Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind

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The beginning of Eternal Sunshine begins with Joel Barish meeting Clementine Kruczynski on a train to Montauk after Joel has a rash decision to go on it. They connect quickly, even though their personalities are opposites, but they don’t know that they were actually in a relationship 2 years prior, after a fight where Clementine went to Lacuna, a memory erasing clinic to help her get rid of Joel in her mind. We are then flashed back to when Clementine and Joel break up. After Joel finds out what she did, he’s distressed and decides to go through the same procedure while he’s sleeping.
We see Joel’s memories of Clem starting from the end of their relationship, all the negatives and bad things about her, since those are the memories most recent in his mind. The movie continues to go back in time and we start from the end all the way into the beginning where Joel meets Clem for the first time at the beach. After he figures out what is happening, he regrets it and tries to hide Clem in the deepest part of his brain and tries to make sure the procedure cannot go as planned. Dr. Howard fixes it despite Joel’s efforts, and the day after we see Joel and Clementine listening to why they broke up in the first place.
ALTERNATIVE MODELS

ETERNAL SUNSHINE OF THE SPOTLESS MIND

Flashback

Lacuna stories

Dist. + Plan

Memory-wiping

Regret flashbacks (non-chronological)

Flashbacks as illustration (surreal escape)

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TP1

TP2
The opening credits are not shown right away in the movie. Although when they do appear they start to fade when they leave the screen. This is representation of Joel’s memories about Clementine throughout the movie. They start to fade as they are being erased by the Lacuna procedure. Eternal Sunshine is metaphor for ongoing peace and happiness. The full title portrays how one can experience happiness and joy once the negative experiences are removed from the mind.
Setting
In reality, the setting takes place in New York over the course of a 2 year relationship. Much of the movie occurs within Joel’s mind; however there are other settings including:

- Joel’s house
- Clementine’s house  - The beach
- Clinic  - Montauk
- The bookstore
- Train station
Characterization
Joel Barish

Joel is the protagonist in the film. In the beginning of the film, before he meets Clementine, he is shown as very reserved, introverted, and timid. We see that Joel is somewhat unhappy with his life, and we can infer this from what he tells us about Naomi, the way he keeps to himself, and his overall lack of motivation. This changes as he starts to fall in love with his polar opposite, Clementine. Throughout the movie Joel is very indecisive when it comes to what he wants in life. At first he wants to erase his memories of Clem but during the memory erasing process he decides he wants to keep them.
Clementine plays Joel’s love interest. We know that she is a very spontaneous and quirky character from her actions such as the impulsive decision to erase Joel from her memory and how often she changes her hair color. We see a big portion of her through a restricted view of Joel’s subconscious projections.
Joel and Clementine

"Too many guys think I'm a concept, or I complete them, or I'm gonna make them alive. But I'm just a messed-up girl who's looking for my own peace of mind. Don't assign me yours." Clementine literally brings life into Joel’s dull life. He subconsciously places that responsibility on her and makes her to be something that she is not in his head. They breakup for the same reasons that they fall in love. Joel thinks Clem is immature and an embarrassment. Similarly, Clem grows bored of Joel and feels trapped in their relationship. In conclusion, their relationship represents imperfections, but for some reason they are drawn to each other even after they erase each other.
Mary Svevo

Mary is the receptionist at Lacuna Inc. and works for Dr. Howard. Although Mary has a relationship with Stan, she is infatuated with her boss, Dr. Howard. She is portrayed as a "Stupid girl with a stupid crush". When Howard’s wife is introduced, we learn that him having an affair is nothing new, seeing that there was a past relationship she was unaware about. They made a collaborative decision to erase that memory from her. While Mary is a minor character, her decisions have a significant impact on Joel and Clementine’s relationship towards the end of the movie. She makes us question the ethicality of Lacuna.
Stan Fink

Stan works at Lacuna Inc. his job is to essentially erase the patients unwanted memories. He has feelings for Mary and was aware that she had a thing with Dr. Howard in the past. He did look out for the two when Dr. Howard’s wife caught them in the act.
Patrick

In the beginning, Patrick’s character does not seem to have much importance to the film other than the fact that he assists Stan. Although as we progress into the movie we see that he has feelings for Clementine. Patrick is so determined to get the girl that he goes through great lengths for Clem to fall in love with him. When Patrick would help Stan erase memories of Clementine from Joel, he would steal them in order to use on one Clementine and ultimately replace Joel. Despite his efforts, he becomes confused and cannot successfully replicate the memories.
Dr. Howard

Dr. Howard is the mind behind the memory erasing process. He was able to come up with a way to track bad memories and erase them from his patients. His intentions seem good at the beginning until we learn that Howard was the one who erased Mary’s memory of their relationship. While he states that it was agreed upon, we get the sense that he manipulated Mary into doing it. The audience can infer that Howard is aware of the negative impacts of the procedure when he tells Joel the operation is like brain damage. There is parallelism between these two characters because of the way that Howard interacts.
Rob and Carrie

Rob and Carrie don’t receive a lot of screen time. Nevertheless, they are catalysts for moving the plot forward. They are Joel’s friends who have his best interest in making decisions like giving him the Lacuna letter. Everytime Rob and Carrie are shown they are constantly arguing, highlighting the imperfections in their relationship. This inclusion is significant because it argues that erasing memories of a partner is not the most effective solution. The fact that Rob and Carrie are still a couple each time they are seen suggests that talking out their disagreements is better than forgetting everything.
Range and Depth

At certain points in the film Joel is unaware of the fact that his memories are being erased, and that he has erased them before, making the film restricted. However, when his subconscious realizes that his memories are getting erased, the film becomes unrestricted. In relation to the audience, the film is unrestricted for the most part because we are aware of the events occurring and we have knowledge that they have history prior to them. Although, it is restricted until it is revealed that they have erased their memories several times before. The film portrays mental subjectivity (knowing what the character knows) in the sense that we are able to hear his thoughts and see his dreams.
Subplots/Subtext

Some Subplots are:

- Mary and Dr. Howard’s relationship prior to Joel’s memory erasing.
- While we don’t see her in the film, Joel’s relationship with Naomi prior to meeting Clem.
- Patrick and Clem dating, and what happens after Clem gets with Joel again.
Change of Knowledge

For the first portion of the movie we know the same amount as Joel, and it is not until we learn about the process of Clementine cleansing Joel from her memories, and vice versa, that we know what the movie is about. For the most part we are only restricted to Joel’s point of view, memories, and subconscious, but towards the end we become unrestricted as we see more parallels in scenes and Joel’s experiences happening again like seeing Patrick, and his car.
Motifs, Symbolism, and Recurring Things

- Clementines Hair: represents her emotions and their relationship timeline
- Water: represents different emotions
- Cassette tapes and Musical Score
Clementine’s Hair
Symbolism of Clementine’s Hair

Represents her moods and the time placement of the states of her relationship with Joel

- **Blue**: The present
- **Green**: The beginning of their relationship, in many cases, green represents new beginnings
- **Red**: The beginning to middle of their relationship, and means her passion and love for Joel is very high
- **Orange**: Middle to end of their relationship, the passion and the love is fading away
water
Symbolism of Water

Joel’s character is closely associated with water in the film. Each display of water has a different meaning that explains an aspect of the plot or an emotion. The motif is first introduced when Joel and Clementine see each other on a beach in Montauk. This same beach is later recognized as the beach at which the characters first met during a friend’s party in the prologue. The beach setting reappears many times throughout the movie and is supposed to reinforce the theme of eternal peace. It brings attention to the endless ocean and roaring tide, alluding to the word eternal in the title and that love can be wild.
After, Clem takes Joel to a frozen lake, symbolizing that they both feel that that positive moment has stopped in time and will last forever. However in the opening credits we become aware that Joel and Clementine’s high spirited relationship eventually goes downhill. The audience sees Joel in his car hysterically crying while it is pouring rain outside. The rain scene is resurfaces in Joel’s apartment as he tells Clem that they should hide in a different memory before the Lacuna people erase it. Another reference to the destructiveness of the water is when the beach house begins to flood.
Similarly, when Joel second guesses the procedure while it’s being performed, he attempts to hide his mental configuration of Clementine in other parts of his memory such as his childhood. Baby Joel is being bathed in the sink and while at first he is floating, he quickly begins to drown. The floating feeling is expressed because he feels that he is an outsider rewatching the memories as they play out. The drowning is resemblant of his memories being sucked from his mind. Yet, this also represents how Joel processes his emotions; he is submerged in them like water and he cannot escape.
Symbolism of Cassette Tapes/ Musical Score

Cassettes tapes are all throughout the movie, and we see that at the beginning of the movie in the opening credits, and we see Clementine and Joel receive one from Mary. These cassette tapes represent their relationship and how their relationship is being rewinded, or how Joel wants to rewind back to when their relationship was good.
Symbolism of Cassette Tapes/ Musical Scores (Cont.)

We see him reminiscing about his relationship in the beginning when Joel is weeping after finding out Clementine has erased him from her memory. He's sitting in his car listening to Everybody's Gotta Learn Sometime, over and over on cassette tape because it was his and Clementine's song together. As he drives off, he throws the tape out the window and the camera lingers on the tape. Since Joel didn’t bring the tape to the clinic, the memory of the song doesn't get erased. As a result, fragments of that song play throughout the movie as a part of the score.
Start at 1:42
Motivation in the movie

When the film brought us into Joel memories we saw that the in the scenes he was drowsy and lethargic. He would have tunnel vision. These indicators showed us that we were out of reality and a memory is being erased. We could tell that we were in Joel’s memories through the director’s motivation. For example, when Joel was at the bookstore the lights would shut off at the time for seemingly no reason.
The main theme is the question, is it better to love and to or never experience that love at all? The message is that memories, both the good and bad ones, influence our behavior and who we are as people. Memories of people are not easily extracted from one’s life; this idea is conveyed through the fact that Joel and Clem’s relationship was revitalized after they both erased each other from their memories. The film makes us look inward as it demonstrates that we as humans are always looking for a quick fix for our pain.
The movie is narrated through the mind of Joel. Throughout the movie, we are able to know exactly what he is thinking because his thoughts are made known to the audience. The narrators are Joel and the camera.
Important Scenes/Clips

In this scene, Joel mentions to Rob and Carrie, that he saw Clementine, and she “pretended” that she did not know who Joel was. The movie transitions by going from the bookstore into the room and all the lights turning off/fading behind him as Joe walks. This is a clue that Joel is in the process of getting his mind cleansed. After he mentions that, Rob pulls out a letter from Lacuna, about how Clementine erased everything from her mind about Joel.
Important Scenes/Clips

The second important scene is when Joel is trying to find out a way to not lose Clem in his memories and fight back against Stan and Dr. Howards mind erasing. He tries going deep into his memories, where she is not supposed to be and shows the complications and complexity of why he loves Clem, and what makes him love her, even though they are complete opposites.
Important Scenes/Clips

The third important scene is when Mary sends out the confession tapes to the owners of who’s memories they erased, and Clem plays it while she is in Joel’s car. Revealing to both Clem and Joel that they have met and dated before this.
The 4 V’s

Voyeuristic: The setting in this movie was realistic because it is in New York and portrays everyday life as we know it.

Visceral: This movie causes the audience to feel suspense and bittersweetness, especially at the end when Joel and Clem put aside their “past” and try to make it work again.
The 4 V’s (continued)

Vicarious: The audience becomes emotionally involved with Joel and Clem as they experience emotional distress and confusion themselves.

Verisimilitude: Although no machine known to man has been created, it is realistically a possibility in the future of our society, and does not seem far-fetched as well the rest of the movie is normal for a big city.
Overall rating:
The movie was a good mixture of romantic comedy, drama, and sci-fi. The scenes containing jokes provided comedic relief from the heartfelt and more dramatic scenes. The movie emphasizes that memory is a huge part of our personal identity and one cannot exist without the other. Overall, it was a well thought-out movie that was directed with the purpose of making the ending unclear and leaving the audience with a sense of confusion.
Links

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https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Eternal_Sunshine_of_the_Spotless_Mind