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THE DELUSION OF BEING HUMAN: FANTASTIC MOTIVES IN THE MOVIE ANOMALISA (2015) BY CHARLIE KAUFMAN AND DUKE JOHNSON

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Abstract

This study aims to analyze the fantastic motives that lay inside a movie titled *Anomalisa*. The background of choosing this movie as an object is caused by the unique concept where all the other characters except the main character named Michael have the same face and the same voice, no matter what gender they are. However, there is one exception which when Michael met a girl named Lisa, who is the only person ever in Michael's world to ever has a different voice and face. This leads to a problem statement; whether the phenomenon of facial and voice uniformity is a fantastic event that is experienced directly by the character due to external factors or internal factor such as psychological intervention. This study uses qualitative method and in order to answer this question, the writer uses Todorov's fantastic theoretical framework. The results show that the fantastic motives presented in *Anomalisa* is included in the fantastic uncanny category. The fantastic motives are present due to the delusion of Fregoli experienced by the main character, Michael Stones. Delusions experienced by Michael according to the author are triggered by a sense of boredom and loneliness experienced by Michael.

Keywords: Anomalisa; Fantastic literature; Film analysis; Tzvetan Todorov.

Anomalisa is a 2015 American animated film directed and produced by Charlie Kaufman and Duke Johnson. Kaufman adapted the scenario from the 2005 *Anomalisa* audio which was written under the pseudonym Francis Fregoli. The album was released on December 30, 2015 by Paramount Pictures. The film portrays a lonely customer service officer named Michael (voiced by David Thewlis) who recognizes everyone (all voiced by Tom Noonan) as identical until he encounters a unique woman (Jennifer Jason Leigh) at a hotel in Cincinnati.

Anomalisa was nominated in the Academy Award for the Best Animated Feature category (which was the first R-rated film nominated), won the Golden Globe for Best Animated Feature Film, and achieved five Annie Awards. *Anomalisa* became the first animated film to be awarded with the Grand Jury Prize at the 72nd Venice International Film Festival, after premiering at the Telluride Film Festival on September 4, 2015. Most awards prevailed are unsurprisingly about the best animation because it adopts *stop-motion* techniques in producing the scenes. The actors are not the result of computer animation either; however, the production teams actually employ puppets that are manually printed in 3D, photographed one by one to generate a very detailed and realistic

moving image.

The writer found that the stories and relationships between the characters developed in this entire animated film were truly honest, not exaggerating, yet at the same time complex and confusing. All the characters (besides the two main characters) own the same face and are voiced by the same person; moreover, the main character looks and feels 'normal' regarding this perception. However, when the film has been running for a few minutes, the main character hears a different female voice (Lisa); with a different face, and he seems surprised. Thus, it raises a question since it is in contrast to the real world of the writer, whether in the world of *Anomalisa*, that is a 'supposedly' natural situation.

The confusion of watching the movie does not stop there because at its ending part, a friend of Lisa, in one *frame* with her, is shown with a different face. Lisa's friend unlikely portrays the similar faces as is usually illustrated from Michael's point of view. This leads to a problem statement; is the phenomenon of facial and voice uniformity a fantastic event that is experienced directly by the character due to external factors or internal factor such as psychological intervention. The question is going to be scrutinized through Todorov's fantastic theoretical framework in order to reveal decisive explanation of the film.

METHOD

The method of this study adapt itself to the theoretical framework used. This study uses the theory of fantastic story by Tzvetan Todorov. There are several definitions of fantastic stories. Generally, fantastic story is defined as a story that presents the sudden appearance of a supernatural event in the real world (Djokosujatno, 2005: 1). Related to this, Tzvetan Todorov (in Djokosujatno, 2005: 5) said that fantastic is the hesitation felt by a human being who only knows natural laws, when facing an event that is apparently supernatural. Furthermore, Todorov (in Djokosujatno, 2001: x) explains that in a world lived by human being where demons, fairies, or vampires do not exist, illogical events may occur out of nowhere. The person experiencing the event must choose one of two possible answers: the event is an illusion of feeling, an imagined outcome, and there is no problem with scientific principles, or the event actually occurs, and is an inseparable part of reality, which has laws that we understand about.

Fantastic effects will be more visible when placed in the decoration of a realist story. In a neat and clear groove, it is in a reasonable and reasonable world that these phantoms of events or fantastic motifs emerge here and there. The emphasis is not on the sequence of events itself, however the strange events that intervene, which causes the plot to stop. Prosper Merimee, author of the fantastic story of the XIX century France, utilized this model to write fantastic stories (Djokosujatno, 2005: 58). Consequently, this explanation clarifies the effect of the reader's hesitation on something normal (natural) and supernatural.

Furthermore, Todorov (1975: 41-42) divides fantastic stories into uncanny, fantastic uncanny, fantastic marvelous, and marvelous categories; while pure fantastic is in the middle of fantastic uncanny and fantastic marvelous. The adjective "Uncanny" is understood as stories that raise no doubt in the audiences' eye. The story runs with natural events and concludes with an explanation on a natural level. Fantastic uncanny story begins with indecision, but finishes with a rational explanation. Meanwhile, fantastic marvelous tells a story with a logical thing and concludes with illogical ending. Marvelous story accepts supernatural stories as part of entertainment, and it does not explain them rationally. It only accepts and illustrates such as fairy tales or legends. Pure fantastically contains shades of pure indecision throughout the story.

Therefore, this is a qualitative study with qualitative method since it deals with the abstract ideas and concepts of fantastic motives and not to their counts or measure which relates with numerical data. The object of this study is a movie titled *Anomalisa* directed by Charlie Kaufman

and Duke Johnson. The data used in this study are the narrative (such as the dialogues of the characters) and the non-narrative aspects (such as mise en scene) of the movie that relate with the research questions.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Fantastic Motives in *Anomalisa*

Anomalisa has a fantastic thematic that is accompanied and based on a strong realist thematic. It includes convincing realist motifs, such as the names of place referring to a geographical reality; for instance, a scene when Michael landed at Cincinnati International Airport. The realistic depiction of the main character with the anatomy of the body like humans in general, Michael, an English man. However at this stage, the writer starts to feel a little bewildered by the faces of all the characters in *Anomalisa* depicted as if they were wearing masks. This mask-shaped face is the first fantastic motif the author witnesses, however, due to its genre as animated film; the writer thought that this might be the style of the animation maker.

As an audience, confusion degree may be stronger when Michael enters the airport and intermingles with people due to their similar faces and voices. The technique of taking pictures and using the soundtrack that was listened to by Michael in the beginning *scene* forces the writer to pay attention to details, which in turn makes the writer feel confused whether the image is supposed to be that or is seen through Michael's perception.

Figure 1
People with the same face at the airport



In the picture above, Michael is about to head to the airport exit. From here, the shot technique turns into a single perspective (which is likely from Michael's point of view) which commences the fantastic motifs. Previously, the shot always shows Michael inside *the frame*, so as if the viewer sees from the third perspective, Michael's subjectivity is greatly influenced by the portion of the dialogue and shots that focus a lot in explaining Michael's activities and feelings. However, because in this scene Michael's factor disappears from the camera's spotlight, the writer does not have a specific focus (i.e. Michael) to pay attention to, until finally paying attention to what or who is present in the *the frame*. This retrieval technique causes the writer realizes the bizarre portrayal of identical faces and voices.

Figure 2.
Opera song *The Flower Duet (Lakmé)*
which Michael listened to as he walked out of the airport



The author realizes that this is an opera song because of the peculiarities of the singing technique and the instruments used. This song really exists in the real world, which makes the realist motives stronger. When Michael starts playing the song as he walks out of the airport, there is a disturbing oddity: the singer's voice sounds the same. This is the second fantastic motive that appears in *Anomalisa*. Opera songs, which are usually sung by several people in high, medium, and low notes, with the distinctiveness of the singer's voice, all now sound the same.

The same voices spoken by people around Michael will not seem more disturbing and frightening because different speaking moments compared to listening to opera songs sung by the same voices at the same time. Also, even if people talk at the same time, there must be one dominant voice and there is a gap from one dialogue to another. In singing the song, all the sounds are equally dominant which results on scary effect that makes the writer confused with what is actually happening.

It should be underlined if the voices heard by Michael are male-specific. The identical faces that Michael sees are also likely to be male faces, because of more masculine facial features. This similarity is present in everyone around Michael, from his wife, children, family, ex-lover, taxi driver, hotel clerk, and everyone; except Lisa. Lisa is a character who later encounters Michael, with a different face and voice. Lisa becomes a bright spot for Michael and the key answer to what actually happened; whether fantastic themes come from external factors and are experienced directly by Michael, or because there are psychological interventions (internal factors) that cause the emergence of these fantastic motives.

Delusions of Fregoli

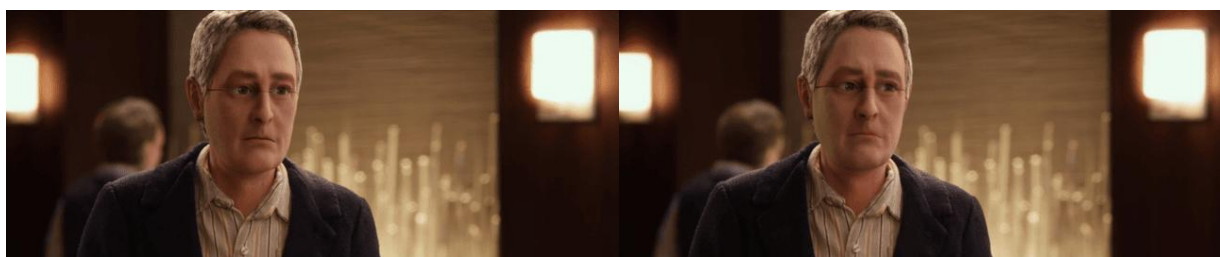
Figure 3.
The hotel where Michael is staying



At first, the writer thought that the concierge is a realist decoration of a hotel located in

Cincinnati. In contrast, in the snippet of the picture above, *front office* employee carries out an activity that makes the writer senses any discrepancy. After Michael books a room, the clerk searches the room data according to his request (a quiet and soothing room). During this data search, officer observes Michael's face and his fingers busily move over the keyboard. This process lasts for 15 seconds, with Michael not turning his head despite showing body language furrowed his eyebrows that the writer catches as a feeling of confusion, as in the picture below.

Figure 4.
Change in Michael's expression



A 15-second pause of silence with both figures holding their eyes creates an uncomfortable feeling for the writer. The confusion shown by Michael is unusual for him to show when meeting other people with identical faces, so the writer assumes that it is indeed the officers' strange actions that cause Michael confused. Strange behavior (which is also a bit scary coupled with a blank and flat expression) the clerk shows and the hotel's name "The Fregoli" lead to a finding about a type of delusion. "*Patients with Fregoli delusion are convinced that everyone they meet is actually one single person - who usually wants to harm them*" (Feinberg, Eaton, Roane, & Giacino, 1999).

So, the Fregoli delusion is a delusion that causes someone to believe that everyone they meet is the same person, usually it tends to act to endanger the sufferer. From this, it can be drawn that with Michael staying at The Fregoli hotel, Michael is also under the influence of the Fregoli delusions. This can be seen from the similar faces and voices which in Michael's subjectivity are present in everyone he meets. The emergence of fantastic motives appearing in the film can be assumed as a psychological intervention experienced by Michael. Then, what causes Michael to experience these delusions?

Loneliness

Michael is a *customer service staff* which is very well known for his success and innovation in improving company services. He has even written his own book and has sold thousands of prints throughout the world. Michael's presence in Cincinnati itself is actually to attend a seminar, where he would be the speaker. The mundane works and business seem to bring Michael to the emptiness of life, especially since he leaves his girlfriend, Bella, without any explanation. He only states that Bella has changed. Since their separation, Bella's image has turned into a man with a male voice. Slowly, one by one the people in Michael's life also turn into the face of the same man, with the same voice.

Boredom from routine and loneliness because Michael considers everyone 'changes' and no more unique characteristics from them could be the cause of Michael's delusions of Fregoli. Even when he is married and has children, who are expected to paint colorful life in his, it also turns into something boring from his perspective. This is demonstrated when Michael is practicing seminar speeches in his room, then his wife and children call him- certainly with the same voice. The only thing that can be distinguished between his wife and children is the context of dialogue. While practicing his seminar speech, Michael is also haunted by his past with Bella, as shown below.

Figure 5.
Bella's figure in the past



Bella is not a real figure in the picture. She is just *Flash back* memories from the past that suddenly bothers Michael's mind. The figure is described as having a brighter light and saying "*I mean, what the fuck did I do, Michael? It's a God and mystery. One minute we're gonna spend the rest of our lives together, and the next-*" and then the reconstruction of the past disappears. Bella lives in Cincinnati, and maybe that is the reason Michael's memory is suddenly filled with Bella's figure.

Michael then contacts Bella through the telephone book in his hotel room, saying "*something's wrong with me*" (minutes 23:42) and invites her to drink together. Bella agrees to come to the hotel bar and enjoy a drink with Michael, however, she is very angry when Michael invites her to his hotel room, possibly inviting her to have sex. At that moment, Michael says, "*I just- ... I'm just ... really bloody lonely and we had something and I thought maybe we could figure it out toge-*" (minutes 30:00) which immediately causes Bella angrily leaving Michael. Bella's exit is followed by Michael's shout, "*Bella! I'm just trying to understand!*" (minutes 30:15).

From the paragraph above, it appears that Michael already feels that something is wrong with him. According to the writer's assumption, Michael assesses that having sex would make him understand his condition (boredom and loneliness). In other words, the Fregola delusion is the result of the manifestation of Michael's boredom and loneliness. With his job as a customer service, Michael is required to put all his clients in the same position, and it becomes the reason he is likely accustomed to seeing everyone as the same person, repeatedly.

Anomali(sa)

How Michael sees everyone around him as the same person, but not with himself (Michael still sees his own face in the mirror, and hears his own voice) according to the writer is also a sign of how Michael only sees himself as the only unique human being. Humans besides himself, according to him, are just a flock of boring people and have absolutely no uniqueness. His meeting with Bella who weakens the tangled threads of his life makes him drink a lot of alcohol.

In his drunken condition, Michael walks outside the hotel to buy toys for his child, because he promised to bring toys for his child when he returns home. Michael mistakes the toy shop - which, although it is named Dino's Toys - which turns out to be a sex toy shop, like in the picture below.

Figure 6.
Dino's Toys store



Michael, however, is fascinated by a sex doll with a Japanese Geisha design (to the right of the guard, holding a fan), and buys it within his drunk state. After buying the doll, Michael returns to the hotel room and takes a shower. However, when he finishes bathing and looking in the mirror, something strange happens to his face. His face suddenly moves without control; changes expressions followed by mechanical noises as if he were a robot that suffers technical damage. Michael attempts to 'open' his face; and at that moment, he hears Lisa's voice from outside the hotel room with different sound.

Figure 7.
Michael tried to remove the 'mask' of his face



These two events are concurrent; Michael opens his 'mask' and hears Lisa's voice. The mask that is useful for hiding the real face behind it has long been used as a symbol of identity, disguise, or performance. Due to the focus of the image of Michael, so that it might be influenced by the Fregoli delusions that Michael has, the strange scene that appears on Michael's face and his desire to unmask himself, according to the author, is a symbolism of Michael who doubts himself. Is the face he sees in the mirror his own face? Is the uniqueness that he has seen in himself actually only a delusion? Is it possible to accept that he is also no different from other humans, it will reduce his expectations of others so that they can see them more as a variation of life, and eliminate feelings of loneliness and boredom?

Just as Michael is about to open his mask, he hears Lisa's voice. Spontaneously, Michael said, "*Jesus, someone else!*" (minutes 33:36). According to the author, this is the moment where Michael experiences turmoil between reality and his delusion. The reality that forces Michael to try to look back at the humans around him, but finally the desire disappears when he hears Lisa's voice. Michael again feels that there is nothing wrong with him because he hears *other people*, and decides to go after Lisa. Long story short, Michael manages to get close to Lisa until they finally carry out

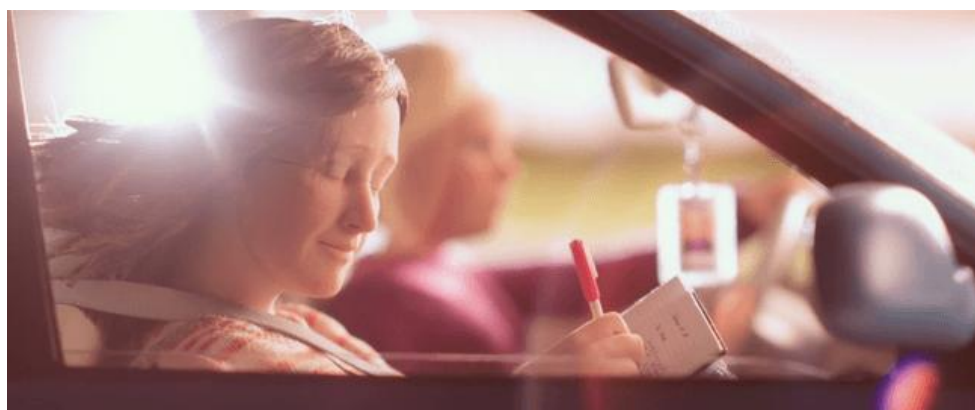
their first intercourse. Michael calls Lisa an “anomalisa”. Anomaly which means different, peculiarity, and combined with Lisa's name, which means Lisa is someone different according to Michael.

But the interesting thing is, during their intercourse and their conversation the next day, Lisa's voice changes a little. Her unique voice is stacked by the male voice Michael used to hear. Until finally, it really turns into a male voice when Lisa states, "So, see you after? ". Lisa invites Michael to meet when Michael finishes speaking in his seminar, although he immediately returns to England without contacting Lisa at all.

Upon Michael's return to England, he gives the Japanese doll to his child. When the child attempts to activate the doll and it opens its mouth, the child says "Daddy, what's coming out of the toy?" and Michael's wife is surprised because the doll releases sperm fluid. The writer has the hypothesis that Lisa and the doll resembles each other. Lisa appears after Michael bought the doll. Lisa's unique and different figure could also be the effect of Michael's delusions. That explains why Michael hears Lisa's voice slowly turning into a male voice in the morning; when he is completely free from the effects of alcohol. It could be that during the influence of alcohol, Michael sheds his loneliness towards the doll he just purchased, and just encounters Lisa who he considers unique although everything is lost in the morning. Lisa is only part of Michael's delusions; the real person is the same but due to the influence of the doll, which has similarities with Lisa's character, makes Michael think that Lisa is an anomaly for him. This explains why there is sperm in the doll's mouth.

The similarity between the doll and Lisa is their involvement with anything related to Japan. Lisa is described as a person who likes various languages, especially Japanese by saying, "and I like Japanese, of course " (minutes 52:45). The word "of course " raises suspicion for the writer, because Lisa's portrayal is far from the Asian race and there are no previous clues that indicate Lisa has an affinity relationship with Japan. Lisa and the Japanese doll purchased by Michael also have a wound on the right temple, as in the picture below.

Figure 8.
The equation of the wound between Lisa and the Japanese doll





The last scene when Lisa writes a letter to Michael in the car also shows that Lisa sees the meaning *Anomalisa* through his Japanese-English dictionary, which means *Goddess of Heaven*. Why does it have to be a Japanese-English dictionary? The closeness of Lisa and the Japanese doll adds to the writer's suspicion that Michael, who is fascinated by the Japanese doll, thinks that Lisa in all its similarities with the doll is unique, before Michael eventually perceives Lisa through his delusion when he is completely out of alcohol.

Meanwhile, in the last scene, Lisa's friend who Michael previously saw had the same face and voice as he usually heard, is shown to have a different face. This is because the storytelling is viewed from the perspective of Lisa, who does not have a Fregoli delusion. From this point of view, Lisa is still a real character that really exists together in Michael's room, not just a substitution of a doll that Michael might have made as a desire to vent his loneliness. To the extent that Michael perceives Lisa as a different person, it is because of the several similarities Lisa has with the Japanese doll.

CONCLUSION

Based on the fantastic motives presented in the *Anomalisa* film, the author concludes that *Anomalisa* is included in the fantastic uncanny category. Realist decorations still feel very strong although the fantastic motives cause doubt to the writer. The writer feels confused during the whole story even though the confusion seems to be discerned through logical explanation after the writer makes a deeper reading of the signs in the film.

The fantastic motives are present due to the delusion of Fregoli experienced by the main character, Michael Stones. This delusion of frigate is shown in the hotel that Michael lives in, which has the same name. Delusions experienced by Michael according to the author are triggered by a sense of boredom and loneliness experienced by Michael.

The similarity in face and voice captured by Michael shows that he feels himself as the most unique person, lack of connection, isolation, and lack of empathy. The presence of Lisa, who is described as having a different voice and face, is a marker that tries to say what Michael looks like. They do *one-night stand* (in Indonesian context, it is more popular with the temporary expression of love through short and non-commitment intercourse) which involves not only sexual drive, but also love. Michael has never felt like meeting someone so special before; so is Lisa. But apparently, Michael's feeling only lasts for one night before Lisa's voice slowly turns into a male voice. Why does it have to be male? The author's conclusion is, because the film tells the sexual orientation of Michael is a woman; thus, it is a sign that Michael is bored with the women around him (his wife, ex-girlfriend, even Lisa). This is probably caused by the existence of Michael who is famous and admired by many people; including by the women who approach him. Eventually, all women are considered identical and not interesting in the eyes of Michael, so that they carry the similar and flat

voice and face of men (both face and intonation), which he knew he would never be interested in.

Ironically, Michael finds the pounding of love with a Japanese doll that he considers unique. Lisa, the woman Michael met after he bought the doll, according to the author's conclusion is more than just a substitute for the sex doll that Michael has bought. The presence of the character Lisa is not just a delusion parable of Michael who considers himself having sex with a woman even though Michael is fondling the doll. The author concludes that Michael had 'sex' with the doll because the doll has sperm in its mouth when Michael brings it home. Because the doll has just been purchased, it is not possible if the doll has been used before; except by Michael himself.

Even so, it does not mean that Lisa's character is also Michael's delusion. Michael probably sees another woman, who actually portrays the same male face and voice, only Michael believes that Lisa is an anomaly for him because of the many similarities between Lisa and the doll, which both have a relationship with things connected with Japan. This is likely to turn Michael's awareness upside down between reality and delusion. According to the author, Lisa's character is also real because Lisa is still shown at the end of the film, without Michael's point of view, and with the Japanese doll Michael's child now owns.

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