



ANIME

Perfect Blue

Satoshi Kon's feature debut plunges us into Japan's late 1990s pop idol scene, and surfaces with a fractured tale of psychological and physical brutality. Mima is 21 when she decides to leave CHAM!, the J-pop group in which she rose to fame, to pursue what she hopes will be a more rewarding acting career. Mima's manager Rumi is against the change – as are her fans. For one in particular, an anonymous figure lurking behind the online persona 'Me-Mania', that devotion tips into stalking. But for Mima, escaping the cocoon of her cute idol persona is as urgently felt as an adolescent's yearning for independence. The transition isn't easy, though, and from limited options she takes a role as a rape victim on a TV show – a part that distresses her in her 'real' life. Before long, Mima's co-stars and collaborators start turning up murdered, and she finds herself haunted by visions of her former self – and increasingly unable to distinguish fact from fiction.

Based on a 1991 novel of the same name by Yoshikazu Takeuchi, though updated to reflect the new digitally connected world, *Perfect Blue* is not only concerned with how the self is perceived by others but also with the then new creation of online personae. It's an unsettling work, a psychological thriller about personal identity, fame and reality that is disturbingly prescient about the emboldening anonymity granted by the web. When Mima naively corresponds with her crazed stalker Me-Mania, she has little sense of the danger she is putting herself in – with hindsight, perhaps a lesson for us all.

Perfect Blue was only the first of Kon's films to blur the lines between dream and reality. His second project *Millennium Actress* (2001), in which a TV interviewer and his cameraman meet former actress Chiyoko, offers a mosaic-like tale of personal empowerment which is also a homage to classics of Japanese cinema. Leaping to and from the sets of Chiyoko's decades-spanning career with its unreliable narrator, it interweaves memories with fantasies and desires – in many ways it is a counterpoint to Mima's odyssey in *Perfect Blue*.

In 2003 Kon made the underrated John Ford pastiche *Tokyo Godfathers*, and in 2006 he made an even more head-on attempt at breaking apart the subconscious via the hallucinatory world of *Paprika*, a film with a matryoshka-doll-like plot in which dreams can be rummaged through to unearth repressed urges and manias (it was reportedly a key influence on Christopher Nolan's 2010 *Inception*).

Kon died aged only 46 in 2010, after just one intensely creative decade of making features. But starting with *Perfect Blue*, he injected a unique vision into anime, and a run of lasting inquiries into the murky regions of the human mind.

Serena Scateni, *Sight & Sound*, Summer 2020

A contemporary review

Perfect Blue could almost be the Kylie Minogue story in reverse. Its heroine Mima abandons pop for a career in a television soap, not only alienating the male fans of her squeaky-clean, white-knickered past, but causing her former

self to return as a vengeful succubus. The film's most telling images of fan fantasy revolve around Mimaniac, a dead-eyed ghoul cupping his hand to make it seem as if Mima is dancing in his palm.

In narrative terms, Satoshi Kon's *anime* doesn't wholly make sense. The phantom Mima seems to be at once the ex-singer's own psychic projection and someone else. But *Perfect Blue* has much to say about fame as an addiction for star and audience – a mutual dependency heightened these days by the internet. To know herself, Mima has to read her own diary as compiled by a psychotic fan. In essence, *Perfect Blue* is a traditional *doppelgänger* nightmare. Mima's artificial pop self – one of three near-identical fluffy Lolitas that comprise Cham – revolts by taking on a life of its own, and all Mima can do is guiltily suffer its taunts, while trying to exorcise it in her new soap role. It's no accident that Mima's television character is dressed as a soft-porn version of the Cham look in her rape scene.

Satoshi and screenwriter Sadayuki Murai develop a complex structure for Mima's psychosis, interleaving layers of the real with Mima's dreams and the appropriately named show *Double Bind*. In one scene from the series, it seems that Mima's character Yoko is suffering from multiple-personality disorder, and is convinced that she's really Mima – a baffling moment soon revealed as only a provisional representation of Mima's predicament.

Elsewhere, the carpet is pulled from under our feet several times in quick succession. A traumatic scene proves to be a dream as Mima wakes, but that reality is collapsed in turn as Mima wakes yet again in a replay of the same scene – a brilliant use of the hallucinatory repetitiveness of commercial animation.

The reality-dream divide is memorably worked out in the images. Satoshi – a manga artist who worked on *Roujin Z* – goes for a flat, flimsy look, often reducing background figures to faceless cut-outs, but dropping in jolts of visual complexity, quoting pop and manga images as manufactured product. At one point, an excessively baroque flash of manga art – a generic big-eyed space girl – invades the screen, looking much more three-dimensional than the film's real world. The execution becomes a complex metaphor for Mima's reality, in which the everyday becomes a colour-drained place of exile from the pop universe. This dilemma is resolved in a bizarre conclusion, as Mima simply exchanges one kind of stardom for another: a career in soaps hardly seems the best way to get a purchase on reality. Even so, *Perfect Blue* is a delirious, culturally astute invention, and you can't help thinking it would make instructive viewing for former-Spice Girl Geri Halliwell.

Jonathan Romney, *Sight and Sound*, August 1999

PERFECT BLUE (PÂFEKUTO BURÛ)

Directed by: Satoshi Kon
Production Company: Rex Entertainment Co Ltd
Filmed in association with: Kotobuki Seihan Printing Co., Ltd., Asahi National Broadcasting, Fangs Co., Ltd.
Executive Producers: Koshiro Kanda, Yuichi Tsurumi
General Producer: Takeshi Washitani
Producers: Hitomi Nakagaki, Yoshihisa Ishihara, Yutaka Togo, Masao Maruyama, Hiroaki Inoue
Planning: Koichi Okamoto, Yoshikazu Takeuchi
Production Manager: Mitsusuke Hayakawa
Project Advisers: Katsuhiko Otomo, Toshio Funakawa, Atsushi Naito
Unit Director: Ko Matsuo
Screenplay: Sadayuki Murai
Based on the novel by: Yoshikazu Takeuchi
Based on character design by: Hisashi Eguchi
Director of Photography: Hisao Shirai
CGI Production: Iwao Yamaki, Tsuneo Maeda, Masafumi Otsune
CGI Production in association with: Imagica D-Shop, Animation Stuff Room, Satellite, Marcus
Character Designers: Hideki Hamazu, Satoshi Kon
Animation Director: Hideki Hamazu
Animation Studios: Mad House, Oniro
Photography: Studio Cosmos, Tetsuo Daito, Motoaki Ikegami, Katsunori Maehara, Yoichi Kuroda, Hiroshi Noguchi, Shinji Ikegami, Naohisa Haijima, Takashi Shimada, Toshikazu Hisano, Kouichi Furusawa, Soji Yazawa, Kanae Hirano, Kazumi Miyata, Masafumi Awakara, Tomohiro Nishiyama, Norizaku Yamaguchi, Yuki Katsuta, Kumiko Dei
Special Effects: Shoko Sanada, Visual Workshop
Editor: Harutoshi Ogata
Art Director: Nobutaka Ike
Music: Masahiro Ikumi (Office 93)
Choreographer: Izumi
Sound Director: Masafumi Mima
Recorded by: Fujio Yamada

Voice Cast:

Junko Iwao (*Mima*)
Rika Matsumoto (*Rumi*)
Tsuji Shinpachi (*Takodoro*)
Masaaki Okura (*Uchida*)
Yosuke Akimoto (*Tejima*)
Akira Shiota (*Shibuya*)
Hideyuki Hori (*Sakuragi*)
Emi Shinohara (*Eri*)
Masashi Ehara (*Murano*)
Kiyonobu Harita (*director*)
Toru Hurusawa (*Yada*)
Shiho Niiyama (*Rei*)
Emiko Furukawa (*Yukiko*)
Aya Hara
Shin'ichirô Miki
Hitoshi Yamanoi
Megumi Tano
Takashi Nagasaki
Akio Toyama
Osamu Hosoi
Koichi Tochika
Emi Motoi
Soichiro Hoshi
Noriaki Taniyama
Shocker Ono (*M.C.*)
Shocker Ono, Loft Plus, One Brothers (*audience*)
Makoto Kitano (*special appearance*)
Kaori Minami (*special appearance*)

Japan 1998
81 mins

CONTEMPORARY ANIME AUTEURS

Your Name (Kimi no Na wa)

Sun 1 May 12:30, 18:00 (BFI IMAX)

The Girl Who Leapt through Time (Toki o Kakeru Shôjo)

Sun 1 May 14:45; Sat 28 May 14:50

Weathering with You (Tenki no Ko)

Sun 1 May 15:15, 20:30 (BFI IMAX)

Tokyo Godfathers (Tôkyô Goddofâzâzu)

Sun 1 May 18:00; Sat 28 May 12:30

Perfect Blue (Pâfekuto Burû)

Mon 2 May 18:40; Sat 14 May 20:45

The Place Promised in our Early Days (Kumo no Mukô, Yakusoku no Basho)

Tue 3 May 18:00; Sun 22 May 15:00

5 Centimeters per Second (Byôsoku 5 Senchimêtoru) + The Garden of Words (Kotonoha no Niwa)

Tue 3 May 20:45; Sat 21 May 17:50

Millennium Actress (Sennen Joyû)

Wed 4 May 20:55; Sat 7 May 11:50;

Mon 23 May 18:15 (BFI IMAX)

Summer Wars (Samâ Uôzu)

Sat 7 May 20:45; Sat 28 May 18:00

Paprika (Papurika)

Fri 13 May 20:40; Wed 18 May 20:45

Wolf Children (Ôkami kodomo no Ame to Yuki)

Sat 14 May 17:40; Sat 28 May 20:40

ANIME CLASSICS PART 1

Tekkonkinkreet (Tekkon kinkurîto)

Sun 1 May 12:10; Thu 5 May 20:50

The Tale of the Princess Kaguya (Kaguya-hime no Monogatari)

Tue 3 May 14:00; Tue 3 May 17:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Akira

Tue 3 May 20:30; Mon 23 May 15:00; Mon 23 May 20:30 (all BFI IMAX)

Lupin the 3rd: The Castle of Cagliostro (Kariosutoro no Shiro)

Wed 4 May 14:30; Tue 31 May 20:45

Fullmetal Alchemist the Movie: Conqueror of Shamballa

(Gekijô-ban Hagane no Renkinjutsushi: Shanbara o Yuku Mono)

Fri 6 May 21:00; Mon 9 May 20:40

Memories (Memorîzu)

Sun 15 May 12:00; Tue 24 May 20:40

Grave of the Fireflies (Hotaru no Haka)

Thu 19 May 18:00 + intro by Alex Dudok de Wit, author of BFI Film

Classics: Grave of the Fireflies; Fri 27 May 20:45

This season was co-programmed by writer and academic Hanako Miyata



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