

This extract from *La La Land* (Damien Chazelle, 2016) is a good example of escalating tension between two characters. It is a classic shot reverse shot sequence. The scene invites the audience to a very intimate and delicate moment in a relationship. In fact what should have been a nice dinner of reunion is about to scar the characters forever. It starts with the close up of a vinyl that is playing an upbeat jazz tune. Until this moment they were probably enviable lovebirds. Two young people who share the love for the arts together. Two creative and talented minds, a match made in heaven. Since the beginning though, it can be perceived that there is some emotional distance and disconnection between the two characters. They are obviously in a relationship, since they are having dinner at home, in a romantic atmosphere, with warm light from some candles. They are both wearing elegant yet not too over the top clothes. Sebastian is wearing a tie, while Mia a shirt and a jumper. The background though looks quite green and cold, a presage that something bad is going to happen. They are talking about how nice it is to be home, so obviously one of them has been away. Even though the viewer can only see a small part of the house, it seems to be quite tiny and empty, with very little furniture. Definitely not expensive, it will become clear in fact that they are both struggling to make it in their respective fields. As then it will be specified, Sebastian joined a band and is going on tour with them. They both have busy lives, trying to follow their dreams. They are simply talking about their jobs, as if there is nothing else they could share, they are having conversation almost just to fill the silence. It is more like a forced small talk.

Their long distance relationship clearly is not working. Mia is impatient for him to finally settle down. But this would mean to leave the band, which Sebastian is not planning on doing. They have almost not touched their food at all, their attention now is on what they know is about to happen. The audience gets driven in even more when the camera switches from medium shots to close ups, as they get more tense. They are both trying to think their sentences through, so that they will not hurt each other.

Mia is visibly shocked by Sebastian's decision. She wants him to pursue his dream and passion, while he is getting caught up on the perspective of a pretty stable job and regular income. To make this even more irritating, jazz music is still playing in the background, the same happy tune. He thought that she had expectations of stability and that is why he accepted the steady job. In reality out of the two she is the true dreamer. The flickering light from the candles makes the scene feel even more unstable. In a puff everything could just blow away. They are raising their voices to the point of almost covering the music. Art has lost its power. It is not the glue that holds them together anymore, it is actually pulling them apart. It is now an element of disturbance and irritation. The camera indulges on the actors' faces long enough to capture facial expressions of shock and disappointment. They are both insecure and their future is unpredictable. This not only applies to their relationship but also to their careers. Sebastian has created an illusion of stability and contentment. In reality he is dissatisfied with both his job and private life. This dinner went from being awkward to being a therapy session. And their stream of consciousness is not going well. He wants to convince himself that he is doing the right thing. That is why he raised his voice and is accompanying his speech with broad hand gestures. They will always be theatrical, performance will always be in their lives, whether they like it or not. As the music stops they both remain speechless, they lost their rhythm. They are not on the same wavelength anymore. While he is looking down and reflecting, Mia is staring so angrily at him. But then he attacks her, painful words come out of his mouth, like knives ready to stab her. Mia is tearing up. A close up shows the vinyl still spinning, but no sound is coming out. They are all worn out, completely consumed by their passions: theater, music and an impossible love for each other. They have to pick one of these things, they cannot possibly show dedication to all of them at the same time. The silence is broken by the fire alarm that goes off. It is a deafening sound of a relationship that maybe was never meant to be. The alarm is like a wake up call for Mia. It is visible on her eyes, she has

come to the realization that their relationship has come to an end, she is still shocked because Sebastian turned out to be a completely different person than she expected. They could have motivated each other, but he gave up without even trying. He ran after the first convenient opportunity that was presented to him, without even questioning it. He was looking for something steady and instead he found a shaky romance. As he wakes up to go to the kitchen, an handheld camera precedes him. The result is as unstable as Mia and Sebastian's relationship. She is still sitting in the cold green light that took over the warm light, that despite its intensity is now invisible. Both the kitchen and living room are now the remains of a battle field. Mia finally makes up her mind, still incredulous, she just grabs her bag and leaves. Sebastian is left alone, dealing with a burnt meal in a small kitchen that is now filled with smoke. Maybe that is all it always was, just smoke.