Flashback And Flash Forward In Eternal Sunshine of The Spotless Mind: Film Analysis

Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind is a film that incorporates romance, drama and science fiction. It is based around a man in his middle age called Joel Barish who falls in love with a girl called Clementine Kruczynsk. Later their two years relationship started to fall apart, and Clementine erases all the memory she had about Joel. After Joel realizing what Clementine did, he decides to undergo the same process to erase his girlfriends' memories. In the middle of the erasing process, Joel decides he is not ready to let the memories disappear. Valdís Óskarsdóttir, the film editor, brings out various editing techniques: chronology, flashbacks, continuity and discontinuity editing, jump cuts and eye-line matches. These techniques help in developing the narrative and also balance the characters' perspectives while at the same time maintaining its simplicity easy for the audience to follow.

Flashback and Flash Forward

Flashback is usually used to take the narrative back in time before the current story time. It helps build the story as well as the character. The film uses flashback to reveal the love life story of the couple before Clementine decided to erase their memory's together. When Joel decides to undergo a similar memory erasing procedure, he watches the memories fade, and this is when he realizes he does not want them to disappear. He tries to stop the process because he finds out he still loves Clementine. At this moment the story is told through Joel's memory erasing and this makes it look like it is narrated backward. For example, one day Joel goes to bed to sleep and finds himself watching his dream. He views himself as he speaks with his neighbors who ask him about Valentine's Day and then mentions Clementine. This makes Joel uncomfortable with the talk (Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, 2004). The audience is passed through the confusion that Joel is undergoing as their happy relationship moments disappear one after the other. This makes the storyline more interesting and unique from any other love triangle drama film. The author also incorporates flash-forward editing at the start of the film. We see Joel and Clementine together in the train, and they are meeting for the first time as far as they can tell since their memories have been erased.

They are pretty use of continuity editing in the film. It is the most commonly used style in movie editing. Continuity editing is a process of cutting to maintain the flow and a clear storyline. Continuity editing is classified into two: temporal continuity and spatial continuity. In the In Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, we see Joel Banish experiencing various fragments of reality. Some of the fragments are memories, and some pieces are made of illusions of his imaginations. In the entire film, the audience is able to use and join different cues to tell the reality of Joel at various times. When Joel realizes he does not want to continue with his impulsive decision of erasing the memories, he holds Clementine's hand, and they run through different places, at the same time the doctor is still working to erase Joel's memories. The places eventually disappear as the Joel and Clementine are seen running from a drive-in movie theater to the office of the doctor and finally to the library (Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind, 2004).

However, even though the film portrays Joel moving from one scene to another in his life, the audience understands that it is a single continuous scene basing on Joel ’s behavior and the film’s ideas. Continuity technique is used in exploring ideas of memories and the unconscious mind. Even when everything is faded away: faced seemed distorted, and the car disappeared, Joel continued to hold on to Clementine. He struggles to save her and his memory from being shuttered. We also see fights and painful moments of their relationship in Joel’s memories. Joel can use imaginations and minds as he holds on his ideas of Clementine to move from different scenes, time and space. In a continuous running scene regardless of many changes in the setting, the audience knows that the scene is continuous because Joel is continuing with the fight to retain Clementine’s memories.

At the initial stage of the film, there is a noticeable smooth rhythm. Later on, the author integrates both discontinuity and continuity editing in order to balance the drastic changes between the memories and reality. At the beginning of the film we see Joel approaching his car and notices the it had been damaged only to live a note saying thank you on neighbor’s car to suggest that the neighbor caused the damages, he cannot remember since this scene happened the morning after the procedure. This scene is not very straightforward and author incorporated discontinuity editing which can potentially confuse the audience. Without discontinuity, the audience would lack a clear view of what other actors are doing during a particular time.