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I am a Japanese major who loves literature, art, and music. This research paper was written as my final paper for my ART 400C

(Japanese Visual Culture—Anime and Manga) course that I took during the Summer of 2015. Through the duration of this class we studied a variety of manga and anime works that not only focused on visual representations and art, but also the deeper meaning within the story line itself. This course allowed me to critically think about the in-depth meaning behind the story in various anime and manga works, and make correlations to Japanese history and society. For my final paper I wanted to concentrate on comparing the manga and anime for *5 Centimeters Per Second* because it was something different from what we have learned, and the way in which the two medias were represented had different effects. Not only did the visual representation catch my eye, but also the story line itself and how the characters are able to deal with the space and time that separates them.

5 Centimeters per Second

A Close Analysis of Two Forms of Media

CHANELLE MIWA

Art 400C (Special Topics: Japanese Visual Culture—Anime and Manga)
Mentor: Christopher Smith

Makoto Shinkai's 5 Centimeters Per Second is a manga (comic) and anime (animation) that takes place in Japan during the 1990s up until 2008. The manga version of this story was serialized in Afternoon, a manga magazine targeted to adult men. Tono Takaki and the new transfer student, Shinohara Akari quickly become good friends because of their similar interests and personalities. However, upon their elementary graduation Akari moves due to her parents' jobs. The story takes place during a time when cell phones were uncommon and email was not utilized. Shinkai portrays several realistic themes of the struggles some people face such as space, time, and love. Both the anime and manga are broken down into three connected stories; "Cherry Blossom," "Cosmonaut," and "5 Centimeters Per Second." However, the anime and manga are different in the way that the story is structured as well as the visual representations of certain scenes. Visual representation of the same story has different effects in the two different medias; anime and manga. Through both mediums there are different messages that are relayed through the way that the story is presented. The anime presentation of 5 Centimeters Per Second implies an unhappy outcome for the story whereas the manga version implies more optimism. The different representational choices in both mediums create very different receptions of the same story.

Makoto Shinkai's *5 Centimeters Per Second* is a *seinen* manga and anime that takes place in Japan during the 1990s up until 2008. The manga version of this story was serialized in *Afternoon*, a manga magazine targeted to adult men. Tono Takaki and the new transfer student, Shinohara Akari quickly become good friends because of their similar interests and personalities. However, upon their elementary graduation Akari moves due to her parents' jobs. The story takes place during a time when cell phones were uncommon and email was not utilized. Shinkai portrays several realistic themes of the struggles some people face such as space, time, and love. Both the anime and manga are broken down into three connected stories; "Cherry Blossom," "Cosmonaut," and "5 Centimeters Per Second." However, the anime and manga are different in the way that the story is structured as well as the visual representations of certain scenes. Visual representation of the same story has different effects in the two different medias: anime and manga. Through both mediums there are different messages that are relayed through the way that the story is presented. The anime presentation of *5 Centimeters Per Second* implies an unhappy outcome for the story whereas the manga version implies more optimism.

The different representational choices in both mediums create very different receptions of the same story by the utilization of techniques such as perspective, internal focalization, and bifurcated narration.

In the hour-long anime version of *5 Centimeters Per Second*, the story starts off with a conversation between Shinohara Akari and Tono Takaki. She says, “Hey, They say it’s five centimeters per second...The speed at which cherry blossoms fall. It’s five centimeters per second.”¹ This scene and this conversation set up the basis for what the theme of the story will be. In an interview with director Makoto Shinkai, he said that, “One understands early on in the film what the title is referring to when the heroine, Akari uses these words in reference to the speed of falling cherry blossoms”² Within his interview he talks about how this theme “draws on the speed of a variety of things”. This is an important aspect of the visual representation of both the anime and manga because the portrayal of speed is significantly different. The beginning of the anime continues on with Akari’s voice narrating a letter she has written to Takaki. The beginning shows the gradual progression of time since the last time that the two were together, which was around a half a year ago during their elementary school graduation. After this first narration of Akari reading the letter that was sent to Takaki, her narration continues to her second reply to his letter. They often mention the change of seasons in their replies to each other, indicating how time has quickly passed since their last meeting. The story continues on with Akari’s narration while the visuals focus on what Takaki is doing, such as playing soccer. After Akari mentions that she looks forward to meeting Takaki again, the story transitions back to when the two of them are still in elementary school together. It shows them petting the neighborhood cats together and eating at McDonald’s, then the narration switches over to Takaki. As he is narrating, the visuals switch over to the next scene where the events are focused around Akari’s first day of school, to the books that she and Takaki have both read, and to a scene where their classmates make fun of them for always being together. The story continues on switching between three characters narrating the story.

However, in the manga adaptation of this story time goes by much slower compared to the anime. In the first

part of the book (“Cherry Blossoms”) the beginning of the story progresses slowly, starting with Akari’s first day at Takaki’s school. The entire section is about Akari and Takaki becoming close friends, Akari’s family moving to Iwafune in Tochigi, Takaki and Akari keeping in touch by snail mail and phone calls, their meet up, and the one-sided love of another classmate, Sumida Kanae, for Takaki. Unlike the manga, the anime version of this portion of the story is told in retrospective. It gives viewers/readers two different perspectives of the same story; the movie is like a memory while the manga walks us through the story step by step.

Seike Yukiko (the author of the manga) does a good job of portraying the anxiety that Takaki experiences when the train that he has to ride in order to meet Akari is constantly behind due to the winter weather. In order to do this he doesn’t include any dialogue in any of the panels depicting the trip.³ The panels portray Takaki’s solemn expressions and show him walking alone in the empty station. When he and Akari finally meet, they share a meal together that was prepared by Akari. When they go outside under a cherry tree, they share their first kiss and during that moment Takaki realizes that they will never be together again. There was a letter that he wrote prior to meeting Akari, but on his way to meet her he lost it when a big gust of wind came by. However, he decides that the letter that contained his true feelings does not matter anymore. Akari also had a letter prepared for Takaki, but ends up not giving it to him. By the time the story reaches the second part (“Cosmonaut”), the distance between Takaki and Akari has grown significantly. By creating a flow of time that gradually stretches through the details of specific scenes such as the time it takes Takaki to meet Akari at the train station, Seike gradually sets up the story to slowly imply how these two protagonists grow farther and farther apart from each other. By this time Takaki is already in his third year of high school in Tanegashima.

In the anime, the beginning starts off with internal focalization in order to indicate that the characters are already looking back at the time they met and spent together before being separated. One of the important aspects of both medias is the theme of “time.” Shinkai himself states that speed is the unifying theme of this story. While he makes his viewers aware of how time drags by, he also carefully mixes dragging scenes with fast montage. Un-

1 Shinkai, Makoto. *5 centimeters per second*. [S.l.]: ComixWave, 2012.

2 Shinkai Makoto. “5CM Makoto Shinkai Interview.” YouTube. YouTube, LCC, 6 Mar. 2014

3 Shinkai, Makoto, Yukiko Seike, Melissa Tanaka, and Taka Tanaka. *5 Centimeters Per Second*. New York: Vertical, 2012. pp. 104–106

like the anime, the manga is different because there is no internal focalization because the story is not being told as a memory. Despite their differences, both the anime and the manga convey character emotion in the same way. For example, the shape of the speech bubbles in the manga change from circular shapes to a simple rectangle whenever narration is taking place. At one point there are panels which depict Takaki in his room reading a letter from Akari, which is being narrated⁴. Makoto Shinkai's films "exploit the possibilities of the voice-over as a technique of internal focalisation. Internal focalisation is when the audience is given access to what a character in the film thinks or feels. But, voiceover is a way to condense the narrative by providing a summary of the events"⁵. Lissy Jose notes that "The incident (Takaki's rough journey on the train in order to meet with Akari) takes up about 20 percent of the total running time of the film. The scene faithfully translates Takaki's desperation and helplessness at the seemingly never-ending journey. But the scene does not have a monotonous rhythm because it alternates between fast, decoupage shots and static shots coupled with diegetic sounds and two different internal voice-overs, the railway announcements and Takaki's monologues. Shinkai's insertion of flashbacks also helps to achieve a change in visuals."⁶ The decoupage technique employs several quick shots to describe a place instead of utilizing long pan shots in order to create a fast tempo. The diegetic sounds also add to the tempo of the shots. In the manga, this particular scene also takes up a good chunk of part I (35 pages, 69–104). There are panel transitions such as "moment-to-moment" and "aspect-to-aspect" transitions that take place during this important scene. The *moment-to-moment* transition shows a short amount of time passing.⁷ For example, at one point the panels transition from Takaki's face to his watch (next two panels), then to his bag, and finally to him sitting on the train.⁸ The time

on the watch also indicates that a minute has passed by between the two panels. There is an example of an *aspect-to-aspect* transition where Takaki is on the train alone and the next panel below it shows a scene of the cold wintery night.⁹ The effect of this kind of transition is effective in creating anxiety in the mood of the story, especially in the manga. The anime has a similar effect. However, the manga creates more anxiety in these particular scenes because of the way the author chooses to focus on smaller details such as the minute passing by on Takaki's watch between two panels.

Eventually a girl named Sumida Kanae (the third narrator in the anime) is introduced as being the girl who has been in love with Takaki ever since middle school. The story is mostly comprised of narration. Only when there is an important scene between two or more characters is there actual interaction and conversation that takes place. There is a technical term for this type of narration called bifurcated narration. Bifurcated narration "refers to the method of providing two different kinds of information simultaneously through visuals and audio which are non-complementary."¹⁰ This technique saves time in depicting the long introduction of events that is portrayed in the beginning of the manga, but it also indicates that the characters are narrating the events that have already become memories.

By the time the story reaches the second part ("Cosmonaut"), the distance between Takaki and Akari has grown significantly. By creating a flow of time that gradually stretches through the details of specific scenes such as the time it takes Takaki to meet Akari at the train station, Shinkai gradually sets up the story to slowly imply how these two protagonists grow farther and farther apart from each other. By this time Takaki is already in his third year of high school in Tanegashima. His classmate, Sumida Kanae, has been in love with Takaki ever since their first meeting in middle school. Although she loves him, she has never had enough courage to confess her true feelings. There are many panels in the manga that portray how Kanae notices that Takaki is always writing emails to someone and staring off into the distance as if he is searching for something far away. In one scene, Kanae observes Takaki sitting alone in a grassy field star-

4 Shinkai, Makoto, Yukiko Seike, Melissa Tanaka, and Taka Tanaka. *5 Centimeters Per Second*. New York: Vertical, 2012. pp. 55

5 Joe, Lissy. "The Multiplicity of Screens And Its Impact on Filmic Narration: A Study on The Feature Films Of Makoto Shinkai." *Singularities.in*. Unity Women's College, Jan. 2015.

6 Jose, Lissy. "The Multiplicity of Screens And Its Impact on Filmic Narration: A Study on The Feature Films Of Makoto Shinkai." *Singularities.in*. Unity Women's College, Jan. 2015.

7 Cohn, Neil. "Japanese Visual Language Parts of This Chapter Appeared Previously in Cohn (2010b)." *The Visual Language of Comics: Introduction to the Structure and Cognition of Sequential Images* (2013)

8 Shinkai, Makoto, Yukiko Seike, Melissa Tanaka, and Taka Tanaka. *5 Centimeters Per Second*. New York: Vertical, 2012 pp. 86

9 Shinkai, Makoto, Yukiko Seike, Melissa Tanaka, and Taka Tanaka. *5 Centimeters Per Second*. New York: Vertical, 2012 pp. 88

10 Joe, Lissy. "The Multiplicity of Screens And Its Impact on Filmic Narration: A Study on The Feature Films Of Makoto Shinkai." *Singularities.in*. Unity Women's College, Jan. 2015.

ing at his phone. The isolation that is around him in the scene, evident because of one panel that depicts a faraway view of Takaki who looks like a small blob sitting in a vast field with nothing but grass surrounding him, indicates how lonely he has become ever since Akari moved away.¹¹ Another indication of how the two protagonists have grown apart is Takaki's dialogue later: "Did it become my habit to type text messages I won't send?"¹² Because the distance between the two of them has become greater, Takaki types text messages, but does not have the courage anymore to send them because he discovered at the time of his first kiss with Akari that they will never be together. By the end of "Cosmonaut," Kanae fails to tell Takaki her feelings and eventually realizes that he is searching for something that is far beyond what she can offer and decides to acknowledge that she will always love him unrequitedly. In the third and final part ("5 Centimeters Per Second") it is 2008 and Takaki is working as a computer programmer in Tokyo. Takaki is still longing for Akari, even though she is preparing to get married to another man. Because Takaki is unable to deal with his feelings for Akari, he leaves his job. Ironically both Akari and Takaki have dreams about each other, which entail the events of their last meeting in the snow and hoping to watch the cherry blossoms together again the following year. This section in the anime ends with Akari and Takaki crossing paths while walking down a road. They recognize each other at a train crossing where they previously decided to watch the cherry blossoms together when they were younger before Akari's move to Tochigi. While standing on opposite sides of the tracks, they both stop and look back, but the passing trains block each other's view. Takaki waits for the trains to pass, but Akari is gone, and then he smiles to himself and goes on walking. The way that Makoto Shinkai handles the ending of the anime is different because the manga includes an epilogue where Takaki and Kanae meet up after a long period of time, which is what gives readers the impression that there is a more optimistic ending for Takaki.

One of the biggest differences between the manga and the anime is the order of events. In the manga, before the actual beginning of the story where Akari is introduced to her new class, there are four pages in color

that portray the last scene from part three where Takaki and Akari pass each other as adults. Although these four pages are similar to the way that the anime starts, the manga version is still entirely different because it is not told in retrospective. The last page before the beginning of the story depicts the young version of Takaki watching Akari and her mother walking away on the street. In the anime, the story immediately starts off with the scene where Akari says, "Hey, they say it's five centimeters per second...The speed at which cherry blossoms fall. It's five centimeters per second." The story takes off with Akari's narration, which is an indicator of reminiscence and how the time has already gone by. With the two characters narrating the beginning of the story, it is implied that they are already separated and are recalling the past times when they were together. In the manga, this exact scene is portrayed later on in the first part where Akari is talking about the speed at which a falling cherry petal falls as well as the fact that clouds fall at one centimeter per second and rain falls at five meters per second.¹³ Another big difference between the two medias is sound. With manga there is really no way to employ the effects of things like a theme song. However, in the anime Shinkai carefully took the time to choose an appropriate song for the story. The theme song for the story is a well-known song titled, "One More Time, One More Chance" by Yamazaki Masayoshi. Shinkai remarked that "The reason why we picked it is that...people already know the song...it perfectly matches the era of the first story, which is about Takaki and Akari. And the biggest reason was that the theme of the song matches the theme of the story."¹⁴ The biggest effect that this careful selection of the theme song has is the fact that it is able to provide a nostalgic type of feeling for viewers since it is assumed that everyone is already familiar with this song. As Shinkai said, the song matches the theme of the story. Some of the lyrics of the song are, "How many more pains do I have to suffer, to meet you once again? One more time, oh seasons, fade not One more time, when we were messing around...I'm always searching, for your figure to appear somewhere on the opposite platform, in the windows along the lane."¹⁵ The lyrics of this song per-

¹¹ Shinkai, Makoto, Yukiko Seike, Melissa Tanaka, and Taka Tanaka. *5 Centimeters Per Second*. New York: Vertical, 2012 pp. 212–213

¹² Shinkai, Makoto, Yukiko Seike, Melissa Tanaka, and Taka Tanaka. *5 Centimeters Per Second*. New York: Vertical, 2012 pp. 228

¹³ Shinkai, Makoto, Yukiko Seike, Melissa Tanaka, and Taka Tanaka. *5 Centimeters Per Second*. New York: Vertical, 2012 pp. 36–37

¹⁴ Shinkai Makoto. "5CM Makoto Shinkai Interview." YouTube. YouTube, LCC, 6 Mar. 2014

¹⁵ Yamazaki, Masayoshi, and Kitarō Nakamura. *Yamazaki Masayoshi, the best blue period*. Japan: Universal Music, 2005

fectly capture the essence of the theme and the pain that the two protagonists suffer, being separated from each other and longing to meet each other again to see the cherry blossoms together. This song creates the impression from the start of the story that the two protagonists will end up unhappy, not being able to be together because of the great distance between them. Without the song, this impression cannot be conveyed in the manga.

The anime version of *5 Centimeters Per Second* leaves its viewers with the implication that Akari and Takaki never meet again and that Takaki ends up being depressed and alone in the end. In this sense the anime is much more tragic than the manga. The differences between the

anime and manga were carefully thought out in order to create two different ways for the audience and readers to be able to experience two different takes/views on the story overall. The way in which the story is represented in the manga gives off a slower and gradual approach of the space and time in the story. The anime is faster but employs more emotional effects through things such as the use of internal focalizations of the character and careful selection of the theme song. Although film theory is often utilized to analyze manga, this paper shows that the film and manga adaptations of the same story can have very different effects on the audience.

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