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## Film Response: Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind

Michel Gondry's film, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, tries to answer the age old question of whether or not it is better to have loved and lost than never to have loved at all. The film greatly explores the importance of memories and how they have an impact on one's own future. Gondry utilizes patterns along with cinematic techniques to enhance Joel's memories and complex narrative. With such complicated themes and symbols, common patterns found within the film can help the audience guide themselves through it. Joel's experiences cause him to strip away all of the good and bad memories of Clementine, which prompts the audience to react to his sense of regret. Gondry allows the audience to sympathize with Joel, the film's protagonist, and even encourages the audience to look at their own memories.

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* tells the story of a passionate, yet clearly incompatible, romance of Joel Barish and Clementine Kruczynski. Their relationship blooms over two years, but unfortunately ends with heartbreak for both characters. As Joel discovers that Clementine recklessly undergoes a medical procedure to remove all memories of him, he is so hurt to the point where he decides to track down the doctor and demands the same operation. However, midway through the procedure Joel begins to regret his impulsive decision and begins to realize the importance of his past as well as learning the inevitable pain that comes with losing some of his most cherished memories of Clementine.

Apparent throughout the film, Gondry uses the element of *mise-en-scene* and cinematography to introduce Joel's thought process and state of mind. Even when it's not a memory, the focus is always on Joel and his reactions towards the world around him. The first few shots are highly significant in terms of both introducing the narrative structure and stylistic implications. The film opens with a fade in from black to a close up of an unshaven Joel, waking up the morning after the memory erasing operation. The morning sunlight is bright, which supplies the scene's only source of light. The act of waking up to a natural morning sunlight provides the feeling of a new beginning, although the audience feels that something is lacking from the scene. His facial expressions are rather blank which indicates his now "spotless" mind. Although there is no dialogue in the opening scene, the minimalist arrangement of the background music reinforces the feeling of a life that is somehow lacking in emotion. This confusing and empty scene begins to establish the importance of past events.

Throughout the operation, Gondry keeps the audience in Joel's memories so that the audience forms a connection necessary to understand his emotional transformation. Once introduced into Joel's memory, Gondry further utilizes cinematography to create a clear message about what Joel is experiencing. The most noticeable element of cinematography is perhaps that use of

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hand-held cameras. This clunky flawed technique recreates the effect of home video footage, an illusion that enhances the subjectivity of the memory scenes. This technique is very effective in differentiating between memories and reality. Another effect used to convey memory is the use of blurred camera movement. The first memory erased is of Joel's most recent conversation with Clementine. The scene starts with a shot of Joe lying on his bed listening to a conversation from the lobby. The next shot is of him frightened and confused as his neighbors' face is blurred behind him, a clear indication that a memory has just been erased. Gondry's choice to keep Joel in the frame as the only character forces the audience to pay close attention to his reactions and understand the emotions he is going through.

Other stylistic elements that requires analysis is the use of editing throughout the film. Continuity, the style that creates the illusions of a smooth, unbroken story by guiding the attention of the audience on plot and character, is rather varied in the film. The "dining dead" scene, for example, shows a series of reversing shots and eye-line matches that help portray the tense conversation between Joel and Clementine. The editing technique gives the scene a pace that provides both excitement and balance for each character's perspectives. In addition, a montage is used to provide the audience with a large amount of information in short period of time. This editing technique was most noticeably used when Joel returns home to collect all the objects that reminded him of Clementine, which offers the audience a small glimpse into their relationship prior to procedure. Unlike scenes in reality, continuity is often radically altered in memory scenes. This is quite evident in the scene where Joel is trying to turn Patrick around in the bookstore to face him, a sequence of fast jump cuts stops the audience from seeing his face. Jump cuts are also used to depict a sudden change in location or to erase Clementine from his memory.

While being transported into Joel's memories, the audience is constantly searching for cinematic patterns to help them navigate through the complicated storyline. As the viewer connects the dots and mentally rearrange the narrative chronologically they feel an overwhelming sense of disappointment by the sad truth that they just discovered. Unlike Joel, the audience can't forget about the bad memories and they're stuck with them while the film unfolds. Gondry was able to successfully create a piece of art that stimulates the audience's senses while also pushing them to consider and reflect on the complex relationship between love and loss.

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