

Analysis of the Role of the Scene Colors in La La Land

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Abstract: This study explores the role of scene color in *La La Land*, focusing on how color functions as a narrative and emotional tool in musical cinema. Set against the backdrop of increasing academic interest in film aesthetics, the research analyzes key scenes to examine how color contrast, brightness dynamics, and color-symbolic meanings are used to reflect characters' emotions and psychological states. By adopting methods of text analysis and literature review, the paper dissects the use of contrasting colors, subjective color richness, and seasonal shifts, highlighting their synergy with music and narrative structure. The study finds that *La La Land* employs color not only for aesthetic purposes but also as a symbolic language that bridges reality and fantasy. The film's integrated use of color enriches emotional expression and narrative cohesion, offering a dreamlike yet grounded cinematic experience. These findings contribute to a deeper understanding of color symbolism in contemporary musicals.

Keywords: *La La Land*, Scene Space, Emotional Expression, Color Symbolism

1. Introduction

The scenes in movies are the background of the story and the place where the characters perform. They not only indicate the time when the story takes place, but also show the location where the story takes place, thereby providing background information such as region, season, ethnicity, culture, and era [1]. This indicates that the scene space is more inclined towards the concept of space. Thus, scene space, defined as the diegetic environment within which the film's narrative unfolds. In movies, color symbolism allows directors to convey emotions. Color is a visual language that influences the audience's emotions and understanding through color tones, contrasts, and color schemes in films. The film *La La Land* has made good use of color symbolism in its scenes to organize its plots and strengthen the resonance of audiences [2]. This article analyzes key scenes from *La La Land* to analyze the film's use of color. It seeks to make contributions to the color studies about *La La Land*. This article will analyze the color construction characteristics of the scene space in *La La Land* systematically, and in the process of analyzing each characteristic, based on the natural and cultural attributes of color, analyze the techniques and aesthetic effects of color construction, as well as the symbolic meaning, ideological connotation, and emotional representation of color construction.

2. The use of contrasting colors

2.1. Simultaneous color contrast and emotional metaphor

In the movie *La La Land*, numerous contrasting colors are employed in the same frame or connected. Red and blue are the most prevalent pairing. Simultaneous color contrast refers to the phenomenon in which the color of an object in the human eye changes due to the influence of surrounding or adjacent colors. Taking Sebastian's concert scene during a band performance as an example, the performance scenes are filled with a lot of red and blue, with purple often used as a transition in the middle of the color blocks. As purple is a blend of red and blue, influenced by simultaneous color contrast, the audience perceives red as tiring. At this time, the purple around red reflects into people's nervous system and is perceived as less red and more blue. Purple seen as a blend and red and blue are a strong set of contrasting colors, which will make the audience feel that the colors in the picture are very bright, full of collision and impact. However, at the same time, due to the transition role of purple, the contrast is not as clear at first glance, and the overall color of the picture is strong, which does not make people feel abrupt. In Mia's home, a direct overlay of red and blue contrasting colors is used to highlight the strong color contrast effect. The application of contrasting colors in the film is not limited to the intrinsic contrast within scene space colors. Scene space colors often contrast with character clothing colors, making the picture colors richer and more intense. In addition to the aesthetic effect brought by natural attributes, the contrast between red and blue in the film also plays a promoting role in shaping the characters' psychology and scene atmosphere in terms of cultural attributes. Culturally, red is often associated with warm emotions such as excitement, anger, happiness, and tension. It symbolizes concepts such as resistance, victory, celebration, and judgment in terms of meaning. As the opposite of red, blue often represents relatively calm and static emotions such as tranquility, calmness, and melancholy. In terms of meaning, it often evokes associations with calmness, rationality, wisdom, and among others.

Notably, red and blue pervade the film's visual vocabulary. For example, at the beginning of the film, Mia is subjected to injustice and cold treatment during the audition. The blue color creates a cold and suffocating atmosphere, and Mia suppresses her emotions externally, yet her inner sadness and helplessness are overwhelming. When Mia walks out of the audition room, the scene changes to a relatively lively red, and Mia's expression relaxes. As she vents, she undoes the button on her shirt, and the red color of the scene creates a sense of rebellion and anger, which is also a true portrayal of Mia's inner self. Anger reaches its peak and turns into a deep sense of helplessness and despair [2]. Throughout the entire scene, the color changes as the protagonist's emotions fluctuate.

2.2. Brightness dynamics and psychological immersion

Brightness dynamics in *La La Land* serve as a psychological lens, externalizing the protagonists' emotional states. For example, when Sebastian is working in a coffee shop, he can not resist playing his favorite music after growing bored with the prescribed repertoire. As he gradually immerses himself in his musical world, the color brightness of the surrounding scene space decreases to black, and a beam of chasing light shines down on Sebastian, as if he is the center of the world. At this moment, apart from the colors on the characters' bodies, there is only a small patch of white chasing light and black covering the screen. The director uses the changes in color brightness in the scene space to showcase the protagonist's involvement. At this point, the color brightness gradually decreases until it turns black. Due to the dominance of black, the audience will focus their attention on the character. At the same time, with the coordination of the camera, the protagonist's psychological state of being lost in the moment can be better highlighted. At this point, everything around him seems no longer important to him. At the end of the film, there is a special use for

reducing color brightness. When Mia, who has become a popular movie star, accidentally comes to Sebastian's jazz club and hears him play the song they have played and sung together, the two gradually enter the world of the song, and the surrounding scene begins to darken and turn black. With the coordination of camera scheduling and scene settings, when the screen lights up again, it returns to the day when the two first meet in their imagination. At this time, the change in color brightness also provides convenience for natural transitions, so that the audience will not feel stiff while watching. The cultural attributes of black itself also add more symbolic resonance to the color settings of such scene spaces.

Black, as the darkest color among all, often gives people a sense of mystery and coolness. It absorbs all colors without reflection and contains various cultural meanings. Black can express reverence and longing for the universe, possessing a dreamlike and infinite spiritual power that transcends reality. The existence of black itself demonstrates its own power. In the film, the protagonist is immersed in a black world, indicating their infinite spiritual power and transcendent state at this moment. The contrasting color techniques discussed above—both in simultaneous hue contrast and brightness dynamics, which serve as foundational elements of *La La Land's* visual language. Furthermore, the film's color design extends beyond mere contrast, integrating color with other narrative and aesthetic layers to construct a cohesive cinematic world.

3. Integrated color techniques

3.1. Subjective enhancement of color richness

Subjective enhancement of color richness and purity in artificially constructed scenes is prominent in the movie *La La Land* [3]. In it, the color composition of the natural environment space mostly presents the original natural color representation, while in the artificially constructed scene space, such as the audition room, Mia's home, lighthouse bar, and other spaces, richer colors are used compared to daily life. Especially in the imaginative scene of Sebastian playing the piano for Mia at the end, the richness of colors in their minds is applied to the extreme. Sebastian pulls Mia into a white room, which contains white, red, orange and yellow. The two continue to move forward, and the colors in the picture become even richer, such as red, blue, green, yellow, orange, black, pink, purple, and white. Multiple contrasting colors interweave together to create a kaleidoscope-like visual effect. In addition to being a nickname for Los Angeles, *La La Land* also has a meaning in English slang, a dreamland, referring to a place that is detached from reality, and can also be understood as a state of daydreaming, that is, a daydreaming state [4]. The rich, complex, and vivid colors in the film effectively convey this psychedelic feeling, making the audience feel as if they have fallen into a surreal dream while watching the film. But the thematic core and narrative device about dreams and love presented in the film also have many elements of reality, and the strong clash between reality and dreams brings a unique viewing experience.

3.2. Color-music synergy and seasonal narrative

The shaping of color and musicality in the scene space is formed by the coordination with other color elements in the movie. In the film, the director pays great attention to the color structure when configuring the scene space colors [1]. There are many significant features such as changes in brightness, color temperature, and purity of color. At the same time, the director also pays great attention to the correspondence between the scene space colors and the colors of props and character appearances. In terms of coordination with character costumes and props, if colors of the same color scheme appear in the same picture, the purity of character costumes and prop colors is often higher than that in the scene space, while the purity of prop colors is lower than that of costumes. Through the perspective of colors, the characters become the visual center. For example,

in the dance that begins on a congested highway, the actors wear striking clothing in colors such as bright red, yellow, and blue. The color purity of actors wearing blue clothing is higher than the gray and blue of the sky in the background.

Meanwhile, as the main storyline of this film is narrated in chronological order, which is divided into five parts including winter, spring, summer, autumn, and winter. The brightness and purity of the natural environment scene space colors also change over time. The overall color in autumn and winter is darker. In spring and summer, natural scenes with higher color purity and brightness are selected, which serve as a narrative reminder of time and also reflects the emotional development between the male and female protagonists [5]. By aligning color with seasonality and musical rhythm, *La La Land* crafts a visually cohesive narrative that merges aesthetics with emotion.

4. Discussion

Singing in the Rain, similarly demonstrates masterful color design, yet its approach diverges significantly from *La La Land*. Specifically, the film *La La Land* incorporates color into its narrative, creating an immersive and emotionally resonant experience for the audience. *Singing in the Rain* deliberately uses colors to enhance the dreamy feel of the film and blur the boundary between reality and fantasy. *Singing in the Rain* uses Technicolor technology to enhance the dreamy qualities of musical films with high saturation colors. On stage scenes, it uses high-key warm colors such as gold and red, in combination with exaggerated costumes and scenery, reflecting the glamorous and illusory production style of early Hollywood.

Meanwhile, there are also some similarities between these two works in their use of color. *Singing in the Rain* also uses the symbolic meaning of colors to reflect the psychological state of the characters. For example, when Lockwood dances solo in the rain, he is dressing in a dark gray suit. This scene contrasts his inner freedom after breaking constraints with a cool gray and blue background [6]. In addition, *Singing in the Rain* also employs the technique of color contrast. For example, it creates a surreal stage with neon like high contrast colors such as red, purple, and blue, showcasing Hollywood's pursuit of audio-visual wonders during its golden age.

These contrasts highlight how *La La Land* situates color within a psychological, character-driven narrative and underscore the evolving role of color in musical cinema from the technical innovation to emotional symbolism.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, *La La Land* is a great example of the construction of scene color design to reveal characters and plots. In terms of color design in the scenes, *La La Land* matches the narrative structure, character emotional development, and scene atmosphere of the film through changes in color attributes, while also creating a immersive dream journey for audiences. Overall, color provides filmmakers with more visual means of expression, emotional resonance and artistic conception to convey the directors' intentions and viewpoints. Color is a visual element and a symbol that influences emotional resonance and shapes perception through different symbolic meanings. The director and film production team use specific colors to convey emotional meanings, themes or character development based on the character's personality and story, strengthen the film's theme and emotions, create dramatic effects, and convey the character's emotions or psychological state to the audience.

However, this study's selection scenes in *La La Land* remains limited. The analysis mainly focuses on a few prominent scenes, overlooking other scenes that may also contain valuable insights into color symbolism. It is necessary to deepen analysis of the symbolism of color, which is

also a direction that needs further research. Additionally, examining technological impacts on color design in musicals across eras will also enrich the findings.

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