Paprika is a film about a technological device that allows humans to capture dreams with the intention to manipulate the subconscious and memories to cure mental sickness. Inevitably the characters engage in these dreams and the main character Paprika has an ability to engage in others’ dreams while she is awake as the protagonist, Chiba. This essentially becomes the primary conflict in that the device was stolen at an unstable state of security, and throughout the film an unknown antagonist is using the device to manipulate people’s mind while they are awake, essentially forcing them into a state of insanity to gain power. The film utilizes a complex method of viewer comprehension that forces the viewer to constantly question whether what is happening on screen is the reality or a dream of a character.

In the corresponding scene as indicated in the reverse-storyboard attached, one of the main characters, Detective Kogawa is initially introduced to the viewer as a detective on the hunt for what appears to be a suspect. His character becomes a vital role in the initiation and understanding of the rules of the world as well as the setting up of the viewer’s comprehension of the character states that later revealed in the film. It is virtually immediately introduced in this beginning sequence of the film where the detective experiences what is later revealed to be a dream like state that takes place in a circus.

As indicated by frames 1-4, we are introduced to the character as the film reveals the detectives face accompanied his dialogue over a radio ear piece with him searching for a suspect. His accidental encounter with the clown that overhears him on his radio creates confusion for the character as well as the viewer being unsure about the events that are taking
place in terms of who, what and when. This also introduces the first image system of a clown’s face, which is a central figure of a circus that essentially represents the parallel universe of what a circus represents in terms of it being an abnormal and unimaginable realm. At this point of the film, the audience is not clear as to what the rules of the film are, especially since it is an animation and levels of intense elements are more forgiving. This unknown murder suspect the detective is searching for becomes a determining factor in the character’s overall arc; in that, in order for the character to find peace he has to come to terms with himself and overcome the detriment that is haunting him internally.

In the following sequence, a little girl on her father’s shoulders is seen with a clown mask on the back of her head. There is an interesting play on image with this mask, the unrevealed girl’s face may represents reality, while the mask that ends up talking and moving its eyes that faces the camera represents the dream world that they are currently in. This alternate reality of a dream is further elevated through the use of a magician in the following frames, that of which become the detectives first direct encounter with a character in the circus. Through the use of lighting, the detective is singled out in the crowd with a spotlight, and as the magician performs his magic trick, the detective ends up inside of a cage on the main stage. Continuing at this point, it is still not perfectly clear as to what is going on, the viewer comprehension is still open for interpretation since we have just met the characters, the magic trick can simply represent the same type of magic that takes place in real life. The filmmakers used this magic trick as a mechanism for overall theme of the character, which essentially takes a detective in search for a suspect and places him in a cage, reversing the hunter to the hunted; where the bars of the cage can be correlated with that of a jail cell.
While trapped in the cage, the background characters and complimenting cast end up taking on the face of himself charging directly at him; which implies a sense of a lack of physics and possibility in the world they are in, allowing the viewer to confirm that the character is experiencing a type of mental manipulation and/or a dream. Since the detective is his own worst enemy, he finds himself trapped in a cage with essentially images of himself chasing after him trying to grab him through the bars. It takes a while for the detective to confirm this as the film uses sharp contrast of light and dark once again as the characters run towards him, only confirming the premonition that they have his face once they are too close to him and wide in the camera frame, creating a suspenseful, captured and claustrophobic type feeling. As the detective searches out in the crowd, he see’s a figure in the identical framing and positioning and as it showed him previously when he was singled out by the magician with the spotlight before he was summoned inside the cage; except this time, the film utilizes lighting to darken the area of the face, so it is not clear as to who it actually is. As the figure points towards the stage, it further supports the premise of the idea that as his own worst enemy, he is essentially chasing himself. There is a strong usage of high valued contrast in lighting to direct the viewer’s eyes, and since spotlights are common in a circus, it lends itself a part of the environment; along with the usage of patterned spots of bright light and shadow that can be found in a circus tent as well. When the detective is scanning the crowd and we see his POV, the filmmakers utilized a shaky-panning camera to emphasize the confusion, which stands out from the rest of the shots that are primarily steady with minimal character movement.

The confirmation of the dream state continues when the detective falls through the ground, and transitions into a free falling phase from high in the tent, until a trapeze artist
saves him and sends him into a different realm through the canopy as a metaphorical portal.

The trapeze artist is later revealed to be Paprika, which also represents the savior of the film as well as the primary protagonist that solves the conflict by defeating the thief. This is the first time that Paprika is seen, the film develops further and clarifies her ability to engage in other’s dreams to essentially rescue them under various forms that fit the variables and conformity of the dream taking place, in this case, a circus trapeze artist. The fact that she is hanging upside down, also creates a contrast with the detective is being suspended in the air by the arms with feet towards the ground, it forms two different orientations of up and down in correlation with the contrast of the world of dreams and the reality. While Paprika is only seen in the dreams as she resides in the body of another “awake” human, Chiba, it creates another parallel double contrast of a characters that separate the dream world from reality for of purpose of viewer comprehension where Paprika defines the dream world.

The film utilizes classical forms of audio in the sense that when the light flashed on him, it was a classical Film Set light sound, and the crowd applause felt similar to that of watching a television sitcom. The most effective sound device that was used was simply cutting the circus music when the spotlight was placed on him, it shifted the viewer from witnessing his events as an audience, to creating the feeling that you are actually experiencing the moments with him, which was aided by the first and only uses of the POV camera.

The story structure follows a path that of which starts with an image system of levels of the subconscious and dreams, which is later revealed in the film in a metaphorical elevator with floors taking on the roll of the levels of sleep. These levels (floors) become an important factor since it explains the structure of dream versus reality, and evaluates the level of comprehension
to the viewer in the end. The film utilizes some opening scenes and events that follow the scenes storyboarded to re-encapsulate the premise of an awkward reality and further close the story arc of resolution by allowing it to take place in real-time, concluding the events and revealing the characters again once the comprehension has been satisfied. This film was produced before the blockbuster film, Inception, however it carries much of the same premises, which as indicated by the end of the film, the reality they are in can always be questioned. On forums online, I discovered the Christopher Nolan based a character in his film off Paprika, and although different, it was quite interesting to find similar anecdotes and methods of displaying the dream and reality states.

**Note:**

Allocation of Key Points: Story structure, story conflict, character development, lighting, sound effects music