



# A Level Film Studies

## 'La La Land' (2016, USA, Chazelle)

### Component 1: Varieties of film and filmmaking American film since 2005 (two-film study)

Written examination: 2.5 hours  
35% of qualification

AO1 Demonstrate knowledge and understanding of elements of film  
AO2 Apply knowledge and understanding of elements of film to:  
analyse and compare films, including through the use of critical approaches  
evaluate the significance of critical approaches  
analyse and evaluate own work in relation to other professionally produced work

### CONTEXTS

#### Production | Social and Political | Critical Debate

Some critics attacked the way the film glosses over LA's turbulent history, especially issues concerning race. In 1990, there were huge riots in the wake of the acquittal of LAPD officers accused of beating black motorist Rodney King, and in the 1940s there were the 'Zoot Suit Riots' where black jazz fans were viciously attacked by large gangs of white people. These racial conflicts are ignored by the film and the black community is marginalised by the film's narrative. Chazelle defended his choices by pointing out that LA constantly erases its own past and the film reflects the city's ahistorical nature.

The film's references to previous movies and Seb's nostalgia for a bygone age of 'pure' jazz chimed with a sense of conservatism and longing for a 'golden age' in America that culminated in the election of Donald Trump.

### IDEOLOGY AND THEMES

#### The American Dream

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

### SYNOPSIS

A bittersweet musical pitched somewhere between dream and reality, past and the present; a ménage à trois between a musician, an actress and the city of Los Angeles.

### TERMINOLOGY

ACTIVE SPECTATORSHIP

PASSIVE SPECTATORSHIP

PREFERRED

NEGOTIATED

OPPOSITIONAL

ALIGNMENT

## AUTEUR

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

Damien Chazelle  
Babylon 2022  
First Man 2018  
Whiplash 2014

## LANGUAGE AND MISE EN SCENE

The film adopts a **hyper-realism** that is stylistically conventional in contemporary Hollywood. The images are often shot in deep focus with a substantial depth of field, and each shot is relatively long in terms of its duration. These techniques encourage us to scan the image like we would our lived-world horizon thus encourage us to accept these conventions of realism as if we are looking through a window on the world. Nevertheless, the film juxtaposes more traditionally realist sequences with techniques that pertain to subjectivity rather than the illusion of an objective view of the world.

## SPECTATORSHIP

Some have criticised the gender politics in the film, accusing it of being a male fantasy about artistic integrity that Mia just facilitates and applauds. Our alignment between Seb and Mia changes often, until he is villainised in the ‘dinner sequence’.

The audience would be mostly passive due to Classic Hollywood style, invisible editing, form of escapism – however it shifts to an active audience nearer the end as there is no happy ending. A pure escapist film would be expected to have an ending with closure – melancholic.

## NARRATIVE | GENRE

‘La La Land’ is a musical, and musicals are commonly considered to be a form of escapist entertainment which can be watch and enjoyed **passively**. The viewer can watch and enjoy the film without being challenged. The cinema experience allows for escapism because the viewer is in a space separate from their every day life, making it easier to forget the reality of their existence. They can ‘escape’ into a fantasy world.

## KEY SEQUENCES

- Opening ‘Day in the Sun’
- You’re fired
- A lovely night (end of pool party)
- Dinner sequence
- Mia’s audition
- Final scenes

## PAST PAPER QUESTIONS

a) How far do your chosen films demonstrate a constant shift between passive and active spectatorship? Refer in detail to at least one sequence from each film.

(b) How far do your chosen films demonstrate the importance of visual and soundtrack cues in influencing spectator response? Refer in Detail to at least one sequence from each film.