La La Land et le genre de la comédie musicale traditionnelle

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La La Land et le genre de la comédie musicale traditionnelle : l'innovation au service du pastiche ?

Illustration par *Le Point*, 'Tout le monde dit *La La Land*' (2017)

présenté par

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Grade : Master

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To my grandmother,

‘ A ship is always safe at shore –
but that is not what it is built for.’
- Albert Einstein

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Introduction

"[I was] trying to call back certain things from the past that I felt had been lost and didn't need to be lost. But also, really, the main goal was to try and update those things. Either you try to make a case for them as still vital, or still urgent, or you try and actually change and update them, and extend that tradition in a way."[1] This is what the filmmaker Damien Chazelle stated when he tried to explain what his main aim was when writing and producing *La La Land*, a film musical released on November 9, 2016 which was granted 23 prizes including awards and 21 other nominations. That may seem very surprising when we think that musicals are now seen as 'box office poison' that nobody would like to watch. But this is exactly the challenge Chazelle wanted to take up – creating an apparently 'old-fashioned' genre (the musical film) that a contemporary audience would like to watch by modernizing the genre. However, the musical film in itself has often been a genre which reacted against political reforms or governmental ideas ; and underneath this appearant modernization, one can still find some stylistic traditions. Indeed, even if *La La Land* is a 'modern' musical with features such as the presence of pessimism and realistic elements which turn it into an innovative movie, it still remains a traditional musical with dream-like sceneries making the viewers escape real life. Thus, one may wonder - how do modernity and tradition coexist inside a single film? This is the dichotomy I am going to study in this essay. To achieve this goal, I will also need to analyze the dichotomy between escapism in an imaginary world and the coming back of social and sociological goals in a film musical. Indeed, through the evolution of the love story between Mia, a young woman whose dream is to become an actress, and Sebastian, a piano player and jazz addict who would like to open his own jazz club, the filmmaker Damien Chazelle, who was already famous for the release of *Whiplash*, a very dark musical, tackles a film genre which wavers between modernity and tradition and which is considered by the film scholar Rick Altman as one of the most difficult genre to analyze and to define and as the most complex art form[2] – the musical film.

Indeed, what is a musical ? And how should one define a musical film ? For the majority of viewers, a musical is defined as a genre in which the main characters are singing, dancing and tap-dancing throughout the film, this way paying a tribute to previous musicals which were created between the 1920s and 1960s. However, as the French film theorist Michel Chion stated in *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, the musical film is not only a simple tribute to some previous films, but it is a

1 Damien Chazelle in his interview for the Independent :
THE INDEPENDENT. *Arts and Entertainment*. https://www.independent.co.uk/arts-entertainment/films/features/damien-chazelle-interview-la-la-land-oscars-2017-ryan-gosling-emma-stone-a7522311.html

2 ALTMAN, Rick. *La comédie musicale hollywoodienne.* Paris : Armand Colin (1992), p. 12 : « la forme d'art la plus complexe au monde ».

very complex genre made around an impressive number of 'conventions'[3]. Hence, each musical film is fabricated respecting stylistic, narrative and formal conventions that are often invisible for any viewers. The same problem occurs as far as its main aim is concerned. Indeed, musicals, and above all Hollywood musicals, are often enjoyed by viewers because they are after a light and escapist entertainment. The numerous scenes showing on the screen an audience going to see a play or a musical seem to confirm that thesis. However, things are much more complicated than that, and the conflict between musicals made to entertain and musicals made to convey a message is also linked to the history of the musical film genre.

Indeed, there are two main landmarks that the readers of this essay need to know in order to understand *La La Land* and study its genre. Firstly, *La La Land* is based on classical Hollywood musical films from the 1930s- 1940s. At that time, musical films seemed to be made to entertain the viewers and to make them escape from reality with dream-like settings, magnificent dances and deeply emotional love stories. Almost all the musical films of this period were produced by Hollywood and the MGM (Metro-Goldywn Mayer) and the age was seen as the 'Classical Era'. The Hollywood industry[4] favored mainstream conventions which applied to each movie which were produced. For instance, there was a 'clearly marked beginning, middle and end', 'a clear process of cause and effect', 'three stages with exposition, action going towards the goals of the characters and the end [which] offers a sort of closure'[5]. Hollywood musicals' main aim was to entertain. From the 1970s, filmmakers decided to 'leave the dull bits in' i.e to change the content of films and to make them less dream-like and darker, more faithful to reality and it led to a period which is the second landmark necessary to understand this analysis : the emergence of indie films in the 1970s - 1980s. It was linked to the rise of independent filmmaking which began during a very depressing period for most American people after the 1973 oil crisis and the Watergate Scandal in 1974. Independent trends wanted to depict reality and to see realistic elements invading the movies as life at the time was difficult because of the crisis. Seeing people dancing in movies did not fit the taste of the audience any longer. Thus, history and the context of a society may have an influence on the production of movies. Hence, a musical cannot just be defined in some sentences and cannot be defined as a simple way to entertain people, and the whole of this work will be an attempt to find a proper definition for the term 'musical film', to see what is hidden behind this appearant aim of entertainment, and to see what a new type of musical can be in a society like ours. Indeed, Damien Chazelle decided to produce a film musical reminiscent of the musical films from the Classical Era and even resorted to direct references like props, settings or dances directly taken from them, just

3 « La comédie musicale », in *les cahiers du cinéma, les petits cahiers du cinéma*. Michel Chion, ed. Scérén-CNDP (2002). p74

4 KING, Geoff. (2005) *American Independent Cinema.*

5 *Ibid.*

after the financial crisis of 2008 and at a moment when nothing in the world seemed positive (the election of Trump in the USA, the vote in favor of the Brexit in the UK) and this choice may seem a little strange. One may think this is an attempt to make the audience enjoy film musicals again by making them escape reality, just as it was in the 1930s. But what if Chazelle was trying, through his musical film, to infuse the context of crisis into his work in order to make a new musical genre, thus, giving a rebirth to a mythic genre ?

In this way, through this tension between modernity and tribute to the old, we may wonder if *La La Land* is really renewing the musical genre or if this musical is just another hidden pastiche of the genre.

In my first part, I will analyze *La La Land* stylistically and I will show that some features of the traditional film musical are reproduced in order to make a pastiche of the American film musical. Then, in a second part, I will show that *La La Land* is actually modernizing the genre of the musical film and it is giving it a new birth. Indeed, this feature of modernization really seems to be extended in *La La Land* and Hollywood producers thought that the innovation brought by this film musical would not be successful. That is the reason why Chazelle was forced to produce *Whiplash,* his previous film dedicated to realism and to the relationship between a violent and severe drum teacher and his student. Indeed, the release of this movie enabled him to earn enough money to produce *La La Land*. Finally, I will explain the limits to modernization in this musical. Indeed, Damien Chazelle tackles a genre which is already created to make a comment on society and we may wonder which features belong to a real modernization of the genre of the film musical and which features are actually already part of the genre in itself.

Part 1 : *La La Land* or a pastiche of mainstream classical Hollywood musical films.

As one has noticed in the introduction, Damien Chazelle tackled a very ambitious scheme, that was recreating a classical film musical. Thus this part is going to be dedicated to the study of all the classical features used by the filmmaker in *La La Land*.

A. Features taken from classical musical films

First of all, the idea of *La La Land* seems to stem from early classical musical films from the early 1930s to the late 1940s which was also a period called 'The Golden Age' of musical films. At that time, musical films were rather based on the melodrama[6] of staged Broadway productions which were about 'the fight in order to survive during the depression'[7] and whose dancers were non- professional[8]. In *La La Land*, we notice that the two features evoked are displayed on screen. On the one hand, Mandy Moore, the choreographer, had to create dances that would fit the main actors Ryan Gosling (Sebastian) and Emma Stone (Mia) as they are not professional dancers as it is explained in the *New York Times*[9] so the focus is more on the melodramatic atmosphere of the story.

Besides, intertextuality is used in order to produce foreshadowing and to echo the characters' stories. Indeed, melodrama springs from the tragic love story between the two characters who eventually break up, Mia being with another husband, and Sebastian living alone. This is reflected through the use of a reference to *Casablanca*, a film musical released in 1942 and directed by Michael Curtiz. Indeed, in the scene in which Mia is depressed because she did not manage to get the role during one audition, the viewer may notice the presence of the poster from the film in Mia's room and in the scene of the first real date between Mia and Sebastian. And while the couple is in front of the cafe, Mia points out at the window of the house in which the character performed by Bogart in Casablanca lived, which is one of the place where the main event of the plot happened in the musical film. It may be considered as a foreshadowing as in the movie, Rick, the main character, comes behind the window and thinks about his love story with Ilsa, whom he met in Paris at the beginning of the war. As it was dangerous for her to stay in Paris because she could be captured by the nazis when they invaded the city, they decided to leave and take the train together but she never came. We have the same ending in *La La Land* with characters separated because of their dreams and jobs and because they needed money.

6 CHION, Michel, « La comédie musicale », in *Les cahiers du cinéma*, les petits cahiers du cinéma, ed. Scérén-CNDP (2002), p 38.

7 *Ibid*. p 42 : « Broadway marque par la dépression et la lutte pour la vie »

8 *Ibid.*

9 https://www.nytimes.com/2016/12/13/arts/dance/mandy-moore-dance-in-la-la-land.html

Illustration 1: Mia in front of the poster of the movie 'Casablanca' after her failure during the audition

Besides, some sceneries are taken from *An American in Paris* which tells the story of Jerry Mulligan, an American painter, who was struggling to earn a living. He met a rich woman who decided to give him money and become his patron. Thanks to this encounter, he met Lisa, a young French girl he fell in love with, without knowing that she was already married to one of his friend. We first see the scenery from this musical film in a studio in the middle of *La La Land,* and then at the end during the 'Epilogue'. Indeed, Chazelle decided to create an imaginary ending just before the real end of the movie during which Mia imagines what her life would have been if she had continued dating Sebastian, and while she is watching and listening Sebastian playing the piano with her husband in Sebastian's own bar, the camera shows us an imaginary world and makes a summary of Mia and Sebastian's dreamt life together. The two characters go through different stages of their lives which are symbolized by different magical sceneries such as a stage, a cinema and a cartoon-like setting of the city of Paris in which the characters are walking and which is reminiscent of the one used in *An American in Paris*. So it may symbolize an evolution towards the breaking-up of their relationship. Thus, there are explicit references to famous classical Hollywood musical films, through which *La La Land* acknowledges the influence of classical Hollywood cinema and claims a direct connection with this mythical era.

Illustration 2: Mia and Sebastian in 'La La Land' during the epilogue / The scenery used in 'An American in Paris'

Furthermore, several other classical features are displayed. First, throughout the film, the classical structure of the musical is used. Indeed, Rick Altman asserts that the viewer is used to watching movies whose structure is linear (A causing B causing C)[10] and that is the way 'our cultural experience' makes us think about movies, whereas film musicals seem to respect this organization but do not in reality. Indeed, *La La Land*, just like any other classical musical, is built on a 'biplex'[11] structure as it does not focus on one unique character, but on a couple of stars (Sebastian and Emma starring Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone)– each of them standing for different or opposed values : 'la comédie musicale americaine ne focalise pas tout l'intérêt sur le personnage central, elle présente deux foyers d'intérêt constitués par un couple de stars de sexe opposé et se réclamant de valeurs divergentes'. Thus, the structure around which *La La Land* is built is A/A'[12] (a feminine scene associated with its masculine opposite) and it works as a 'series of fragments which are almost autonomous and which work as duets between the two main characters'. Thus the structure from *La La Land* stems from the characters, not from the story with songs which echo each other and parallel sequences. So each sequence must be analyzed compared to its parallel scene.

In *La La Land*, the movie begins with the musical number called *Another Day of Sun* followed by two parallel sequences showing Mia's life after the traffic jam, and then, a flashback brings us back to the traffic jam in order to follow Sebastian's life. Moreover, a series of sequences are centered around the two characters who are together at the same place. The same structure is followed throughout the movie and it is the same with the songs - *Someone in the Crowd* is Mia's song while Sebastian is performing the next one with the piano (when he is fired). In addition, this structure, just like in a classical musical, is associated with the dichotomy masculine / feminine[13], Indeed, each character stands out for some particular features : 'chaque sexe est caracterisé par un attribut, une valeur, un désir, un lieu, un age ou un autre trait particulier. Au départ, ces caractéristiques secondaires sont toujours diamètralement antithétiques et réciproquement exclusives'[14]. In some musicals, men are rich and women are pretty but not rich and conversely. However, this opposition is made smoother at the end of each musical, most of the time thanks to a 'harmonious union' such as a marriage. Moreover, to understand the meaning and the function of a musical, we must analyze the dichotomies and the way they are solved. The dichotomies are visible thanks to the 'parallelism' between the scenes which can be hidden or transferred visually by the use of symmetrical composition or shots, for instance. As Altman states it, 'one convention is that

10 ALTMAN, Rick. *op. Cit.* in the introduction p. 1.
11 *Ibid.* p 30.
12 *Ibid. p 32.*
13 *Ibid.* p 42
14 *Ibid.* p 36

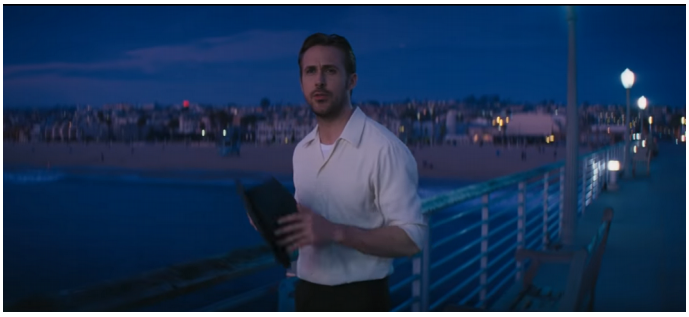
Use of parrallel sequences in La La Land : Sebastian vs Mia's life

WINTER

▲ *Mia rehearsing in her car vs Sebastian in his car*

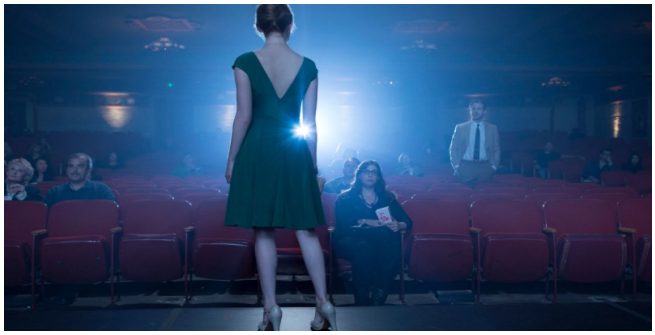
▲ *Audition Scene for Mia and scene in the bar (improvisation) for Sebastian*

SPRING



▲ *Dinner with Greg for Mia and 'City of Stars' for Sebastian*

SUMMER / AUTUMN



▲ *Mia's one woman show and Sebastian going onstage around the world with his jazz band*

all the couples are not formed through the movie, but that they are predetermined'[15]. In *La La Land*, all these features concerning the dichotomies stand out. Indeed, the dichotomy male / female is present in the dances (Epilogue scene) and in the parallel scenes between Mia and Sebastian's stories ('City of Stars' for Sebastian, 'The Audition' for Mia and there even is the same amount of lyrics in the duet of 'City of Stars'). The two characters are predetermined to be together visually, as Mia often is on the left-hand side of the screen while the right-hand side is empty and Sebastian is on the right-hand side while the left-hand side is empty.

▲*Mia and Sebastian's visual connection*

Moreover, we see the global duality through a 'secondary dichotomy' which can be the one between work and leisure : 'l'une des deux composantes de la dichotomie thématique est étroitement associée à l'univers du travail et ses valeurs, tandis que l'autre se rapporte aux activités et propriétés traditionnellement qualifiées de distractives'.[16] Thus, one member of the couple embodies the work ethics while the other embodies leisure or art. However, the dichotomy is solved as the viewer can notice a 'reciprocal transfer of styles or features between the characters'. Finally, at the end of the musicals, the two dichotomies are resolved. The viewers notice a 'thematic resolution between two ways of life and opposed values'. This resolution is present but distorted in *La La Land* as both characters represent the two sides (work and entertainment) as their dream is to play the piano and be an owner (Sebastian) and to become an actress (Mia), which is also their passions. At the end, if we consider their love story as entertainment, they both choose their work over their love story (Mia going to Paris to shoot a movie, and Sebastian not following her to create his own jazz club). Moreover, at the end, they exchange their clothing habits. Each character, through the movie, takes the other's features as Mia is dressed in bright colors at the beginning in a 'Lovely Night' for instance whereas Sebastian is in black and white, and it is almost the contrary in the 'Planetarium' scene in which Sebastian is wearing light colors whereas Mia is wearing a dark-green dress.

15 *Ibid.* p 43
16 *Ibid.*

▲The exchange of clothing habits between Mia and Sebastian from 'A Lovely Night' to the end.

Besides, in classical musical films, the use of duets is not made by chance and it is even actually used at climactic moments either showing great tension between the members of the couple or showing the power of the love story with the amorous exhilaration of the couple : ‘le duo est généralement réservé aux moments de tension ou d'exaltation maximale’[17]. This may seem to be obvious in *La La Land*, if we take into consideration the example of ‘City of Stars’ sung by Mia and Sebastian in the Spring part of the movie, just after their first real date during which they confessed to the other character their dreams and their aspirations. This moment is the climactic moment in their love story, the moment when everything is positive and in which the love relationship works. Indeed, Mia is entering the room when Sebastian begins playing the piano and at the beginning, the camera is at the same height as Sebastian, thus showing his point of view ; but later it zooms-in slowly on Mia up until it leads to a close-up on her face and we identify with her as she begins to sing and join Sebastian by sitting with him on the piano bench. Then, the two actors look at each other several times and that shows the complicity of the couple and their love. The scene also respects the classical duality between the feminine and the masculine as Mia is standing in the light so she is depicted with bright colors (purple and her face turns almost yellow) while Sebastian is in the shade, wearing a black suit while the background behind him is blue (a cool color). So their love story is shown respecting classical filming conventions. Moreover, ‘A Lovely Night’, during which Mia and Sebastian show through their acting that they do not really like each other and that they regret having spent the whole evening together by putting dust on the other’s shoes and by looking into the opposite directions when they are next to each other, is a duet showing the tension between the two characters. The actors exaggerate the performance to show that they really do not care about the other as Sebastian takes a stone and throws it while Mia tries to find her car throughout the extract by pressing on her keys. She also turns back when Sebastian comes close to her and Sebastian follows her while she is not looking at him. The entire acting performance is created in order to make us notice visually the tension between them.

17 *Ibid.* p 49

▲ *Visual tension between Mia and Sebastian made visible by the contrast between cool and bright colors / light vs dark areas within the frame.*

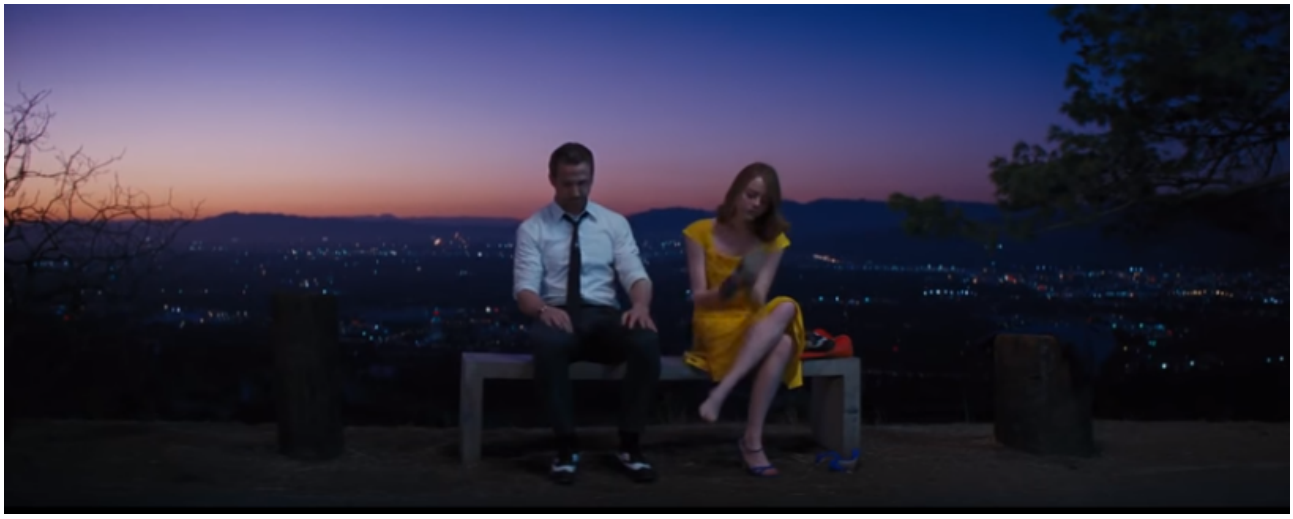
Then, the dance sequences are also designed to fit classical mainstream musical film's conventions as in Hollywood, the camera follows the actors when they are moving and it accompanies them. It combines the use of very long shots to show all the dancers with tighter shots such as medium close-ups or close-ups to show the different couples or characters[18]. This is what the viewer witnesses in the opening scene. Indeed, at the beginning of the sequence, the filmmaker used a medium tracking shot with the camera making a pan and showing the inside of different cars belonging to different characters so we hear different diegesis and we enter separated worlds.

▲ *Different types of shots used in the Opening sequence*

Then, the music starts with *Another Day of Sun* and it becomes louder than the diegetic soundtracks coming from the personal cars of each character. From this moment, long shots are used to shoot the community of drivers dancing on the highway while waiting for the traffic jam to end. Finally, very long shots are used to film the whole of the community standing on their cars and dancing. Thus, the camera work is a classical one in the opening scene.

18 Ibid p 50.

Moreover, the steps of the two characters in the dance scenes must echo each other to put an emphasis on the duality between the masculine and the feminine and the idea of the couple must be put right in front of the eyes of the audience. That is the case in 'A lovely Night'. First of all, several shots show a symmetrical composition of the frame with the characters being at the center of it to show that they are the two protagonists and also to put the couple at the center of the attention.



▲ *Symmetrical composition in 'A Lovely Night'*

Besides, the characters are using the same steps one after the other just before the real dance begins : Mia crosses her legs and then Sebastian does the same, Mia looks to the right and then Sebastian looks to the right and then to the left for both characters. Finally, the dance scene begins and we may notice that the characters have got the same amount of time dedicated to their own dancing and steps. No character is dancing more than the other. Indeed, for 40 seconds, the characters are dancing together and performing the same steps, then, the time is divided and each has got 10 seconds of solo dance alternating while the other is watching and finally, the couple ends the dance with the same steps that they perform together. Besides, the steps of one character are echoeing the steps of the other character : when Mia does tap dancing on the right and then on the left, Sebastian does the same just after her and so on. So there is a real equality between the two members of the couple and the characters are reflecting the duality between the masculine and the feminine in this dance scene.

Finally, as far as the issue of point of view is concerned, Jane Feuer explains that the viewers of a musical film also share the point of view of the audience in a show within the musical film thanks to numerous point-of-view shots which enable the viewers to identify with the audience in the film[19] : 'through shot transitions, the spectator may be included in the internal audience (from a third row center seat)'. And then, there is 'a cut to a closer view of the performance (or crane or dolly shot)'. So we have a 'double identification' to the performers and the audience. It is what

19 FEUER, Jane. The Hollywood musical. Bloomington and Indianapolis : Indiana University Press (1993)

happens when Mia is performing her own one-woman show. We both identify with the public and with Mia who is performing on stage as an audience of the musicals from the 1930s- 1940s would.

B. A Berkeleyesque film musical.

La La Land's filmmaker was inspired by early classical musical films in general, but the film is even more closely related to the musical films created by Busby Berkeley. Berkeley (1901-1971) was an American film director who began his career on several Broadway shows such as *Good Boy* (1928)[20]. Afterwards, he decided to emancipate himself from Broadway, and to make his own career as a filmmaker. *Gold Diggers of 1933* was produced at the beginning of this emancipation and it is described as a 'pineaccle of the backstage Format'[21] which was a format 'work[ing] primarily on the inside' and which is 'centering on the relationships between the performers [who belong to the main plot]'[22]. He was mostly successful for his 'geometrical formations', his filming techniques such as for the use of 'overhead shots that form kaleidoscopic patterns', as well as for 'extravagance and excess in setting and camerawork', 'extended and spectacular crane shots', a 'stylized use of the female body in abstract and object-like ways' and 'the use of giant, multiple and bizarre props'[23]. I will analyze those elements later in this subpart.

La La Land is reminiscent of Berkeley's Broadway period for several reasons. Firstly, it may remind the viewer of the **'**Tour-of-the-town' tradition which was predominant at the time 'utilizing the basic Tom-and-Jerry format of a country bumpkin's visit to the city as the pretext for a series of rapidly shifting scenes filled with songs and dance'[24]**.** This technique is used by Damien Chazelle at the end of the movie in the dreamt version of Mia and Sebastian's story. Indeed, Mia is part of the audience in Sebastian's bar when he is playing the piano with her husband, and suddenly, a zoom-out of Sebastian begins the flashback which brings us back to the moment when Sebastian was playing in the bar at the beginning of the movie, the two characters kiss each other and the story is rewritten. They go through an impressive number of really different sceneries in this sequence. Indeed, after the flashback, the viewer follows Mia who opens a door in a café leading into their house, then a graphic match on the canvas leads us into another bar in which they are dating, and then, we are going from the bar to one of Mia's representation of her one-woman show, from the one-woman show to the world, from the world to Paris, from Paris to one of Mia's audition, from the audition to a bar, then back to Paris and from Paris to a starry scenery.

20 RUBIN, Martin. Showstoppers : *Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle.* Colombia University Press (1993). 249 p.
21 *Ibid*. p 35.
22 Ibid. p 34.
23 *Ibid.* p 6.
24 *Ibid.*

▲*Visual match between a canvas hung on the wall and a man playing the piano in the bar in which Mia an Sebastian are dating*.

Finally, we see the couple watching the movie of their own life and we follow the characters into five other different settings and places (into the house, in the fields, around the pool, outside and into the living room) to finally be back to the original setting (the highway and the bar) but with a completely different story. Thus, the camera follows the characters in their trip into several settings and that feature shows that Chazelle decided to pay a tribute to former 'Tour of the Town' musicals created by Busby Barekeley in Broadway at the beginning of his career.

Besides, Damien Chazelle pays a tribute to *Gold Diggers of 1933* by working with several techniques which were used at the time it was produced. First of all, Berkeley used only a single camera in his films. In an interview of Mandy Moore, the choreographer who created all the dances, she explains that the opening scene was shot around 52 times to get it right and to make it perfect, as it is one unique sequence which was filmed by one unique camera without any cut[25].

Moreover, Damien Chazelle made several visual references and tributes to *Singin in The Rain* (1952) and *The Band Wagon* (1953), which were considered as using the 'Backstage format'[26]. The term has been defined sooner in this subpart[27] but we can assert that *La La Land* also pays a tribute to this kind of Broadway musicals as the plot is built around the love story between the two main protagonists, Mia and Sebastian, as well as on their professional success or failure. In her monologue saying and repeating 'Maybe I'm not good enough' to Sebastian, Mia confesses her very own feeling about herself and her doubts to the viewers and to Sebastian. We see the characters in their intimacy (for instance when Mia is in her room or in the bathroom in front of the mirror or taking her shower or when Sebastian is in his kitchen quarreling with his previous girlfriend). Besides, the framing of the camera becomes even tighter as we move on into the narrative: in the opening sequence, very long shots are used, but then, the camera comes closer to the characters with medium-shots so the story, just like in a backstage musical, is really built around the main protagonists and their intimacy. We also follow the professional success of Sebastian who played

25 RUBIN Martin. *Showstoppers : Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle.* p3
26 *Ibid*. p 35
27 *Supra* p. 12

the piano in a bar to earn a living and who begins to play in a band, who becomes successful and who finally manages to build his own club and to fulfill his dream. We also follow Mia's life as she tries to become succesful but has to face a lot of failures, for instance during the first audition at the beginning, and when she goes on stage to perform her one-woman show. But after having been helped by Sebastian, she manages to have another audition where she will perform 'The Fools who Dream' and which will enable her to become successful and to get a role in Paris. So *La La Land* is definitely relying on the Backstage format dating back from the 1920s - 1930s. It is obvious all the more so as different references are made to one classical film musical using the same format – *Singin in the Rain*, which was released in 1952, produced by the MGM[28] and directed by Gene Kelly starring Kelly and Debbie Reynolds. It tells the story of Don Lockwood (Gene Kelly), an actor into a company which has to face the transition period between silent movies to the talking picture. In the story, he falls in love with a dancer named Kathy Selden (Debbie Reynolds). Chazelle decided to make two visual analogies to this musical film in *La La Land* : first of all, in 'A Lovely Night', when Sebastian walks and hangs himself to the lampost the same way Gene Kelly did when he was singing 'Singin' in the Rain' ; then, in *La La Land*, in the opening of the movie on the highway, all the dancers are pointing their hands to the sky at the same time and that is reminiscent of one extract of *Singin in the Rain* with a very long shot showing the crowd doing the same gesture. A second analogy is made between *La La Land* and *The Band Wagon*, a film musical dating back from 1953 directed by Vincent Minelli starring Fred Astaire and Cyd Charisse, two very famous actors at the time. In the film, a former musical star wanted to give a new start to his career by bringing back one old Broadway show on the screen. The analogy is made with the dance scene between Cyd Charisse and Fred Astaire, who are going out on a horse-drawn coach and who walk into central Park during the night. Then, they began to dance on the song called 'Dancing in the Dark'. The dance choreography of 'A Lovely Night' in *La La Land* follows exactly the same patterns and some similar steps are used in the two extracts who both focus on the climactic moment in the love story between the two lovers. These analogies suggest that *La La Land* and *Singin' in the rain* are the same kinds of movie and that their story is close to former love stories. So it directly enables the viewer to consider *La La Land* as a classical musical and to associate it with one of the greatest musical of all times. Moreover, the choice of those two musicals was made on purpose as Chazelle is exactly on the shoes of the film directors of those musicals and of Fred Astaire and Gene Kelly. Indeed, Astaire and Kelly, when performing in *Singin' in the Rain,* were trying to recall an old genre (the early musical films) and to make it trendy again. Chazelle, by producing *La La Land,* follows the same dream as he also would like to make previous musicals trendy today by modernizing them. Besides, he is also at the crossroads between two eras the same

28 Metro-Golwyn Mayer, a famous American film producer

way Gene Kelly and Fred Astaire were, as they were divided between the old era with classical Hollywood musicals and the new one with more modern ones focused on realism.

Illustrations : visual analogies – *La La Land* paying a tribute to former classical musical films

Gene Kelly in *Singin in the Rain*

Sebastian around the lampost

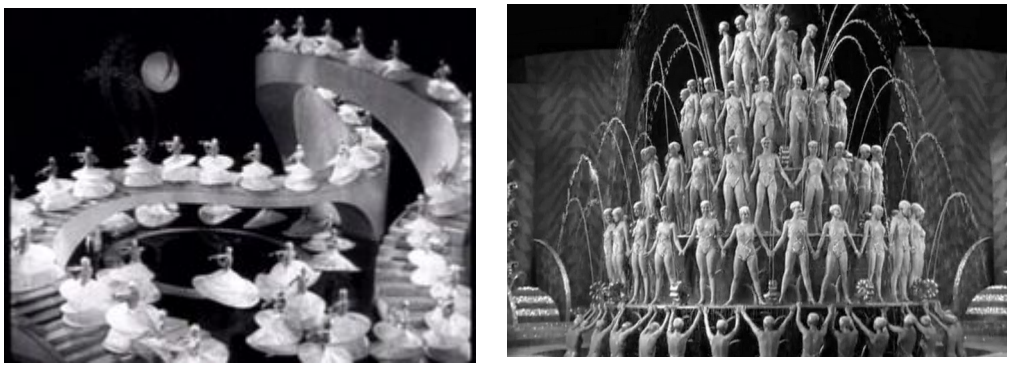
Singin in the Rain (1952)

La La Land (2017)

Astaire and Charisse in a park at night to perform 'Dancin' in the Dark' (*The Band Wagon*, 1953)

Mia and Sebastian in 'a Lovely Night' (in a park in the evening in Hollywood)

Moreover, he also created musical numbers and dances in which a large number of chorus girls are standing in order to make ‘geometrical formations’, the camera uses ‘overhead shots that form kaleidoscopic patterns’ as well as ‘extended and spectacular crane shots’ and ‘giant bizarre props’. In the epilogue, the lampost and the bushes are giant, and the couples on the stage are positioned in order to depict a triangular shape. They all move at the same time with the same dance moves, and the camera shows them with a crane shot.



▲ Busby Berkeley’s geometrical formations in his dance scenes

Furthermore, classical musical films must contain ‘a significant portion of musical numbers that are impossible’[29]. In the Planetarium scene and in the Epilogue, both characters are dancing and are uplifting at the same time into the air, what is completely impossible in real life. The impossibility occurs on ‘two main levels : the level of scale and the level of effects’[30]. As far as scale is concerned, ‘the numbers create a constant and rapid progress into new and enormous spaces that could not possibly accomodate them all’. That is exactly what happens in the Epilogue with all the settings crossed so quickly by the two main protagonists that it would not be possible in real life. Then, the impossibility occurs at the level of effects with numbers which ‘create configurations that are only feasable with a movie camera or in a special effect lab’ like ‘underwater shots’ or ‘overhead shots’[31]. During the pool party, the camera is plunging into the pool with the character, it is turning on itself underwater and we see all the characters dancing around the pool from the bottom of it thanks to a low-angle shot.

Finally, the filmmaker in *La La Land* also uses a ‘spectacularization of the camera’ like Berkeley. Indeed, in Berkeley’s work, ‘the camera itself is liberated from the demands of narrativity […] in order to assess its own presence as an element of autonomous display – that is, of spectacle’. Cinema, in this way, has ‘no other function, no other meaning, no other existence than visual beauty’. The example taken in the book is ‘We’re in the Money’ from *Gold Diggers* in which the camera is blurred sometimes before showing each one of the girls. In *La La Land*, the same effect is

29 RUBIN, M. op cit p. 13
30 *Ibid.*
31 *Ibid.*

used during the pool scene when the camera goes underwater as we see the guests dancing around the pool from under the water. This effect does not seem to convey any particular meaning to the movie except to make the viewer feel dizzy and put an emphasis on the excess of this spectacle and on the frenziness of the party.

C. The use of dream sequences and artificiality

Then, a lot of musicals are made in order to entertain the viewers and to make them escape reality and this is also one of the main aims of *La La Land*. This is shown through different ways.

Firstly, the use of colors is relevant as Martin Rubin explains : 'Studios progressively added color to provide more entertainment, that is, to increase the voluptuousness of those parts of a film which were supposed to represent fantasy'[32]. It led to an increasing use of artificiality in musicals as the producers began creating colorful settings on purpose as '[Colors] increased the contrast between musical numbers and spoken ones'. In *La La Land*, colorful settings are used during the epilogue with unrealistically colorful trees and colorful settings with a purple sky and subdued colors which render the scene completely unrealistic just like in *An American in Paris*. Chazelle wanted to reproduce the effect of technicolor without using it thanks to the use of props and colorful settings hence *La La Land* 'look[s] Technicolor and Timeless'[33]. Indeed, David Wasco, one member of the production team explained that '[Chazelle] would show the crew movies he wanted *La La Land* to look like: *The Young Girls of Rochefort* and *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg*, both of which had very heavy prime colors'[34]**.** In order to achieve this goal, he decided to modify the settings and even the places where the film was going to be shot following the model of Jacques Demy :

> ''To get the Technicolor just right, Wasco said that *La La Land*'s departments communicated more than they would have normally, to choreograph the film's big color moments. So, for example, when planning the musical number during which Stone and her character's roommates dress up for a night out, Reynolds-Wasco outfitted each bedroom in the 1920s Spanish-garden complex to complement the girl living there. Once we knew the roommates would be wearing costumes in these jewel-tone colors, we decided to make each room correspond with the roommate," explained Reynolds-Wasco. "If we had a simple, single-color dress, I tried to put it against some patterned wallpaper. Or the green-and-white stripe in one area, and then there was the yellow nouveau color in another room. It went back again to Jacques Demy in that we dressed the apartment in sort of French, thrift-shop-y items, like little metal ornate chairs."[35]

Hence, the impression of technicolor was not given thanks to a filming technique, but thanks to the use of props and paintings in order to give the impression to the viewer that they were watching a

32 *Ibid.* p 63
33 MILLER, Julie. 'The clever tricks that made *La La Land* look Technicolor and Timeless' in *Vanity Fair* (2017). https://www.vanityfair.com/hollywood/2017/02/la-la-land-production-design (last consulted 02 / 25 / 2019)
34 *Ibid.*
35 *Ibid.*

technicolor movie. However, the impression given is reminiscent of the tradition of the classical musical film. If we analyze 'A Lovely Night', Mia is wearing a yellow dress and a red bag standing out against the background of the valley at sunset. Moreover, the artificial light brought by the lampost combined with the natural light from the sunset gives the viewer an impression of technicolor whereas it is not.

Moreover, there is a 'multiple diegesis' with 'multiple narrative worlds'[36] in *La La Land*. If we still take the Epilogue into consideration, Mia and Sebastian walk through fifteen different settings (if we take the different settings from the flashback into consideration) as if they were going to fifteen different worlds. Moreover, we are led to another version of their story which is an imagined one in the epilogue when the story is rewritten with Mia and Sebastian ending together as a couple. Besides, 'dream ballets in the MGM musicals emphasize either the wish or they represent a tentative working out of the problems of the primary narrative'[37]. In the epilogue, the tentative is to escape from reality and from the breaking-up of the couple between Mia and Sebastian as well as the failure of the love story that is so unbearable for the viewers that the filmmakers invent a new one, a one less difficult to accept. In the 'ballets which represent the dreamer's wish, the ballet foreshadows in symbolic form the eventual outcome of the plot'[38]. This is true with 'a Lovely Night' in which the two characters seem to quarrel and to be opposed with the performance on the bench where they quarrel by throwing dust on the other's shoes. Besides, 'the resolution always takes place in the primary diegesis, the real world', and that is true, as the camera cuts back with a reverse shot on Mia's face. Then, we understand that the dream sequence was just a dream.

Finally, Jane Feuer explains that props are often used to create an artifical scenery and add up to the artificiality of musicals. Filmmakers indeed 'create numbers in which performers make use of props at hand, things perhaps intended for other ends, to create the imaginary world of the musical numbers'[39]. 'For both Astaire and Kelly, props must not appear as props. Rather they must give the impression of being actual objects in the environment'[40]. It is true in the epilogue in which props (trees, balloons, make-up) seem to be part of the environment, and in a *Lovely Night,* in which Sebastian uses the lampost to dance just like in *Singin' in The Rain*. All these elements make us feel we are watching a real classical musical film.

D. The use of Mise en Abyme

Finally, Jane Feuer explains that 'musicals about Hollywood always become musicals about

36 *FEUER, J. The Hollywood Musical.* Beginning of Chapter 4
37 *Ibid.*
38 *Ibid.*
39 *Ibid.*
40 *Ibid.*

making musicals'[41] and 'of the many camera positions, most are demystifying. […] Many reveal all or part of the movie set on which the movie is being shot'. Moreover, 'the number *concludes* with shots of technicians monitoring the sound'[42]. One example given comes from the musical *Singin' in the Rain* which 'may be the product of a show of technology'. In *La La Land*, the same process can be observed as Mia and Sebastian are walking in the studios in Hollywood and we see several props moving, like for instance a fake setting that is being pushed by a worker in one of the warehouse where they shoot the movies. Then, the couple is stopped because one team is shooting a scene from a movie. They even see the shooting and a long shot is used to put on screen the whole setting with the cameras and the microphones that are hidden behind. All the material necessary to shoot a movie is unveiled in front of the viewer. Moreover, one must not forget that the plot of *La La Land* in itself is a mise-en-abyme as Mia wants to become an actress in a movie.

Another kind of mise-en-abyme that we may find in the movie is the one brought visually by the use of mirrors by Mia several times. Indeed, a mirror shot by the camera creates a frame within the frame showing the same character that we see from behind and that is facing us in the mirror. In this shot, Mia is entrapped into the mirror and it gives two different views on the same character : a rear view and a frontal view in the mirror. The effect created is that of a duplication. Indeed, the mirror is a 'splitting device'[43]. So the characters are fragmented within themselves. We can see this feature when Mia is looking at herself in the mirror at the pool party or when she comes back from her audition. It may symbolize the split of her identity between who she is (a normal girl going to several auditions) and who she would like to be (a famous actress acknowledged for her talent. This is associated with the traditonal narrative arch of Hollywood movies in general which often tells from-rags-to-riches story or are about characters who struggled a lot in their lives and are finally successful at the end of the movie or manage to fulfill their dreams.

To conclude this part, we can assert that a lot of features taken from *La La Land* belong to classical Hollywood musical films from the narrative arch to the filming techniques. However, Damien Chazelle's aim was to create a modernized musical that would fit the taste of a 20th century audience so we may assert that some modern features must be hidden under a cover of tradition.

41 *Ibid*. p. 46
42 *Ibid*.
43 'The mirror in the Art of the twentieth century' in *CIRCA 95*, Spring 2001.

Part Two : The modernization of the classical musical film.

Even if a lot of features of *La La Land* are taken from classical Hollywood musicals as we saw in the first part of this essay, one must not forget that Chazelle's aim was to modernize the genre and make it accessible for everyone, even the viewers who do not like classical musicals[44]. Thus, in this part, I will study all the features (stylistic, formal and contextual) which show that *La La Land* is not completely a classical musical film and that some of the features differ from those taken from a classical one. Indeed, one main aim of the musical is to entertain people and to make them forget the harshness of their everyday life. This theory is called 'escapism' and states that musical films are like 'an opium for citizens'[45] and musicals should be movies accessible to older children and teenagers'[46] and that one must not need to think when watching a musical film but one should just enjoy. That is what is explained when speaking about musical films which were produced during the Depression Era :

> "[les comédies musicales sont] couramment présenté[es] comme une sorte de paradigme de l'évasion (*movies as escapist entertainment*) dans le cinéma hollywoodien de la Dépression : par l'étalage des *production values* (le luxe des costumes, la splendeur des décors, la griserie de la musique et de la danse et la séduction érotique), la comédie musicale se serait employée à faire oublier aux Américains les réalités et les causes de la crise. Le cinéma fonctionnait bien comme un « opium du peuple ». (…) Les réalisateurs de l'âge classique revendiquent le statut de divertissement de leurs films, se moquent des prétentions des «auteurs » à livrer des messages, et jurent que le film hollywoodien doit rester accessible à un public de douze ans d'âge mental."[47]

Thus, if Chazelle's motivation was to create an innovative musical, then he should have challenged this notion of escapism and he must have created a musical in which the viewer can notice traces and fragments coming from real life and telling the viewer that he is not in a parrallel world in which only magic and happiness occur. So we are going to look for these 'dull bits' in this part as the filmmaker indeed shows the darkness of real life through the use of different features.

A. Crisis and society

First of all, Damien Chazelle decided to make a lot of references to the crisis and to the society in which we are living in the 21st century.

Firstly, we can assert that there is a parallel between the musicals made in the past to counteract the presence of escapism in musicals and *La La Land*. For instance, in 1933, *Golddiggers* was directed and produced by Mervyn Le Roy and the movie was not only about making people escape from real life but it was also about showing the underlying pessimism hidden

44 *Supra*. p. 1.
45 BORDAT, F. « Cinéma et civilisation », *Revue française d'études américaines*. 2001/2 (no88), p. 44-52.
46 *Ibid.*
47 *Ibid.*

under a cover of joyful musical. Indeed, *Gold Diggers of 1933* was about a from-rags-to-riches story as four girls were trying to create a musical onstage, but they struggled to find enough money, and they finally became rich because of their love story and their encounters with four men. But even if *Gold Diggers* was presented as 'escapist entertainment' as it was a musical (showing wealth, magnificient sceneries in which the characters are dancing, music) released during the Great Depression, during which unemployment and poverty were the rules, Francis Bordat explains that under this cover, if we consider the musical as a whole, we may notice that *Gold Diggers* is not just an escapist movie :

> 'Il ne va pas du tout de soi que le film joue véritablement cette carte, ou en tout cas qu'il ne joue que celle-là. Il suffit pour s'en convaincre de replacer la scene incriminée dans ses contextes. Le premier et le plus important d'entre eux est celui de la totalité du film, dont on ne saurait détacher impunément un plan, une scene ou une séquence''[48].

To illustrate this point of view, he takes the example of the song 'We're in the Money' which seems to show the characters as very rich and happy (contrarily to what happens in society) whereas a closer study of the lyrics saying 'We've got a lot of what it takes to get along' shows that they clearly refer to their jobs – prostitutes. So they are not rich, they just climbed up the social ladder by being prostitutes and by sacrificing themselves to earn money. We can draw a parallel between *Gold Diggers of 1933* and *La la Land* because *La La Land*, just like *Gold Diggers*, was produced in a particular context. Indeed, if *Gold Diggers* was shot during the Great Depression, *La La Land* was released in 2017 in the US after the crisis of 2008, after the election of Donald Trump and in a society that is evolving more and more – from the technological advance to the rise of unemployment, poverty and terrorism, our society is faithfully depicted in *La la Land*. In Gold Diggers, the song 'We're in the money' seems to explain that women manage to earn a living and get enough money to pay for the bills because they become prostitute. We find the same stylistic choice in Chazelle's film musical as the song from the Audition 'The Fools who Dream' explains that Mia's aunt was a dreamer, that she became famous, but that she suffered a lot to succeed ('Here's to the heart that breaks') since she had to bear the others' point of views ('Here's to the fools who dream / Crazy as they may seem'). Besides, one may find the same approach in the song 'City of Stars' which is sung twice in the movie : at the beginning it is sung by Sebastian alone when he is walking on the pier by the seaside, and then it is a duet between Mia and Sebastian that is sung when they are sitting together on the piano bench in their home. However, there are two versions for this song. The first one explains that 'City of Stars' is 'A Dream that I cannot Make True' whereas the second time, Mia and Sebastian explain that 'The Dream has finally come true'. However, after seeing the dramatic ending of the musical, the viewers may understand that the first version of the song was the one to believe as the love story between the two lovers is definitely a

48 *Ibid.*

‘Dream that [they weren’t able to] make true’. Thus, the first version of the song was a foreshadowing of the ending of the musical. So *La La Land* not only depicts the good side of becoming famous, but also the bad side, even if it is pessimistic.

Another example is given by Francis Bordat in this article : at the end of the first sequence of *Gold Diggers*, the rehearsal is interrupted by bailiff coming to take the furniture. In *La La Land*, an underlying pessimism is present in each sequence of the movie the same way to refer to the crisis we had to cope with in 2008 and which still had an effect on our lives several years later. For instance, we learn by Laura that Sebastian has just been swindled ; we see the domination and the coldness of the bar owner the day when Sebastian is fired ; then, Mia has to sell all her belongings, including the poster from *Casablanca* in order to earn money to produce her one-woman show, but in the end, nobody comes to see it and she has lost her money so her sacrifices do not seem to be successful ; Sebastian goes on Tour to earn money to be able to open his own club after the call from Mia’s mother that makes him realize he has not fulfilled his dreams yet ; the room in the cinema is almost empty because people have no money to pay for the tickets and the bar at the beginning also is ; Mia passes by the cinema which has closed. All those details are present to testify for life in our society after the crisis. Moreover, the presence of Mia’s parents by the phone seem to let pessimism enter the movie as during the phone call to Mia’s mother, when Mia is explaining Sebastian is going to open his bar, and that she is doing a one-woman shown her mother asks : ‘are you paid ?’ whereas she is daydreaming about fulfilling her dreams and she has to answer ‘Not yet. I am paying to be able to do it’. And when speaking about Sebastian, she also has to admit that ‘He is going to open his bar but no, he has not opened it yet’. The diegesis indicates a brutal coming back to reality through the different phone calls that are made. Unlike other musicals, *Gold Diggers* and *La La Land* do not want to follow the trend which consists in seeing the musicals as a way to escape from reality.

Moreover, unlike other musicals, *La La Land* is a blend between two opposite eras (the 50s and the 21st century). Indeed, in *La La Land*, most of the props are coming from the 21st century : from the Toyota Prius to the characters’ clothes throughout the movies, everything is made so that the viewer sees what they actually see everyday in their lives. However, some references are made to the 1950s through the movie, like for instance when Mia is driving in front of the cinema and the movie *Rebel without a Cause* is in the movies whereas it was released in real life in 1955. Moreover, the band playing at the Engagement Party is wearing clothes from that era. The reference to the movie *Rebel without a Cause* which is transferred to our era in *La La Land*, as if it were released in 2017. Mia driving in front of the cinema twice while the movie is on the screens may symbolize the conflicts between generations and it gives the idea of celebrating a new way of thinking as well as innovation. Indeed, Jim Stark in this movie does not manage to comply with the

rules of society and he always fight. Nobody understands him, not even his parents and as the title indicates he rebels against all that is from that are and fights for his futur life. Thus, the presence of this movie in our context may symbolize the urge to rebel against our society as well as the promotion of a new way of doing things that contrasts with what is going on in society nowadays.

Illustration 3: The band playing at the pool scene is wearing clothes from the 1950s

Illustration 4: On the contrary, the other guests are wearing clothes from the 21st century

Then, modernity is present through technology which is breaking people's relationships (phone call during Mia's audition, phone call in the 'Lovely Night' scene which interrupts the dialogue between Mia and Sebastian, close-up on one woman texting during the audition). During the dinner with Greg's brother and his lover, the brother says : 'Cinemas are terrible. People are always on their phones'.

Besides, the tragic love story is linked to society. Firstly, this is shown by the link made with *An American in Paris* as some sceneries are taken from this musical which tells the story of Jerry Mulligan, an American painter, who was struggling to earn a living. He met a rich woman who decided to give him money and become his patron. Thanks to this encounter, he met Lisa, a young French girl he fell in love with, without knowing that she was already married to one of his friend. We first see the scenery from this musical film in a studio in the middle of *La La Land*, and then the characters are in the middle of the scenery when speaking so it may symbolize an evolution towards the breaking-up of their relationship and a foreshadowing of the dramatic ending of the musical. Thus, if *La La Land* quotes a classical musical film, its only aim is to bring out the negative out of it and include it into *La La Land*, and it is opposed to a classical feature.

Moreover, *Gold Diggers* is a musical speaking about and speaking to the society as it puts forward a dichotomy between the individual and the collective in order to refer to the New Deal which wanted a balance between collective and individual values. In this dichotomy, the individual was shown, absorbed by the mass before they come back revived from this journey : ''Les numéros sont dynamisés par une dialectique complexe de l'individuel et du collectif (..) Une structure en trois temps ou l'individu est d'abord affirmé, absorbé ensuite dans la masse, pour émerger à

nouveau enfin, renforcé et vivifié par son experience (Rubin 59)".[49] In *La La Land*, this dichotomy is also the basis for our analysis. Indeed, in the scenes which seem visually artificial (The dreamt epilogue, the opening scene on the motorway), the individual seems to be revived by the experience of the collective as all the characters seem desperate in the middle of the traffic jam, for instance, and dancing together seems to make them change their behavior and be less agressive. The camera moves with a pan from the inside of a car to another car (individual/ private sphere), then focuses on each character performing some steps alone (medium shot), whereas at the end of the scene, they are all doing the same steps, so their union seems to be reached as they are visually part of the same community (extreme long shot). However, the character of Mia is not revived after the pool scene as she is even more alone and lonely and she finds a refuge in the toilets. So this breach of the structure introduced by Rubin is not innocent. It is a deliberate choice of the director to unite Mia and Sebastian who are different and who do not fit into this world. One can notice Mia and Sebastian are often off-centered and if we superimpose the two images of them, we obtain the complete image of the couple. At the beginning, after the Engagement Party, Mia seems to be very lonely and it is visually visible as she is shown in a very long shot which brings out the setting and makes her seem really tiny, to show her lonelines. So the dichotomy is even extended in *La la Land* as individuals (the couple) seem to be isolated from the community. Thus Chazelle seems to move away from the traditional dichotomy and to extend Mervyn Le Roy's dichotomies even further to make the breach from the tradition even more visible and harsher than the one used at the time in order to let pessimism invade *La La Land* (loneliness of the characters, alienation from society, and so on). It may also put forward the idea that people do not recognize themselves into this society and feel like they do not belong there and this may be linked for instance to the election of Trump as he was already running for the election in the United States at the moment *La La Land* was produced.

Illustration 5: Very long shot to show Mia's loneliness

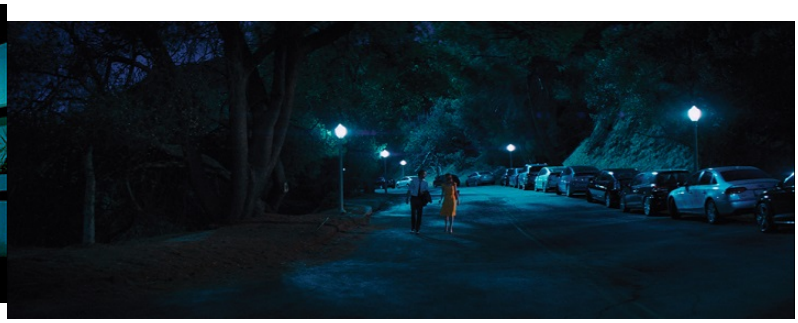


Illustration 6: Very long shot showing Mia and Sebastian in 'A Lovely Night's Scene'

Moreover, the group and individuals also have a negative impact on the individual, as the two characters are actually separated after Sebastian's involvement in Keith's band which separates Mia and Sebastian both visually (as they are now in the middle of the frame, as if they did not need

49 *Ibid.*

each other any longer) and physically (distance of the tour). So, the link between collective and individuals is depicted as bringing negative events.

Besides, the idea of entrapment is shown visually with the use of frames within the frame and of circular patterns throughout the movie and above all during the Planetarium Scene with the shape of the Planetarium, of the different floors and the motif of the sphere. Moreover, it is visible thanks to the gradation and evolution of the feeling of seclusion as the film is shot outside in a highway at the beginning, inside several houses afterwards and in a cave at the end. The motif of the door is also relevant to analyze as the camera often shows closed doors to the viewers. For instance, when Mia passes by the cinema, the door from the cinema is locked, and 'locked doors keep others from one's private world'[50]. Thus, even the cinema has become an enclosed space and each place seems to be locked and prisoner of this world. The camera is also often moving the same way as characters for instance in the opening sequence when it is swirling the same way the characters are turning upon themselves when they dance. The circular movements show the confinement as the camera comes back to the same place it was at the beginning. Moreover, an idea of domination is obvious with the use of a lot of high-angle shots showing that outside forces are at stake and are a pressure put on the characters (idea of fate visible through the narrative arch too). Besides, at the beginning, the scenes are often set outside, with very long shots showing the city, but it becomes tighter as we go further in the movie, with scenes focusing on the couple together after the pool scene (*Lovely Night, City of Stars*) and then, with the use of parallel editing between Mia and Sebastian's life as the viewer finally follows each individual on their own way to success. This focus on the individual may be seen both as positive, as a call made by Chazelle not to follow the path given by society, but to become one's own self, but it can also reflect the negative side of relationships, and depict society as a place in which everyone is lonely and entrapped without any way out, except loneliness.

▲ *From the use of very long shots with a depth of field at the beginning to the use of close-ups in the Epilogue scene : the camera comes closer to the characters and entraps them.*

Finally, in *Gold Diggers*, we can witness an objectification of the feminine as the chorus girls represent coins. In *La La Land,* Mia is desindividualized by the way her story is treated. Indeed, at the end, we know that Sebastian has reached his dream and the viewers share one of his

50 MOSS Leaonard. *A Key to the Door Image in the Metamorphosis.*

concert in his jazz club. However, we do not know anything about Mia who comes back out of the blue in Sebastian's world but we do not exactly know if she is happy, what she is doing to make a living in her new life and so on. This feature does not seem to fit with the features from a traditional musical which aims at giving the same importance and the same amount of time to both main characters hence the parallelism between the feminine and the masculine.

B. Influence of the American Independent Cinema

Then, Damien Chazelle, when directing *La La Land*, decided to make some innovations based on previous genres whose aims were to innovate at the time they were produced. Independent filmmaking is one of Chazelle's inspirations as he graduated from Harvard with a degree in films and he had already made and directed a film there. But he realized when trying to raise money in order to produce *La La Land* that he would have to produce another film, *Whiplash*, to earn enough money to produce it as he explains :

> 'En fait, j'ai écrit *La La Land* avant *Whiplash*, et c'était difficile de trouver l'argent. A Hollywood, une comédie musicale comme ça, surtout dans la tradition de Jacques Demy, c'était pas très commercial et j'ai fait *Whiplash* en espérant que si ça réussirait, ça m'aiderait à faire *La La Land*'.[51]

And that is the reason why he produced *Whiplash,* a much darker drama movie which tells the story of a successful young drummer called Andrew who is helped by a very strict teacher called Terence Fletcher who goes up to beating him in order to make him succeed and to make him perfect. The atmosphere of this movie is really dark and realistic as well as full of pessimism as it is showing the bad side of society.When someone sees *La La Land*, they may be surprised by the contrast between the two productions as it is much smoother and lighter with a lot of dance scenes and the main topic being fulfilling one's dream. This movie is thus more mainstream and belongs more to the tradition of Hollywood movies and it contrasts with the previous films made by Chazelle. Even if *La La Land* is not an independent film, I am going to study the presence of independent features in this musical film which turns *La La Land* into an innovative musical film as those features are never or almost never associated with the traditional features of a musical film.

Firstly, what is an independent film ? Independent films appeared in the 1980s thanks to the '1980s boom in music video'[52] and because 'major studios were unable to match people's new demands'[53] for realism which was necessary after the stock market crash. At the time, Hollywood was way too much conservative so filmmakers turned to independent filmmaking. [It] requires an

51 C A VOUS. Interview de Damien Chazelle, réalisateur de *La La Land*. 13 / 01 / 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NvMJNw-7CBI (last accessed 17 / 04 / 2019)
52 KING, G (2005). *American Independent Cinema*. I.B Tauris : Bloomsbury. 294 p.
53 *Ibid.*

industrial location ‘that is either clearly independent or somewhere in the grey area often known as ‘Indiewood’ which includes studio-owned specialist or ‘independent’ labels’[54]. It was often ‘low-budget’ at the beginning and using avant garde cinema’ and avant-garde ideas. One other feature was the ‘use of small and committed casts and crews prepared to work without salary’[55]. But as it became successful with the emergence of new companies such as Miramax, Hollywood became more and more interested in those movies which produce budget films nowadays. Today, they are in favor of ‘the pursuit of auteurist individual freedom of expression’[56]. Even if the aims of independent filmmakers (realism and breaking away from the conventions) are very opposed to the traditional aim of the film musical (escapism)[57], I am going to prove that *La La Land* is taking some of the features of American independent cinema and that the musical is modernized thanks to a blend between classical features coming from Hollywood and more independent features.

First of all, the presence of a crisis is one feature that appears both in independent films and in *La La Land* which moves away from the escapism one might expect of a musical, and contains more than mere positive and optimistic features whose aim is to help the viewers escape from reality. Indeed, independent films make a ‘claim to the status of something more closely approximating the reality of the lives of most people and especially those on the socio-economic margins’[58]. This is linked to the idea of financial crisis evoked in the previous chapter.

Besides, the main aim of an independent film is realism as we have a ‘motivation according to verisimilitude, or realism. The material makes sense because of its claims of proximity to the way things are in the outside world, rather than the extent to which it accords with the dominant conventions of fictional narrative’[59]. Hence the aim is ‘leaving the dull bits in’[60]. Indeed, most of the time, musical films tend to only show to the viewer splendid and breathtaking dance scenes or spectacular elements, but Chazelle combines those elements with more boring and usual moments taken from everyday life and ordinary life. For instance, he shows Mia and Sebastian working and rehearsing. He also concentrates and spends a lot of time on all the negative moments that one may face in real life – for instance, the viewer witnesses Sebastian being fired, Mia and Sebastian quarreling and asserting at the beginning that they feel nothing for each other. It is the same in the epilogue when Mia enters the bar owned by Sebastian. The filmmaker uses a point-of-view shot on Mia through the sequence and we see thanks to the actress’s performance that Mia can hardly breathe when she realizes she is in Sebastian’s bar. There are two zooms-in which enable the viewer to identify with the characters whose faces show the suffering. Besides, when Sebastian notices

54 *Ibid.*
55 *Ibid.*
56 *Ibid.*
57 *Supra.* p. 1 of part 2.
58 KING, G. op. Cit. On the previous page.
59 *Ibid.*
60 *Ibid.*

Mia's presence, the camera zooms-in and there is a long silence to show the embarrassment of the two characters and their mutual affection, but also their disappointment. Mia is isolated as the light becomes darker around her thanks to the lighting. The emphasis is put here on the feelings of the characters that the viewer shares thanks to the point-of-view shots.

Illustration 8: Point-of-view shot on Mia in the epilogue

All those scenes are realistic and make the viewers feel as if they were watching a movie telling a story which could happen in real life and in a real world. That is turning *La La Land* into an 'anti-musical' i. e. a musical which seems to be composed of features that are opposed to the ones we traditionally find in a classical musical. However, the way the negative sides of life and realism appear in *La La Land* is very different from what the viewers may have seen in *Whiplash,* in the sense that *Whiplash* clearly and directly shows the reality brutally with physical violence and mental harrassing. Moreover, a very dark main theme is used with a drum teacher beating his pupil so that he improves himself. Fletcher is dominative and we can see that through the composition of the frames as he is always standing above his student and we clearly see thanks to the acting that the student is exhausted and that Fletcher becomes mad at him and begins to throw the drums up in the air and to yell 'faster' several times. In *La La Land*, realism is hidden behind the dream of the two characters.

▲ *Mental harrasment and domination of Terence in a very dark atmosphere (use of dull colors).*

Just like the characters, the viewer only sees the dreams but not all the negative that is around them. For instance, when they are in a taxi, the car passes in front of the cinema which has closed, but we do not really notice it or just as a detail as we are absorbed into the character's lives and the parallel sequences showing Mia and Sebastian preparing the one-woman show and the tour with the jazz band. However, we have a point-of-view shot on Mia showing her smile disappear when she is in the car in front of the closed cinema and we see some kind of worry in her face whereas everything was going well. Mia's acting performance, by being suddenly desperate when she sees the cinema

closed, foreshadows the failure of her one-woman show as it is going to be the next, after *Rebel Without a Cause*, to fail at obtaining an audience.

Illustration 9: Point-of-view shot on Mia when she sees the cinema which was showing on the screens a new kind of movie has closed.

The same phenomenon happens in the ending. Indeed, in independent filmmaking, 'points of dramatic crisis might arise more abruptly and are not subjected to the kind of reconciliation or closure typical of the Hollywood model' and 'the film ends in dissipation rather than any sense of progression or the learning of any lessons'[61]. This defines the sense of confusion the viewers feel when watching the movie. Indeed, at the end, Mia comes back several years later with her new husband in the streets and enter Sebastian's bar, and we understand that Sebastian and Mia will not live their lives together as expected in traditional musicals.The epilogue shows the desire to make the movie realistic as it is opposed to a version of an ending made in Hollywood in which everything goes well for everyone. Chazelle even shows us an unrealistic version of the ending – the one that is dreamt by Mia when she is listening to Sebastian playing their song at the piano whereas she went into his club by chance when she was walking with her husband. In this version, the two lovers end up together and do not have to make any compromise – they both manage to be happy in their couple and to fulfill their dreams. This final sequence shows what Mia and Sebastian's story could have been if they had been shot by a filmmaker from the traditional and classical period of Hollywood as July Demers explains in her article[62] :

> « en révélant cette version fantasmée, Damien Chazelle offre aux spectateurs ce qu'il attendait depuis le début. Une comédie musical hollywoodienne idéale. Un monde où la magie fait son œuvre, où les méchants ne sont pas de vrais méchants et où les amoureux n'ont pas à faire de compromis pour réaliser leurs rêves. Cette dernière séquence ne présente dès lors pas ce que Mia et Sébastien auraient pû être si l'un et l'autres avaient pris d'autres décisions, mais bien ce qu'ils auraient pu devenir s'ils avaient été filmés par les réalisateurs d'autrefois ».

Hence, this shows Chazelle's refusal to make a classical musical and to depict in his movie a world that is unrealistic (as the ones made in Hollywood are).

61 DEMERS, Julie. « La La Land et l'anti-musical » in *Séquences : la revue du cinéma. (*Mars-Avril 2017).
62 *Ibid.*

Another feature we find in independent movies is that they focus on lost characters and less on the plot as 'the main focus is on character rather than the plot' and 'Characters tend to be more complex and ambiguous defined less in terms of clearly established goals or morality than is usually the case in Hollywood'[63]. We also find this feature in *La La Land* as the emphasis is often on the feelings of the two characters. For instance, when Mia sings 'Someone in the Crowd', the performance of the actress makes us see her sorrow and her grief after her audition. Moreover, both characters are not sure they will make it and reach their dream and their feelings are clearly expressed, for instance in Mia's monologue when she is doubting and repeats 'Maybe I'm not good enough'. All the sequence is about her low self-esteem and her mind.

Then, the way the protagonists try to make connections with other people is reminiscent of independent filmmaking. Indeed, the 'characters are separated in their lives' and 'connections, when they occur in these films, are the product of chance as much as goal-directed design on the part of the characters'[64]. Firstly, there are numerous long shots in which we can see Mia walking alone in the streets (when she goes out of the bar at the beginning and comes back on foot) and a lot of medium shots showing only one protagonist. Sebastian is isolated behind his piano and because he is surrounded by the tables of people who are celebrating together. This contrast makes his loneliness stand out.

Illustration 10: Play on lights and chiaroscuro to make Sebastian stand out and emphasize his isolation from the audience

Besides, just like in independent films, there is a 'denial or delay of moments when narrative crisis is expected to culminate in explosions'[65]. Indeed, in *La La Land*, the biggest crisis (the couple not ending up together) is revealed at the very end of the film very quickly, whereas the dreamt version is taking more than ten minutes. This way the 'narrative is downplayed or displaced,

63 KING, G. *op. Cit.* p. 27
64 DEMERS, J. art. Cit. p. 29.
65 *Ibid.*

slower-paced or de-melodramatized. Such strategies reduce the potential for lapses into sentimentality'. At the end after the dreamt version, Mia and her husband go out quickly, Mia and Sebastian smiling at each other quickly. There is no melodrama, no flashback remembering what happened at the beginning and their love story.

Moreover, the structure of the narrative is similar to the structure of independent films. Firstly, another strategy shared between independent films and Chazelle's musical is the 'repetition' of the same event or the 'reworking of events from different perspectives or shifted into different contexts'[66]. Indeed, this quote perfectly defines the ending of *La La Land* with the twist at the end. Mia's love story is reworked in an improved positive version of itself in a dream-like sequence so we see a different story – a positive version of what would have happened if Mia and Sebastian had stayed together. Thus, more work is often required from the viewer than in Hollywood and it is 'a process that also tends to increase consciousness of the process of narration itself'[67]. The numerous interwoven narratives also 'create a proliferation of material that can reduce narrative clarity' and confuse the viewer. That is the case at the end of the film when the viewer has to work mentally to understand that they have been trapped by the filmmaker as they believed that the ending would be a classical one (ie. positive). Moreover, the play with the moves of the camera and the visual effects of the dream-like vision makes the viewer think about whether or not they are watching the reality. Too much information is given in thirteen minutes – that Mia is married to another man, that Sebastian has opened his own club associated to the dream-like vision of what their life would have been together and the final coming back to reality. This gives an idea of fragmentation as several stories are associated.

Finally, the image of the mirror can be associated with independent features as the mirror is a 'splitting device'[68]. So the characters too are fragmented within themselves. We can see this feature when Mia is looking at herself in the mirror at the pool party or when she comes back from her audition. It may symbolize the split of her identity between who she is and who she would like to be. Moreover, the use of mirrors shows that the musical parodies the American Dream. Indeed, the characters are often looking at themselves and rehearsing in front of the mirror so it gives the idea of being another self as the mirror is like a projection into the future or into the dream of the protagonists. Indeed, when Mia has failed during her first audition in the movie, she locks herself into her bathroom, takes a shower and seems to be really desperate, but suddenly, as she finds herself in front of the mirror, her face changes and she begins to smile and sing. The light dims down around her to illuminate herself singing as if she was onstage in front of a crowd, successful.

66 KING, G. op. Cit. p. 30.
67 *Ibid.*
68 PHAY-VAKALIS, Soko. 'The mirror in the art of the Twentieth Century : From Division to Infinite' in *CIRCA 95.* Spring 2001.

Thus the acting performance and the use of lights linked to the melting of the character into the mirror show the second side of her identity – the dream she has about being successful and being an actress. This split between two identities may also symbolize the traditional split of any character in a musical between work and leisure as it is leasure when mia takes her shower, but then, when in front of the mirror, she is into work, trying to rehearse. However, the dichotomy between work and leisure is not solved at the end, contrarily to the typical features of Hollywood musicals promoted by Altman[69] as they both chose their work. This may show the negative side of a society that is based on achieving, being successful in the professional field and appearances.

Illustration 11: Mia's face reflected into the mirror

C. A mixture of jazz and pop rhythms : musical hybridity

Not only does *La La Land* combine features coming from different genres such as independent films or the musical film, but it also combines different types of music. This feature is embodied first of all by Sebastian's musical choices.

On the one hand, the movie is actually reflecting on the weight of tradition as Mia and Sebastian are separated by their own visions of tradition and modernity. Indeed, the separation (both physical and mental) between the characters begins at the moment when Sebastian accepts to perform in a pop jazz group in order to earn money to be able to open his own jazz club after that, whereas he does not really like pop music at first. The point-of-view shot on Mia's face shows her surprise at the modernization of a traditional jazz song during one of Sebastian's concert. Later, their quarrel begins because of their two different viewpoints on jazz and on their dreams. Sebastian is seeing the future while Mia is still holding on to the past. In this movie, Chazelle seems to tell us that holding on to the past cannot lead to someone's happiness and that a genre, such as the musical film, must evolve and change according to time and to the society people are living in. The same thing happens when Sebastian goes out with Mia and that they go to an old cinema to watch an old film and that, suddenly, the screens turns black as the movie roll has broken. The old seems to be strongly criticized by the events of the film all the more so as Sebastian manages to open his own

69 *Supra*. Part 1.

jazz club by looking at the future and accepting Keith's proposal to perform in a pop band. The sentence told by Keith to Sebastian when he was hesitating to perform in the pop band to make money 'How could you be a revolutionary if you're such a traditionalist ? You're holding on to the past, but jazz is about the future' seems to be a sentence told to all the viewers.

On the other hand, the use of 'jazz polyrhythm' is innovative and shows the refusal to follow the tradition : 'Chazelle révolutionne le genre en brisant les attentes du spectateur. Pour ce faire, il recourt à quelques caractéristiques du jazz dont la polyrythmie. Il superpose des rythmes d'accentuation différente autour d'un même motif musical'.[70] It is the case in the song 'Start a Fire' at the moment when the melody changes from being traditional to being innovative (pop) and the polyrhythm is also used when Sebastian plays the piano at the beginning as well as in the epilogue.

D. The importance given to the trivial, the ordinary and banality

Then, *La La Land* seems to focus on the everyday life of people like us and not only on the glimmer of Hollywood and of the success of famous people but also on the dull side of it – the struggle to succeed, the imperfection of life and of events.

This is firstly visible with the choice of the actors made by Chazelle as, contrarily to their ancestors who were professional dancers hired to perform in musical film, they do not have professional skills as far as singing and dancing is concerned, and this is visible for the viewer. As Julie Demers says 'Chazelle propose de révolutionner le genre en créant un anti-musical. A commencer par le choix des acteurs qui ne viennent pas de Broadway. Ryan Gosling et Emma Stone se débrouillent mais ne savent ni danser ni chanter comme Gene Kelly ou Debbie Reynolds'[71]. They are people like us the viewer can identify with. In this way, *La La Land* differs from the conventions. Indeed, Ryan Gosling and Emma Stone are not professional dancers and the imperfection of the steps they perform produces a natural effect because it makes their flaws visible as well as the physical efforts and pain they have borne to achieve the performance that we can imagine just by watching the choreography (Lovely Night, Planetarium Scene). It reminds us of TV reality shows such as *Dancing with the Stars* or *Strictly Come Dancing*, which celebrate 'the sheer effort required in their learning new skills with considerable success'[72] as well as the 'accomplishments of trained amateur dancers as they master complex and demanding routines'. Thus Stones and Gostling, just like TV reality candidates, master complex choreographies, making a difference between a typical musical film, and *La La Land* in order to please a 'relatively new

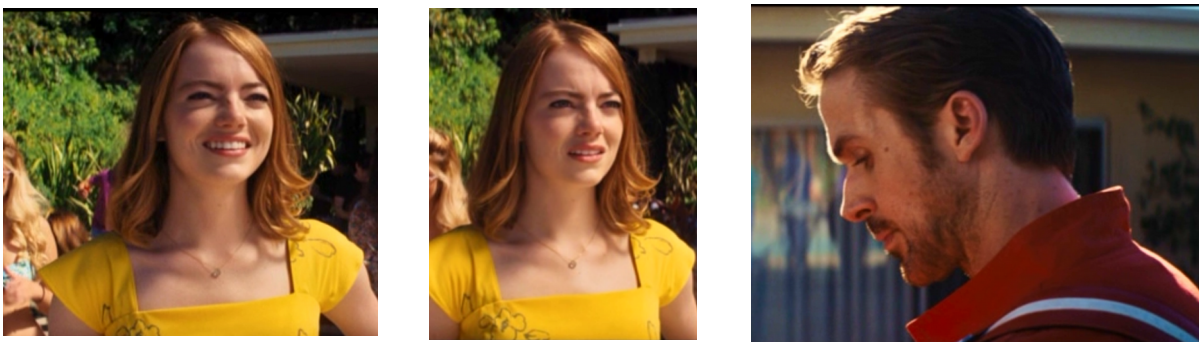
70 DEMERS, Julie. 'La La Land et l'anti-musical' in *Séquences 307*. March- April 2017.
71 *Ibid.*
72 WALTER, James. 'Does La La Land rethink the Hollywood musical?' in *University of Birmingham*. https://www.birmingham.ac.uk/research/perspective/la-la-land-rethinkmusical.aspx (Last accessed on 08 / 05 / 2018)

audience' which has an 'appetite for authentic or non-expert performance'[73]. We may then oppose Emma Stone to Roger : as Roger had to dance perfectly with high-heeled shoes, Stone simply removes her shoes to dance. Their dances are mainly composed of tap-dance, charleston and modern dance while the songs are mainly jazz or pop songs. Those genres are very popular genre. For instance, jazz was brought by Black people and it was a way for them to fight against discrimination and to connect together. Hence the culture is really popular and accesssible to the viewer (classical dance is not used for instance).

Then, the story introduces everyday events from everyday life : 'le récit n'est rien d'autre que la rencontre ordinaire de gens ordinaires. Pas de coup de foudre. Ils se croisent à plusieurs reprises et s'ignorent. Lorsqu'ils se trouvent dans une fête, ils affirment ne rien ressentir l'un pour l'autre. C'est plutôt les coïncidences, ainsi que le contexte (un nostalgique coucher de soleil sur les collines d'Hollywood) qui les poussent dans les bras de l'autre'[74]. The characters indeed always bump into each other by chance or see something in the streets that gives them ideas to fulfill their dreams and it seems realistic. For instance, when Mia drives in front of the cinema after the failure at her audition, she sees the movie 'Rebel without a Cause' has just been released in the movies so she begins to smile at the moment we identify with her thanks to a point-of-view shot. The next shot which appears after a fade into black is a close-up on what Mia is writing and thanks to a zoom-out we see that she is the one writing at that particular moment. After that, her flatmates comes in and ask what she is doing and she answers that she is writing a one-woman show. Thus, if she had taken another road, she would never have seen the title from this movie inciting to rebel against the conventions and to make one's destiny and something that is showing her identity. Besides, the two characters 'keep running into each other' (Sebastian). Indeed, the two characters are just going on with their lives and suddenly they begin to bump into each other several times in a small lapse of time, and that is the reason why they begin dating. At the beginning, Sebastian is into his car just behind Mia who is rehearsing for her audition, and Sebastian, impatient, passes next to her car as she forgets to move forward. Then, Mia enters the bar into which Sebastian is playing the piano because she has to go back home on foot as her car was not parked in an authorized area so it has been sent to the impound and she sees there is a bar and decides to come in by chance. Throughout this scene, we see Sebastian playing from Mia's point of view but as soon as Mia tries to talk to him, he escapes bumping into her physically this time. Afterwards, she goes to a party and we follow her point of view when she hears a group singing and tries to look in the direction of the group. As she is dazzled by the sun, she walks at the front of the audience, and a reaction shot shows the moment she realizes Sebastian is performing in this band. Then, she asks for the band to play a particular song so that he notices her. Finally, they speak together and the day ends with '*A*

73 *Ibid.*
74 *DEMERS, Julie.* art. Cit.*in this page*

Lovely Night' and with a sequence in which the two characters dance together. Without chance, there would not have been any relationship between them. It differs from what Altman explains as he says that in a musical, it is clear from the beginning that two characters are going to be together and chance does not usually seem to be the reason uniting two characters but rather their destiny.



▲ *Mia's reaction shot when she sees Sebastian*

Besides, the characters are not magnified by an exaggerated amount of make up or by eccentric props or clothes. They are clothed like in everyday life. This is visible thanks to Mia's make-up through the movie which is really minimalistic and renders her natural beauty. Her lipstick is not very bright, nor is her eye shadow very colorful. If we compare for instance with Debbie Reynolds, the contrast is seizing as she is wearing a bright red lipstick and she is wearing a golden party dress and has some feathers in her hair so she is made more sophisticated. Mia looks like the common girls that one may see in the streets everyday.

▲ *Emma Stone in La La Land vs Debbie Reynolds in Singin in the Rain (1952)*

Moreover the choice of the shooting locations is really relevant with an emphasis put on the artificiality of Hollywood sets by showing them, showing the shooting of a movie in the studios to break the dream and the illusion of reality given when we see them on the screen. It is fake and Chazelle enjoys showing it to us several times when Mia and Sebastian are walking after he joined her at work. Then, shooting places are seen as nothing more than trivial and simple places without any particularity in it. All the magic side of Hollywood is erased to keep the banality of things (it is a working place just like a coffee shop). The importance of the place has been taken away as Sebastian and Mia walk in the middle of it normally, as if they were in any other streets. The camera

follows the couple and their dialogue on their mutual dreams rather than what is happening in Hollywood.

▲ *Representation of Hollywood in Singin' in the Rain vs Representation of Hollywood in La La Land.*

Besides, the movie is often shot in common everyday-like places : the opening takes place in an everyday-like traffic jam, Mia goes into her bedroom after her audition is a failure ; Mia and Sebastian meet in the cafe where Mia is working and they quarrel in Sebastian's kitchen. The emphasis is put on the idea that the character are like us and live in ordinary places. This enables the viewers to better identify with them and thus to be better affected by the breaking up of the traditional love story and ending at the end of the movie.

Finally, musical numbers are ordinary and also show the difficulties to face when two people are in a relationship : 'contrairement aux comédies musicales classiques, les numéros [de danse] ne magnifient pas leur relations, au contraire. Ils montrent son aspect moins éclatant, la routine, le quotidien, la difficulté à suivre ses ambitions personnelles quand on est à deux'[75]. Indeed, what the movie shows to us is that Mia and Sebastian finally chose between their love story and fulfilling their dreams, while a classical Hollywood musical would have reversed their dreams and own features to give them to the other protagonist. Moreover, *A Lovely Night* is a dance scene only based on the simple act of accompanying a relative to his / her car, which is a very common everyday-like action.

75 *Ibid.*

Part Three – The limits to modernization

Thanks to the two previous parts, we can now assert that *La La Land* is a blend between traditional and innovative features as far as the genre of the musical is concerned. However, this modernization of the musical film may have limits and that is what we are going to study in this part. My analysis will be based on all the reviews that can be read. Indeed, according to several critiques, some mistakes have been made by Damien Chazelle when making *La La Land* : 'compte tenu des références que *La La Land* exhibe, plusieurs maladresses résonnent comme autant d'occasions ratées de réviser les aspects problématiques du *musical* classique'.[76] The few paragraphs below will explain what the 'blunders' told by Fanny Beuré are.

A. The problem of the depiction of jazz

First of all, the main 'blunder', according to Fanny Beuré, is the way the references to jazz and jazz itself are treated. Indeed, she explains that the way it is treated is only reflecting and spreading all the racist stereotypes against which black citizens have been fighting for decades. Indeed, Sebastian is a white man, and all the lights are on him as he is the one trying to make people like jazz in the movie. Yet associating the modernization of jazz with a white man is denying the history of jazz, which has been created and brought by black people when they arrived in the USA. Jazz is part of the Harlem Renaissance which took place in the 1920s and which enabled Black people's art to be known and spread at a time when racism was still very obvious in society. Keith, the only black representant, is put aside whereas he could have been the one promoting jazz. When black musicians are playing in front of the table around which Mia and Sebastian are sitting, it is Sebastian who is telling to Mia the story of jazz. Thus, *La La Land* seems to reproduce an example that has been fought in history, according to Fanny Beuré :

> '*La La Land* perpétue le stéréotype raciste du musical classique consistant à écarter les artistes noirs d'un genre pourtant porté par une musique dont ils sont à l'origine. Ce whitewashing crée un malaise d'autant plus prégnant que les Afro-Américains ne sont pas totalement absents du film de Chazelle, mais se trouvent – littéralement – relégués à l'arrière plan, qu'il s'agisse du personnage (secondaire) incarné par John Legend, de ce couple avec lequel Sebastian esquisse quelques pas sur une jetée, ou encore des musiciens devant lesquels il conte à Mia l'origine du jazz'[77].

Besides, Beuré is speaking about the first scene during which Sebastian is singing 'City of Stars'. Indeed, at that moment in the film, Sebastian is walking on a pier when he sees a couple composed of a black man and a black woman. He puts some money in the hat of the man and begins to dance with the black man's wife while he is watching completely stunned by what has just

76 BEURE, Fanny. 'La La Land' in *Le genre et l'écran*. April, 17, 2017. https://www.genre-ecran.net/?La-La-Land (last accessed 19 / 04 / 2019)

77 *Ibid.*

happened. If we study the performance of the actor, the black man stares at Sebastian throughout the scene and seems to try to come closer to take the hand of his wife back, but does not do it at the end because he seems not to be bold enough. He just does not dare. Thus, the acting performance puts the emphasis on the domination of Sebastian over this black man. Moreover, the composition of the frame is interesting to study as Sebastian is in the foreground while dancing, and the black man is completely hidden behind in the background as if he was not there any longer. We do not know anything about those two characters – they have no name, they do not speak and we do not see them again after this scene, so they seem to be a bit dehumanized.

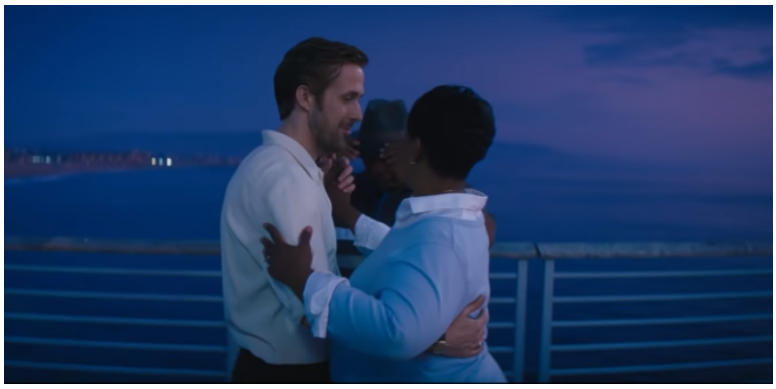


Illustration 3: Sebastian dancing with the black woman

In the 'Start A fire' scene, John Legend is singing with some black women behind him who are forming a choir. However, most of the time, we follow Sebastian's point of view with the use of point-of-view shots on Mia, and in the middle of the song, a group of white girls are going on the stage in order to dance but at the end, they are positioned in front of the black women and in front of the stage, as if they were the most important elements to notice in the performance, whereas a jazz song is performed.

Illustration 4: White girls dancing

Besides, Sebastian explains that it is really important to listen to jazz in a very attentive manner, but there is not any moment in the film which enables us to really listen to it as we hear a modernized version of it, not jazz. That is Fanny Beuré's assertion when she says 'on savourera l'ironie avec laquelle le personnage répète l'importance d'une écoute attentive du jazz sans que le

film ne nous permette d'entendre les musiciens à l'écran'[78]. The movie seems to tell us what not to do without even following the rules it creates. In an article taken from theguardian.com, we learn that Chazelle has even been accused of 'ideological snobbery' as most people actually agree with Keith's vision and not with Sebastian's vision whereas in the film Sebastian is the one who seems to be acknowledged for his views on the matter. Finally, The character of Keith is described in the same article as actually disconnected from real 'jazz roots' as he 'turns out to use a laughably 80s sound that's meant to seem completely disconnected from his jazz roots'[79].

B. The problem of inequality in the depiction of the characters and their stories

Then, *La La Land* is based on a very inequal and gendered balance of power as Fanny Beuré speaks about some 'portraits de rapports de force genrés et inégaux'[80]. First of all, I am going to focus on the place of women. Indeed, women are seen in the film musical according to what they can bring to men and they are even often put in the background. They seem to be less important than men and the character of Mia embodies this idea. Indeed, the viewer does not learn many things about Mia and her one-woman show. Has it become succesful at the end ? We just know that its first representation takes place in front of an empty theatre whereas we learn, thanks to the editing, that Sebastian struggles to accept having abandoned the star-system. It makes Mia appear really unfair when she reproaches him having abandoned his dream and it also shows the difference of levels between Mia's ambitions and Sebastian's ambitions : 'Non seulement ce traitement fait passer Mia pour une ingrate lorsqu'elle reproche à son compagnon d'avoir renoncé à son rêve, mais il contribue à ne pas placer sur le même plan les ambitions professionnelles des deux protagonistes'.[81] Indeed, Sebastian's plans appear to be well-thought and created after having thought about it a lot when Mia's plans seem just superficial as she seems to be just craving for attention and to be self-centered (for instance, when the shots in which she is looking at herself in the mirror appear on the screen several times in the movie). Moreover, Mia, in 'Someone in the Crowd' is waiting for someone (a man) to discover her and bring her where she must go ('Someone in the crowd will be the one you need to know / Someone who can lift you of the ground / Someone in the Crowd will take you where you wanna go') so it reduces the place of women who appear as dependent on someone (a man) in order to become what they must become and become successful in life. Besides, in the epilogue which takes place five years later, the viewer does not learn many things about how Mia succeeded or how she met her husband as the filmmaker does not show her success on the screen. Her performance even makes her discouraged at the first failure as she goes

78 *Ibid.*
79 THE GUARDIAN. 'The La La Land backlash : why have critics turned on the Oscar's favorite ?'. February 2017. https://www.theguardian.com/film/2017/feb/06/la-la-land-criticism-race-gender-jazz-awards (last accessed 19 / 04 / 2019)
80 BEURE, F. Le genre et l'écran, art. Cit. In the previous page.
81 I*bid.*

crying in her room after her first audition instead of trying to look for another. She even goes out with her friends instead. Moreover, she is always daydreaming thus she is the archetypal character for the rebel and lost teenage girl. She embodies all the clichés of femininity as she is wearing high-healed shoes and dresses. Then, Mia seems to be dependent on Sebastian and it is even thanks to him that she manages to obtain a new audition and be successful. Chazelle renews a typical cliché of gender inequality in his appearant modernization as he used the traditional hierarchy between men and women to create his film musical.

C. A caricature of the dichotomy between popular forms of art and classical ones

In her article, Fanny Beuré explains that there is a caricatural use of the discrepancy usually found in the classical musicals between the more noble forms of art and the more popular ones :

> 'Le film reprend ici encore un thème cher au *musical* classique : l'opposition entre « art » et *entertainment*. Pourtant, à l'époque classique, cet antagonisme était résolu en montrant que les formes les plus « nobles » (musique et danse classique par exemple) étaient sources d'euphorie, tandis que celles plus commerciales (comme le swing) pouvaient se constituer en moments de bravoure artistiques. Dans *La La Land* l'opposition est réduite à sa plus simple caractéristique et frise la caricature, au point que la scène du concert n'est plus crédible : devant l'euphorie de la salle, mais aussi de Sebastian qui prend plaisir à son solo de piano, on peine finalement à comprendre en quoi cette intégration au groupe est une disgrâce. On en vient à suspecter Mia de s'opposer à cette évolution du seul fait qu'il s'agisse de musique amplifiée... Le personnage féminin se voit donc ici attribuer une réaction exagérément élitiste (rétrograde ?), redoublant son caractère antipathique ; il est dès lors difficile de ne pas adhérer au point de vue de Sebastian selon lequel les rêves changent au cours d'une vie.'[82]

Indeed, as we can see in the quote, in classical musical films, this discrepancy was reduced and the problem was solved by showing that noble forms (such as classical dances and music) produced laughters and that the more popular ones could reveal some real artistic talents. However, in *La La Land*, Chazelle uses this feature to caricaturize it and it seems to be a pretext to put the character of Mia in danger and to assert that she is the one who is wrong, while Sebastian is right, and everything negative that happens to Sebastian is linked to him dating Mia. Besides, in 'A Lovely Night', Chazelle has decided to use the exact same settings and steps as in *The Band Wagon* (1952) when Mia and Sebastian are tap-dancing together, but he turned the dance into an absurd and laughable one as the characters finally sit on the bench and quarrel by putting dust on each other's shoes. This feature is used as a hyperbole to shed light on the caricature. But which meaning can we draw from this feature ? Chazelle is actually taking another feature of the classical musical and turning it into a new production which may be seen as having no real meaning.

82 *Ibid.*

D. Unconvincing use of music and dance in Mia and Sebastian's love story

Contrarily to what the poster of the movie shows, i.e a couple in love and celebrating it during the dance sequences, the scenes containing music and dance do not manage to convince us of a real love story between Mia and Sebastian. Indeed, the three musical numbers which should explain the evolution of the love story (A Lovely Night / The Planetarium scene and the Epilogue) between the two main characters do not manage to make the viewers believe in it : 'Les trois numéros censés expliquer l'attirance entre les deux personnages principaux (le pas de deux sur la colline, la séquence du planétarium et le montage de l'été) ne parviennent pas totalement à la rendre crédible'[83]. When we think about the summary of what happened in their love story during the summer created by the juxtaposition of sequences showing the viewer different scenes in different places (the funicular railway, the cinema, in the streets), there is no moment during which the characters are speaking as the music covers their love story. Usually, there would have been a long dance scene with steps showing the feelings of the couple, just like in the Astaire and Rogers' musicals, but in *La La Land*, there are only a few dance steps when the characters go out of the railway station. Moreover, the first dance which usually enable the two characters to reveal their feelings by denying them (traditional Astaire and Rogers' formula) is confiscated to the viewers by a very unusual camera work :

> 'Cette séquence apparait « confisquée » par une caméra bien trop mobile, au point de placer à quelques courts moments les danseurs hors-cadre ! Une telle maladresse ne saurait être fortuite : il s'agit vraisemblablement d'une volonté de créer l'ivresse ; on retient cependant surtout une caméra qui n'a de cesse de se donner à voir'.[84]

Indeed, the camera does not stop moving and, sometimes, the two dancers are even outside of the screen. This is one of Chazelle's decision to create 'dizziness and the viewer only sees the camera'.

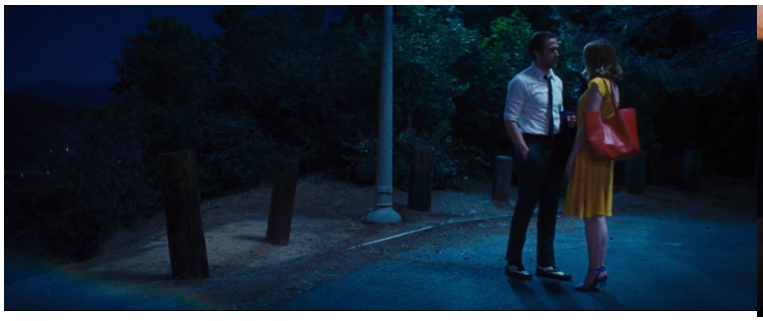


Illustration 5: Off-centered composiiton

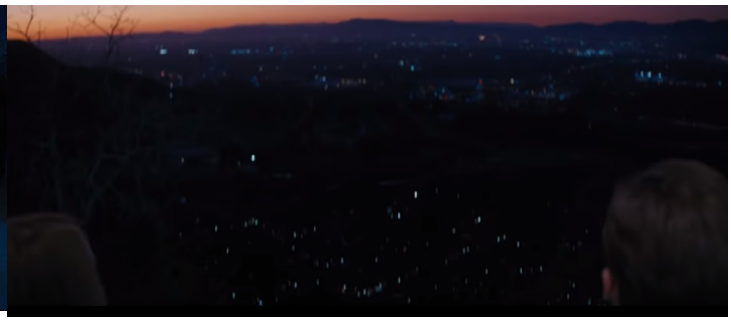


Illustration 6: Camera not showing the characters but zooming in on the landscape during the dance scene.

For instance, at one moment, during the dance, the camera tracks-in until it goes above the head of the characters whereas at this moment, they may have been looking at each other to convey a moment of complicity and to show their mutual affection. Besides, traditionally, a camera is moving

83 *Ibid.*
84 *Ibid.*

to follow the characters when they are walking or running (tracking shot), but in 'A Lovely Night', the camera moves around them while the characters stop in order to look at the landscape, and the composition of the frame is unbalanced, whereas in traditional movies, the couple is at the center of the attention, one character more on the right and one more on the left. He is actually interested in 'art for art's sake' making a visually beautiful musical as a priority over the love story between Mia and Sebastian. Besides, Sebastian is trying to explain to Mia that if she tries to push on the button of her keys while she is putting them near her head, her head will turn into an antenna and it will look for the car more easily. As a consequence, Mia decides to try to do so throughout the dance sequence as if she was more preoccupied by her car than by the love story. It brings some behaviors which are remininiscent of the absurd trend, consisting in doing something and not knowing why one is doing it. The same thing happens when the music is playing and the characters are still sitting on a bench throwing sand on each other's shoes, another feature reminiscent of the absurd trend.

E. Innovation at the service of repetition

When making and releasing *La La Land*, Chazelle asserted that he wanted to 'make something new' thus that he was innovating and recreating the genre of the musical by making it more actual and adapted to our lives nowadays. However, the renewal is already a part of the features of classical musicals. Indeed, Jane Feuer explains that musical film is a genre which always renews itself by definition as she says that 'innovation' is 'conservation'[85] of the genre ; and she even goes further saying that 'genres have to keep giving us something new without sacrificing the appeal those conventions held in the first place'[86]. Moreover, musicals are about 'the demystification of earlier forms of its own species'. That is what Chazelle does when he caricaturizes the conflict between classical and popular music and dance genre, as well as when he uses the same steps as in *The Band Wagon* in a 'Lovely Night', the same settings as in *An American in Paris* in the epilogue or the same visual composition than in *Singin' in The Rain* (figure of the man bending around a lampost). Thus, in trying to renew, he only recreates a new classical musical film.

Besides, the choice Chazelle made when it comes to actors and actresses is only showing a renewal of the genre as it shows on the screen a tradional couple composed of a man and a woman who might be reminiscent of Gene Kelly and Debbie Reynolds for instance. They are famous actors and as Jane Feuer says 'later Hollywood musicals begin to use materials from earlier Hollywood musicals or from familiar star persona'[87]. So his choices have created a new classical Hollywood musical film. This is summed up by Jane Feuer's words : 'Accross time, the synthesis of past and

85 FEUER, J. *op. Cit. In Part 2.*
86 *Ibid.*
87 *Ibid.*

present entertainment forms cancels the distinction between old and new forms of entertainment, so that musical shows appear simultaneously revolutionary and traditional'. And that is the exact definition of *La La Land,* as it corresponds both to traditional features (dichotomy between work and leisure, parallel scenes) and to innovative ones (presence of features from independent filmmaking such as the realism, focus on the crisis and on banality).

Conclusion

La La Land has been a very acclaimed movie as it was granted several prizes. This success seems to be due to the will of the filmmaker to adapt a very classical Hollywoodian genre i.e. the musical film and to make it more modern by adding 'dull bits' and pessimism linked to our societal context into the movie. As Chazelle asserted it, he wanted to make everyone like *La La Land* and the genre of the musical film which is not a genre that the Hollywood studios wanted to produce any longer as it is considered as being not realistic enough. Thus, Damien Chazelle kept some traditions of the genre and added some modern features to it.

The aim of this essay was then to assess which features are classical and which ones are modern and added by the filmmaker as well as to show how modernity and tradition coexist in the movie.

On the one hand, we saw that some features of *La La Land* are still classical. Indeed, the movie still follows some traditions of the musical film evoked in Rick Altman and Jane Feuer's books. Indeed, it follows the traditional structure of a musical film with a major dichotomy between masculine and feminine elements and a secondary one between work and leisure which is resolved at the end. Moreover, the filmmaker used parallel sequences in *La La Land* and a lot of intertextuality which shows that *La La Land* acknowledges the influence of classical Hollywood cinema and claims a direct connection with this mythical era with the use of shots reminiscent of *Singin in The Rain*, *The Band Wagon* or *An American in Paris*. Besides, some elements of *La La Land* are taken from Berkeley's musical films. It is the case for the geometrical formations that we can find in the epilogue for instance, the use of a single camera to shoot a sequence in the opening scene, the impossible musical numbers such as the ones of the Planetarium scene during which the characters fly and dance in the air or the epilogue scene in which Mia and Sebastian walk through different places in town and which is reminiscent of the Tour-of-the-town tradition used by Berkeley. Moreover, the use of a spectacularization of the camera, of artificial elements with bright exaggerated colors or of a mise-en-abyme with the shooting of films inside the films show that *La La Land* follows the tradition of classical hollywood musical film.

On the other hand, *La La Land* breaks away from tradition and asserts its modernity. First of all, there are a lot of references to our world and to the 2008 crisis in *La La Land* as the cinema has closed and failure is shown on-screen with Mia's one-woman show which is unsuccessful. Moreover, the presence of technology echoes our lives and separate the characters in *La La Land* just as it does for people in real life. Besides, loneliness and the isolation of characters is emphasized thanks to the composition of shots as the camera becomes tighter throughout the movie

and extreme or very long shots are used to show isolation. Moreover, a lot of features of *La La Land* find their inspirations into indie films. For instance , the ending which separates the two main protagonists, the complex mind of the characters as well as the reworking of events with the sequence during the epilogue which rewrites the entire movie and shows what would have happened if the two characters had lived their whole lives together, show the influence of indie films. Besides, the use of the mirror as a splitting device reflects the different personalities of the characters and it is reminiscent of the form of independent films. Finally, the use of jazz polyrhythm is innovative as well as the emphasis on banality and on the ordinary. Indeed, the movie shows on the screen everyday-like characters who have not got any make-up on, who meet by chance in everyday-like places and whose actors are not professional dancers ; and those features break away from the traditional musical films.

However, there are limits to modernization. Indeed, as Fanny Beuré explains in her article, the way jazz is associated to a white man is actually denying the history of the genre which was actually brought by black ethnic minorities and putting them aside whereas they created the genre. Moreover, black people and women are put aside and even dehumanized sometimes. For instance, Mia's story seems not to be important and always linked to Sebastian's will. There is a caricature of the dichotomy between classical and popular art and classical scenes are sometimes turned into absurd scenes. Music and dance are used in a way that is unconvincing as the dance scenes do not manage to convince us of the love story between Mia and Sebastian as the emphasis is put on camerawork rather than on the couple. Finally, Jane Feuer explains in her book that innovation is nothing more than a tradional feature from the musical film ; thus, this turns the innovative *La La Land* into another traditional musical film.

To put it in a nutshell, *La La Land* really is a blend between classical elements reminiscent of the classical era of musical films and more modern elements. However, as modernization already is a feature of classical musical films, one can assert that *La La Land* is not an innovative musical film but that all the new and innovative elements are actually at the service of the tradition.

Thus, other possibilities and other ways may have been possible to make the renewal of the genre and to make the story between the two main protagonists more modern. If we consider Feuer's theory explaining that 'innovation' is 'conservation'[88], there could have been two other alternatives possible for the filmmaker to renew it differently : making realism harder to a point the viewer does not recognize a musical film any longer or not innovating at all, as innovation is a typical feature of musical films.

88 FEUER, J. *op. Cit*. In part 2.

Firstly, if we follow the first solution, the presence of dream worlds and dream sequences tends to sugarcoat the contents and the realism of the movie and it contrasts and makes smoother the foreshadowing of what is going to happen in this movie. Indeed, for instance, the epilogue seems visually very far-fetched and this is only one more feature of classical musicals, thus suppressing those scenes might have hardened the realism and the tension.

Besides, the fact that Sebastian is a white man may be seen as an issue because he is the one who seems to succeed onstage and the one on whom the focus is. Indeed, when we think about the first concert scene, the camera and the viewers are following Sebastian's point of view as he is looking at Mia while performing. The black characters and members of the band seem to be put aside and not to be important for the viewer to notice[89]. Thus, maybe choosing another actor (a black one) may have lessened the racial stereotypes which are present throughout the movie, according to several critiques.

Moreover, Sebastian may have been linked to another type of music but not to jazz. He might either have played another instrument and he might have been in love with another kind of music or the story of jazz might have been another side story linked to another character, a black man, this time. Indeed, according to several critiques, the plot may tend to generate and reactivate the racial stereotypes and clichés which are present when he renews the musical genre[90].

Moreover, the plot might have been more focused on the character of Mia who succeeds, for instance with a long sequence on how she managed to meet her husband and to become successful. Besides, Sebastian might not have been the one breaking the news to her about her audition. It might have been replaced by an audition obtained because someone not connected to Sebastian notices her one-woman show, and Mia might have discovered it thanks to a letter or a phone call made by a woman rather in order to break the stereotypes concerning women as well as the traditional views of them. Another way of renewing might have been to change the love story and make it more modern – about a homosexual couple for instance, which could not be reminiscent of any other previous couples seen in previous classical musical films to make the break away from tradition too heavy for the audience to follow and really believe it is a musical film.

Finally, the dance scenes might have been treated differently. Indeed, Chazelle might have used classical dance and more popular genre for what they really are in life to join the realism of the independent cinema in order to push further the renewal and the identification with independent filmmaking.

89 *Supra* paragraphs A and B.
90 *Ibid.*

If we consider the second solution, if innovating is one main feature of film musicals, then another way to innovate would have been not to innovate and to make a film musical as it would be in the 1930s – 1050s, with the same dance scenes, an exaggerated optimism without any traces of the crisis nor any kind of realism. For instance, the film musical could have been associated with other kinds of movies such as sci-fi movies about aliens to make it humorous and completely disconnected from reality.

II / Partie didactique

Après avoir analysé *La La Land* et son genre stylistique, je vais désormais vous présenter une séquence composée de plusieurs points qui permettraient de faire comprendre aux élèves le problème du genre étudié dans la partie précédente.

1. Présentation du contexte d'enseignement

Cette année, j'enseigne l'anglais au sein du collège de Champagney (70290) à une classe de sixième et deux classes de quatrième. Etant donné que ce chapitre sur *La La Land* était très technique et nécessitait de faire analyser stylistiquement le genre d'une œuvre dans ses détails, j'ai choisi de mettre en œuvre cette séquence avec mes deux classes de quatrième. Les deux classes sont constituées d'élèves de niveaux très hétérogènes dont certains ont déjà atteint le niveau B1 alors que d'autres ont de réelles difficultés à produire une phrase et se situent donc au niveau A1 du CECRL. Ce contexte est particulier car mes élèves n'ont pour la plupart pas eu de cours d'anglais l'année précédente, et étaient pour la plupart très peu intéressés par la matière, dans un collège où certaines classes sont très difficiles et où beaucoup d'élèves ont besoin de beaucoup de temps pour admettre un nouveau membre de l'équipe pédagogique. Le challenge s'avèrait donc difficile à mener sur deux fronts : d'une part sur le plan pédagogique, sur la manière d'aborder une séquence très technique avec des élèves de ce niveau, et d'autre part, sur le plan de la discipline et de la gestion de classe, étant donné que ce type de séquence pourrait facilement créer des brèches dans lesquelles mes élèves pourraient s'engouffrer pour ne pas travailler et prétexter ne pas comprendre pour justifier certains de leurs comportements.

2. Présentation de la séquence destinée aux élèves.

a) Présentation globale de la séquence : objectifs et tâche finale

J'ai regroupé dans un tableau synoptique tous les objectifs de la séquence, l'activité langagière principale, le niveau attendu des élèves à la fin de la séquence ainsi que la tâche finale. Les consignes sont notées en anglais et en français.

Titre	Hollywood and the musical film
Classe	Quatrième
Niveau (CECRL)	A2 → B1 A2 : Je peux utiliser une série de phrases ou d'expressions pour décrire en termes simples ma famille et d'autres gens, mes conditions de vie, ma formation et mon activité professionnelle actuelle ou récente. B1 : Je peux articuler des expressions de manière simple afin de raconter des expériences et des événements, mes rêves, mes espoirs ou mes buts.

	Je peux brièvement donner les raisons et explications de mes opinions ou projets. Je peux raconter une histoire ou l'intrigue d'un livre ou d'un film et exprimer mes réactions.
Thème	Languages : the cinematograhic language
Problématique	What is a classical musical film made in Hollywood and to what extent is *La La Land* a musical film ? / Qu'est-ce qu'une comédie musicale classique hollywoodienne et dans quelle mesure *La La Land* en est-elle une ?
Nombre de séances	12 séances (notion très compliquée à aborder et comprendre et qui contient de nombreux concepts particuliers ainsi que beaucoup de vocabulaire spécifique).
Domaines	- Domaine 1 : Les langages pour penser et communiquer : la langue anglaise et le langage cinématographique. - Domaine 3 : La formation de la personne et du citoyen. - Domaine 5 : Les représentations du monde et l'activité humaine (la création de film comme activité humaine et les représentations du monde par le biais des films).
Parcours	- Parcours Citoyen : lié à l'objectif Citoyen - PEAC (Parcours d'Education Artistique et Culturelle) : étude de la manière de faire un film, d'Hollywood et du système de séléctions des œuvres.
Tâche finale	- At the occasion of the cinema week organized in your school, choose a picture taken from the film *La La Land* and record yourself making an oral review of the film '*La La Land*'. Explain the process of its making, if it is a typical film musical or not and if the renewing of the genre of the film musical is a success or not, according to you. The pictures and audio reviews will be displayed in the library at the occasion of the cinema week, and all the pupils will be able to vote for the best recording which will be broadcast on the school's website. // - A l'occasion de la semaine du cinéma qui est organisée au collège, choisis une image tirée du film *La La Land* et réalise une critique orale de cette comédie musicale. Elle devra comporter plusieurs parties : 1 . Une explication sur la façon dont le film a été réalisé à Hollywood 2. Dans quelle mesure est-ce que c'est une comédie musicale ? 3. Le genre est-il renouvelé, et si non, comment aurais-tu pensé une réelle innovation du genre ? Tu t'enregistreras à l'aide d'un MP3. Un vote aura lieu au sein de l'autre classe pour élire la meilleure critique.
Interdisciplinarité	- Histoire des Arts : étude d'une comédie musicale
Activités langagières dominantes	-Expression Orale en Continu (EOC) - Ecrit oralisé
Tâche intermédiaire (milieu de séquence)	By group of 2, make a video to explain what Hollywood is, how the industry of Hollywood works and what its typical features are (the general ones).

	- Par binôme, créez une vidéo dans laquelle vous expliquerez ce qu'est Hollywood, comment marche l'industrie d'Hollywood et quelles sont les caractéristiques typiques des films produits à Hollywood.

Dans la séquence que je propose, la tâche finale a pour but de motiver les élèves à participer étant donné que leurs productions vont être réellement utilisées au sein du collège lors de la semaine du cinéma, et un vote va avoir lieu, donc leurs productions seront lues par leurs camarades de l'autre classe de quatrième. De plus, cette tâche finale favorise l'émulation car les élèves sont encouragés à faire de leur mieux pour espèrer être ceux qui auront écrits la critique gagnante. En effet, cela permet de rendre la séquence plus attractive pour les élèves car elle se base sur leur autonomie et sur leurs compétences et elle amène à la création de projet : 'making the curriculum more intrinsically rewarding to students by focusing on student autonomy and competence, emphasizing relevance of subjects, and providing opportunities for project-based learning.'[91]

Les objectifs de la séquence sont les suivants :

Objectifs culturels	**Objectifs linguistiques**		
- Los Angeles et les studios d'Hollywood - Les étapes qui entrent en jeu dans la production d'un film - L'histoire du cinéma américain - Les films musicaux d'Hollywood classiques vs le cinéma indépendant américain. - Etude de trois œuvres majeures : *La La Land, The Band Wagon*, et *Singin' in the Rain*	Grammaticaux	Lexicaux	Phonologiques
	- La voix passive : '*La La Land* was shot in …' - Le prétérit : '*La La Land* was a success among viewers' - L'expression modale BE ABLE TO : 'Chazelle wasn't able to produce *La La Land* before Whiplash' - Le superlatif : 'the worst / best film ever' - Le present perfect : I have never seen a movie like this one'	- les mots laudatifs : 'manage' / 'brilliantly' / 'convincing' / 'a delight' / 'be well made' -les mots péjoratifs (review) : 'fake' / 'disappointing' / 'failure' / 'hate' - le vocabulaire lié à Hollywood : 'to be shot' / 'on location' / 'in the studios' / 'to be released' / 'the filmmaker' / 'the producer' - Les types de films : rom-com, thriller, musical film, drama - les mots de liaison : 'moreover', 'besides', 'however'	- L'accent américain – La prononciation du son /h/ : Hollywood - Les diphtongues : /ei/ => filmmaker ; /ai/ => delight

Objectif sociolinguistique	L'accent américain
Objectif méthodologique	Organiser ses idées / Travailler en groupes
Objectif pragmatique	La forme de la critique de film

91 BROPHY, Jere (2004). 'Motivating students to learn (2nd ed.)' in *The School Psychologist*. Vol. 59, No. 1

Objectif citoyen	- Comprendre l'industrie qui se cache derrière les films produits à Hollywood - Apprendre à ne pas croire tout ce qui est fait / produit à Hollywood.

b) Déroulé de la séquence

- Anticipation

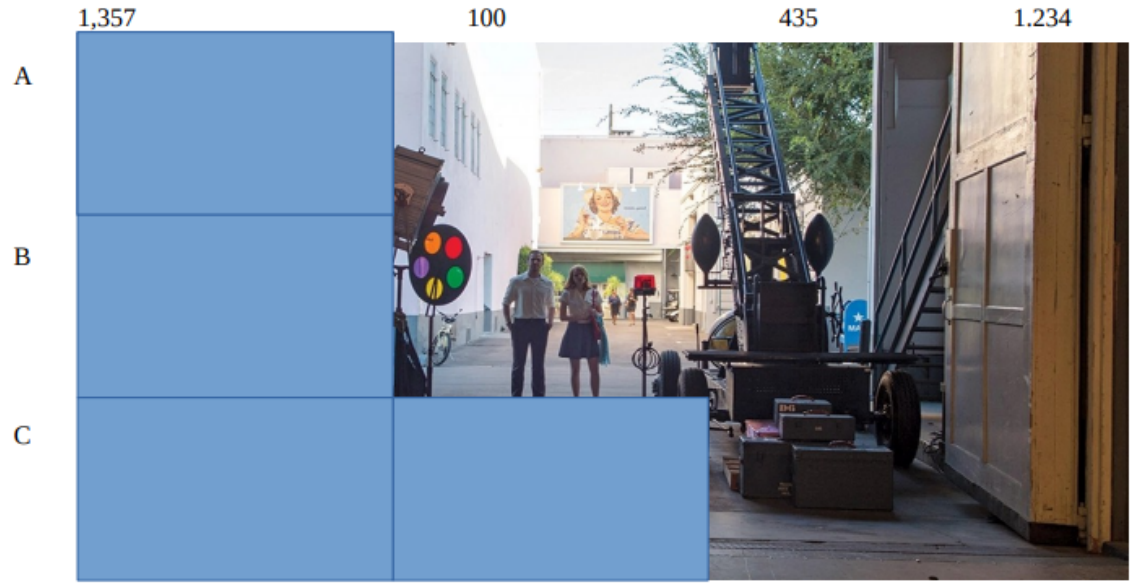


Illustration 7: Anticipation de séquence à l'aide d'une image symbolique du film musical.

La séquence commence par une anticipation dont le but est de faire deviner aux élèves le prochain thème que nous allons étudier ensemble et ainsi d'attiser leur curiosité et leur intérêt pour ce qui va suivre. Pour atteindre ce but, j'ai selectionné une image provenant de *La La Land* qui met en exergue le sujet de ce mémoire et le problème du genre, c'est-à-dire celle où les deux personnages se retrouvent au milieu des décors fabriqués pour Hollywood. Puis j'ai recouvert l'image d'une étoile mystérieuse. Il s'agit d'un dispositif similaire à celui des batailles navales dans la mesure où l'image est cachée par une grille de cases bleues et chaque ligne comporte une lettre, et chaque colonne un numéro. Pour enlever une des cases bleues et ainsi dévoiler l'image, les élèves doivent me donner en anglais la lettre et le nombre sans aucune erreur. Le but est que les élèves découvrent quel est le thème avant que les cases soient toutes enlevées. Cette activité va aider mes élèves à être motivés et concentrés car les élèves sont motivés lorsqu'ils comprennent l'importance de la tâche à accomplir et qu'ils y trouvent du sens : 'Students are motivated when they [...] value the outcome of the task'[92]. En effet, le thème de la séquence laissé en suspens et le but qui est de battre le professeur en devinant le thème avant la fin du jeu rend l'activité plus ludique et permet de les garder attentifs. Ensuite, je donne une fiche de travail à mes élèves avec tous les objectifs de la

92 *Ibid.*

séquence et ils doivent la coller sur leur cahier. Cela leur permet d'être inclus et d'être acteurs de leur apprentissage. Ils comprennent ainsi quel est le but de la séquence et pourquoi nous voyons tel ou tel point grammatical ou lexical. Or, une des stratégies pour motiver les élèves est de donner plus de sens aux activités de connaissance : «[the aim is to] make academic activities meaningful [for them] and worthwhile and to try to get the intended learning benefits from them."[93]. Puis, je leur montrerai trois fois la vidéo de Visit California[94]. Lors de la première écoute, ils devront repérer les informations générales ('people' / 'places' / 'characters') puis ils devront remplir une carte heuristique avec différentes consignes telles que 'activities' / 'places to visit'. Cela nous permettra de remplir la carte avec tout ce qu'il est possible de faire et voir à Hollywood et de faire une définition de ce que c'est et de ce qu'on peut y voir. Cette carte sera complètée au fur et à mesure de la séquence avec les informations que nous apprendrons ensemble au fil du temps.

La séquence est divisée en 3 parties principales :

I. Study of what Hollywood is / the MGM

II. The musical film : what is it ? What are its classical features in Hollywood ? (étude d'un extrait tiré de *Singin' in the Rain*)

III. Is *La La Land* a real classical musical film ? (comparaison entre *The Band Wagon* et *La La Land* et analyse comparative de deux séquences tirées des deux films).

I / The MGM / Hollywood

Dans cette partie, le but sera de faire découvrir aux élèves ce que sont Hollywood et la MGM et ils vont apprendre les caractéristiques typiques d'un film tourné à Hollywood ainsi que le déroulé de la production d'un film. La première étape sera d'expliquer aux élèves ce qu'est Hollywood.

En premier lieu, je vais étudier avec les élèves l'histoire du cinéma avec les dates importantes qui s'y rapportent : la date de la création d'Hollywood, de l'émergence du cinéma indépendant américain, entre autres. Ensuite, nous étudierons la dichotomie entre le cinéma traditionel provenant d'Hollywood et le cinéma non-traditionel en utilisant des extraits tirés du site wikipédia pour les enfants[95] grâce auquel nous allons réalisr une frise chronologique avec les évènements clés de l'histoire du cinéma en utilisant le prétérit. En guise d'anticipation au texte, j'utiliserai plusieurs images d'Hollywood et de Los Angeles dont une provenant de 'The Walk of Fame'.

93 Ibid. p. 249.

94 VISIT CALIFORNIA. 'Hollywood : 5 amazing things. December 2017. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Grl1GDchnps (last accessed 19 / 04/ 2019)

95 Wikipédia Kidz. 'Hollywood'. https://wiki.kidzsearch.com/wiki/Hollywood (last accessed 19 / 04 / 2019)

Dans un second temps, nous étudierons les différents lieux de production. Je ferai une transition avec ce qui viendra d'être vu en demandant : 'what can we find in Hollywood ?' et j'attendrai que mes élèves me répondent : 'The process of making a film' / 'The places or studios to produce films'. Puis, pour étudier le thème, nous travaillerons sur un schéma sur les étapes de la production d'un film. En enlevant les couleurs, je demanderai aux élèves de classer les différentes cases : 'classify the texts into three categories : before the production, during the production, after the production'. Puis, par groupe, ils travailleront sur l'ordre de chaque catégories et recolleront les vignettes au bon endroit.

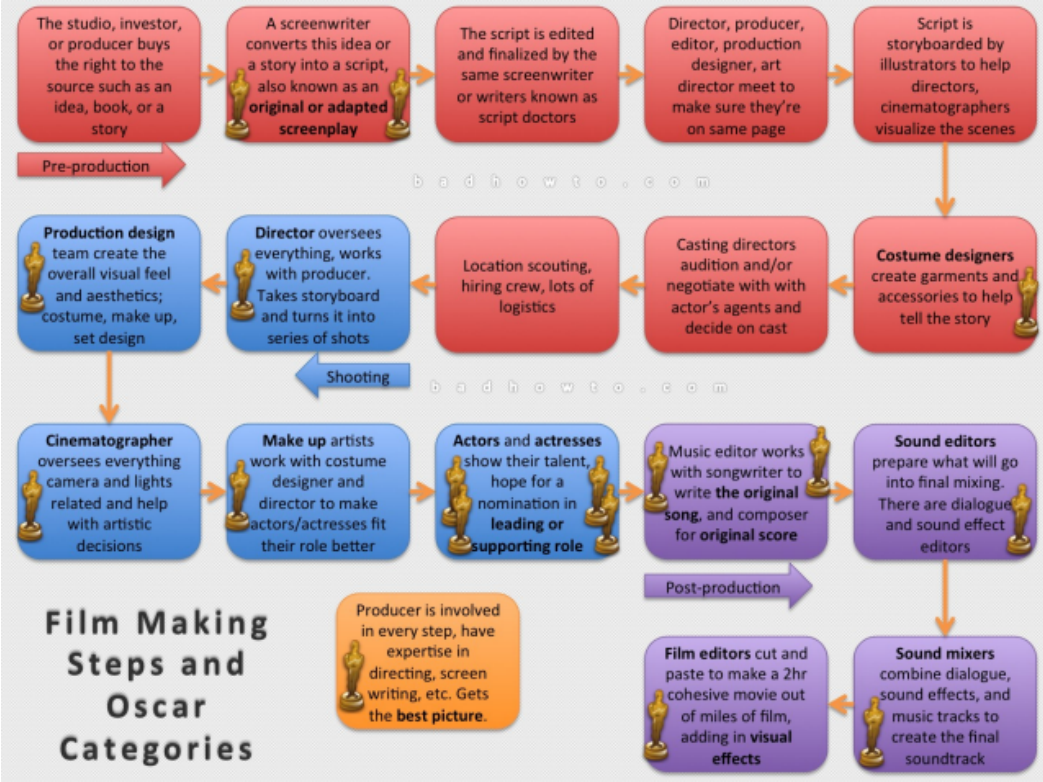


Illustration 8: Les étapes de production d'un film à Hollywood

Ensuite, nous étudierons les caractéristiques principales que nous trouvons dans les films hollywoodiens en coopération avec ma collègue de français donc nous pourrons faire un lien entre le schéma naratif traditionnel que nous trouvons dans un livre et le schéma narratif utilisé à Hollywood dans les films classiques. Puis, pour le cours suivant, je leur demanderai de choisir un film hollywoodien et de le résumer puis nous comparerons ensemble les différentes étapes pour essayer de trouver des points communs entre eux. Nous trouverons ainsi l'arc narratif traditionnel avec la situation intiale, l'émergence du problème, le climax, la résolution du problème et finalement, une fin heureuse. Nous pourrons également visionner une fin heureuse de film traditionnelle et exagérée.

Illustration 9: Logo de la MGM

Après l'étude de ce point, notre but sera de faire comprendre aux élèves ce qu'est la MGM. En guise d'anticipation au thème, je leur montrerai d'abord une image du logo qui est visible à la fin de chaque film produit par la MGM. Je leur demanderai de décrire ce qu'ils voient : 'what can you see ?' (a logo, a name, a lion). Puis, je leur demanderai s'ils ont déjà vu ce logo et dans quel contexte ('Have you ever seen that logo ?' / 'Where?'). Ensuite, je leur montrerai le logo au format vidéo (tel qu'il est dans les films) pour qu'ils puissent le reconnaître. Je leur demanderai ensuite d'émettre des hypothèses sur ce qu'est la MGM. Pour vérifier les hypthèses, nous lirons ensuite une définition de ce qu'est la MGM puis nous ferons une compréhension écrite composée de quelques extraits provenant de la page wikipédia de la MGM[96].

En dernier lieu, je ferai un lien entre Hollywood et l'enjeu monétaire qui y est lié pour montrer qu'Hollywood n'est autre qu'un business et que le but ultime est de gagner de l'argent. Pour atteindre ce but, je montrerai aux élèves une citation de Orson Welles : 'Hollywood expects you to experiment but on a film that makes money. And if you don't make money, you're to blame. Your job is to make money' (Hollywood veut que vous innoviez mais sur un film qui rapporte. Et si vous ne rapportez pas d'argent, c'est votre faute. Votre travail c'est de rapporter de l'argent). Je leur demanderai de surligner les mots qu'ils comprennent et ensuite, de faire un résumé de ce qu'ils comprennent à partir des mots clés relevés. J'attendrai en guise de production écrite un petit résumé du type : 'Hollywood filmmakers want to make money and to produce films in order to earn money'.

Transition 1 : Article - 'For Years no one in Hollywood wanted to make *La La Land*'[97].

En guise de transition entre la partie 1 et la partie 2, j'ai choisi cet article car il explique comment fonctionne Hollywood à l'aide d'un exemple concret qui est celui que nous étudions - *La La Land.* En premier lieu, je vais étudier cet article et quand l'étude sera terminée, je vais poser plusieurs questions aux élèves comme 'can you make a link between the article and what we saw about Hollywood ?' ou encore 'what types of film are produced in Hollywood ?' ou 'can you remind me what features are expected ?'. Je terminerai en faisant un lien avec ce que nous avons

96 WIKIPEDIA. Metro-Goldwyn Mayer. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Metro-GoldwynMayer (last accessed 19 / 04 / 2019)
97 https://www.vulture.com/2017/01/no-one-in-hollywood-wanted-to-make-la-la-land.html

abordé auparavant en demandant : 'so, what can we conclude about the musical film *La La Land* ? Find the reason why nobody wanted to produce it'. J'attendrai qu'ils m'expliquent que si les producteurs hollywoodiens n'ont pas voulu produire *La La Land,* c'est certainement parce que cette comédie musicale n'était pas assez classique et ne suivait pas les caractéristiques hollywoodiennes nécessaires : 'In Hollywood, the producers didn't want to produce it because it doesn't follow Hollywood features or not all of them'.

II / Focus on the musical film (le film musical)

Cette partie a pour but de définir ce qu'est un film musical et de devenir de plus en plus précis et spécifique dans la définition en y ajoutant des éléments au fur et à mesure.

A. What is a musical film?

Pour commencer notre étude des comédies musicales, je vais faire regarder des extraits de plusieurs films musicaux tels que *Singin in The Rain, Top Hat, Grease, Dirty Dancing* et *La La Land*. Lors du premier visionnage de ce medley, je demanderai aux élèves de répondre à la question 'what is the type of document ?'. J'attendrai qu'ils me disent que ce sont des extraits de comédies musicales (the documents are 'extracts from movies / musicals'). Ensuite, lors du deuxième visionnage, je leur demanderai de prendre des notes sur les personnes, les actions, l'époque en leur disant 'take notes on people / action / time and on what you can see'. La production attendue sera : 'The people in the video are singing and dancing. They seem to be happy and to laugh'. Ensuite, je leur demanderai :'what can you conclude about the type of film ? What's the type of film ?'. Si les élèves ne trouvent pas le nom correct directement, je ferai un pendu avec son nom et quand le nom sera trouvé, je leur demanderai de faire une phrase : 'can you make a sentence ?'. En dernier lieu, je leur demanderai de me donner le nom des films qu'ils ont reconnus en leur demandant : 'Did you recognize any movies ?'. Voici un exemple de trace écrite qui rassemble des productions attendues d'élèves : 'The videos are taken from several musical films such as *Singin' in the Rain, The Band Wagon, Dirty Dancing* and *La La Land*. A musical film is a film in which the actors and actresses dance, sing and tap-dance to entertain the viewers'. A cette étape, la définition restera très générale pour entrer au coeur du sujet en douceur et ne pas les perdre.

B. More specific features of the Hollywood musical (focalisation sur les caractéristiques plus spécifiques de la comédie musicale)

Dans cette partie du chapitre, je concentrerai l'analyse sur le célèbre film musical intitulé *Singin' in the Rain* dans lequel jouent Gene Kelly et Debbie Reynolds et qui a été produit par Arthur Freed en 1952[98]. En guise d'anticipation de cet extrait, je montrerai aux élèves l'affiche du film, qui

98 YOUTUBE. *Singin' in the Rain* (title song). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=w40ushYAaYA (last accessed 19 / 04/ 2019)

sera à analyser visuellement. Je leur demanderai d'abord de décrire le type de document, le titre du film, les personnes qui sont dans le film, ce qu'ils sont en train de faire, où et quand. Puis, je leur demanderai d'analyser visuellement le document. D'abord, je leur demanderai de se concentrer sur les couleurs en disant 'colors' (bright and use of contrast) puis 'disposition of the characters' (aligned, symmetrical composition), 'the place of women' (in the middle of the boys so she is led by them). Ensuite, nous construirons ensemble une fiche de travail sur ce que nous pouvons analyser dans une image (couleurs, composition, etc). Puis, je leur montrerai l'extrait pour la permière fois. Avant de lancer la vidéo, je demanderai aux élèves d'être capables, après le visionnage de m'expliquer ce qu'il se passe dans la vidéo (nombre de personnages, lieux, contexte). Pour le deuxième et le troisième visionnage, je mettrai en place ce qui s'appelle un 'information gap', c'est-à-dire un déficit informationel au sein de la classe, avec certains élèves ayant certaines réponses et d'autres en ayant d'autres. Certains élèves étudieront les couleurs (colors), d'autres l'éclairage (lights), d'autres la composition, d'autres l'artificialité (artificiality) et d'autres l'utilisation d'accessoires (use of props). Ensuite, les élèves complèteront le reste de la grille grâce à l'interaction en posant des questions sur les différentes catégories en allant voir les autres groupes (en se répartissant les tâches au sein d'un même groupe). Puis, le but sera d'être le permer à avoir complèter la fiche de travail intégralement. A la fin de l'activité, nous mettrons les réponses en commun au tableau et écrirons un résumé de ce qui a été trouvé. Le titre de ce résumé sera 'les caractéristiques d'une comédie musicale hollywoodienne classique' ('The features of a traditional hollywood musical').

Pour terminer, nous étudierons *La La Land* (le trailer, une compréhension écrite et un exitrait du film) pour étudier l'intrigue et la place des différents personnages.

III / Is *La La Land* a traditional musical film ? (*La La Land* est-elle une comédie musicale traditionnelle?)

Voici tout d'abord les extraits étudiés dans cette partie :

The Band Wagon : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kPK_6CzPJ4s

La La Land : https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waTDxRZ93Qc

Dans cette partie du chapitre, je vais proposer aux élèves d'étudier deux extraits de comédie musicale – un extrait de 'Dancin' In The Dark' de *The Band Wagon* et une séquence tirée de *La La Land* qui correspond au moment où les protagonistes dansent sur 'A Lovely Night' . De cette façon, je vais pouvoir comparer deux scènes – une provenant d'une comédie musicale traditionnelle, et l'autre de *La La Land* pour voir les points communs et les différences entre eux. A partir de cette analyse, les élèves vont pouvoir voir que *La La Land* recrée une scène qui existait déjà dans *The Band Wagon*, en reprenant même les mêmes pas que dans la performance originale. En revanche,

l'innovation est évidente quand nous voyons la différence entre la chorégraphie dansée par des danceurs professionnels dans *The Band Wagon* et celle dansée par des danseurs non-professionels dans *La La Land.* Je les guiderai également pour qu'ils remarquent le jeu entre Mia et Sebastian (avec la poussière jetée sur les chaussures) qui peut être considéré comme absurde et relevant d'un comportement très enfantin pour deux adultes.

Pour terminer, la dernière étape de la séquence sera de préparer les élèves à la tâche finale qui consiste à faire une critique radio[99]. Pour atteindre ce but, nous allons étudier en classe une critique positive et une critique négative pour que les élèves ait un modèle sur lequel s'appuyer lorsqu'ils travailleront sur leurs productions. Après la compréhension globale et détaillée de ce document, je leur ferai repèrer les adjectifs et mots laudatifs et péjoratifs qui peuvent être utilisés dans une critique et je travaillerai avec eux sur la méthodologie pour répondre aux deux questions suivantes : comment organiser sa critique et quelle est sa mise en page ?

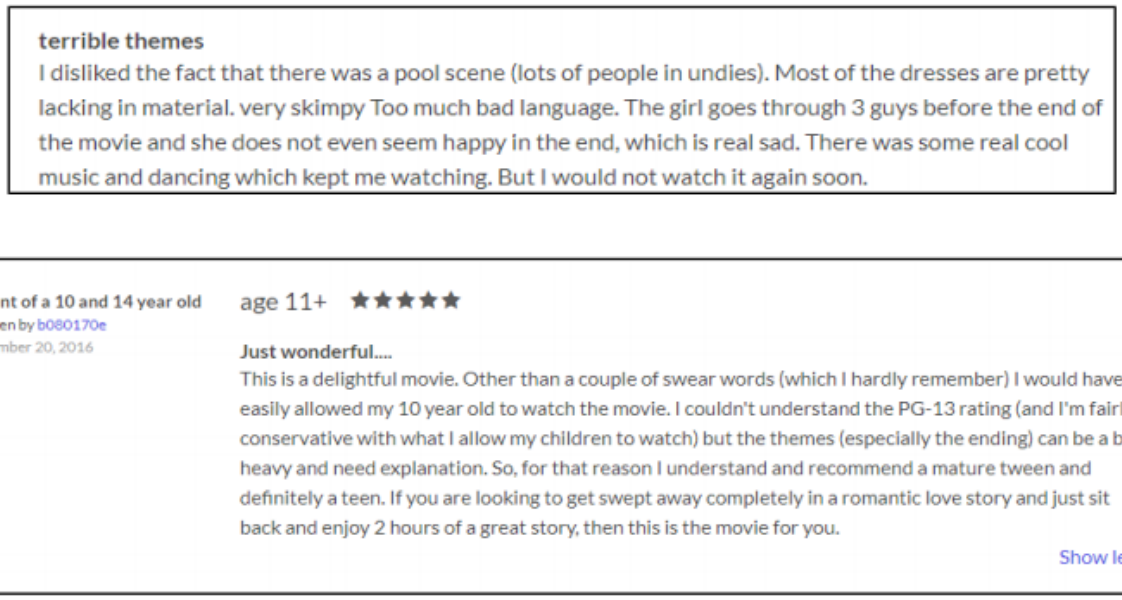


Illustration 10: Critiques de films

c) Déroulement d'une activité précise : la comparaison stylistique de deux extraits tirés de deux comédies musicales différentes.

1. Anticipation

En guise d'anticipation, avant le visionnage des deux vidéos, je demanderai aux élèves de comparer les deux posters de film qui ont été affichés dans les cinémas au moment de la sortie des deux films. Je leur demanderai d'abord de me donner le type de document en disant - 'what type of document is it ?' (they are posters for movies) puis je leur demanderai de me donner le titre en

99 COMMON SENSE MEDIA. La La Land : reviews. https://www.commonsensemedia.org/movie-reviews/la-la-land/user-reviews/adult (last accessed 19 / 04 / 2019)

demandant ‘What are the titles of the movies ?’ (*La La Land* / *The Band Wagon*), puis de me donner la date de sortie des films en disant ‘when were the movies released ?’ (*La La Land* was released in 2017. / *The Band Wagon* was released in 1953). Ensuite, je leur demanderai de deviner le type de film en leur disant ‘what types of movies are they ?’ (The movies are musicals) et de déduire à quelle période de l’histoire du cinéma ils appartiennent : ‘So to which part of the history of Hollywood do they belong ?’ (They belong to the MGM for t*he Band Wagon* / to a modern Hollywood for *La La Land*). Ensuite, je leur demanderai d’émettre des hypothèses sur le contenu des vidéos que nous allons voir en disant ‘We’re going to watch two videos, in your opinion, what are they going to be about ?’. La bonne réponse est de trouver qu’il s’agit de duos entre deux personnages principaux.

Illustration 11: Affiches des deux films

2. Compréhension globale des vidéos

Pour commencer cette étape, je vais montrer aux élèves le début des deux extraits (de 0:00 à 0:42 pour *The Band Wagon* et de 0:00 à 1:01 pour *La La Land*). Je leur demanderai ensuite de relever des informations sur les personnages, les endroits ainsi que le sujet principal de la vidéo : ‘give me some information about the characters / the place / the main topic of the video’. J’attendrai qu’ils me disent que la scène se passe pendant la nuit et que les deux personnages marchent dehors pour *La La Land*, et qu’ils sont en train de faire un tour de calèche dans *The Band Wagon ;* que les deux personnages sont à chaque fois un couple et qu’on peut deviner que ce sont les personnages principaux (The scene takes place at night and the two characters are walking outside in *La La Land* and taking a ride in a horse-drawn coach in *The Band Wagon*. There is a man and a woman. We do not know exactly if they already are together at the beginning of the video but they must be the main characters). Ensuite, je leur montrerai les vidéos entières l’une après l’autre et je leur demanderai de prendre des notes sur les relations et liens entre les personnages (‘take notes on the relationships between the characters’). Nous en déduirons les différences principales entre les deux scènes : ‘at the end of the extract from *The Band Wagon*, the two characters seem to

be closer thanks to the dance. In *La La Land*, however, they quarrel during the dance scene, by throwing sand on each other's shoes'. Ensuite, je leur montrerai deux captures d'écran provenant des deux films musicaux et je leur demanderai de me parler des différences entre les deux clichés pour mettre en évidence l'idée que Mia et Sébastian ne se regardent jamais alors que Debbie Reynolds et son partenaire se regardent souvent de manière complice.

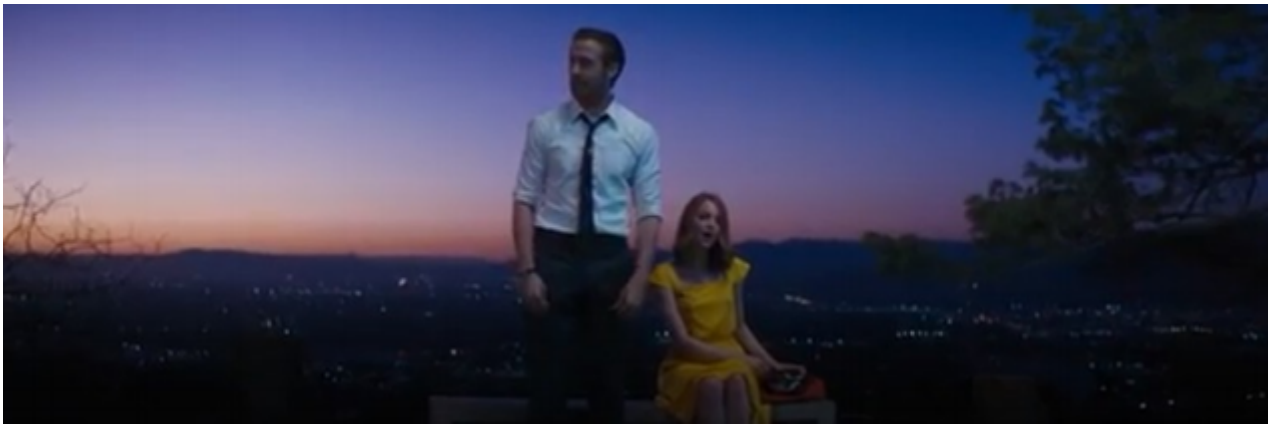


Illustration 12: Mia et Sébastian dans 'A Lovely Night'

3. Compréhension détaillée de la vidéo

Ensuite, je vais faire un point méthodologique et demander aux élèves quels éléments nous pouvons analyser dans un film (cela a été étudié lors d'une séquence précédente). Je projeterai un tableau et le complèterai au fur et à mesure avec les éléments qu'ils me donneront (composition / couleurs, etc). Puis, pour étudier la vidéo en détail, je diviserai la classe en groupes (8 groupes de 3 élèves puisqu'il y a 8 catégories à étudier). Chaque groupe se concentrera sur un des éléments à étudier : en anglais, lighting (lumière), colors (couleurs), use of props (utilisation d'accessoires), setting (lieu de tournage), camera work (jeu avec la caméra), performance (jeu des acteurs), woman / man (le contraste entre femmes et hommes), dances (les dances). Ci-dessous se trouve l'exemple du tableau complété avec les réponses à trouver en deux visionnages (un sans pauses et l'autre avec pauses). Si les élèves ne trouvent pas les réponses après deux visionnages, je montrerai le moment précis où se trouve ce qu'ils devaient voir et je les guiderai vers la réponse lors de la correction ou je mettrai certaines fois des captures d'écran provenant des deux extraits côte à côté pour qu'ils voient les différences de couleurs, du lumière et de composition.

	Dancing in the Dark	*La La Land*
Lighting	The light falls on the characters Chiaroscuro between the characters and the background	Mia and Sebastian stand out against the dark background
Colors	Both characters are wearing a white gear.	Contrast between Mia who is wearing a yellow dress (bright colors) and

		Sebastian who is wearing a black and white suit.
Composition	Symmetrical and centered on the characters	Most of the time centered on the characters with Sebastian on one side and Mia on the other and sometimes off-centered
Use of props	- The bench - The horse-drawn coach => nothing particular to notice	-The lampost (like in *Singin in the Rain*) - The keys – they say that we could use them as an antenna (absurd) - The bench : same as in *Dancing in The Dark.* - Bags : symbol for the quarreling - Phone : separating them
Settings	- Forest (very romantic) - In the park - In the middle of dancers	- The city is in the background - Nobody in the streets
Camera work	- Turning on itself to follow the dancers - The city is in the background	- Often in the middle of the screen but outside of it sometimes (strange) - Bird-eye view in the end above the heads of the two characters => the camera is a character in itself and its main aim is not to show the characters all the time
Performance	No exaggeration – very natural	Exaggerated (playing with dust to annoy the other)
Man / Woman	They are on an equal footing The man follows the woman's step	Sebastian dominates Mia => parallel composition
Dance	- Tap Dance => doing the same steps one after the other - Waltz : more elegant - The woman dancer is very flexible => professional dancers (jetés, dégagés, rond de jambes, arabesques)	- Tap Dance => one after the other => the characters use some of *Dancing in the Dark*'s steps (in the stairs vs on the floor when they turn on themselves). - - The woman is not flexible => non -professional dancers

Ensuite, nous demanderons aux élèves de déduire : 'so, what are the common points between the two ?', 'What is different in *La La Land* ?'. Voici ici une trace écrite de ce que les élèves doivent être capables de déduire en anglais :

The two movies are set in a city and we can see L.A or a city in the background. They are set at night and the two characters are the only ones in the streets and they walk through a crowd dancing at some point (in *La La Land*, it was in the pool scene, just before the extract). There is a chiaroscuro in the two scenes. What is interesting to notice is that sometimes, the same elements are used in *La La Land* and in *the Band Wagon* so the filmmaker decided to use *The Band Wagon* as a model. But they are used in a different ways. For instance, in *La La Land*, the bench is used as a

way to show the quarrel for the characters and some moves of *The Band Wagon* are used but by a non-professional dancer. Moreover, the camera uses a bird eye-view and put the characters out of the screen. So *La La Land* is a modern version of a musical film.

Enfin je leur demanderai ce qu'ils en déduisent sur le genre de *La La Land* en disant 'So, what can you conclude about *La La Land* ? Is it a classical musical film ?'. J'attendrai qu'ils répondent que *La La Land* est un film innovateur qui ne suit pas toutes les régles d'Hollywood. :

La La Land is an innovative musical film which does not follow all the rules from the musicals.

4. Trace écrite

Voici un exemple de résumé que nous pourrions écrire dans le cahier en guise de trace écrite.

The scenes take place at night and the two characters are walking outside in *La La Land* and taking a ride in a horse-drawn coach in *The Band Wagon.* There is a man and a woman. We do not know exactly if they already are together at the beginning of the video. However, they seem to love each other and to get closer thanks to the dance in *The Band Wagon* while they seem not to care about each other in *La La Land*. Indeed, they often do not look at each other whereas the characters always look at each other in the eyes in *The Band Wagon*. What is interesting to notice is that sometimes, the same elements are used in *La La Land* and in *The Band Wagon* so the filmmaker decided to use *The Band Wagon* as a model. But they are used in a different ways. For instance, the bench is used as a way to show the quarrel for the characters in *La La Land* and some moves of *The Band Wagon* are used but by a non-professional dancer. Moreover, the camera uses a bird eye-view and put the characters out of the screen. So *La La Land* is a modern version of a film musical.

5. Ré-activation des savoirs assimilés

Pour réactiver les connaissances assimilées lors de l'étude de ces deux extraits vidéos, je leur demanderai d'écrire un très court article de presse (6-10 lignes) pour le site du collège dont le but sera d'expliquer pourquoi *La La Land* est à la fois une comédie musicale classique mais aussi une comédie musicale innovante. Ils utiliseront ainsi ce que nous avons écrit dans le cahier et appris (nouveau lexique filmique, grammaire et idées) en le reformulant avec leurs mots à eux pour écrire leur article.

3) Retour sur la mise en œuvre de la séquence.

Cette séquence reste difficile à mettre en place en collège, surtout avec mes élèves, et ce pour plusieurs raisons. Par exemple, lors du remplissage du tableau par les élèves, bon nombre d'entre eux arrivent à trouver les couleurs et les accessoires et à les noter, mais très peu arrivent à analyser réellement la séquence et je n'ai obtenu que des réponses superficielles de type : '*In La La*

Land, the man is wearing a black suit whereas in *Gold Diggers*, the man is wearing a light brown suit.' De plus, à ce niveau, produire une phrase grammaticalement correcte telle que celle évoquée est déjà un lourd travail qui demande beaucoup de concentration et qui est remarquable en quatrième, il est donc difficile, en plus de cela, de leur demander de réfléchir très clairement au symbolisme de l'usage d'une telle couleur. L'implicite n'est évoqué dans le CECRL (Cadre de Référence pour les Langues) qu'au niveau B2, celui que les élèves doivent atteindre en fin de terminale et de lycée. Pour pallier à cette difficulté, j'aurais dû laisser un temps d'analyse clair aux élèves (10 minutes) en passant dans les rangs pour les aider à formuler leurs idées. De plus, faire un récapitulatif lors de notre première analyse du symbolisme de certaines couleurs, des types de composition et leurs significations, par exemple, aurait pu leur permettre d'analyser dans le détail, mais cela leur demanderait d'assimiler de nombreuses informations en très peu de temps à un stade où le savoir parler un anglais grammaticalement et lexicalement correct est l'objectif premier. Cela peut se faire petit-à-petit en faisant par exemple des micro-analyses de films en début d'heure de manière régulière, et ce dès le début de l'année, ce qui permettrait aux élèves de se familiariser à ce type d'exercices et de développer leurs capacités d'analyse.

4) Conclusion

En conclusion, cette séquence est attrayante pour les élèves grâce à son support et document principal étudié, le film de comédie musicale *La La Land*, dont ils ont entendu parler et qui leur permet de travailler la compréhension de l'oral et de l'écrit ainsi que la compétence méthodologique, notamment l'étude de séquences et leur analyse stylistique. Elle permet par conséquent de développer des stratégies transférables qui seront réutilisables par les élèves en classe de troisième. Cependant, cette séquence reste difficile à mettre en œuvre en quatrième de par sa complexité et de par les précisions attendues dans l'analyse de genre ; elle serait plutôt à réaliser avec des élèves de troisième en collège voire de seconde en lycée.

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Summary

La La Land, certainly one of the most rewarded film of the 21st century, is more than a simple traditional musical film. As the producer and filmmaker Damien Chazelle asserts it, he wanted to renew the genre and to modernize it by making it more realistic. But how do modernity and tradition coexist in *La La Land* ? Is *La La Land* really an innovative movie and to what extent ? This essay will try to answer those questions paying a tribute and refering to previous film musicals and to the history of musicals and musical films.

Résumé

La La Land, certainement l'un des films les plus récompensés du 21ème siècle, est bien plus qu'un simple film musical traditionnel. Comme l'a annoncé d'emblée le réalisateur et producteur Damien Chazelle à la sortie de son film, il souhaitait renouveller le genre de la comédie musicale et le moderniser en réalisant une comédie musicale plus réaliste que celles des années 1940-50. Mais comment a t-il réussi à faire coexister tradition et modernité dans *La La Land* ? Est-ce que *La La Land* est réellement un film musical innovateur et dans quelle mesure ? En faisant appel à l'étude de films musicaux classiques et à l'histoire des films musicaux, ce mémoire essaie de répondre au mieux à ces questions.

Mots clés : *La La Land ;* comédie musicale hollywoodienne ; Damien Chazelle ; innovation