

Berklee College of Music, Valencia Campus

**Everybody's Gotta Learn Sometime:**  
**Understanding the Foundational Bonds Between Music**  
**and Memory in**  
*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Degree of Master of Music in  
Scoring for Film, Television, and Video Games

Supervisor: Alfons Conde

by

**Ricky Schweitzer**

Valencia, Spain

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- Ricky Schweitzer

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## Preface

I first saw Michel Gondry's *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* when I was only 14 years old and highly impressionable, during its opening weekend in March of 2004.<sup>1</sup> My friends and I couldn't choose between seeing this film and that week's other major release, Zack Snyder's entertaining, albeit disgusting remake of *Dawn of the Dead*, so as teenagers with little use for common sense are wont to do, we saw them both. Though *Dawn of the Dead* left us feeling more than a bit nauseous, that feeling washed away during the opening minutes of *Eternal Sunshine*. By the time we exited the theater, we could think of and talk of nothing else. More than any other film that I have seen, *Eternal Sunshine* changed my life.

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is the first film that I can remember watching that forced me to confront the idea of love as it truly is: messy, imperfect, heartbreaking... essential. Though it has a distinctly science-fiction slant, it also contains a more realistic portrayal of romance than just about any rom-com you are likely to see. I was young at the time, but a born romantic, and I felt like this film helped me to understand emotions that had been lying dormant my whole life. Simultaneously, the film forced me to ask myself questions about the intangibility of love and whether this intangibility need be coupled with impermanence. I was 14; I was confounded; I was enamored.

Among the many lingering effects that I felt upon leaving the theater was an attachment to Jon Brion's score, which was immediately calcified in my head and heart. Though I had heard and loved other film scores prior, the simplicity of his thematic material, particularly the piano, stuck with me in a way that no other score yet had; I was simply too young to begin to analyze

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1. IMDB, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," Amazon.com, June 7, 2017, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0338013/>

why and how it succeeded in the ways that it did. In this regard, I can trace the beginning of my love and curiosity of film music to my first viewing of *Eternal Sunshine*. Extra-musically speaking, *Eternal Sunshine* helped to spark a desire to understand the brain better, in particular, how we process emotions like love. An interest in neuroscience and psychology grew throughout my remaining teenage years and continued while I studied pre-medical science in undergraduate school.

Having now decided to pursue film scoring as a career and tasked with analyzing a score of my choosing, it seemed rather obvious that I should select *Eternal Sunshine* and that I should do so through the lenses of neuroscience and psychology. All these years later, I was given the chance to try and better understand how Jon Brion's use of music correlates to the emotional state of mind of the characters within the film and whether or not this can be explained from not just a musical standpoint, but a psychological standpoint as well. Being given the opportunity to seek out these answers has been a distinct honor and I sincerely hope that my findings will cause anyone who reads them to either watch the film for the first time or reevaluate it; regardless of your age, it might just change your life.

## 1. FOUNDATIONS

### 1.1. What Does “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind” Mean?

Though it is not a creation of screenwriter Charlie Kaufman (it is borrowed from Alexander Pope’s long-form poem “Eloisa to Abelard”)<sup>2</sup> – one can still understand much about the title of *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* simply by ruminating on the individual words chosen. It can be broken down and analyzed as follows:

- The word ‘Eternal’ connotes more than just an endless amount of time; it carries with it an emotional heft. Though this emotion can be positive (e.g. eternal love) or negative (e.g. eternal loneliness), to consider it merely a synonym of ‘forever’ would be reductive.
- ‘Sunshine,’ tautologically speaking, refers to the energy produced by the sun, but when used colloquially, it carries with it an unmistakable positivity. For this reason, ‘Sunshine’ is often used as a term of endearment for a loved one. We associate our best days with sunshine and without it, we can become lost and fall into despair – there is even a medical disorder to describe this phenomenon, Seasonal Affective Disorder.<sup>3</sup>

Interestingly, sunshine’s positive connotation has become so famous that over time, it began to be used ironically as a nickname to describe an unhappy person. Both this fact and the objective reality that sunshine has the ability to blind us and cause *spotty* vision

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2. Poetry Foundation, “Eloisa to Abelard,” Poetry Foundation, n.d., accessed June 10, 2017, <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems-and-poets/poems/detail/44892>

3. Mayo Clinic Staff, “Diseases and Conditions: Seasonal affective disorder (SAD),” Mayo Clinic, September 12, 2014, accessed June 16, 2017, <http://www.mayoclinic.org/diseases-conditions/seasonal-affective-disorder/basics/definition/con-20021047>

gives the wielder of the word the license to use it as either an extreme positive or a sarcastic pejorative.

- ‘Spotless’ and ‘Mind,’ must be considered in combination. ‘Spotless’ generally refers to an immaculately clean environment, but surely not all environments are meant to be spotless; the mind, in particular, is nothing if not the sum total of all of the spots – its memories – that have been accumulated over a lifetime. So when considering a ‘Spotless Mind,’ we must decide: is this something desirable?

Taken as a whole, “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,” can be reduced to the following meaning: To be free of one’s baggage is to live a carefree life. Michel Gondry and Charlie Kaufman’s film asks whether or not this is true and ultimately determines that it is not. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a facetious title as the film teaches us that we need our baggage to give meaning to our lives. Taking this even further, the film eventually makes the case that a spotless mind is not only undesirable, but also likely a conceptual impossibility. This is made relatively explicit by the mechanics of the screenplay, but supported more esoterically by Jon Brion’s magical score, which utilizes both thematic repetition and more foundational connections between cues to form a network of musical moods that are less tangible, but more permanent than typically complex motifs.

## 1.2. Composer – Jon Brion

Though he may not have the name recognition of many of the greats of the film-scoring medium, Jon Brion has steadily built up an incredibly impressive résumé in his 20+ year career



and is considered as in-demand a composer as they come. Brion is a notoriously selective artist, only taking meetings with top directors who interest him as he is more interested in the artistry of the medium than the paycheck. Aside from *Eternal Sunshine*, some of his most notable scores include his collaborations with Paul Thomas Anderson (*Hard Eight*, *Magnolia*, *Punch Drunk Love*), David O. Russell (*I Heart Huckabees*), Amy Schumer (*Trainwreck*), and his reunion with *Eternal Sunshine*'s screenwriter, Charlie Kaufman (*Synecdoche, NY*).<sup>4</sup>

In addition to composing film scores, Brion is a highly respected singer-songwriter, arranger, and producer for artists such as Fiona Apple, Aimee Mann, David Byrne, Rufus Wainwright, Spoon, and perhaps least expectedly, Kanye West.<sup>5</sup> West was so impressed by the score to *Eternal Sunshine* that he recruited Brion to work on his 2005 critical and commercial smash, *Late Registration*.<sup>6</sup> Shockingly, "Gold Digger" is partially the brainchild of the composer of *Eternal Sunshine*.<sup>7</sup>

Brion's musical style has sometimes been mis-categorized as purely esoteric or left field, but this is a gross oversimplification.<sup>8</sup> Brion pulls from his vast well of musical knowledge, primarily in the worlds of pop, rock, and jazz, in order to create highly original and deeply affecting music that exists in a realm somewhere between Randy Newman, Mark Mothersbaugh, Elvis Costello, and Danny Elfman. He may be quirky, but he is also incredibly effective.

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4. IMDB, "Jon Brion," Amazon.com, July 28, 2006, accessed June 10, 2017, [http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0109726/?ref\\_=nv\\_sr\\_1](http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0109726/?ref_=nv_sr_1)

5. AllMusic, "Jon Brion: Credits," AllMusic, member of the RhythmOne group, n.d., accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.allmusic.com/artist/jon-brion-mn0000257160/credits>

6. Rodrigo Perez, "Kanye's Co-Pilot, Jon Brion, Talks About the Making of *Late Registration*," MTV, August 12, 2005, accessed April 2, 2017, <http://www.mtv.com/news/1507538/kanyes-co-pilot-jon-brion-talks-about-the-making-of-late-registration/>

7. Ibid.

8. Rodrigo Perez, "Kanye's Co-Pilot, Jon Brion, Talks About the Making of *Late Registration*."

## 2. PLOT

Recently, The Writers Guild of America named *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* as having the 24<sup>th</sup> best screenplay of all time, situated right between *Gone With the Wind* and *The Wizard of Oz*; <sup>9</sup> it was also the winner of the Academy Award for Best Original Screenplay. <sup>10</sup> Suffice it to say, the plot is very complex and the key to understanding it, particularly in regards to how key details relate to music, lies in approaching the chronology of the film in two ways: as the events unfold on screen and as they unfold in reality. To this end, I have chosen to provide a brief overall synopsis, then to explain the events as Mr. Kaufman wrote them, inserting a title for each musical cue as it appears.

Note: Instead of delving into the characterizations of each character and subplot, I will focus on the primary storyline involving Joel Barish, played by Jim Carrey, and Clementine Kruczynski, played by Kate Winslet, as they are the most inherently tied to the musical grammar of the film.

### 2.1. Brief Synopsis

*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is the story of a man who, upon learning that his girlfriend has had a procedure that has erased him from her memory, decides to undergo the process as well. Things go awry when during the erasure, the man changes his mind and fights to

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9. Writers Guild of America, "101 Greatest Screenplays – Writers Guild of America, West," WGA, June 28, 2016, accessed May 2, 2017, <http://www.wga.org/writers-room/101-best-lists/101-greatest-screenplays/list>

10. IMDB, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind – Awards," Amazon.com, June 27, 2005, accessed June 10, 2017, <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt0338013/awards>

hold onto the memories that he so flippantly chose to abandon. What follows is an occasionally psychedelic tour through his memories that is as fascinating and illuminating as it is heartbreaking.

## 2.2. Extended Synopsis

### Cue 1: Theme

The film begins with our protagonist, Joel, waking up from a deep sleep. He appears confused, but not so much so that the audience is meant to pick up on it on first viewing. Joel goes to his car to drive to work when he notices a giant dent on the door. Understandably upset, he leaves a note on the car next to him, thanking that driver for their consideration. As Joel waits for the Long Island Railroad, he ruminates on love (“Valentine’s Day is a holiday created by greeting card companies to make people feel like crap”<sup>11</sup>) and spontaneously decides to ditch work and hop on a train going in the opposite direction of his normal route, out East to Montauk. Montauk is located at the eastern-most tip of New York’s Long Island and it is considered very much a summer destination, making this impromptu journey seem even stranger. To travel out that far in February without reason might be considered masochistic, yet the self-described “not-impulsive”<sup>12</sup> Joel does it anyway. Since he does not know why he has made this decision, perhaps it is more appropriate to consider it a compulsive action rather than an impulsive one – a key distinction that will come into play later. Small details continue to confuse Joel – why are

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11. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, directed by Michel Gondry, written by Charlie Kaufman (Universal Studios Home Entertainment, 2004), DVD

12. *Ibid.*

there two years of entries missing from his diary? – yet he brushes off the thought almost immediately.

Soon enough, a woman (Kate Winslet) appears on the beach. Joel is drawn to her immediately, though his lack of confidence prevents him from introducing himself. When in the next scene, he finds that they are in the same diner, he wonders why he “falls in love with every woman who shows (him) the least bit of attention.”<sup>13</sup> From the scene on the beach through the diner scene and onto the train platform where this mystery woman also waits, no new characters are introduced and in fact, no other characters are visible at all. It is as if no one else in the world matters and they are fated to be there.

#### Cue 2: On the Long Island Railroad

On the train ride back west, the woman, whose name we learn to be Clementine, approaches Joel and tries, with limited success, to pull him out of his shell. They seem familiar to one another and we are lead to believe that this is because Joel frequents the bookstore where Clementine works. Though she is friendly and Joel allows himself to enjoy her company for a short while, eventually, her in-your-face personality overwhelms him and Joel retreats into his shell, explaining that he has work he must do.

Joel sees a chance to make up for his rudeness by offering Clementine a ride home, which she accepts. Soon enough, Joel is invited upstairs and they are having a drink. Joel’s nervousness gets the better of him, so he leaves, but not before promising that he will call Clementine, which he does as soon as he arrives home. These two are supernaturally drawn to each other but neither can explain why.

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13. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, written by Charlie Kaufman.

### Cue 3: Phone Call

Time begins to speed up and we see Clementine take Joel to the frozen Charles River, where they lay down on the ice in an angled shot that can be seen on the film's poster.

Clementine naps on the car ride home and even though Joel brings her back to her apartment, she suggests that they go back to Joel's to sleep after she runs upstairs to grab her toothbrush. Shortly after Clementine heads inside, Joel is approached by a stranger (Elijah Wood) who asks what he is doing there. Both seem confused. Fade to black.

### Cue 4: Title Credits ("Everybody's Gotta Learn Sometime")

Over the title credits and Beck's cover of The Korgis' "Everybody's Gotta Learn Sometime," Joel sits in his car, weeping over his steering wheel. What has happened? To what information is the audience not currently privy? Joel ejects the cassette from his tape player and throws it out the window.

### Cue 5: Main Title

In the next scene, we see a van following Joel to his home. Joel opens his mail, paying particular attention to a package from a company called Lacuna. His neighbor asks if he has made Valentine's Day plans with Clementine and judging by Joel's reaction, we can tell that something has gone wrong in the relationship. The audience is left wondering how far forward in time we have jumped. At this point, we cannot know.

Joel rushes inside to prepare, but for what? He opens the package, puts on the included set of pajamas and takes the medication provided. He begins to feel woozy.

#### Cue 6: Lights Out; Cue 7: Showtime

Joel passes out on the floor. After this happens, two men (Stan, played by Mark Ruffalo, and Patrick, the stranger who surprised Joel earlier) enter his apartment with medical equipment. We flash to Joel's perspective, reliving the scene that we have just seen with the neighbor, but this time it is blurry.

We next see Joel telling some friends that he tried to give Clementine an early Valentine's Day gift, but she acted as if she didn't recognize him. We then cut to a new scene where we get to see what Joel has just described in real-time. The audience can now determine that time is moving backwards and we are being walked through Joel's memories but still, we do not know why.

#### Cue 8: Postcard

We now flash back to the previous scene where Joel was explaining Clementine's odd behavior and his friends fill him in on her betrayal: she has had a medical procedure done to have him and their dysfunctional relationship erased from her memory. As a petty act of revenge, Joel decides to do the same to her.

#### Cue 9: Collecting Things; Cue 10: Joel's Mapping Session is Deleted

At the Lacuna office we meet Dr. Howard Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson). The doctor explains the procedure to Joel, which begins by scanning the brain while the patient focuses on objects associated with the person or event that he/she is hoping to erase. Joel collects these objects and returns to have his brain mapped. In one of the film's first moments of self-awareness, Joel becomes conscious, mid-memory, of the fact that he is currently undergoing the procedure... and then in a flash, the memory is erased.

Cue 11: Deleting Continues; Cue 12: I'm Erasing You and I'm Happy; Cue 13: Clem Watches TV; Cue 14: At the Market; Cue 15: Joel's Journals; Cue 16: Patrick; Cue 17: Clem is Confused

The next few scenes move us through various moments at the end of Joel's relationship with Clementine, all of which are quite painful. Joel takes futile satisfaction in informing his memory of Clem that he is deleting her and that he is happy to do it. In a notable subplot, we learn that Patrick, while performing the procedure on Clementine, had developed a crush and has since used the materials she provided to try and reproduce her now-deleted positive memories with Joel, substituting Joel with himself at each step. This backfires spectacularly and leaves her confused and frustrated.

Cue 18: Joel Changes His Mind

Joel next relives his most recent positive memory of Clementine, which focuses on her fragility and insecurity, primarily in regards to her childhood. It's a beautiful memory and Joel

begins to plead to be allowed to keep just this one... but it is a lost cause. At this moment, he decides to do everything he can to hijack the procedure and prevent it from continuing.

Cue 19: Joel Tries to Escape; Cue 20: Row

In his memory-world, Joel tells Clem what is happening and together they try to escape (for lack of a better word). The next few sequences resemble nightmares with panicked and chaotic music and arresting imagery. Clem – who, of course, is actually just Joel’s projection of her – suggests that they travel to a memory in the past, before she and Joel had met, in order to hide in a part of his brain that Lacuna has not mapped.

Cue 21: Baby Joel; Cue 22: Baby Joel 2; Cue 23: Down the Drain

We transition to Joel’s childhood in his parents’ kitchen. Joel is now reliving this experience as if he was a child and Clem plays the role of his mother’s friend. In the real world, the technicians begin to notice that something is wrong and attempt to correct the error by finding where Joel is on his brain scan. They call Dr. Mierzwiak for assistance and he manages to course correct.

Cue 24: Drive In; Cue 25: Peer Pressure; Cue 26: Spotless Mind

Realizing that their escape tactics aren’t working, Joel and Clem attempt to hide in memories that Joel barely ever confronts. They start this journey at surface-level embarrassment



– his mother catching him masturbating in his bedroom – but progress to genuinely traumatizing – other children pressuring him into mutilating a dead bird. This tactic works, for a time, but soon enough, the doctor recognizes the connective tissue between fictitious events that are playing out in Joel’s memory – a game that he and a child-version of Clementine are playing – and actual memories that Joel has had mapped – when they played a sexualized version of the same game as adults. This allows the doctor to locate Joel and put him back on track.

#### Cue 27: Elephant Parade

Back in the real world, drama plays out amongst the technicians as Mary (Kirsten Dunst), the Lacuna receptionist and love-interest of Stan reads to Dr. Mierzwiak an excerpt from “Eloisa to Abelard” (the source of the film’s title). After she finishes, she kisses him just as his wife arrives to catch them in the act. Mary confesses to having loved the doctor for a long time and in a twist, we learn that she has in fact already had the procedure done (at least) once so that she could forget an affair that they already had. She is shocked and disgusted.

#### Cue 28: Bookstore

Confronted with the reality that nothing he is doing is helping and realizing that he is at nearly the beginning/end of his memories of Clementine, Joel loses hope. In a moment of tragic sincerity, Clementine suggests that the best he can do is simply to try and retain some fragment of her.

## Cue 29: Drums on the Beach; Cue 30: The Beginning of the End

We flash now to a scene on the beach, where Joel first met Clementine... but this is clearly different than the meeting we saw at the beginning of the movie. There is a party going on and it is not winter. As the audience begins to put the puzzle pieces of the film's chronology together, Joel and Clementine succumb and decide to simply enjoy their first (and final) memory together.

## Cue 31: Meet Me In Montauk

As this first/last encounter begins to crumble, Clementine leaves one last message with Joel: "Meet me in Montauk."<sup>14</sup> Suddenly, the whole film comes into focus. The 'impulsive' meeting from the beginning of the movie was in fact, a compulsion. Some fragment of his memory of Clementine was compelling him to meet her there so that they could give their relationship another chance.

## Cue 32: Another Beginning; Cue 33: To Try Again; Cue 34: End Credits

The technicians finish up their work and we catch up to our protagonists at the chronological start of the film. The events that confused Joel – and the audience – now start to make sense (e.g. we now know that the dent on Joel's car was caused by Clementine). Mary, in an act of revenge on Lacuna, mails the entry interviews and files of all participants back to them. When Clementine returns to the car after getting her toothbrush (from back at Cue 3), she opens

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14. *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*, written by Charlie Kaufman

her mail and finds her tape. Since she doesn't know what it is, she asks Joel if she can play it in the car, to which he agrees. Joel and Clementine are very confused and upset. Clementine gets out of the car, unsure of how to proceed. We flash to Joel at home. He is now listening to his tape. Clementine appears at his door. The two are baffled as to how this happened but they felt such a connection during their brief time knowing each other (this time around, at least) that they decide to ignore the warnings of their past selves and give their relationship another go. In the film's final shots, we see Joel and Clementine chasing each other on a snowy beach, but when? Has this all already happened?

### **3. PRIMARY MUSICAL THEMES**

The aural world of *Eternal Sunshine* is brought to life most immediately and obviously by repeated melodic themes. Though there are a whopping thirty-four cues used in the film, most of them can be organized according to which theme is most prevalent. When considering the score in this fashion, it becomes clear that there are six primary themes that form its musical backbone. They are as follows:

### 3.1. Theme 1: "Theme"

#### Example 1. Transcription of Theme 1 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Piano Score

### Theme

Theme 1 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Comp. by Jon Brion  
Arr. by Ricky Schweizer

Swing  
Alloof ( $\text{♩} = 105$ )

The piano score is written in 3/4 time with a key signature of two flats (B-flat and E-flat). It consists of six systems of music, each with a treble and bass clef staff. The score includes various musical notations such as dynamics (mp, mf, p, f, poco), articulation (accents), and phrasing slurs. Measure numbers 13, 25, 36, 47, and 58 are indicated at the start of their respective systems. The piece concludes with a 'rit.' (ritardando) marking and a final chord.

The very first cue in the film (it's main theme, according to the soundtrack) is also one of its most memorable and does an excellent job of introducing the audience to the types of sounds to which they will be exposed during the film's runtime. This theme is, in essence, a swung piano track in a loose singer-songwriter style, given support by an upright bass and sound effects (to be analyzed in Chapter 4). It features repetition reminiscent of pop music, but the ways in which the repetition occurs are unexpected and upon first listen, a bit disorienting. Like Joel, we are made to feel like we are experiencing something familiar, yet we cannot quite explain why.

Furthermore, the ascending bass-line visible in measures 5, 10, etc. makes the melody seem as if it is on loop, constantly on the verge of cycling back to the start, acting as very early foreshadowing of the structure of the screenplay. This technique becomes particularly useful in hindsight when near the end of the film (Cue 32), it appears again, almost exactly the same as the first time, but now associated with the character of Mary. After learning of her own erasure and subsequent decision to return all patients' files to them, she is confused, but about to start a new life journey, much like Joel at the start of the film. It is a deft decision by Brion to repeat this theme only once and not when Joel and Clementine are being reacquainted (for reasons explained in Chapter 5). The avoidance of making this "Joel and Clem's Theme" or something similar helps contribute to the more optimistic take on the film, which concludes that perhaps Joel and Clementine are not destined to keep repeating the same mistakes, looping that same ascending bass-line, and may have a happy ending in store for them yet.

### 3.2. Theme 2: "Phone Call" / Relationships

#### Example 2. Transcription of Theme 2 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

**Phone Call**  
Theme 2 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Composed by Jon Brion  
Arranged by Ricky Schweitzer

Wistful ( $\text{♩} = 125$ )

**System 1 (Measures 1-8):**  
Guitar: *mp* *poco* *poco* *poco* *poco* *poco* *poco* *poco*  
Bass Guitar: *p*  
Viola: -  
Violoncello: *pp* *mp* *p*  
Contrabass: *mp* *pizz*

**System 2 (Measures 9-14):**  
Gtr.: *poco* *poco* *poco* *mf* *poco* *poco*  
Bass: *mf*  
Vln. I: *pp* *p*  
Vln. II: *p* *mf* *f*  
Vc.: *p* *mp* *mf*  
Cb.: *arco* *mf*

**System 3 (Measures 15-18):**  
Gtr.: *poco* *poco* *pp*  
Bass: *pp*  
Vln. I: *pp* *ppp*  
Vln. II: *mf* *mp* *mf* *pp*  
Vc.: *mp* *mf* *pp*  
Cb.: *mp* *mf* *pp*

Our second theme is introduced near the start of the film, when Joel calls Clementine after their first date (Cue 3) and next reappears in a more minor tonality when Joel gathers the objects used to map his memories (Cue 9). Its most important appearance comes when Joel is reliving the memory that made him change his mind about the procedure (Cue 18). We can extrapolate that this theme is meant to symbolize the familiarity of his relationship and its repetitive, yet somewhat flexible composition allows for Brion to explore the possibilities of the ups (Cue 3 and 18) and downs (Cue 9) inherent to volatile relationships such as these. The instrumentation used revolves around a fingerpicked acoustic guitar with support from a small string section and an electric bass.



### 3.3. Theme 3: "Everybody's Gotta Learn Sometime" / Regret

#### Example 3. Transcription of Theme 3 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

**Everybody's Gotta Learn Sometime**  
Theme 3 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Composed by Jon Brion  
Arranged by Ricky Schwitter

**Somnambulant** (♩ = 67)

The score is divided into three systems. The first system (measures 1-12) features a voice part with lyrics: "Change your heart, look around you. Change your heart, it will astound you." The accompaniment includes FM Synth (piano), Electric Guitar (pp), and a bass line. The second system (measures 13-19) continues the voice part with lyrics: "need your lo vin'. like the sun shine. Ev-ry bo-dy's go-ta learn some-time. Ev-ry bo-dy's go-ta learn some-time." The accompaniment includes FM Synth (mp), E. Gtr. (ppp), A. Gtr. (mp), Bass (mp), Vin. 1 (n), and Vla. (mp, n, mp, mf). The third system (measures 20-24) features the voice part with lyrics: "Ev-ry bo-dy's go-ta learn some-time." and a "mmm" vocalization. The accompaniment includes FM Synth, A. Gtr., Bass, S. Bass, Vin. 1 (mp, mf, p), Vla. (mp, p), and Cb. (p, poco).

“Everybody’s Gotta Learn Sometime” was originally a hit for the English rock band, The Korgis, in 1980.<sup>15</sup> For *Eternal Sunshine*, Brion worked with singer-songwriter, Beck (née Bek David Campbell)<sup>16</sup>, to re-contextualize the track with a more pensive and modern sound. The instrumentation is comprised of electric piano, acoustic guitar, electric guitar, strings, electric bass, and an expanded drum kit.

The theme is used twice during the film (in addition to over the end credits), both of which are in a diegetic fashion. Its first appearance comes when Joel, through his tears (presumably after learning of Clementine’s decision to erase him), listens to the track on a cassette in his car before ejecting it and throwing it out the window (Cue 4). The theme next appears when Clementine is complaining to Joel about how he doesn’t open up to her and how she feels that she is the only participant in the relationship. Given that the theme is used diegetically, it is logical to assume that when Joel listens to the tape, he is semi-masochistically reliving this earlier moment with Clementine and wishing he had handled himself differently. With this in mind, we can extrapolate to determine that this theme represents Joel’s regret. This theory is supported by the lyrical content of the song, which may be cheekily referencing the film’s title (“I need your loving like the sunshine”)<sup>17</sup> if one is to consider the word ‘sunshine’ in the semi-ambiguous terms laid out in the introduction of this paper.

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15. Gavin Mulhoney, “The Korgis :: About their music and history,” The Korgis, June 15, 2014, accessed June 2, 2017, <http://www.thekorgis.com/about-the-korgis/>

16. IMDB, “Beck - Biography,” Amazon.com, March 29, 2005, accessed June 12, 2017, <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0065059/bio>

17. AresCapeta, “Beck – Everybody’s Got to Learn Sometime Lyrics | Genius Lyrics,” Genius Media Group Inc., April 3, 2004, accessed June 9, 2017, <https://genius.com/Beck-everybodys-got-to-learn-sometime-lyrics>

### 3.4. Theme 4: “Strings That Tie to You” / Peer Pressure

#### Example 4. Transcription of Theme 4 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

**Peer Pressure**  
Theme 4 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Composed by Jon Brion  
Arranged by Ricky Schweitzer

**Solemn** (♩ = 60)

Piano

Our fourth theme is peculiar in that it is based off of an original song, composed and sung by Jon Brion exclusively for the *Eternal Sunshine* soundtrack: “Strings That Tie To You.”<sup>18</sup> The song itself does not appear in the film, but its presence is felt perhaps more than any other piece of music. Our introduction to the theme actually occurs last, chronologically speaking, as we hear snippets fading in and out as Joel begins the procedure (Cue 7). This particular usage is ingenious in that it lays the foundation to evoke a feeling of nostalgia when the piece appears later without ever actually playing it (according to theories on timbre detailed in Chapter 5). The theme next appears in one of the film’s most memorable, but painful sequences: when Joel’s relives his childhood memory of being pressured into mutilating a dead bird (Cue 25). Not too much later, we hear the theme again in a very different kind of scene as Mary recites the aforementioned Alexander Pope quote as a way to impress Dr. Mierzwiak (Cue 27). The last appearance of

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18. AllMusic, “Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind– Jon Brion,” AllMusic, member of the RhythmOne group, March 16, 2004, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.allmusic.com/album/eternal-sunshine-of-the-spotless-mind-mw0000696862>

the theme occurs during Joel's final/first memory of Clementine, in the house on the beach where they almost spent their first night together (Cue 31). The common thread amongst these four cues is that in each one, the theme makes an appearance when someone is doing something out of character in order to impress someone else. Joel is only having the procedure done as an act of revenge (Cue 7), Joel's childhood actions resulted from peer pressure and are his greatest shame (Cue 25), and Mary is trying to seem older and worldlier to Dr. Mierzwiak (Cue 27). Following this train of thought, we can determine that the theme's appearance during Cue 31 is actually a directive coming from the phantom of Clementine as she is doing everything she can to try and get him to stay, to act uncharacteristically of himself and to live in this final moment a little longer. She wants him to own this theme. This theory is supported by the effectiveness of Clementine's utterance of "Meet me in Montauk," which does in fact compel Joel to meet her all over again. We are left wondering if Joel issued a similar musical plea while this memory was being deleted from Clementine's brain.

In its various incarnations, Theme 5 proves to be orchestrated more diversely than any of the previous themes, which suggests that its appearances are tied together in some ways and not in others, separated by timbre (to be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5). Its first appearance (Cue 7) has the classic rock band breakdown of guitar, drums, synthesizer, and bass, but subsequent appearances are arranged differently, whether that is with a simple detuned piano and strings (Cues 25 and 31) or acoustic guitar and piano (Cue 27).

### 3.5. Theme 5: The Past


#### Example 5. Transcription of Theme 5 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Piano Score

**The Past**  
Theme 5 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Composed by Jon Brion  
Arranged by Ricky Schweitzer

**Nostalgic and Calm** (♩ = 75)



Our fifth theme first appears in Cue 7 alongside Theme 4 and in much the same fashion, as a fully mixed audio file fading in and out. Its only other appearance arrives when Joel and Clementine figure out how to escape the procedure by hiding in a memory from childhood (Cue 20). Our common thread here is that the theme appears when Joel becomes fixated on the past.

This is perhaps the simplest and most easily digestible cue in the whole film with a basic chord progression on piano that is later joined by strings in Cue 20.

### 3.6. Theme 6: Abandonment

#### Example 6. Transcription of Theme 4 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

**Abandonment**  
Theme 6 from Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Composed by Jon Brion  
Arranged by Ricky Schweitzer

**Agitato** (♩ = 125)

The musical score is for the piece 'Abandonment' by Jon Brion, arranged by Ricky Schweitzer. It is in 4/4 time and marked 'Agitato' with a tempo of 125. The score features four staves: English Horn, Violin I, Viola, and Violoncello. The English Horn part starts with a rest, followed by a series of eighth notes with a dynamic of *pp*. The Violin I part also starts with a rest, followed by a series of eighth notes with a dynamic of *p* and a *pizz* (pizzicato) marking. The Viola part starts with a rest, followed by a series of eighth notes with a dynamic of *mp* and a *pizz* marking. The Violoncello part starts with a rest, followed by a series of eighth notes with a dynamic of *mp*. The score includes a first ending bracket and a second ending bracket, both marked with a '1.' and a '2.' respectively.

Theme 6 is notable in that in addition to its four appearances, it also forms the timbral foundation for much of the non-thematic incidental music that appears in the film. The first three appearances of this theme (Cues 14, 16, and 17) occur while Clementine is particularly upset and Joel shows an inability to engage with her anxiety, suggesting that it might represent Clementine's anger... but its true meaning is revealed in its final appearance. We last hear the theme when Joel and Clementine travel to Joel's childhood and he begins to cry, overwhelmed with the magnitude to which he is feeling abandoned by his mother (Cue 22). Hearing the theme in this scene re-contextualizes the earlier appearances as not representing anger, but instead,

representing Clementine’s fear of abandonment. For people who suffer from abandonment issues – including those with maladies such as Borderline Personality Disorder, whose phenotype appears to fit Clementine’s character – responses to any real or imagined abandonment can vary, but impulsivity and emotional lability (“fluctuating back and forth, sometimes in a quick manner”) are considered common.<sup>19</sup> Diving deeper, we can consider that the usage of intermittently sprightly pizzicato strings, which may seem almost antithetically buoyant to the surface-level situation, do a good job of representing said lability. The use of this theme in this context keys us into the fact that the adult Clementine is doing little more than acting out as a defense mechanism, much in the same way that Joel does as a baby. She is terrified that she will be abandoned by a man that either cannot or will not accept her for who she is, as she likely has been before.

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19. Steve Bressert, Ph.D., “Borderline Personality Disorder: Symptoms & Treatment,” Psych Central, March 6, 2017, accessed on Jun 10, 2017, <https://psychcentral.com/disorders/borderline-personality-disorder-symptoms/>

## 4. SOUND DESIGN

In addition to its brilliant screenplay, direction, and acting, *Eternal Sunshine* is notable for particularly flashy editing, production design, and sound design. In the case of the latter, it is often used as a crucial component of the musical score and is therefore worth a brief analysis.

The primary sound design techniques used in the score are as follows:

### 4.1. Reverse

Brion uses reversed versions of his music to represent an unstable timeframe and the level of maintained musicality vs. deterioration involved in its appearance is directly related to the relative temporal stability of the scene. Its first appearance is right at the start of the film and if we were to watch the movie with no foreknowledge of its plot, we would not be aware that this was an intentional representation of memory tampering. Even if we knew the basics involved, we might not recognize that its appearance is also a clue that the first section of the film is actually near the end of the plot, chronologically speaking. This first usage is pleasant musically, whereas its next appearance, when Joel's memories begin to be deleted in Cues 11 and 12, is hypnotic and almost nightmarish in quality. Its appearance in Cue 18 lies somewhere in the middle of this spectrum as Joel is being torn out of his first positive memory that we've seen in the film thus far and he begins to change his mind about the procedure. It is used one final time as a pleasant embellishment, in Cue 30, when Joel comes to terms with the fact that there is nothing he can do to stop his memories from being erased and he gives into the temporal instability.



## 4.2. Vinyl Distortion and Aging Techniques

Due to its association with aged and weathered sounds, the inclusion of vinyl distortion and the degree to which it is included on certain tracks immediately evokes feelings of nostalgia. Its appearance on Cue 3 makes the new relationship – new to them at least – feel familiar and well worn. It helps to emphasize how comfortable Joel and Clementine are together. When it appears again in Cue 9, it is the perfect companion to Joel’s collecting of all of the objects he associates with Clementine, providing an aural manifestation of his mindset as he unconsciously relives the joy and pain experienced with each one. Its return in Cue 18 is immediately reminiscent of its usage in Cue 3 (emphasized by the repeated theme, albeit in a different key) and is particularly useful in cluing the audience into the fact that Joel is looking back upon this memory with fondness, even though the story that Clementine is telling is quite sad. It helps the audience to determine, even before Joel says so out loud, that he will want to keep this memory and to stop the procedure. Since this distortion is used primarily on fingerpicked guitar, it is notable that when similar guitar lines appear in Cue 26, they do so without any such buzz. This seems to indicate that though Joel is experiencing another positive memory, one that Clementine seems to be enjoying in the moment as well, he is beginning to come to terms with the fact that this is a losing battle; there is no longer any hazy sheen clouding the memory and he must face reality. Sure enough, this is the last memory during which Joel puts up a fight.

## 5. TIMBRE, TRACE MEMORY, AND GESTALT PSYCHOLOGY

### 5.1. The Power of Timbre

The use of thematic leitmotifs to represent characters and emotions is a tried and true method of cohering a musical score, but when viewed in the context of this particular film – given its reliance on our understanding of human memory – it behooves the critical audience member to draw even deeper connections; we must consider connections that are perhaps less immediately tangible and more esoteric than those revolving around the organization of pitches.

In his book, *This Is Your Brain On Music*, Dr. Daniel J. Levitan uses neurological and empirical data to posit that the baseline foundation for our musical memory relies primarily on timbre. One exemplary test had participants read a list of famous songs, then listen to less than one second of a random selection from the list.<sup>20</sup> With staggering efficaciousness, the participants were able to successfully identify the song being played, even though they had not heard a single full note, let alone a melody. Even when presented backward “so that anything overtly familiar was disrupted,” the participants still recognized the songs, a notable fact when considering Jon Brion’s heavy use of the reverse technique.<sup>21</sup> It was determined that it requires less of the brain to form memory based on timbre than based on melody and therefore, the timbre of any given song can be recalled more rapidly than its melody. The score to *Eternal Sunshine* exhibits a keen understanding of Dr. Levitan’s theory by using theme-agnostic variations in

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20. Daniel J. Levitan, *This Is Your Brain On Music: The Science of a Human Obsession* (New York: Penguin, 2006), 155.

21. *Ibid*, 156.

timbre to create categories of memories in the abstract. The effect on the audience is that our brains trick our bodies into associating different sections of the film together without actually being exposed to recycled melodies. The effect on our protagonists is far cleverer still.

## 5.2. “Gestalt Psychology” and “Fuzzy-Trace Theory”

The ways in which timbral variations stimulate Joel and Clementine’s memories truly comes into focus if we view the film through the lens of the derivation of “Gestalt Psychology” known as the “Fuzzy-Trace Theory.” This theory posits that we encode information into two different fragments or traces: *verbatim*, for more specific memory recall, and *gist*, which is more semantic and conceptual.<sup>22</sup> All processes are said to leave behind chemical traces and we recall memories by reforming the connections made between these traces, not by retrieving them whole cloth. Every new process or experience can contain a trace from a previous experience, “thereby that previous experience having an effect on the new experience.”<sup>23</sup> This concept allows for flexibility in how strictly we learn. As an example, consider the following: Have you ever heard a song for the first time in years and your spontaneous response is to recall a period of time in your life instead of a specific date? On the occasions when I hear Santana’s “Smooth,” I am reminded more of summer days in the late 90s, driving with my family, when it would play every day in multifarious situations, than of any one memory in particular. By contrast, when I hear “Crazy In Love” by Beyoncé and Jay-Z, I am immediately reminded of the one ill-advised dance class in which I participated, where I was forced to hear that song on what felt like an

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22. Valerie Reyna, “A new institutionalism: Meaning, memory, and development in Fuzzy-Trace Theory,” *Judgment and Decision Making* 61, no. 3 (May 2012): 332-359.

23. Patricia E. Blosser, “Principles of Gestalt psychology and their application to teaching junior high school science” *Science Education* 57 (1973): 45-53.

endless loop, while performing the same dance steps. On my first listen, “Smooth” left both *gist* and *verbatim* memory traces in my mind but upon each subsequent listen in new environments, new connections were formed, therefore favoring the *gist* traces over the *verbatim* traces. By not forcing my brain to use the same connections formed initially, my recall became more flexible and less tied down to a specific event. With “Crazy In Love,” my brain was forced to codify very specific connections between these traces through intense repetition and therefore, *verbatim* traces were favored and that specific set of connections gets recalled when I hear the song. This variance allows our brains to be more efficient, as according to Gestalt psychology, “the act of repetition or drilling which often occurs in learning situations based on Behaviorism can actually hinder the learning process. When learning is acquired through repetition, the trace becomes only available to that one process and hence less available to other processes.”<sup>24</sup> In summary, the variant intensities of temporal and contextual specificity with which one can associate any given piece of music helps to provide evidence of the existence of trace memories.

Physiologically, neurologists and psychologists who subscribe to the theory of Gestalt psychology have determined that “there is no great excess of cells which can be reserved as the seat of special memories” and therefore, “it is not possible to demonstrate the isolated localization of a memory trace.”<sup>25</sup> Since Dr. Mierzwiak explains in the film that the memory erasing procedure is technically brain damage, “akin to a night of heavy drinking,” we must assume that it succeeds through a series of microscopic physiological changes made to the brain – but if these traces cannot be localized to a single set of cells, it would follow that the procedure does not delete them, but instead, simply erases the connections between them. Though the

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24. Blosser, 45-73.

25. Karl Lashey, “In Search of the Engram,” *Society of Experimental Biology Symposium, No. 4: Physiological mechanisms in animal behavior* (1950): 477-480.

memories are now inaccessible, true forgetting occurs only “when the trace disappears or the trace cannot influence or communicate with a new process,”<sup>26</sup> which seems to be a fate that Joel and Clementine have avoided.

If timbre is the easiest musical attribute to recall, as Dr. Levitan posits, it could be said that it is the foundation of musical memory and therefore, it is logical to consider it analogous to an aural representation of trace memory (in that traces are the most basic component of larger memories). Since these traces cannot be deleted by Lacuna’s procedure, post-erasure Joel and Clementine would still retain them. It would then follow that the most vague musical connections (i.e. timbre) would appropriately represent the most vague of memory recalls (i.e. feelings), which is what allows timbral connections to earlier musical material to suitably represent the intangible emotional bonds between Joel and Clementine that have survived the erasing process. They might not remember each other per se, but they are still subject to neurological and emotional responses to timbral stimuli that are connected to the memories that they can no longer access.

Cue 33, the film’s last cue, best exemplifies this concept. It is during this cue that Joel and Clementine, now reunited, discuss how or if they should proceed with their relationship. They are experiencing a microcosmic mash-up of the full gamut of emotions that they have endured in the film thus far and so it would make sense that while trying to sort out these emotions, the music should make reference to what we have heard previously... but those specific memories have now been erased and therefore, complex musical phrases like themes should not register with them. This is likely why Cue 33 bears a striking timbral resemblance to several other musical passages in the film, primarily those associated with strong emotions, but does not actually reuse any thematic material that has appeared thus far. In fact, it melodically

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26. Blosser, 45-73

diverges from the film's main themes more than any other cue. With its constantly shifting center, Cue 33 sounds as if it cannot figure out how to recall a melody that is just on the tip of its proverbial tongue, which is very appropriate, given the context. In revisiting the timbres that formed the building blocks of their earlier memories, Jon Brion is representing musically that Joel and Clementine's trace memories and emotional bond are still intact and this happy fact will give them a head start towards reforming their relationship.

## 6. SOUNDTRACK

The soundtrack to *Eternal Sunshine* is one that has accumulated a passionate fan base since its release in 2004 and despite the film not being a box office behemoth (~\$72.3 million worldwide, ~\$34.4 million domestic US)<sup>27</sup>, it still managed to be nominated for a Grammy for Best Score Soundtrack Album – Film, Television or Other Visual Media.<sup>28</sup> It lost the award to *Garden State*, another independent film that perhaps more immediately captured the zeitgeist of the times, but has not aged quite as gracefully.

The majority of the music that appears in the film is on the soundtrack, but the cues appear out of order and in certain cases, in different versions.

### Tracklist<sup>29</sup>

1. “Theme”
  - a. AKA Cue 1.
2. “Mr. Blue Sky” - ELO
  - a. “Mr. Blue Sky,” a classic pop song by the English band Electric Light Orchestra (ELO) that was used in the film’s trailers and capitalizes on some clever lyrical connections to the title. It does not appear in the film in any capacity.
3. “Collecting Things”

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27. Box Office Mojo, “*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* (2004),” IMDB.com, March 19, 2004, accessed June 20, 2017, <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/movies/?id=eternalsunshine.htm>

28. IMDB, “*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* – Awards,”

29. AllMusic, “*Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*– Jon Brion,”

- a. AKA Cue 9.
4. “Light and Day” by The Polyphonic Spree
  - a. This track appears diegetically in the film and continues – along with “Mr. Blue Sky” and track 6, “Section 2 (It’s the Sun)” – to use the film’s title as a springboard for lyrical connections.
5. “Bookstore”
  - a. AKA Cue 28.
6. “Section 2 (It’s the Sun)” by The Polyphonic Spree
  - a. See Track 4.
7. “Wada No Tod – Dil Tujhko Diya” by Lata Mangeshkar
  - a. This track appears diegetically when Clementine first has Joel over to her apartment and is used (alongside the imagery of Clementine’s potato-dolls) to help set up the character as offbeat and intriguing.
8. “Showtime”
  - a. AKA Cue 7.
9. “Everybody’s Gotta Learn Sometime” by Beck (Originally by The Korgis)
  - a. In that it is played both diegetically in the film (Cue 4) and then again over the end credits, this track works as an unofficial theme song.
10. “Sidewalk Fight”
  - a. AKA Cue 14.
11. “Some Kinda Shuffle” by Don Nelson
  - a. This track is used diegetically in much the same way as Track 7.
12. “Howard Makes It All Go Away”



- a. AKA Cue 17.
13. “Something” by The Willowz
- a. This track is used diagetically to add energy to a sequence between the characters of Mary and Stan while they perform the procedure on Joel.
14. “Postcard”
- a. AKA Cue 8.
15. “I Wonder” by The Willowz
- a. This track is used diagetically in a similar fashion to Track 13.
16. “Peer Pressure”
- a. AKA Cue 25.
17. “A Dream Upon Waking”
- a. AKA Cue 10.
18. “Strings That Tie To You” by Jon Brion
- a. This is the original song from which Theme 4 is derived. It never appears in the film in full, but the audio track is sampled briefly in Cue 7.
19. “Phone Call”
- a. AKA Cue 3.
20. “Nola’s Bounce” by Don Nelson
- a. This is diagetic music used in a similar fashion to tracks 7 and 11.
21. “Down the Drain”
- a. AKA Cue 23.
22. “Row”
- a. AKA Cue 20.

23. "Drive In"

- a. This is an expanded version of Cue 24. Perhaps the scene was originally longer and had more music written for it, but was then edited down closer to the film's release.

24. "Main Title"

- a. AKA Cue 5.

25. "Spotless Mind"

- a. AKA Cue 26.

26. "Elephant Parade"

- a. AKA Cue 27.

## 7. RECEPTION, LEGACY, AND CULTURAL IMPACT

Upon its release, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* was greeted with enormous critical acclaim, scoring a 93% on review aggregator Rotten Tomatoes<sup>30</sup> and an even more impressive average score of 89/100 on Metacritic.<sup>31</sup> The film received a total of 34 wins based on 97 award nominations, most frequently for Charlie Kaufman's screenplay and Kate Winslet's performance as Clementine.<sup>32</sup> Both were nominated at the 77<sup>th</sup> Academy Awards with Mr. Kaufman walking away with a win.<sup>33</sup>

In subsequent years, the esteem in which *Eternal Sunshine* has been held has only grown. Its ranking as the Writer's Guild of America's #24 Best Screenplay of All Time is only one of many aggregate accolades it has won, including a constant spot on the IMDB Top 100 Best Films of All Time list,<sup>34</sup> several critics groups choice for Best Film of the Decade (e.g. Austin Film Critics Association)<sup>35</sup> and Best Screenplay of the Decade (e.g. Awards Circuit Community Awards, Gold Derby Awards)<sup>36</sup>, Indiewire's Critic's Poll's 3<sup>rd</sup> Best Film of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century,<sup>37</sup>

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30. Rotten Tomatoes, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind (2004)," Fandango, March 19, 2004, accessed on May 1, 2017, [https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/eternal\\_sunshine\\_of\\_the\\_spotless\\_mind](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/eternal_sunshine_of_the_spotless_mind)

31. Metacritic, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind," Metacritic, March 19, 2004, accessed on May 1, 2017, <http://www.metacritic.com/movie/eternal-sunshine-of-the-spotless-mind>

32. IMDB, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind – Awards,"

33. Ibid.

34. IMDB, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind,"

35. IMDB, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind – Awards,"

36. Ibid.

37. David Ehrlich and Eric Kohn, "The Best Movies of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, According to Indiewire's Film Critics," Indiewire, June 25, 2016, accessed on June 10, 2017, <http://www.indiewire.com/2016/06/best-movies-21st-century-carol-boyhood-12-years-a-slave-1201699418/>

the Los Angeles Film Critics Association's (LAFCA) 3<sup>rd</sup> Best Film of the Decade,<sup>38</sup> and Metacritic's 2<sup>nd</sup> Best Film of the Decade according to an aggregate of 37 individual critics who released "Best of the Decade" lists.<sup>39</sup>

The cultural impact of *Eternal Sunshine* has also been far reaching, expanding to surprising places, including the world of rap music on more than one occasion. In addition to Jon Brion's aforementioned recruitment by Kanye West for *Late Registration*, the film's themes were also used as the basis for Jay Electronica's *Act I: Eternal Sunshine (The Pledge)*<sup>40</sup>, which is generally considered to be the work that launched his career and one of the most original collections of rap songs to date by any artist.

In October of 2016, it was reported by *The Hollywood Reporter* that a television adaptation of *Eternal Sunshine* was in the works, though perhaps fortunately, this has yet to gain any significant momentum.<sup>41</sup>

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38. IMDB, "Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind – Awards,"

39. Jason Dietz, "Critics Pick the Best Movies of the Decade," *Metacritic*, January 3, 2010, accessed on June 1, 2017, <http://www.metacritic.com/feature/film-critics-pick-the-best-movies-of-the-decade>

40. Jay Electronica, *Act I: Eternal Sunshine (The Pledge)*, 2007, Digital Release, <https://soundcloud.com/jcolladocanon/eternal-sunshine-the-pledge-jay-electronica>

41. Bryn Elise Sandberg and Borys Kit, "'Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind' TV Series in the Works (Exclusive)," *The Hollywood Reporter*, October 7, 2016, accessed on May 5, 2017, <http://www.hollywoodreporter.com/live-feed/eternal-sunshine-spotless-mind-tv-933163>

## 8. CONCLUSION

For such a heady film, it is worth noting that *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* succeeds primarily because of the many ways in which it is relatable. Though we might never have the opportunity to erase painful memories – we’re a bit more complex creatures than snails<sup>42</sup> – the desire to do so is incredibly common and deeply human. Underneath the many layers of conceptual plotting, jaw-dropping imagery, literary allusions, toying with the concept of fate, and nuanced acting lies a relatively platitudinous perspective: the people that matter most leave an indelible mark upon you and nothing can change that. Jon Brion’s incredibly effective score demonstrates this thesis by creating a series of connections between characters, emotions, and memories that are deeply bonded not just by theme, but also by timbre, which is far more difficult (and potentially impossible) to shake. If music in its purest form is merely sound and memory in its seemingly invincible form is merely feeling, then we can surmise that no memory erasing procedure can truly succeed in robbing people of the connections they might feel as a response to timbral stimulus. With *Eternal Sunshine*, Kaufman, Gondry, and Brion have succeeded in proving that a truly “Spotless Mind” is not only undesirable, but also likely impossible to attain.

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42. Jonathan O’Callaghan, “Scientists Have Managed to Erase Memories In A Snail’s Brain,” IFLSCIENCE!, June 24, 2017, accessed on June 24, 2017, <http://www.iflscience.com/brain/scientists-have-managed-to-erase-memories-in-a-snails-brain/>

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