

Balance - Kate Benitez

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Visual Arts: Anime Appreciation

When the twisted psychologist Himuro tells our protagonists "The sun during midday will light up the dark night. Night dreams of day. Light dreams of darkness. But the ignorant sun will chase away the darkness and burn the shadows... eventually burning itself!" (Kon), it sounds like most of the madness spouted by minds corrupted by the DC Mini. However, there is method in this particular piece of insanity. This is our first glimpse at Kon's message, which tells us that a form of balance in the world is necessary. Disguising philosophy in the ravings of a lunatic, Satoshi Kon points out that both the shadows and the light need each other, both to continue to exist and to give each other meaning. When one is purged or destroyed, according to *Paprika*, both are doomed. The concept of balance existing in the world shown in the film has been mirrored all over the world and all throughout time, and appears as a universal constant in the media, religion, and science.

For example, ancient Greek and Roman doctors operated under the idea of Humorism. They thought that each person had four fluids in their body, which would control both personality and health. The four fluids, black bile, yellow bile, water, and blood, existed in balance with each other. "When they are in the right condition we have health; when they are corrupted we have illness." (Richet) As someone fell ill, the principle was that the excessive humor had to be identified and then neutralized or counteracted in the body. When someone had too much blood, they were cut to let some of it out; when someone was choleric, the "warm and dry" humor, they were given foods that were considered "cold and moist" to provide balance. Humorism provided a notion of how the universe worked, and provided the idea that balance was ideal, and that death lay in disharmony, a message to be repeated eras later by Kon. Eventually, as mankind progressed and developed, Humorism was proven to be pseudo-science, and the theory fell out of use, to be replaced by more successful medical practices. Scientists, however, still clung to the idea of a system in balance, and it showed up in many other fields and disciplines.

A notable example of this is Le Chatelier's Principle, a chemical theory stating that systems in balance will naturally shift to keep themselves in equilibrium, even as they are affected by outside sources. This applies to both the states of matter and balanced chemical equations. If there is a set amount of liquid at a certain temperature, then that liquid will convert to gas as the temperature rises, to maintain the equilibrium. If the concentrations of a solution are altered, then a reaction will occur, forcing the solution back to a balanced state. Even if catalysts are introduced, the midpoint will still be reached, albeit it will take longer. Regardless, the occurrence of this phenomenon only serves to provide further evidence of Kon's message, that balance and equilibrium are a natural occurrence, and are the normal state for the world to exist in. The fundamental laws of science illustrate the occurrence of this idea, and it is mirrored in the human subconscious because of it.

Humans are fascinated by the duality in things, and use it to assign meaning to everything. In religion, there are divisions between right and wrong, creating Heaven and Hell, to illustrate both ideal and problematic behaviors. The pop culture ideals of magic provide two options, Black Magic and White Magic, representing the dark and evil, and the pure and just. The governments of the world create two states of being, law and anarchy, each existing as the other's antithesis. Yin and Yang, hot and cold, dark and light, all exist because we perceive a coexisting contrast. Each of the ideas is so intertwined with its opposite that they become nearly impossible to define without the use of its counterbalance. The concept of balance defines the human existence, and is depicted, sometimes subconsciously, everywhere, including by today's creative minds and artists.

Satoshi Kon does an expert job of portraying the duality in the film *Paprika*, both on a very obvious level, and on a more hidden one. In the plot, he shows the duality between waking and dreaming, and between *Paprika* and the Chairman. If a deeper look is taken, more balances become apparent, between Chiba and *Paprika*, sanity and madness, Konakawa, Tokita, and Osanai, and between past and future. Just as there are multiple levels and scales of equilibriums in the world, there are multiple levels of representation of it. Throughout the film, Kon continues to do an expert job of representing what already exists, and balances blatant messages with subtle hints perfectly. After the film ends, we are left with stark look at the mechanics of the world, and remnants of a strong picture of what happens when those mechanics are toyed with. Kon speaks with voice echoed by the world itself, telling his audience to be aware of the balance, because it is everywhere.

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