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Blurring the screen: the fragmented self, the database, and the narratives of Satoshi Kon

Abstract. Dream states, virtual identities, shadow selves, psychological deformations of space and time and many more – these are the cinematic narratives that the Japanese animator Satoshi Kon spectacularly created. When dealing with a permissive medium such as animation, termed by the American theorist Paul Wells as extending the limits of both imagination and human consciousness (1998), and following the idea of a specific form of animation that is *anime* (Japanese animation), which creates a blending of reality and fantasy in what Susan Napier termed the *fantasyscape* (2001), one must wonder what the underlying stake is for the future of narrative.

Also, in a moment when *the database* as concept is considered a new form of fan consumption (Azuma, 2009) and, even, a new cultural form (Allan Cameron, 2009), thus transforming the way narrative is performed and consumed, anime researcher Brian Ruh went even further in analyzing anime as sustaining the formation of a global *database fantasyscape* (2014).

The current paper proposes to explore the concept of database in connection to narrative, identity and anime. Thus, the paper will start with the representations of identity in relation to space, time, the real and the virtual, while using the operational concepts of modular narratives (Allan Cameron, 2009) and remediation (Bolter & Grusin, 1999) in analyzing Satoshi Kon's *Perfect blue* (1997) and *Paprika* (2006). Is the database an exploration or a reaction to contemporary anxieties? Is it a reaction to the liquid modernity and the fragmented self (Zygmunt Bauman, 2013)? Is it a symptom or a warning for all of the above?

Keywords: Japanese popular culture, animation, remediation, database fantasyscape, modular narratives.

The Modular and the Database

The narratives a culture produces at a specific point in history can provide prolific insights into the hopes, fears and anxieties which that culture experiments and tackles with. Living in a global and, moreover, digital “culture”, these hopes, fears and anxieties address a database of knowledge, consciously or unconsciously. “In conditions where realities and identities are upgraded like

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EKPHRASIS, 1/2016
EXTREME STORYTELLING
pp. 63-74

software, it is not surprising that memory disorders should have become the focus of cultural anxiety – see, for instance, the *Bourne* films, *Memento*, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind*.” (58) writes M. Fisher in *Capitalist Realism*, in a postmodernist and rather daunting tone, linking reality, identity, memory with narratives and cultural anxieties performed and consumed as mere simulacra. With the potential to “upgrade” one’s reality and identity, Fisher argues that the contemporary capitalist realism “entails subordinating oneself to a reality that is infinitely plastic, capable of reconfiguring itself at any moment.” (54), thus rendering the original or the starting point obsolete, and hinting both to what other researchers termed the *modular* and the *database*.

With a multiplicity of identities to consume, realities to experiment, and narratives to assimilate, both the self and its memory become fragmentary, liquid and so forth. In this line of thought and research contexts, A. Cameron proposed to address the connection between the modular and the database: “I suggest that contemporary modular narratives, however indirectly, address the rise of the database as a cultural form, while also gesturing towards broader shifts in the conceptualization of time.” (2) But what is a modular narrative? In a brief and simplified manner, Cameron argues: “‘Modular narrative’ and ‘database narrative’ are terms applicable to narratives that foreground the relationship between the temporality of the story and the order of its telling.” (1), referring to specific types of film in today’s cinema like some of the aforementioned by Fisher, as well. Refusing or disrupting linearity in time, and sometimes space, the modular becomes a way of looking at the world. Though on different grounds, both theorists link anxiety, time and its conceptualization, and the modality a part of today’s filmmakers construct their narratives, addressing the advent of a new cultural stage or form.

And here enters the database and its rise. While Fisher and Cameron address live-action cinema and its construction, the cultural critic and sociologist H. Azuma advances the concept of database in connection to Japanese animation consumption and the *otaku* (the fan), pointing to the centrality of the character and other non-narrative elements that circulate in the contemporary transmedial environment of anime and its fandom. Thus, Azuma goes even further underlining the characteristics of database consumption as “not simply to consume a work (a small narrative) or a world-view behind it (a grand narrative), nor to consume characters and settings (a grand non-narrative). Rather, it is linked to consuming the database of otaku culture as a whole.” (181) In other words, the database functions as a new cultural form in the practices of the otaku, and there’s no escaping it, both as producer or consumer. Moreover, the database is linked by Azuma with digitalization and the advent of the world wide web, a context in which the otaku, as the ultimate fan and consumer of popular culture, can function both as: “the solitary animalesque consumer who withdraws into favorite ‘small narratives’, cutting off communication with the outside world, and that of the humanesque consumer who actively intervenes in

received commodities, constructing a flexible network of communication via the 'grand database'" (187). Of course, his view is permeated by the postmodern, the database as a new cultural form of production and consumption of meaning being understood as a "multiple personality disorder worldview" (180), a point that draws us back to the modular, as there is no linearity, only "small narratives" recreated by each person, according to their own and subjective experience of the world, both in matters of space and time.

Continuing this point of view, researcher B. Ruh links Azuma's definition of the database with S. Napier's concept of anime as *fantasyscape* – the in-between territory where both imagination and identities are experienced, created and recreated - to coin the idea of the database fantasyscape as the form in which anime travels globally. "The reason some of the database elements flow and others do not depends to a significant degree on certain cultural norms, ideals, and fantasies, and how these individual and collective fantasies play out on multiple levels. Fantasyscape is how the database travels." (173) Ergo, the database also becomes the antidote to the anxiety it produces, containing the problem and the solution, as it is an ongoing form of consumption, as well. Though time is not specifically linked in this line of research, one can argue that the database consumption functions in a continuous present where reality is reshaped, as the ultimate form of escapism and hyperrealism all in all.

Returning to P. Wells and the definition on animation as extending the limits of both imagination and human consciousness (1998), and mixing it with the specificities of anime as supporting an almost database worldview, I will address two works of Satoshi Kon, a Japanese animator renowned for his dense and experimental films that tackle with dream states, virtual identities, shadow selves, psychological deformations of space and time and many more. Analyzing Kon's *Perfect Blue* (1997) and *Paprika* (2006), chosen for their modular characteristics, though not modular narratives in their entirety, I will further explore the links between space, time, identity, and the database as both reflecting and numbing contemporary anxieties. I will, also, tackle with the operational concept of remediation, defined by Bolter and Grusin as functioning in a double logic of immediacy and hypermediacy: "Our culture wants both to multiply its media and to erase all traces of mediation: it wants to erase its media in the very act of multiplying technologies of mediation." (313) - a double logic quite literally represented in the animated works discussed.

The choice for this specific animator and his first and last animated films continues his own line of thought, as stated in an interview for *Midnighteye.com* on 20 November 2006: "I think in countries like Japan and America and other countries where internet is prevalent, people can anonymously seek or release things they can't speak of offline, as if there's a part of the subconscious that's uncontrollable and comes out on the internet. That is very much like dreams. This may be a very visualistic analogy, but I've always thought we drop down into dreams, and when you're sitting in front of your computer and connect to the internet, you're also going down into

some kind of underworld." The prevalent themes of real and virtual, consciousness and the subconscious, dreams and the self, and the way they are shaped through the animated medium poses a challenging view of contemporary narratives and the modular as concept. Both *Perfect Blue* and *Paprika* present these doubles not as antitheses, but as blurred sequences being part of a one large and encompassing reality that evades time and, sometimes, even space. Furthermore, both movies show timely remarks on otaku culture, digital worlds and realities that enhance the point of view of the modular and the database as new forms of worldview that blur the borders of reality and fantasy, drawing on mental illnesses as well, in a literal sense, and as metaphor for contemporary issues.

Perfect Blue – the double that binds

The animated worlds of Satoshi Kon usually function in terms of doubles, public and private, real and virtual, real and dream, identity and alter-ego, and so on, and so forth. In the case of *Perfect Blue*, the animator's first film released in 1997, the focus is on both the public and the private space that intermingle in the life of a celebrity, Mima Kirigoe, ex-pop idol turned actress, but also the perceived self and another schizophrenic self, in the life of the protagonist. While the diegetic linearity of the film is construed in a classic sense to a certain degree, the film becomes modular in its second part, in the lines of a "modular tendency, in which story elements and events are imbued with a high degree of uncertainty, and are subject to revision and rearticulation" (Cameron, 23). The story follows Mima, a young pop singer that leaves her band, CHAM, so as to develop as an actress, starring in the TV crime drama, *Double Bind*, while being harassed by an obsessive fan through a webpage titled *Mima's Room* (depicting a fake diary with real information about Mima's private life and thoughts). But, as the starting sequence foreshadows, with flashbacks on her idol persona, and flash-forwards reflecting her current private life (buying milk at the supermarket, feeding the fish in her apartment, etc.), Mima soon finds herself trapped in a reality that shifts from one screen to another, until all of them blur inside her mind. Using both windows and glass surfaces that reflect Mima's personas, but also the camera as an oppressive instrument, Kon underlines throughout the movie, the advent of the database, while remediating its outlets (advertising outdoors, posters, comics, the personal computer, the photo and video cameras, etc.).

Another modular tendency that functions in addressing Mima's dissolving self, is the repetition of scenes and elements, from CHAM posters appearing and disappearing, to train rides, culminating in a filmed rape scene that the character performs as part of her role in the TV series, to pinpoint her maturity as an actress, a scene later reenacted in the film as an almost rape by the deviant fan harassing her. The TV rape scene, thus, becomes the starting point for the fragmentation to occur, as she begins to see her idol persona staring back at her from windows, mirrors, etc., confusing the realities she lives as her private self and her public self. As the story

unfolds, the audience transgresses the line between the celebrity and the personal, entering Mima's delusional mind.

Furthermore, as C. Norris underlines, the world of *Perfect Blue* is, also, the world of otaku, addressing both "the image of the fan community as a group of male nerds committed to the fantasy image of cute, young, and high-spirited girl singers" (77), but also the image of the pathological fan, in the character of Me-Mania, who is portrayed throughout the film carrying a video recorder, and later discovered as the author of *Mima's Room* webpage. In a screen shot involving the otaku stereotypical room, dark, full of posters and photographs with Mima, and having the PC at the center, Satoshi Kon makes a timely critique on what Azuma, more than ten years later, terms the database consumption and the otaku as a database animal, obsessively "ingesting" affective elements in regard to a certain character.

If the trio presented throughout the movie as supporting Mima, while consuming her music, TV series, and, also, other related otaku goods (manga, predominantly) represents the view of the "tame" database animal, in Azuma's terms, Me-Mania is the pathological otaku that blurs reality and fantasy for his own development of an affective database consisting of Mima's fictional online diary, so as to consume his own delusional version of Mima. Though not so directly construed, Me-Mania enriches the database and the modular by living in a time of his own fabrication, stuck in a moment of perpetual adulation for a fictive idol, while persecuting and stalking the real, "impostor" Mima.

Another theme the animation tackles with is precisely that of identity, memory and mental illness, as the TV character that Mima portrays is a murderous multiple-personality disorder patient, making Mima confuse her reality, the filmed narrative, and her idol persona hallucinations reflecting in mirrors and windows. From this point of view, the subjective time becomes modular in terms of a fragmented worldview, in which Mima's own actions and thoughts transform into a database of hallucinations and memories, making the second part of the movie progress in a total state of confusion, as seen through her eyes.

While she struggles to keep her mental sanity, a series of crimes, also, starts to unfold around her, involving the producers of the *Double Bind* TV series she stars in. The climax gives a final warning to the dangers of technology in connection to identity and the database, as her manager, Rumi, an ex-pop star herself, is revealed to suffer from a mental illness, believing herself to be the true Mima, and tries to kill our protagonist. Thus, Kon develops throughout the narrative two mentally ill characters, both revolving around Mima's identity: Me-Mania, the pathological fan/otaku in the negative sense of the term, and Rumi, who sees herself as Mima the idol, being stuck, just as Me-Mania in a subjective and fragmented time, the affective elements construing the database being precisely the parts that signify the idol identity: the red lipstick, the wig that Rumi wears to transform to Mima, the posters of Mima singing that both Me-Mania and Rumi worship, the costume and so on. And

the connections go even further as Mima herself portrays a mentally ill character in a TV thriller drama, commenting on the fragile line between perceived identity, virtual reality and memory.

The final cuts of the film are a spectacular show of immediacy and hypermediacy, as the brain becomes the screen for both Mima and Rumi, in a chase where the hallucinations and the real persons blend, only to be literally shattered as they break a shop window while fighting for their lives so as to kill the imposter. Kon, also, skillfully operates this double logic of remediation throughout the film, making Mima or the pathological characters surrounding her see the idol persona/double through video cameras, in a radio studio or on stage, underlying the use of a mediated reality to project something that doesn't exist outside their ill minds.

The first line that Mima has as actress in the TV series becomes the leitmotif of the film: "Who are you?". This line is altered in various moments as Mima reads her fake diary on *Mima's Room* webpage (written by the obsessive Me-Mania), while being in her room and asking "How was *your* day?", thus hinting to the further schizophrenia, or the final frame of the film showing Mima after visiting the now institutionalized Rumi, looking in the car's mirror and saying "No, I'm the real thing.", while getting her sunglasses off. This interplay on identities and multiple personas is, moreover, reflected by switching between the public space of the filming set or the street, and the private space of Mima's *otome* (young maiden) room, full of plush toys and cute objects, another deliberate choice of the animator to suggest the internal struggle between the pure adolescent pop idol and the mature actress. But, in connection to time, the interplay switches from the private and the public to the real and the imagined, the second part of the film repeating the same shots of Mima waking up or fainting, while confusing her identity with that of her TV character's identity.

The fragmentation of both self and time, together with rapid cuts and blurred frames within the filming set and Mima's home connect the second part of the narrative with the concept of modular and its relation to temporal anchoring. Though Kon doesn't create a modular narrative per se, he uses Mima to show the contemporary anxiety of forgetting and a failing memory through what seems at first a personality disorder, which escapes both time and reality. We do see the nights and days passing, but the borders of public and private, Mima's memory and her TV drama character's memories are constantly intertwined so as to understand her failing psychological state. Again, the animator uses elements that transgress all the antitheses to further fragment the database: the bloody clothes making Mima think she actually committed murder at one point, the ice pick being the murder weapon both in the TV series and the real murders of the TV series' crew, etc.

Yet, as K. Ogg concludes in her analysis on Satoshi Kon, while finding similarities between the climaxes of *Perfect Blue* and *Paranoia Agent*, another one of Kon's animations, "the mystery is ostensibly solved, yet the phantasm that has been menacing the main character remains and continues its ruthless pursuit." (167). Even

if Rumi is now in a mental institution, her own identity double can still bind her, as, although Mima asserts she is the real one, it is still through a mirror. It is as if even the identity itself can become another aspect of the database, functioning and taking over on its own, while maintaining the global anxiety of the (trans)mediated and remediated reality.

Continuing the analysis that Cameron makes on “modular subjectivity” and “the externalization and manipulation of memory” that “function as a source of both order and forgetting, of pleasure and crisis”, *Perfect Blue* enhances the concept of modular in terms of affective delusional states in which false identities and fictional memories disrupt space, time and the sense of self, underlining the contemporary anxiety of the liquid self.

Paprika – the brain is the screen

It is no wonder that the tagline of the final film of Satoshi Kon, *Paprika*, released in 2006, is “Your brain on anime”. If *Perfect Blue* is a psychological thriller foreshadowing the uses and misuses of technology at the end of the 20th century, *Paprika* becomes the science fiction thriller that completely erases the border between “real” reality and virtual reality in the shape of dreams, thus pointing to the specific affordances of animation as medium, and the specificities of anime itself. It is no wonder, also, that similar to the fantasyscape, another concept coined to address the definition of anime (and manga for that matter) is the *mediascape of dreamscapes*, by M. McWilliams, underlining “an articulation of a dream world”, a collective unconscious that it comprises, “having the power to express people’s hopes and fears” (5).

Analyzing the works of Kon along those lines, W. Gardner talks about the *virtual mirror* that the animator creates so as to blur the private and the public, the self and the other, the real and the virtual, etc., both in *Perfect Blue* and *Paprika*: “a space both personal and medial” (58) in which the characters develop their imaginative worlds, but that also comprises the desires and fears of the others, beyond that character. That is taken quite literal in *Paprika*, as the film presents a world where psychologists developed an experimental device to treat mental disorders called the DC Mini. This device connects the mind of the psychologist to the mind of the patient while dreaming, letting the psychologist operate the healing process inside the patient’s dreams. Dreams become the main element of the database, as a form of a collective unconscious digitally stored. Moreover, the film starts with a dream sequence that remediates classic cinematography with references to movies such as *Tarzan* or *The Roman Holiday* and presents one of the two main recurring scenes in the same modular fashion of the resequencing and repetition (Cameron, 25). This dream sequence introduces the main character, Paprika, later discovered as the alter ego (dreaming ego) of doctor Atsuko Chiba, while illegally using the device to treat detective Toshimi Konakawa of his adolescent traumas reflected in this incomplete, recurring dream.

From the start, Kon uses fluid cuts between the dream and the reality spaces, so as to underline a world where interconnectivity transcends even the psyche. As Gardner also argues “the digital realms enabled by information technology are not presented as fundamentally different, or even distinguishable from, such non-digital phenomena as dreams, hallucinations, or moviegoing.” (67) What started in *Perfect Blue* as the blurring and doubling of one identity, in *Paprika* becomes the blurring and multiplying of the collective identities. The plot is triggered by the DC Mini being stolen and used in order to plant schizophrenic dreams in the minds of the psychologists at the research facility where doctor Chiba and the inventor of the device, doctor Tokita, both work. That schizophrenic dream becomes the second main recurring sequence, representing a parade of toys and media objects (mobile phones, cameras and other such devices, anthropomorphized) that the characters start to visualize while being awake, as the villain uses the DC Mini to implant the visions in their brain. This dream sequence, as such, can be considered the completion of the database, mediated and remediated inside the human psyche, as a collective and fragmented identity, defined through mindless consumption of objects, in the otaku sense. Or, as Azuma terms it, in the perpetual present of the dream state, every person transforms into a database animal, consuming both the “small narratives” and the “grand narrative” at once, as the dreams store affective elements and subjective stories “told” in a modular way (the parade sequence, the cinematic dream that the detective shares with Paprika, the villain’s own dream at the end of the movie).

Both doctor Tokita and his assistant, Himuro, are portrayed as pathologic otakus, Tokita being the childlike geek perpetually in love with technology, the DC Mini he invented, and all the possibilities it represents, while Himuro being a doll otaku, as later seen in a frame with his room consisting of dolls, toys and doll parts. Ergo, Himuro becomes the first victim of the DC Mini and the parade dream, being trapped inside as one of the dolls he obsesses over. If *Perfect Blue* start the critique of the otaku as stalker, *Paprika* ends it with the ultimate state of the otaku that blurs the line of reality and fantasy by transforming into the object of his passion – not only consuming or constructing the database of toys in Himuro’s case or technology in Tokita’s case, but becoming both the database (as being stuck in a dream of their own manifestation) and its parts (Himuro as a doll and Tokita as a giant robot in the parade sequence).

Joining the two narrative directions, the detective Paprika is secretly treating is assigned to investigate Himuro’s disappearance, while Chiba and Tokita along with their older manager, doctor Shima, further investigate the DC Mini theft. As both Shima and Tokita fall prey to the dream sequence, throughout the film, almost being killed, the chairman of the research facility wants to shut down the project, having a philosophical take on the dangers of “the technological dream”. Thus, the parade dream becomes the visual “embodiment” of the technological menace that can destroy humanity and its sense of identity. Furthermore, by the end of the film,

the chairman proves to be the villain, in a dream sequence that combines the two main dreams, the remediated cinema of detective Konakawa and the parade where Tokita is still trapped, which becomes the dream that now the whole world is dreaming. This final part of *Paprika* entraps the fragmented identity struggle of Tokita as the otaku geek literally turned in a giant robot eating the dream (doctor Tokita is presented as having an almost eating disorder throughout the film) and wanting to eat doctor Chiba/Paprika. Also, in this “crossing of two dreams [that] creates many more dreams”, as one of the character pinpoints, the protagonist is shown at the same time with both her personas – the stern psychologist and the dream alter ego, Paprika – first in an almost rape scene resembling that of *Perfect Blue*, that ends with the literal disembodiment of Paprika from doctor Chiba, and then in a struggle of the two to take control as a whole identity. The struggle ends with Paprika saying about Doctor Chiba that she is beginning to “be true to herself”, as she admits her love for Tokita, and goes to rescue him while he, as the giant robot dream self, tries to eat her. In that same moment, Paprika runs to stop the chairman, who has also entered the dream as the god governing this new world.

The parade dream that enters the remediated cinema dream and becomes the dream of the world is a productive take on the modular and the database, as it entails both references to the history of classic Hollywood cinema, the remediation of almost all technology (from advertising screens in Tokyo to mobile phones, cameras, etc.), and the individual “database” of otaku culture and the fluid identities of today’s world. The characters create, move and, at the same time, consume this very database as part of their own desires and anxieties: as Paprika asks doctor Chiba “Have you ever thought that maybe you are a part of me?”, erasing the lines between ego and alter ego, then doctor Chiba is ingested by the robot Tokita in a metaphoric nod to the mindless consumption of the otaku culture, while he states “It needs more spice. Maybe some Paprika.”, wanting to consume her as a whole.

The denouement shows doctor Chiba’s faint projection hinting to the fact that she is dreaming inside the dream world, while the frames that follow repeat a scene from the first part of the film involving her and the one she loves, Tokita. She is her “true self” now, maybe. But the film does not end here, as the old chairman appears, stating “he is reborn” in the dream world, transforming into a giant and naked “Lord of Darkness” that controls cosmos and even death. With an ingenious reply stating the dualities of the world (light and darkness, reality and dreams, man and woman), Paprika transforms into an infant and starts eating the dream world and the chairman himself, until she grows into a naked doctor Chiba and saves humanity. Now, her true self has been completed, while her consumption is not that of an otaku, but that of a conscious individual choosing specific elements of the database.

After the borders between the real and the dream world are, apparently, reinstated, Satoshi Kon, still, wants to further play with his audience, presenting the detective accessing Paprika’s illegal website (the same website used in the beginning of his

dream treatment) from his laptop and receiving one final message from her, a movie recommendations, *Dreaming Kids*. Then, the detective is shown going to the cinema and buying the ticket for this movie, while “the camera” rolls over other movie titles, all being Kon’s oeuvres. Whether this is the real or the dream world, for me it remains unclear, just as the spinning humming top in *Inception*, which is another modular narrative nostalgically nodding to the very *Paprika*.

“Cinema not only puts movement in the image, it also puts movement in the mind. (...) The brain is unity. The brain is the screen. (...) On the contrary, the biology of the brain – molecular biology – does. Thought is molecular. Molecular speeds make up the slow beings that we are” (366), G. Deleuze states as he connects philosophy, cinema and biology. The fluidity, “the molecular speed”, shows in *Paprika* from the very beginning as she jumps from one screen to another, embodying dream objects and sceneries. While both critiquing and relieving current anxieties on the uses of technology and the effects on the self, the film enters a profound debate about what reality, dreams or the self really are. The whole narrative of *Paprika* can be addressed in terms of modular subjectivities that intertwine, while the self is stuck in a perpetual dream sequence pointing to traumas or mental illnesses supported by technology. We are not presented with split screens, but with split minds that fragment past stories (Konakawa and his childhood drama), selves (the literal fragmentation of *Paprika* and dr. Chiba) and worlds (the clash of dreams in the end).

Instead of a conclusion

J. Baudrillard was writing in the 80s about entering a stage of hyperreality, where people exist in “a state of terror which is characteristic of the schizophrenic, an over-proximity of all things, a foul promiscuity of all things which beleaguer and penetrate him, meeting with no resistance, and no halo, no aura, not even the aura of his own body protects him. In spite of himself the schizophrenic is open to everything and lives in the most extreme confusion” (27). This state, whether going to the extreme of the schizophrenic, is a state of blurred lines and blurred screens where the reality and identity are recreated in an ongoing process. Living in a mediated world, both as presented in *Perfect Blue* and *Paprika* can perpetuate a state of constant anxiety, but also relieve that anxiety as it becomes the norm.

S. Napier’s *fanatsyscape* concept has an optimistic overtone: “the action is play, and the setting is a world construed for entertainment, a world of simulacra. Unlike other, more ambiguous simulacra, however, anime makes no pretense of participating in the ‘real’ except for what its viewers bring to it. (...) This is the ultimate attraction: the viewer may play in a liminal world of entertainment, free to take part in an infinitely transforming state of fantasy.” (293-294) Yet combined with the database, this liminal state of free pleasure and fantasy becomes the new form of cultural consumption that further develops the fragmentation of the self, the escape from space, time, reality, and the anxiety of modular subjectivities. If I may term *Perfect Blue* and *Paprika* as

fantasyscapes, then the conclusion is bleak, as both animations underline the dangers of a blurred border between the real, the virtual, the self, and fantasy, as usually they pertain to a subjectivity that views the world as modular and sick. It is no coincidence that both the theorists and Kon's narratives make use of mental illnesses and personality disorders as metaphors or manifestations of a new worldview dominated by technology and mediated realities, which further support the modular narrative as the way to address both personal histories and history per se.

Thus, turning to the modular and the database as forms of defining and analyzing the contemporary culture of the global and the digital entwined, one may agree to both Baudrillard and Z. Bauman in addressing the world as hyperreal or liquid: "What was some time ago dubbed (erroneously) 'post-modernity' and what I've chosen to call, more to the point, 'liquid modernity', is the growing conviction that change is the only permanence, and uncertainty the only certainty." (82) I believe that both change and uncertainties of the world or of the self are fully integrated in the way the elements combine in the modular and the narrative. But, returning to Kon's narratives, do the main characters really change? I am not convinced. What they do is experience modular subjectivities that distort reality, time, space, and construe their own "small narratives", in Azuma's definition, while being challenged by external forces and internal doubts. Although the "small narratives" are part of what seems to be a linear narrative in the diegetic sense, their own fragmented memory (*Perfect Blue*) and dreams (*Paprika*), plus their own fragmented sense of self overwrite their reality getting them stuck in-between spaces, moments in time, "realities" or personalities.

It is an interesting fact that the modular narrative in the end, as a form of production, and the database as a form of consumption, present the instruments that can further support cultural anxieties, but also attenuate them, just like the double logic of the immediacy and the hypermediacy. It is through a mirror that Mima apparently regains her "true" self at the end of the movie, and it is through a computer screen in a virtual bar that Paprika addresses her identity change, as she goes on to get married. While, on the one hand, they present the world with irrational and fragmentary scenes and practices, on the other hand they maintain the status quo by supporting the constant questioning of the world and the self. In the true spirit of Satoshi Kon's works, as well, the modular subjectivity becomes the form of both enjoying and critiquing the world.

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