

INTER-REVIEW: Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)

Jonathan Doyle and Sarah Duda

WARNING: The following “Inter-Review” contains **SPOILERS**. Unless you have access to Lacuna’s techniques for the focused erasure of troubling memories, you should refrain from reading this until after you have seen *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind*.

Jonathan Doyle: Do you have any favorite moments in the film?

Sarah Duda: I’m not big on picking favorite moments but I guess I would choose the part where Joel and Clementine are under the covers in their bed and she says “never leave me Joely.”

I liked that scene, too. What did you like about it?

They were so close in that scene. It shows us how much relationships change and how people can change their minds about other people.

I liked that they shot it from under-the-covers, not above the covers, as is the norm. It was a nice authentic touch. There are a lot of those in a movie that would otherwise seem to be about a totally fantastical, unrealistic situation.

Yeah, that’s a good point.

In spite of the naturalistic touches, I think Gondry overdoes it a bit on the surrealism. It’s appropriate but I think the subtle effects are more effective than the really show-offy, over-the-top stuff. What do you think? Do you like the way they visualize Joel’s memories?

Okay. I agree that some of Gondry’s stuff is a bit too wild. But, ultimately, yes, I do like the way they visualize his memories because memories screw with your head

and every time you remember something it changes slightly. He’s showing us how similar memories are to dreams. I think his over-the-top stuff is making that connection. And it is an interesting connection, don’t you think?

Yes. Most of it is very good. My only real criticism is that I found the real-life interaction between Joel and Clementine more interesting than the interaction in the memories because Joel’s not interacting with a real person in the memories so the consequences of this interaction, if there are any, are unclear.

Actually, I like the way Joel interacts with his memories of Clementine, although I do agree that it’s all a bit confusing. It’s just that we all have a tendency, I think, to romanticize our memories and so, even though Joel is controlling what Clementine says to him in his memories, it still makes for some pretty touching stuff. It’s like he’s fighting to remember her in a particular way. I think that Joel’s memories tell us a lot about his character and how badly he wants the relationship to work. I would almost say that Joel wants the relationship more than Clementine does and I think that his underdog status, in terms of the relationship, is clear from the beginning. She chooses to forget him, whereas he only does it out of spite.

I think you’re right. Joel does want the relationship more than Clementine. Or at least, he’s less willing to move on. But actually, we don’t know whether or not she tried to stop the erasing process, as he did. Still, I think he’s unknowingly exploiting the memory-erasing process, the same way Elijah

Wood did. He's able to score with Clementine because of her erased memory. But he doesn't know he's doing this so he's not as creepy as Frodo. No one's as creepy as Frodo.

If Joel hadn't erased his memory, he wouldn't have got Clementine back.

That's debatable.

Were you confused by the film at all or do you feel, after two viewings, that you have a pretty good handle on it? I've only seen it once but I find myself second-guessing all of my reactions because it has that hall-of-mirrors quality that *Adaptation*, which I didn't like, also had. By design, it's full of contradictions and the potential for multiple interpretations.

I'm still confused by the movie, even after two viewings, but I'm not really watching it with "let's figure this out" in mind. Sure, things became a bit clearer to me upon the second viewing and I noticed a few things that I missed the first time, like any movie. But I saw it again mainly because I loved the way it made me feel. Like the very fabric of my own personal reality was even more complicated and messed up than I imagined. It was one of those movies that made me feel weird when I left the theatre and walked down the street. I was seeing things differently. That sounds dramatic, totally cheesy. Maybe it was just my monumental hangover playing mind games with me.

Don't blame your hangover. The movie's crazy.

Yeah. That's true.

Would you ever erase your memory? Have you ever erased your memory?

Sometimes I forget things when I drink.

Me, too. But would you ever erase your memory on purpose?

It's easy for me to say, right at this moment, that I would definitely not erase my memory because memories make us who we are and all that feel-good stuff. But there have been times, very specific emotionally charged moments, when I could definitely see myself saying "let me get rid of this God-awful memory." I guess it depends on the mood I'm in. What about you?

I'd like to erase my memory of *The Life Of David Gale*. I wonder if Kate Winslet could set that up?

Speaking of Kate Winslet, what did you think of the acting?

I particularly liked Jim Carrey's performance. It's strange, some of the criticism of the film -- there hasn't been much -- is that Jim Carrey's character isn't likable enough. For some reason, there's an expectation that every romantic comedy character must be endlessly lovable. The same criticism was made of Adam Sandler's performance in *Punch Drunk Love*. In reality, most people have unlovable sides but they still find love. Not every man is Cary Grant. I know I'm not.

And yet, in other more typical Carrey movies like *The Mask* and *Ace Ventura*, no one mentions that Carrey's character is not even close to leading man material. But he still gets the girl in those films. And those girls are hot! I think that some people are just looking for cheap ways to attack Jim Carrey for playing a dramatic role.

And the same is true of Adam Sandler. I guess the characters' flaws are more apparent to people in films that are grounded in reality, although *Eternal Sunshine* is also grounded outside of reality.

I also really loved Kate Winslet in the movie. She plays the "alternative" girl without being too annoying.

She's confident in the way that characters like that usually are but she's also totally insecure which counteracts that in a positive way. One reviewer called her a hippy which I don't get at all. Do you think she's a hippy? Hippies don't dye their hair tangerine, do they?

She's not a hippy by my understanding of that term. She's really just a playful person. I'm just shocked that I didn't hate her. I usually hate the way they portray fly-by-the-seat-of-their-pants people in movies. Like they have it all figured out. No worries, no weaknesses.

It's Valentine's Day the second time Joel and Clementine fall in love. Any thoughts on this? Do you think it's intended as some kind of ironic commentary on Valentine's Day? The first time we see this scene, we think it's a sentimental first-encounter-set-on-Valentine's-Day thing but at the end we realize something much more unusual is going on. It's actually their second "first meeting" and they've just had their memories of their original relationship erased.

It's interesting. Jim Carrey bashes Valentine's Day in his voiceover but then it appears as though it is the power of that day that brings them to the beach to re-unite. Or maybe not.

What does he say about Valentine's Day?

He says something like "Valentine's day is a greeting

card holiday designed to make people feel bad” or something similar.

Charlie Kaufman is a strange guy. He’s a cynical romantic, I think. He wants the world to be great but knows it isn’t but hopes it might get better but knows it won’t.

I definitely think Charlie Kaufman is a strange dude. I’d like to have dinner with him some time.

Spike Jonze and Michel Gondry are inextricably linked, not only because they are respected directors of music videos but also because Charlie Kaufman has written all of their films. Do you have a preference? Jonze or Gondry?

I haven’t seen *Human Nature*. However, based on music videos and, if you want to get right down to it, *Being John Malkovich* vs. *Eternal Sunshine*, I’d definitely go with Gondry. What’s your take?

On the basis of two films each, I’d say both are 1 for 2. *Human Nature* and *Adaptation* both have their strengths but they left me feeling cold and unaffected. I think *Eternal Sunshine* is a more enjoyable film than *Being John Malkovich* but *Being John Malkovich* is more coherent and complete. I have to see *Eternal Sunshine* again.

I don’t think the movie is as crazy as we’re saying. I don’t think it is any less coherent or complete than *Being John Malkovich*. What is a complete picture? Movies always end in the middle or they wouldn’t end. And I really, sincerely, do not think that the movie is all that incoherent. It makes sense.

I was surprised that Gondry took such a loose approach, formally. Most of the film, even the effects-intensive scenes, was handheld. Was there anything about Gondry’s formal approach that impressed or bothered you? I really liked Jon Brion’s score.

Oh, yes. I absolutely loved the score. It was amazing! I haven’t loved a score that much since *Edward Scissorhands*.

Let’s get to the important stuff. Is it just me or is *Eternal Sunshine Of The Spotless Mind* the most annoying title ever? It’s fine but it just takes way too long to say.

That’s what you get for quoting ‘Pope Alexander.’

What would we do without Kirsten Dunst? I’m gonna go out on a limb and say she ad-libbed that line.

Yes. That’s pure Dunst. Anyway, what I really like about

the film is that it examines the ups-and-downs of a relationship in a totally original way. It’s a twisted love story.

I agree. Most relationship movies operate on the hope and assumption that the central couple will remain together forever but, in this film, we see the relationship unfold after we see it break up.

How do you interpret the ending?

It’s interesting. On one hand, it’s a totally tragic ending. These characters may be doomed to repeat their mistakes but then, maybe they’ll learn from the evidence they have of their previous relationship (ie. the audio recordings). Those recordings forced them to say what they were probably unable to say to one another before they broke up.

But then we have that final scene of them running along the beach. There are three shots of them running the same stretch of beach like maybe they will erase and find each other yet again. I guess I’m wondering, do you think that, knowing what they know, they will erase each other again when the going gets tough? She’s still impulsive, by nature.

I’ve heard that the loop ran all the way through the end credits originally but they felt it was too depressing. I think Lacuna may be out of business at the end of the film. But that may also be unhappy, as the characters’ happiness at the end is really the result of Lacuna’s work. It may be tragic that they can’t erase their memories again.

Maybe. I forgot that Lacuna got screwed over by Kirsten Dunst.

Do you think it would have been better for them to just move on to other relationships and learn from their mistakes? It’s hard for me to say because movies condition you to want the characters to wind up together, not with some hypothetical character we’ve never met. But they might have been happier with different people. At the same time, the movie is saying that these people are destined to be together. They did find one another in two completely unrelated situations, as strangers.

I don’t know. I wanted them to be together, of course, but I also thought that maybe they should make a clean break because, ultimately, they don’t fit together. But that is easier said than done. It’s nearly impossible to face the fact that you are not meant to be with somebody because there is always that hope that “we can change.”

I liked the way that the structural confusion of the

opening was clarified in the end. It seemed totally organic to the idea of the film and not gimmicky in the way that structural experiments often are.

The beginning is the end is the beginning is the end.

That's the end. Or is it the beginning?