Elements of Realism in Japanese Animation

Thesis

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Abstract

Certain works of Japanese animation appear to strive to approach reality, showing elements of realism in the visuals as well as the narrative, yet theories of film realism have not often been applied to animation. The goal of this thesis is to systematically isolate the various elements of realism in Japanese animation. This is pursued by focusing on the effect that film produces on the viewer and employing Roland Barthes’ theory of the reality effect, which gives the viewer the sense of mimicking the surface appearance of the world, and Michel Foucault’s theory of the truth effect, which is produced when filmic representations agree with the viewer’s conception of the real world. Three directors’ works are analyzed using this methodology: Kon Satoshi, Oshii Mamoru, and Miyazaki Hayao. It is argued based on the analysis of these directors’ works in this study that reality effects arise in the visuals of films, and truth effects emerge from the narratives. Furthermore, the results show detailed settings to be a reality effect common to all the directors, and the portrayal of real-world problems and issues to be a truth effect shared among all. As such, the results suggest that these are common elements of realism found in the art of Japanese animation.
Dedication

Dedicated to the memory of Professor William J. Tyler, truly an irreplaceable mentor.
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Introduction

As opposed to American animation, European animation, and experimental forms of animation, certain works of animation in Japan seem to strive to approach reality, featuring elements of realism in visuals as well as subject matter. However, in contrast to live-action film, theories of film realism have rarely been applied to animation. Film theorists in Japan such as Azuma Hiroki have only recently touched on this subject.

Various reasons for this lack of research are plausible. First, animation is undoubtedly highly formalistic in nature when compared to live-action film. Unlike the photography-based live-action mode of film, everything in an animated film is necessarily created by an animator rather than relying partly on a mechanical process. This allows creators to adapt and alter the world and its laws free from constraint; in essence, to create the most formalistic films.

Second, animation has a long history of formalistic expression. The great formalistic potential of animation has undoubtedly attracted those with formalistic intent and led to animation’s exploitation as a formalistic art form. Consequently, the large amount of formalistic work overshadows the realistic work, and little attention is given to realism in animation.

Lastly, many techniques used to achieve realism in live-action film are either not applicable to animation or limited in effectiveness. For instance, natural lighting cannot
be used in animation. Likewise, nothing can be shot on location; all is created in the studio. Similarly, no hand-held camera can be used; its use can only be mimicked. Furthermore, use of non-professional actors only affects the quality of voices in animation; the effect is severely limited as compared to the use of non-professional actors in live-action film. Film theorists, not able to see such familiar techniques, may have overlooked elements of realism in animation or erroneously concluded that none are present as a result.

Noticing elements of realism in Japanese animation and the need for further research in the field, this thesis aims to methodically isolate elements that produce realism in Japanese animation. Before conducting this analysis, two concerns must be addressed. First, can such a highly formalistic mode of film such as Japanese animation actually possess elements of film realism? Second, if so, would not at least some of the techniques used to bring about realism in live-action cinema—the very techniques identified above as being either impossible or limited in effectiveness in the animated film—need to be present in Japanese animation? In effect, these techniques would serve as criteria in determining if realism is present in film.

In response to the first concern, realism is present even in extremely formalistic material. It is well-acknowledged among film theorists that no work can be entirely realistic or entirely formalistic; a film is always an amalgamation of the two. Regarding realism, film (or any art form) is not reality itself, but a representation of it. Belgian surrealist René Magritte’s *The Treachery of Images* painting (1928-1929) is a well known example illustrating this concept. In this work, a realistic painting of a pipe is accompanied by the caption “Ceci n’est pas une pipe.”: “This is not a pipe.” The painting
draws attention to ideas of symbolism and imagery by pointing to the very clear fact that the pipe, no matter how realistically drawn, is not a pipe, but its image. Thus formalism can never be entirely absent from a work of art, including Japanese animation.

Regarding formalism, film is never entirely formalistic and divorced from reality; it always relies on reality in some manner. Even the highly experimental animations of Norman McLaren rely on some concepts of reality. For instance, his 1940 short animation *Dots* features nothing but series of dots falling, moving, and changing form. This film relies on concepts of gravity, speed, acceleration, deceleration, shapes and figures, and colors. All of these concepts are grounded firmly in reality. As such, realism can never be utterly absent from film, just as formalism cannot be absent from film. Thus film is a combination of realism and formalism, and there must be elements of realism, no matter how limited, in Japanese animation.

In response to the second concern, the necessity of Japanese animation matching the criteria defined as techniques which bring about realism in live-action film is also invalid. There is no pure form of realism; only various forms of realism in film, some with contradictory techniques. Realism in classical Hollywood film, such as in *The Best Years of Our Lives* (1946), strived to conceal its artificiality through careful control over all aspects of film thereby creating an illusion of reality; concealed artificiality equaled lack of artificiality equaled reality. Thus, very paradoxically, film artifice concealed the artificiality of film to bring about reality. Films were shot in studios with artificial lighting and avoided expressive camera movements and shots as well as montage so as to make the viewer forget through a uniform film style that he/she is watching a film rather than experiencing reality.
In contrast, Italian neorealist film, such as *Bicycle Thieves* (1948), avoided artifice in film. These films strived to depict the lives of ordinary people in an ordinary manner while addressing social issues of post-war Italy. The goal of these films was to make the viewer reflect on reality. While Italian neorealist film also avoided expressive shots and montage as did classical Hollywood cinema, other techniques used to bring about realism are different. These films were shot on location and featured natural lighting in an effort to avoid artificiality which is not present in reality.

Both classical Hollywood film and Italian neorealist film are recognized for possessing realism, however they achieve realism through the use of different techniques; the former paradoxically exploited artificiality to conceal its artificial nature while the latter avoided artifice. If one film form was judged realistic or not based on the other’s techniques as criteria, both would be considered lacking of realism. As such, it is not possible to judge realism using the presence or absence of techniques of certain film forms. Another method must be used.

In this thesis, analysis of elements of realism will be conducted by focusing on the effects film produces on the viewer. Specifically, two effects which bring about realism will be considered. The first, proposed by theorist Roland Barthes, is termed the reality effect (Barthes 148). This effect gives the viewer the impression of mimicking the facticity or surface appearance of the world we know. For instance, natural lighting could be considered a reality effect as it mimics conditions in reality; when it is dark, vision is obscured. The second effect, theorized by Michel Foucault, is named the truth effect (Noonan 30). This effect consists of representations in film which agree with the viewer’s subjective ideas about what is true about the world. For example, if the viewer
believes that New York City is a place of non-stop excitement, such a portrayal—possibly in an action genre film set in New York City—would ring true to the viewer; it would be realistic.

Using the above methodology, an analysis will be conducted of the works of three directors of Japanese animation; two who are particularly noted for their realism and one whose work simply includes realism in what is otherwise manifest fantasy. The directors focused on include Kon Satoshi, Oshii Mamoru, and Miyazaki Hayao. The main analysis will be divided into three parts, each consisting of an examination of works by these auteurs in the same order as they are named above. Each chapter will begin with an analysis of these directors’ films for reality effects. The chapters will end with an examination of the same works for truth effects. Following the three chapters comprising the main analysis, a conclusion will summarize the findings and address possible further research into this subject.
Chapter 1: Kon Satoshi

From his directorial debut in 1997 with Perfect Blue to his latest work Paprika (2006), Kon Satoshi has consistently incorporated multiple elements of realism in his films. Reality effects are primarily brought about through visuals; detailed character designs, elaborate settings, light effects, and the use of color all contribute to a realistic world portrayal. Truth effects in Kon’s films arise due to narrative content; depictions of real world problems and challenges, realistic character portrayals, the limited capacity for action of characters, and representations of suffering and pain all add to the quality of realism in Kon’s works. These numerous elements of realism combine to give an impression of reality to the viewer, even through the highly formalistic medium of animation.

Reality effects are produced by various aspects of the visuals in Kon’s films. First, in sharp contrast to the individual lack of detail in characters (all characters look the same aside from hair style and color) and overt glamorization (all characters are unrealistically attractive) typical in Japanese animation, character designs in Kon’s works are highly detailed and often lack exaggeration and beautification. Characters are frequently overweight, balding, aged, and unattractive rather than unrealistically glamorized. In Perfect Blue, a film about a Japanese pop idol attempting to become an actress, the young starlet Mima is attractive, however those around her are not; her
managers include a middle-aged, poorly shaven man and an overweight former idol, and Mima’s fans are all unattractive male *otaku* (obsessive fans). Likewise, in Kon’s second film titled *Millennium Actress* (2001) about a documentary interview of a famous retired actress, documentary filmmaker Gen’ya is middle-aged and overweight while his cameraman has an oddly tall and thin design. Similarly, in *Tokyo Godfathers* (2003), Kon’s third film in which a group of homeless people absurdly attempt to return a baby to its parents, Gin is middle-aged, has an untrimmed beard, and is missing a tooth, while Miyuki is overweight. It is only when emphasizing the fantasy elements of the works that certain character designs are made to be unrealistic or comical. Hana, a poorly shaven, tall transvestite in *Tokyo Godfathers*, and the dangerously obese Dr. Tokita in *Paprika* serve as examples.

The settings in Kon’s films are also highly realistic, featuring an enormous amount of detail in contrast to most animation. In animation, it is typical for a specific character or object to be focused on with some detail while surrounded by subdued colors and less detail in the environment. Conversely, Kon wants all details focused on, and is thus “renowned for injecting a staggering level of lived-in detail into each of his compositions” (Jackson, par. 10). This level of detail is seen throughout his work from *Perfect Blue*, such as Mima’s room full of belongings and personal trinkets, to the most recent *Paprika*, as seen in the mass of research tools, materials, and equipment in the research lab setting of the film. Jackson illustrates the level of detail in a scene from *Paprika* set in an apartment: “Toys are piled in mountainous heaps, cables flow freely from electrical appliances, dishes sit unwashed in an unkept sink and assorted debris litters the floor to wonderful effect” (par. 10).
Additionally, details of settings in Kon’s films further suggest reality by emphasizing imperfections and avoiding beautification in settings. In *Millennium Actress*, the office of the documentary production studio is dirty, trash bags lay by the door, papers are stacked everywhere in a haphazard fashion, mountains of videos rest on cheap metal shelves, and post-its and notes are pasted along all surfaces of the office. Likewise, Gin’ei Studio where famous actress Fujiwara Chiyoko once worked is shown in flashbacks as anything but the fantastic image of a studio where the magic of the movies is realized; although the sets are in order, all outside of the studio camera’s range is different, with props, ladders, and tools strewn about and damaged surroundings (we see broken windows hastily taped together). Again, *Tokyo Godfathers* is set during Christmas time which would normally be associated with pure white snow, festive ornamentations, and beauty, however the actual setting of the film is quite different; snow in Tokyo is gray and brown, the city is full of traffic cones, telephone lines and booths litter the sky and the streets, the cry of ambulances is heard recurrently, and rust and trash are plainly visible in the environment. This emphasis on imperfections and avoidance of beautification produces a clear reality effect, seeming as if the real world.

The level of detail in the settings of Kon’s films is due in no small part to heavy use of photography; photographs of locations are taken and used as models for drawings of settings. This process allows for an extreme level of detail which furthers realism. As a result of this use of photography, images such as city intersections, parks, bridges, and the Tokyo skyline all appear as if part of a live-action film rather than animation.

The use of light in Kon’s films also produces reality effects. Many sources of light are considered and replicated from natural sunlight, with variations in quality
depending on time (sunrise, sunset, etc.) and season (for example, bluer light during winter), to various artificial light sources such as lamp light in rooms, halogen lights in stores, neon billboards, and street lights. Furthermore, similar sources often produce slightly different light. For example, light from one apartment window appears slightly different from that of another apartment even though the building is the same. This lack of uniformity matches reality; the real world is not perfectly orderly and homogenous. In addition, lights affect surrounding objects in Kon’s films. Objects are dyed in the light source’s color and shadows are cast from them. For instance, in Tokyo Godfathers, which has many night scenes making light effects quite noticeable, cars on the street change color in front of bright store lights, and snow is dyed certain colors depending on the light sources in close proximity. Likewise, Scott points out in Tokyo Godfathers another light effect which adds to realism: “At one point as Hana, Miyuki, and Gin argue outside a drab cement-block hospital at night, the fluorescent lights in the windows flicker on and off, an effect that deepens both the film’s realism and its sense of wonder” (E11).

The last reality effect produced through the visuals of Kon’s films is found in the use of colors. Kon avoids exaggerated colors in characters as well as settings except when necessary for the narrative or when emphasizing certain elements of fantasy. Idol Kirigoe Mima in Perfect Blue dresses in bright pink clothes for performances, however her personal attire is subdued and typical of reality; she wears dress shirts, denim jackets, and skirts of dark blues, white, and black. Likewise, her managers do the same, dressing in dark suits and other business attire. Just as the lack of exaggeration and beautification
in character design produces reality effects, so too does the control of colors in Kon’s works.

Truth effects in Kon’s films arise due to narrative content. First, a truth effect is produced through the portrayal of problems and challenges found in the real world. Representations of such problems match our concepts of reality. The Italian neorealist film movement in postwar Italy aimed to portray the social and economic problems of the times. *Bicycle Thieves*, for example, focuses on the great unemployment problem after the war while depicting the challenges a normal man faces in trying to provide for his family. Much the same, many of Kon’s works depict problems in modern society. In *Perfect Blue*, idol Kirigoe Mima switches professions to acting, and in the process, she is forced to go through horrible experiences to succeed; in order to get a recurring part in a television drama, she must act in a rape scene and pose nude for a photographer. Mima agrees, while secretly not wanting to perform. As a result, she becomes mentally unstable; “Although she goes out of her way to do a rape scene (much to the horror of Rumi), the traumatic nature of the actual filming causes her to break down after it is finished” (Napier, “Excuse Me” 31). Even at the film’s end, it remains unclear whether she has regained her sanity. The film thus portrays problems in the idol and acting system, focusing specifically on the exploitation of women in the media. Again, in *Tokyo Godfathers*, while a story about three homeless people who find a baby on Christmas Eve is undoubtedly comedic in nature, the subject of homelessness in modern Tokyo is a somber reality. Many homeless people are shown in the film, emphasizing the great scale of the problem. Likewise, the atrocious beating of the homeless at the hands of youth gangs as a pastime is also depicted.
Similarly, in *Paranoia Agent* (2004), a thirteen episode television series, Kon portrays an avoidance of responsibility and escape from reality in modern society. To those with similar concepts of reality, this portrayal of a societal problem becomes a truth effect. In this series, various people are shown with problems and, unable to bear the pressure, they seek to escape from reality by being made victims; they all unconsciously summon “Shônen Bat”, a dangerous youth who wields a metal bat and attacks people, turning them into victims and allowing escape from life’s problems and personal responsibility. For instance, the first victim Sagi Tsukiko is a popular doll designer pressed for a new design, however she is unable to produce any satisfactory work. At the peak of pressure, she is attacked by the “Shônen Bat” character (a personification of escapism) and, made a victim, is temporarily relieved of her responsibility while simultaneously gaining the compassion of those around her. Kon’s portrayal of escapism and avoidance of responsibility does not end with the main characters, but extends to background characters as well; the first scenes are part of a montage showing various people in trains, cars, and on the streets of Tokyo making excuses over mobile phones and avoiding responsibility in work and personal situations.

Another truth effect arises from realistic portrayals of characters and the world in the narratives of Kon’s films. Just as the visuals avoid the grandiose and exaggeration, so too do these portrayals. For example, in *Perfect Blue*, Mima is an admired star on stage as an idol, however offstage she is simply a common person. She is not driven by limousine to any destination on a whim, but rather takes the train. Likewise, she does not dine out or employ a cook; she shops and handles groceries herself as anyone might. Finally, her income and success, as well as that of her agency, are very limited; she lives
in a miniscule apartment, undoubtedly unable to afford anything larger, and the agency office is similarly small and struggling financially, as we know from the managers’ complaints of poor income from record sales. Similarly, in *Millennium Actress*, the documentary film studio Studio Lotus is a small operation with only two employees; company chief, director, editor and interviewer Tachibana Gen’ya, and cameraman Ida Kyôji. The company office is correspondingly small, appearing to be little more than a single low-wage apartment room turned office overflowing with work materials.

Likewise, Gin’ei Studio where actress Fujiwara Chiyoko worked is not portrayed as a place of magic where movies are conjured up, but a place of business, separated and organized into divisions, ranks, and roles. As such, there are many minor and insignificant jobs; even documentary filmmaker Tachibana Gen’ya, a principle character in the narrative, was a low-ranking member of one of the crews at Gin’ei Studio in the past, and is shown performing minor errands rather than actively producing the grand movies of the studio. Additionally, the politics and social friction among directors, actors, and the crew are portrayed, again emphasizing the reality of film production. For instance, actress Shimao Eiko views main character Fujiwara Chiyoko as a rival and repeatedly causes problems for her. Again, despite the absurd and exaggerated premise of homeless people finding a baby on Christmas Eve in *Tokyo Godfathers*, the reasons for their homelessness are believable and real. Gin pretends that he was a bicycle racer who fell victim to a betting scheme and thus lost his income as well as his family; however, the reality is that his homelessness is a result of gambling and large debt. Likewise, teenager Miyuki contends that she is homeless simply because she chooses to be, but in reality she is a runaway, stricken with guilt over a family conflict. These character and
world portrayals in Kon’s films thus match the viewer’s concepts of what is real and produce a truth effect.

Yet another truth effect arises in Kon’s works as a result of characters’ limited capacity for action in their lives. Grodal notes, “‘realist’ representations often prefer situations in which the agents are supposed to have a limited capacity to ‘act’” (86). In essence, humans have limited control over their lives, and as such, representations of characters with similarly limited capacity to act match our understanding of what reality is. In Perfect Blue, Kirigoe Mima’s limited control over her life is evident in her transition from idol to actress; the transition is anything but simple. She has small roles, few lines, and must struggle to succeed. To Mima, the smallest challenges become big obstacles. For example, her first line in a recurring drama “Double Bind” is simply “Who are you?”; however, understanding the weight of even the smallest line at the beginning of her career (it will undoubtedly determine if she is cast again), she practices feverishly up until the moment of filming. Likewise, the small scale of her aspirations and victories also reinforces her limited capacity for action; rather than a part in a film or stardom, Mima’s aspiration and eventual victory is in completing this first recurring part in “Double Bind”. Again, we see another small victory when she gains praise for her performance from the crew, writer, and director. This limited capacity for action is not just seen in Mima, however, it is also seen in other characters; Mima’s former idol group, “Cham”, is shown rejoicing at having achieved the small (but tellingly difficult) goal of winning inclusion into the weekly best 100 chart for a new pop song single.

Closely related to the truth effect originating from a limited capacity for action, the final truth effect produced in Kon’s films is a result of the severity of the world and
the suffering of characters within it. Grodal points out that realism is more often attributed to representations portraying negative emotions, and proposes that this is due in part to “a feeling that pain and deprivation are more real than pleasure” (87). As noted earlier, in *Perfect Blue*, Mima must perform in a rape scene and later pose nude, all of which ultimately causes her great pain as well as the loss of her sanity; this suffering directly matches our conception of reality as harsh or severe in nature, and thus produces a truth effect. Similarly, in *Tokyo Godfathers*, all the main characters are suffering and homeless. Gin has gambled away all his money on horse races and left his family in great debt. He can no longer face his family, nor does he expect forgiveness. Likewise, Miyuki is guilt-ridden, having attacked her father, and believing that she has lost her family forever. Again, Hana has lost his lover in an accident and is suffering from an illness implied to be AIDS. Other characters in the film suffer as well; Sachiko, having miscarried her own child, kidnaps a newborn baby from a hospital in a state of mental instability and shock. Finally, in *Paranoia Agent*, all characters are caused to suffer to the point that they seek to escape reality. Sagi Tsukiko is under enormous pressure for a new design work, all the while facing harsh criticism and jealousy from her peers. Taira Yûichi is the target of bullying. Chôno Harumi suffers from dissociative identity disorder, and her alter ego, a prostitute, threatens her proper and established life as well as her new marriage. Hirukawa Masami is a policeman who is forced into thievery by his debt to a yakuza syndicate. Hirukawa’s daughter Taeko, having been betrayed by her father who secretly recorded her undressing, wanders the streets of Tokyo not knowing who to turn to for help. Detective Ikari Keiichi, unable to solve the case of “Shônen Bat” or prevent a related suicide at his police station, is forced to resign and begin work in construction,
struggling to support an ill wife. Lastly, detective Maniwa, partner to Ikari, loses his sanity as a consequence of the case.

As a final point, it is necessary to briefly make note of the role of fantasy in Kon’s works; while numerous elements of realism are present in his films, failing to mention fantasy in these films ultimately invites a fundamental misunderstanding of this filmmaker. Kon’s films are best characterized as a mix of elements of realism and fantasy which results in a complete blurring of the line separating the two. This union has been present in Kon’s films from the very first one and on, to the point that “the juxtaposition of meticulously detailed realism with flourishes of the surreal has become a hallmark of Kon’s work” (Jackson, par. 10). The forms of fantasy range from insanity, to subjective and embellished memories, to self-delusion, to dreams. For instance, in *Perfect Blue*, Kon mixes reality with Mima’s eventual fall into madness to the point that the viewer (as well as Mima) can no longer distinguish between reality and fiction. In his most recent film, *Paprika*, Kon slowly destroys the line between reality and dreams as a device which was meant to allow psychiatrists access to patients’ dreams is misused, causing waking life and dreams to merge. Although this thesis’ goal is to isolate elements of realism in Japanese animation, brief mention of this aspect of Kon’s works is necessary.

Throughout his career, Kon Satoshi has repeatedly imbued elements of realism in his animations. Detailed character designs lacking exaggeration, intricate settings, careful use of light effects, and subdued use of color all give rise to reality effects, constructing a realistic world portrayal. Likewise, representations of problems found in the real world, realistic character portrayals, characters’ limited capacity for action, and
depictions of suffering in a severe world all produce truth effects, which further contribute to the characteristic of realism in Kon’s films. These various elements of realism allow Kon to convey a sense of reality to the viewer, all the while using the formalistic medium of animation.
Chapter 2: Oshii Mamoru

Director Oshii Mamoru has been infusing his films with elements of realism as early as 1989 in *Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie*. Above all, four of his films contain numerous reality and truth effects: *Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie*, *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie* (1993), *Ghost in the Shell* (1995), and *Innocence* (2004). Like Kon Satoshi, Oshii achieves reality effects chiefly through the visuals of his works, such as character designs and settings replete with detail as well as the use of a muted and often dark color palette. Truth effects in Oshii’s films stem from the narratives; depictions of problems and issues present in reality and realistic world portrayals bring about realism in Oshii’s works. Furthermore, Oshii’s use of the science fiction cyberpunk genre also produces a truth effect. Through these various reality and truth effects, Oshii succeeds in conveying a sense of reality in his films.

Reality effects in Oshii’s works arise primarily due to a number of elements in the visuals, much as in Kon’s films. To begin with, the character designs in his films are highly detailed and lack the beautification and exaggeration found in many animations. Characters in *Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie* and *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie*—principally middle-aged public servants such as police officers, their mechanics, and bureaucrats—have plain, dull designs which appear true to life. Captain Gotô is oddly tall, has a dreary face, and is droopy-eyed; officer Ôta is short; head mechanic
chief Sakaki has white hair and is markedly aged; detective Matsui is overweight and short; and mechanic Shige is peculiarly thin. The only exception to this plain portrayal seems to be officer Izumi Noa, one of the main characters. In contrast to the rest, she is younger and stands out somewhat with reddish hair and blue eyes. Likewise, characters in *Ghost in the Shell* and its sequel, *Innocence*, are chiefly middle-aged and feature unattractive designs. Chief Aramaki is short, balding, and considerably aged with white hair; Batô is unattractive and big, as one would expect of a security force member; and Ishikawa is middle-aged, unshaven, and has a disorderly appearance. Similarly, while the main character, Kusanagi Motoko, seems to be relatively young (early 30s), she is not beautified or glamorized in stark contrast to her character in the original manga graphic novel that served as source material for the film. The original manga featured a very attractive and sexualized design, however Oshii decided upon a restrained design for his work. In fact, Kusanagi appears somewhat masculine with a thick frame and broad shoulders, stressing her artificial body made for work in a government public security force.

The settings in Oshii’s films also contribute a reality effect. Like Kon, Oshii also fills his films with meticulous detail. Personal objects fill rooms and carefully speak to the owner’s character (posters of firearms within gun enthusiast Ôta’s room in *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie*, for instance) and offices feature numerous materials, reports, and supplies. Details extend to the smallest visual characteristics such as the grain of wood in a door frame, a metal hook used to support a clipboard on a shelf, tape used to affix a map on a wall, and the technical writing on a computer cable. Also like Kon’s films, Oshii’s films emphasize imperfections through details and avoid beautification
thereby suggesting reality rather than fantasy. For instance, ruined buildings and demolished blocks are shown in *Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie*. Likewise, in *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie*, cracks are visible along the window frames in offices and also running down drywall in the officer dormitories. Similarly, the slums in *Ghost in the Shell* feature dirt and garbage, abandoned housing, broken vehicles (even a tram), graffiti on walls, rust on metal, and trash in the waterways. The museum providing the setting for the last few scenes of this film is likewise old, abandoned, partly flooded, and has fallen into decay.

Oshii clearly achieves much of this detail in the settings through the use of photography, taking photographs of real locations to serve as models for drawings. This method of creating the setting of a film allows for an extremely high level of detail. Oshii frequently travels both inside and outside Japan in search of ideal scenery for his films. For example, it is well known that Oshii heavily used Hong Kong as reference material for the setting of both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Innocence*. Kon also uses this method of filmmaking; however, the technique is more pronounced in Oshii’s works especially due to multiple long shots and scenes in which characters travel about these locations unaccompanied by any dialogue. *Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie* features such a scene. Detectives inspect dilapidated apartments, formerly occupied by a criminal, in search of clues. Likewise, in *Ghost in the Shell*, Kusanagi wanders around the Hong Kong-like city pondering her existence and identity within her environment.

While Oshii builds reality in his films by emphasizing details in visuals much like Kon, quite in contrast to Kon’s works, Oshii’s films are frequently set in the near future. In fact, all the above films noted for their realism are set in this temporal space. According to Oshii, the key to
bringing about a sense of reality in these near future settings is the addition of great detail to things that the viewer is familiar with; these items from the past and present have an overwhelming sense of presence (“‘Bureedo Rannaa’ o kakuritsu shita yuuitsu muni no hōhōron’”). Thus details of the grain of wood in a door frame, the materials in offices, and imperfections in the settings of films all aid in portraying a realistic future.

The final reality effect found in the visuals of Oshii’s works arises from the use of colors. There is an avoidance of gaudy colors in character designs and backgrounds and an adoption of a more common and typical color palette found in the real world. Both Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie and Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie are full of whites, grays, blacks, and browns. The patlabor (a portmanteau for patrol labor) robots themselves are not of flashy or striking colors, but simple black and white, much like Japanese police patrol cars. Similarly, Ghost in the Shell features primarily dark blues, blacks, grays, and whites. Oshii expands the range of colors in Innocence to include occasional reds and warmer colors; however, the film is still characteristically dark and employs a cooler color palette.

Truth effects in Oshii’s films are found in the narratives. To start with, Oshii brings about a truth effect through the portrayal of real world issues and problems. These depictions match the viewer’s concept of reality and evoke a sense of realism. Kon Satoshi’s works also feature this truth effect, although the issues and problems Oshii deals with in his works are different from those of Kon. In Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie, Oshii depicts problems caused by technological development. A computer programmer named Ôba implants a virus in a new and highly touted operating system for labors (robots used by laborers in construction work). Prompted to act when labors hear high frequency vibrations off of high-rise buildings due to wind, the virus causes the labors to go berserk and destroy their surroundings. In their investigation of Ôba, detectives track down and inspect multiple
old and dilapidated apartments Ôba had chosen to live in recently, and they reach the conclusion that the programmer has come to regret the constant forgetting and destruction of the old (such as the apartments) for the sake of the new. Oshii thus problematizes the relentless development of technology which often leads to the loss of the past, both in memory and in concrete terms (buildings). Likewise, Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie also deals with a real world issue: the current state of peace in Japan. In the opening of the film, a UN peacekeeping force composed of Japanese soldiers is attacked in Southeast Asia. The commander of the force, Tsuge, requests permission to open fire from headquarters, but is denied. The Japanese government has provided soldiers to the UN mission wanting to be part of the international community, yet it is unwilling to have troops participate in combat. Ultimately, the whole force is decimated and only Tsuge survives. “To try to teach the rest of Japan the lessons he had learned so harshly,” Tsuge orchestrates a mock military coup d'état and terrorizes his country (Ruh 111). The film thus probes whether Japan’s post-war policy of pacifism, which prohibits military combat in other countries (even if it means turning a blind eye to suffering and wars outside of Japan), has brought about a false peace built on the suffering (or overlooking of suffering) of others.

Another truth effect is produced as a result of Oshii’s portrayal of the world through the narrative. First, representations of the institutions within society match the conceptions of the viewer. The police and the government are bureaucratic structures; they are stratified systems in which the subordinate is forced to do as the superiors say (even when the decision or action is flawed), political aspirations rule decision-making, and bureaucratic discord and disagreement are profuse. For instance, Captain Gotô in
*Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie* and *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie* originally had a promising career; however, he upset certain politicians who in turn sent him away from police headquarters to lead the second division of the lowly Special Vehicles 2 section out in the middle of nowhere. Likewise, it is the political aspirations held by the upper echelons of the police that Tsuge manipulates to orchestrate what appears to be a coup d’état in *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie*; he leads the police to think that a certain military base may be plotting against the state. Certain elements in the police hope to earn recognition by coming down hard on this fictitious threat, and, without real proof or credible intelligence of any plotting against the state, make a preventative (unlawful) arrest of the military base commander. As a result, the military base is threatened and arms and prepares itself for combat; Tsuge has managed to turn different parts of the state against each other through manipulation of political aspirations. In *Ghost in the Shell*, bureaucratic discord is again seen in different Public Security force sections; both Section 9 and Section 6 want to acquire the artificial life form termed the “Puppet Master” and vie against each other to this end.

The portrayal of economic realities in the narratives of Oshii’s films also produces a truth effect. Budget and financial limitations are present in several of these films. For example, in both *Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie* and *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie*, the Tokyo Metropolitan Police Special Vehicles 2 section is a small, poorly equipped and weakly funded group of several police officers and the mechanics who repair and maintain the officers’ labor robots. This depiction contrasts sharply with the impressive idea of a futuristic police force created to prevent labor crime. In this limited financial state, the group must farm and fish to lessen their financial needs and continue
to function. Likewise, budget restraints do not allow for ideal training. For instance, target practice (requiring travel and the use of a costly firing range) must be approved by headquarters and is only allowed once per year. These economic realities portray the Special Vehicles 2 section not as a team of science fiction action heroes striving to protect the world from evil, but as a small group of officers doing their job with the available funds, just as in the real world.

Oshii’s use of the science fiction cyberpunk genre produces an additional truth effect in several of his films. This genre allows Oshii to pursue to a further degree ideas concerning technology and its relation to humanity (ideas he had begun to explore in Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie). These ideas are very much present day issues and problems in the real world, and thus their appearance in Oshii’s works matches the viewer’s understandings of reality, bringing about realism through a truth effect.

Cyberpunk was originally a movement in American science fiction literature which began in the early 1980s and spread across mediums and cultures. William Gibson’s novels, such as the highly influential Neuromancer (1984) and Ridley Scott’s Blade Runner (1982) film are exemplars of this genre. In his Notes Toward a Postcyberpunk Manifesto, Person isolates the core characteristics of the genre as featuring a marginalized and “alienated loner living at the edge of society,” a futuristic dystopia, a network of computerized information, a condition in which daily life has been impacted by rapid technological change, and “invasive modification of the human body” (par. 5). Furthermore, works of cyberpunk often include computer hackers and artificial intelligence, use the Earth of the near future as the setting (in contrast to earlier science fiction narratives about space travel and unknown planets), and feature narratives that
underscore “the provisional status of many conventional definitions of value, rationality and truth” (Cavallaro, Cinema 27).

Both Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* and its sequel, *Innocence*, feature a great many of these characteristics. A vast information network, simply termed the “Net,” is present in the film. Likewise, daily life has clearly been altered as a result of technological progress; main characters easily connect to the Net from anywhere, even a car. A cable input in the back of the neck allows this convenient access. Similarly, a great degree of modification of the human body is also visible. All main characters feature some sort of modification, and multiple characters have full cybernetic bodies, the only remaining original body part being the brain. Lastly, the narratives of these films include hacking, references to artificial intelligence, and a near-future setting (2029 in *Ghost in the Shell* and 2032 in *Innocence*) on Earth while also questioning conventional definitions of value, rationality, and truth; particularly the value of the body and the form of the soul.

Only two common characteristics of the cyberpunk genre are less clear in these films. First, the “punk” element typified in the alienated and rebellious loner character is not present. However, Cavallaro argues that the punk element need not be a character, noting that “punk is not employed literally by cyberpunk writers as a context-bound and context specific culture,” but rather, “punk is used as a metaphor for restlessness, alienation, and cultural dislocation” (Cinema 166). Indeed, the characters in both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Innocence* show restlessness, alienation, and dislocation. In particular, Kusanagi Motoko questions restlessly the existence of her “ghost,” or soul, and is dislocated from reality and alienated from even her humanity as a complete cyborg. Likewise, it is also less apparent if the futuristic dystopian element of cyberpunk is
present in these films. Though individual suffering is shown, mass subjugation or repression is not portrayed. However, numerous dystopian characteristics are indeed present. For example, the main characters are members of Public Security Section 9, an anti-crime force that officially specializes in cybercrime and terror, but also conducts politically motivated operations without public knowledge. In fact, the group carries out the assassination of a foreign diplomat at the beginning of the first film. Additionally “shadowy government agencies” seem to actively conflict with one another in these narratives (Napier, Anime 105). For instance, Section 6, another Public Security division, conducts an operation against Section 9 and ultimately attempts to assassinate Kusanagi in *Ghost in the Shell*. Given these characteristics, both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Innocence* can reasonably be considered works of the cyberpunk genre.

Successfully employing the cyberpunk genre in both *Ghost in the Shell* and *Innocence*, Oshii examines two issues concerning the ever progressing development of technology in the present real world. As a result, a truth effect arises as these issues match viewer conceptions of reality. The first issue Oshii considers is the anxiety over the use of technology by humanity. His films exhibit an overt pessimism towards the use of technology and the harm it ultimately causes. For example, technology is used by Section 9 and others to break the law and even commit murder (for the government, no less). Kusanagi murders a foreign diplomat under the cover of thermo-optic camouflage, a form of applied technology that renders the wearer nearly invisible to the naked eye. Similarly, Section 6 members use computer systems to aid in sniping and destroying Kusanagi’s body towards the end of *Ghost in the Shell*. Furthermore, technology is not only misused by the government; multiple computer hackers are included in these films.
For instance, a garbage man is hacked in *Ghost in the Shell* and implanted with false memories; a wife and a daughter who he is tragically forced to recognize have never existed. What is more, the man is told he may never regain his former (actual) memories. Likewise, Batô, a member of Section 9, is hacked in *Innocence* and goes on a rampage in a supermarket, nearly murdering the shopkeeper.

The second issue Oshii considers is the ever deepening relation between humanity and technology which alters human abilities and even the definition of humanity itself. His films show human capacities greatly enhanced as a result of the advance of technology. As noted earlier, humans can connect directly to the Net without the need for a terminal. Similarly, cybernetic bodies allow humanity to overcome physical weakness and injury. For example, Kusanagi is shown jumping down from a helicopter, and despite noticeably deforming the surface of her landing spot, she is entirely unharmed. These enhanced corporeal capabilities extend to even the minute and daily activities such as drinking a beer; the viewer learns through a conversation between Kusanagi and Batô that the chemical implants within their bodies allow them to quickly break down alcohol and maintain sobriety. However, Oshii’s examination of the relation between humanity and technology does not end with consideration of human capabilities, but extends to the highly theoretical questions of what it is to be human and what the ultimate joining of humanity and technology might be. In *Ghost in the Shell*, a computer program originally designed for espionage claims that it has achieved self-cognizance, arguing that it has a “ghost” (soul) just as humans do. The self-professed information life form enters a cybernetic body and seeks out Kusanagi, who has been questioning her existence and form, urging her to combine so as to evolve into a new life form, neither
entirely artificial nor organic. The two combine, leaving their bodies and entering the Net. Thus Oshii questions whether the corporeal form is an integral element of humanity and if a form free of the body and joined with the Net is the final shape of humanity, radically and completely transformed by technology.

Given Oshii’s use of the cyberpunk genre and the concomitant elements of realism in his films, a question naturally arises: why do his works employ this particular genre and its distinctive sense of reality? Neither Oshii’s writings nor his interviews provide clarification. Certainly, his films are not merely the product of intellectual exercises which at once envisage the near future while also applying elements of realism to the traditionally formalistic mode of film of animation. It can reasonably be surmised that his manner of filmmaking derives from an objective to address the numerous real-world issues surrounding the ever advancing spread of technology specified earlier; his approach to filmmaking allows thorough consideration and representation of these issues. However, one must also take note of the popularity of Oshii’s films and of the cyberpunk genre itself; the popularity of this near-future world portrayal, its narrative, and its conventions has no doubt had a role in the production of Oshii’s films. Oshii himself shows no signs of interest in the popularity or reception of his work. His films are not easily accessible, containing a profusion of inter-textual references, making frequent use of erudite proverbs, and providing little plot explanation to the point that viewers often fail to understand what is happening in the narratives. In fact, Oshii admittedly seeks to make his films difficult for the viewer to understand, believing that this aids in the realization of the films’ respective visions, although at the cost of drama (“Dorama ka bijon ka”). Even so, the producers and financiers of Oshii’s films have certainly taken
popularity into account, necessarily aiming for a strong reception; the film business is just that—a business. As such, it is likely that the popularity of the cyberpunk genre and its conventions is partly responsible for the production of several of Oshii’s films.

The cyberpunk genre has been popular among audiences since its creation in the 1980s and remains so in the present. This is clearly seen in the output of works of this genre, not only in novel form (the original form), but in live-action cinema, such as Ridley Scott’s *Blade Runner* (1982), as well as in Japanese animation, such as *Akira* (1988), *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998), and *Texhnolyze* (2003). In particular, the *Ghost in the Shell* series has gained enormous popularity, growing from its original form as a manga graphic novel (1989–1991) by Shirô Masamune to Oshii’s *Ghost in the Shell* film, its sequel *Innocence*, and Kamiyama Kenji’s two television series, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* (2002-2003) and *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex 2nd Gig* (2004-2005), and film, *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex Solid State Society* (2006).

The source of popularity of the cyberpunk genre and its conventions as well as the massive success of the *Ghost in the Shell* series is found in three aspects of the genre: a disorientation of the viewer, new plot possibilities, and the issues that the genre considers. First, the near-future setting found in cyberpunk works is a disorienting world to the viewer; it is at once modernistic and conservative. The world is new, as seen in the advancement and proliferation of technology that extends to the human body, altering and enhancing it. However, the world is also familiar and conservative; the setting is Earth of the near-future, rather than an unknown planet in the distant future, and society’s institutions, bureaucracies, and problems are similar to those of the present. Thus, the
disoriented viewer is presented with a fascinating setting, both excitingly new and comfortably familiar.

The cyberpunk genre also achieves popularity through the numerous new plot possibilities that arise in a world where technology has changed even the human body. The narrative is no longer restricted by the limits of present-day technology. This is seen most clearly in the enhanced abilities of the body; whereas physical limitations on the body would have correspondingly limited the narrative in another genre, they are not present in the cyberpunk genre. Thus, Kusanagi can fall from a helicopter in *Ghost in the Shell* and stand unharmed due to her cybernetic body. In extreme cases, even death is negated; Kusanagi’s body is destroyed in the end of *Ghost in the Shell*, however her brain case is put into another body, allowing her to survive.

Finally, the cyberpunk genre attains popularity by allowing consideration of various new issues in film narratives. As detailed earlier, Oshii’s use of the genre allows the contemplation of ever advancing technology; specifically, he reflects on the anxiety stemming from the advancement of technology as well as the relation between technology and humanity. However, the genre does not only scrutinize new issues, but also considers those found in other genres and presents them in a fresh and interesting setting. For instance, political deceit and confrontation is a common theme in the political thriller genre, and while it may be considered tired and perhaps didactic in this genre, it is renewed and made interesting in the new setting of the cyberpunk genre. Thus, the conflict and deceit between diplomats and various sections of the government portrayed in *Ghost in the Shell* is made compelling.
Oshii Mamoru has a long history of instilling realism within his films, most notably in *Mobile Police Patlabor the Movie*, *Mobile Police Patlabor 2 the Movie*, *Ghost in the Shell*, and *Innocence*. Visuals such as highly detailed character designs and settings as well as realistically soft and restrained colors all produce reality effects in Oshii’s works and add a sense of realism, much like in those of Kon. Likewise, portrayals of issues and problems from the real world as well as realistic depictions of the world achieve realism through the films’ narratives in the form of truth effects. Lastly, Oshii’s utilization of the cyberpunk genre of science fiction brings about a further truth effect. These series of reality and truth effects allow Oshii to imbue his films with a noticeable sense of reality.
Chapter 3: Miyazaki Hayao

Having been directing films since 1979, Miyazaki Hayao is one of the most experienced and well known animation directors, and although his films all have strong elements of fantasy, even they contain numerous elements of realism. Reality effects in Miyazaki’s films are found principally in two aspects of the visuals: the fluid and meticulous animation and the detailed settings. Truth effects arise from narratives, including the portrayal of real-world problems and issues, the lack of clear and unambiguous villains, an avoidance of simple happy endings or solutions to the problems raised in the narratives, the depiction of economic reality, representations of growing up, and the complex portrayal of women. Although Miyazaki’s films are unquestionably fantastic in nature, these numerous elements of realism together convey a sense of reality to the viewer.

Before beginning the analysis of realism in Miyazaki’s films, it is necessary to first take note of the fantastic nature of these works. Overlooking this quality would encourage mistaken conclusions about Miyazaki and his films while also missing the significance of the presence of realism in even these fanciful works. As stated in the introduction, Japanese animation is primarily a formalistic mode of art (although it also features numerous elements of realism, especially as compared to other forms of animation), and Miyazaki’s films in particular are quite formalistic, featuring far more

Reality effects arise in Miyazaki’s films through the visuals. First, a reality effect is found in Miyazaki’s scrupulous animation. This animation, fluid and meticulously detailed, is realistic; human movement appears genuine, the environment is active and lively, and machines and vehicles move and operate realistically. This focus on animation quality stands in stark contrast to many works of Japanese animation which use the technique of limited animation with the goal of limiting the amount of animation necessary for the sake of savings in cost and time. This type of animation features a lower drawing-to-frame rate ratio; fewer drawings are photographed for each second of film. Additionally, only the essentials of movement are animated. In extreme cases (in older animation), only the mouth would be animated as a character speaks. Furthermore, camera techniques replace character movement; pans, tilts, dramatic close-ups, and other techniques are used instead of expensive and time-consuming animation. Thus, “any movement becomes a series of more or less perceptible jerks, abandoning a fundamental element of the American style: fluidity” (Raffaelli 127).
Similarly, the careful observance of human habits and form and Miyazaki’s translation of them into animation gives a sense of reality. He does not merely animate the necessary parts of actions (walking, eating, etc.), but includes the unessential nuance and details in the actions of people, such as personal habits and accidents/mistakes that people make. For example, in *Spirited Away* (2001), when Chihiro is leaving the boiler room and puts on her shoes, she taps the toe of her shoe, adjusting it comfortably onto her foot, before running off. This is not an essential detail to animate, but it is very realistic and adds to the depth of her character. Likewise, when Chihiro’s mother and father are eating at a restaurant early in the film, Chihiro’s mother bends her unused left arm and holds her hand up (making a V-shape with her arm). Of course, such a posture is not essential to eating, but is a habit of the mother; an idiosyncratic mannerism that breaths individuality and life into her character. Miyazaki’s animation also includes accidents and missteps. While their presence is not necessary, it adds realism as the actual world is not perfect, but full of such missteps. In *My Neighbor Totoro* (1988), such a misstep is seen when Mei, lost and separated from her family, sees her sister Satsuki on the Catbus (a giant cat which looks and operates like a bus), runs to the wrong side of the bus (the side without a passenger door), and runs back and around to the correct side. This is not an essential sequence to animate, but it adds realism; in her anxious state, she has mistaken where the door to the bus is located.

Another reality effect is found in the suffusion of detail in the settings of Miyazaki’s works. In contrast to the unrealistic and abstract character designs in his films, the settings are infused with high detail. In Miyazaki films, care is “devoted to the recording of minute details that may often go unheeded in real life” such as drainage
holes on the side of a bridge, spots of moss growing on stone steps, and the adhesive between a window frame and each individual pane of glass (Cavallaro, Animé 13). This level of detail is similar to that found in Kon and Oshii’s works; however, Miyazaki’s films comprise a far greater range of settings. Kon and Oshii feature settings of present-time or near-future Japan, but Miyazaki uses various times and locations throughout his works. Temporal periods range from the Muromachi Period (1336-1573), as in Princess Mononoke (1997), to the 1929 Great Depression age, as in Porco Rosso (1992), to modern time, as in Spirited Away. Locations are similarly diverse, such as rural Japan found in My Neighbor Totoro; Italy and multiple other unspecified European countries as in Porco Rosso, Laputa: Castle in the Sky (1986), Kiki’s Delivery Service (1989), and Howl’s Moving Castle (2004); and the highly fantastic spirit world found in Spirited Away.

As with Kon and Oshii’s films, details within these settings reveal imperfections of the world and avoid beautification and glamorization despite the various fantastic elements in Miyazaki’s works. This imperfection is seen in the common home environment, such as in slight nicks and marks in wooden doors, dents in stools, slight changes in the color of walls indicating age, and cracks in plaster. Likewise, imperfections are present in even the most ornate and uncommon locations, such as the abrasions on the stairs of a royal palace, indicating wear developed over a long time. It should also be noted that this eschewing of beautification is not limited to the setting. It is also found in character designs, particularly in those of female leads in several of Miyazaki’s newer films. As Cavallaro notes, “in his most recent productions, Miyazaki has steered clear of conventional notions of feminine beauty altogether” (Animé 11). For
instance, Chihiro in *Spirited Away* is of a plain character design rather than one of the beauties that typically appear in fantasy films. Likewise, Sophie’s design in *Howl’s Moving Castle* is that of a very old woman for a great portion of the film as her appearance has been altered by a magic spell.

Numerous truth effects arise from the narratives of Miyazaki’s films. Most significantly, a truth effect is brought about through the portrayal of real-world issues and problems in narratives. The appearance of these issues agrees with viewer conceptions about what is true of the world. Pollution and environmental problems repeatedly figure in Miyazaki’s works. These problems first appear in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. The setting is an apocalyptic world in which an enormous and ever spreading forest of toxic miasma, termed the Sea of Decay, and the abnormally large insects within it are slowly overtaking the world and destroying the remnants of human civilization. Various nations attempt to destroy parts of the Sea of Decay; however, enraged insects go on a rampage, pursuing these humans until death, when their bodies let off more miasmic spores and further spread the Sea of Decay. When the Valley of the Wind, a small village-sized kingdom, is drawn into the conflict between two nations and the insects, Nausicaä, daughter of the ruler of the Valley of the Wind, attempts to save her village from the conflict. When she is thrust deep underground below the Sea of Decay, she notices that the toxins are not present and comes to the conclusion that the Sea of Decay is in actuality consuming and terminating the poisons man has released onto the Earth, presumably before or during the apocalypse. Thus, the Sea of Decay is a healing mechanism of the Earth. Nausicaä then attempts to stop the conflict between the humans and the insects of the Sea of Decay. She succeeds and saves her kingdom, but the
problem of the growing Sea of Decay and its toxic miasma is unresolved. Miyazaki thus addresses the problem of environmental destruction and pollution. He assigns responsibility for environmental problems to mankind for its relentless exploitation of environmental resources and abuse of ecological systems. Additionally, he intimates that there is no grand solution to solve environmental problems; humans must learn to live with nature rather than desperately trying to control it and the problems which arise from its domination.

The environmental issue reappears in *Princess Mononoke*. As mentioned earlier, the setting for this film is Muromachi Period (1336-1573) Japan; however, various gods exist in the form of animals. The gods and the animals they lead are in conflict with humanity. The narrative focuses especially on an ironworks town that deforests land and uses nature’s resources to make iron goods, including weapons. In the very beginning of the film, a boar god shot by an ironworks weapon grows mad with rage and becomes a demon, proceeding to go on a rampage and attacking a hidden remnant Emishi village. Ashitaka, the prince of the tribe, slays this demon, but is cursed to die during the encounter and travels west, searching for the cause of the boar’s anger as well as a cure for the curse. Ashitaka finds in the west the animal gods in addition to the ironworks village. He sympathizes with both sides, the latter being lead by Lady Eboshi, who has hired former prostitutes to work the bellows and lepers to construct the firearms, among others. Ashitaka attempts to stop the conflict from both sides, allying himself with neither. He ultimately succeeds in his struggle; however, the peace is most probably restricted to the few animal gods surviving and the ironworkers, and it is suggested that the animal gods eventually die out due to humanity’s actions. Miyazaki thus continues to
explore environmental problems in this work. Again, he affixes the responsibility for these problems on mankind; however, he goes further than in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*. Whereas the earlier film simply tells the viewer that mankind has ravaged the Earth, *Princess Mononoke* clearly shows environmental destruction and the use of nature’s resources. Miyazaki also again suggests that there is no ultimate solution to these problems. As mentioned earlier, the peace achieved is very likely limited to the ironworkers and the surrounding animals. It is also implied to be a temporary peace as the animal gods no longer exist in the present age; humanity must have eventually destroyed the last of this life. Additionally, lacking a grand solution just as in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Miyazaki’s narrative suggests that humans must coexist with nature. However, Miyazaki is much more pessimistic in this film about coexistence. Not only does the eventual death of the animal gods reflect further conflict, San and Ashitaka’s separation at the end of the film also suggests that a complete coexistence in which mankind does not harm nature is impossible. A human girl raised from infancy by a wolf god named Moro, San fights against the humans (and is termed Princess Mononoke); however, Ashitaka gains her confidence and they develop a close bond, possibly romantic. In spite of this relationship, the two separate at the end of the film, Ashitaka to live among humans, and San, unable to live among humanity and having refused Ashitaka’s offer to do so, to return to the forests. The two agree to meet from time to time. Miyazaki thus implies that complete harmony between humanity and nature is fundamentally impossible; humanity can only attempt to approach harmony and limit its burden on nature.
The depiction of environmental problems also appears in *Spirited Away* and *Ponyo on the Cliff* (2008), although in a more limited capacity. In *Spirited Away*, a god visits the bath house where the main character Chihiro, who has been spirited away to the spirit world, is working. This god is filthy and it is decided that he is a “stink god”; however, Chihiro notices something stuck in his side and pulls on it with the help of the other workers. A mountain of trash ranging from pipes, barrels, and an I-beam, to a bicycle, a toilet, and a dresser flows out from the god. The being is actually a river god, horribly polluted in the real world. Similarly, even *Ponyo on the Cliff*, a film clearly targeting a decidedly young audience, portrays environmental problems. When Fujimoto, Ponyo’s father, is following Ponyo in the harbor waters, he collides multiple times with garbage in the water such as bottles, buckets, gasoline containers, and a profusion of mud-like trash deposit on the sea floor.

The problem of war is also presented in several of Miyazaki’s works. In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, conflict is seen between several human nations and the insects of the Sea of Decay, but also between the nations themselves. The Tolmekian Empire aims to unite the world’s remaining nations and wage war against the insects and the Sea of Decay. To do so, they forcibly take over those who do not willingly join them. Thus, wars between nations result. Pejite is one such nation that fights against the Tolmekians, even going so far as to provoke insect attacks and, by consequence, allowing the Sea of Decay to expand. War between these two nations ultimately threatens the Valley of the Wind kingdom as Pejite attempts to provoke an insect attack there to strike the Tolmekians who have occupied the Valley of the Wind in the beginning of the film. Miyazaki’s representation goes further than simply portraying war in a harsh light; it
intimates that there is never a just cause for war. Tolmekia, though aspiring to unify nations and rescue mankind from the Sea of Decay, is portrayed negatively as a militaristic nation of murderers. Pejite, although simply trying to protect itself from Tolmekia, would sacrifice the Valley of the Wind as well as enlarge the Sea of Decay, and is thus similarly depicted negatively. Neither side is just in their war.

*Porco Rosso* also addresses the problem of war. The setting is 1929 in Italy, and as such, World War I has already ended; however, the main character Marco (or Porco Rosso) continues to agonize over it. He is the only member of his friends to survive the war and feels a deep sense of guilt; so much so that the guilt finds representation in his physical form. Marco’s head has the appearance of a pig, and it is implied that his own self-loathing is the cause. Although originally entirely human, he has the form of a pig after the war, and it is only after he gains the affections of someone at the end of the film that he regains self-respect and his human form. Miyazaki seems to suggest that war is ultimately of no benefit, at least to those directly involved; even those who survive are left to suffer after the war has ended.

Likewise, *Princess Mononoke* features the problem of war, both between humans and various animal gods and among humans alone. The prime focus of the narrative is the conflict between the animal gods and the men and women of the ironworks; however, numerous battles between humans are also shown. While journeying west, Ashitaka is by chance involved in a battle among samurai (as well as villagers), and it can be inferred that it is late in the Muromachi Period, drawing near to the tumultuous Sengoku Period (1467-1568). Additionally, samurai from the domain where the ironworks is located
come there and battle; the domain lord is interested in the land of the ironworkers now that they have built the ironworks and worked hard to make the land profitable.

Similarly, war is addressed in *Howl’s Moving Castle*. The film is set in a kingdom that is just about to go to war. The narrative focuses on Sophie, an 18-year-old girl turned very old by a magic spell, and Howl, the wizard she loves. Howl does not want to go to war (in fact, he actively interferes in it), but is commanded to by the king’s head sorceress, Madam Suliman. When their home is threatened, Howl finally joins the conflict to protect those close to him. The fighting is fierce, showing villages ablaze and Sophie’s hometown destroyed; “devastating conflagrations fill the screen, while sinister battleships and mammoth zeppelin bombers unremittingly torture the battered environment” (Cavallaro, *Animé* 170). It is only when Sophie finds the missing prince of the opposing country that the war appears to stop; the prince, released from a spell, exclaims that he will return to his country and stop the war. In this film, Miyazaki not only shows the destruction of war, but points out and criticizes the glorification of war. Just as war is beginning early in the film, crowds of people are shown celebrating, laughing, and cheering during a parade for soldiers about to leave for battle. The entire city seems enthusiastic and excited. Such images show an idealization of war among the populace. People soon lose this enthusiasm as a dreadnaught returns from battle devastated, the enemy disperses propaganda, and towns in the kingdom begin to be bombed. Thus, the people who foolishly idealized war are made to suffer as a result.

Finally, issues of materiality and consumption are dealt with in *Spirited Away*. Everyone in the bathhouse where Chihiro finds work is portrayed as being obsessed with money and material goods. Yubaaba, the master of the bathhouse, is a prime example;
she places all value on material objects, such as jewels, gold, and other luxuries. So much does this fixation on materiality dominate her that she fails to realize when something truly precious disappears. Her baby is turned into a mouse by a sorceress, and not only does she not recognize the fake that the sorceress installs in the baby’s place (her attention is instead focused on recently acquired gold nuggets), but she fails to recognize her child in mouse form upon encountering him. Miyazaki thus points out the danger of a materialistic life: one loses sight of what truly has value.

Likewise, directly related to materialistic value, the issue of consumption is present in the film. This issue is seen from the start of the film as Chihiro’s parents gorge themselves with food at a restaurant stand in a theme park (which is actually the spirit world). Chihiro wanders off from her parents and explores the surroundings, however when she returns, she finds her parents turned into enormous pigs creating a mess. Thus, Miyazaki portrays consumption negatively from the very start of the film. More importantly, No Face’s furious devouring in the bathhouse depicts overconsumption poorly. No Face, an extremely lonely spirit with no memory or family, goes on a feeding frenzy, eating all that the enormous bathhouse can make for him, growing vulgar and obese. It is as if he is desperately trying to fill the void inside himself stemming from loneliness. He only finds fulfillment after Chihiro gives him a medicinal herb granted to her by a river god; No Face vomits out all he has consumed, and befriends Chihiro. Miyazaki thus suggests that the lifestyle of excess consumption can never replace the worth of human connections. Indeed, it only results in the poisoning of the self.

Another truth effect is produced by the narratives lies in the lack of a clear villain. This matches the viewer’s understanding of reality; people are complicated and
ambiguous, not simply wicked like the villain of a fairy tale. Many Miyazaki films either paint a much more complicated picture of any character who might be termed an antagonist or simply lack such a figure altogether. For example, Kushana, Tolmekian princess and commander of the Tolmekian army in *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, is not merely a mad despot with illusions of grandeur and aspirations to rule the world; she is honestly trying to save humanity by uniting nations and conquering the Sea of Decay. To this end, she has suffered greatly, as evidenced by her mangled body.

The portrayal of Lady Eboshi in *Princess Mononoke* is yet more ambiguous. She deforests nature and murders animals as well as humans; however, she protects her ironworks village, hires former prostitutes to work the bellows, and employs lepers when nobody else would accept them. Thus, not only is her goal of leading and protecting the village at odds with the trite and simplistic depictions of villains in typical fantasy narratives, her portrayal is made yet more ambiguous than that of Kushana as her good character is depicted concretely in the hiring and aiding of outcasts that would have otherwise suffered greatly. As McCarthy explains, “she’s a complex character whose motivations and drives can’t be understood in terms of ‘good’ versus ‘evil’” (194).

In *Porco Rosso*, American Donald Curtis might be considered a rival of Marco, the main character, rather than a villain. While he does challenge Marco to a duel in their airplanes and shoots him down, he only wishes to defeat Marco and earn the recognition of having bested the top pilot of the Adriatic Sea. Rather than a wicked villain, Curtis is portrayed as a playboy, interested in beautiful women (who love Marco), and an aspiring young man with dreams of becoming a Hollywood star and (quite comically) eventually...
President of the United States. The rematch between the two ends not with a death or even a downed airplane; it finishes in a humorous fist fight.

None of My Neighbor Totoro, Kiki’s Delivery Service, or Ponyo on the Cliff feature any character that might be considered a villain. My Neighbor Totoro is about two sisters who, after having moved to a rural town, encounter fantastic creatures (the Totoros) and endure their mother’s prolonged illness. Kiki’s Delivery Service tells the story of a young witch’s journey out into the world, the business she creates (a delivery service), and a loss of confidence, symbolized in the loss of her flight magic, which she must overcome. Lastly, in Ponyo on the Cliff, a fish wants to become human in order to be with her friend, Sôsuke. These narratives operate without any real antagonist.

An additional truth effect is produced as a result of narratives which often lack happy endings and fail to provide answers to the problems and issues present within the films. Such narrative representations align themselves well with the uncertain and question-filled real world. As mentioned earlier, neither Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind nor Princess Mononoke feature solutions to the environmental problems they deal with; there is no happy ending. In Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind, the threat of the Sea of Decay has not been overcome by the end of the film. Likewise, in Princess Mononoke, it is intimated that the animal gods eventually perish due to humanity’s destruction of nature. Furthermore, the romance between San (representative of nature) and Ashitaka (symbolic of humanity, albeit one mindful of nature), is never realized, as they decide to live in the forest and the ironworks village respectively; as Drazen terms it, “she doesn’t ride off into the sunset with Prince Ashitaka” (276).
Porco Rosso’s ending is similarly devoid of a happy ending. Marco triumphs over Curtis in their rematch, and after gaining the affections of Fio, recovers his human form. Fio’s affections have likely improved Marco’s negative self-image, an image born out of his guilt-ridden survival of World War I; he survived while his friends did not. However, Marco does not stay with Fio or go to Gina, who might be considered his actual love, but flies off, never to be seen by either woman again. He has likely returned to his lonely island in the Adriatic, unable to ever be released from his guilt of survival, even though his self-image has improved.

Even Howl’s Moving Castle, which ends with a scene showing Sophie and Howl kiss and fly off into the blue sky, might be considered quite the opposite of the happy ending it seems to be. First, as Cavallaro explains, “the audience is simply not allowed to indulge in this moment of harmony and somehow suppress or repress the troubling images of ruination and blinding acrimony that have marked several of the film’s most dramatic sequences” (Animé 171). Second, sorceress Madam Suliman’s sudden decision to stop the war is alarming; having seen through her crystal ball the resolution among the main characters and the finding of the prince of the opposing country, she comments that it is a happy ending and calls for the Prime Minister and Minister of Defense to end the “foolish war.” This abrupt decision is apparently made on a whim and suggests that the very opposite is also possible; the war may start again quite capriciously. Indeed, there is no reason given for the war in the film, and it may very well have started equally as arbitrarily. Third, the final scene questions any true resolution. The scene consists of military airships flying below dark clouds over villages towards the right of the screen, a pan and tilt left and up to Howl’s castle flying leftward above the clouds in a blue sky,
shots of happy characters, and a kiss between Sophie and Howl. The first part of the scene contrasts sharply with the happiness of the second, compelling the viewer to question if the war is really over, and if so, whether it will start up again suddenly and haphazardly.

The portrayal of economic realities in several of Miyazaki’s works also produces a truth effect; depictions of characters working, earning money, and living within the means of their income match viewer notions of what reality is like. This portrayal is much like that in Oshii’s *Mobile Police Patlabor* films; however, rather than the budget of the entire police division, the economic reality is much more personal in Miyazaki’s work, relating to individuals instead of the group. *Kiki’s Delivery Service* offers the best example of this truth effect. The young witch Kiki leaves home for one year to live in another village, and must make a living for herself. Even though she is a witch, the only magic that Kiki is capable of is flight on her broom; she cannot create money, food, or shelter out of thin air. Kiki thus starts a delivery service in which she may make use of her ability of flight. She is shown working; weighing delivery items, delivering, and collecting pay; as well as shopping. Furthermore, her budgetary limitations are also realistically depicted as in Oshii’s films. Kiki must carefully consider her expenses and spend wisely. She is shown counting her funds, limiting the purchase of groceries to what she can afford, and regrettably passing up wanted items that are too expensive (red dress shoes). Such scenes “ground it [the film] firmly in a recognizable framework of the ‘real’” (Napier, *Anime* 164).

This depiction of economic reality is also seen in *Porco Rosso* and *Howl’s Moving Castle*, although it is not the focus of either film. In *Porco Rosso*, Marco makes a
living as a bounty hunter of “air pirates” (pirates with seaplanes). He negotiates his pay with the client, performs his job, and purchases supplies, fuel, and ammunition. Despite being known as the best fighter pilot in the Adriatic, Marco is shown to have financial limitations. For example, when Curtis destroys his plane, his savings is not enough for the repairs; he must take out a loan from the mechanic. Likewise, his dwelling consists of a tent propped up on a beach and a small shanty, possibly built into the side of a mountain, and does not suggest great financial means. In Howl’s Moving Castle, Howl and his assistant, Markl, run a business making use of their magic. As in Kiki’s Delivery Service, they cannot simply use magic to create food or money even though Howl is a very competent sorcerer in contrast to Kiki who is only a young witch. Markl is shown handling the everyday business such as selling powder which draws wind to boat sails. Sophie and Markl spend their funds in the marketplace.

Yet another truth effect arises from the representation of growing up in several of Miyazaki’s films. The experiences of the characters in these films fit the viewer’s own understanding of what it is like to grow up; specifically, an adoption of responsibility for one’s own life and the development of self-reliance. This representation is seen strongly in Kiki’s Delivery Service. As Kiki leaves home, she undergoes a journey of maturing. She must find a new village where she might be of use as a witch. She must also find housing despite being 13 years old, unaccompanied by a guardian, and holding no form of identification. Additionally, she must find some way of using her skills in a job to earn income. Kiki struggles to accomplish these tasks, finding a part-time job for room and board in a bakery, and starting a delivery service.
The process of maturing is also a key theme in *Spirited Away*. Chihiro, having had her parents turned into pigs, is alone in the spirit world. She is told that the only way she can survive in this world is to seek a job, work hard, and never utter a single complaint, otherwise she will be turned into a piece of coal or a pig; in this world, she alone can help herself. Although she is terribly frightened and reliant on the character Haku when she first finds this out and obtains a job in the bathhouse, she eventually takes responsibility for her life and becomes self-reliant. In fact, Chihiro grows to the point that she not only cares for herself, but also helps others, including Haku, who had originally aided her.

The final truth effect is found in the complex portrayal of women in Miyazaki’s works. These characters are not the one-dimensional docile beautiful princesses that typically inhabit fantasy narratives (particularly in western animation); they are “ambivalent characters that frequently transcend stereotypical notions of femininity and masculinity” and match more accurately the complex notions of women that viewers hold (Cavallaro, *Animé* 11). In *Nausicaä of the Valley of the Wind*, Nausicaä is indeed a beautiful princess; however, she is independent, inquisitive, caring, courageous, and strong in character. The viewer sees the caring side of her not only when she is with her people, but when she is with others, as when she aids the insects of the Sea of Decay that other humans are trying to destroy. In contrast, the viewer sees the brave and strong side of her character as she takes vengeance for her father’s murder and leads her people. Thus, Nausicaä’s character is multi-dimensional and complicated; she is not the typical fantasy narrative princess.
San’s portrayal in *Princess Mononoke* is similarly complex; she is at once aggressive, fearless, compassionate, and sensitive. Her bold and hostile character is visible as she makes her way into the ironworks, past castle-like barriers, and confronts all guards, riflemen, and Lady Eboshi alone in a rage. San’s benevolent nature is seen in her aid of the wolf god Moro, her mother; she sucks the blood from Moro’s bullet wound towards the beginning of the film. More significantly, she feeds and heals Ashitaka after he has been shot and is on the verge of death despite her strong dislike of humans (she herself is human, but has been raised by Moro) and suspicions of Ashitaka. Finally, her sensitive character is visible as she feels betrayed when Ashitaka attempts to aid both the gods of the forest as well as the humans.

Likewise, the depiction of the mechanic Fio in *Porco Rosso* is multi-dimensional; she is young, energetic, capable, intelligent, and brave. Her lively character is seen as she all but forces Marco to let her perform the repairs on his airplane. Despite Fio’s young age (17 years old), she is a very skilled and intelligent mechanic, providing Marco with a better airplane than he had had before for the rematch with Curtis. Fio’s brave nature is most visible as she stands up to the air pirates who want to destroy Marco’s new airplane in vengeance. She fearlessly admonishes them, explaining that seaplane pilots are supposed to be fine people who esteem honor, and urging them to let Marco challenge the American Curtis for the dignity of the seaplane pilots of the Adriatic.

Although Miyazaki’s films are undoubtedly formalistic, containing a legion of fantastic elements, these films too contain elements of realism. The visuals of Miyazaki’s works bring about reality effects, specifically through impressively smooth animation and settings of scrupulous detail. The narratives of these films produce truth
effects by means of the depiction of problems and issues present in reality, the absence of explicit villains, an eschewing of typical happy endings and clear-cut solutions to the problems introduced in the narrative, the portrayal of economic reality, depictions of growing up, and the multi-dimensional representation of women. The presence of these reality and truth effects in Miyazaki’s films brings about an impression of reality, even in the highly fantastic narratives and worlds this director creates.
Conclusion

The results of this analysis show a multitude of elements of realism in the works of Kon, Oshii, and Miyazaki. Despite the lack of many familiar film realism techniques particular to live-action cinema, elements of realism are indeed present. Reality effects in these works are found in the visuals, and include detailed character designs, settings of meticulous detail, the use of light, a subdued and natural color palette, and fluid and precise animation. Truth effects in these directors’ films rest in the narratives, and consist of the depiction of real-world problems and issues, realistic character portrayals, characters’ limited capacity for action, representations of suffering and pain, realistic world portrayals, the lack of unambiguous villains, avoidance of happy endings and solutions to the problems presented in the films, depictions of economic reality, portrayals of growing up, and complex representations of women.

Numerous similarities are visible in the realism of these three distinct directors, both in the form of reality effects and truth effects. Regarding reality effects, the use of highly detailed settings is a common feature in all of these directors’ works. Indeed, it is the most shared reality effect among these films. This characteristic is even found in Miyazaki’s films, despite the lack of detail in character designs in these works. Oshii and Kon, in particular, make use of photography to achieve this level of detail in the settings. Additionally, the settings found in all of these directors’ films all clearly portray
imperfections and avoid beautification and idealization of environments. Likewise, although not a feature found in Miyazaki’s work, meticulously detailed character designs are a commonality among the films of Kon and Oshii. Furthermore, these character designs avoid beautification as the settings do, rather providing a more genuine depiction of the human body. Similarly, both Kon and Oshii’s films produce a common reality effect in the use of colors; the chromatic palette in these films is muted and more closely matches the real world.

Concerning truth effects, the portrayal of problems and issues from the real world is an element of realism that all of the directors in this study employed. None of the filmmakers addressed the same issues, which ranged from the avoidance of responsibility and escapism, to the development of technology and its relation to humanity, to environmental problems and war. However, all of these issues indeed reflect directly on the real world. Likewise, the depiction of economic realities was another commonality among directors; both Oshii and Miyazaki’s films offer representations of a money economy which both demands work for income and restricts spending in the form of the limited budget. Finally, the realistic portrayal of characters in the narrative is another truth effect common among these directors. Specifically, Kon avoids the grandiose and exaggeration in the representation of characters’ lives, while Miyazaki eschews the simplistic villain character and presents a more multi-dimensional image of women.

These many common reality and truth effects suggest that these elements are the most common in all realistic Japanese animations, even beyond the limited number of directors and works considered in this study. Indeed, these appear to be the core
elements of realism in this type of Japanese animation. However, one cannot make such a determination without further research.

Significantly more research is necessary to come to the above conclusions. All realistic works of Japanese animation will have to be analyzed meticulously. Such film directors as Ōtomo Katsuhiro (*Akira*), Yamaga Hiroyuki (*Wings of Honneamise*), Okiura Hiroyuki (*Jin-Roh: The Wolf Brigade*), Hosoda Mamoru (*The Girl Who Leapt Through Time*), and Takahata Isao (*Grave of the Fireflies* and *Only Yesterday*) will need to be examined. Similarly, many television series must also be considered, such as Kamiyama Kenji’s *Ghost in the Shell: Stand Alone Complex* and Kojima Masayuki’s *Master Keaton*.

Beyond this research, possibly the most perplexing question prompting further inquiry into this subject is why realism is found in Japanese animation. The writings and interviews of the directors considered in this study do not shed light on this question. This thesis has suggested that a goal of addressing real-world issues in works is a reasonable conclusion. However, if this is so, why have these directors not chosen to work in live-action? Only Oshii has directed live-action films; roughly half of his films are in this cinematic mode. To address these questions, it is necessary to conduct exhaustive research on various art forms and their interactions with and influence on Japanese animation across history. Such art forms include manga graphic novels, which are widely recognized as having had a strong influence on the birth of Japanese animation, and indeed continue to deeply affect it. These art forms also include other types of literature as well as film, both Japanese and not.

This continued research will help characterize and detail realism in Japanese animation. More broadly, it will aid in understanding what Japanese animation is exactly,
and define how it is different from other forms of animation. Indeed, this research will help understand animation itself; one may thus recognize the full possibilities of the art form and discard the preconceptions and biases stemming from an inadequate understanding limited to Western animation.
References


