A Film Analysis of Makoto Shinkai’s Garden of Words, 5cm per Second, and Your Name

AJ Holmberg

Western Oregon University

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses

Recommended Citation
Holmberg, AJ, "A Film Analysis of Makoto Shinkai’s Garden of Words, 5cm per Second, and Your Name" (2019). Honors Senior Theses/Projects. 186.
https://digitalcommons.wou.edu/honors_theses/186

This Undergraduate Honors Thesis/Project is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Scholarship at Digital Commons@WOU. It has been accepted for inclusion in Honors Senior Theses/Projects by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons@WOU. For more information, please contact digitalcommons@wou.edu, kundas@mail.wou.edu, bakersc@mail.wou.edu.
A Film Analysis of Makoto Shinkai’s
Garden of Words, 5cm per Second, and
Your Name

Examining Themes of Isolation, Missed Connections, and Passage of Time

By
Alexander John Holmberg

An Honors Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for Graduation from the Western Oregon University Honors Program

Dr. Shaun Huston,
Thesis Advisor

Dr. Gavin Keulks,
Honors Program Director

June 2019
# Table of Contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Acknowledgements</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Abstract</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Approach to Research and Terminology</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Makoto Shinkai’s Filmography &amp; Place in the Industry</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Garden of Words</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5cm per Second</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your Name</td>
<td>43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conclusion</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Works Cited</td>
<td>56</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Acknowledgements:

The completion of this project would not have been possible without my advisor, Dr. Huston, who provided me with the proper resources and timely advice throughout the duration. His comments provided guidance that kept me on the right trajectory to finish this thesis.

A thank to Dr. Keulks is also needed because of his tolerance of late night emails. I have even more appreciation for his near instant responses for my numerous questions.
Abstract:

Makoto Shinkai’s *Garden of Words, 5cm per Second*, and *Your Name* have all been acclaimed as powerful films both in Japan and around the world. This project analyzes some of the filming techniques that Shinkai uses to make these films successful. The analysis centers on the themes of isolation, passage of time, and missed connections that occur throughout all three of the films. This project uses shots from the films to demonstrate how Shinkai uses certain filming strategies to accentuate these themes with the aid of the narrative and storyline. Initial analysis shows that Shinkai favors repetition of shots, montages, and long shots in these films. Further analysis could study the entirety of his works for similar themes and establish even more styles that remain consistent through his work.
Introduction:

Makoto Shinkai has been a rising star in the Japanese animation industry for many years and has garnered a significant amount of international attention as well. His style has been praised for its ability to draw emotion from viewers concerning teenage and young adult love stories.

This project examines the cinematic expression of dramatic and narrative themes in the films of Makoto Shinkai, with a specific scope of *Garden of Words*, *5cm per Second*, and *Your Name*. Main themes that will be analyzed and compared are those of missed relationships, isolation, and the impermanence that comes with the passing of time. Before investigating these themes it is necessary to define methods of film analysis and establish terminology that will be used to explain my findings and compare Shinkai’s works to that of other animators.

The analysis of these themes will be done in three stages. The first is finding interesting formal features, both in terms of camera location and editing. For example, the camera focusing on seemingly unimportant objects, or an isolation of a character compared to others. The second stage is taking those instances of film features and situating them into the context of the narrative. This is done to show the importance of the feature and why it does
more than just please the eye. The third stage is taking examples from across all three of the films and comparing them with each other in order to establish tendencies that Makoto Shinkai uses. Using these examples helps to demonstrate what makes them effective and unique from other films and separates Shinkai from other filmmakers.

The goal of this project is to draw increased awareness to Shinkai’s films. Although he is well-known in Japan and internationally recognized, the average person has still likely not heard of him or his work. The project will provide specifics on what makes Shinkai innovative and worthy of his critical appraisal, both in terms of his attention to detail and intricacy of the mise en scene.
**Approach to Research and Terminology:**

Film is a complex and influential art form that has grown more and more popular in the last hundred years, dating all the way back to Charlie Chaplin in the 1910’s. It is easy to watch and enjoy, but often it can be difficult to truly understand the decisions that directors make while filming. Critics have analyzed films and reported their opinions to the public since the beginning of the industry. Many reviews focus on the effectiveness of the plot or the acting in the movie, but there is so much more to film that the screenplay or the actors.

The analysis of film has evolved over the years. Instead of simply examining the content and the plot — as one may with a literary analysis — critics will now delve into the styles of filming that set directors apart from one another. Similar to how great authors have their own style, so to do great directors.

Advancements in technology over the past couple decades have allowed filmmakers to express their visions in new ways and provoke stronger and more powerful emotions. Isolation of objects, the inclusion of background materials, close-ups, long shots, or montages are all choices that directors are able to use in order to make their film more potent and unique. The infinite number of ways film helps enable movies to become a sort of
language in the modern day. As James Monaco explains in *How to Read a Film*, “Film is not a language in the sense that English, French, or mathematics is. ... Clearly, it is not necessary to acquire an intellectual understanding of film in order to appreciate it—at least on the most basic level. But film is very much like language. People who are highly experienced in film ... see more and hear more than people who seldom go to the movies. An education in the quasi-language of film opens up greater potential meaning for the observer” (Monaco 152).

And like other languages, there is a lot of nuance that can be skipped over or missed if a lack in understanding of the language is present. This is why understanding the nature of film and the intricacies that come with it is so important: it allows one to appreciate film for all that it is. Not just the visual aesthetics or the plot, but for the angles and settings that are at least partially responsible for the intense feelings that cinema can make a person feel.

Tying the form of a film (the technical side) with the meaning (the narrative) is necessary to create a good film and each aspect aids and completes the other. In order to fully comprehend the meaning of Shinkai’s films, a better understanding of what filming techniques and stylistic choices are used is absolutely critical. Within a narrative there is an explicit story, but
when filming, there are so many ways to provide implicit clues and subtleties by using the camera as a point of perspective. The balancing of these two ideas are what create effective films and allow these films to be pursued in an academic fashion.

My thesis aims to encompass all of these ideas, while focusing on Makoto Shinkai’s renowned films, *Garden of Words*, *5cm per Second*, and *Your Name*, and create a documentation on how the form (the technical aspects) of these films not only aid, but also define what makes these movies special. I plan to discuss how Shinkai’s decisions or his ‘language’ through his choice of camera angles, lighting, etc., are used in order to make an effective film and successful legacy.

Ultimately this project is designed to follow Martin Scorsese’s quote, “Cinema is a matter of what’s in the frame and what’s out,” and answering the question of why certain things are in the frame and the purpose that they serve. And equally as important is what the director chooses to leave out of the frame. The exclusion of an object or character in a scene can speak volumes, without any acknowledgement of the absence in the narrative. Ideally, nothing in a film is by accident. For Shinkai, specifically, the focus on objects and isolation is relevant for both what is in and what is out of every shot.
In order to properly analyze *Garden of Words, 5cm per Second*, and *Your Name*, it was necessary to establish the purpose of the films and how Shinkai portrayed that purpose through filming methods. I centered my analysis around three of the more frequent themes of all of the films and Shinkai in general — those being isolation, missed relationships, and the passage of time. Due to the fact that film analysis is such a broad discipline it was important for me to define criteria and a general approach for my research.

For this project, I used a shot-by-shot lens for my analysis — meaning that I took shots and images that were representative of the themes that I was examining and described how the techniques in these shots affected the interpretations of the audience (Ryan & Lenos). For instance, there are camera angles in all of the films that emphasize the isolation of characters from their surroundings and other characters. All of the films also have occasions where the setting or the inclusion/exclusion of an object help aid the theme of missed relationships, and the overall passage of time.

Of course, in doing this type of analysis, it was crucial for me to learn appropriate cinematic terminology in order to accurately and effectively understand and evaluate the techniques of Shinkai. Many of the terms that I discuss throughout this project will be briefly explained within the context of
the example; however, I have also compiled a list with definitions of terms I used from the book, *A Curriculum in Film*. These definitions were important to create a consistent framework for me to complete my shot-by-shot analysis. There may be different definitions than what I have used in my research, but for the sake of consistency the definitions that I describe are how I conducted my research. Special attention was paid to the mise en scene in specific shots and frames of the films. Mise en scene is the arrangement of scenery and other aspects of the setting. I looked for how objects were placed within shots that I chose to analyze, was there specific focus on a seemingly useless object, was there an emphasis on natural objects, where were the characters in relation to the other scenery, and examples of a similar nature.

When looking at films shot-by-shot, there was other terminology that was necessary to describe my findings. Even though these films are animated, there is still a ‘camera’ or point-of-view that the shots are filmed from. I refer to the ‘camera’ frequently throughout this thesis even though it is not a physical and real camera. *Frames* are singular images that are combined to create *shots* in a film. It is also important to note that a *shot* is simply one continuous “run of the camera” and there are three major varieties of shots: long, medium, and close-up. *Long shots* are described as shots where the focal point, or main point, of the camera is filmed from a distance. *Medium*
**Shots** are shots from a middle distance. And **Close-ups** are shots where the focal point takes up the majority of the screen. (Katz, 107-113).

A few other terms are critical for this project. **Camera Angles** are apparent when analyzing a film, but it is important to note that there are high angles (above), flat angles, and low angles (below) that can add emphasis to objects in the foreground or background in a scene. When one shot is followed by a different shot instantly they are called **Cuts**. **Cuts** can be used for contrasting or emphasis along with countless other possibilities in a scene. One other important term are **Establishing shots**. These shots are used to provide an introduction to the plot, setting, character, or even a major theme in a film.

These final two terms are fairly straightforward, but are crucial to this project in particular. **Sequences** are any number of different shots that are used to represent a feature in a film, a conversation, a train ride, and other continuous events. Finally, **Montages**, which are especially prevalent in Shinkai’s films, are edited sequences that can be used to portray time gaps, or rapid events — also used, in this case, as a vehicle to deliver strong emotional effects.

Examining the usage of these camera angles, lighting in certain frames, and the usage of the mise en scene was the main form of analysis for this
project. The angle of the shot can help highlight certain items that contribute to the narrative. The shot can be from up close to promote intimacy or from a distance to emphasize space and isolation. The lighting can do much the same, the illumination of certain objects helps viewers recognize the importance of them.

For example, in *Garden of Words*, numerous instances occur where the camera zooms in on isolated objects instead of focusing on the characters in the scene. Using images that physically separate objects and characters from their surroundings helps Shinkai to accentuate the already story-driven theme of isolation. In *5cm per Second* there are scenes where the characters are rendered insignificant by other, more camera focused objects. In *Your Name*, the passage of time is shown through camera techniques as well. When the lovers finally meet for the first time, due to the magic of time travel, their respective time periods are highlighted by the formation of the lake behind the characters.

Using these specific instances and tying these forms into the meanings of the films’ themes was the next step of analysis. This was done by providing context for the images that show these themes. In *5cm per Second*, a scene occurs where the main couple is standing in the snow looking at a barren cherry tree that suddenly appears to flower and bear fruit. The contrasting of
winter and spring in the images helps to provide more evidence for the theme of time within the movie. Using these important images and then connecting them to the context of the narrative helps to explain the purpose for why these techniques are used. The camera angles and mise en scene are used to accentuate the meaning of the narrative in a way that simple dialogue cannot.

After examining each of the films separately it is important to then compare common tendencies and camera usages between them to establish the techniques that Makoto Shinkai frequently uses in his films. For example, both 5cm per Second and Your Name provide a lot of isolated images of train stations and trains moving. They both point to themes of missed connections and the passage of time when the images are provided with context. Another example is that in all three of the films focus is placed on flying objects because they are isolated from the rest of world in the sky. Using these similar examples together helped to formulate tendencies that Shinkai uses in his films to help accentuate the themes that are propelled by the narrative.

The final product of this research was providing examples of filming techniques, formal features and styles — Shinkai uses in order for his movies to have the impact on audiences that they do. I have a different section for each film, where I provided a brief synopsis of the plot and setting to aid in my combination of the meaning (narrative) and the form of the films. After
this brief synopsis, I evaluated examples of all three of my main themes by putting each of these themes in a separate section so that they can be easily compared at the end of the analysis. And I concluded the section with a quick summary of the main formal features the film contained; such as, montages, lighting, etc.
Makoto Shinkai’s Filmography & Place in the Industry

Anime as a medium is a deep and diverse one. There are many anime movies and television series that resemble American cartoons in that they are designed for young children. But there are also many that embrace difficult and adult themes like *Neon Genesis Evangelion*, and *Death Note*. Something else that separates many anime from other cartoons is the attempt at realism, “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” (Stey 1). Of course, not all directors do this and the idea is recent, but many of the more renowned anime directors focus on a realistic portrayal of their themes and morals even if it is a fantastical setting.

When many people think of Japanese animation, they think of Hayao Miyazaki — the creator of *Spirited Away*, *Princess Mononoke*, and *Castle in the Sky*. The admiration and recognition Miyazaki receives is well deserved due to his many revolutionary techniques that he implemented in these films. However, it has been some time since Studio Ghibli and Miyazaki have released a film. It has caused many critics, like Mike Hale to ponder, “Anime would seem to be at a crossroads. Ghibli’s twilight raises the question of who is to step into the breach — to be the next Miyazaki.”
Based upon recent success, many critics have tabbed Shinkai as the next great anime director, the two share a lot in common; but they are also quite different in the way they approach the animation process and ‘filming’ itself. Both focus on sharp contrasting images, the weather, and breathtaking beauty and grandeur. That is where much of the comparisons can end however. Shinkai uses digital animation compared to hand drawn styles. He incorporates many lighting effects related to twilight that aid in time transitions (Bradshaw 41). Shinkai is able to embraces realism themes and attempts to make the artwork match reality as much as possible as well.

Makoto Shinkai’s style is more about provoking emotion rather than intricate plots. This is achieved with his attention to detail and portrayal of themes, which generally involve adolescent love. He appeals to similar things that adolescents feel: “Shinkai’s aesthetic-ideological strategies construct, develop and propagate an artistic vision that counterbalances the contemporary identity crisis triggered by increasing destabilized and fragile precarious selves with the notions of love and a melancholic longing for the past” (Grajedian). His films target feelings that many adolescents, young adults, and even adults feel often throughout their lives. So beyond just a form of entertainment, Shinkai’s works can be seen as a form of expression that many individuals can relate to.
Even beyond the themes and artistic values, there are specific filming strategies that set him apart from most of the world’s film industry and anime industry as well, “is markedly different from the characteristic narrative style of contemplative cinema, which comprises long takes, long static shots, slow narrative pace, longer length etc. Instead Shinkai uses an array of techniques in these films such as setting the scene through decoupage, bifurcated narration through visuals and audio which are non-complementary, string of ellipsis, condensed narration through montage sequences, first person voice-over, periodic alternation of static shots with fast action shots” (Jose 5). While other filmmakers also use quick cuts and montage scenes, Shinkai has been recognized as doing this in the most effective and emotion-provoking way in recent memory.

One of the more unique techniques that Shinkai employs to great use and frequency is the highlighting of everyday items that help portray a passage of time or even an overall theme. Even more importantly — albeit less unique — is, “his depiction of the city, Shinkai loves images of passing trains and sliding doors, emblems of glancing chances and evanescent connections. Each of his films is patterned around a separated pair; even when a couple moves into alignment, he introduces a more distant third figure for contrast” (Bradshaw 41).
Shinkai has often been compared to Miyazaki and has stated that he has been influenced by him, but has pointed out that, “You can’t be Miyazaki, you can only be the second Miyazaki” (Leader). Even though he has been influenced by Miyazaki, many have said that Shinkai's attention to detail and unique montage and long shot based techniques make his style unconventional and effective. All of these intricacies are what this thesis examines in great detail throughout his films and what exactly Shinkai does that is effective and what separates himself from other anime directors.
Garden of Words:

Synopsis:

_Garden of Words_, like many of Shinkai’s films, is romantic and drama filled. It begins on a rainy day with a high school student in Tokyo, who skips school when it rains, missing class to sketch shoe designs under a gazebo in a park. He meets a woman there, who is drinking alcohol and eating chocolate. They do not introduce themselves and simply sit in silence. When the boy, Takao, goes to leave — the woman, Yukari, recites a short poem about meeting in the rain. In the coming weeks, the two of them continue to meet and eventually discuss Takao’s interest in shoemaking and Takao decides to make her a pair of shoes in secret.

However, after the rainy season, he stops skipping school — as it is no longer raining — and he sees Yukari at his school one day. She was a literature teacher at his school who had just quit because of gossip at the school. Later that day, Takao meets her at the park again and after a thunderstorm, they end up back at her apartment. Takao confesses his love, but Yukari tells him that is inappropriate and he leaves very upset.

Yukari chases after him and they confront each other outside in the rain. Takao talks about how the time in the park was life-changing for him
and how it helped him with his depression. Yukari opens up about how she felt the same way. The film ends with Yukari moving on to a different job and Takao coming back to the park during the winter and placing a pair of completed shoes on the bench that they shared together.

Isolation:

Isolation is quite possibly what Shinkai does better than anything else in his films. *Garden of Words*, is no exception to this, and many of the examples from other themes involve some sort of isolation as well. The isolation present in this story is a sort of bittersweet kind, where it feels lonely and also gives a sense of self-sufficiency as well. In this story, Shinkai uses the park/garden that the characters visit as a seemingly distant and isolated world where the two characters can be together. Isolation of objects and characters revolves around the park in most contexts and provides immense emotional value for the viewer with simple shots of objects or characters — both from long shots and close-ups.

A more positive shot that represents isolation comes after Takao has met with Yukari for the first time. Here he narrates his feelings of joy and how he hopes it will rain more often so he can go and see her. The shot itself is a tracking shot of a crow flying through the sky during a rainy day. It is difficult
to pin down the exact meaning of the crow, but it is clear that it promotes a sense of isolated freedom for the character of Takao. The shot gives the viewer the sense that they are flying free and alone like the crow because of the aerial nature of the shot, as well as how the camera follows the bird closely throughout its various movements in flight.

Near the beginning is a perfect example of this garden/park being an isolation from the rest of world. Takao approaches a toll booth in order to enter the park and the camera faces him from the inside of the park. It is a simple shot, but with the framing of the booth it makes it feel as though Takao is entering a special place away from the world. Similarly Yukari arrives on a train at the park, but the shot has the train pass by in front followed by leaving Yukari isolated at the park alone, almost as if the outside world can not gain access to this precious sanctuary. Both of these shots utilize other objects highlighting the isolation of the garden/park and also the characters themselves.
While there are countless of other examples of Shinkai using filming techniques to promote the theme of isolation, there are few better than an exceedingly long distance shot of the two of them walking in the park. The shot is from so far away that the two characters seem to be little more than dots. And the garden is backed up by the landscape of Tokyo, making the garden itself feel isolated and the characters even more isolated within it. The layering of isolation comes through clearly in this shot and adds more emotion with almost no effort at all.
Isolation is a key theme in many of Shinkai’s films and his excellent use of long shots, tracking shots, and even the framing of other objects — helps to add to the feeling the narrative provides.

**Passage of Time:**

Due to the short duration of *Garden of Words* (45 min), the film requires many filming techniques that portray the passage of small and large amounts of time. One of Shinkai’s most effective ways of doing this is through montages, whether at the beginning or end of the film, they are frequently used to great effect and this film is no different.

The first montage that signifies a significant passage of time comes in the form of simple three images. It occurs when rainy season comes to an end and summer arrives in full swing. The first image is simply a locust molting and spreading its wings. The second is the city skyline on a clear evening (devoid of the rain) that helps aid in the portrayal of the end of spring. And finally with Yukari stirring a drink with ice cubes on it with the glass sweating profusely. Those three images signify a passage of months that takes roughly four seconds.
Shinkai’s use of montages is quick, simple, and effective at times; but at times they seem unconventional and oddly timed. Often times, he will place montages at the climax of a film or as a replacement for dialogue in an important scene. Likewise in *Garden of Words*, he does this right before the end credits roll — but before the final scene with Takao placing the shoes on the bench in winter.

The two character’s time together has come to an end — as well as the film. And Shinkai decides to compress the narrative to pack more emotion into a shorter time frame. He flips back and forth between the characters, first waiting/riding trains somewhere, then to the city scape and the garden, then to Takao at school and Yukari at her new job, and continuing with more images from Takao living life without Yukari (notably happier than before he met her).
The montage is quick, but serves its purpose of wrapping up the story in a way that causes rapid emotion from the viewer by switching back and
forth between the characters and what has happened since they departed from each other. It concludes with a low shot inside the park looking up at the cityscape as the credits begin to roll by, giving the sense of finality inside of the garden itself.

Montages are one of Shinkai’s signature moves in his films to portray many things — notably the passage of time in this case. They are an effective way to condense the narrative, but keeping the meaning and emotional impact intact.
Missed Relationships:

Missed relationships span the narrative of all three films, but with many of the narratives being condensed — it is crucial for good filming techniques to accentuate this theme. In the case of Garden of Words, this theme may be the least utilized; but it is still notable in the film. For missed connections, Shinkai often uses shots of objects to represent this theme, as is the case in this movie as well. However, this film also has many scenes that utilize a high angle shots to a similar purpose. When Takao finds out that Yukari is a teacher at his school, he does so by looking out of a classroom window into a courtyard below.

This high angle shot is interesting for a number of reasons. The first being that Shinkai could have simply switched perspectives and have a simple flat shot of her leaving the school and the narrative would have remained the same. Instead, he chose to look down into an isolated courtyard from the
perspective of Takao. The high angle shot emphasizes the fact that she is alone and is further accentuated by her shadow being the only thing near her. Now the main reason that this is a technique used to further missed connections is because of the implication that it is Takao’s perspective looking out the window.

Even though he does not admit feelings for her until later, it is clear that he enjoys spending time together. This high angled perspective shot only emphasizes how, in the setting of a school, a teacher and student will never be together. It is a simple shot, but the decision to take it from a high angle makes the emotional value felt even stronger without necessarily changing anything to the narrative structure otherwise.

Possibly the strongest sequence of the film is the moment, at the end, when Takao leaves the shoes that he designed on the empty bench at the park in the snow during winter. While there are many shots that deserve attention from this scene, two stand out the strongest — both having near mirror shots earlier in the film. The first is a flat angle shot that looks in on Takao from a slight distance reading a book, exactly like when he first meet Yukari; but this time she is obviously absent from the frame.
By using the exact same angle and distance as earlier, Shinkai is able to provoke a sense of a lost relationship by Takao sitting alone in the same place he had a companion only a few months ago. Possibly even more important to the shot and the mood in general, is the change in the weather. When the two met, it was in the warmth of spring and summer; but when Takao comes alone it is snowy and frozen. This aspect fits well with the theme of passage of time, but it also emphasizes that a relationship between the two of them is not possible and the times they had together are over. Again, it is a simple shot, but the foresight to use the same angle to emphasize the repetition with the absence of Yukari is genius.

Finally, another high angle shot, but this time it feels as though it is a view from the heavens. When Takao leaves the shoes on the bench, he walks away with his umbrella — perfectly contrasting with a scene earlier where the two characters walk through the park with umbrellas to meet from the exact same angle. The high angle here helps to accentuate the isolation of
Takao, even though that is a theme itself, it fits better here because of the context of the narrative.

Whereas when the two characters meet with umbrellas and signifies their connection and relationship, when Takao walks away individually it draws even more attention to the fact that he is leaving alone and that the relationship between Takao and Yukari is over forever. The aerial shot is another simple shot, but again it requires foresight to be able to duplicate one shot with slight alterations that will be able to add to the emotional value of the narrative.

Even though missed connections is not the strongest theme of this film, it is clear that even using simple shots can greatly enhance the meaning of the narrative. Here Shinkai keeps with fairly common techniques, but they are done exceedingly well in an effort to get the viewer invested and enthralled in the film as a whole.
**5cm per Second:**

**Synopsis:**

*5cm per Second* is split into three continuous episodes. The first, views the young relationship of two elementary students, Takaki and Akari. The two are separated when the two families move away from each other in middle school. After exchanging letters with each other, they decide to meet at a midpoint train station. In the snow, Takaki takes a train for many hours that is delayed frequently and arrives to the meeting point hours late. Akari is still there and after the train station is closed, they find an abandoned shack and spend the night there contemplating what may happen with them in the future.

The second episode follows Takaki during his last year of high school. His family has moved again and he now lives on an island next to a space shuttle launch site. A girl in his class, Kanae, is in love with Takaki and attempts to convey her feelings after many internal struggles and confidence issues. One day as they are walking home from school, they watch a shuttle launch in the distance into space, and at that moment Kanae realizes that Takaki is far away — like the space shuttle — and is chasing after love with someone else (Akari). The episode ends with Kanae returning home and crying herself to sleep.
The final episode occurs when the three characters are adults working in Tokyo. Takaki has been dumped by his girlfriend and beer cans litter the house, and he feels as though something is missing in his life. Akari is about to be married, but often thinks of Takaki. There is a long montage of all the experiences the two have had together that ends with the two of them passing each other at the train tracks. Puzzled, they look back, but speeding trains have blocked their view. Takaki waits until the train has passed, but there is no longer anyone there. The movie ends as Takaki walks away with a sad smile on his face.

Isolation:

Throughout the three episodes that comprise this film there are countless instances of isolation — whether in a wide open space, or isolated in a tiny black room. Many of the shots that perfectly encapsulate this theme are long shots, including long shots that use other objects to further emphasis this isolation of characters.

The first example comes from Akari calling Takaki from a payphone booth to tell him that she is moving farther away from him. Using a long shot in this scene helps cement her as alone, aided by the fact that it is night time and dark. Even further amplifying her isolation is the fact that she is further
enclosed in a phone booth, and having the light inside contrast heavily with the darkness around.

The long shot also makes Akari look smaller and weaker than she may look up close and in the light.

Another long shot that is used to great effect here is when Akari and Takaki meet at the train station and find a cherry tree in the middle of winter. Unlike the previous shot, this one is from such a long distance that the viewer can barely make out the two characters next to the cherry tree.
The lack of light also helps to further emphasise the isolation of these characters from the rest of the world. It is important to the narrative because at that moment the two characters are only concerned with each other in that moment. They do not care about what will happen next or how their relationship will continue. And this shot brings that feeling out even more because of how it emphasises their isolation from the outside world.

Repetition can also aid greatly when portraying an important theme like isolation. Near the beginning of the film, Takaki waits alone at the train station isolated from everyone around him as he stares at the instructions he has to meet Akari. Similarly, at the end of the film, Akari waits at a train station alone, on the opposite side of the screen from Takaki.

This subtle switch helps the viewer draw the conclusion that the two are truly alone and also emphasises the missed relationship that the two of them were unable to keep throughout their life.

Finally, one of the most spectacular images of the film, a scene with Kanae, really concludes how effective long shots are at conveying isolation of
characters. Before she draws the courage to tell Takaki that she loves him, Kanae attempts to stand up on a wave while surfing for the first time. This shot promotes isolation, but in a more self-sufficient light.

As she finishes riding the wave, the brilliance of the sun causes her character to become a shadow that really contrasts with the blue of the water. Making it a long shot is important in emphasising the vastness of the ocean and how small she is in comparison, highlighting the isolation at sea. The shot shows how she accomplished this feat by herself and how this moment of success is completely isolated from the outside world.

Passage of Time:

Similarly to *Garden of Words*, much of the narrative has to be condensed to provide enough time to finish the story. In true Shinkai fashion, most of this is done through montage; but also through a single quick cut to
show how much things have changed over time. The passage of time may be the strongest theme that *5cm Per Second* has to offer.

Beginning with the montage in the first five minutes of the film, Shinkai uses this montage in order to establish the distance between Akari and Takaki by having them exchange letters repeatedly. This quick cut between letters, to images of school, to the characters — helps Shinkai establish the fact that a long time has passed since they were in elementary school together.

As far as the filming techniques themselves, it is a rather simple tactic — but effective. Shinkai focuses on everyday activities to emphasize the passage of time. An image of students studying, a street in summer, a city skyline, and then in order to create meaning of these random images, he inserts close-ups of the letters that they exchange with each other. The final outcome is a montage that highlights the two characters keeping their relationship alive, while also noting that months have passed by with only them exchanging letters as contact.
Another great example of the passage of time, comes with the repetition of a scene with Akari and Takaki being separated by trains. At the beginning of the movie, Akari races across the train tracks and disappears until after the train passes, but at the end when Akari disappears as a train passes — she is no longer there when the train has gone.

First off, the characters have grown from children into adults, which highlights the passing of a large amount of time. And keeping the angle the same for both shots, it brings the viewer back to the beginning of the movie to provoke the emotional response that the narrative is pushing — lost love and missed relationships. Finally, the contrast of Akari being there in the first shot, and not being there in the second shot, really shows how much time has passed and how the two characters have grown so far apart.
A quick cut can also highlight the passage of time. When Akari and Takaki stand in front of the cherry tree in winter, they are reminded of their early childhood and Akari telling Takaki that cherry blossoms fall at 5cm per second. As Akari catches a snowflake in her hand, suddenly the barren cherry tree in winter is replaced with a cherry tree in full bloom and the snowflake becomes a blossom.

It is a simple shot to analyze, but the quick cut is super effective because of how fast it happens and concludes. The quickness of the cut gives a glimpse into the past of these two characters as they attempt to continue their relationship. The brevity of it helps to highlight how much has happened since the simple times of their childhood. Finally, the contrast of light helps to signify simpler times from the confusing and difficult times they face in that new moment.
Missed Relationships:

Much of the main message of this film is the missed relationships that people have in their lives and because of this the film is riddled with small filming techniques that push this theme.

For example, when Takaki rides the train to meet with Akari, he writes a letter to give to her when he arrives. At the station, when he goes to look at it, he loses it in the wind and it blows away into the unknown. The shot is stationary as the letter blows from his hand out into the night air.

It is effective because it signifies the fleeting relationship that Takaki and Akari are attempting to hold onto. The camera does not track and follow the letter, instead it stays stationary as the letter flies away into the dark. It is also important that the shot is relatively wide and causes the letter to look small and become smaller and smaller as it disappears.

Another example comes when, after spending the night together when they met at the train station, Akari watches Takaki’s train disappear down the
tracks. This is repeated later on when Akari meets her parents at the train station as she is about to be married. The contrast of the dejection she feels as Takaki rides away and the elation she has when her family discusses her engagement adds a lot of power to the narrative.

The shot is filmed from the same angle in both cases and in both shots she is facing away from the camera, but the presence of other characters helps to signify that Takaki and Akari’s relationship has finally ended. It is also important to note that both shots show train tracks with the train very far away in the distance. Possibly meaning that their time together has arrived and departed already.

Possibly the most important moment in the entire film is when the two characters pass each other at the train tracks as children and as adults, which is described above. This scene epitomizes missed connections because when they are children they wait for each other, but when they have grown apart they simply continue on with their lives.
It is critical that the two shots remain exactly the same besides the two characters because it shows that nothing has changed except the two of them. The scenery and the trains have remained the same, but the characters have grown apart and have missed the window for their relationship to succeed.
Your Name: 

Synopsis:

*Your Name* begins with two teenagers switching bodies, waking up as the other person on random days, after a comet passes overhead in Tokyo. When the two awaken, they slowly forget everything that happened when they switched bodies, like a dream. The boy, Taki, lives in Tokyo and juggles school and a part-time job at an Italian restaurant. The girl, Mitsuha, lives in the countryside in a small town without much to do. After some confusion with these constant switches, they begin to set rules about what the other can do when they switch bodies -- no spending Taki’s money, no showers, no making a scene at Mitsuha’s school.

Mitsuha’s family looks after a traditional shrine that represents human connections. One day, when the two have switched places, Taki -- as Mitsuha -- travels up a mountainside with Mitsuha’s family with some alcohol created by them as an offering to the shrine. After this event has taken place, the two of them no longer switch places with each other. The only clue is a note that Mitsuha left Taki on his phone the last time they switched bodies claiming that there was a comet passing overhead that night. Taki attempts to call
Mitsuha, but the number does not go through. Sensing that something bad has happened, he attempts to locate her by traveling and finding her town.

Eventually, he discovers that she is from Itomori and goes to visit. Only to find that a comet destroyed the town over three years ago. At a hotel, Taki has a sudden memory of going the shrine with alcohol in Mitsuha's body and attempts to find the shrine. Upon finding the shrine, he drinks some of the alcohol and wakes up in Mitsuha's body again. Knowing that the comet will destroy Itomori, he attempts to convince the town of their impending doom. Ultimately, he realizes that he needs the true Mitsuha to save the city and returns to the shrine. Upon arriving at the shrine at twilight, or magic hour as they call it, the two finally meet for the first time in the magic of the shrine. They know that they will forget everything when they awake from this dream, but Mitsuha ends up finding a way to save the people of Itomori.

Taki awakens at the shrine with no memory of what has occurred and returns home with a strange feeling that he is forgetting something important. The same goes for Mitsuha. Five years later, and the two of them see each other while they are riding opposite trains. Suddenly, the memories flood back to them and they attempt to find each other again. The film ends with them passing each other on a stairwell, finally meeting in reality.
Isolation:

*Your Name* focuses more on bringing to characters together than on isolation itself — unlike the other two movies; but there are still good examples of characters being isolated. Many of these scenes also highlight the missed connections and relationships that the characters experience, so I will attempt to focus heavily on only isolation in this section.

There are two near identical scenes that depict isolation for both Taki and Mitsuha. For Taki, it is at the beginning when he looks at the comet fly over his apartment in Tokyo and for Mitsuha it is when she before the comet crashes into Itomori. The shots are near identical, simply replacing the characters is the only difference. It is an interesting angle, because the camera is close-up on the characters, but they are located in the right corner of the screen. Most of the focus is placed on the night sky with the comet being the object that captures the most attention garnered from the bright lights and colors that are used to attract the viewer’s eyes.
As far as how these two shots impact the narrative and give off a sense of isolation, it is important to note that after the first scene the two characters began switching places. And after the second scene they stopped switching places with each other. Really the scenes signify the end of isolation and a return to isolation, because when they are switching bodies with each other they are no longer isolated from an intimate relationship. Even more so, having the camera focus more on the comet than the character makes the characters seem small and insignificant in the face of the might of the natural world. The comet is this all powerful force that is able to end Mitsuha’s life and end the connection that the two characters share together, effectively isolating them from each other — while also being the force that ended their isolation and brought them together in the first place.

One more important scene that aids a lot in the narrative, while also pushing the theme of isolation, comes when Mitsuha is complaining about how small her town in the country is. As she is talking, the camera pans out into the lake, with nothing to see besides a lone bird flying over the surface of the lake. This scene really promotes the vastness of the Japanese countryside and while representing isolation for Mitsuha herself because of how much she does not like living there, it also serves as isolation for the city of Itomori from
the rest of Japan as a whole.

The shot is fairly simple, but holds a few special aspects that really drive home the message. The bird flying over the vastness of the lake is a good touch because of how small it looks in comparison to the lake, becoming an easy symbol for Mitsuha feeling insignificant in Itomori and Itomori seemingly being insignificant in Japan. The fact that it is such a wide shot of the lake helps the viewer be awed by the largeness of nature, again making this natural beauty feel isolated from the rest of the world.

**Passage of Time:**

With the narrative being spread out over many years, the ability to portray a passage of a large amount of time with little touches in specific shots is very admirable. Shinkai uses contrasting shots to show a large
passage of time, as well as easter egg type material that gives hints that the two characters are from different time periods all-together.

One of the more noticeable contrasting shots comes when Taki and Mitsuha meet on top of the mountain during magic hour (twilight). Due to the fact that they are technically three years apart in their timelines, the only time they can meet is during twilight — the time when supernatural things may occur according to Japanese tradition. When they meet on top the mountain, Shinkai portrays their different timelines by changing the shape of the Itomori lake behind them. For Mitsuha, there is no mark where the comet hit, but for Taki the lake has grown bigger from the destruction the comet has wrought on the area.

The shot really helps the narrative by giving the viewer something to keep track of time with. By including the different lakes in the background of each character when the camera is focused on them, it is able to give understanding of the situation for the viewer without explicitly explaining it.
Also, by keeping the characters out of the middle of the shot the viewer is easier able to see the lake in the background. Shinkai uses the contrasting differences in these shots to great effect for the narrative as well as a magical feeling that comes in the supernatural occurrence of the two characters finally meeting in person for the first time.

Another important scene comes earlier in the movie when Taki takes Ms. Okudera (a coworker) to a museum on a sort of date that Mitsuha (while in his body) had set up. As they walk past a memorial display, a series of pictures of the lake at Itomori is shown after the comet has hit and destroyed the town.

It is a hint to the viewer that the two characters are from different time periods, but is hard to catch without full knowledge of the plot. It is a small
Missed Relationships:

There are so many examples of missed relationships in this film, but there are a couple that stick out as more cinematically interesting than the others, as well as more powerful and poignant.

One comes when Mitsuha and Taki meet atop of the mountain for the first time. Realizing that they will not remember their conversations when they return to reality, they have the idea to write each others names on their hands so they will not forget. Just as Taki begins to write his name on Mitsuha’s hand, the pen drops and Taki is gone because twilight has come to an end.

It is a simple contrasting image, but its simplicity is what makes it so effective. The many different colors gives it a sort of magical feel that is
represented well in the narrative as well. By keeping Taki in the exact same position, it really accentuates the missed relationship between them because of them being from different time periods. Her being there one second and gone the next is made even more powerful by the suddenness of her departure, with Taki still holding his hand up to touch her.

The next example actually comes when Taki and Mitsuha see each other in the real world for the first time. They both live and Tokyo and are plagued by a feeling that they are missing something in their lives, but are unsure of what exactly it is. One day while riding opposite trains they see each other, and know that the other person is exactly what they are looking for.

The shots are another case of switched perspectives that help show how much both characters are invested in their feeling of incompleteness. At this point in the film, it is still unsure if the two characters will have a happy ending together and these shots help push that idea of missed connections.
even stronger. There are still obstacles between them and the tinting of the glass helps to highlight the space that is still between them and how they can still not be together.
**Conclusion:**

While animation does not have a literal camera that tracks the action, like in traditional cinema, it does use many of the same filming techniques that can be found in live-action films. The three films of this project use many of these strategies in order to accentuate the themes of missed connections, the passage of time, and isolation. The more common and effective strategies of Makoto Shinkai are long shots that promote isolation, montages that show a passage of time, and quick cuts and repetition that symbolize missed connections.

Even though Shinkai is not the creator of any of these strategies, it has been shown above that he uses them to great effect. His work is a perfect example of using the ‘camera’ to help support the narrative. Essentially, he uses his form to enhance his meaning. Tactfully placing subtle repetition shots that help portray progress, quietly using imagery of trains or seasons changing to show long passages of time, and even isolating characters to show personal growth or devolution within the narrative.

The purpose of this study was to elaborate on *why* Shinkai uses the strategies that he does, and even more importantly what *purpose* these strategies serve within the context of the narrative. While this study only
begins to scratch the surface of the depth that can be found within film, it begins the process of answering the question of why. Through further study, a full analysis of all of Makoto Shinkai’s work could show, to a greater extent, if there are more styles that he favors beyond the aforementioned montages, etc.

I am grateful for the opportunity to explain how these films are so much more than simply entertainment. Film is a means of expression and analysis is needed in order to understand the entire message of a director and artist.
Works Cited:


