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Japanese Popular Culture and Character Fashioning

The Quest for Subjective Agency in the Animated Films, *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* and *Perfect Blue*

Mio Bryce and John Stephens
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The Quest for Subjective Agency in the Animated Films, *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* and *Perfect Blue*

Mio Bryce and John Stephens

**Introduction**

What constitutes and/or determines one person’s identity and uniqueness in the discourses of Japanese popular culture? Are individuals attributed with a potential for self-fashioning in dialogue with their surrounding community, or are they rather interpellated by social formations and influences? Situating narratives within the prevailing pressures to conform which are imposed intentionally or unintentionally on individuals in Japanese society, and the individuals’ internalised conflicts over their identities, this paper contrasts how Japanese animations, *Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* (1984 hereafter *Nausicaä*) and *Perfect Blue* (1998) produce the characterisation of the principal female characters, Nausicaä and Mima respectively, in terms of subjectivity and abjection. Both films were based on earlier written texts (manga and novel), but discussion in this paper will focus only on the animations.

The two films represent a world under threat. *Nausicaä* is a post-disaster narrative, set in a remote future in which Earth has been laid waste, a thousand years earlier, by a global war deploying “God Soldiers”, monstrous biotechnological weapons capable of unlimited destruction. *Perfect Blue* is a contemporary dystopian narrative, set in a postmodern Tokyo in which subjective integrity or agency are denied. In the earlier film, Nausicaä displays strong integrity of identity. She presents as a young yet resourceful leader of the Valley of Wind, a small, somewhat utopian community constantly resisting the encroaching disintegration and destruction of the Fukai, or fungi forests (the Sea of Corruption). With her sympathy for marginalised existences and her telepathic ability, Nausicaä functions as a mediator between humans and the Fukai, especially through her ability to communicate with the Ohmu, huge beetle-like insects which are its dominant life forms. Nausicaä accomplishes the mediation when, risking her life as a catalyst, reconciliation between humans and Fukai is established and a mutually agreed boundary is determined for future coexistence.

The metafictive element of *Perfect Blue* — that is, the self-conscious attention to processes of representation in the initially disastrous attempt to transform Mima from pop-idol to actress — accentuates body as social production. Whether as lead singer in a look-alike girl group, or uttering lines written for her by a less than

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competent screen writer, she is nothing more than a body under constant social surveillance and upon which is inscribed a series of events which produce a dissociated Self in a state of perpetual disintegration. The opening stage performance offers the body as a kind of “innocent” spectacle (the girlish body), with the erotic focus being the exposed flesh between stocking tops and skirt; the need for “exposure” to boost the acting career subsequently leads to the display of the naked, womanly body. The beginning of the disintegration of the body is formally marked by a letter “bomb” that explodes during Mima’s first scene as an actress, but has been anticipated in the only line assigned to her — “Excuse me, who are you?”. The disintegration is externalised by the multiple deaths that occur around her. Furthermore, Mima is dangerously influenced by her role as the psychotic Yoko in the TV drama, “Double Bind”: she develops the personality dissolution attributed to her character, and this spills over into her struggle against an illusory, virtual Mima (hereafter V-Mima) who represents the pop-idol self. The story ends, however, with Mima asserting her new persona as an independent actor, which she achieves by defining the former mask of the pop-idol Mima as a V-Mima (that is, devoid of subjective agency), identifying it with the delusional mentality of Rumi, Mima’s sub-manager, and abjecting it. Wholeness is produced narratively by projecting the identity split outwards and disclosing that the truly abjected character is Rumi, not Mima herself.

Mirrored Worlds

The worlds of Nausicaä and Mima represent a stunning contrast in almost every detail. The former conveys Miyazaki Hayao’s clear ethical message, whereas the latter has been intentionally constructed as evasive and equivocal. Both engage in detailed depiction although differently: Nausicaä employs fantastic and nostalgic images of beauty and human goodness, whilst in Perfect Blue Kon Satoshi combines realistic details (e.g., things in Mima’s room) and rather ugly, distorted figures to convey an ambience of reality. The colour ‘blue’ functions symbolically in each, but in contrasting ways: in Nausicaä, it metonymically signifies the connection between Nausicaä and nature, the Ohmu, and the healer of the injured earth, particularly the deep blue of her clothes when, in the climactic scene, they are dyed by a young Ohmu’s blood; whereas in Perfect Blue it is a metaphor for a depressed state of mind, the absolute disintegration and dispersal of the self, alienated from nature and locked within an artificial, illusional, psychotic world.

Nausicaä presents its world with intense clarity, integrity and linearity in spite of the complex, detailed illustrations, the story line, characters’ personalities and their interrelationships. There is consistent logic and realism of outlook underpinning the fantastic perspectives of the post-apocalyptic world, as evidenced by the hopelessness experienced by Nausicaä and her community in response to the invasion of the valley by the militaristic Kushana, princess of the Torumekian Empire. There is no inhabitant who shows, at least overtly, any mental disorder. Even eccentric behaviours are overtly motivated: Nausicaä hysterically kills soldiers, yet it is because they have killed her father, Jil, and she subsequently becomes appalled and frightened by her potential madness and capacity for homicidal mayhem; Asbel’s air attack upon Kushana’s forces is in revenge for the destruction of his country, Pejite; and Kushana hates the Fukai, as she has lost her arm in battles against it. There are no villains or sadistic characters who cause
harm to others for the sake of inflicting pain or asserting power. It is a remarkably stable sphere.

One reason that Nausicaä’s world is so stable is the clear limitation of human power, visually and physically represented by the ever-encroaching Fukai. People live in a restricted environment, as visually represented in the physical condition of Jil and other old men. Such obviously defined limitations make people humble, yet dignified, with a clear understanding of their positions and what they can do and what they cannot. Knowledge about their limitations prevents them from being overwhelmed by endless uncertainties, fear and madness, and furnishes an existential logic for survival through cooperation and brings discipline into the relationship between humans and non-humans, as common inhabitants of the limited world. Thus the presence of the Fukai is not only a physical visualisation of what they have to confront, but may also stand for the unbounded world of unconsciousness.

In contrast, in Mima’s Tokyo everything is ambiguous, discursive, illusional and unreliable. Things are unable to keep their shapes and meanings. The boundaries between the real and the virtual, the exterior and the interior, oneself and the other, yesterday and today, are all blurred and diffused. Even time does not flow forward smoothly, but moves in a spiral, with many flashbacks. Respect for authenticity is erased and replaced by a strong preference for visual representation, which is arbitrary and easily manipulated. People are interpellated by the social demand for conformity and thus circumstantially appropriate ‘role-play’ whereby the commodification of themselves is normalised along with an aggressive commercialism (e.g., Iida 2000). Mima and people around her (e.g., her manager Tadokoro, Rumi, the script writer and the photographer) are all of no more than mediocre ability, yet the absence of constraint impels them to a voracious pursuit of success: but success in the entertainment industry largely depends on luck, and popularity is confused with and mistaken for quality. In such circumstances, Mima’s undignified media exposure involving provocative nudity is imposed upon her, as ‘appropriate’.

Nausicaä’s world is characterised by directness, promoting sincerity and a balanced view. As a post-disaster world, it retains only some components of past technology, and while there is sufficient technology to create gunships, there are no means of telecommunication. People’s contact is immediate. This is why Yupa, Nausicaä’s mentor, travels so far to survey the current extent of the Fukai’s expansion. Similarly, the enemy is tangible, such as Kushana’s presence. The immediate contact with surroundings, either humans or non-humans, provides tangibility to the perspective of their world maintained in the Valley of the Wind. The community is aware of the world’s limits and therefore its preciousness. This understanding is also promoted by their lack of material goods and rather primitive lifestyle, somewhat similar to the pre-modern period, despite the setting in the distant future. Moreover, the inhabitants of the Valley of the Wind know that the valley and the winds from the ocean protect them from the poisonous air from the Fukai. Their view of nature is thus balanced by awe and appreciation, perhaps representing the Japanese traditional view of nature before the post-war period of rapid economic growth.

In contrast, in the contemporary Tokyo of Mima’s world people are connected by communication technologies. Letters, phones, fax and Internet are all employed, allowing anonymous strangers/stalkers to invade Mima’s personal life. Information
becomes an independent entity, alienating itself from reality. It is a realistic danger in today’s city life, particularly for a young woman living alone. Furthermore, the Internet symbolises the structure of the story, *Perfect Blue*, which expands like a web, unexpectedly linking originally unrelated incidents in different times and places and creating/adding new significances through a common image, much as keywords function within a data-base search engine. For example, Mima’s symbolic utterance “Who are you?” is repeated in various scenes, addressing different persons and intensifying her fear and uncertainty about what she cannot perceive.

The Valley of the Wind manifest itself spatially and metonymically as a site of discipline and power, and more specifically of the regulated body (with a strict regime of hygiene indicated by the eradication of threatening “spores”). The world is exposed to encroaching disintegration as the Fukai expands, and humans’ own will to power accelerates this process. This symbiosis affords a broad ecological analogy between a collapsing ecosystem and the dissociated self in a state of perpetual disintegration and the potential for its reintegration in a wider context. Nausicaä’s secret garden may signify a kind of heroic individuality, which breaks community rules but creates a cleaner domain, to achieve the ultimate goal, the solution for the rescue of their emaciated territory. Her communication with the Ohmu and research into the Fukai indicates a new interpretation of the boundary between humanity and nature, as the Fukai, which has been seen as an embodiment of evil, is discovered to be the cleanser of the poisoned earth, whilst the humans’ willingness to again unleash the destructive power of the God Soldier reveals their potential for completing the destruction of the earth. When, at the climax of the film, Nausicaä places her own body in the path of the stampeding Ohmu, just as the imperfectly reanimated God Soldier disintegrates, and she is then brought back from apparent death by the healing touches of the Ohmu, the film announces the end of the hostile dichotomy between the human and natural worlds and hence reconciliation and a search for a new coexistence.

In contrast, the world of *Perfect Blue* proliferates in the schizophrenic, delusional mental sphere of the postmodern city, dominated by its artificial, virtual reality and alienated from nature. This story is extremely complex, ambiguous and equivocal, as if it is constructed out of various tangled Möbius strips, of contradicting visions and logics of dual personality, of Doppelgänger and spirit possessions, stressing the unreliability of boundaries of any kinds, particularly between the human psyche and the world. Mima’s life is controlled by the gaze and surveillance of anonymous others — intangible and susceptible to manipulation. The obscurity of the viewers increases her fear, leading to the disintegration of the world and herself. This is incorporated and accelerated by the advanced communication technology, which deconstructs authentic communication and replaces it with artificial, performative communication. Heavy borrowing from the slasher-film genre accentuates the threatening nature of invisible surveillance. Mima’s identity is represented not as intrinsic but as moulded and constructed by the gazes of ‘others,’ including herself as an audience. Her struggle with identity, which may be read as her journey into the depth of
unconsciousness, seems to be at best ambiguously resolved at the film’s end with the reinstatement of her identity as a confident actress.3

Nausicaä, the Mediator

Nausicaä’s characterisation as an independent individual with integrity and self-esteem well supports Napier’s claim that Miyazaki created characters “more independent in thought and action from the group-orientated characteristics traditionally celebrated in Japanese culture” (2001:473). She accepts her role and responsibility as a leader/protector of the Valley of the Wind and tries hard to fulfil them. Although having a female figure, her asexual androgyneity is evident, affording her physical and psychological freedom. She wears girls’ clothes and behaves rather submissively in her castle, but is not restrained by gender and/or community orientated expectations. She embodies ideally compounded human qualities: femininity and masculinity, innocence and maturity, independence and compassion, intelligence and spirituality, and arts and nature. She refuses to accept the absolute dichotomy between human and non-human as inevitable and relates to each existence as individual (Inaba 1996). Her unprejudiced curiosity and undiscriminating openness embody a harmonious animism which enables her to stand firmly against the humans who indict the Fukai as the monstrous Other, despite the fact that the Fukai restores the earth damaged by humans. With her telepathic ability, she is like a ‘performing shaman’ able to know the truth and act as executor/mediator of the will of nature (Kitano 1998:155-6). Nausicaä’s messiah-like significance is suggested at the opening, when the visual epic of the battle between the humans and the Fukai ends with an angelic, feminine figure in a long blue dress, which is replaced by Nausicaä flying toward the Fukai. Nausicaä has been criticised as too ideal and unreal (e.g., Shimizu, 2001), but her behaviour and personality are rendered verisimilitudinous by Miyazaki’s careful mixture of realistic and fantastic details (Napier 2000:122; 135).

The first real test of Nausicaä’s leadership and strength occurs when a Torumekian cargoship crashes in the Valley of the Wind, bringing a chain of disasters because its cargo is the only remaining (proto-)God Soldier (kyoshinhei). Soon after, Kushana invades the valley, kills Nausicaä’s father, and announces her intention to revive the God Soldier to burn the Fukai. The valley is critically damaged with the loss of autonomy and later of the precious forests. A mass of dead moss-like insects, the tenacious mucilage from the spores on the dead insects, and the unformed body of the God Soldier are all vividly depicted and function as emblems of what is ugly, destructive and abjected. Nausicaä’s qualities of leadership reside in her ability to make careful observations and follow these with resolute and swift actions. Her reliability lies in her close, logical connection of gaze and action. She rushes to the burning aircraft and rescues the prisoner, Rastel. She leads the desperate eradication of the Fukai’s spores, assuring and encouraging her devastated people. She enables an injured insect to return home and gains the Ohmu’s recognition. Finding her father murdered, however, she loses her self-control and slaughters his killers, until Yupa interferes by letting her stab his arm, and the flow of his blood to her hand through her sword shocks her back into self-

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3 Her role here coincides with the slasher film character Carol Clover calls “the Final Girl”, the hero who at the close asserts her agency by overcoming the killer (1999, p.236).
reflection. This moment is her personal crisis of realising her own monstrousness. With Yupa’s support, she then recognises the danger that her people will be massacred and decides to surrender.

Nausicaä’s relationships with others are reciprocal, involving mutual effort and affection. She is constant with them through her everyday commitment and gains their trust. The injured Ohmu heals her, forgetting its own pain. At her departure, three young girls give her a bag of nutritious Chico nuts (which later save her and Asbel in the bottom of the Fukai). Nausicaä appreciates their collecting of the nuts. When they ask if she will really return soon, she asks them “Have I ever lied?” and the girls happily say, “No, never!” Three old men in captivity tell Kushana that Nausicaä is special, because she sincerely cares for her people; for example, she strokes their disabled, disfigured hands and says that she likes them, the beautiful, diligent hands. Their Japanese wording ‘washira no hime-sama’ (our princess) articulates their deep, warm feelings towards her and their pride that she is their leader.

Amongst Nausicaä’s diverse relationships, her communication with Ohmu is both spiritual and intimate. She admires the great Ohmu, but affectionately calls it ‘ii ko’ (good child) and omae (‘you’, used by the older/superior). She respects the Ohmu’s knowledge of everything in the Fukai and their determination to protect it from invaders. However, she also knows their destructive power and how in rage they forget themselves and continue to run until they are all dead (which may be analogous to her own state of mind when she kills Kushana’s soldiers). In short, Nausicaä views them as they are. The mutuality of her interaction is most impressively demonstrated when she stands with the baby Ohmu in front of the enraged, stampeding Ohmu. It has been proposed that her image implies an unintentional glorification of self-sacrifice (e.g., Ohtsuka 1984), especially if compared with the image of Japanese suicide squads in the Pacific War, whose acts had no realistic objective in terms of winning victory, but rather entailed the performative effect of their oath to the nation. This seems a far-fetched interpretation of Nausicaä’s act, however, and the perceived similarity lies only in the element of self-sacrifice. It is also unclear whether Nausicaä is actually depicted as dead and reborn, as often claimed (e.g., McCarthy 1999). What seems ignored is the significance of the baby Ohmu in the scene. The confrontation with the enraged Ohmu is Nausicaä’s last solution once she has realised that the Ohmu have lost control over themselves and have lost sight of their purpose to reach the injured baby. The teamwork of Nausicaä and the baby Ohmu, standing side by side, is an ultimate expression of their bond. She is there to apologise and to plead with them not to attack the valley, but the main mediator is the Ohmu, as its tormented captivity had enraged the adults of its species. The two display no sign of fear, tension, sorrow or heroism, but only dignified serenity, suggesting their trust in the Ohmu. They unstoppable Ohmu sweep over and trample them, which is perceived as Nausicaä’s heroic death, although it appears an unfortunate consequence of the Ohmu’s delayed realisation of what the two are doing.

Reconciliation is manifested when the Ohmu’s angry redness is replaced by the blue of serenity. At the quiet centre of the herd, the young Ohmu extends its feelers to touch Nausicaä. The adult Ohmu raises her up, joined by others. Soon their numerous feelers form a golden field whereupon Nausicaä awakes. She is not surprised, but simply appreciates their treatment. She sees the baby Ohmu and, in relief, repeats “Thank you” to all the Ohmu. Their feelers particularly touch her leg.
and shoulder where she had been shot by Pejite’s soldiers, indicating that she was hurt but not dead and they know how she rescued the young one. Her recovery, signifying their mutual forgiveness, is reconfirmed by the tapestry image of a prophetic saviour, wearing foreign, blue clothes and coming down onto the golden field, as the old, wise Obaba-sama claims. Ohmu and people now coexist without fear or hostility. The film appears to carefully avoid suggesting that Nausicaä becomes a living god, however. Despite the mystic spectacle, Nausicaä is embraced by her fellow humans with pure joy and affection, not awe. Although her appearance in foreign blue clothes dyed with the Ohmu’s blood may echo a resonance of Otherness, perhaps of Japanese divine visitors (marebito), she returns to the valley as its core member.

Throughout the story, Nausicaä three times encounters the vision of a golden field in conjunction with Ohmu feelers. The first is when she is inspected by an Ohmu, and feels a sense of freedom as if her cap, mask and outer clothes are one by one taken away by a gentle breeze. She sees a golden field and a big tree. In contrast, the second vision is frightening. After falling into the depth of the Fukai, she dreams she is a young child summoned by her parents while she is gathering flowers in a golden field. Because she is concealing a baby Ohmu beneath her skirt, she does not go with them. Once the Ohmu is discovered, she is told that humans and Ohmu cannot live together and she appears as a helpless child unable to protect the Ohmu, in contrast to the dark shadow of a large adult. The dream reveals that she is the Other, confronting humans by taking the side of the Ohmu, the discriminated against and persecuted. In the final vision, raised up on the feelers of the Ohmu she is seen walking on a golden field under a blue sky. The happy song of the young Nausicaä signifies her overcoming of torn identities, between humans and nature. This is confirmed by the closing snapshots: the departure of the Ohmu, Kushana and her troops; Nausicaä making a new windmill, supervising children’s flying practice and greeting Yupa and Asbel. The story has begun with Yupa’s lonely visit to a deserted village but ends with him cheerfully going to search the Fukai with Asbel, indicating the formation of a wider community. The reintegration of the worlds of the human and nature is further symbolised by a sprout of the Chico, the tree which belongs to the valley, beside Nausicaä’s flying cap in the deep interior of the Fukai.

Mima, the Actor

Revolving around her transformation from pop-idol to actress, Mima’s story presents an ambiguous and complicated psychodrama about the catastrophic disintegration of the self. At the beginning, she is presented with two subjective possibilities: one is to remain in her present sphere where she presents herself as pop-idol; and the other offers potential development of the self through an acting career. Her attempt to pursue the latter possibility is hampered in two ways — by her suppressed attachment to the former role, and by the despair of her fans, especially Rumi, and the marginalised, grotesque figure, Uchida (a.k.a. Mi-mania, the maniac fan of idol Mima). Their concerted resistance to her career change is manifested externally as a series of brutal murders and internally as the disintegration of Mima’s subjectivity. Mima is essentially an actor, with frail self-esteem and subjectivity, locked in the group-oriented society where group interest and pragmatism overpower individuals’ preferences. She performs any assigned
role, whether on stage, in TV drama, photo-studio or real life. Her lack of initiative emphasises the fragility and fluidity of the human psyche under social pressure. Mima initially embodies ‘the docile body’ in Foucault’s term yet reveals its characteristics as a fluid and ambivalent site, rather than a tangible entity, perhaps close to the image of a ‘volatile body’ (Grosz 1994).

Reflecting the kawaii (cute) culture prevailing in Japan since the 1980s (e.g., Kinsella 1995), friendly cuteness, an ingenious combination of artificiality and naturalness/familiarity, has been regarded as an essential factor of pop-idols. Mima’s presentation — cute, lively, friendly and slightly careless — perfectly fits the role. A pop-idol is assembled as a commodity, subject to her age (Nakamori 1991). Adult beauty and musical perfection are not sought as they may alienate fans, so Mima’s childish mannerisms, high-pitched, girlish speaking voice and mistakes in her songs are thus rather artful. Such behaviour ensures her dependence, as with her affected naivety in seeking Rumi’s help to set up an Internet connection. When Mima is alone, she is far more mature, sensible and efficient. From the outset, her personality is disparate, slipping between the childish coquettishness of her doll-like persona and the realistic face, gestures and behaviour of a young woman coping with life in a large city.

Mima’s roles are dictated by socio-cultural context. Her transformation to actor and the concomitant sexualisation of her image are instigated by her manager and, despite her reluctance, she accepts these changes as her own choice. Her acceptance is predictable, as people are trained by ‘friendly authoritarianism’ (Sugimoto 1997) to demonstrate their social appropriateness in the vertical power dynamics (Nakane 1967). If Mima wants to survive in the industry, she has to accept whatever roles are allocated her. Her attachment to the pop-idol role and her unwillingness to change must be concealed. Her uncertainty is elaborately presented where she faces the audience and sits between the reflections (on a glass cabinet) of Tadokoro and Rumi arguing about her future (Aso 1998). Insisting on pragmatism, Tadokoro refuses Rumi’s suggestion that Mima work both as singer and actor. He argues that she has little future as a pop-idol because of her age (21) and the limited success of her group, Cham, whereas she has an aptitude for acting.

As her subjectivity becomes fragmented by the attempt at career change, which suspends her between the roles of past and future, Mima is subjected to anonymous intrusive voyeurism. As Aso claims (and Kon agrees), Mima’s vulnerability to voyeuristic gazes is symbolised by her fish tank, which is shaped like a television screen. On the night of her final performance with Cham, her personal space, her flat, is violated by an anonymous, offensive telephone call and a fax repeating the word, ‘Betrayer!’ These initial assaults are followed by a letter bomb and a website, “Mima’s Room”, which publishes the details of her everyday life. The anonymy of the invaders threatens Mima’s security and self-confidence, upsetting the boundaries between the external and the internal worlds, and the real and imaginary. The shattering of her subjectivity under the obscene voyeuristic gaze is furthered when she acts the victim of a gang-rape scene and is induced to pose for nude photos. Under the bright lights, the rape scene requires two takes, so she twice has to expose herself as a helpless prey to the gaze not only of rapists/actors, but also of people in the control room, and finally of audiences. Despite demonstrating professional control during the performance, the damage she suffers is embodied as V-Mima, who appears on the glass of the train door on the way to the studio and states her opposition to the work. Mima ignores the apparition as
illusion and completes the filming. That self-concern is equated with selfishness exhibits how deeply she is restrained by the Japanese collective mentality. Her self-criticism and suppressed anger burst out when she later finds all of her fish dead (although this is also an illusion). She becomes violent and shouts, “Of course, I didn’t want to do that! But I cannot say No to others who have done so much for me!” The discourse delineates the inner conflict between her desire and her sense of obligation to her managers, which functions as her super-ego. V-Mima’s re-emergence at this point from the wall where the Cham poster was previously displayed confirms that she is the materialisation of Mima’s suppressed yearning for the role of pop-idol. Moreover, that she appears to have an actualised embodiment indicates that Mima’s internal conflict is now externalised.

The gap between Mima’s body and inner being is further widened by the photo session, to the point where the actor role begins to assert its own identity. Her body becomes a site of multiple Mimas, besides the already independent V-Mima. Abandoned by both the virtual and the actor Mima, she expresses her despair when, embracing her betraying body in the bath, she shouts “bakayaro (Busters)” into the silencing water.

The struggle for subjective agency climaxes when, having escaped an attempt on her life by Uchida (a tool of V-Mima and hence possibly another illusion), Mima encounters Rumi apparently doubling herself and V-Mima, although in her blurred and doubled vision V-Mima seems more real than Rumi. Possessed by V-Mima, Rumi violently attacks Mima but eventually exhausts herself and has to be rescued from imminent death by Mima. Mima’s face at the moment she rescues Rumi is sane, resolute, mature and lucid, as if she has woken from a long nightmare. But does this final self-control constitute subjective agency? In a brief epilogue, Mima, now a well-known actor, is shown visiting Rumi in a mental hospital. Her response to the information that Rumi most of the time thinks she is the idol Mima seems ambiguous. Is she visiting her insane friend, her own past, the idol Mima, or even the recent Mima who has struggled to become a serious actor? The mystery is compounded when she overhears a passing nurse remark that she is a look-alike of the famous actress Kirigoe Mima, and she responds with a smile and the mysterious utterance “I am the real one”. Her smile, however, is like V-Mima’s and does not contain the unaffectedness and vulnerability the real Mima shows in private.

Mima accomplished the metamorphosis initially imposed upon her, and those who tried to control her have all been erased: four men have been murdered and the eyes of the bodies stabbed, symbolising punishment for their visual violation of Mima; and Rumi seems to have been accused of the murders but has gone unpunished due to her insanity. Ultimately, the person who benefits from the murders is Mima. The whole scheme remains unarticulated. Is V-Mima projected jointly by Mima, Rumi and Uchida? Who is the real killer? Does Mima’s spirit possess others to kill? Does Mima have a dual personality and her other self kills or controls others to do so? Or, does Mima’s Doppelgänger act independently and control others? Or, does Rumi willingly become V-Mima to achieve her own dream? In any case, only Mima survives, gaining her freedom and success. Which Mima survives is another question. Her enigmatic smile at the close is reminiscent of a blood stained mask from the scene in which the photographer is murdered. The mask, resembling a female mask used in the Noh plays, has only a vague/blank face but enables emotions to be expressed eloquently by means of
subtle gestures. It may indicate that the new Mima is only another mask and she is destined to live in a “perpetual present” (Fredric Jameson, quoted from Pandey 2001), by repeating transformations with different masks.

Conclusion

*Nausicaä of the Valley of Wind* and *Perfect Blue* ultimately celebrate that (paradoxical) version of agency whereby an individual of her own volition pursues the path that society assigns her. The films contrastively explore the intense, profound dialogue and interdependence between an individual and her surroundings within a dominant pressure for social conformity. Nausicaä and Mima are attributed with considerable potential for self-expression. Nausicaä’s independence deconceptualises a notion of girl/woman in Japanese society, whereas Mima’s passive femininity intensifies the notion to the extent that it threatens her existence. Living in an ecologically hostile world, Nausicaä possesses an intact subjectivity and engages in active communication with her external world, achieving resolution of the conflict between humans and nature. In contrast, living in a city with a strong sense of alienation and performative artificiality, Mima lacks self-confidence and allows external forces to govern her life, suppressing her individualistic desire as ‘selfish’. As a result, she creates the Other within herself. The projection of V-Mima is a desperate manifestation of a critically injured subjectivity that is very real for many Japanese people. Her eventual metamorphosis is a sublation of her split selfhood, although its ambiguity indicates the superficiality of her reintegrated identity and the continual makeover of her persona in response to the incessant changes demanded by society.

Bibliography


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