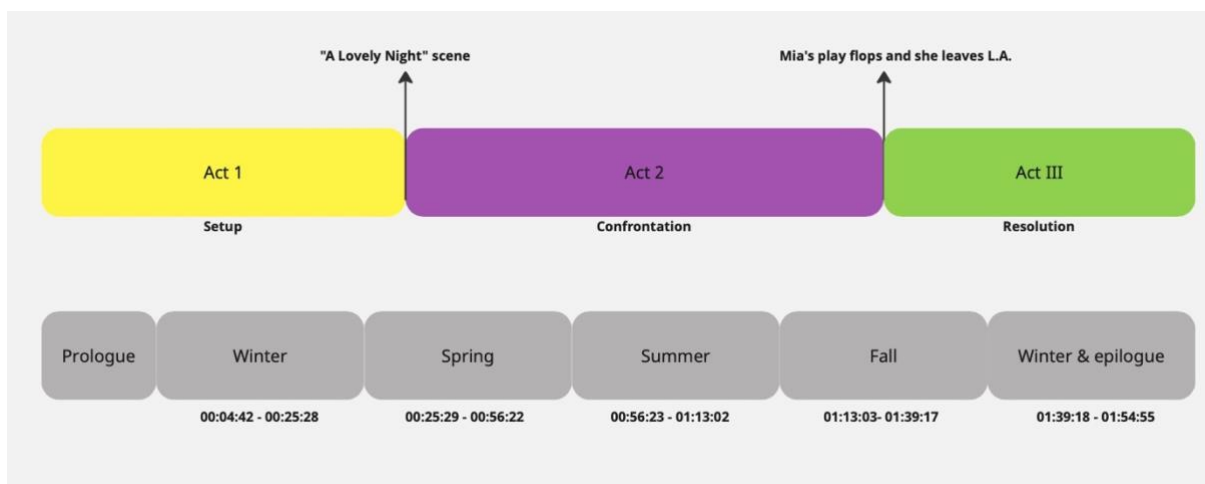


Figure 3 - La La Land and the three-act structure

Because they seem to break up, and physically part ways, this is the second turning point and transition from the second into the third act. While lying in bed, Sebastian gets a phone call about a callback for Mia. This prompts him to drive to Boulder City, where Mia’s parents live, to tell her about the callback and audition. After an emotional discussion, Mia turns up the next morning and her and Sebastian drive back to Los Angeles for the audition. After the audition, the pair is seen talking on a bench at the Griffith Observatory. Mia and Sebastian talk about where they stand and conclude that they don’t know, but should both chase their dreams, and tell each other that they will always love each other.

The story jumps forward five years, and we see Mia visiting the coffee shop she used to work at, now as a famous actress and Sebastian in his own jazz club. This is central to the third act, the

resolution. They both have achieved their goals, but it is revealed they are not together when Mia is seen with her husband to leave for a night out. When they end up at Sebs, Sebastian's jazz club, we witness a dream sequence (the epilogue), picturing a bittersweet version of what could have been. After we return to the jazz club, Mia and her husband leave, but not before Sebastian and Mia share a look, with a subtle nod and smile, acknowledging they both achieved what they wanted, just not together.



Figure 4 – Five years later

As mentioned before, to the casual observer, the film seems to be split up in the four seasons. But when examining more closely, it quickly becomes clear that this division does not match up with four acts, particularly the four-act structure as discussed by Thompson. First, the film clearly consists of more than the season parts. The film starts with a short prologue. After the opening number, the subtitles indicate a first 'cut' in parts of the film when it mentions 'winter'. Spring follows, then summer, fall, and winter again, including a five-year time jump forward, and an extensive dream epilogue. Even if you would force the film into four parts, by combining the prologue and first winter, and spring with summer, the narrative structure of the film still fails to conform to Thompson's theory. She categorizes the second act as 'the complicating action' and the third act as 'the development', but I would argue that in the case of *La La Land* the development of the story would be in spring and summer and the complicating action would arise in fall, making it the other way around.<sup>130</sup> To conclude, it is hard to fit these six sequences in Thompson's four-act structure, which signals that her theory does not align with the film's act structure.

<sup>130</sup> Thompson. *Storytelling in the New Hollywood*, 27, 28.



But even though the seasons do not seem to match up with a four-act structure, it does provide structure for the narrative in a different way. In my opinion, the seasons seem to signal not only the passing of time, but also the thematic state of the story and its characters. We are introduced to the characters in winter, the first (and last) season of a calendar year. In spring, a season that usually signals a fresh start, the characters get together. In summer, a season that generally symbolizes joy and happiness, their relationship seems to be in full bloom and they both actively try to make their dreams come true. In fall, we witness in the literal sense of the word, the downfall of their relationship. It is notable that this is the only season where the title card is black, putting extra emphasis on the dark and unhappy chapter in Mia and Sebastian’s story (see figure 3). When we enter winter, the story, much like a calendar year, ends.

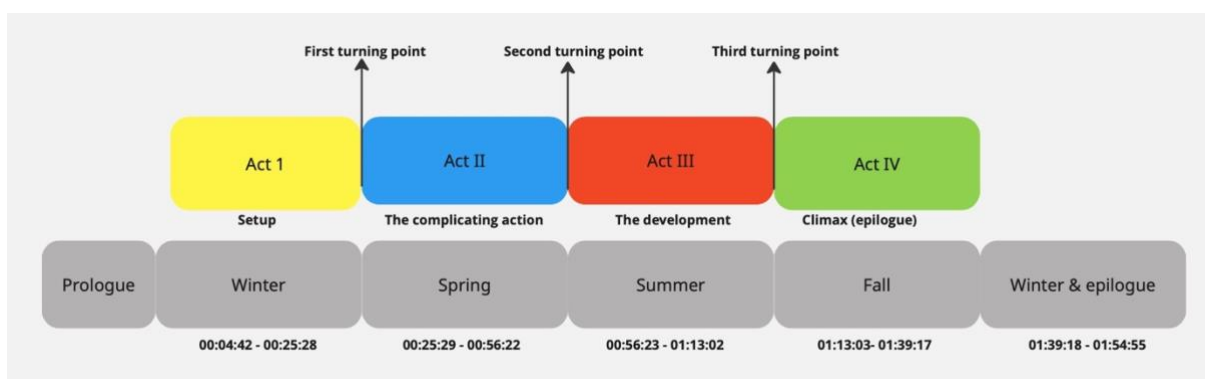


Figure 5 - Four-act structure

Although maybe not intentional, the use of seasons could also be interpreted as a nod to the always sunny Los Angeles weather. Even though time passes, and so do the seasons, the weather does not really seem to change, which is usually something associated with the changing of seasons. The title of the opening number, “Another Day Of Sun” can be considered an ironic contrast with its setting being winter.

The film’s act structure and division into seasons can be identified as a device through the lens of the neoformalist approach. This device mainly has a compositional motivation, which refers to the use of techniques that reflect on the narrative structure of the film.

### *Narrative themes*

The story of *La La Land* consists of two story arcs: the love story of Mia and Sebastian, and Mia and Sebastian chasing their individual dreams. First, I will discuss how the love story arc in *La La Land* relates to the romantic theme often seen in musical movies. Second, I will discuss the theme of dreams in *La La Land* and how this relates to traditional musical movies.

Altman notes that it is standard for a romantic story to conclude with the union of the main characters.<sup>131</sup> Classic musical movies frequently follow the norms of romance, with a happy ending. Because this has become so standard, this outcome is usually expected by the spectator. As Altman argues, this means that the interest does not have to be on the “what will happen” but the “how will it happen”.<sup>132</sup> The biggest part of the film understandably leads the spectator to believe that there will be a happy ending both relationship wise and goal wise and complies with Altman’s idea of the romantic couple in musical movies. This eventually throws the spectator for a loop because Mia and Sebastian do not end up together. As is revealed in time jump forward, five years after their inconclusive break-up, Mia is with another man who she has a child with.



Figure 6 - Five years later, Mia and not Sebastian

In conclusion, *La La Land* presents a deviation from the classic romantic happy ending trope commonly found in musical movies. Despite the build-up and the protagonist’s profound connection, the narrative subverts the anticipated romantic norm. The film ends on a bittersweet note, with a look into what could have been their romantic ending. Richard Dyer might have compared the ending of the film to the type of ending he mentions is commonly attributed to musicals, like *A Star is Born* (Frank Pierson, 1976), having a tough and bitter nature.<sup>133</sup> This dream sequence in the epilogue could be interpreted as a homage to this classical romantic trope by director Damien Chazelle because he does give the spectator the satisfaction of seeing a happy ending. At the same time, with the ‘real’ ending, he hopes to maintain the integrity of the harshness of the real world portrayed in the film.

<sup>131</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 32.

<sup>132</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 32.

<sup>133</sup> Dyer, “The Sound of Music,” 59.

During a visit to the University of Wisconsin-Madison, Chazelle spoke about the duality of the semi-happy ending of the film:

Pitching *La La Land*, Damien found that many producers insisted that the couple unite for a happy ending. Damien objected that many of the great romantic films, including *Casablanca*, *A Star Is Born*, and *Gone with the Wind*, center on lost love. Still, he found a way to a happy ending by offering an alternative outcome that many viewers will prefer.<sup>134</sup>

The duality of this finale combines the acknowledgement of the audience's expectation and potential desire for a happy ending, with also underlining the reality of how dreaming big needs sacrificing sometimes. It is a nod to the classic film tropes, but also a new take on happy endings. The prologue is also a clear example of how duality shows in the film: it shares a second possible course of Mia and Sebastian's life, enforcing the dual-focus, this time between reality and a fantastical ending.

The dual ending of the film is identified as a device, which can be defined using all four of Thompson's motivations: compositional, realistic, artistic, and intertextual. It is a compositional device because of its impact on the narrative structure of the film. The fantasy scenes in the ending are also artistically motivated because the dreamlike ending aligns with the film's choice to blend the real world with fantasy. The real part of the ending, where it is made clear that Mia and Sebastian do not end up together, is the realistic part of the device, portraying the harsh reality of how life does not always turn out the way we might want to. The fantasy sequence, where the spectator witnesses what could have been, also carries some intertextual references to the traditional musical genre, envisioning a happy ending, as was usually expected in movie musicals.

### *The dual-focus structure*

The movie musical frequently employs the trope of basing the storyline and narrative on the romantic involvement of two main characters. According to Altman, romantic relationships are often the center of a story in musical films, making the romantic relationship a recurring theme in musicals:

Instead of focusing all its interest on a single central character, following the trajectory of her progress, the American film musical as a dual focus, built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values. This dual-focus structure requires the viewer to be sensitive not so much to chronology and progression – for the outcome of the male/female match is entirely conventional and thus quite predictable – but to simultaneity and comparison.<sup>135</sup>

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<sup>134</sup> David Bordwell, "New colors to sing: Damien Chazelle on films and filmmaking," *David Bordwell's website on cinema*, Accessed March 22, 2024, <https://www.davidbordwell.net/blog/2018/03/06/new-colors-to-sing-damien-chazelle-on-films-and-filmmaking/>

<sup>135</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 19.

In this case, *La La Land* is no exception, because the film follows two main characters, Mia and Sebastian, trying to make it in Los Angeles. Mia is an aspiring actress, while Sebastian is a jazz musician wishing to open his own jazz club one day. A more elaborate summary and segmentation of the film can be found in the appendix.

The film opens with an extravagant musical number set in a traffic jam in Los Angeles, after which we first meet the main characters. We also witness the first encounter between Mia and Sebastian, which is not romantic at all, but laced with frustration, with Sebastian honking at Mia, and Mia flipping Sebastian the finger. They both do not seem to remember this encounter when they properly meet, but it does have function for the spectator. Altman writes that the narrative structure of the musical is used to establish the strong connection between the two main characters, so the audience perceives them as a destined couple.<sup>136</sup> According to Altman, the sequence of scenes is not determined by plot point, but in response to a more fundamental need, which is for the spectator to sense the eventual lovers as a couple even when they have not met yet or are not together.<sup>137</sup> The first meeting of the main characters can be seen as the starting point of the direction the narrative structure is taking in the film.



Figure 7 - The middlefinger from Mia's point of view

This also endorses the concept of the dual-focus narrative as explained by Altman. He sets apart the narrative mechanism that is usually found in movie musicals from other traditional genres where a chronological order of events is commonly used to imply causal relations.<sup>138</sup> In the case of the dual-focus narrative, the story unfolds through a series of segments that are designed in pairs. The

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<sup>136</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 28.

<sup>137</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 28.

<sup>138</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 36.

segments are used to highlight certain emotions, or the development and experiences of the main characters. Altman notes that in films with dual-focus structure, events often unfold simultaneously or display similarities, with scenes mirroring each other when it comes to emotions, actions, or developments.<sup>139</sup>

One of the first examples of the dual-focus employed in *La La Land* is right after the opening number has ended. We first see Sebastian stuck in the traffic jam, rewinding the same piece of music by famous jazz pianist Thelonious Monk on his old-school built-in car radio. The camera moves on to Mia in the car, appearing to be on the phone with someone but actually rehearsing a script, presumably for an audition. These introductions immediately pair the characters with their passion. Sebastian as a jazz musician carefully listening to a piece of music, Mia as an actress rehearsing her lines for an audition. It implies that no matter where they are, even when they are stuck in traffic, they are consumed with their passion. The traffic starts moving, but because Mia is still focused on the script, she does not start driving, which causes Sebastian to get frustrated, honk and drive past her. When he stops to give Mia an irritated look, she raises her middle finger and realizes she should start driving.

After the opening scene, the storyline splits up and follows Mia's point of view first. The spectator gets to know Mia, and after her introduction (see plot segmentation, 1. Mia) shares her point of view up to her seeing Sebastian for the first time (consciously). She is drawn into a restaurant because she hears a piece of piano music, which is named "Mia & Sebastian's Theme" on the official soundtrack.<sup>140</sup> While we see Mia watching Sebastian play, the music flows over into a car honk, which transports the spectator back to the traffic jam, but this time from Sebastian's point of view



<sup>139</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 28.

<sup>140</sup> "Mia & Sebastian's Theme," track 3 on Justin Hurwitz, *La La Land (Original Motion Picture Soundtrack)*, Interscope, 2016.

(scene 14 and 15, see detailed segmentation on page 56 and 57). We are introduced to Sebastian as well and follow him up to the same moment as the end of Mia's introduction sequence.

*Figure 8 - The middlefinger from Sebastian's point of view*

Mia and Sebastian's storylines merge in the restaurant, with Mia watching Sebastian playing piano. When he is finished, Sebastian gets fired for playing the wrong music and he and Mia lock eyes. While he grabs his money and walks towards the exit, Mia walks towards Sebastian, wanting to tell him how beautiful his music was, but Sebastian does not interact with her and walks past her. Mia is left surprised and insulted.

The structure of the first part of the film emphasizes the theme of duality, which aligns with Altman's concept of the dual-focus narrative. Here, the story is presented through pairs and paired sequences, illustrating how the narrative unfolds in a dualistic manner. The spectator is introduced to the main characters through a short sequence that both start in the traffic jam from their individual points of view and arrive back at another meeting point where their story intertwines, which is the restaurant where Sebastian plays piano.<sup>141</sup> Because we start and arrive at the same point (traffic jam and restaurant), it can be assumed that the events in their introduction sequence happen at the same time. The sequences share similarities, mainly showing the characters engaging with their passion and showing them in their workplace, in which they both seem unhappy. After both characters are properly introduced, the film moves on to the second part of the film.

The dual-focus approach can be identified as a compositional device, as it forms the whole narrative construction of *La La Land*. The approach involves two distinct yet interconnected story arcs (the romantic and the ambition focus), each focusing on another component, but equally important aspects to the plot.

### *Parallelism*

A compelling way in which the concept of duality manifest itself in (this) film is through the use of parallels. Reflections or echoes of certain moments, themes, locations, and visuals are very present in *La La Land*. Duality does not only manifest itself through simple opposition (for example, two storylines), but also through more subtle, interwoven reflections of earlier moments in the film. In the case of the examples discussed below, the parallel has significant meaning for the story and thus the narrative structure of the film.

In the case of *La La Land*, the parallels seem to have different functions. Sometimes, it serves as a marker for where Mia and Sebastian's personal stories are heading (e.g. driving shots of Mia, see figure 10, 11, 12 and 13). Other times, it seems to be a foreshadowing of what's coming (the theatre shutting down, breakup). As discussed before, it also serves as a clear marker for which point of view the spectator is following, which is seen in the highway scenes with Mia's middle finger from two

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<sup>141</sup> Mia's introduction sequence is 11 minutes and 7 seconds long and Sebastian's introduction sequence is 8 minutes and 11 seconds long.

different perspectives (figure 7 and 8). There are many parallels in the film, and probably too many to discuss. I have chosen a few that stood out to me because of their function in the narrative. The opening number already includes a parallel to another important scene in the film, in which Mia and Sebastian properly connect and have their first dance (the “A Lovely Night” scene in Griffith Park). To start, both scenes include a song performed by mainly a woman and a man, but that is only where the similarity starts. First, there is a clear visual parallel seen in clothing. The female and male singers of the opening number wear clothes that closely resemble the outfits worn by Mia and Sebastian in Griffith Park, as can be seen in figure 9. Mia wears a yellow dress, just like the first female singer in the opening number, and Sebastian wears a classic white shirt with a tie, just like the first male singer in the opening number.



Figure 9 - Parallel in mise-en-scène

This immediately connects the opening number to Mia and Sebastian and creates an instant connection between the lyrics of the opening number and the journey of the main characters.<sup>142</sup>

*I think about that day  
I left him at a Greyhound station  
West of Santa Fé*

*We were seventeen, but he was sweet and it was true  
Still I did what I had to do  
'Cause I just knew*

*Summer Sunday nights  
We'd sink into our seats  
Right as they dimmed out all the lights  
A Technicolor world made out of music and machine*

<sup>142</sup> La La Land Cast, “Another Day Of Sun,” Genius. Last accessed April 24, 2024. <https://genius.com/La-la-land-cast-another-day-of-sun-lyrics>

*It called me to be on that screen  
And live inside each scene*

*Without a nickel to my name  
Hopped a bus, here I came  
Could be brave or just insane*

*We'll have to see*

*'Cause maybe in that sleepy town  
He'll sit one day, the lights are down  
He'll see my face and think of how  
He used to know me*

The lyrics tell the story of how the girl had to leave a boy to chase her dream, and how in the future, he might see her again when she became successful and remember what they once had, which is quite literally what eventually happens with Mia and Sebastian. Other lyrics of the song also allude to chasing dreams, and not giving up on those dreams. In conclusion, the opening number uses *mise-en-scène* to connect the scene to the main characters and uses the lyrical content to establish the theme of dreaming, while also foreshadowing what is to come for Mia and Sebastian. The opening number “Another Day Of Sun” is not just a lively introduction of the film, but also uses the *mise-en-scène* to foreshadow the unfolding story to the audience.

Another parallelism with a foreshadowing function is created through scenes of Mia driving her car. The first time Mia is in her car she drives past the Rialto theatre, where she is supposed to meet up with Sebastian later. She looks at the theatre, and subtly smiles when she drives past it (see figure 10). She seems relaxed, content, and looking forward to her date with Sebastian. The next time we see her in the exact same position, she drives past the theatre again, but this time the Rialto has closed down. Mia’s hair is up, giving the impression of a more reserved and serious look, which matches with her facial expression, which is much more low-spirited than before (see figure 11). The scene seems to be hinting at some friction, especially with the contrast from the first time Mia is in this exact place. The scene also comes right before the big fight between Mia and Sebastian (scene 52, see detailed segmentation on page 60), which connects the dejected mood of the scene to narrative developments of the story.<sup>143</sup>

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<sup>143</sup> The music of the montage this scene follows has slowed down and is less upbeat than it was in the beginning of the montage (scene 48, see detailed segmentation on page 59). It is worth noting that Mia wears green in the second time she drives past the theatre. The closed down theatre, along with the changed mood of the music and Mia’s more serious expression, indicate some sort of tension, which culminates in the big fight scene a few scenes later (scene 52, see detailed segmentation on page 60). Visually, this scene stands out because of the room that is flooded with green lighting. The spectator has seen this apartment before, but it was never green. The return of a color that is connected to a moment where Mia is clearly unhappy and worried in a pivotal scene (the fight scene) indicates a connection between the mood of the two scenes and even though this sub question does not discuss music or color but I think this discovery deserved to be noted.





Figure 10 - Mia in her car, driving past theatre where she will meet up with Sebastian for their date.



Figure 11 - Mia in her car again, driving past closed theatre

The third time Mia is seen in her car, the setting looks quite similar, but the most notable difference is the different driving direction (see figure 12). In the first two instances Mia is driving in her car, she is moving towards the right, which can be associated with moving forward.<sup>144</sup> When she is in her car for the third time, she is driving towards the left, which is not just a shift in literal direction, but also indicates a shift in the direction of her story. This aligns with where she is at in her life at the moment of this scene, because it is the moment where she decides to leave Los Angeles and move back to her parents after giving up on her relationship and being an actress. After the close-up shot, she is seen driving towards the left in the following shots, enforcing Mia going backwards and giving up on her dream (see figure 13). She seems to be wearing the same green shirt as in figure 11, but it is not clear if she is driving past the Rialto theatre again.



Figure 12 - Mia in her car, now driving the other direction

<sup>144</sup> Associating movement to the right with moving forward is a culturally defined aspect, influenced by factors such as the direction in which we are taught to read. Furthermore, using literal movement as figurative movement is a commonly used convention in filmmaking. For example, in the famous Western *Stagecoach* (John Ford, 1939), the deviation in the direction of the shot (changing from right to left to moving from right to left) is used to underscore the narrative. (David Bordwell and Kristin Thompson, *Film Art: An Introduction*. (New York: McGraw Hill, 1992), 370.



Figure 13 – Mia's car driving towards the left

These similar scenes do not only use the location and setting as a parallel to support the story, but also shows how shot composition and the direction of action in a frame can have a distinct narrative function.<sup>145</sup> This is a bit more of a subtle construction than previous examples, and I discuss this example because it shows the many layers of visual storytelling in *La La Land*. This collection of similar scenes shows how several elements of the mise-en-scène collectively convey a message and corroborate the story. The costume and make-up (the subtle difference in her hair down and up), the almost identical lighting, the acting (Mia's facial expression) and the movement (the different directions of driving the car) all work together to get the point across.

A different type of parallelism that has narrative function is created by returning to the same setting or location. This seems to serve the purpose of a point of reference in the current state of the story. Returning to the same setting or location happens several times in the film. One example of this can be seen in figure 10, where the story is set in or around Griffith Park and the Griffith Observatory several times throughout the film.

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<sup>145</sup> This mirroring with different directions is seen again in another parallel scene. In the beginning of the film, a famous actress enters the coffeeshop where Mia is working as a barista. When she exits the shop, she steps in a golf cart, which is pointed to the left side of the frame. When this scene is mirrored at the ending, when Mia is the famous actress who buys her coffee at the shop and leaves in a golfcart, the cart is facing the other side of the frame, the right side.



Figure 14 - Setting parallels in location, in this case Griffith Park and Griffith Observatory.

When the romantic connection between Mia and Sebastian seems to be established, the scene is set in Griffith Park (see first image of figure 14 and scene 26 in the detailed segmentation on page 57). The second time this location, more specifically now set at the Griffith Observatory, is shown, it is in a scene shown in the film *Rebel Without a Cause* (Nicholas Ray, 1955)<sup>146</sup>. It is the film that Mia and Sebastian watch on their first date and where they almost share their first kiss. The film is referenced earlier in the film (scene 29, see detailed segmentation on page 58), when Mia and Sebastian discuss her callback at The Lighthouse Café. Mia admits to never having seen the film, which prompts Sebastian to invite her to watch it at the Rialto theatre. When Mia and Sebastian almost kiss during their cinema date, they are interrupted by the sudden end of the film, but their date continues because Mia has an idea, which is visiting the real Griffith Observatory they have just seen in the film. When Mia and Sebastian arrive at the Griffith Observatory, the shot is almost an exact copy of the shot used in *Rebel Without a Cause*, only it is now set at night (see second and third picture of figure 14). They share a fantastical dance and finally kiss at the end (scene 40, see detailed segmentation on page 59). The fourth and final time this location is used is after Mia's big audition, when the pair discusses their future and relationship (scene 64, see detailed segmentation on page 61). The thematic, visual and narrative parallelisms as devices in *La La Land* mainly have compositional function, tying various narrative threads together, resulting in narrative and visual harmony. Some parallels, like the one in figure 14, pay homage old Hollywood films, carrying some intertextual motivation by referencing other films that the director wants to tie his film to. Parallelisms can also be artistically motivated as a

<sup>146</sup> The film was shot in the then newly introduced format of CinemaScope, which is also used in *La La Land* and clearly referenced in the opening shot of the film, creating yet another way of connecting *La La Land* to old Hollywood filmmaking and underscoring the film's awareness of its predecessors.

device because the visual aspect of it creates an overall artistic style, which gives the film a unique look and feel.

*La La Land* uses a blend of narrative techniques that stems from traditional filmmaking as well as innovative elements. When analyzing the film's structure through the lens of both older and newer visions on act structure, it becomes clear that *La La Land*'s act structure closely aligns with the three-act model as discussed by Syd Field, mixed with a rich dual-focus narrative. The narrative structure clearly establishes the theme of duality. Duality can be found on different levels: in the act structure, which follows two storylines, in the central themes of romance and dreaming, subtle and more obvious parallels, the dialogue and lyrical content of songs and the 'double' ending. This dual-focus narrative not just tracks the romantic story of Mia and Sebastian, but it also intertwines with their professional paths, which are both separate and connected: their passion is what brings them together in the first place, and they are both supportive of each other's dreams, but this passion is also what leads to conflicts later on, which effects their romantic relationship. While still paying homage to the traditional musical format, the film strategically deploys elements such as an unconventional ending to create a narrative that sets itself apart from what is usually expected to be seen in traditional musical films.

Most, if not all devices regarding the narrative structure, carry some form of dichotomy, creating the dominant theme of duality. All devices interact seamlessly to emphasize the films dominant: duality. The theme of duality transcends just the narrative structure and manifests itself in the visual image of the film as well. As seen in the examples given above, the story is established through notable visual techniques, like the use of parallelisms, which intertwines with the narrative structure of the film. The following part of the analysis will shift to the visual realm, examining how *La La Land* uses mise-en-scène, specifically color, to enhance the storytelling.

## **2. In what ways does the mise-en-scène of *La La Land*, particularly through its use of color, echo the storytelling and challenge traditional conventions of the musical genre?**

The way a story is told extends beyond what is heard in dialogue and, in the context of musical, in music. It inherently includes visual elements as well. This is where the mise-en-scène comes into play. The use of color is central to the film and will be the subject of this part of the analysis. Monahan and Barsam write that color is not used just to give a film an overall look, but it has function as well: it can be used to convey mood and meaning.<sup>147</sup> Bordwell and Thompson add that color can also be used as a motif, used to emphasize certain elements in a film.<sup>148</sup> Through mise-en-scène, conscious use of color can also contribute to narrative progression.<sup>149</sup> On some occasions color is used

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<sup>147</sup> Monahan and Barsam, *Looking at Movies*, 190.

<sup>148</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 52.

<sup>149</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 121.

to display contrast, and other times it is used to create connection. It also functions as a signifier for a certain emotional state of mind or is used to signal a parallel connection as described in the first sub question.

Functional use of color is used on these different levels in the film, and this segment of the analysis will examine the use of color and its function within the storytelling and narrative. The recurring theme of duality as discussed in the previous sub question is again present, in the use of color this time, which serves as a deepening extra layer to the narrative.

### *Color contrast*

When Mia and Sebastian first appear on screen, they are not yet surrounded by or dressed in bright colors, which are typical for the film as a whole. They are seen dressed in and surrounded by neutral colors: Sebastian in brown and beige tones, representing the warm and melancholic feeling of jazz and the past he seems to hold on to, and Mia in white and gray tones, possibly representing the acting business in Hollywood, often described as cold and hard. While both color schemes are way less vivid compared to the lively colors seen elsewhere in the film, there is an obvious contrast in these colors in undertone (warm and cold), which establishes a contrast and duality between the characters. Creating contrast can be used as a tactic to guide the audience, because our eyes naturally gravitate towards differences.<sup>150</sup> Highlighting contrast between these characters emphasizes the dual focus narrative discussed in the previous sub question and ties into the duality of *La La Land*.



*Figure 15 - Contrast between warm and cool undertones*

When Mia and Sebastian properly meet at the pool party, and do not seem to hit it off right away, they are again seen in contrasting colors, this time, in vivid tints of red and yellow. After Mia requests the song *I Ran* from Sebastian's band, he recognizes her as the girl he walked right past in the restaurant. After his performance, he finds Mia and they engage in a snarky conversation. The two primary colors clash, just like their personalities. But something interesting happens in the next scene, when

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<sup>150</sup> Bordwell, Thompson and Smith, *Film Art*, 144.

they find their cars together and have a normal, calmer conversation: Mia has adopted some of Sebastian's color through her red bag (see figure 16).



Figure 16 – Mia adapting Sebastian's red

Scott Higgins writes that using an obvious accent of color is a fairly standard ploy for tying color to the task of guiding the spectator's attention.<sup>151</sup> Since the color red is so present in Sebastian's outfit in the previous scene, the decision to have Mia wear a red bag during their first romantic encounter can be seen as an intentional choice, and signals a budding connection between the two, even though it has not literally been established yet. Again, the conscious use of color through the mise-en-scène, in this case the costumes, serves as a visual guide for the spectator and enriches the narrative in this way.

The color contrasts in the film are used to highlight differences between Mia and Sebastian's world and personality. Not only through the contrast of warm and cool undertones, but also through clashing colors like red and yellow juxtaposed in a frame, reflects their different lives. When we see a change in the construction of this device, like Mia adapting the red from Sebastian's outfit, it serves as a compositional device to guide the narrative and create an extra layer of storytelling.

#### *Color connection*

When Mia and Sebastian meet again after their initial confrontation in the traffic jam, they are surrounded by the color blue. Leading up to their meeting, Mia is seen wandering the streets looking for her car. The sky is blue, the streets are covered in blue lighting, and she is wearing a blue dress.

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<sup>151</sup> Higgins, "Color at the Center," 457.



*Figure 11 - Blue taking over the frame in several scenes leading up to their meeting*

Sebastian is also wearing blue following up to their meeting. This similarity in color signals they are connected, and on the same level. Sebastian is playing the music he likes most, instead of Christmas songs he is supposed to play, and Mia is drawn to his music (and thus his passion) and enjoys it. Even though the colors indicate a connection between the two, Sebastian does not want to interact with Mia and the relationship is not yet established by their actions. But it is already established through color (blue), and sets up their romance for the audience, before the characters realize it themselves.



*Figure 12 – Blue at Sebastian’s workplace*

Altman mentions this type of narrative technique, where a strong connection between the main characters is established for the audience, through the way the story is structured.<sup>152</sup> And even though he does not specifically mention the use of color, it applies to his theory where the audience already understands the deep connection between the characters when they eventually get together, with the use of the color blue in the scenes described above as a fitting example.

Another color that is often used to connect specific settings is purple (see figure 19). Just like the color blue, purple seems to function as a motif for moments where their romantic connection is on the foreground of the story. During the “A Lovely Night” scene, where Mia and Sebastian sing about their non-existing romantic connection, which is obviously there, the sky behind them is mainly purple, transitioning into some orange on the horizon (scene 26, see detailed segmentation on page 57). After their first get-together at The Lighthouse Café, Sebastian is strolling along a pier and the sky is a similar shade of purple with some orange. Sebastian sings “City Of Stars” (which is a song that Mia and Sebastian sing together later in the film as well) and one of the lyrics of the short song is “Is this the start of something wonderful and new?”, which indicates he is thinking about Mia and what they could be, after spending some time together. When the film enters the chapter of summer, the purple skies are seen again several times during their dates (see last two pictures in figure 19).

The purple skies also complement the theme of dreaming, because this color of sky is not common. Using a non-realistic color in a conventional setting can transform an ordinary moment into a magical, fantastical one, aligning with the theme of dreaming. When Sebastian picks up Mia after they share their first kiss, purple trash cans are very present in the scene (scene 41, see detailed segmentation on page 59) and Mia is also wearing purple. The color has taken over some mundane objects in daily life as well, which could suggest how the dreamlike state of their budding relationship infiltrates every aspect of their lives, coloring their everyday world in the color connected to their romance.

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<sup>152</sup> Altman, *The American Film Musical*, 28.





*Figure 19 – Purple skies, costumes and setting in romantic moments*

It is not until the final sequence of the film that purple and blue return as the predominant color in frame (see figure 20). Seb's, Sebastian's jazz club, is lit in a blue and purple light that takes over the whole space and thus frame. It is here where the pair shares their last significant moment together, seeing each other again after all those years. The return of these now significant colors seem to serve as a reminder for what their relationship used to be and helps to transport the spectator back to romantic moments in their relationship. The purple and blue evoke a sense of melancholy of what their relationship once was. This feeling is underscored by the acting in the final shots, with a few close-ups focusing on the subtle smile and nod Mia and Sebastian give each other, acknowledging they both achieved the dreams they once had as a couple and remembering their respective efforts into helping each other achieve those dreams. The colors frame the bittersweet reality of their final moment together and by doing so, seem to bring their story full circle.

The device of color connection functions as a compositional tool. The use of blue and purple during romantic moments weave these individual moments together into a cohesive narrative structure, providing extra guidance for the spectator by echoing the storytelling in the use of color.



Figure 20 – The ending scene is almost completely purple and blue.

### *Color aesthetic*

It is safe to say that *La La Land* is a very colorful film. The vivid colors scattered throughout the film create a unique visual style and gives *La La Land* a distinct look and feel. As discussed in this part of the analysis, color can have function for the story and the narrative. But it would be a stretch to assume that every color has meaning. In the vivid style of *La La Land*, attributing meaning to every use of significant color would be nearly impossible. When discussing film style, David Bordwell outlines four broad functions of style, of which the decorative purpose is one.<sup>153</sup> According to Bordwell, this does not mean that style is sometimes just a form of superficial decorations but should be considered as an invitation to the audience to appreciate the pattern or arrangements made in the film.<sup>154</sup> Besides narrative functions, the use of color in *La La Land* also creates a cohesive colorful visual style. Reflecting on Bordwell's observations about decorative style, this distinct visual style encourages the spectator to appreciate the pattern throughout the film. An example of a visual, color pattern with decorative function can be seen in several instances where *La La Land* seems to be copying the Technicolor style from the old Hollywood musicals. This decorative type of visual style

<sup>153</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 33, 34.

<sup>154</sup> Bordwell, *Figures Traced In Light*, 34.

is reminiscent of these musicals from the old days, with sometimes direct references and copies of visual style from certain musicals (see figure 21), thus establishing a pattern for the audience connecting *La La Land* to the rich history of the genre.

The aesthetic use of color functions both as an artistic device and transtextual device. The vibrant color palette used throughout the film creates a unique visual style for the film, while also referencing the rich history of Technicolor-colored musicals like the films in figure 21.



Figure 21 – Colorful references to famous musicals (from top to bottom) *Sweet Charity* (Bob Fosse, 1969), *Singin' in the Rain* (Gene Kelly & Stanley Donen, 1952), *Funny Face* (Stanley Donen, 1957), and *Singin' in the Rain* again.

Bright colors are not new to the musical genre. But in *La La Land*, the use of color is taken a few steps further by creating a system of color to guide the spectator through the story. In *La La Land*, the consistent use of specific colors functions as a narrative coding system. It is used to highlight differences in character, such as the contrast between Mia's cool tones and Sebastian's warm tones in the opening scene. The system also signals the development of their relationship: when their romance evolves, so do the colors. Mia and Sebastian start adapting each other's colors, like Mia adapting Sebastian's red outfit in her purse. They also start sharing colors, signifying them coming together: their once separated colors are now shared. Significant romantic moments, like their first dance and the first moments of their official relationship, are marked by the colors blue and purple. The return of these colors during significant moments connects these events for the spectator, almost as a common thread to follow. Whenever the story evolves, the colors reflect that evolution. In conclusion, color mainly acts as a visual echo to the story, enforcing the narrative and connecting important moments in their relationship, while also continuing the tradition of bright colors in the musical genre.

## Conclusion

This thesis aimed to examine the role of *La La Land* within the musical genre, particularly paying attention to the integration of traditional genre elements with modern and innovative narrative and visual techniques. Through an analysis of the film's narrative structure, mise-en-scène and particularly use of color, visual style and thematic content, I aimed to uncover how these elements collaborate to create the film's dominant theme of duality. The primary research question of this thesis was: In what ways does *La La Land* combine traditional elements of the musical genre with innovative narrative and visual techniques to redefine the genre? Two sub questions were developed to help answer the main question.

A neoformalist approach was used to conduct the analysis. Using this approach allowed for meaning to be constructed through the devices present in the film, because neoformalism is rooted in the understanding that meaning is not fixed but constructed through these devices, which are unique to every film. This was especially useful for analyzing the use of color through the mise-en-scène because it allowed for a structured analysis on a concept (color) that has no fixed meaning. Thompson's neoformalism puts emphasis on the concept of the dominant, which she defines as a formal principle that controls a work on every level through the use of devices. In the case of this thesis, the dominant was identified as duality. Defining the dominant has offered a welcome structure for the analysis, serving as a guiding principle to examine the devices that secure the film's place within the evolution of the musical genre.

The first sub question that was answered was: What narrative techniques does *La La Land* employ to blend traditional storytelling with innovative plot developments, and how do these principles relate to the musical genre? *La La Land* employs a traditional three-act structure combined with a thematic division into seasons. This immediately emphasizes the theme of duality on a more abstract level, because on the one hand, a traditional act structure is used to form the story, while also adding an extra layer to the narrative by the division into chapters, to add emotional depth to different parts of the story. The main themes of love and dreams are woven into the dual-focus narrative, demonstrating how these themes can support but also conflict with each other. All these devices enrich the narrative, supporting the dominant theme of duality while also adhering to some genre traditions. These findings conclude that *La La Land* successfully combines traditional musical elements, like the themes of romance and dreams being explored in song and dance, with innovative narrative elements such as the dual ending.

The second sub question that was answered was: In what ways does the mise-en-scène of *La La Land*, particularly through its use of color, echo the storytelling and *challenge* traditional conventions of the musical genre? Analyzing the use of color and possible meaning behind it posed a challenge, because there is no general consensus about the meaning of color, not in academia and not in society. It was necessary to link the use of color to other elements of the film to discover a suspected pattern or system in the use of color, which was done by connecting the colors to the

narrative structure of *La La Land*. Combined with a detailed segmentation, reviewing the screenshots taken from the film revealed a pattern that paralleled, or echoed, the narrative structure of the film. Notable use of color showed through several elements of the mise-en-scène, and elements like setting, lighting, costumes were all used to create the pattern of narrative echoing. I selected examples that exemplified this pattern, such as the contrasting undertones of the colors seen in Mia and Sebastian's first appearance, parallels in costumes on screen and the continued use of blue and purple throughout their relationship. Significant and structured use of color is used to echo the narrative and by doing so, provides an extra layer of narrative structure.

As became clear in the analysis, the concept of duality is interfused throughout the whole film: its narrative structure, thematic subject matter, visual style are all cloaked in the concept of duality. The film makes repeated references to contradictions and thus duality several times: realism versus utopia, happiness versus disappointment, belonging versus rejection, success versus failure and constant references in the future to the past of filmmaking and jazz. On a less literal level, duality is seen through the use of the classic musical dual-focus narrative, focusing on a duo of storylines, and the exchange between adhering to traditions of the genre versus applying newer, more surprising techniques regarding narrative structure and mise-en-scène.

The detailed and systematic analysis of *La La Land* provided insight into the complexity of the film, which unfolds through a meticulous collaboration between narrative structure and the mise-en-scène, which makes the object deserving of academic analysis. This collaboration came about through the use of various devices: the act structure, the dual-focus narrative, parallelisms, color contrast, color connections and color aesthetics. All these devices create a cohesive narrative that deeply engages with the concept of duality, making it the focus of the film's narrative and visual structure, and artistic expression. This explains how *La La Land* redefines the musical genre by combining traditional elements, like the theme of dreaming and the musical expressions, with innovative narrative techniques like an unexpected but still fulfilling ending due to the extensive dream sequence prologue. The film constantly references other famous films from the genre, therefore rooting the film in genre history and tradition. *La La Land* transcends the traditions of the genre by creating a unique narrative structure and visual image that supports this narrative structure.

I am aware that this thesis has some limitations. This thesis is limited by its focus on *La La Land* as a representation of modern musicals, which is not enough to paint a complete picture of the evolution of the genre. It is also important to note that the analysis remains an interpretation of the subject matter and inherently carries some form of subjectivity. However, I am confident that the neoformalist approach was the right choice for this thesis, because neoformalism offers a lens to analyze patterns in works of art, which was necessary to uncover the structured use of color. Further research could broaden the scope by analyzing other contemporary musicals, such as *Mamma Mia!* (Phyllida Lloyd, 2008), *Hairspray* (Adam Shankman, 2007), *The Greatest Showman* (Michael Gracey, 2018) and *Mean Girls* (Samantha Jayne & Arturo Perez Jr., 2024). Furthermore, audience

reception analysis could offer insight in how the narrative structure and use of color are perceived more widely.

This research has not only fueled my appreciation for the musical genre but has also reminded me of the power of color. I would encourage everyone to pay more attention to the use of color when watching a film, as it can significantly enhance storytelling and subsequently the viewing experience. After all, is that not what we all seek in film, to genuinely enjoy the craftsmanship behind every frame?

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## Appendix

### 1. Plot segmentation

#### C. Credits

1. Traffic jam on the highway (00:00 – 05:45)
  - a. Cars in traffic jam, performance of “Another Day Of Sun”
  - b. Sebastian and Mia are both in their cars, frustrated with the traffic jam. While Mia is reading a script, Sebastian passes her, honking, because she does not drive, and she gives him the finger.
2. Mia (05:56 – 16:46)
  - a. Mia is at work as a barista in a coffee shop at the film studios lot. A famous actress enters and orders coffee, while insisting on paying herself, even though it was offered to her for free. Mia seems to be in awe of the actress. Mia receives a notification about an audition on her phone, and when she walks out, she bumps into a customer who spills his coffee on her white blouse.
  - b. Mia is auditioning in a blue winter coat. While she performs an emotional scene, she is rudely interrupted. She is thanked and she leaves. In the hallway, we see several women who look and dress like Mia. She unzipped her coat, which reveals the coffee-stained white blouse. She gets in the elevator with a few look-a-likes.
  - c. Mia returns home in a house with a Christmas tree in it. She walks into her room and lays on her bed.
  - d. Mia gets out of the shower and looks in the mirror. Music starts and her roommate steps in while another roommate asks how Mia’s audition went. A fourth roommate walks in the bathroom as well and they put on their makeup in front of the mirror. One roommate mentions that Mia should come along, Mia does not want to. One of her roommates picks out a blue dress for her (the girls wear red, yellow and green). A sing- and dance number starts and the girls sing “Someone In The Crowd”. Mia decides to stay home, but she seems to doubt her decision while laying on her bed. Then she steps out in her blue dress and joins her roommates in choreography on the street. While the music keeps going, the four women get in a car and arrive at a lavish party. There is a montage of party scenes.
  - e. The music slows down and Mia is by herself in the bathroom. She sings a solo while she looks in the mirror. When she steps out and the music starts swelling up, the party guests move in slow-motion. The song continues and ends with fireworks.
  - f. A sign about a car towing is in view and Mia's car is gone. She starts walking and passes a club, which she enters because of the beautiful piano playing she hears. Inside, her gaze remains fixed on the piano player, who does not come into view. The piano playing intertwines with a louder tone, which eventually turns out to be a horn.
3. Sebastian (16:47 – 25:00)
  - a. Sebastian is in his car on the same highway as the beginning, his point of view is followed now. He's honking because cars don't drive, and we see the same scene as 1b from Sebastian's perspective.
  - b. Sebastian arrives at a gas station/cafe and has a drink. He looks at a club across the street (Van Beek tapas & tunes) with a disapproving look.
  - c. Sebastian walks into his apartment. He is startled because his sister is in his house. unexpectedly They bicker and talk about him wanting to start his own jazz club.
  - d. Sebastian plays along with a piece of music that he plays on a record player.
  - e. We are at the restaurant where Sebastian works as a pianist. He shakes hands with his boss Bill and Bill says he doesn't want to hear jazz but the agreed upon setlist. He starts playing Christmas music. He looks annoyed but keeps playing the Christmas music. Then he starts playing a piano piece (“Mia & Sebastian’s Theme”). We see Mia in frame looking at him. He

looks at her too but is interrupted by Bill firing him. Mia watches from a distance. Sebastian walks away Mia tries to address him, but he walks past her and Mia is left offended.

4. Spring (25:01 – 36:33)
  - a. We see a trio of auditions by Mia.
  - b. Spring has sprung. The setting is a pool party. After a boring conversation with a guy at the party, Mia walks away and listens to a cover of *Take On Me* and walks toward the band that is playing. She sees Sebastian standing behind the keyboard and seems surprised. Mia does a request song for *I Ran*, and Sebastian recognizes Mia. She keeps watching and begins to dance. They have eye contact. Mia walks away and Sebastian looks for her after the performance. He admits he was an asshole that night he walked past her. They bicker. After the party ends, Sebastian walks past Mia and she tries to get his attention by calling him "George Michael". He turns around and Mia asks if he will take her keys.
  - c. Mia and Sebastian walk down a street lit by streetlamps looking for their car. Their conversation turns into a song and dance number ("A Lovely Night"). They are interrupted by a call from Greg, Mia's boyfriend. Mia has found her car and Sebastian holds the door open for her. Mia asks if she should drop him off at his car but he declines the offer because his car is nearby. It turns out that his car is not nearby at all but rather close to the party and so he has walked with Mia to walk with her. He gets into his car and drives away.
  
5. Mia & Sebastian (36:34 – 56:21)
  - a. Mia walks across the studio lot to the café where she works. Sebastian comes by and asks if she is on break. Mia is almost finished working. They walk out of the café together. Sebastian asks about Mia's boyfriend. He tells about the jazz club he wants to own and talk about why Mia wants to be an actress. In the background a scene is filmed between an actress in a red dress and an actor in a blue dress, when the director calls "cut" they start arguing. They continue walking across the film sets. Mia says she hates jazz. Sebastian asks what she is doing now, and she says nothing.
  - b. Sebastian has taken Mia to a jazz club, and they are sitting at a table at. They discuss jazz. Sebastian tells Mia about his plans to open his own jazz club. Mia gets a call about a callback. Sebastian suggests taking Mia to the film *Rebel Without A Cause* for "research" and they agree on a day and time.
  - c. Sebastian walks alone along the pier in Los Angeles, singing ("City Of Stars"). The sky is the same shade of purple as in their first meeting in 4c.
  - d. Mia gets out of her car in a parking lot. She walks into an audition. After her first sentence, Mia is cut off and can leave. She drives in her car past the Rialto theater where the film she is going to with Sebastian is playing and she immediately seems in a better mood. Once home, her boyfriend Greg comes in for a date Mia had forgotten about. During dinner she remains silent, and we see Sebastian waiting for her at the theater. Then she hears Sebastian's piano music coming from the restaurant speakers. It almost seems like a sign, and Mia excuses herself and runs away. She runs down the street, again a blue/purple sky.
  - e. Sebastian is sitting in the theatre and waits for Mia. Mia enters and stands on the stage, full in the spotlight, looking for Sebastian in the seats. They sit next to each other and watch the film. They sit closer and closer together, until their hands touch. They almost kiss, until the screen goes out and the lights come on. Mia says she has an idea and they leave.
  - f. They arrive at the Griffith Observatory, just as they have just seen in the film. The sky is blue. They go inside as music begins to play ("Planetarium"). They dance, fly, and end with a kiss.
  
6. Summer (56:22 – 1:13:01)
  - a. Mia is writing her own play. She hears a loud car horn; Sebastian is at the door. Mia gets in the car, gives Sebastian a kiss and they drive away
  - b. A montage of several dates follows. It includes a shot of the pier again with the purple sky. We also see Sebastian's sister with an engagement ring. Sebastian plays the piano at the Lighthouse Café, where it all began, and Mia dances to jazz music. As they have a drink at a

table, an old acquaintance of Sebastian's, Keith comes by. He says he and his band are looking for a keyboard player, but Sebastian turns down the offer.

- c. Mia and Sebastian are at home. Mia has just performed her one-woman-show for Sebastian. He thinks it's genius. Mia shows a logo for the jazz cafe Sebastian wants to start himself someday, called Seb's. Mia asks about Keith and they discuss their dreams.
  - d. It is morning and Mia has her mother on the phone and explains her play idea to her mother. She says Sebastian is great and that he wants to open his own jazz club, but it is not open yet and he is still saving up, she thinks. Sebastian hears this and has a downcast expression on his face. Sebastian goes to see Keith, who is practicing with his band. He gets a good offer from Keith about a tour. He is impressed but suppresses it and they start jamming. As they play, modern music effects come through the music, to Sebastian's dislike. Keith says he knows it's different but that modern jazz is the future.
  - e. Mia walks into the apartment while Sebastian sits behind the piano. The room is lit green. Sebastian plays and sings "City Of Stars" again, Mia joins in.
  - f. There is another montage of events. Sebastian signs a contract with Keith, Mia turns in her apron to her manager and quits and continues to write her play. Sebastian gets a new suit, Mia walks through the theater, Sebastian paces through the dressing room at his performance, Mia has stuff in boxes to sell, Sebastian and the band give an interview. Then Mia is seen driving past the Rialto theater while the music slows down and becomes less upbeat. Mia sits on the floor in Sebastian's house and draws on paper for her play, looks at the door and Sebastian is not home yet. When he gets home Mia is already asleep and when she is awake, he is still asleep. It is clear that they don't see each other often and are busy with their own projects. The montage ends with Mia and Sebastian together behind the piano again, singing the last notes of "City Of Stars".
  - g. Sebastian has to perform with his band and Mia comes to watch. The music begins, Mia looks at Sebastian and he looks at her. After the opening, which looks like a traditional jazz song, the music changes to a modern, flashy version of the song. Mia is startled by the music, the bright lights and colors, background dancers, and moves through the enthusiastic crowd to the back of the venue.
7. Fall (1:13:02 – 1:28:05)
- a. Mia is in a restaurant working on her play. Moments later, she walks down a blue-lit street and leaves a voicemail for Sebastian. She sounds sad and says she hasn't heard from him in a while. When she gets to the door, she hears piano playing. In the green-lit room, the table is beautifully set for a dinner for two and music is playing on a record player. Sebastian sees Mia, says "surprise" and that he has to leave again tomorrow morning but really wanted to see her. They hug and are happy to see each other. At dinner, Sebastian says it is nice to be home and Mia says she is happy. They talk about Mia's play and Mia says she is nervous. Sebastian says Mia needs to come with him to Boise, the location of his next performance. Mia says she can't go with him because she has to practice for her play. Sebastian says she can practice there, too. Mia would rather not have that, and an uncomfortable atmosphere develops. Mia asks when Sebastian will be done with the tour, he says that after the tour they will go back into the studio and go on tour again. Mia seems startled by his answer and asks if this is for the "long term," and if he will stay in the band for a long time. They get into a discussion about Sebastian's band and tour. Mia asks if he likes the music he plays. He dodges an answer and asks the question back. She says yes but that she thought he didn't like the music and didn't like Keith either and is now touring with him all this time. Sebastian gets frustrated and says he thought this was what Mia wanted for him, to be in a band and have a steady job. Mia says yes, because that way he could lay the groundwork for his big dream, his own jazz club. Sebastian appears doubtful about the club, and Mia says people will come because he is so passionate about it. Sebastian disagrees and says this is the reality now and that Mia should have said something earlier before he signed a contract. Mia says she just wants to point out that he had a dream, and Sebastian says this is the dream. Mia says it's not his dream. Sebastian says he is finally doing something that other people appreciate, and Mia wonders since when Sebastian cares about others. He tells her that she's not the one to talk, since she is

- an actress. The music stops and they're both silent. Sebastian mentions that maybe Mia felt better about herself when he was not achieving anything as well. Mia's eyes well up and asks if that's a joke, to which Sebastian replies that it is not. They are both silent. We see a shot of the record player, finished. The fire alarm goes off. Sebastian runs to the smoking oven and Mia is left in shock at the table. She grabs her bag and walks out the door.
- b. Mia walks into the theater, her play is tonight (*So Long Boulder City*). She stands on stage with all her props and runs through everything again. Sebastian is seen leaving his rehearsal, but Keith asks if he will be there tonight, at the photo shoot. Sebastian forgot and seems frustrated because Mia's play is also that night. He is outside, thinking about what to do. We see Mia walk onto the stage, starting her show. Sebastian is still at the photo shoot is instructed by the photographer to do a silly pose. The photographer asks him to play something, and on the red keys of the keyboard he plays the first notes of "Mia & Sebastian's Theme". He looks up and stares ahead as the photographer continues shooting.
  - c. Mia's show is over and there are hardly any people in the theater. Her roommates are dressed in black and clapping happily. Mia looks at the reserved seat for Sebastian, which has remained empty. Once backstage, she sits bewildered on a chair and hears two people in the audience talking negatively about her.
  - d. Sebastian arrives at the theater. He bangs on the purple-lit door, when Mia walks out another door. Sebastian says sorry several times and wants to make amends. Mia is angry and sad and says it's over, their relationship and her acting dreams. She mentions she is done making a fool of herself and has had enough, and she is leaving to live with her parents for a while. She drives away and Sebastian stays behind on the sidewalk.
  - e. Mia is in the car heading home. She arrives at her parents' house in Boulder City. In her old room, there are several trinkets that seem reminiscent of her acting dream.
  - f. Sebastian plays the piano at his sister's engagement part.
8. In between (1:28:05 – 1:39:17)
- a. Sebastian gets a call from a casting agency trying to reach Mia.
  - b. Mia is at home with her parents and there is a horn outside. Sebastian is outside telling her that a casting director was at her play, who wants her to come audition for a big film. Mia doesn't want to, Sebastian doesn't understand and tells her she must go. Mia says she might not be good enough, Sebastian says she is. Mia doesn't want to go anymore because it hurts too much to be rejected every time. Sebastian says she is a baby and that he will be at her house the next morning to get her to the audition on time.
  - c. The next morning, Sebastian arrives. Mia is not there yet, and he thinks she is not coming, but the moment he wants to drive away she arrives with coffee. They go to the audition together.
  - d. Mia goes to audition. She has to tell a story and starts talking about her aunt who lived in Paris (the film will be set in Paris) and starts singing.
  - e. Afterwards, Sebastian and Mia sit outside on a bench in Griffith Park talking. Sebastian is convinced that Mia will get the part. Mia asks where they are standing, and Sebastian says he doesn't know. He tells Mia to give it her all if she gets the part. She asks what he will do, and he says he has his own plans. Mia says she will always love him. He says the same thing.
9. Winter (five years later) (1:39:18 – 1:54:57)
- a. Five years have passed, and Mia is seen exiting her car, walking on the studio lot. She enters the coffee shop she used to work at, and everyone looks at her. She asks for two iced coffees and is offered them for free. Like the actress in 2a., Mia insists on paying for them.
  - b. Sebastian sits behind the piano playing the piano. He signs a contract, and his colleague says it's not even that bad (the revenue, probably). Sebastian responds that not even that bad is great.
  - c. Mia walks into a house. She greets her partner, which is revealed is not Sebastian but another man. She asks about her daughter and cheerfully goes over to her.
  - d. Sebastian enters his apartment. It is not the same apartment as before. On the piano is a red Santa Claus hat. A little later he gets out of the car and walks past a poster of Mia.

- e. Mia says goodbye to her daughter and the babysitter and leaves for an evening out with her partner. They decide to take another route due to traffic jams to get a bite to eat and walk down the street. Once they return to their car, they hear jazz music. They walk toward the sound and enter a jazz club. Then Mia sees the blue-lit logo of Seb's, the name for Sebastian's jazz club that she came up with (he wanted to call it Chicken On A Stick). Mia seems startled by the sight of the sign. The jazz club is full. Mia's partner hands her a drink and they sit down. Mia seems uncomfortable and looks around. Then Sebastian comes on stage to announce the band. They see each other and Sebastian falls still for a moment. He welcomes the crowd to Seb's, sits down behind his piano and starts playing a familiar piano piece ("Mia & Sebastian's Theme").
- f. The scene turns into a fantasy flashback. We are back at the restaurant where Mia and Sebastian first saw each other. Sebastian does not rudely walk past her this time but walks up to Mia and kisses her. In a montage of scenes, they are seen moving in together, in their own apartment. Sebastian turns Keith down at the Lighthouse Cafe. Mia performs her play; the theatre is full, applauding loudly and Sebastian is there. Mia does her audition, and they leave for Paris. Sebastian plays the piano in a jazz club and Mia acts in the film. At night they dance through the city. On a projector we see a sequence of images: their first house, a pregnant Mia, the baby and birthday of the baby, Sebastian and Mia are married and leave for a night out. They decide to take another exit because of the traffic jam and end up in the jazz club that looks like Seb's, but someone else is behind the piano. They sit down, listen to the piano piece, and kiss. Then it is revealed it was all just a dream, and Sebastian is back at the piano.
- g. Sebastian finishes his piano piece. Mia and her partner leave. Before Mia walks out the door, she seeks Sebastian's gaze. They look at each other, give each other a friendly smile and a nod. Sebastian continues his performance. The screen fades to black.

E. The End

## 2. Detailed segmentation

S.	Timecode	Action	Location	Characters	Colors	Music/song	Choreography/dance
1	00:00 – 00:23	Opening (Cinemascope)				Claxons auto's	
2	00:34 – 00:56	People in a traffic jam	Highway		Vivid multicolor scheme	Different music from the cars	
3	00:57 – 04:30	Performance “Another Day Of Sun”	Highway		Vivid multicolor scheme	“Another Day Of Sun”	✓
4	04:31 – 04:35	Title in frame, ‘winter’ in subtitle	Highway		Yellow		
5	04:36 – 05:18	Pan from highway to Sebastian in his car, repeating a piece of music	Highway	Sebastian	Brown and beige tones (car and clothing Sebastian)	Thelonious Monk's “Japanese Folk Song”	
6	05:19 – 05:45	Mia is in her car, rehearsing a script. Sebastian passes her car honking and shows her his middle finger	Highway	Mia, Sebastian	White and gray tones (car and clothing Mia)		
7	05:46 – 6:50	Mia is at work at the coffeeshop on the film studio lot when a famous actress enters. Mia leaves work in a hurry and walks into someone holding coffee, causing it to spill on her	Café Warner Brothers Studio's	Mia, famous actress	White/gray (clothing Mia), red (clothing actress)	Jingle Bells from in speaker restaurant	
8	06:51 – 08:30	Mia is at an audition and is rudely interrupted by the casting directors. She walks into the hallway where several look-a-likes also wait for their audition	Audition	Mia, actress's	Blue (coat Mia, background)		
9	08:31 – 10:14	Mia is home, steps out of the shower and looks at herself. She talks with her roommates who are preparing for a party. Mia does not want to come	Mia's home	Mia, Tracy, Alexis, Caitlin	Blue, red, pink/green (shower)	Music for “Someone In The Crowd” starts	
10	10:15 – 12:17	Performance “Someone In The Crowd”. Mia does not want to join her roommates at first but ends up joining them. They dance on the street and get in the car to the party	Mia's house, street	Mia, Tracy, Alexis, Caitlin	Primary colors red, yellow green, and blue (dresses)	“Someone In The Crowd”	✓
11	12:18 – 12:43	The roommates arrive at the party	Party	Mia, Tracy, Alexis, Caitlin	Vivid multicolor scheme	“Someone In The Crowd”	✓
12	12:44 – 14:38	Mia goes to the bathroom. Looks in the mirror again, sings a solo, the song has slowed down. She walks out of the restroom and everyone at the party moves in slow motion or is frozen. The music speeds up and the singing starts again, this time by everyone at the party. Ends with fireworks	Party, bathroom	Mia	Blue dress Mia,	“Someone In The Crowd” (solo Mia)	
13	14:39 - 16:11	Mia has left the party and cannot find her car, which has probably been towed away	Street	Mia	Blue (light, air, streetlights, clothing Mia)	Piano music (“Mia & Sebastian's Theme”)	
14	16:12 – 16:47	Mia is entranced by a piano piece she hears while walking past a	Restaurant Sebastian	Mia, Sebastian	Blue (clothing Mia)	“Mia & Sebastian's	



		restaurant, and stares at the man behind the piano		(not seen)		Theme”, car horn	
15	16:48 – 17:00	Back on the highway Sebastian’s point of view, driving past Mia, middle finger raised	Highway	Sebastian , Mia	Brown and beige colors (Sebastian, car)	Jazz music from car	
16	17:01 – 17:23	Sebastian sits on a terrace near a parking lot, drinking coffee. He is looking at the Van Beek Tapas and Tunes restaurant, looking grumpy	Parking lot, terrace	Sebastian	Orange (mural painting oranges), brown (shirt Sebastian)		
17	17:24 – 19:35	Sebastian comes home and is startled by his sister. They have an argument/discussion	Apartment Sebastian	Sebastian , sister	Neutral tints (no brown but blue-ish shirt), blue (shirt sister)		
18	19:36 – 20:10	Sebastian sits behind the piano practicing the piece of music he repeatedly played back in the car on the highway	Apartment Sebastian	Sebastian	Neutral tints in apartment, brown shirt		
19	20:11 – 21:07	Sebastian arrives at work in a restaurant, his boss welcomes him back and urges him to play the set list. He begins to play Christmas music	Restaurant Sebastian	Sebastian , boss	Orange glow (lights), blue (suit Sebastian)	“Jingle Bells’ on piano	
20	21:08 – 25:00	Sebastian is still playing the set list and seems not content with it. He begins playing a piano piece of his own. As he plays, a spotlight comes focused on only him. When he is done, he stands up resolutely and his eyes meet Mia's. His boss calls him in and fires him, Mia looks at them. She wants to compliment Sebastian, but he walks right past her	Restaurant Sebastian	Sebastian , boss, Mia	Orange glow (lights), blue (suit Sebastian)	“Mia & Sebastian’s Theme”	
21	25:01 – 25:25	Mia is at several auditions. Things don't seem to be going very well	Audition rooms	Mia	Yellow and blue (first audition), blue and red (second audition), green and red (third audition)		
22	25:26 – 28:00	Mia is at a pool party. While waiting for her drink she spots Sebastian in a cover band. Mia requests a song and Sebastian recognizes Mia	Pool party	Mia, Sebastian	Yellow (dress Mia), red (jacket Sebastian), yellow (pants Sebastian)	Covers of “Take On Me”, “I Ran”	Mia is dancing, no choreography
23	28:08 – 29:08	Sebastian looks for Mia and they bicker about their interaction and work. They don't part very friendly	Pool party	Mia, Sebastian	Red (Sebastian jacket) en yellow (dress Mia)	“Tainted Love”	
24	29:09 – 29:56	Mia is at the exit of the party; Sebastian is also leaving. Mia calls Sebastian (as 'George Michael) and asks if he can take her keys	Street	Mia, Sebastian	Black and white (Sebastian’s clothing), yellow and red (clothing and bag Mia)		
25	29:57 – 31:01	Mia and Sebastian walk down the street, chatting	Street	Mia, Sebastian	Blue, yellow (dress), purple (sky), red (bag)	Piano music “A Lovely Night”	
26	31:02 - 36:32	Performance “A Lovely Night”. After the song, they end up close, but a potential kiss is interrupted by Mia's phone ringing. Mia finds her car and Sebastian stays behind and	Griffith Park, viewpoint	Mia, Sebastian	Blue (light, heels Mia), yellow (dress), purple (sky), red (bag), black and white (Sebastian clothing)	“A Lovely Night”	✓choreography

		walks back to the party, where his car is parked			and matching shoes)		
27	36:34 – 37:50	Mia walks across the studio grounds to the café where she works. Mia is addressed by her boss. In the background, Sebastian enters, and they both seem to enjoy seeing each other, smiling	Studio lot, café	Mia, Sebastian	Blue (walls, scarf), green (cafe), black and white (clothing, both)		
28	37:51 – 41:20	Mia and Sebastian walk out of the cafe and Sebastian asks about her boyfriend. They talk about their work as they walk around the studio lot. Mia says she hates jazz. Sebastian asks if she has anything to do at the moment	Studio lot	Mia, Sebastian	Green (cafe), blue (skirt, scarf,) red (bag Mia), black and white (Sebastian clothing)	A few notes from “City Of Stars” in the background	
29	41:21 – 44:23	Mia and Sebastian are at a jazz club together. They talk about jazz and Mia gets a callback for a series she compares to Rebel Without a Cause, even though she hasn't seen it. Sebastian suggests taking her to see it, for research	The Lighthouse Cafe	Mia, Sebastian , Keith	Blue (light/glow), browns, blue/red (Lighthouse Cafe logo)	Jazz music	
30	44:24 – 44:41	Mia and Sebastian walk out of the cafe, and both go in different directions	The Lighthouse Cafe	Mia, Sebastian	Blue/red (The Lighthouse cafe)	“City Of Stars” starts	
31	44:42 – 45:59	Sebastian walks down the pier and sings “City Of Stars”	Pier	Sebastian	Blue/purple (sky)	“City Of Stars”	✓ semi
32	46:00 – 46:59	Mia enters her audition; the casting directors don't seem interested and after two sentences she is rejected	Audition room	Mia	Red (coat)		
33	47:00 – 47:22	Mia angrily walks out of the audition and drives past the Rialto theater in her car, where she will go to with Sebastian. Her mood seems better	Car	Mia	Red (coat, taking it off angrily, bag)	A few tones from “A Lovely Night”	
34	47:23 - 48:02	Mia is standing in front of the mirror when Greg walks in unexpectedly; she had forgotten about their date	Mia's house	Mia, roommate, Greg			
35	48:03– 48:40	Mia sits at dinner with Greg and friends, she is not having fun	Restaurant	Mia, Greg	Green (dress)	Piano music (“Mia & Sebastian's Theme”	
36	48:40 – 48:53	Sebastian is waiting at the theater; Mia doesn't show up. He goes inside alone	Rialto theatre		Beige (suit Sebastian), yellow/orange (lamps), green (spotlights poster)		
37	48:54 – 50:23	As another glass of wine is poured, Mia seems to become increasingly irritated. Suddenly she hears Sebastian's piano piece coming out of the speakers. She decides to leave and runs across the street with a smile on her face	Restaurant, street	Mia, Greg	Green (dress), purple/blue (sky)	Piano music (“Mia & Sebastian's Theme”, theatrical version)	
38	50:24 – 52:20	Sebastian is in the movie theater looking for Mia. She walks in and runs onto the stage, looking for Sebastian. They seem happy to have found each other and sit down	Rialto theatre	Sebastian , Mia	Blue (light, spotlight)	Piano music (“Mia & Sebastian's Theme”,	

		and watch the movie. Mia and Sebastian put their hands closer and closer together. They almost kiss, until the movie cuts out. Mia says she has an idea				theatrical version)	
39	52:21 – 53:15	Mia and Sebastian arrive at the Observatory and go inside	Griffith Observatory	Sebastian , Mia	Blue (sky),		
40	53:16 - 56:21	Performance “Planetarium”, afterwards they share their first kiss	Griffith Observatory	Sebastian , Mia	Blue/purple (light), green (dress)	“Planetarium”	✓ choreography
41	56:22 – 57:24	Mia is writing her play, Sebastian comes to pick her up, they are happily in love	Mia’s house, street	Mia, roommates, Sebastian	Green (pen), purple (dress, bag, trashcans, wall)		Background music, loud car horn (like the beginning)
42	57:25 – 58:13	Montage dates Mia and Sebastian	Several date locations	Mia, Sebastian	Purple (dress), yellow (bag), pink, red, blue, yellow (outfits Mia), purple (sky, again)	Jazz music (“Summer montage/Made line”)	Small piece of choreography, dancing to jazz music at lighthouse cafe
43	58:14 – 59:49	Mia and Sebastian are at a jazz cafe, Sebastian plays the piano and Mia dances to the music, enjoying the jazz she used to hate	The Lighthouse Cafe	Mia, Sebastian	Brown, red and blue, pink (Mia’s clothing)		Dancing by Mia
44	59:50 – 1:00:33	As they sit down at a table, Sebastian’s old friend Keith approaches their table. Sebastian does not appear happy to see him. Keith asks if he is interested in a piano job. He declines	The Lighthouse Cafe	Mia, Sebastian , Keith	Yellow (clothing Keith), pink (Mia), green (beer bottle)	“Another Day of Sun” instrumental in background, jazz version	
45	1:00:34 – 1:03:15	Mia has just performed her play for Sebastian. They talk about Keith. They both discuss their dreams	Sebastian’s apartment	Mia, Sebastian	Red (light), blue (light, clothing Mia), pink	“Another Day of Sun” instrumental in background	
46	1:03:16 – 1:05:35	Sebastian decides to go to Keith and joins the band. They start playing, but suddenly modern sound effects come through the music. Sebastian is puzzled. Keith explains	Band rehearsal studio	Sebastian , Keith	Blue, green	Jazz music by band, singing by Keith	
47	1:05:36 – 1:07:50	Mia walks into Sebastian's apartment, he sings and plays “City Of Stars” on the piano, Mia sings along	Sebastian’s apartment	Mia, Sebastian	Orange, green, purple (Mia dress)	Sebastian plays “City Of Stars” on the piano	
48	1:07:51 – 1:08:53	Montage of events, Sebastian joins the band and Mia works on her play	Several locations	Mia, Sebastian , Keith	Multicolor, green dress Mia)	“City Of Stars” just the piano version, slows down	
49	1:08:54 – 1:10:01	Mia is at Sebastian's house, working on her play, Sebastian doesn't come home. Then they are seen behind the piano together, again	Sebastian’s apartment	Mia, Sebastian	Green (apartment), beige/neutral, Mia black and white clothing, green (apartment)	“City Of Stars”, sung by Sebastian	
50	1:10:02 – 1:13:02	Sebastian is performing with his band. Mia stands in the audience, looking proud until the music becomes completely different (hip/flashy/modern), she is confused	Concert venue The Messengers	Sebastian , Mia, Keith, The Messengers	Blue (spotlight), yellow (lamps), red and blue neon sign, red (Keith clothing, lighting), blue (lighting), multicolor	“Start a Fire” (John Legend)	

51	1:13:03 – 1:14:37	Mia emails all kinds of people in the Hollywood scene about her play. She walks down the street and leaves a voicemail for Sebastian. At home, she sees Sebastian is home as a surprise and has cooked dinner	Restaurant, street, Sebastian’s apartment	Mia, Sebastian	Blue (street), green (apartment)	Music record player, sped up piano version “City Of Stars”	
52	1:14:38 – 1:20:48	Mia and Sebastian sit at the table and eat. They get into an argument about their careers. The painful conversation is interrupted with the fire alarm, and while Sebastian goes to check on the oven, Mia angrily walks out	Sebastian’s apartment	Mia, Sebastian	Green (light)	Record player jazz music background	
53	1:20:49 - 1:22:33	Mia is getting ready for her performance. As Sebastian is leaving his rehearsal, he is reminded of a photo shoot of the band he had forgotten about. He looks frustrated because Mia’s play is also in the evening	Theatre Mia, rehearsal room, photoshoot studio	Mia, Sebastian , Keith	Red and blue (poster), red (light theatre), multicolor (band)		
54	1:22:34 – 1:23:02	As Mia takes the stage, Sebastian is still at the photo shoot. He gets assignments from the photographer and carries them out, but his mind seems somewhere else. He plays a few notes of “Mia & Sebastian’s Theme”	Photoshoot studio	Sebastian , Keith, band, photographer	Multicolor (band) black and white (outfit Mia, Sebastian)	“Mia & Sebastian’s Theme”	
55	1:23:03 – 1:24:59	Mia’s play has ended. There are only a few people in the auditorium and Sebastian is not there. Mia is backstage, disappointed and overhears two people talking negatively about her	Theater	Mia, audience	Black (clothing roommates), blue light, black and white, (Mia’s clothing), red lipstick		
56	1:25:00 – 1:26:41	Sebastian finally arrives at the theater, Mia walks out and he says sorry. Mia is very angry, Sebastian keeps apologizing. She says she is done with it, the relationship and acting and leaves Sebastian behind	Sidewalk theatre	Sebastian , Mia	Blue light (street), purple (door)		
57	1:26:42 – 1:27:15	Mia is in the car to Nevada. She arrives at her parents' house. In her room we see all sorts of things that remind her of her acting dream	Car, Boulder Nevada	Mia, parents Mia	Green (shirt Mia, wall)	“Another Day Of Sun” piano version	
58	1:27:16 – 1:28:03	Sebastian is playing the piano at his sister's engagement party	A garden	Sebastian	Brown/beige (suit Sebastian), blue accents (engagement party)	“Another Day Of Sun” piano version by Sebastian/ “Engagement party”	
59	1:28:04 – 1:28:45	Sebastian lies in bed and gets a call about an audition for Mia	Sebastian’s apartment	Sebastian	Neutral colors		
60	1:28:46 – 1:31:29	Mia is sitting at the dinner table with her parents when there's a loud honk outside. It's Sebastian, coming to tell her she has a big audition. Mia doesn't want to go and is done with it, Sebastian wants her to go and says he will pick her up the next morning	Mia’s parents’ home	Mia, Sebastian , parents			

61	1:31:30 – 1:31:09	Sebastian arrives, Mia arrives with coffee, and they drive to Los Angeles	Nevada, Boulder City	Mia, Sebastian			
62	1:31:10 – 1:33:39	Mia and Sebastian are waiting. Mia can go in and starts her audition	Audition room	Mia, Sebastian, actress, casting people	Red (actress clothing), blue (walls, clothing), green (couch), yellow (clothing casting director)		
63	1:33:40 – 1:37:01	Mia starts to sing her story, about her aunt and dreamers	Audition room	Mia, casting people	Blue (Mia)	“Audition (The Fools Who Dream)”	
64	1:37:02 – 1:39:17)	Sebastian and Mia sit outside talking after the audition. They wonder what is next for them, and don't know, but tell each other that they will always love each other	Bench in Griffith Park, Griffith Observatory	Sebastian, Mia	Blue (Mia en Sebastian clothing)	Piano motif from “A Lovely Night” plays in the background	
65	1:39:19 – 1:40:21	It's five years later. Mia gets out of a car and walks into the cafe where she used to work. She orders two iced coffees and insists on paying for them. Everyone looks at her, she is the famous actress now	Studio lot, Mia's old work location	Mia	Black/white (Mia's dress), green (cafe)	Christmas music	
66	1:40:22 – 1:40:50	Sebastian plays behind his piano and signs his autograph on a piece of paper	Jazz club	Sebastian	Brown (Sebastian's clothing), yellow (shirt colleague)		
67	1:40:51 – 1:41:31	Mia comes home to her hotel and greets her partner and daughter	Chateau Marmont	Mia, partner, daughter	Neutral colors, colorful bouquet of flowers		
68	1:41:32 – 1:41:49	Sebastian enters his apartment, a new one. He puts away his keys and starts cooking in his kitchen	House Sebastian	Sebastian	Neutral colors, red (Christmas hat), blue (fridge light)	Jazz music in the background	
69	1:41:50 – 1:42:08	Sebastian gets out of his car, walks down the street past a large poster of Mia	Street	Sebastian	Blue (streetlight), red and blue (poster Mia)		
70	1:41:09 – 1:46:19	Mia and her partner are going out for a night out. They walk past a jazz club, which turns out to be Sebastian's. Sebastian enters the stage and Mia and Sebastian see each other again after all these years. Sebastian sits down behind the piano	Jazz club Seb's	Mia, partner Mia, Sebastian	Blue (street, tie partner Mia, light jazzclub, logo Seb's) Red/blue (spotlight piano Sebastian), brown (suit Sebastian), purple/blue lighting, hue	Jazz music	
71	1:46:19 – 1:53:21	Fantasy flashback, musical sequence epilogue	Fantasy locations like Paris, studio, shared home	Mia, Sebastian, Keith	Vivid multicolor scheme		
72	1:53:22 – 1:54:56	Sebastian sits behind the piano in his jazz club. He plays the last notes of the song. The audience applauds; Mia still watches with sadness in her eyes. She leaves, but not before looking back one last time at the exit. They look at each other, smile slightly and give a nod	Jazz club Seb's	Mia, Sebastian, partner Mia	Blue, purple	Slowed piano version “Mia & Sebastian's Theme” from moment f smile	
73	1:54:57	The End					

