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Surrealism in Paprika: A Portal Into the Psyche

Satoshi Kon's oeuvre can be difficult to define in binary terms. His creative direction emphasizes the playful insertion of illusory visual spaces concurrent with fragmented and non-linear narratives, resulting in the production of cinematic masterpieces that manipulate, destroy, and subvert perceived notions of reality that ultimately foster a sense of innate surrealism within his works. *Paprika*, Kon's 2006 Japanese sci-fi animated thriller, is a paradigm of the surrealist worlds and experiences he cultivates through his filmmaking. At the heart of Paprika's narrative lies the revolutionary and technologically innovative development of the DC Mini, a device that allows therapists to enter and interact with their patients' dreams. Dream psychologist Dr. Atsuko Chiba uses her alter ego, Paprika, to enter the dreams of her patients and assists them in confronting their innermost traumas and desires. However, chaos befalls Tokyo after the DC Mini is stolen and dreams begin to invade the waking world, causing the distinct lines between dreams and reality to become indistinguishable. As havoc ensues amongst the public, Dr. Chiba and her colleagues attempt to uncover the thief and dissolve their nightmarish scheme. Through its use of a surrealist framework in cinematography and narrative direction, the film ventures into the labyrinthine depths of the human psyche, where the linearity of time and space distorts, and the objectivity of the real world fades away into the dreamscape. Paprika employs a surrealist framework in its cinematography to explore the concept of polymorphous

realities and subjective experiences, presenting a world where every individual's dreams and subconscious thoughts are interlaced to sculpt an abstract and multidimensional narrative that reflects heterogeneity in individual perspectives and inner worlds. The film's focus on the multiplicity of realities challenges the notion of a single, definitive, and objective reality, and underscores the subjective nature of the human experience.



Figure 1: Paprika (2006) Dr. Atsuko Chiba



Figure 2: Paprika (2006) Dr. Chiba Turns Into 'Paprika'

A consistent feature of *Paprika*'s cinematography is its employment of match cuts, often used in the film as modes of transition and visual cohesion. These seamless transitions, often achieved through the usage of match cuts, are vital in depicting the fluidity of navigation between realms and identities in the film. In its foremost application, match cuts lay the foundation for the film's non-linear narrative structure, establishing its dream logic that abstains from conforming to linear plot lines. In utilizing match cuts to transition between new environments, characters, and scenes, the film visually mimics the fluid and often disjointed

nature of dreams, where ideas, images, and narratives are convoluted and can senselessly shift in unconstrained spontaneity. This is portrayed in Dr. Chiba's attempt to rescue Detective Konakawa from his own dream, where she runs through her lab until she synchronously shifts into her dream alter ego, Paprika. As Dr. Chiba seamlessly transitions into Paprika, the setting shifts from the sterile environment of the lab into a vibrant, fantastical dreamscape of Konakawa's subconscious (Figures 1 and 2). This technique effectively captures how Kon utilizes surrealist characteristics of unpredictability and the nature of errationess, as portrayed in this transition, to construct an amorphous narrative structure where logical sequences are abandoned in favor of unprompted and bizarre juxtapositions. This usage of a match cut also portrays a juxtaposition of the complexities of identity, specifically in how the duplicitous nature of the reserved, composed, and ingenious scientist Chiba can single-handedly shift into the adventurous and carefree Paprika within a singular unbroken shot (38:55-38:58). This visual juxtaposition not only underscores the fluidity and adaptability of identity but also challenges the notions of selfhood, suggesting that identity is not static, but rather a dynamic and evolving construct that is navigated and shaped through one's experience and perception of the self.

In navigating between the real world and the dream world, mirrors, a common surrealist motif, are heavily utilized in the film as a symbolic and transitional device between the physical world and the characters' internal states, revealing subjectivities in the way each character perceives and interprets their world. As characters seek to enter and navigate the dream world, they must first confront their reflection and the inverted exteriors of themselves. In relation to this idea of an inverted reality, French philosopher Michel Foucault describes the mirror as a type of heterotopia. Introduced in his 1967 lecture, "Of Other Spaces: Utopias and Heterotopias,"

Foucault defines a heterotopia as a tangible location that simultaneously represents, contests, and inverts reality as a multi-layered space of otherness. As detailed by Foucault, a mirror is a paradoxical space that is both real and unreal as it reflects a reality that is not physically present, resulting in the creation of a virtual space that interacts with the actual physical space of the viewer (Foucault 4). Similarly, mirrors in *Paprika* are employed as portals between the waking world and the dream world, acting as a device that reflects intersections between the conscious and subconscious, along with the real and the imagined. The characters exist physically in reality while simultaneously portraying imagined versions of themselves in their dreams, most of which are created from the root of their subconscious. The dreams establish a vivid reality that is both connected to and separate from the waking world, aligning with Foucault's notion of heterotopias and how they establish a space of otherness that mirrors yet distorts reality. In understanding the mirror as a heterotopia, we are able to see how it is an object that disrupts the conventional understanding of space and time, as portrayed in the movie, adding to its surrealist quality. This disruption of conventional order forces characters and viewers alike to reconsider their perceptions of reality and its portrayal in the film.

While Foucault's concept of heterotopias provides us with a more nuanced understanding and philosophical framework for interpreting the mirrors in *Paprika* in relation to multi-dimensionality in perception, it is important to remember the function of mirrors as a surrealist object of introspection. In his book titled "Reframing Reality," surrealist film scholar Alison Frank describes the purpose of the surrealist object, stating that "The surrealist object, by its very nature, defies the logic of the everyday. It is an ordinary item transformed by the artist's vision, rendering the familiar unfamiliar and inviting the viewer to see the world anew" (Frank).

Through a surrealistic lens, mirrors serve as a symbol of introspection within the film, where characters confront their internal state and enter the gateway of self-discovery. As characters physically enter and exit the dreamscapes through the mirrors, they simultaneously transition between their two states of consciousness. This duality of the mirror motif emphasizes the complexity of the characters' identities, ultimately inviting viewers to question the authenticity of their own individualistic perception, providing them the opportunity to consider alternative viewpoints to expand their comprehension of lived experiences. This underscores the film's message of the subjectivity in interpreting the human experience. While the film's use of mirrors to create spaces that challenge and disrupt conventional realities aligns with Foucault's concept of heterotopias, it also extends beyond it through its surrealist emphasis on the function of mirrors as a device for psychological exploration.



Figure 3: Paprika (2006) Konakawa's Trauma



Figure 4: Paprika (2006) Konakawa Confronts Trauma

Metamorphosis, a common surrealist motif is interlaced within the core structure of the film, challenging, dissolving, and reconciling the fragmented boundaries between reality and the dream realm through the use of Superimposition. Superimposition, combined with the motif of metamorphosis, enhances the surreality of the film, creating layered visual spectacles to convey not only the dissolution of real-world constraints within the film's landscapes, but also to depict the collage of elements that composes one's identity. This is visible in the dream sequences of Detective Konakawa. In (Figure 3) he is shown running through a series of film strips while his figure becomes superimposed over a variety of movie scenes; these film scenes later blend into his profession in the real world. This sequence reveals the internal turmoil of his subconscious and reflects his subconscious' influence on his conscious actions in the real world. This showcases both the intermingling of the two worlds and the pervasive influence of the subconscious in one's discerned self. Towards the climax of the movie, in (Figure 4) Konakawa confronts a past trauma, a memory relating to the death of his friend that has haunted him for years through a dream. He faces the younger, traumatized version of himself through a projection, with both versions of him superimposed on top of one another. Through this scene Konakawa reconciles with his past, uniting this fragmented and estranged version of him with who he presently is, symbolizing his metamorphosis as an individual. The feature of overlapping images that constitute a merge with multiple aspects of identity suggest that identity is not singular, but is a composition and eventual reconciliation of varying elements, even if they are conflicting.



Figure 5: Paprika (2006) Parade



Figure 6: Paprika (2006) Procession

Paprika continues to explore the tumultuously chaotic process of reconciling, departing, and perceiving one's identity and reality through its incorporation of Surrealist assemblage theory, specifically in the film's profuse incorporation of symbolic objects in its mise-en-scene. Assemblage theory, as stated in art professor R.E. Somol's article, "In the Wake of Assemblage," can be defined as the idea of "disparate elements" coming together in order to form a more complex, multidimensional whole (Somol 2). The film's iconic parade scene depicts an assemblage of various objects, figures, and cultural symbols. In (Figures 5 and 6) appliances, technological devices, traditional Japanese items and ritual objects, along with surreal creatures

march in a procession, all drawn in a mixture of hyper realistic and fantastical art styles in order to depict the chaos that composes one's identity. This use of assemblage is employed by Kon to create a feeling of visual overload, overwhelming viewers with an abundance of bizarre and dissimilar objects to evoke a sense of reflection on what constitutes our identity. This reflects assemblage theory's emphasis on the aggregation of heterogeneous elements to form a complex, multi-layered whole. Many objects seen in the parade are psychological projections of the characters' inner thoughts and suppressed feelings and memories. For example, the recurrent inclusion of dolls, mannequins, and mechanized objects symbolize the loss of individuality or mechanization of human life, reflecting the characters' anxieties about their loss of self or incomprehensiveness in identity. Additionally, iconic landmarks of Tokyo, such as the Tokyo Tower and Ginza district become reimagined within the parade, serving as visual motifs that convey the psychological states of the characters as the city oscillates between chaos and order.

The parade scene in *Paprika* is reminiscent of the carnivalesque, a literary concept developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, that resonates with ideals of surrealist principles due to their shared emphasis on subversion, chaos, and the liberation of thought. In her book about literary theory and storytelling titled, "All the Same The Worlds Don't Go Away: Essays on Authors, Heroes, Aesthetics, and Stage Adaptations from the Russian Tradition," literary critic Caryl Emerson describes Bakhtin's concept of the carnivalesque as a mode in literature that "subverts the dominant and social order" through the use of humor, inversion, and the grotesque (Emerson). *Paprika*'s parade scene is an embodiment of the carnivalesque, depicting the world as an unconventional reality that blends elements of humor and chaos with a critical commentary on individual expression. In the parade scene, the dream word serves as a space of liberation for

the characters, allowing them to freely express their collection of suppressed or convoluted thoughts through the procession of objects created by their subconscious. The procession is replete with grotesque and surreal imagery of dancing refrigerators, giant traditional Japanese dolls, and anthropomorphic animals. Each of the objects in the parade are invigorated by life, embodying a carnival's exuberant celebration of life's absurdities and its rapturous subversion of order. Objects and characters in the parade are also seen visually morphing and transforming into other objects, reflecting the fluid nature of a carnival and embracing a carnivalesque celebration of flux and mutability while defying the static and unliberated nature of reality.

In order to enhance its Surrealist atmosphere, the film overwhelms the senses of the viewer, creating a barrage of auditory stimuli through its soundtrack that allows for deep introspection. Many of the scores in the film replicate the intensity and unpredictable nature of the Surrealist concept of Automatism. Automatism, as an artistic technique, profoundly impacts both artistic expression and how a work is interpreted as it is a principle that encourages creation without conscious control. In actively working in an automatist mindset, spontaneous gestures, thoughts, and ideas guide an artist's creative process, allowing their intuition to take the help of their expression. This allows the audience to also view works more intuitively and through their own perception. The music of *Paprika* mimics this principle by its inclusion of a soundtrack that incorporates diverse sonic elements and layering them to create a textured soundscape that reflects the multi-layered nature of the film. This is especially present in the Soundtrack's songs titled "A Drop Filled with Memories" and "The Girl in Byakkoya." This lack of predictability is exemplified especially in the score titled, "The Girl in Byakkoya," which features a non-linear song structure that aligns with the non-linear narrative of the film. This score is used within the

sequence where the parade of dreams has entirely invaded the real world, creating an image of fantastical chaos as giant dolls, animated appliances, and mythical creatures invade the streets of Tokyo. The melodies and rhythms within the score shifts and changes in unexpected ways, blending sounds of classical and electronic instruments to create a surreal and chaotic auditory experience that compliments the surreality of its accompanied scene. This aligns with the principles of automatism as it allows the music to evolve naturally without predictability, similar to the flow of one's subconscious. More subtly, the song "A Drop Filled with Memories," is an emotionally charged composition featuring delicate piano melodies that are unexpectedly overtaken by sweeping orchestral arrangements. While the previous song instilled a sense of the film's spontaneity and dream-like atmosphere, "A Drop Filled with Memories" evokes feelings of nostalgia and memory, contributing to the film's exploration of reconciling memories, identity, the passage of time, and the perception of the past and present. The song accompanies a moment when Dr. Chiba and Konakawa confront the haunting memories of their past traumas, aiding the film's reinforced message of our memories shaping our identity and the necessity of confronting the multiple fragments of ourselves. Like automatism in visual art, Paprika's soundtrack allows for a subjective interpretation and a sense of personal resonance within the viewers. As the soundtrack is mostly composed of classical and instrumental scores, it elicits emotional responses and subconscious associations that resonate with each viewer differently, enhancing the immersivity of the film.



Figure 7: Paprika (2006) Paprika Flies in a Dream



Figure 8: Paprika (2006) Dr. Shima Oversight



Figure 9: Dali (1937) Swans Reflecting Elephants



Figure 10: Paprika (2006) Desert Procession

In addition to its use of audio to establish a sonically surrealist environment, the film also utilizes juxtaposing palettes of color and visual symbolism reminiscent of the surrealist paintings of Salvador Dali, to enhance its visual storytelling. *Paprika* employs a combination of juxtaposing vibrancy and monochromatic tones within the costumes of the characters and the landscapes they inhabit. The dream sequences are a kaleidoscope of vibrant elements and often clash with the more subdued tones of the real world. This is seen in (Figure 7) where Paprika is depicted flying through the skies of the dream world whilst in contact with Dr. Torataro Shima, who communicates with her in the real world, as seen in (Figure 8). The dream that Paprika

inhabits and explores is incredibly vibrant and colorful, whereas the reality of the waking world Dr. Shima inhabits is incredibly dark and subdued. This juxtaposition of color is further accentuated when the computer screen Dr. Shima overlooks entirely radiates the brightness and vibrancy of the dream world. This is incredibly reminiscent of the works of Salvador Dali, such as "Swans Reflecting Elephants," that contrast the vibrancy of the landscape as opposed to the depicted objects of a swan and elephant that alludes to his feelings of mental paranoia, as seen in (Figure 9). This contrast in schemes is further exemplified in the ways identity is represented within the characters. Our protagonist, Dr. Atsuko Chiba exhibits a cooler and muter color scheme in her professional life within the dream world; this reflects her reserved and often serious demeanor. However, her alter ego, Paprika, exhibits a warm and vibrant appearance symbolic of her playful and uninhibited personality that is normally concealed. Dali's use of visual symbolism is also heavily utilized in *Paprika*, especially in the desert procession scene. Dali utilized the principle of hypnagogic hallucinations in his art, which is described by psychological researchers Mina Caraccio and Meir H. Kryger in their article, "Salvador Dali: Hypnagogic Hallucinations in Art," as a "state manifested through a distorted perception of space and time, fluid idea association, and involuntary, imagined sensory stimulation" (Caraccio and Kryger). The desert is a common motif among several Dali works and was the main environment for his paintings. This is due to their often isolated and tranquil environment that is vast and unexplored. Paprika utilizes Dali's interpretation of the desert as an isolated space, utilizing it in the desert procession scene. In Paprika, the desert, as seen in (Figure 10) is used as a metaphor for the characters' subconscious, a place where their deepest fears and memories, depicted through an assortment of objects, is seen parading through the barren landscape of their mind. This symbolizes the characters' psychological state and their fear of being lost in the complexities of their subconscious, aligning with Dali's symbolic use of the desert as a form of a hypnagogic hallucination.

Harnessing the medium of animation was a vital contributor to the film's portrayal of surrealist elements. While surrealist paintings are able to portray dream-like scenes which mimic those in our subconscious, they remain static illusions. In contrast, by utilizing animation as a medium, Paprika and other animated films are able to showcase the conventionally static and tangible objects in motion, allowing them to mimic illogical movements observed in dreams. This embodies the paradoxical inherent realism inherent in Surrealism. In his expansive research on anime as a genre and its exploration on temporality, Japanese Studies researcher Alistair Swale expresses in his article, "Anime and the Conquest of Time," that "the ultimate merit of this perspective is that it leads to an appreciation of animation as enabling access to realms of cinematic expression that are in their own way sublime and deeply relevant to the broader artistic aim of expressing "truths" about the human condition" (Swale). Animation as a medium provides creators the liberty and flexibility to explore narratives and concepts that are conventionally constrained by the logic and rules of a physical reality, allowing them to depict surrealist thought without limitations. In the case of Satoshi Kon, he utilized this freedom to enable his portrayals of gravity, logic, and physic-defying dreamscapes which allowed the viewers to be immersed in an otherworldly experience. Such freedoms enabled the team of *Paprika* to harness a wide range of dynamic techniques, allowing for this consistent morphing, distortions, and subversions in the film to be employed to convey emotional and conceptual ideas in a visual form. Through the use of animation, characters underwent radical transformations and inhabited surreal environments

that are typically unable to be portrayed in traditional live acting sequences, reflecting the malleability of identity and reality within the film's animated dreamscapes.

Satoshi Kon's *Paprika* exemplifies the capabilities of animation and its intricate interplay between surrealistic storytelling with psychological narratives. Kon's utilization of a surrealist framework, both narratively and cinematically, contributed to the phantasmagorical dreamscapes and nuanced understanding of the complexities of the human psyche in *Paprika*. By leveraging the unique capabilities of animation, Kon produces an abstract narrative instilled with commentary on the complexities of human consciousness and the fragile boundary between our dreams and reality. *Paprika* not only depicts the potential for exploring and visualizing the intricacies of the mind through its animation, but also demonstrates the potential for unique storytelling techniques in cinema. Kon's work is a testament to the enduring dialogue between artistic expression and the intricacies of the human experience, exemplifying the result of the interaction of creativity and contemplation of the human mind. Through this paper, I hope to have contributed valuable insights into the intersections of surrealism, cinematic storytelling, and psychoanalysis in film.

Annotated Bibliography

Caraccio, Mina, and Meir H. Kryger. "Salvador Dalí: Hypnagogic Hallucinations in Art." *Sleep Health*, vol. 9, no. 1, Feb. 2023, pp. 1–2. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.sleh.2023.01.009.

Mina's article *Salvador Dali: Hypnagogic Hallucinations in Art* describes the definition of Hypnagogic hallucinations from a Freudian psychoanalytic perspective. In the article, Caraccio and Kryger give an overview on the facets of what constitutes hypnagogic hallucinations and how it has been used in art history through time. They give an overview on the common objects found within these hallucinations at their psychological impact. They also provide an artistic and historical perspective, detailing Dali's use of hypnagogic hallucinations and their symbolism within his works. I plan to utilize their commentary in the portion of my essay where I compare the film's use of juxtaposing colors and illusory symbolism in alignment to Dali's use of vibrant and monotone contrasts and illusory symbolism, in relation to his insight on hypnagogic hallucinations.

Emerson, Caryl. "POLYPHONY AND THE CARNIVALESQUE: INTRODUCING THE

TERMS." All the Same The Words Don't Go Away: Essays on Authors, Heroes,

Aesthetics, and Stage Adaptations from the Russian Tradition, Academic Studies Press,

2011, pp. 3–41. JSTOR, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctt21h4wh9.5. Accessed 10 June 2024.

Emerson's chapter Polyphony and the Carnivalesque: Introducing the Terms provides a

literary analysis on the literary concept developed by Mikhail Bakhtin, carnivalesque.

Emerson deep dives on the significance, definition, and utilization of this concept within several literary works from Russian literature. I plan on using the principle definitions of

what constitutes a carnivalesque perspective and utilize it in my analysis on surrealism within the movie's parade scene. I feel that the concept of carnivalesque is especially similar to the surrealist principles of chaos and liberation, allowing me to draw conclusions on the similarities between both concepts in my analysis. I hope the inclusion of this article provides more narrative insight into the movie and Kon's narrative intentions with the mise-en-scene of the film.

Foucault, Michel, and Jay Miskowiec. "Of Other Spaces." *Diacritics*, vol. 16, no. 1, 1986, pp. 22–27. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/464648. Accessed 10 June 2024.

Foucault's lecture *Of Other Spaces* provides a nuanced analysis on the usage of mirrors as a heterotopic object, an object that subverts reality, whilst being a part of it. I found this lecture to be particularly interesting, especially because it provided an expansive and contrary perspective on my own understanding of mirrors. I plan to utilize it in my essay to provide a more philosophical perspective on the usage of mirrors in Paprika and how Foucault's perspective is both agreeable and disagreeable to my own. I also plan on utilizing it to provide a contrast to the philosophical viewpoint of mirrors, adding a surrealist take within the conversation of the mirror as a surrealist/heterotopic object.

Frank, A. (2013). Reframing Reality: The Aesthetics of the Surrealist Object in French and Czech Cinema / Alison Frank. Intellect.

The book *Reframing Reality: The Aesthetics of the Surrealist Object in French and Czech Cinema* is a scholarly exploration of the surrealist influence and exhibited manifestations in French and Czech cinema. The book goes into depth on topics such as the surrealist object and how its presentation and contextual background can evoke and stimulate

multiple sectors of imagination and introspection within a viewer. Frank argues that the surrealist object in cinema serves not only as a narrative device, but is fortified with elements that challenge traditional cinematic expressions and themes that were commonly seen in cinema within the early 20th century. Frank's scholarly exploration and analysis of surrealist French and Czech cinema contribute to the broader field of film studies. I plan to utilize his analysis to expand on how surrealism resonates in contemporary cinema and films like *Paprika*, expanding past its root in avant-garde movements. As a secondary source, the book is limited in the sense that it only focuses on French and Czech films, however, the information it provides on surrealism in relation to cinematography is incredibly valuable to my paper.

- Somol, R. E. "In the Wake of 'Assemblage." *Assemblage*, no. 41, 2000, pp. 92–93. *JSTOR*, https://doi.org/10.2307/3171349. Accessed 10 June 2024.
 - Somol's article provides expansive context on the history and use of assemblage theory in the art scene. His article *In the Wake of Assemblage* gives a historical account of the several usages of assemblage and how it has been perceived within Surrealist and Assemblage works. I plan to utilize his description of Assemblage theory within my paragraph on assemblage and the film's mise-en-scene. I believe his account provides a good constitution for the definition of assemblage and its importance in the art world.
- SWALE, Alistair. "Anime and the Conquest of Time: Memory, Fantasy, and the 'Time-Image' from *Ghost in the Shell* to *Your Name*." *Japan Review*, no. 35, 2020, pp. 199–218. *JSTOR*, https://www.jstor.org/stable/27009006. Accessed 23 Apr. 2024.

Alistair Swale's article Anime and the Conquest of Time: Memory, Fantasy, and the 'Time *Image'* from Ghost in the Shell to Your Name explores the intricacies and relationships between time, memory, and fantasy in animated films. Swale examines movies such as Ghost in the Shell and Your Name to argue how these films edge in the exploration of temporal structures and the fluidity of memory, and how these inclusions challenge conventionalities in narrative storytelling within animated films. The article employs a psychological framework, utilizing Gilles Deluge's concept of the 'time-image,' a philosophical idea that contrasts the idea of the 'movement-image' seen in classical cinema. The concept of the 'time-image' serves as Swale's theoretical framework for the paper, allowing him to analyze how anime creates its own distinct sense of time through the use of non-linear storytelling. I plan to use Swale's article to compare the surrealist element of non-linearity in other animated movies. Swale also mentions how the manipulation of time and reality within these movies are used to build complex stories that focus on identity and the human experience, as does *Paprika*. Though this article is not focused on analyzing my specific primary source, it offers valuable information on elements that are also present within *Paprika* that I am able to expand on.

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