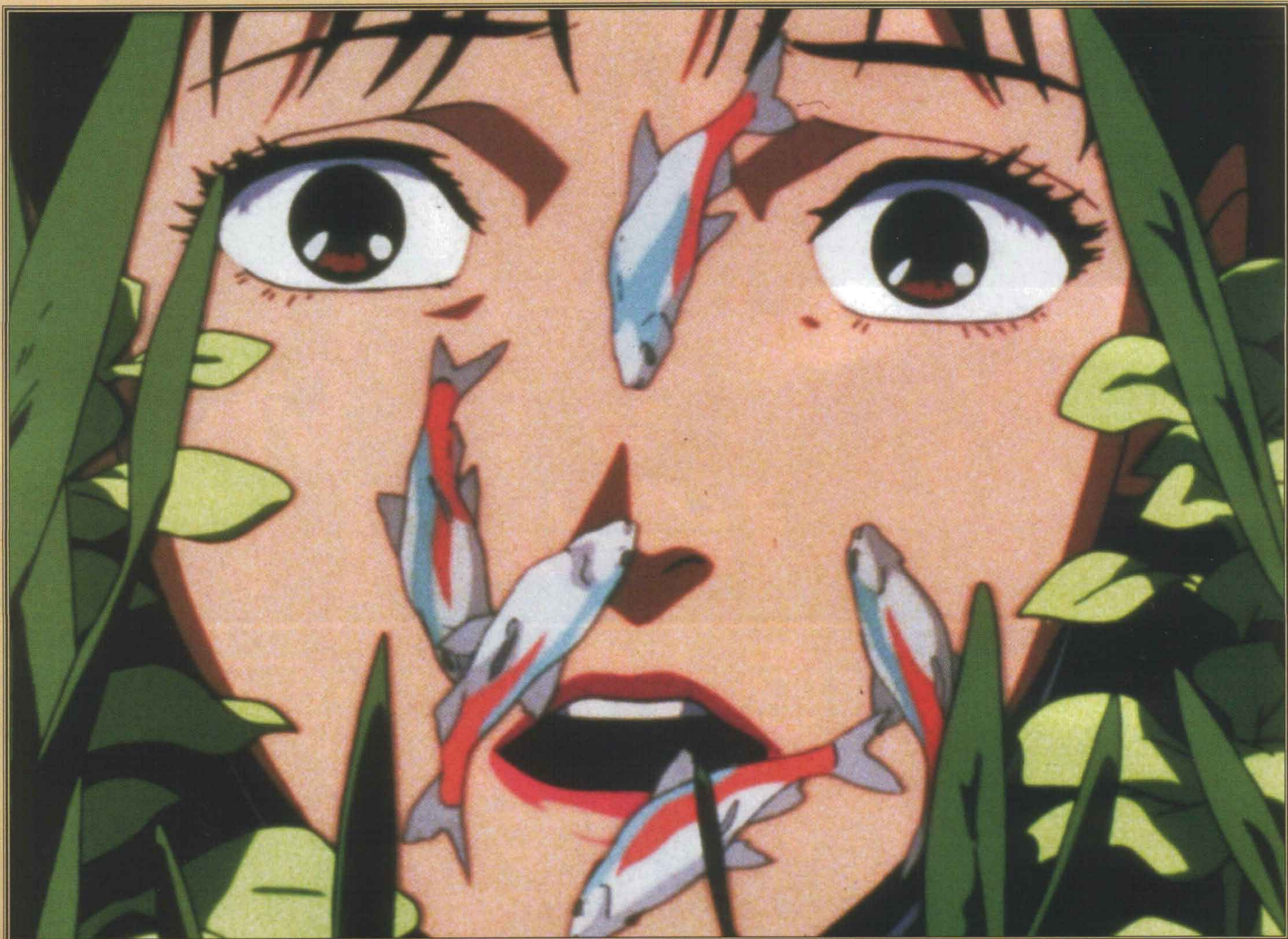


PERFECT BLUE

WHAT IS REAL AND WHAT IS ILLUSION?



WHERE EXACTLY DOES the line between reality and illusion blur? That's the question posed by Satoshi Kon's compelling psychological animated thriller, *Perfect Blue*.

Set in modern day Tokyo, the story follows the transformation of Mima Kirigoe (voiced by Junko Iwao of *Cardcaptor Sakura* and *Ceres: Celestial Legend*) from pop idol and lead singer of the pop group CHAM! to actress in a chilling, psychological soap opera called *Double Bind*.

Based on a novel by Yoshikazu Takeuchi, *Perfect Blue* is ideally suited to animation, rather than to the later live action movie version. This is mainly because it's so unclear what is real and what is the product of Mima's delusions.

But the film also has something to say about Japanese culture, a society that is full of pop idols who rise to fame. Many have a hard-core fan base of fiercely dedicated otaku, but then sink into obscurity or try to make the tenuous jump into acting. As Mima and her manager

Rumi struggle to come to terms with her new life as an actress, Mima watches, torn, as the remaining members of CHAM! achieve success without her.

"EXCUSE ME, WHO ARE YOU?"

At the same time, *Perfect Blue* also delves into otakuism and shows the ugly and unkempt Me-Mania convincing himself that the actress Mima is not the Mima-rin he adores, but an impostor; the real Mima – Mima the Idol – is channelled through the numerous pictures that adorn his room who speak in unison as he updates Mima's Room, a fansite that is written from his beloved idol's perspective.

Mention *Perfect Blue* and most will immediately think of the infamous strip club rape scene, which Mima (or Mima-rin to her devoted fans) shoots as part of the series *Double Bind*. Despite the fact the scene is ultimately fake, it is still powerful and is often cited by critics of anime as being an example of the genre's darker side.

Mima begins her acting career with only one line: "Excuse me, who are you?", but her role as

Yoko Takakura soon becomes one of the most important in the series as Yoko begins exhibiting multiple personalities and schizophrenic tendencies. The infamous rape scene marks the beginning of both Yoko and Mima's descent into madness. This is amplified by the website Mima's Room, which chronicles her movements with an unsettling note of voyeurism, as well as the murders of people associated with the *Double Bind* show.

But *Perfect Blue* has a stunning twist in its tale, Me-Mania is merely a delusional fan and someone much closer to Mima is trying to force her hand by messing with her mind. Add the eerie soundtrack, melding music with strange 2001: *A Space Odyssey*-like vocals, and it becomes chilling; the perfect aural representation of Mima's confusion.

Unsettling to the core, *Perfect Blue* is an excellent example of how powerful anime can be without resorting to pornography or needless graphic violence. The compelling story is one seldom seen in an animated feature film, making it must-see viewing for all anime fans.

LESLEY SMITH