

# Film analysis for "hiroshima, mon amour" (directed by alain resnai in essays exam...

[Sociology](#), [Women](#)



## **Analysis of Hiroshima, Mon Amour**

When Alain Resnais' debut feature *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* opened in 1959, it was celebrated in *Cahiers du Cinema* as the first really "modern film." The positive reviews poured in, mostly focusing on the sophistication of the movie. It was not only a success in France, though; it played for half a year in London and New York City, and it became the symbol for the "new wave" of film that was emerging from France (Kreidl). From the very outset, this is a powerful film that continues to leave a significant impact on its audience. The prologue to the film lasts a full ten minutes and consists of a poignant montage of reconstructions, newsreel footage, still photographs and contemporary representations of Hiroshima. This montage serves as a counterpoint with intimate portrayals of the couple, joined together. At the same time, though, the woman details all of the things she remembers seeing Hiroshima, while the man differs, saying that she has not seen a thing. This sets up a collection of dichotomies that will last throughout the entire movie: war vs. peace, past vs. present, truth vs. recollection and sex vs. mortality. Japan and France are set up as a pair of oppositions as well, and so are public and personal tragedy. It is this last pairing that is the most poignant, though, at it is reflective of the sort of event that took place at Hiroshima. For people who did not have a personal connection to the city, the dropping of the atomic bomb is more of an academic consideration. It is possible to look at photographs of the damage and still lack an emotional connection to the sheer horror of the day. People who have a closer personal connection, perhaps through losing their home losing friends and family, remember the tragedy on a completely different level. Resnais recognizes

this trend and takes it upon himself to help the viewer to recognize it as well. This is why the focus on the film is not on the bombing itself but rather on the microcosmic love tale, as well as the memories that the French woman has of her time living under occupation.

This means that one of the film's central ideas is the connection between memory and time. As the film opens, having the lovers' joined bodies briefly coated in ashes brings to mind the fallout that landed on and around Hiroshima. Bringing the past and present together at the same time becomes one of the central motifs of the movie, implying that time is more of an illusion than a reality (Johns). One purpose of the film is to demonstrate that separation over time is more a mental construct than a fact, because memory can bring figures together that time has kept apart. Consider the position of the hand of the slumbering Japanese man; this recalls for the viewer the hand of the French woman's German lover as he lies on the ground, his life gone from him. Over the course of the film, the woman's preoccupation with the past continues to grow, until the point when she fails to differentiate between her past and present lovers, talking to the Japanese man like he is her German soldier. The movie brings the two places together as well, blending shots from France with those from contemporary Hiroshima. The implication is that the woman's memory is reality, rather than any sort of present construction.

Hiroshima, Mon Amour also uses sound in a distinctive way. In traditional films, images and words tend to go along with one another unless there is an error in the dubbing. In this film, it is often impossible to tell whether one is listening to an actual conversation, imagined repartee or even asides from

the characters. When the woman speaks, she often sounds as though she is caught in a trance, using a charged monotone. Rather than a typical soundtrack, this film's sound seems like a broadcast that sends us right into the cerebral cortices of the characters. There is a musical score in the background that holds together visual rhythm and time, but for those who expect the dialogue to follow the visual action, Hiroshima, Mon Amour marks a significant departure.

When Resnais manipulates the bursts of memory into the film, it shows the skill at work in the editing department, but there are also other techniques at work. The tracking shots keep the viewer right in the moment with the characters, and when there are close ups of things and faces, the composition shows a great deal of care. The tracking shots showing Emmanuelle walking among the lonely, spectral streets of Hiroshima show just as indelibly as the mushroom cloud images do the devastation that atomic holocaust and emotional loss can both wreak on a city and on the soul. In that opening montage, the camera appears to glide from one image to the next, taking the viewer through a tour of time. When the woman is talking about the affair that she had and the tragedy that ensued, Resnais shows that he is just as skilled at rendering the intensity of interpersonal drama on screen (Slade). When the young woman is confined in a cellar and embarrassed by the villagers who want their pound of flesh from her, the result is a collection of scenes that horrify more than the best that Hitchcock and Craven could ever put on the screen.

One of the most effective elements of Hiroshima, Mon Amour is the fact that it is impossible to classify. It is not a romance, at least not in the typical

sense, and it is certainly not a documentary (Johnson). On an even more basic level, though, it is difficult to figure out just what the film is about, at least in an easy phrase or two. This is not a film that a trailer can encapsulate; such abbreviation would raise more questions than it would answer. The central question of the film, though, is clear: In the face of tragedy, should one try to bury it in one's memory or keep it in some way? The woman would clearly like to leave her past behind, but she cannot convince her unconscious to release it (Anderst). This is why the similarities that her present and past lovers wake up those old memories; when this happens, though, she chooses to break off her present relationship. This is not the healthy response that the man shows; he is willing to talk about his personal memories. This is the path to healing; without this sort of healing, the implication is that history is doomed to repeat itself.

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