

**Name:** Emma Deckers

**Word count:** 1187

### Written assignment: Alive

The short film “Paris, je t’aime” follows a middle-aged woman named Carol who goes to Paris for the first time, as she has always dreamed about, and recounts her journey in a French class back home. While she narrates her story in accented French, it follows her on her last day there and the sights she sees and encounters. She describes her experience in Paris and all the feelings bubbling up to the surface about love, life’s potential, and what it means to be truly alive. In this short film, the impactful narration, cinematography, clever sound design, and style of editing help convey the confronting feeling of being ordinary but finding profound beauty in its simplicity. This essay will explore the non-diegetic narration and selected use of diegetic sounds, different cinematography techniques to set the film’s composition, and the deliberate cuts that highlight navigating life.

This short film employs a unique narrative style, predominantly using non-diegetic voice-over narration. This technique, told from a limited first-person perspective, provides a deeper insight into the main character, Carol, and her experiences in Paris. As she recounts her story in her French class back in Denver, we see the flashback of the day she is talking about linearly as the story moves chronologically. The film follows her as she goes through the motions of visiting a city she has never seen before, just like any ordinary tourist would. The day Carol experiences is typical for a tourist as she tries to speak the local language, sees the beautiful sights Paris has to offer, and ends up sitting in a park enjoying the sun and a sandwich. However, in Carol’s case, this did not turn out to be an ordinary day for her, as she had discovered a long-forgotten feeling. As the camera zooms in from a medium close-up to a close-up shot (5:38), we see her truly experience the realization of being ‘alive’ as she

narrates it to us. It is a beautiful feeling many people can relate to, as it came crashing over her, and she is momentarily overwhelmed with emotion.

Furthermore, the film effectively uses sound design to enhance the emotional impact of the narrative. A pivotal moment in the film is highlighted by the falling away of all non-diegetic sounds. As the voice-over and the upbeat music abruptly stop, the diegetic sounds of children playing, the winds and the birds in the park, and other people talking to each other come to the foreground. Then, the non-diegetic music comes back, but the song has changed from an ‘elevator song’ into a more profound one, and she starts doing the voice-over again, talking about how this feeling grabbed ahold of her. This use of sound design not only colors the emotional impact but also engages the audience, making them feel more connected to Carol’s experience.

The cinematography in this short film plays a crucial role in setting up the story and showcasing the beauty and loneliness of the city’s vastness. The first establishing shot of the city and the hotel (0:12-0:28) and the zoom that directly follows onto the hotel, which then switches to a full shot (0:42) of Carol looking out the window with a slightly hunched posture standing still in a dark room, help illustrate the point that she is just one person in a vast, bustling city. To further demonstrate this, another establishing shot (1:50-2:01) of a busy Chinese restaurant full of friends and lovers eating and chatting away ends with Carol sitting and eating alone at her table in the corner. The shot then cuts to a medium close-up (2:02-2:13) of Carol while she looks around, and the voice-over narration explains that this is the “city of love,” but she does not expect anything to happen to her. The combination of her sitting alone at the restaurant, the shot framed on her while looking at people in love, and explaining that that will never happen for you, gives us a peek into her innermost feelings of having accepted that life is just ordinary. Although Carol does not seem too bothered by this insight, in the next scene, the camera follows her through a dolly shot (2:14-2:42) through a

lovely, quaint street, and she fantasizes about living there. Still, even in her utmost fantasy, she would have the same old job as back home: delivering people their mail.

Furthermore, editing and cinematography collaborate effectively in “Paris, je t'aime,” creating a series of shots and reverse shots (3:08-3:37). The shot of Carol remains still, while the reverse shot of the tomb is a handheld pov-shot that creates a sense of ‘looking through her eyes’ at this tomb. The same technique is used at the viewpoint, with a close-up of Carol (4:10-4:13) cutting to the view and showing the view through a pan (4:13-4:24) as if to mimic Carol looking at the view herself. This technique engages the audience, inviting them to see the world through her eyes and join her on this physical and spiritual journey through Paris.

Lastly, the editing style does an excellent job of helping the wonderful mundaneness and simplicity of her life shine through. At the beginning of the short film, when she starts talking about her dogs and her dislike of Parisian food, the cuts to the physical photo of her dogs she took with her (0:56) and the American-style hamburger she did not finish (1:07), do a subtle but impactful job of immediately showing who this woman is and how much she is set in her ways. Additionally, the dramatic cut from seeing her alone in the graveyard thinking about her deceased mother and sister to the packed elevator of tourists where she is trying to ‘pop’ her ears from the height difference highlights her ‘that is just life’ mentality. She reiterates this notion as she talks about one day dying and nobody coming to her funeral, and she would not care as she would be dead. However, she follows this up by saying she is happy, which all ties into finding beauty in the ordinary.

The short film “Paris, je t'aime” skillfully illustrates the profound journey to find beauty in the simplicity of ordinary life through impactful narration, cinematography, clever sound design, and editing style. The clever use of non-diegetic and diegetic sounds impacted the audience's engagement with the main character. Furthermore, the camera movement and

different shots helped contrast the qualities of Carol's deliberate stillness and constant, keep-moving attitude. Additionally, the editing creates the world where Carol resides and immediately gives a clear picture of who she is while trying to make the viewer go on this journey with this woman. This analysis dives deeper into the meaning and significance of the short film “Paris, je t'aime”. It discusses how life does not have to be incredible all the time, as life can be pretty spectacular and fulfilling, even if you feel like it is ordinary, when you are open to receiving joy from places you might not expect it from.