

Between Dreams and Realities: An Analysis of Propaganda Themes and Auteurship in Satoshi Kon's 'Paprika' (2006)

Propaganda is arguably one of the most dangerous forms of manipulation out there. But how do we define it? And what makes it so dangerous?

Propaganda is defined as *“information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause or point of view”*. Propaganda is used in a multitude of ways, such as through film, advertising, and even social media. But just how far does it really go? And how can the average person ensure that they are not being affected or influenced by it?

Paprika (2006), a Japanese animated science fiction film directed by Satoshi Kon, based on the novel Paprika (1993) written by Yasutaka Tsutsui, explores these themes of manipulation and the influence of technology on society. The film involves a device, known as the ‘DC mini’ which can allow external people to see into people’s dreams, allowing them to explore their unconscious thoughts. However, before this device can be authorised for usage, it gets stolen, and the thief uses it to trap people in their dreams and render them into unreachable comas. *“Renowned scientist, Dr. Atsuko Chiba, enters the dream world under her exotic alter-ego, code name "PAPRIKA," in an attempt to discover who is behind the plot to undermine the new invention.”*

The DC mini can be used as a metaphor for external sources foraging into people’s minds and influencing and manipulating their beliefs. This is shown by the villain of the story, and the man who stole the DC Mini being none other than the CEO and chairman of the company overseeing the production of it. Additionally, he was exposed for stealing the DC mini for profit, which is what many companies and governments are thought of doing in the media to influence and manipulate people by exposing them to propaganda.

Auteur theory is the theory in which the director is viewed as the driving creative force in a film or motion picture. It became a rising theory in the late 1940s in France, introduced by American film critic Andrew Sarris, who created the theory based on ideas from two theorists Andre Bazin and Alexandre Astruc³. An example of this theory in accordance with the movie Paprika is that the director, Satoshi Kon, was well known for his use of the recurring theme of blending fantasy and reality.



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Pictured left is a still from Paprika of the protagonist, Paprika, holding the device the ‘DC Mini’

One could argue, according to this theory,

¹ https://2.bp.blogspot.com/-9a6zcANsOYA/WhGl6a1XJ5I/AAAAAAAAAKzw/hbA92i_LtmwceZQOsW_PIG7jadoF6QWSgCLcBGAs/s1600/paprkiaFT.png

that Auteurship is a form of propaganda, as it is a director using their own ideas and subliminal messaging, to influence the audience of their motion picture.

So, is this considered propaganda? Roland Barthes (1915-1980), in *The Death of the Author* (1967) questions where the meaning of the text resides. Is it determined by the author, the reader, or by some sort of external force? Is the meaning of the text already decided before the audience gets exposed to it?

Can dictators be considered Authors? And their manipulative propaganda be nothing but a product of Auteurship? If this is true then why can't we as an audience, choose to interpret their work differently? Why can't we decide whether we want to be manipulated by their works? And why does propaganda get so far, when it's so obvious to everybody what it really is?

The Power of Film Propaganda by Nicholas Reeves (2004) discusses this phenomenon, and in one of many arguments concludes that propaganda is *'the deliberate attempt by the few to influence the attitudes and behaviour of the many by the manipulation of symbolic communication'* he summarises that while many forms of media do have many active commands and intentions for its audience, propaganda is about the intent. *'Those who engage in propaganda will always understand that this is indeed the project on which they have embarked'*. However, history disproves this. Later in his book Reeves comments on how in the Soviet Union, the way the leaders tried to make life under the Soviet Union more 'appealing' was by recreating the avant-garde films that the people in Moscow loved to watch, albeit with a little bit of a propaganda twist. Unfortunately for them, their films were just too complicated and 'incomprehensible to peasant audiences. The notion that *'film'* is a universal language is misplaced. The language of film must be learned like any other language' This concept disregards Reeves's previous point, as while intent may be necessary in propaganda, it still requires its audience to be able to translate the message, in order to be manipulated by it. ²

Pictured below is an 'iPad kid' from a news article discussing this concept.



This seems to be the reason why nowadays, there seems to be an increase in extremist opinions in young people. They are so susceptible to propaganda and media manipulation, due to the fact that they grew up with it all and grew up learning it as their first language. They know how to translate film, and know, even subconsciously, how to translate the messages being given to them,

through social media, and advertising. It's seen throughout the up-and-coming phenomena of 'iPad kids' – kids who grow up knowing technology even better than their parents do, so it's no wonder that political and extremist groups are taking advantage of their advanced knowledge and using it to manipulate their opinions and guiding them with propaganda.

² <https://www.cbsnews.com/minnesota/news/kids-and-ipads/>

Politicians and extremist groups have had their eye on media manipulation for a while. Leslie (2004) in *Hollywood Flatlands* quotes ‘fascists had their eye on Hollywood. It had been described by the bomber and filmist Victor Mussolini as the “centre of political agitation against the fascist idea”’ Furniss (2009) states ‘the communists were determined to get their hands on the movies.’ Even back then, when film and movie culture was still developing, skilled manipulators and propagandists knew that they could use this to their advantage. The question was, how to get a step in? And yet they managed. For example, Disney was well known for including racist and antisemitic stereotypes in his animations. By inserting their own political opinions and ideologies, directors could now influence the younger generation – who were typically the ones more open to looking at this new technology - into developing similar opinions and ideologies, as what they saw from these films, was negative stereotypes about Jewish people, and people of colour in general. And if it’s in the films, or in the newspapers, or in advertisements that people are exposed to basically 24/7, it must be true!³



154. Иванов В. Ленин — жил, Ленин — жив, Ленин — будет жить! Вл. Маяковский. 1967

*Communist
propaganda poster
from 1967*

Regardless of whether people are manipulated by propaganda, that should not be entirely put to blame for their ideologies. Even if a person is manipulated, they are still responsible for their beliefs, and the way that they act on these beliefs. According to Beller (2015) ‘by suggesting antisemitism is a disease and an irrational force of nature, it suggests that those who persecuted Jews were simply infected and not morally responsible for their actions’.

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*German soldiers reacting to footage
taken in concentration camps.*

if someone is intentionally surrounding themselves with people who think a certain way, they will start thinking that way, as they have no ‘conscience’ to dismiss the ‘incorrect’ or ‘questionable’ comments they make. Just as Reeves stated, a person who doesn’t know film language cannot be manipulated by it. Therefore, a person can only be

³ <https://i.pinimg.com/originals/19/5c/07/195c0712f5aadcc770d6bf5dd227e58d.jpg>

⁴ <https://goodizen.com/german-soldiers-reacting-to-concentration-camp-footage-1945-2/>

manipulated and affected by propaganda if that is all they see, and they are not exposed to anything but that. By saying that the director is solely responsible for the meaning behind the film, it takes away autonomy from the audience, rendering them brainless zombies who only fill their head up from what they see, and rendering them blameless from the beliefs they take with them from the director.

⁵In order for a person to protect themselves from being exposed and influenced by propaganda and media manipulation, there needs to be an emphasis on education geared towards teaching how propagandists make use of emotive language and false information in order to manipulate people. Paprika is one of the few films that seems to attempt to educate people in this very way. While the film itself doesn't explicitly focus on propaganda, the way that it explores the psychological and societal implications of technology invites the audience watching the movie to reflect on the dangers of unchecked media manipulation, intrusion, and control of their private information, and minds. Because of this message that Satoshi Kon carries across, this film can serve as a cautionary tale on the responsibilities that come with advancing technology, and how it can have possible negative implications on our



A picture from a news article showing how Russia is using 'deepfakes', and AI technology to put fake videos of Ukraine's president on the internet.

society if we are not careful. This is seen in today's society, with the upcoming advancements that Artificial Intelligence has made. There is already propaganda using AI to generate fake images, and videos to incite fear into people, and persuade and manipulate them into believing things that aren't true, in order to put a certain political message across.

In conclusion, while propaganda is determined by the intent of the author, it is up to the audience to translate that message in the way that the author intended it. Even if a director wants to put across a political message, it is up to the audience to see that message, into the way the author intended it to be. This is why it is so important for each person to be wary of what they are exposed to, and to not put themselves into a place where propaganda is all they can see. In order to do so, we must educate society into recognising the difference between propaganda and reality, so that we can help stop the spread of fearmongering and political manipulation.

⁵ <https://globalnews.ca/news/8716443/russia-artificial-intelligence-deep-fakes-propaganda-war/>

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Satoshi Kon Wiki. (n.d.). *Paprika*. [online] Available at: <https://satoshikon.fandom.com/wiki/Paprika#:~:text=Renowned%20scientist%2C%20Dr.> [Accessed 27 Dec. 2023]. Renowned scientist, Dr. Atsuko Chiba, enters the dream world under her exotic alter-ego, code name 'PAPRIKA,' in an attempt to discover who is behind the plot to undermine the new invention.

The Editors of Encyclopedia Britannica (2017). auteur theory | Definition & Directors. In: *Encyclopædia Britannica*. [online] Available at: <https://www.britannica.com/art/auteur-theory> Auteur theory is the theory in which the director is viewed as the driving creative force in a film or motion picture. It became a rising theory in the late 1940s in France, introduced by American film critic Andrew Sarris, who created the theory based on ideas from two theorists Andre Bazin and Alexandre Astruc.

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AAGBYHjIICAgQABgWGB4yCAgJEAYFhgeqAIAAsAIA&sourceid=chrome&ie=UTF-
8 information, especially of a biased or misleading nature, used to promote a political cause
or point of view.

BA Animation Autumn Term 2023

Informed Practice Project Proposal (600 words)**1. Research Question and Project Rationale****What do you plan to research? How will you research it?
& why it is important to research this subject?**

I plan to research the phenomenon of the growing lack of nuance in today's society. It is important to research this as I feel that this is a subject that is often overlooked and not questioned.

Often, especially in the media, people are very quick to take sides, seeing their 'side' that they've picked as 100% right and only ever good, and refuse to see the opposite side as anything other than evil; and wrong.

As the lack of nuance and opportunity for people to see each other's points of view grows, we have begun to ignore the fact that most often conflicts and problems are often categorized and answered in shades of grey.

I will be researching this by looking into where this phenomenon started from, and how it grew into the polarizing binary that we see today. I will be looking into psychological studies and try to find research that both supports my question and denies my points. I will be researching both supporting and rejecting theories as this will help me to have a nuanced view of my work, so as not to be biased, regardless of my viewpoint on the matter.

I hope to be challenged when writing this essay, and to learn more information on what I am researching.

2. At least 5 keywords

Propaganda

Bias

Misinformation

Binary

Nuance

3. Situate your proposal in relation to key texts, issues, and debates.

Situate issues and debates in relation to key concepts and/or subject area. Name and explain authors relevance to your project proposal

Issues and debates in relation to my subject area:

- One could say that the only people having these opinions are a small minority – they just happen to shout the loudest.
- The concept of cognitive dissonance – this *is the perception of contradictory information and the mental toll of it.* – the effects of this is psychological stress. – this is why people react the way they do when they're told they're wrong.
- A lot of the polarizing and binary reactions can be explained by post traumatic trauma of colonization and generational trauma.
- Bias in the media has always been a thing and therefore is not really a good talking point as correlation does not necessarily equal causation.
- Good versus evil has always been a thing in literature – it can't just be specific events in history that contributed to it.
- It's only really been up and coming in the current generation – not the older ones.
- Good and evil don't really exist – people do recognize the shades of grey in between and saying they don't is a generalization.

4. Research Methodology and Analysis

Include names of case studies, images, material examples like artworks, games, or films.

Case studies can include:

- Stan twitter
- How World War 2 impacted how we as a society see good versus evil, mainly due to American propaganda on the war, including marvel and DC which both originated as forms of war propaganda
- American politics in general, democrats versus republicans, left versus right, man versus woman.
- A case of ego - Psychology, and how people do not like to be proven wrong, and when they are proven wrong, they automatically jump into their 'child brain' – resorting to insulting the person offering a differing opinion to theirs, or just saying 'nuh uh' or yelling at them.
- Numbering case studies of police forces jumping to conclusions based on 'race theory' and unconscious bias – this can relate to 'good v bad' and having different treatment for different races.
- Race theory
- Storybooks – we grow up reading these storybooks in which there is one evil and one good character – this went on to showing these cliches in movies and animations – which we show to kids, and yet still expect them to have nuanced opinions in how they see the world.
- 'The underdog can do nothing wrong' – each side is considered either completely good or completely bad.
- Israel versus Hamas, America versus Isis, God versus Satan: people ignore the flaws of those they support and watch them with rose colored glasses.

5. Bibliography (not included in word count)

Harvard Style – For guidance on how to reference correctly (using your UAL login)

see appropriate examples on <https://www.citethemrightonline.com/>

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