

The Word and The Image:
Collaborations between Abe Kôbô and Teshigahara Hiroshi

by

Yuji Matson
B.A., University of British Columbia, 2002

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the
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Department of Pacific and Asian Studies

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ABSTRACT

My area of research is Modern Japanese Literature and Film, and my thesis examines the collaborations between the writer Abe Kôbô and filmmaker Teshigahara Hiroshi, two artists who addressed the themes of identity and alienation in modern society through their work together. Specifically, I focus on the process of adaptation, looking at how the themes from the original texts are approached and captured cinematically. Such a study will allow me to explore the relationship between the two media, the differences in the presentation of theme and the possibilities of translation. The collaborations between Abe and Teshigahara offer a rare opportunity to conduct a survey on a specific pair of writer and director over the course of several works, tracking the evolution of their artistic vision and practice. What I hope to achieve through this project is to situate film adaptation as a valuable branch in the study of narrative, demonstrating its exciting possibilities in providing a discourse on the re-imagining of words through images.

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INTRODUCTION: A Study of Modern Japanese Literature and Film

When the film *Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no Onna*, 1964) won the Special Jury Prize at the 1964 Cannes Film Festival, the world was introduced to an independent filmmaker from Japan named Teshigahara Hiroshi (1927-2001), as well as the creative mind behind the screenplay, the novelist and playwright Abe Kôbô (1924-1993).¹ The two came to know each other during the period following the Second World War through the avant-garde circles, which were a gathering place for artists disillusioned by the postwar ruin and social decay, looking to disavow the past and promote a new value system through new artistic modes of expression. The writer and critic Hanada Kiyoteru was a leading voice in this community and, according to Mutsuko Motoyama, “maintained that in the new postwar era in which the foundation of the traditional value system was undermined, a new method of representation should be devised to depict the changing world.”² Later, Hanada proposed a theory in which the artist turned to the outside world to capture and record the unconscious elements of reality in an effort to grasp ‘total reality’. Many saw in cinema an artistic medium with such radical possibilities.

Having served as an assistant to the documentary filmmaker Kamei Fumio during the 1950s, and with a number of short documentary films to his credit, Teshigahara developed a filmmaking style that put into practice the theories of Hanada and was ready to attempt his first full-length dramatic film. Abe, who was also active in promoting these ideas, was enthusiastic when the emergent filmmaker first approached him about

¹ All Japanese names, including those appearing in bibliographic references, will be written in the Japanese order of surname first unless presented otherwise in the source.

² Mutsuko Motoyama, “The Literature and Politics of Abe Kôbô: Farewell to Communism in *Suna no Onna*,” *Monumenta Nipponica* 50.3 (Autumn 1995), 312.

collaborating on a film adaptation of a television drama he had written. With Abe providing the script, *Pitfall* (*Otooshiana*, 1962) was Teshigahara's debut feature and was met with critical acclaim. This proved to be the beginning of a combination between director and writer that spanned a decade and resulted in three more films based on Abe's three major novels from that period. Working together gave them the opportunity to address the issues that concerned them both, namely human alienation and identity in modern society, while experimenting with an artistic mode that attempted to make the abstract perceptible and to capture a dimension of reality—of everyday lived experience—hidden below the surface. Over the course of the 1960s, their collaborations demonstrated innovative approaches to adaptation and, together, offer a great opportunity to examine the relationship between literature and cinema.

Theoretical Framework: On Adaptation

Before outlining the structural organization of my thesis, I wish to discuss adaptation-related issues and what I will focus on in this study.

In *Novel To Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation*, an insightful general study which I will refer to often, Brian McFarlane identifies a fundamental question governing the process of adaptation: the distinction between “what may be *transferred* between one narrative medium to another and what necessarily requires *adaptation proper*.”³ According to McFarlane, “Narrative, at certain levels, is undeniably not only the chief factor novels and the films based on them have in common but is the

³ Brian McFarlane, *Novel To Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 13.

chief transferable element.”⁴ On the other hand, he argues, its mode of presentation is the element most resistant to transfer. To help illustrate this difference, McFarlane invokes Roland Barthes’ classification of the narrative structure into distributional and integrational functions, the former referring to the actions and events arranged “linearly throughout the text,” the latter referring to its semantic orientation, a “diffuse concept” affecting the intellectual and emotional response to those actions and events.⁵ More specifically, the transferability of narrative elements is closely linked to the degree to which they depend on a given semiotic system. Preferring the term ‘enunciation’ to designate the “expressive apparatus” governing the narrative’s semantic orientation, McFarlane argues that its transfer is complicated by the fact that both media operate through differing sign systems and thus requires more complex processes of adaptation, a procedure he describes as ‘adaptation proper’.

Mieke Bal characterizes the art of adaptation as follows: “‘Translation’ of a novel into film is not a one-to-one transposition of story elements into images, but a visual working-through of the novel’s most important aspects and their meanings.”⁶ Certainly, Bal overlooks the multi-sensory nature of cinema by focusing only on its visual dimension, yet her omission points to the primacy of the image. She also exposes the common perception that adaptation entails a “one-to-one transposition,” of achieving the closest equivalence between the two media as possible. Yet such a view is reductive and rests on the assumption that what is desired is a ‘faithful’ adaptation. As McFarlane points out, this is only one possible adaptation objective, a criterion that, in Thomas

⁴ Ibid., 12.

⁵ Ibid., 13.

⁶ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 164.

Leitch's opinion, is "unattainable, undesirable, and theoretically possible only in a trivial sense."⁷ I would like to begin my survey of adaptation by addressing this persistent, contentious, and often misunderstood issue.

Fidelity, Originality, Intertextuality

There is a misconception surrounding adaptation that the original text has ultimate authority and is infallible, that it is the standard against which the film version is to be measured. This attitude presupposes a privileging of the literary source. According to McFarlane, fidelity "depends on a notion of the text as having and rendering up to the (intelligent) reader a single, correct 'meaning' which the film-maker has either adhered to or in some sense violated or tampered with."⁸ Perhaps such a notion is symptomatic of the tendency to "identify a single shaping intelligence as a given work's creator."⁹ The implication is that adaptations are to be "mechanical reproductions of original works of art."¹⁰ However, such an expectation denies the filmmaker of a voice, neglects his or her role as creative artist. Therefore, the adaptation should not be treated as derivative of the original, as mere imitation or replication. It is its own creative product and should be treated as such. The presumed inviolability of the source text's 'meaning' also raises the question of "authorial intention as a possible regulatory function."¹¹ Respecting authorial intention should be a matter of artistic choice. Insisting on its preservation ignores the

⁷ Thomas Leitch, "Twelve Fallacies in Contemporary Adaptation Theory," *Criticism* 45.2 (2003), 161.

⁸ McFarlane, 8.

⁹ Leitch, 163.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 163.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 164.

rewarding possibilities of going beyond the original, to comment on it, reinterpret it, or simply use it “as ‘raw material’ to be reworked.”¹²

Furthermore, filmmakers can use the original to “comment on their own cultural and historical contexts.”¹³ Deborah Cartmell touches on this point when she states,

Instead of worrying about whether a film is ‘faithful’ to the original literary text (founded in the logocentric belief that there is a single meaning), we read adaptations for their generation of a plurality of meanings. Thus the intertextuality of the adaptation is our primary concern.¹⁴

Film adaptations are set apart by the fact that they draw on a primary source material. Yet there are other aspects of a film’s intertextuality, hence the importance of not treating the film as an ‘intertext’ limited to “a single precursor.”¹⁵ For example, as McFarlane points out, “Conditions within the film industry and the prevailing cultural and social climate at the time of the film’s making...are two major determinants in shaping any film, adaptation or not.”¹⁶ Discussing intertextuality, Christopher Orr writes, “Within this critical context, the issue is not whether the adapted film is faithful to its source, but rather how the choice of a specific source and how the approach to that source serve the film’s ideology.”¹⁷ Therefore, one must first ascertain the nature of a film’s relationship to its literary source. As McFarlane states, “The insistence on fidelity has led to a suppression of potentially more rewarding approaches to the phenomenon of

¹² McFarlane, 11.

¹³ Leitch, 165.

¹⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 167.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 165.

¹⁶ McFarlane, 21.

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 10.

adaptation.”¹⁸ One such approach, the idea of adaptation as a “convergence among the arts,” is something I will specifically emphasize and pursue further in this study.

Differing sign systems

In my analyses, I will pay special attention to what Bal regarded as the film adaptation’s imperative: the “visual working-through of the novel’s most important aspects and their meanings,” in other words its theme. Admittedly, this is only one aspect deserving of attention (albeit a very important one). To distinguish cinema only by its engagement of the visual sense is to obscure the truth of its complexity, a point McFarlane makes in comparing the two media: “The novel draws on a wholly *verbal* sign system, the film variously, and sometimes simultaneously, on *visual, aural, and verbal* signifiers.”¹⁹ Be that as it may, my study will be limited primarily to an investigation of the visual field, exploring ways in which cinematic images can address the novel’s theme, not by reproducing or transposing the narrative, but by a “visual working-through” unique to its medium. Therefore, for the purposes of this study, the relationship between novel and film will be treated as a complementary one.

If literature and cinema are to be viewed as two means of addressing the same theme, then insisting on the essential properties of the two media becomes of questionable value. After all, ‘essentialism’ will only lead to a severance of genres rather than convergence toward a common artistic cause. Instead of thinking in terms of binary oppositions, such as word versus image, it may be more useful to overcome dichotomies and try thinking of cinema as a synthesis. Jurij Lotman characterizes cinema as follows:

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 10.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 26.

It is not the mechanical conjunction of two types of signs, but a synthesis growing out of a dramatic conflict, out of nearly hopeless but unceasing attempts to acquire new means of expression through the use of sign systems despite, it would appear, their most basic properties.²⁰

In considering those basic properties, McFarlane identifies the “major distinction” separating the two sign systems: “The verbal sign, with its low iconicity and high symbolic function, works *conceptually*, whereas the cinematic sign, with its high iconicity and uncertain symbolic function, works directly, sensuously, *perceptually*.”²¹

This sort of statement is axiomatic (which McFarlane acknowledges), yet the polarization of the two types of signs belies the truth of their interdependence. If concepts can be translated into percepts (at the most basic level, the mental visualization of an idea), then the opposite is also true—percepts can become new concepts. An image does not only depict, it can describe and assert by capturing and directing the viewer’s attention, by inviting “aesthetic contemplation.”²² Therefore, the distinction between these two ostensibly irreconcilable sign systems is not as rigid as is commonly understood—the one can easily bleed into the other. As even McFarlane observes, “the realistic meaning of the action seems to me to melt into the symbolic. ...The symbolic is a function of the *mise-en-scène*, inextricably interwoven into the realist texture.”²³ In other words, the cinematic image as iconic representation of reality (the “realistic” meaning) becomes, and yet always is, the stimulus for interpretation (the “symbolic” meaning).

²⁰ Jurij Lotman, *Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Michigan, 1976), 9.

²¹ McFarlane, 26-27.

²² Leitch, 151.

²³ McFarlane, 132.

In his 1970 essay “The Third Meaning,” Roland Barthes suggests that cinema makes possible another semantic level, ‘the filmic’, which can only be grasped through close scrutiny of the shots that constitute the presentation of the narrative:

The third meaning, the specific filmic (the filmic of the future) lies not in movement, but in an inarticulable third meaning that neither the simple photograph nor figurative painting can assume since they lack the diegetic horizon, ...then the ‘movement’ regarded as the essence of film is not animation, flux, mobility, ‘life’, copy, but simply the framework of a permutational unfolding and a theory of the still becomes necessary.²⁴

Similarly, in proposing a ‘visual narratology’, Bal writes, “The analysis of visual images as narrative in and of themselves can do justice to an aspect of images and their effect that neither iconography nor other art historical practices can quite articulate.”²⁵ For Barthes, “the still is not a sample ...but a quotation.”²⁶ A single shot is more than just a fragment of depicted action, of movement in terms of its realistic or symbolic meanings. It can communicate another dimension of meaning, of movement considered within the “diegetic” context.

In his theoretical writing, the renowned Soviet director Sergei Eisenstein had already discussed “a third something” in film that emerges as the “unifying principle” that, like Barthes’ “diegetic horizon,” is a condition of the narrative: “The full picture of the whole, as determined both by the shot and by montage, also emerges, vivifying and distinguishing both the content of the shot and the content of the montage. It is cases of this kind that are typical for cinematography.”²⁷ The “whole” that Eisenstein alludes to is

²⁴ Roland Barthes, “The Third Meaning,” *Image-Music-Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1977), 66-67.

²⁵ Bal, 162.

²⁶ Barthes, 67.

²⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 10.

none other than the theme of a given work, while montage—the juxtaposition of shots—is celebrated as the fundamental principle of film production. He continues:

In such a case, each montage piece exists no longer as something unrelated, but as a given *particular representation* of the general theme that in equal measure penetrates *all* the shot-pieces. The juxtaposition of these partial details in a given montage construction calls to life and forces into the light that *general* quality in which each detail has participated and which binds together all the details into a *whole*, namely, into that generalized *image*, wherein the creator, followed by the spectator, experiences the theme.²⁸

According to Eisenstein, “to achieve its result, a work of art directs all the refinement of its methods to the *process*,” that is the process of its assembly:

A work of art, understood dynamically, is just this process of arranging images in the feelings and mind of the spectator. It is this that constitutes the peculiarity of a truly vital work of art and distinguishes it from a lifeless one, in which the spectator receives the represented result of a given consummated process of creation, instead of being drawn into the process as it occurs.²⁹

This leads us into the next key issue: the function of style or form, in other words the *process* through which the narrative is presented and, thus, experienced by the spectator.

Style / Form

Taking up the problem of enunciation, McFarlane acknowledges “the varying amenability to cinematic practice” of literary narrational modes:

Film may lack those literary marks of enunciation such as person and tense, but in the ways in which, for example, shots are angled and framed and related to each other (i.e. in matters relating to mise-en-scène and montage) the enunciatory processes are inscribed. The institutional codes and their often highly individual deployment by different film-makers can either minimize or foreground the processes of cinematic enunciation but they cannot eradicate them.... Film enunciation, in relation to the transposition of novels to the screen, is a matter of adaptation proper, not of transfer.³⁰

²⁸ Ibid., 11.

²⁹ Ibid., 17.

³⁰ McFarlane, 20.

Even if we grant that close approximations are available within cinema's specific set of codes, perhaps it is better to put less emphasis on finding cinematic equivalents for literary styles and techniques. Noel Burch insists that a film's stylistic structures should "retain their autonomous, 'abstract' function, but in symbiosis with the plot which they both support and challenge."³¹ Therefore, it is worthwhile to examine how styles and techniques specific to cinema are used effectively to "support" the plot or, alternatively, to "challenge" it. This is a possibility that McFarlane recognizes: "In the study of adaptation, one may consider to what extent the film-maker has picked up visual suggestions from the novel in his representation of key verbal signs—and how the visual representation affects one's 'reading' of the film text."³² In other words, our 'reading' of the film is influenced not just by *what* is depicted but *how* it is depicted, a point emphasized by Lotman who writes, "The images on the screen may be augmented by some additional, often totally unexpected meanings. Lighting, montage, interplay of depth levels, change of speed, etc., may impart to the objects additional meanings—symbolic, metaphorical, metonymical, etc."³³

McFarlane even likens the camera to the narrator of a novel: depending on the way characters are photographed, "the camera may catch a 'truth' which comments on and qualifies what the characters actually say."³⁴ Another factor influencing the presentation of the narrative is its performance by the actors who, subject to varying degrees of directorial control, serve as intermediaries translating a written script for

³¹ Quoted in David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 288.

³² McFarlane, 27.

³³ Lotman, 31.

³⁴ McFarlane, 17.

public reception. As Leitch duly notes, “The script is a performance text—a text that requires interpretation first by its performers and then by its audience for completion—whereas a literary text requires only interpretation by its readers.”³⁵

Therefore, there is an additional stage of meaning production that must be taken into account. One is reminded of Marshall McLuhan’s famous catchphrase “the medium is the message,” which Lotman frames in terms of cinema:

Language also becomes content, sometimes being transformed into the object of the message. This is entirely true of cinematic language as well. Having been created for specific ideological and artistic purposes, it serves them and merges with them. Understanding the language of film is only the first step toward an understanding of the ideological-artistic function of cinema.³⁶

In order to better understand how the above discourse on adaptation applies to this specific study, we need to first situate Abe and Teshigahara’s collaborations within its framework. My study deals with the adaptation into film of a television drama and three novels. Since the author himself was responsible for the screenplays, the adaptation also provides the opportunity to “judge the original writer’s reconception of his own work for a different genre.”³⁷ It should be noted that this ‘reconception’ did not occur in a different cultural and social climate. The process of adapting the television drama began soon after its broadcast, while the film versions of the novels were, in each case, completed within two years of the novel’s publication. In fact, all four films were produced within a relatively short period, the span of a decade. Both author and filmmaker worked closely together and shared similar attitudes, thematic concerns, and artistic aims—that is to say

³⁵ Leitch, 154.

³⁶ Lotman, 106.

³⁷ Mary Lazar, “Jerzy Kosinski’s *Being There*, Novel and Film: Changes Not by Chance,” *College Literature* 31.2 (2004), 99.

a similar ideology—while respecting each other’s creative voice. In adaptation, they saw the possibilities for artistic synthesis, of collaborating as two artists specializing in different media, the result of which is a “mixture of two opposing patterns and one integrated, organic pattern.”³⁸

One issue that I will not pursue but would like to discuss briefly is cinema’s influence on modern fiction, how vision-oriented narrational modes have been favoured by certain writers, leading to an emphasis on *showing* rather than *telling*. Joseph Conrad once wrote, “My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the powers of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel—it is, before all, to make to see.”³⁹ Although predating the advent of cinema, this quote demonstrates a shift that occurred within English literature at that time, a trend that both anticipated and was affected by the emergence of a more strictly speaking visual form of narrative. McFarlane draws attention to this point, stating, “There seems no doubt that film, in turn, has been highly influential on the modern novel.”⁴⁰ Bal goes further to suggest that, “attention to visuality is tremendously enriching for the analysis of literary narratives.”⁴¹ Incidentally, Abe was not only interested in cinema but photography as well, and the influence of the visual medium on his writing style can be detected in his characteristic attention to detail, his “stress on the physical surfaces and behaviours of objects and figures.”⁴² What implication did this have on the re-conception of his novels for cinema, on the process of their adaptation into screenplays? Did Abe write the novels with their adaptation into film

³⁸ Lotman, 53.

³⁹ Quoted in McFarlane, 3.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 5.

⁴¹ Bal, 162.

⁴² McFarlane, 5.

in mind? What effect would this have had on Teshigahara's filmmaking practice, on his decisions, strategies, and approaches? Although beyond the scope of this study, these are some of the questions that could be asked by taking a different angle of inquiry, and would certainly provide further insight into Abe and Teshigahara's collaborations.

Methodology: An Overview

Having considered some of the main issues underlying the study of adaptation, I would like to now define the scope of this particular study and to set out the method for presenting it. The first chapter will provide information on the background—biographical, historical, and ideological. I will begin by introducing Abe the writer and the thematic concerns he addresses in his work while considering the socio-historical milieu. Next, in order to better understand Abe and Teshigahara's artistic aims, especially in relation to film, I will focus on their involvement in the post-war avant-garde movements, experiences that would have an enduring influence on their ideology. Indeed, I suggest that their artistic products from this period be viewed as early manifestations of what they aimed for in their collaborations a decade later. As I shift the focus to cinema, I will trace Teshigahara's path to filmmaking and describe his approach to this art form, treating it as representative of the views of his peers. I will then devote a chapter to exploring the theoretical discussions on the relationship between literature and cinema that informed Abe and Teshigahara's approach to adaptation. I argue that, rather than a straightforward dramatization of the novel's events, of trying to achieve a one-to-one correspondence with the narrative action of the source material, their approach was steeped in notions about the dialectical relationship between the two media—that, by

trying to express through images what was previously attempted through words, a certain concept can be captured and conveyed more completely.

After considering Abe and Teshigahara's dialectical theory of adaptation, I will proceed to the main body of this study, a close examination of how such a theory was applied in each of their four films, and how it can be used to fulfill certain artistic objectives. I will treat their first film, *Pitfall* (*Otoshiana*, 1962), as an introduction to the themes and approaches that they would revisit and develop over the course of their subsequent collaborations: *Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no Onna*, 1964), *The Face of Another* (*Tanin no Kao*, 1966), and *The Man Without a Map* (*Moetsukita Chizu*, 1968). However, I will deviate from the chronological order and leave *Woman in the Dunes* to the end. Firstly, it is the work for which the two artists are best known. Yet, more importantly, I believe it is their most successful adaptation, demonstrating most effectively what I believe the two aimed for in their collaborations: a convergence of word and image leading to the discovery of concrete expressions for what could only be approached abstractly in the literary text.

Their involvement in film came at a time when there were exciting new developments in the art of filmmaking, allowing for a much greater degree of flexibility in the means of cinematic expression. These developments occurred mainly within 'art cinema', conditions favourable for providing the artistic freedom to experiment with innovative techniques. In his discussion of art cinema, film scholar David Bordwell suggests that the narrational strategies characteristic of this mode of filmmaking were influenced by literary modernism: "Here new aesthetic conventions claim to seize other 'realities': the aleatoric world of 'objective' reality and the fleeting states that

characterize ‘subjective’ reality.”⁴³ Indeed, as I will discuss later, Abe and Teshigahara attempted to render both ‘outer reality’, by capturing chance and contingency, and ‘inner reality’, by exploring new ways to evoke subjective experience through cinematic means. According to Bordwell, “the art cinema developed a range of mise-en-scène cues for expressing character mood,” such as “emotion-filled landscapes.”⁴⁴ In fact, in some instances, “the surroundings may be construed as the projections of a character’s mind.”⁴⁵ Dramatic action is thus counterbalanced by psychological characterizations revealed, for example, through depictions of the landscape. Film critic A.O. Scott, in reference to what he terms modernist filmmaking, claims the emphasis is less on social situations and more on “psychological states and existential moods, and the narrative and visual style, in order to capture those moods, dispenses with realism in favor of something more expressive and oblique.”⁴⁶

The expansion of the film’s symbolic dimension was linked to a growing awareness of and appreciation for the complexity of the cinematic image as carrier of meaning. In addition to their denotative function, it was accepted that images possess connotative capabilities as well. Discussing developments in film criticism at that time, Bordwell refers to the perception of film as “a composite of implicit meanings given material embodiment.”⁴⁷ As a methodological choice, I will use Abe’s literary texts as guides to navigating the thematic terrain of Teshigahara’s films, drawing on them to

⁴³ Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 206.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 208.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 209.

⁴⁶ A.O. Scott, “What Is a Foreign Movie Now?,” *New York Times Magazine* (14 Nov. 2004), 82.

⁴⁷ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 64.

emphasize and explicate those “implicit meanings” embedded in the film in order to consider “how form and style make them concrete and vivid.”⁴⁸ For this purpose, I will devote much of my attention to a critical analysis of the themes and issues central to the works examined in this study. What I hope to achieve is to demonstrate the vast potential of adaptation as an artistic endeavor beyond more conventional understandings of what such an operation entails, how cinema can present the themes addressed in the literary text through the differing strengths and capabilities of the medium.

As I mentioned at the beginning, both Abe and Teshigahara were interested in themes derived from avant-garde criticism, with leading Japanese figures such as Hanada Kiyoteru helping to shape their artistic expression and to bring those themes into sharper focus. Indeed, the common thread running through their collaborations is a thematic one, the consideration of such topics as identity and alienation so important at that time. The 1960s were a transition period in Japan when, having reached an advanced stage of industrialization, the country was poised to re-emerge on to the world stage following years of rebuilding. However, economic growth came at a cost as the things that traditionally held people together were compromised in favour of rapid modernization. With this new social order came new issues such as urban alienation and feelings of drift, isolation and spiritual emptiness. Through allegory, Abe and Teshigahara address the impact of these social changes on the individual. It is to a consideration of this socio-historical background that I now turn in order to set the context for my study.

⁴⁸ Ibid., 64.

1. BACKGROUND: Abe, Teshigahara, and the Avant-garde

Context and Theme: Abe Kôbô on ‘Identity’, ‘Home’, and ‘Alienation’

As a postwar writer, Abe Kôbô was in a unique position to comment on Japan. Having grown up in Manchuria (then a colony of Japan), Abe had developed an outsider’s perspective on his country of citizenship. The Japan he was taught as a child was a distant unknown, one to which he had trouble relating. The bleak landscape of Manchuria did not correspond to the image of Japan that was portrayed in his textbooks. This disparity is conveyed in his work, which notably lacks any references to traditional ‘Japaneseness’, as Timothy Iles observes: “There are neither cherry blossoms in his writing nor cherry orchards in his theatre, no ‘Japan the beautiful’ to bolster the protagonist’s self and integrate him—and Abe’s protagonists are always resolutely male—into its protecting bosom....”¹ In other words, for Abe, Japan did not provide a strong sense of belonging. Underneath the “cherry blossoms” was the reality of a nation that carved out cultural boundaries in the sand. It was this reality that Abe observed in Manchuria where the Imperial Government’s policy of racial equality and harmony, which he strongly believed in, was constantly undermined by the actions and behaviour of the Japanese colonizers. As Namigata Tsuyoshi put it, “In the puppet state carrying the banner of ‘The Harmony of Five Races’ (*gozoku kyôwa*), the boundaries between races were strictly formed.”² Based on Abe’s own recollections of the end of the war, the fall of Manchuria was also the collapse of class and racial discrimination: “I cannot deny that the government-less

¹ Timothy Iles, *Abe Kôbô: An Exploration of His Prose, Drama and Theatre* (Fucecchio, Italy: European Press Academic Publishing, 2000), 12.

² Namigata Tsuyoshi, *Ekkyô no Avangyarudo* (Tokyo: NTT, 2005), 247. All translations into English of citations from Japanese texts are mine unless otherwise noted.

condition, despite the anxiety and fear, also planted within me a certain dream.”³ Perhaps, within this state of anarchy, Abe caught a glimpse of a borderless world where identities are freely explored rather than imposed. Namigata writes, “Abe’s philosophy of everydayness, that is to say, his worldview of the everyday in ‘The Nation of Manchuria’ had been formed through spiritual oppression.”⁴ This worldview would remain with him. His experiences in Manchuria, as Suda Tadahiyo notes, had an enduring influence on his imagination: “Within the semi-desert-like climate, in a city filled with a cosmopolitan sensibility, Kôbô would spend his childhood. The things he assimilated here would be projected strongly onto his later writing.”⁵

Edward Said discusses the artificial nature of identity, specifically identity that is derived from membership in a collectivity:

The construction of identity...involves establishing opposites and “others” whose actuality is always subject to the continuous interpretation and re-interpretation of their differences from “us”. Each age and society re-creates its “Others”. Far from a static thing then, identity of self or of “other” is a much worked-over historical, social, intellectual, and political process that takes place as a contest involving individuals and institutions in all societies.⁶

In other words, the danger of such identity formation is the distinctions that are inevitably made between ‘us’ and ‘them’. The following quote from Abe seems to echo Said’s statement:

Collectivities have the function of creating bonds between us, but, at the same time, they serve to create enemies, to exclude something or other, and through the act of strengthening this exclusion, they consolidate their internal organizations. So, when by some means, a weak collectivity tries to consolidate itself rapidly, it ends up strengthening not its consolidation, but its system of exclusion.⁷

³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 247.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 226.

⁵ Suda Tadahiyo, “Abe Kôbô,” *Da Vinci* 30 (Oct. 1996), 178.

⁶ Edward Said, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1978), 332.

⁷ Quoted in Iles, 39.

One could argue that Japan was thrust into such a situation following the Meiji Restoration of 1868, and once again following its defeat in the Second World War. In both instances, Japan's efforts to join (or rejoin) the international community required its re-conception in terms of a modern nation. Yet, on both counts, this re-conception did not come about through an internalized process but was imposed unilaterally by the state. As a result, during the upheaval of the immediate postwar period, there was what David Desser describes as a "propensity for self-examination, for raising, and trying to answer, the question of 'Japaneseness'."⁸ Of course, as Said duly points out, "We all need some foundation on which to stand; the question is how extreme and unchangeable is our formulation of what this foundation is."⁹

In addition to Manchuria, Abe spent part of his youth in Hokkaido, the northernmost island of the Japanese archipelago. Therefore, he experienced his formative years in what essentially amounted to both extremities of Japan's frontier. These life experiences all contributed to Abe's problematic understanding of the concept of 'home':

I was born in Tokyo and raised in Manchuria. Yet, the legal address on my family registry is in Hokkaido—I have several years experience living there as well. In other words, my place of birth, the place where I grew up, and my place of family origin are all different, making it extremely difficult to provide a brief account of my life. You could say that, essentially, I am a man without a hometown. The sort of aversion I have for hometowns, flowing at the bottom of my emotions, could be due to this background. I am hurt by all things that are given value for being fixed.¹⁰

With Japan's defeat at the end of the war, Abe's de facto homeland of Manchuria was lost and he was forced to return to his official homeland, to its political and commercial

⁸ David Desser, *Eros plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 76.

⁹ Said, 333.

¹⁰ Quoted in Andrew Horvat, *Four Stories by Kobo Abe* (Tokyo: Hara Shobô, 1973), 123. Translation mine.

centre of Tokyo. In a way, his experience could be viewed as the model of a more general trend in modern Japan—the relocation of the younger generation from rural hometowns to the city. Though this sense of displacement likely contributed to Abe’s marginalization, remaining on the periphery of the mainstream provided him with the flexibility to maintain a critical perspective on Japan.

Often, the target of Abe’s criticism was the traditional value system that persisted in Japan and had been appropriated by the military government to stir the nation toward its wartime efforts. Perhaps Abe saw these same values manifested in the ‘new’ postwar Japan, which was being stirred toward economic (rather than military) ascendancy. According to Mikiso Hane, the remarkable growth Japan was able to achieve can be attributed to “the values and attitudes that have traditionally prevailed [in Japan], such as obedience, submissiveness, conformity, non-assertiveness, avoidance of conflicts, self-denial, and acceptance of a hierarchical order.”¹¹ As Christopher Bolton points out,

Another way to view the issue of homeland is in this broader context of sense or meaning (including the meanings and values imposed by communities like family, society, or the state) and the need for the destruction of an old meaning before the possibility of a new one can arise. Abe regarded nationality or nationalism as but one species of this communal “sense” or “order” that art must struggle to overcome.¹²

What Abe often explored in his work was the implication of transplanting such ethics, this “communal ‘sense’ or ‘order’,” into the contemporary context with its new social relationships. He likened life in the modern age to ‘rootless grass’ (*nenashi-gusa*) and,

¹¹ Mikiso Hane, *Eastern Phoenix: Japan since 1945* (Boulder: Westview Press, 1996), 111.

¹² Christopher Bolton, “Abe Kôbô 1924-1993,” *Modern Japanese Writers*, ed. Jay Rubin (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001), 3.

through his work, sought to discover an alternative mode of existence, a new ‘sense’ or ‘meaning’ suited to this rootless condition.

For Abe, the loss of the ‘hometown’ (*kokyô*) had deeper implications and, therefore, affected something more fundamental to one’s mode of existence, to one’s identity. Marukawa Tetsushi writes, “[Abe] had perceived the loss of the ‘hometown’ as a matter of possibly losing what it is to be ‘human’ as well. For that reason, then, the ‘hometown’ paradoxically continues to function also as an image of liberation underlying the ‘human being’.”¹³ As Marukawa argues, “It is Abe’s ‘hometown’ confusion that functions as a concept shaking the orthodoxy of the postwar Japanese state.”¹⁴ In reference to Abe’s debut novel, *The Road Sign at the End of the Street* (*Owarishi Michi no Shirube ni*, 1948), Namigata Tsuyoshi discusses how the concept of ‘hometown’ is treated as a “human image” (*ningen-zô*), as “units of belonging such as family, community, and the state” that you define for yourself or, as the case may be, are defined for you according to some standard.¹⁵ Namigata notes that Abe did not feel a strong sense of belonging within his homeland of Japan and, from this feeling of being out of place, he “created a ‘hometown’ as a ‘human image’ not directly connected to any space.”¹⁶ To borrow Abe’s own words, what he calls for is the necessity of “*creating* one’s fate, one’s hometown.”¹⁷

Under the guidance of Hanada Kiyoteru and Okamoto Tarô, two influential figures during the early stage of his career, Abe turned to surrealism for further

¹³ Marukawa Tetsushi, “Shokuminchi no Bôrei,” *Teikoku no Bôrei: Nihonbungaku no Seishinchizu* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2004), 102.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, 121.

¹⁵ Namigata, 218.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 219.

¹⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 220. Emphasis added.

inspiration, considering it a mode of representation made necessary by a new understanding of reality. Abe's concept of surrealism is perhaps best summed up in the following excerpt from an essay written in 1949:

The characteristic of surrealism is in taking up the cognition of reality itself as a theme, ...consequently it is a revolutionary theory that rejects reality while simultaneously attempting to reconstruct it. That is to say, it is not simply the cognition of reality but the interpretation of reality, nor is it simply a mode of representation for the sake of a new impressionistic form, but a mode of representation inevitably required because of a new cognition of reality.¹⁸

Abe's own application of this mode was not limited to the 'deformation' of the object as a function of the subjective, but was more concerned with the 'metamorphosis' of the subject itself, as Namigata observes: "In his novels, ...the protagonist's individual identity crisis becomes an occasion for transformation."¹⁹

With the rise of urbanized society in Japan during the 1960s, 'disappearance' and 'running away' became social problems, and Abe was among the first to make them subjects of artistic inquiry. According to Okaniwa Noboru, with the dismantlement of the 'postwar' and the expansion of the new 'everyday', alienation became less tangible: "Certainly, the loss of spiritual and physical starvation contributed to making alienation difficult to grasp as a structure."²⁰ Namigata suggests that, for Abe, the memory of his Manchurian past (and its 'everydayness' established through spiritual oppression) was "repainted" with the reality of urbanized society.²¹ In his fiction, Abe portrays the city as an artificial and arbitrary collectivity, an artificially and arbitrarily integrated social order indifferent to the individual, who is left to his or her own resources, and which offers

¹⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 227.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 232.

²⁰ Okaniwa Noboru, *Hanada Kiyoteru to Abe Kôbô: Avangarudo bungaku no saisei no tame ni* (Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1980), 91.

²¹ Namigata, 255.

minimal opportunities for significant human contact. The writer discusses the phenomenon of ‘disappearance’ in the following manner: “The escape from a nation should be recognized as a right, and the nation does not have the power to stop it. By making ‘escape’ tangible, I believe the limit of a nation’s function should be made clear.”²² Through a series of ‘missing person’ narratives, Abe would treat the issue of ‘disappearance’ symbolically as the “escape from a nation,” that is escape from the *concept* of a nation.

That man is a product of his social environment, Abe was certainly aware. As Hisaaki Yamanouchi writes, “The search for identity presupposes a community in which the ego is to be realized as a social self. For Abe, however, a community is an illusory idea which he rejects outright.”²³ Abe recognized the tendency to view alienation as a problem that can be resolved simply by emphasizing solidarity in human relations, an assumption he was not afraid to question. He argues, “It is an emotional, regressive phenomenon that attempts to deny rootless grass; today we are in an age where rootless grasses live with power and must carry the burden of culture on their shoulders.”²⁴ In a similar fashion, Martin Heidegger (another of Abe’s many influences) viewed nihilism as an inescapable aspect of modern life:

No one with any insight will still deny today that nihilism is in the most varied and most hidden forms of ‘the normal state’ of man. ...The best evidence of this are the exclusively reactive attempts against nihilism which, instead of entering into a discussion of its essence, strive for the restoration of what has been. They

²² Quoted in *ibid.*, 255.

²³ Hisaaki Yamanouchi, *The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 173.

²⁴ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997), 332.

seek salvation in flight, namely in flight from a glimpse of the worthiness of questioning the metaphysical position of man.²⁵

Abe was likewise skeptical of this insistence on “the restoration of what has been,” stating, “Since modern society is so complex, human beings are alienated and, to recover from this, they say we must restore the connections between human beings. Yet I feel it is precisely this way of thinking that is in fact very negative.”²⁶ In other words, it is not enough to simply “restore the connections” without making more fundamental changes to the nature of those connections, to the very structure of social relationships. By addressing the ‘rootlessness’ in contemporary society and “questioning the metaphysical position of man,” his three major novels of the 1960s—*Suna no Onna* (1962; trans. *The Woman in the Dunes*, 1964), *Tanin no Kao* (1964; trans. *The Face of Another*, 1966), *Moetsukita Chizu* (1967; trans. *The Ruined Map*, 1969)²⁷—form a thematic trilogy.

In addressing such issues in his fiction, Abe often abandoned conventional plot structures. Even within the trio of novels considered in this study, Abe adopts different approaches in his treatment of the themes of alienation and identity: spatial allegory in *The Woman in the Dunes*, an intensely private, internal account in *The Face of Another*, and what could almost be described as a picaresque approach in *The Ruined Map*.

According to William Currie, “Abe’s narrative techniques, similar to the Modernist Franz Kafka and the post-modern Samuel Beckett, introduced something new to twentieth century Japanese literature: dream narratives and the use of a dominant metaphor as

²⁵ Quoted in Iles, 43.

²⁶ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 318.

²⁷ The English translations for all three were done by E. Dale Saunders and published in New York by Knopf.

organizing principle for a novel.”²⁸ Abe’s protagonists are either nameless or, as Fumiko Yamamoto points out, “have names which are strangely deprived of individuality.”²⁹ These bland and depersonalizing names come to stand for the protagonist’s existential anonymity, their “dehumanized existence.”³⁰ If one were to compare Abe’s early works of fiction with his later ones, it is possible to detect a progression in his treatment of the protagonist, as Yamamoto observes: “Abe’s heroes have evolved from the negative images of more passive transformed figures into decisive, transforming individuals.”³¹ In that sense, the aforementioned trilogy seems to represent a turning point, the dawning of the individual’s awareness of his or her transformative potential, of the possibility of self-identity. Here, one can trace the influence on Abe’s writing of existentialism, a philosophy of personal choice and responsibility that attracted him because, as he stated himself, “I was persuaded that ‘existence precedes essence’.”³² However, at the conclusion of all three, Abe offers no clear answers and no explanations, instead leaving the ending uncertain and open-ended as if to invite, indeed require, the reader’s active participation and engagement with the material. His preference for the ambiguous denouement could also be interpreted as a desire to preserve the various contradictions of reality rather than imposing what would necessarily be an illusory resolution.

All three novels raise the question of the ‘other’ (*tasha*) with respect to modern, urban human relations. Following the publication of *The Ruined Map*, Abe stated that,

²⁸ William Currie, “Kobo Abe: Writer for a Global Society,” *Kobo Abe Exhibition* (Tokyo: Setagaya Literary Museum, 2003), 71.

²⁹ Fumiko Yamamoto, “Metamorphosis in Abe Kôbô’s Works,” *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 15.2 (November 1980), 171.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 190.

³¹ *Ibid.*, 191.

³² Quoted in Nancy S. Hardin, “An Interview with Abé Kobo,” *Contemporary Literature* 15.4 (1974), 454.

having exhausted his inquiry into the ‘other’, his interests were now shifting toward representing “the you who must live inside others, the self that has become another.”³³ In many of his works, Abe explores identity at a cultural crossroads. What interested him was ‘boundary situations’ and, like Jerzy Kosinski (yet unlike Japanese writers of his and previous generations), he tended to “diminish the importance of nationality when exploring human behaviour.”³⁴ Indeed, a characteristic of his prose is the absence of localization, of references to a definable place. One could say that Abe was not fixed to any particular space (and identity), going beyond Japan to transcend nationality. This characteristic helped provide his work with the universality for which he is known. His work not only crosses national borders but the borders of genre as well, a point I will return to later.

Numano Mitsuyoshi writes of ‘boundary authors’ responsible for ‘the literature of exile’, a distinctively twentieth century phenomenon exemplified by such writers as Paul Bowles, Isaac Singer, Elias Canetti, and Joseph Brodsky: “Appearing to freely cross all boundaries while, in fact, continuing to be concerned about the sense of incompatibility with another culture as an outsider, only to ultimately, by remaining on the border itself, make one’s own thing.”³⁵ The applicability of Numano’s statement to a discussion of Abe is foregrounded by Namigata Tsuyoshi, who portrays him as “a figure remaining on the ‘border’ of cultural identity while continuing to renew the avant-garde.”³⁶ While incorporating the ‘city’ as a new element into cultural identity, Abe reworked the concept

³³ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 332.

³⁴ Mary Lazar, “Jerzy Kosinski’s *Being There*, Novel and Film: Changes Not by Chance,” *College Literature* 31.2 (2004), 100.

³⁵ Quoted in Namigata, 257.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 257.

of avant-garde, treating its ‘popularization’ as a natural consequence. Namigata argues that Abe did not consider avant-garde art as necessarily “a means for directly reforming society, but as a catalyst to provoke a re- awareness of reality.”³⁷ Abe expressed his views on the topic in a number of articles and, based on these, it can be deduced that he was favourable to the vogue for the avant-garde at that time. Provided that a critical spirit is maintained, Namigata suggests that its “absorption into mass culture” would not have been an issue for Abe.³⁸ It was within this context that the writer expanded the range of his artistic activity to include cinema, an art form with mass appeal, an art form emblematic of industrialized twentieth century culture.

Yet why adapt his novels into films? What specifically did cinema offer for addressing the themes explored in his fiction? One could begin to answer such questions by first considering Abe’s creative purpose. Through his writing, Abe aimed for a ‘unification’ of the concrete and the abstract, as Suda Tadahiro explains: “Kôbô’s literature is avant-garde and universal in that the state of man in relation to reality is not sought out within ideas or the lyrical, but in attempts to newly discover it by way of a direct negotiation with things.”³⁹ Possibly as a further attempt at this ‘unification’, at this “direct negotiation with things,” Abe had ventured forth into the visual and performing arts during the 1950s, writing for the stage and for television. He was also an accomplished photographer. According to Suda, photography was more than just a hobby for Abe, who infused his photographs with “an artistic quality that can be connected to

³⁷ Ibid., 254.

³⁸ Ibid., 254.

³⁹ Suda, 178.

his literature.”⁴⁰ For the writer, and the avant-garde in general, such cross-pollinations of genres represented “an effort to bridge the gap between the written and the visual.”⁴¹

Cinema was another avenue through which to branch out into the visual, and Abe did so with the help of his close friend Teshigahara Hiroshi, a comrade-in-arms in the post-war avant-garde movements and a talented visual artist turned filmmaker. To get a better idea about Abe and Teshigahara’s approach to adaptation, it would be helpful to examine the early period in both their careers when their artistic philosophy was first cultivated.

Collaboration: Transcending Genres Toward a Synthesis of Art

In 1947, Hanada Kiyoteru organized Yoru no Kai (Night Society) with Okamoto Tarô, an artist who had studied in Paris before the war and had associated with the surrealists.

Hanada himself was very familiar with the modernist art movements that emerged in Europe during the first half of the century and was influenced by surrealism in particular.

In what amounted to the group’s manifesto, appearing in the Yomiuri newspaper on January 26th the following year under the title “The Path of Revolutionary Art,” Hanada wrote the following:

So what is the original meaning of the avant-garde spirit? It is a spirit that both always demolishes and always creates; a spirit that advances headlong while enduring solitude; a spirit that treads on opportunity and repels the favourable. Without compromising, without being content, without being satisfied—a spirit that, were it to reach a height, would once again descend head first toward the bottom of the valley. That is to say, in a word, it is the spirit of revolution.⁴²

⁴⁰ Ibid., 180.

⁴¹ Bolton, 10.

⁴² Quoted in Sekine Hiroshi, *Hanada Kiyoteru: Nijû Seiki no Kodokusha* (Tokyo: Riburopôto, 1987), 116.

Hanada hoped that Yoru no Kai would provide a venue for artists to challenge each other and, with collective research (*kyôdô kenkyû*) as a point of departure, work toward developing the fruits of that research into collaborations (*kyôdô seisaku*). However, according to Sekine Hiroshi, a poet and original member of the group, Yoru no Kai ultimately failed to realize this goal; unable to proceed down the path toward collaborations, it simply remained a place for holding workshops and seminars on avant-garde art as well as exhibitions of its works.⁴³ Rather than subject each other's work to intense criticism, the members largely ignored their differences and instead focused on their common ground, something that would characterize (and ultimately undermine) similar groups formed throughout the following decade, as Toba Kôji notes.⁴⁴ Hanada eventually became editor of a literary magazine and, later, devoted himself to writing on fine art and cinema. This shift was consonant with the growing interest in film among the younger artists. Indeed, Hanada's theoretical writings on the subject would have an influence on their philosophy about and approach to this newer art form.

Abe Kôbô had taken a leadership role among Yoru no Kai's younger generation of artists. These aspiring poets and writers, all in their early twenties, had previously formed their own group, which was re-launched as Seiki no Kai (Century Society) in the spring of 1948. The following year, participation expanded to include visual artists, one of whom was Teshigahara Hiroshi. The group's activities involved the cross-pollination of genres, culminating in the publication by mimeograph of a series of seven pamphlets, collectively entitled *Seikigun*, and a collection of paintings entitled *Seikigashû*, which were completed between September and December of 1950. This series demonstrates the

⁴³ Ibid., 118.

⁴⁴ Toba Kôji, *Undôtai Abe Kôbô* (Tokyo: Ichiyôsha, 2007), 63.

group's efforts to continue what Yoru no Kai had set out to achieve—to experiment with producing truly collaborative art by crossing the boundaries between genres.

Katsuragawa Hiroshi, who was the only other visual artist, along with Teshigahara, to remain an active member of Seiki at the time, describes the concept of *Seikigun* as “an experiment in total art (*sôgô geijutsu*) by uniting literature and pictorial art.”⁴⁵ The modern idea for a synthesis of multiple art forms is often attributed to the 19th century German composer Richard Wagner. In his theory of *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or ‘total work of art’, he advocated a fusing of the musical, visual, and dramatic arts, an ideal he attempted to realize in his own operatic performances. While assuming new forms in its 20th century manifestations, ‘total art’ emerged as a key concept in the postwar reconstruction of Japan’s art world. To provide insight into what Seiki no Kai aimed to achieve through their experiment, Katsuragawa refers to an insert from the first issue:

The pamphlet *Seikigun* is a series intended for a new art movement that will develop a diversified form of expression through uniting literature and pictorial art. In particular, the pictorial forms attempted through the designs and illustrations possess independent value and proceed toward attaining a new genre.⁴⁶

The content of each issue of *Seikigun* varied and included Hanada’s translation of Kafka, original short fiction by Abe, critical writings, and a collection of poetry. Other members contributed artwork such as illustrations, cover designs, and frontispieces, all of which show a high degree of importance and commitment based on their attention to detail and the effort required for their inclusion—while the text was done by a professional, the stencils for the pictures were handmade by the members themselves.

⁴⁵ Katsuragawa Hiroshi, *Haikyo no Zen'ei: Kaisô no Sengo Bijutsu* (Tokyo: Ichiyôsha, 2004), 73.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 65.

Even Abe contributed artwork to the pamphlets as well as his own piece for the *Seikigashû*. Describing the latter as a “group production” (*shûdan seisaku*), Katsuragawa explains how those with a background in the visual arts provided assistance to those, like Abe, without formal training.⁴⁷ As Toba Kôji observes, by being unconcerned with the conventional fences between genres and establishing a “communication mediated through pictures,” Seiki was able to produce a fellow feeling among its members.⁴⁸ Toba suggests it was due to Abe’s involvement in such artistic activities, through exploring the possibilities of communicating through pictures, that a distinctive quality of his early short fiction is the richness of its visual imagery.

Toba goes on to suggest that traces of Seiki’s collaborative relationship are evident in the first edition of *The Wall* (*Kabe*), a series of short stories by Abe published in May 1951. By this time, having already reached the height of its activities and in keeping with the avant-garde spirit as defined by Hanada, Seiki had effectively dissolved and its members would go on to join or form other groups. Yet Toba points out that, “as products born within collectiveness (*kyôddôsei*),” there is a degree of continuity that can be observed between *Seikigun* and *The Wall*.⁴⁹ With Teshigahara responsible for the book design and Katsuragawa providing the illustrations, *The Wall* might be viewed as another compilation of the work of Seiki’s members. However, another contributor was non-member Ichikawa Jun, a writer and friend of Abe’s who provided a foreword. What Toba argues is that Ichikawa’s contribution does not merely introduce Abe’s work but serves to

⁴⁷ Ibid., 76.

⁴⁸ Toba, 20.

⁴⁹ Ibid., 114.

expand the interpretive range of *The Wall*, something Abe himself acknowledged with praise.

Much like the *Seikigun* series, the illustrations for *The Wall* should be treated as examples of a pictorial form of expression with their own value. According to Katsuragawa, the products of his collaborations with Abe were less a result of a carefully coordinated synchronization of their efforts but, rather, were born from a free and mutual exchange of ideas. Describing the process as “a reciprocal penetration of our ideas and images,” Katsuragawa maintains, “It wasn’t really difficult work done deliberately or that was planned out but, presuming there was always a tacit understanding between us, I naturally assimilated to his style and completed the drawings in one go.”⁵⁰ Furthermore, in an interview with Toba, he asserts, “It wasn’t so much about attaching pictures to the passages as it was about the pictures that were produced from the intense atmosphere we generated [during our sessions].”⁵¹ In other words, far from being subordinate to the written text, the illustrations function independently of the text, the dynamic of their interaction producing a visual effect that shapes the overall reading. Taken together, the additional interpretive possibilities embedded within *The Wall*, brought about by the collaborative nature of its construction, undercuts the notion of a single coherent authorial voice, of a stable and unified meaning. Instead, by presenting the reader with a work interwoven with multiple sources of meaning, *The Wall* can be regarded as an achievement in collaboration according to the spirit of avant-garde art. It was these early experiences working within an ensemble and engaging with other gifted artists that I believe prefigure Abe and Teshigahara’s philosophy about and approach to cinema.

⁵⁰ Katsuragawa, 354.

⁵¹ Quoted in Toba, 114.

The ‘Subjective Lens’: The Cinema of Teshigahara Hiroshi

It was through Okamoto Tarô that Abe first met Teshigahara during the fall of 1949. Son of Teshigahara Sôfû, founder and head (*iemoto*) of the Sôgetsu School of *ikebana* (flower arrangement), Hiroshi was studying oil painting at the Tokyo School of Fine Arts (present Tokyo National University of Fine Arts and Music). Yet it was his encounter with the work of artists like Picasso through European art magazines, unavailable until after the war, which made a larger impact on the younger Teshigahara. He was deeply moved by the expressiveness of these artists informed by their experiences in resistance movements during the war, and felt ashamed that a similar resistance did not take place in Japan. He had a strong desire to merge art with activism and, in surrealism, he discovered a possible means of finding expression for the “catastrophe” he had born witness to, experiences that had left a “primal scene” permanently etched within him.⁵² His interests drew him to Okamoto and, eventually, to Seiki no Kai. Okamoto was a proponent of the idea of bringing opposites together in art in order to create tension. As Dore Ashton explains, in Okamoto’s writing, the spirit of nonsense as embodied by the paradoxical notion of the “serious joke” is celebrated for having the power to change social reality, while discordance and dissonance were favoured aesthetic principles.⁵³ Okamoto’s teachings were to influence Teshigahara’s art, not to mention others of his generation.

⁵² Teshigahara Hiroshi, “Yume wo Takushita Sôgetsu Âtosentâ,” *Kagayake 60 Nendai: Sôgetsu Âtosentâ no Zenkiroku* (Tokyo: “Sôgetsu Âtosentâ no Kiroku” Kankô Inkai, 2002), 88.

⁵³ Dore Ashton, *The Delicate Thread: Teshigahara’s Life in Art* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1997), 48-49.

Abe would later write that the only place for art is “on the side of the people, where the various contradictions and conflicts of reality appear in their true form.”⁵⁴

Teshigahara was attracted to surrealism since it allowed him to address inner (*naibu*) problems through artistic expression. This was something pursued by many of his colleagues, such as fellow Seiki member Segi Shin'ichi, a critic and art historian.

Reflecting on his writings from that period, Segi recalls that what he emphasized most was “how to unite the methods of avant-garde art with social realism and, thereupon, the great importance of exploring the inner world.”⁵⁵ For Teshigahara, cinema was an artistic medium suited to this end. At the time, he was deeply impressed with the films of Italian Neo-realism. In a talk with Ôkôchi Shôji, Teshigahara explains, “When I was feeling the difficulty of depicting internal problems on the canvas, I found out that cinema is a medium that can casually and accurately capture the problems I am concerned with.”⁵⁶

Noting the dryness and the rigidity of the lines in Teshigahara’s oil paintings,

Katsuragawa Hiroshi suggests that Teshigahara was naturally inclined toward cinema rather than painting:

His eye is essentially hard like a lens and, when mediated through cinema’s glass eye, perhaps you could say that, for the first time, he was able to find his place. ...It is when looking through a camera lens that he fully captures the sticky, damp feel of the material or the physical sensation of human beings.⁵⁷

Teshigahara’s entry into the world of filmmaking occurred by chance when he was asked to take over a film project that had stalled due to funding issues. Despite his lack of technical know-how in the art, he completed *Hokusai* (1953), a documentary short

⁵⁴ Quoted in Katsuragawa, 33.

⁵⁵ Segi Shin'ichi, *Sengo Kûhakuki no Bijutsu* (Tokyo: Shichôsha, 1996), 225.

⁵⁶ Quoted in Ôkôchi Shôji and Yomota Inuhiko, *Zen’ei Chôsho: Teshigahara Hiroshi to no Taiwa* (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 1989), 20.

⁵⁷ Katsuragawa, 363.

on the famous Edo Period *ukiyo-e* woodcut artist. While working on the project, he was supported by veterans of the film industry and became acquainted with the documentarist Kamei Fumio, under whom he would work as an assistant director on three films. The ‘record’ or ‘document’ (*kiroku*) was a concept of central importance to Teshigahara and his peers at the time. During the 1950s, those in the avant-garde circles were becoming more politically active and attempting to apply their art in a practical way. This new movement brought groups of artists together and, reflecting their leftward leaning, aimed to establish a “people’s art” by approaching and assimilating with the proletariat and the working masses, “to construct the reality of the outside world through practical subjective eyes.”⁵⁸ Either voluntarily or at the behest of the Communist Party, these groups flocked to sites of protest or class conflict, in many cases to rural areas such as mountain villages, in order to connect with the masses and record “the reality of the outside world” using the technique deemed most effective for their purposes: reportage.

Discussing the function of *kiroku*, Abe insisted that it is a method specially designed for shedding light on the elements of reality not yet consciously perceived: “Therefore, the spirit of *kiroku*, to put it simply, is a respect for the accidental things (*gûhatsuteki-na mono*) that lie outside of consciousness.”⁵⁹ Alluding to Hanada’s theories, he went on to explain that, while surrealism is the application of this method directed inwardly, there is now a need to likewise re-direct this method toward the outside and, in so doing, make the development of a new realism possible. In response to this new trend, a new group was formed: the Kiroku Geijutsu no Kai (Documentary Art

⁵⁸ Segi, 105.

⁵⁹ Abe Kôbô, “Shin Kiroku Shugi no Teishyô,” *Shisô* (July 1958). Quoted in Tomoda Yoshiyuki, “Fûkei to Shintai: Abe Kôbô / Teshigahara Hiroshi Eiga *Suna no Onna Ron*,” *Nihon Kindai Bungaku* 74 (May 2006), 272.

Society). According to Toba Kôji, the group's members, including Abe, discussed *kiroku* above all in terms of film, using it as the "clue" to comprehending their ideas.⁶⁰ An ardent follower of the discussions that took place, Teshigahara was very receptive to these ideas. Regarding the "document spirit" he learned while working under Kamei, he writes, "One is the flow of the overall theme of the work, the other is the flow arising from the realization of contingency (*gûzensei*), in other words of actuality according to its true meaning, and by putting both of these together, one makes a film."⁶¹

Yet Teshigahara became critical of the left-wing filmmaker's approach, which he deemed too ideological: "Eventually he bypassed contradictions; bypassed brutal truths; the darker side of issues where contradictions enter."⁶² For the aspiring director influenced by the ideas of Okamoto, Hanada, and Abe, it was important to capture the contradictions of reality and present them with brutal honesty in his work. Perhaps partly for that reason, the filmmaker whom he admired most was Luis Buñuel, the expatriated Spanish director best known for his surrealist aesthetic, unflinching critical depictions of society, and jarring images. In an essay on Buñuel, Abe notes a stylistic transition demonstrated by the Spaniard from his highly surrealistic earlier works to the documentary-like realism of his later efforts such as *Los Olvidados* (1950), a favourite of both his and Teshigahara's:

The transition from surrealism to a documentary-like method, when considering the essence of each, is a very natural and inevitable thing. Indeed, due to the

⁶⁰ Toba, 52.

⁶¹ Teshigahara Hiroshi, "Eizô ni Tsukareta Ippiki Ôkami," *Shio* (Oct. 1968). Quoted in Tomoda, 272.

⁶² Quoted in Ashton, 62.

possibilities of that mutual transition, you could say it proves, for the first time, that both have been supported by an avant-garde consciousness.⁶³

Therefore, in the artistic course followed by Buñuel, Abe and Teshigahara's own instincts as artists were confirmed.

According to Teshigahara, "When any art thoroughly pushes itself, it becomes grotesque. It goes somewhere brutal. To redeem [a work] with morals is something that has happened too often."⁶⁴ Within the young filmmaker's circle, socialist realism of the Soviet model was brought into question as a mode limited to depicting surface phenomena. Rejecting this and taking up the issue of how best to capture realist problems, Teshigahara sought a new mode of expression: "What I learned from Italian films is that the way to approach something realistically (*sokubutsuteki-ni*) differs from the grammar that has been used thus far. I aim for a realism of my own."⁶⁵ Commenting on the Italian Neo-realist director Roberto Rossellini, Kiroku founding member Sasaki Kiichi, rejecting the use of the term realism, writes, "Did Rossellini not view historical and even social events in the same way as the merciless, immovable nature? ... Rossellini's documentary-like picture is a symbol of his view of humanity, of his thought, not of the profound essence of reality."⁶⁶ Although, as Toba points out, Sasaki is guilty of conflating realism with an objective, 'uninterpreted' depiction of the condition of reality, his point about the nature of Rossellini's brand of realism was something favoured by artists at the time—the application of a documentary-like *methodology* to give expression

⁶³ Abe Kôbô, "Wasurerareta Firumu," *Sabaku no Shisô: Gendai Nihon no Essei* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1994), 297-98.

⁶⁴ Quoted in Murao Kiyokazu, "Hazukashigariya no Sutairisuto," *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, ed. Sôgetsu Shuppan Henshûbu (Tokyo: Sôgetsu Shuppan, 1982), 13.

⁶⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 13.

⁶⁶ Quoted in Toba, 50.

to one's artistic vision. For Teshigahara, the new realism he pursued was the ability to ascertain the essence of something by thinking in line with the subject. Watching Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* was a breakthrough and would inform the development of his own approach to filmmaking. When asked by Dore Ashton about the film, he recalled being especially impressed with how the "people are placed so that the depths of their minds are hinted at effectively."⁶⁷ In an interview with Joan Mellen, he elaborates on his philosophy about the director's role:

The real meaning of documentary film is not the taking of objective shots, but that the film has to be interpreted by the director, who feels this way or that and draws some meaning from the subject. You have to add this human element; otherwise the film will not emerge as art. Documentary is the presentation of the subject, which is construed and perceived through particular human eyes.⁶⁸

Teshigahara was given an opportunity to put his theories into practice when an idea for a documentary presented itself during a visit to New York. After being introduced to the young Puerto Rican boxer José Torres, Teshigahara filmed the up-and-coming professional fighter during his training sessions and one of his bouts. Keeping in mind how the "document" should be treated and experimenting with ways to "flesh out" his subject, the footage was developed into the 25-minute *José Torres* (1959).⁶⁹ Yomota Inuhiko writes of the film, "Through the eyes of Teshigahara, visiting New York for the first time, José, also a foreigner in white society, is depicted carrying on a lonely battle while maintaining his naïve interior."⁷⁰ Pointing out that the "artless style" of the film was something favoured by American experimental filmmakers "in full rebellion against

⁶⁷ Quoted in Ashton, 119.

⁶⁸ Quoted in Joan Mellen, *Voices from the Japanese Cinema* (New York: Liveright, 1975), 171.

⁶⁹ Teshigahara, "Yume wo Takushita Sôgetsu Âtosentâ," 90.

⁷⁰ Ôkôchi and Yomota, 84.

the technique-oriented slickness of commercial film,” Dore Ashton comments on the impact of *José Torres*:

Perhaps Teshigahara’s choice of José Torres as a subject was influenced by the American tides. Perhaps his choice of a man of the people was a way to assuage his social conscience. In any case, it was far from the subject matter of most Japanese films of the time, and in its deliberate roughness and unedited quality, was something of a manifesto. Teshigahara’s scenes of the dilapidated streets near Torres’ gym, of the denizens of the fight world, and of the drama and suspense attending the preparation for a big fight are registered with a fine sense of rhythm, one of his distinguishing characteristics.⁷¹

An additional point worth noting about the film is the involvement of the composer Takemitsu Tôru who provided the score. This was Teshigahara’s first of many collaborations with Takemitsu, another friend of the director’s whom he would thereafter entrust with writing the music for his films. Takemitsu had been active in the Jikken Kôbô (Experimental Workshop), an avant-garde group that brought together artists from different fields in order to experiment with creating ‘total art’. With its greater emphasis on performance and music as well as experimenting with multimedia, Takemitsu’s experiences in Jikken Kôbô would bring a new dimension to Teshigahara’s work. The composer believed that the music for a film should not be limited to simply enhancing the atmosphere of the work but must express its theme in concrete terms: “Through sound, the concept of a word can be fleshed out.”⁷² According to Ashton, Takemitsu took a keen interest in the filmmaking process, immersing himself fully in order to find the right aural counterpart to Teshigahara’s images. Describing the function of his contributions, Takemitsu once wrote, “The images themselves reverberate with a distinct and fertile sound, and the music can play only an adjunct role, bringing into sharper focus the

⁷¹ Ashton, 68.

⁷² Takemitsu Tôru, “Tairitsu suru Ongaku: Eiga ni okeru Ongaku no Mondai,” *Art Theatre* 1.3 (June 1962), 14.

sounds that the images emit.”⁷³ Clearly, both artists shared a mutual respect for each other’s creative instincts, demonstrating yet again the importance of collaborative exchange in shaping their art.

In 1957, Teshigahara’s interest in experimental film led to the organization of a society for viewing non-commercial films. He brought together a number of young cinephiles to screen movies that would otherwise not be shown at any of Japan’s theatres since they did not conform to mainstream tastes. As a gathering place for those interested in the study of film, the group called itself Cinema 57 (the number would change annually to correspond to the year). The initiative proved successful, drawing a favourable response, and led to regular meetings. The group’s activities were an impetus for the establishment of the Art Theatre Guild (ATG), a network supporting independent cinema. ATG would make a valuable contribution to the Japanese film industry as an alternative to the studio system, committed to the distribution and exhibition of art films (both foreign and domestic) and, later, to their production. As an incubator for independent film in Japan, ATG ushered in the arrival of Teshigahara, who completed his first dramatic feature *Pitfall* in 1962, as well as fellow Cinema 57 member Hani Susumu, a filmmaker whose work would prove seminal. Teshigahara acknowledges, “Although the group dissolved shortly thereafter, you could say that my path to film was opened up within the circumstances of Art Theatre’s birth, when those who were cinema’s heretics gained a foothold for me.”⁷⁴

⁷³ Quoted in Ashton, 103.

⁷⁴ Quoted in Ôkôchi and Yomota, 22.

The Collaborative Potential of Cinema

Cinema, both in its creative process and in its mode of reception, is a communal art, one that provides a sense of shared experience. I would suggest that a key reason for cinema's appeal among Abe and Teshigahara's generation of artists was its collaborative potential. Teshigahara's own recollections of Abe during their early years together characterize him as "a man interested in all the arts and seeking a way to bring them together."⁷⁵ By its very nature, cinema is an art form that requires the bringing together of diverse creative minds who each contribute their individual voice to the work. While this occurs under the direction of the filmmaker who is ultimately responsible for the final product, the strength of the creative process is enhanced when cooperation and the exchange of ideas are encouraged. This spirit is echoed in Teshigahara's other endeavors at the time, which revolved around the Sôgetsu Art Center, founded in 1959 and to which he was appointed director by his father. He had ambitions for it to function as the hub for a new artistic movement, where "individuals from all fields of art would come together voluntarily and create new forms."⁷⁶ One could say that, in cinema, Teshigahara found a medium that allowed him to come closest to achieving this ideal in his own work, something Abe surely took notice of.

Following the release of the film *The Man Without a Map* (*Moetsukita Chizu*, 1968),⁷⁷ which was to be his last collaboration with Teshigahara, Abe revealed his thoughts on being involved in the filmmaking process as scenarist. The responsibility of adapting his novel into the screenplay gave him a more immediate sense of participation

⁷⁵ Ashton, 53.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 73.

⁷⁷ Note the English title of the film differs from that of the novel, *The Ruined Map*.

and allowed him to experience the joy of individuals working together toward a common cause: “Personalities that are diverse and, moreover, exceptionally strong, making something while intertwined as if in a spider web—it’s that sense of excitement that I so desperately like.”⁷⁸ The notion of community raised in his writings and actualized in the filmmaking process opened Abe’s eyes to the possibilities of “forming such a community of free individuals who have brought their creative energies together in order to construct something of value for themselves.”⁷⁹ I believe that, in cinema, both Abe and Teshigahara saw a model for not only the ideal synthesis of artistic activity but also what could be regarded as an ideal mode of relations—a community that nurtures the creative potential of the individual rather than suppressing it.

The attitude of Abe, Teshigahara, and their peers toward cinema is succinctly articulated by Takemitsu in an article appearing in a June 1962 special issue of *Art Theatre*, ATG’s monthly publication, dedicated to Teshigahara’s *Pitfall*:

If cinema has an individual character, then the participation of other fields, to the extent of being pure, will not be established logically but will result in contradiction. However, I think that cinema’s newness is to be found not by overcoming this contradiction but by deepening it through the collective operation.

Perhaps the rediscovery of cinema outside the studios has been due to this new realization. Here, contradiction is the sole criticism and will support the realness of expression. Individual work can only exist at a point beyond individuality. I feel therein lies the meaning of collaboration in cinema.

...What is important in cinema is *what is discovered* within reality. I feel that, even if each differs in where they are coming from, both the camera and the music are an expression based on a subjective interpretation of reality and, therefore, the film’s reality will become more of a certainty.⁸⁰

⁷⁸ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 22, 126.

⁷⁹ *Iles*, 19.

⁸⁰ Takemitsu, 15.

Takemitsu touches on the “individual character” of independent cinema, perhaps an allusion to the concept of ‘auteur’, a popular subject at the time in film criticism. Yet he also acknowledges the importance of collaboration, of the clash of individual voices and the resulting dissonance, that is to say its contradictions. Through contradiction, reality can be approached and captured best. This notion had already been proposed by Hanada Kiyoteru specifically with the potential of cinema in mind, and is very instructive when considering the theoretical basis of Abe and Teshigahara’s film projects.

2. THE COLLISION OF WORD AND IMAGE: A Dialectical Theory of Adaptation

“In the moving image (cinema) we have, so to speak, a synthesis of two counterpoints—the spatial counterpoint of graphic art, and the temporal counterpoint of music.”¹

Sergei Eisenstein
A Dialectic Approach to Film Form (1929)

‘Cinematic Thinking’: A New Artistic Ideal

In a similar vein as Eisenstein before him, Hanada Kiyoteru claimed that artists must rely on “musical thinking and pictorial thinking,” which would inevitably lead to “cinematic thinking, a dialectical integration of the two.”² According to Katsuragawa Hiroshi, as early as the 1930s, critics like Nakai Masakazu, recognizing the collective-integrative opportunities of cinema, had discussed the emergence of “the collective nature of beauty,” a new aesthetic concept that Nakai believed was best demonstrated in cinematic space: “The function of cinema is its material vision (*busshitsuteki shikaku*), a fusion of the mechanical and the human.”³ Although Nakai’s theory, as Katsuragawa acknowledges, could be construed as a pragmatic response to the technological innovations of the time, Hanada’s “cinematic thinking” was an artistic ideal invoking the collective-integrative nature of cinema, and would serve as the basis for his thesis on the destruction of genres and the synthesis of art. In an essay titled “A Consideration of the Apple” (“Ringo ni Kansuru Ikkôsetsu”), which Abe would later cite in his proposal for a new realism based on the spirit of *kiroku* (the ‘record’ or ‘document’), Hanada argues

¹ Sergei Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 52.

² Quoted in Katsuragawa Hiroshi, *Haikyo no Zen’ei: Kaisô no Sengo Bijutsu* (Tokyo: Ichiyôsha, 2004), 31.

³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 31.

that the distinctions and unity of the internal and external worlds need to be addressed in order to grasp reality in its totality:

The methodology of avant-garde art, which up to the present had been used to render inner reality, should be taken up again for the purpose of rendering external reality. Otherwise, I feel the opportunity for our eyes to come into contact with an apple in its true form may never come.⁴

He goes on to suggest that, should the gaze that had been cast toward the inside be re-directed toward the outside, the avant-garde would no longer be confined to the realm of art but would enter the realm of politics, recapitulating his conviction that art should serve political ends. By grasping the distinctions and unity of such genres as literature, painting, and music, he theorized that a “revolution in art” could be carried out, setting the stage for the creation of “revolutionary art.”⁵

According to Toba Kôji, Hanada’s call for artists to “look to the outside with avant-garde eyes” paved the way for the emergence of *kiroku* as favoured concept.⁶ The relationship between documentary and fiction was understood as a clash of opposing methodologies that could be synthesized, an assertion, as Toba points out, in tune with the mood of an era when it was fashionable to talk of Marxist dialectics.⁷ For example, Hanada writes, “If there is no desire to *aufheben* the documentary of today and the fiction of today, it may be safer not to speak on such issues as creativity.”⁸ If “documentary” is to be understood as the method for rendering the outside world and “fiction” the method for rendering the inner world then, as Toba observes, this dialectic could relate to the

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 32.

⁵ Quoted in *ibid.*, 32.

⁶ Toba Kôji, *Undôtai Abe Kôbô* (Tokyo: Ichiyôsha, 2007), 57.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 61.

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 61.

‘total’ vision of reality Hanada had previously theorized.⁹ He was convinced that, from the renewal of avant-garde art, a new kind of realist would emerge—perhaps what he earlier described as “the bearer of cinematic thinking.” His intuition in using the term ‘cinematic’ to articulate his theories was apt and anticipates his own passage into film criticism and the involvement of two of his pupils, Abe and Teshigahara, in the actual art of filmmaking. I now turn my attention to what the two hoped to accomplish by bringing together such diverse genres as literature and graphic art through cinema.

Toward a Theory: On Literature, Film, and their Synthesis

Abe’s first foray into film occurred in 1953 when he was asked to pen the scenario for Kobayashi Masaki’s *The Thick-Walled Room* (*Kabe Atsuki Heya*, 1956). To determine Abe’s basic stance on literature and cinema, I will refer to a conversation he had in 1958 with Ishihara Shintarô (present governor of Tokyo), another novelist who tried his hand at screenwriting and who, at that time, had just finished directing his first film.¹⁰ Over the course of their talk, Abe and Ishihara engage in a discussion on the relationship between art and actuality and the possibilities of cinema as artistic medium. Criticizing the emphasis on mastering technical skill, the two speak of the need for the artist to first grasp the ‘actuality’ that is the subject of the work and then determine how best to express it technically, not the other way around. As Abe stresses, “Form is a tool for discovering actuality. If things are reversed and it becomes the technique of form, then there’s no meaning, no meaning at all.”¹¹ Both writers regarded cinema as another art

⁹ Ibid., 62.

¹⁰ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 9 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997): 210-20.

¹¹ Ibid., 212.

form for discovering and capturing actuality, not merely as a specialized craft for producing an audio-visual spectacle such as the dramatization of their novels. What is important is the ‘artistic quality’ (*geijutsusei*) that cannot be reduced to a single genre such as literature and film, and yet is their common ground. Therefore, Abe rejects the notion of a ‘literary’ film, arguing that cinema should not have to depend on literature. Sharing Abe’s view, Ishihara states that the function of art is “to capture the present actuality through various cross sections.”¹² Thus, if a writer finds that there is something insufficient in his or her novel, rather than simply making a film ‘based on the novel’, he or she should try expressing what the novel cannot by means of cinematic expression.

Abe elaborates on this topic during a discussion in 1959 with art critic Nakahara Yūsuke, who compiled the content of their exchange into an article titled “Film and Literature: Film as Modern Art.”¹³ Here, Abe reasserts his position that literature and film are not to be treated as two independent genres, each supported by a different mode of thought—verbal language (*genko*) and images (*eizô*)—that are in opposition to each other. The thrust of Abe and Nakara’s argument is that the way to restore the vitality within the various genres of art is through synthesis, and that synthesis entails the pursuit of a new unity with literature, not a rejection of it. Their argument is predicated on the assertion that language and images are not opposing modes but are in fact interdependent. According to Abe and Nakahara, language refers to “the conscious act of regarding an object,” which results in an image or impression in the mind separate from the actual object; in other words, through language, an indirect relationship with the object is

¹² Ibid., 218.

¹³ “Eiga to Bungaku: Gendai Geijutsu to shite no Eiga,” Appendix to *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 11: 19-24.

established.¹⁴ Its antithesis would be the direct image, those hypothetical ‘new images’ that, without the conscious operation of language, are latent. Yet, as Abe and Nakahara point out, if these images cannot be contemplated, they also cannot be said to exist. It is only through the process of their signification, through the function of language, that these images can be grasped.

In his 1960 essay “Revolution in Art: Theory of Art Movements,”¹⁵ Abe discusses in more detail the trend in contemporary art toward an independence from literature, an “anti-literature” (*han bungaku shugi*) movement in pursuit of a pictorial mode of expression that cannot be substituted with words. Abe maintains that if sensory stimuli are signs or symbols (*kigô*) in relation to the human sensory system, then language, by converting these primary signs into secondary signs, operates by way of an indirect course. Praising surrealism as an attempt at a pure sensory operation, he points out that the goal of abstract painting is to overcome indirectness: “Rather than stimulating the senses by evoking ‘something’ from reality, they aim for the creation of new signs that appeal to the senses more directly, by way of the signs themselves.”¹⁶ If we rephrase this borrowing the terminology used in semiotics, the goal is the creation of new signifiers; that is, signifiers with no signified. The ‘direct image’ to which Abe and Nakahara refer seems to correspond to this notion of a new signifier. However, in “Revolution in Art,” Abe expresses his skepticism about this trend, suggesting that it will lead to a dead end by moving toward the severance of genres: “The revolutionary role of anti-literature was, after all, derived from its relationship of tension with literature, which took the form of a

¹⁴ Ibid., 22.

¹⁵ “Geijutsu no Kakumei: Geijutsu Undô no Riron,” *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 11: 457-67.

¹⁶ Ibid., 459.

dialectical opposition.”¹⁷ In his joint article with Nakahara, Abe likewise insists that the conflict between the indirectness of language and the directness of the image is dialectical: “Synthesis, by way of a new unity with literature, must make this dialectic of indirectness and directness a conscious process.”¹⁸

What Abe and Nakahara argue for is the need to re-evaluate the energy, the source of the imagination, which makes the “leap from an object” possible in literature in order to determine how it can materialize in film. To entrust everything to the camera is not enough; that would be a denial of the role of the artist. An object can be more precisely grasped by engaging with what is captured by the camera: “Through the discovery of new signs, that which falls outside the existing sign system can be incorporated into an ever-broadening system.”¹⁹ During a roundtable discussion the following year on the topic of the challenge facing today’s young artists, which included Teshigahara Hiroshi, Takemitsu Tôru, Hani Susumu, and the photographer Tômatsu Shômei among its participants, Abe speaks of real facts separated from established concepts: “Capturing the bare truth beyond consciousness is ideal, but if at that time, such an operation is not performed consciously, then consciousness cannot be transcended; it is this self-contradiction that I believe will become the artist’s challenge.”²⁰ In other words, to avoid falling into the trap of perceiving through stereotypes, the artist must endeavor to consciously remove his or her preconceptions. Only then can the truth that lies beyond everyday consciousness be reached.

¹⁷ Ibid., 460.

¹⁸ Appendix to *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 11, 23.

¹⁹ Ibid., 24.

²⁰ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 12, 233-34.

In “Revolution in Art,” Abe begins his treatise by likening the “everyday sense” (*nichijō kankaku*) to a balance between “reason” (*risei*) and “sensibility” (*kansei*). For the writer, “the job of art is to temporarily break the balance and to use its stabilizing force in a progressive way.”²¹ Since an individual’s inner balance is affected by outside reality, this balance can be said to permeate a particular socio-historical milieu, encompassing “such common denominators as time period, social class, and ethnic group.”²² Hence, the broader social relevance of what is required of the artist. If this balance is reflected in the relationship between language, which appeals to human reason, and images, which appeal to human sensibility, then the balance can be disturbed by a ‘new image’: “It becomes a question of driving a wedge (= new image) capable of producing a strong enough shock.”²³ This can only be effective if we allow that language and images are interconnected. As Abe notes parenthetically, since each image has a counterpart on the other side of the balance, a new image must necessarily induce a corresponding development within the domain of language.

Turning his attention to cinema, Abe speaks of the need for a re-evaluation of the literary spirit. By this, he does not imply the privileging of the literary source or a dependence on literary ‘classics’ for respectability, and certainly not the petty commercialism of attempts to capitalize on the popularity of a pre-sold title. For Abe, it is a matter of using “literature as a contrast for awakening the tension [between reason and sensibility].”²⁴ Activating this tension is the common artistic challenge. Yet it is not enough for it to remain within the realm of ideas, as abstract concepts, but must also be

²¹ *Abe Kōbō Zenshū*, vol. 11, 460.

²² *Ibid.*, 462.

²³ *Ibid.*, 464

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 465.

reflected through concrete creations, such as tangible images. Thus Abe is not advocating a mechanical synthesis of genres but rather the need “to bring alive within each genre the spirit of dialectical synthesis in terms of the tension between reason (= the abstract) and sensibility (= the concrete).”²⁵

Emergence of a Theory: “A Collision between Word and Image”

Abe’s concerns were aimed toward forging a new relationship between art and the masses. Carrying this ambition over to his screenwriting endeavors, he experimented with ways to realize a common language through which to think and speak with the people. In “Scenario for an Experimental Film,” he claims an experiment must go beyond experimentation so that, “no matter how abstract it is, it always occurs in relation to something concrete.”²⁶ Here, Abe puts forward his thesis that the encounter with a new image will dismantle the established language system and likewise bring about a new language construction: “This collision between word and image is what I believe to be the discovery of an unknown world.”²⁷ Such a collision is necessary because the primacy of language has enclosed us inside the shell of the everyday, allowing language to stagnate only to become increasingly abstract:

That is why it must collide with a concrete thing, something that does not carry the law of causality, something that only destroys, a meaningless thing, in other words an image, and by doing so, break the dried up shell of the everyday. It is the image that constantly puts the word into an active state.²⁸

²⁵ Ibid., 466.

²⁶ “Jikken Eiga no Shinario,” *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 11, 449.

²⁷ Ibid., 447.

²⁸ Ibid., 448.

By ‘words’, Abe does not refer, for example, to a film’s script, but to the essential function latent in all artistic expression—ideas. By bringing ideas into contact with ‘pure images’, that is images stripped of all meaning and attachments to the everyday sense, a new consciousness can be attained. It is what Juan Bruce-Nova describes as “the constant process of reformulation in concepts and ideas to account for data or experience provided by new discoveries that fail to be accounted for within established formulations of reality.”²⁹ David Bordwell discusses the “Marxist aesthetic” pervading art cinema at that time, the emphasis on “the *process* of awareness (of consciousness of actuality), the *attempt* to deal with the given in a dialectic manner rather than a model-oriented one,” as critic Peter Gidal put it.³⁰ Abe’s desire for the creation of a ‘new consciousness’ was very much in the spirit of what another critic, Mike Dunford, described as “a film practice that helps the people to perceive their situation and to destroy the ideological chains that bind them.”³¹

Abe’s thesis on the collision of word and image is perhaps best presented in his 1960 essay “Will the Image Destroy the Word’s Wall.”³² Here, he argues that language brings order to the chaos of existence. By attaching names and labels to phenomena, outside reality can be classified, controlled, and domesticated: “For example, by naming a stick a stick and recognizing it as a stick, [human beings] were able to obtain not an individual stick but an abstract general stick (an infinite number of sticks). In other

²⁹ Juan Bruce-Nova, “From Text to Film and Back: The García Ponce-Gurrola Collaboration in *Tajimara*,” *Discourse* 26.1 (2004), 169.

³⁰ Quoted in David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 63.

³¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 63-64.

³² Abe Kôbô, “Eizô wa Gengo no Kabe o Hakai suru ka,” *Sabaku no Shisô: Gendai Nihon no Essei* (Tokyo: Kôdansha, 1994): 230-37.

words, the usage of a tool became possible.”³³ All objects that fall under the category of ‘stick’ lose their uniqueness, their intrinsic self, and are defined on human terms, according to human needs. It is through language that human beings establish a relationship with the world. However, it is no more than the construction of an “everyday familiar world” brought about by a conditional reflex, an inherent human need for stability in order to make living within the unknowable, a world that is beyond human comprehension, as manageable as possible. That is why things stripped of the words that normalize them are rendered incomprehensible and, hence, disconcerting: “Uncovered things [not mediated through words] have no meaning. Causality, coherence, the stimulation and association of ideas are all inconceivable.”³⁴

Although images can certainly communicate ideas to the viewer, this communication is possible because the viewer first possesses language, that is the means of formulating ideas. On the other hand, the ‘pure image’ for Abe is one that does not speak, one that is “grotesque.”³⁵ It is grotesque because it is not anchored by meaning and, therefore, jars the viewer out of the security of his or her everyday sense. Thus the image must go beyond the function of words, to be something that defies words. Abe writes, “Its *raison d’être* will be found precisely in its destructive action, its contesting of all linguistic elements—stability and generalization through abstraction, attachment of meaning, communication, interpretation, association, and so on.”³⁶ Yet, according to the writer, the real value of the image is not something intrinsic but rather relational: “It is in its ability to challenge the existing language system, to provide the word with a stimulus

³³ Ibid., 231.

³⁴ Ibid., 232.

³⁵ Ibid., 233.

³⁶ Ibid., 234.

in order to activate it.”³⁷ Abe once pointed out that language is not a finished product but is an evolving process, stating “there are many cases when something captured through words is far more plainly expressed through images instead.”³⁸ This might have been another reason for Abe’s desire to adapt his novels into films. Perhaps, like Ishihara Shintarô, there was something lacking in his writing that he felt could be better expressed through the medium of cinema.

From Novel to Screenplay: “Thinking through Images”

The task of arranging the visual counterparts for what Abe hoped to express was entrusted to the eye of his longtime friend Teshigahara Hiroshi. Faced with the problem of determining how Abe’s theoretical considerations could be applied in their film projects, both agreed about the necessity of first breaking out of the confines of the ‘story’. They felt that, when adapting a novel into a film, following a story as presented in the novel would be ill advised since such an approach does not suit cinema’s particular mode of expression. Abe explains, “Once a film breaks with the novel’s story, there must be a reunification once again of literature...that is, the world of literature, the world of words, with the world of images.”³⁹ In response, Teshigahara concedes that the most difficult and, at the same time, most appealing aspect of their film projects is the challenge of expressing Abe’s ideas through concrete images, of figuring out how to capture his themes in the form of everyday life experiences:

There is always a certain idea that is the major theme and, on top of that foundation, there are various everyday things strewn about and, out of these, a

³⁷ Ibid., 236.

³⁸ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 22, 275.

³⁹ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 19, 321.

scenario is composed. Yet, when converting it into images of experiential things, I feel that the nature of Abe's work is such that the themes do not easily rise to the surface. The ideas that Abe tries to depict in the lines of his script tell of abstract things within extremely everyday situations, like the exchange of a conversation.⁴⁰

Reflecting on their collaborations many years later, Teshigahara reveals, "When working with a scenario by Abe, I always think that, through everydayness, an abstract world is approached."⁴¹ In other words, the challenge for Teshigahara was to communicate the abstract through the everyday. As a result, he recognized the demand on him as director to overturn and then rethink conventional filmmaking practices.

Even Abe's method of adapting his novel into a screenplay was, by his own admission, unconventional. In "Image and Word: The Victory over Story-ism,"⁴² he writes of overcoming the emphasis on plot, to start from concrete images rather than a framework that roughly maps out the overall flow of the story. For screenwriting to be a truly creative process, the writer must "think through images," to allow the images to breath and move on their own.⁴³ If the images are forced into a preconceived framework, they will suffocate. Such an approach, according to Abe, contradicts the very process of creation and must be abandoned in order for a true scenario to emerge:

What is important is, having decided on an ultimate theme, that is a theme that appeals to the whole, with what aim, from what angle does [the image] collide with that theme. Does it shatter it, pierce it, take flight from it, take a detour around it? You do not know the exact process until the very end, unless you try doing it, and I think this is the real way to write.⁴⁴

Returning to his discourse on the collision of word and image, Abe notes that one function of language is to conceptualize, to streamline detailed processes in our daily life.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 321.

⁴¹ Abe Kôbô and Teshigahara Hiroshi, "Jiyû o Masaguru Eiga: *Samâ Sorujâ* o Megutte," *Kikan Firumu* 11 (April 1972), 41.

⁴² "Eizô to Gengo: Sutôrî Shugi no Kokufuku," *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 20: 136-41.

⁴³ Ibid., 138.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 138-39.

Therefore, images can allow us to confront afresh or perform a close-up on those details that we usually process, that we conceptualize and thereby gloss over. By doing so, the “everyday process” loses its everydayness and those concrete details become new points of departure for making unusual discoveries:

If an image, tamed and made safe by language, were suddenly cut out and captured in close-up, we would find a surprising aspect within the everyday that had hitherto been casually overlooked. ... Since, covering the image, there exists a single stable everyday structure mediated through language, when confronted with an image cut off from such a thing, there is a certain shock and the meaning of that image emerges.⁴⁵

In other words, for Abe, the function of the image in its relationship to the word should be to provoke the viewer into questioning the everyday reality constructed and perceived through language. The more distorted, disorienting, and ‘grotesque’ the image, the more effectively it can perform its function. The ultimate goal would be to reintegrate word and image, not as equivalents but as complements: “If we do not eliminate the situation of equating word and image in a state of adhesion, and if the reintegration, discovered once again, of word and image does not take place on a higher plane, then I think it will be hopeless.”⁴⁶ It was likely with this concern in mind that Abe approached the task of adapting his own novels into screenplays.

Abe believed that cinema’s potential to present an alternative mode of expression transcending the limitations of narrative is best demonstrated by montage, where camera position and movement and the way a film is edited—the juxtaposition of shots—become additional sources of meaning independent of the depicted action. As Sergei Eisenstein pointed out in discussing the peculiar property of montage, “two film pieces of any kind,

⁴⁵ Ibid., 140.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 141.

placed together, inevitably combine into a new concept, a new quality, arising out of that juxtaposition.”⁴⁷ In “The Trap that is Story,” Abe writes, “For the sake of expression outside the framework of the story, the cinematic language of montage was invented and, having done so, cinema promises great possibilities as the champion of modern art.”⁴⁸ Lamenting what he perceived to be a dearth of films that effectively pursue matters of social import, Abe stressed the importance of the discovery and recovery of theme: “The loss of theme is the loss of an active interest in reality. Even if that interest has not been lost, then it is a case of losing sight of the way to express that interest.”⁴⁹ For Abe, one way of overcoming this challenge is by renouncing the primacy of story. He criticized the story as a mold into which reality is fixed, a template ensuring a narrative arc with a tidy conclusion. Once freed from the framework of the formulaic, however, the artist can discover themes that carry the present actuality. He states, “As for cinema, plot should not be the parts or material for a story. Plot must be the material for montage.”⁵⁰

Capturing the Contingent: The Role of the Camera

It was in documentary film that Abe observed the most effective use of montage. In his view, the documentary is capable of providing the greatest challenge to the domination of the story, a topic raised during a conversation with critic Hariu Ichirô on the French New Wave director Jean-Luc Godard, who incorporated documentary

⁴⁷ Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1975), 4.

⁴⁸ Abe Kôbô, “Sutôri to iu Wana,” *Sabaku no Shisô*, 287.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 289.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 289-90.

methods in his own dramatic films.⁵¹ Here, ‘documentary’ is discussed not simply as a methodology but also as the capacity for criticism and analysis. Turning his attention to the encounter between human consciousness and the material world, Hariu touches on the elusiveness of reality, the impossibility of fully capturing it. Finding Hariu’s use of the word “reality” inappropriate, Abe refers to “the object” to designate the idea or concept approximated by language but always remaining in abstract relation to it. According to Abe, when the act of observing enters the equation, the object inevitably becomes part of a function with a subject, and only through this interaction does reality occur.⁵² In other words, reality presupposes the presence of a subject; it is the result of the interplay between mind and matter. Meanwhile the object, no longer a stable, fixed concept, is captured as a process in constant change: “When an object is captured as change, a medium is needed to capture it. Change requires conditions. The moment it is captured as change and is given the name ‘change’, it becomes reality. As I just mentioned, if there is no subject to capture it, there is no reality.”⁵³ In cinema, Abe discovered a new medium through which reality could be discovered, an art form that could recreate the conditions for capturing the actuality he observed and crafted into his novels. However, in order to do so, the filmmaker must assume the dual role of recorder and interpreter of life, to both capture and construct reality. As Jurij Lotman insists, “Art does not simply render the world with a lifeless automatism of a mirror. In transforming images of the world into signs, it saturates the world with meanings.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ “Godâru no Kanôsei wa Nanika,” *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 22: 251-76.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 273.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 273.

⁵⁴ Jurij Lotman, *Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Michigan, 1976), 13.

In his famous 1936 essay “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” Walter Benjamin discusses the revolutionary possibilities of film, how its apparatus can be used to represent man’s environment in new ways in order to better understand that which normally goes unnoticed, that which escapes the everyday stream of perception:

By close-ups of the things around us, by focusing on hidden details of familiar objects, by exploring commonplace milieus under the ingenious guidance of the camera, the film, on the one hand, extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives; on the other hand, it manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action. Our taverns and our metropolitan streets, our offices and furnished rooms, our railroad stations and our factories appeared to have us locked up hopelessly. Then came the film and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second, so that now, in the midst of its far-flung ruins and debris, we calmly and adventurously go traveling. With the close-up, space expands; with slow motion, movement is extended.⁵⁵

Just as Abe would assert years later, Benjamin believed that one of the important characteristics of cinema is its “tendency to promote the mutual penetration of art and science”—recall Abe’s dialectic of reason and sensibility—and claimed that bringing together these two applications would be “one of the revolutionary functions of the film.”⁵⁶ In a similar vein, the documentarist and experimental filmmaker Matsumoto Toshio states that, “with the inner world made conscious of accidental truths, [cinema] completely breaks apart the everyday structure alienated from both reality and consciousness....”⁵⁷ Through the camera, unconscious space can be made accessible to human consciousness, as Benjamin observed: “Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye—if only because an unconsciously penetrated

⁵⁵ Walter Benjamin, “The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,” *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt and trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1968), 238.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 238.

⁵⁷ Quoted in Toba, 62.

space is substituted for a space consciously explored by man.”⁵⁸ Such a view informed Teshigahara’s own filmmaking practice, which always accommodated chance, spontaneity, and improvisation: “In the case of film, since I believe camera work must be decided on the premise that things happen by chance and that nature changes by the minute, I pick up accidents one after another.”⁵⁹

It was the camera’s capability of capturing the contingent, the accidental, that Abe and Teshigahara considered to be the strength of cinema, a mode of expression rich in resources that could be put to the service of the common artistic challenge taken on by Abe in his fiction. The actor Igawa Hisashi, who starred in *Pitfall*, describes Teshigahara’s strategy as filmmaker:

Teshi-san is not the type to take the construction of continuity or the division of shots into careful account when making a film but, rather, is a director who likes to somehow capture, within the images of each take, the various accidental moments that cannot be duplicated, a director who values those uncontrived, non-artificial moments and images.⁶⁰

What I believe Teshigahara strived for was that epiphany when chance, contingency, and arbitrariness is, to borrow Gerard Genette’s words, “suddenly ‘captured’ in the web of a structure and the cohesiveness of a meaning.”⁶¹ Teshigahara was perhaps most skilled at visual composition, of capturing a theme effectively within a single image, something Takemitsu Tôru also felt: “In Hiroshi’s films, it is not so much about following the narrative as it is about pursuing the images themselves so that, compared to other

⁵⁸ Benjamin, 238-39.

⁵⁹ Quoted in Ôkôchi Shôji and Yomota Inuhiko, *Zen’ei Chôsho: Teshigahara Hiroshi to no Taiwa* (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 1989), 92.

⁶⁰ Kigawa Hisashi, “Eiga-dsukuri no Kihon o Oshierareta Otoshiana,” *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, ed. Sôgetsu Shuppan Henshûbu (Tokyo: Sôgetsu Shuppan, 1982), 226.

⁶¹ Gerard Genette, *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980), 57.

people's films, there is a density in the texture of the images."⁶² Through their collaborations, Abe and Teshigahara orchestrated a collision of word and image with the aim of heightening their audience's awareness of reality. How this objective was carried out in each film will be the focus of the remainder of this study.

⁶² Takemitsu Tôru, "Hiroshi-san no Eiga-dsukuri wa Taikyû Reisu," *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, 231.

3. PITFALL

In *Pitfall* (*Otooshiana*, 1962), Abe and Teshigahara blend social-realist criticism with supernatural drama, resulting in a raw portrayal of class struggle and labour conditions within postwar, industrializing Japan. The plot concerns a series of murders that are somehow connected to a labour dispute at a large coalmine, a possible conspiracy to break the power of the already divided union, which has split into two feuding camps. The film follows an itinerant coal miner with his young son in tow, ceaselessly searching for steady work. Unwittingly entangled in the web of intrigue, he falls victim to the assassin in an apparent case of mistaken identity—he is a dead ringer for one of the union heads. This event precipitates an altercation, fueled by mutual suspicion and accusation, between the union leader and his rival from the other camp, which comes to a head in a lengthy fight that ends in death for both men, portending an equally grim fate for the coal miners they represent.

Yet the film deals with so much more than what is suggested on the surface of the narrative. It is an allegory for the hopelessness and powerlessness of the common people, subordinated to the interests of big business and the nation as a whole, and it does so by incorporating elements of the supernatural. The film also serves as an overture, introducing the themes, concerns, styles, characteristics, and idiosyncrasies that would become Teshigahara hallmarks, motifs that will reappear and be developed further in the three subsequent films examined in this thesis. One of these is the discovery of analogues of the film's theme within the surrounding landscape. However, it is from the perspective

of a methodological hallmark, the director's juxtaposition of the 'real' with the 'fantastic', that I begin my discussion of Abe and Teshigahara's first collaboration.

Setting the Metaphysical Against the Actual: From Purgatory to Pitfall

Pitfall was originally conceived by Abe as a made-for-television drama called *Purgatory* (*Rengoku*), broadcast by Kyushu Asahi on the 20th of October 1960 as part of their Geijutsu-sai (Art Festival) series. In an article appearing in the June 1962 issue of *Art Theatre* dedicated to *Pitfall*, critic Ogi Masahiro addresses the historical context of the film's origin. The year 1960 was a turbulent one in Japan with large-scale student-led demonstrations protesting the revision of the US-Japan Security Treaty, resulting in violent clashes with police; a rift within the leftist camp, precipitated by the events surrounding the opposition to the treaty; and the Mitsui-Miike coal mine dispute in Kyushu, a bitter confrontation between capital and labour prompted by the rationalization of an already ailing industry exacerbated by the switch from coal to oil as primary energy source. With the basic idea for the drama inspired by real events and having written the scenario amid the tense atmosphere of 1960, Abe's artistic expression was likely restricted, making it all the more necessary for him to encode his critical spirit in "the form of an abstract, stylized, symbolic satire," as Ogi speculates.¹ Reflecting on the areas where *Purgatory* fell short, Ogi suggests that the technology of television could not catch up with the stylization of Abe's scenario, that it lacked "the plasticity to develop, with a clear symbolic style, the 'satiricity' demanded by the original."²

¹ Ogi Masahiro, "Otoshiana no Pointo: Teshigahara Hiroshi Kantoku to Katatte," *Art Theatre* 1.3 (June 1962), 7.

² *Ibid.*, 6.

The drama immediately appealed to Teshigahara's creative instincts. The emergent director was convinced that applying a documentary-like realism to Abe's supernatural drama would produce a more effective result. In a conversation with Ogi, Teshigahara recalls watching the broadcast and thinking, "If this abstract fantasy drama, while leaving the dramatic axis as it is and adopting a thorough realism only as its mode of representation, were made into a film, what would it be like?"³ Later, he elaborates:

Keeping the drama's specific situation, specific mood, specific dramatic structure and, above all, its theme intact, only to try representing the human beings and landscape that make up the drama as if they exist in reality using a vivid style of filmmaking.... In other words, by representing the most fantastic drama through the most documentary-like technique, a twofold appeal may emerge—that is what interested me.⁴

As an active member of the Kiroku Geijutsu no Kai (Documentary Art Society), Abe himself was keenly interested in the application of a documentary methodology in art, especially in film, and was very enthusiastic about Teshigahara's idea when contacted by his friend. Soon after, plans and preparations were made for shooting the film on location in the coal-mining region of northern Kyushu. Teshigahara predicted, "With a deserted coal-mining town in Kyushu as a backdrop and by fitting the allegorical story into an extremely realistic reality, a peculiar space will emerge from within that conflict."⁵ This "peculiar space" was something that could not be reproduced on a studio set, as evinced by *Purgatory*'s limitations, but was something that had to be pursued by taking the camera into the world outside.

³ Quoted in *ibid.*, 7.

⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 8.

⁵ Teshigahara Hiroshi, "Gaudi kara no Shuppatsu," *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, ed. Sôgetsu Shuppan Henshûbu (Tokyo: Sôgetsu Shuppan, 1982), 172.

According to Ogi, what Teshigahara strives for in his films is the “embodiment of ideas,” believing that, “unless all ideas grow legs and start to walk, there is no meaning.”⁶ In other words, the ideas that relate to a film’s theme need to be found, need to be represented in tangible form as real things that move and change by the minute. For Teshigahara, the realization of such an artistic principle was best demonstrated by the methodology of his mentor, the documentarist Kamei Fumio, who insisted that the filmmaker seek out and capture a film’s theme within a variable reality. In reference to his own work in documentary film, Teshigahara explains, “With many ways to cut reality, it is not about filming such a thing as a universal reality but, rather, the various moving realities that, depending on the angle from which they are cut, my documentary films are made.”⁷ The idea of applying such a method to a dramatic film, while already observable in the works of Italian Neo-realism and the French New Wave, would have still been fairly innovative in Japan and anticipates developments to come in cinema.

Although confident about his choice of mode of representation, Teshigahara reveals the importance of first determining how such a mode could be used most effectively to approach and explore the theme of the work:

Of course, in taking up this drama, the idea captured by Abe, namely the protest against the black mechanisms of the world, was at the basis of my aim. However, the number one problem for me was to what extent the reality of Japan could be brought out using the realism of cinema.⁸

I believe that, for the young director, the answer lied in cinema’s distinctive capability of capturing the unpredictable flow of reality, of rediscovering the landscape normally

⁶ Ogi, 8.

⁷ Teshigahara, “Gaudi kara no Shuppatsu,” *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, 184.

⁸ Quoted in Ogi, 8.

relegated to the background of narrative action. This renewed appreciation for the landscape was something that would become a distinguishing characteristic of his films.

The Landscape Tells Part of the Story: Capturing the Flow of Reality

Teshigahara believed that the expression of a film's theme must be found in all elements of the cinematic image, even within the landscape, in order to achieve an overall connected image: "If I am converting Abe's work into images, even if capturing the landscape for instance, I look at that landscape as having the same value as human beings and turn it into an image from the aspect of it having a definite connection to some overall theme."⁹ Abe shared his friend's viewpoint, once stating that the real challenge for Teshigahara as filmmaker is "to grasp the things that flow at the back of the frame."¹⁰

In his essay "Landscape with Parallel Lines," also appearing in the June 1962 issue of *Art Theatre*, Abe insists on the importance of landscape, that the background is an integral part of representing human beings and, therefore, needs to be rediscovered using the capabilities of cinema. Since the backdrop for a film is typically treated in terms of functionality, such as creating a specific atmosphere or placing a scene, then restoring the background in order to reevaluate it within the context of the film's theme is a desired yet radical step, as Abe strongly believed: "I cannot help but feel that to strive to once again discover the meaning of the forgotten background is a far more positive attitude."¹¹ Abe goes on to suggest that cinema is a medium suited to examining human beings through the background. Compared to television, film can make it a more direct subject

⁹ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 19, 321.

¹⁰ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 20, 129.

¹¹ Abe Kôbô, "Heikôsen no aru Fûkei," *Art Theatre* 1.3 (June 1962), 13.

of inquiry, something the writer insists was a motivating factor in his decision to recast *Purgatory* as a film: “It was not simply due to the story being cinematic, but was none other than the result of my having had an interest in the pursuit of that background.”¹²

Abe describes *Pitfall*'s particular background, the scenery of northern Kyushu's coal-mining region, as follows:

What existed there was a wholly artificial landscape, built on top of a dead nature, completely covering it and, moreover, having its breath cut off once again so that, conversely, it approached nature itself, an all too harsh landscape. Unlike the ruins of antiquity and the desolation of the city, it was a peculiar world of death. I could not help feeling that this landscape, once again appealing to the author, was raising a desperate cry.¹³

Teshigahara introduces this “all too harsh landscape” in a sweeping long shot of the area surrounding an abandoned mine, the setting for the drama's main action. The rolling slagheaps call to mind the sand dunes of *Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no Onna*, 1964), Abe and Teshigahara's next collaboration. Perhaps it was such a view that inspired Abe to compare this “artificial landscape” to “nature itself”—both present man with a hostile environment to which he must learn to adapt. It was this bleakness and barrenness that he also saw reflected in the “desolation of the city,” another man-made wasteland. Yet what gave the landscape he encountered among the coal-mining towns in northern Kyushu its “peculiar” quality?

Near the beginning, an unemployed miner (Igawa Hisashi), a drifter with his young son in tow in search of stable work, ponders to himself:

Running away like this, the place we end up at, sooner or later, is another mountain. That's right. A hellish mountain worse than the previous one. Knowing full well that it's nothing more than bait on a hook—biting at a thousand yen's

¹² Ibid., 13.

¹³ Ibid., 13.

worth of support money — gradually to the bottom of a deep abyss, spiraling down...spiraling down...

The miner's inner monologue is juxtaposed with a montage of documentary images depicting the hardship of coalmine workers and their families:

[The miner] lying down with his eyes open. Overlapping his face, a tram loaded with slag comes running up, dropping its load. Slag tumbling down—. A man digging by the lamplight. The figure of a man digging silently. A tram entering the mine. Putting the dug-up lumps of earth into a bamboo basket. A child with an unusually swollen stomach caused by malnutrition. A boy idly sitting in front of the workers' housing. Inside of the dilapidated workers' housing—a man doing the washing in a kitchen. A dead body from a cave-in accident. Close-up of the dead body. People carrying the injured. A crying family. Fire on a slagheap burning faintly like will-o'-the-wisp. (17-31)¹⁴

The sudden intrusion of 'reality' into the narrative produces a distinct effect, the "peculiar space" created by the juxtaposition of documentary and fictive elements that is the film's fundamental design. As if to underscore the miner's thoughts, we are left with the final image of a smouldering slagheap at night, the "hellish mountain" that is both a source of livelihood and suffering for the workers. We begin to sense the peculiarity of this "world of death," a purgatory that lies between heaven and hell, inhabited by wandering souls, those with no choice who are forced into desolation by necessity, cut off from each other, powerless to change their circumstances.

Abe even hints that the landscape may be the true protagonist of the drama, the central axis around which the human characters revolve:

The other characters are no more than non-intersecting parallel lines that are drawn, contrary to the film's common sense, toward that landscape. Parallel lines so lonely that they carry over, without any change, into the world after death. Only the salesman-like god of death cuts across those lines, passing through them like a shadow.¹⁵

¹⁴ The parenthesized numbers refer to shot sequences marked in the scenario, as reprinted in *Art Theatre* 1.3 (June 1962): 41-61.

¹⁵ Abe, "Heikôsen no aru Fûkei," 13.

The notion of “non-intersecting parallel lines” suggests human beings alienated from each other, crossing by each other’s lives without any meaningful contact, moving in a straight line without any hope of changing the gradient or direction. Indeed, Abe’s notion of “parallel lines” implies rigid, fixed courses of identity. The ‘lines’ do not change direction because they lack the power or the impulse to react when faced with an obstacle, be it physical or spiritual. Soon after starting a new job, the miner finds himself on the move once again, drawn to another mountain with the promise of better work. As father and son walk happily along the ridge of a slagheap, their optimism is undercut by the image of an eerie mountain and “the white remains of an abandoned mine” (69). As Dore Ashton observes, Teshigahara makes good use of natural contrasts of light and shadow in the environment to create tension:

Teshigahara films the vast white light behind the naturally desolate, dark landscape of the abandoned mine area. The white light becomes ominous with the appearance of the villain, a mysterious killer always impeccably clad in a white suit and gloves, whose figure stands sharp and threatening against the black slag heaps.¹⁶

To find a visual counterpart to Abe’s idea of a mysterious killer who passes through the other lines “like a shadow,” Teshigahara inserts a shot of the giant slagheap just as “a cloud crosses over and the whole mountain is gradually covered by a dark shadow” (145). In this way, the landscape is given a personality and treated as another character, albeit one that is elusive—at times deceiving, at other times protective, only to become, in the end, a silent and indifferent observer. Different moods are evoked by capturing the landscape from different angles and through different shades and tones. Its remote expanse could also be read as a reflection of the desolation of the characters,

¹⁶ Dore Ashton, *The Delicate Thread: Teshigahara’s Life in Art* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1997), 88.

detached from society, each other, and even their own selves. At times, the human figures seem to be hidden in the landscape, to merge with the landscape, becoming a part of it, an idea encapsulated in the film's final shot where the young boy (Miyahara Kazuo) disappears into the background. Such long shots heighten the significance of the environment, the effect of which is the diminished importance of the human beings, corresponding to the diminution of their presence within the shot.

Looking back on his filmmaking strategies for *Pitfall* during an interview with the critic Yomota Inuhiko, Teshigahara reasserts his belief that the landscape has equal importance to the human actors: "To not capture the desolate coal mine as merely landscape but as something tactile, to bring such things as the muddy pool and crayfish together with human beings and express each with the same weight is what interested me most."¹⁷ Later, Yomota suggests that Teshigahara be counted among what he calls the naturalist filmmakers, such as Erich von Stroheim and Luis Buñuel:

Occasionally, I feel as if, within film history, there is definitely a school of naturalists. Not so much as a matter of description, but as a matter of how to capture, in detail, small creatures starting with insects. It also has to do with the analogies between small creatures and human beings. Cinéastes who, while responsive to such things, proceed to construct the universe always emerge here and there, regardless of the country or era.¹⁸

Teshigahara finds visual analogues of the film's theme within nature, using montage to juxtapose narrative action with natural phenomena. For example, the slaying of the miner is foreshadowed by a shot of the little boy capturing and cruelly tearing apart a frog. Later, the image of the frog, dangling and swaying at the end of a bamboo rod, is juxtaposed with the image of the miner's dead body lying by the same stagnant pond.

¹⁷ Quoted in Ôkôchi Shôji and Yomota Inuhiko, *Zen'ei Chôsho: Teshigahara Hiroshi to no Taiwa* (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 1989), 87.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 90.

Finally, Teshigahara inserts a shot of a crayfish biting on the frog and dragging it into the murky depths of the pond, just as the authorities arrive to investigate what we know is a crime just as muddy.

Teshigahara's improvisational approach is illustrated by an episode when, while studying the landscape in between takes, the director's eye was caught by a group of stray dogs in the distance. Instinctively, Teshigahara captured the scene on film without immediately knowing how it could be incorporated into the film. Only later, in the editing room, would the shots be inserted effectively, resulting in a powerful visual statement of a recurring metaphor. Abandoned and without a home, the stray dog serves as a metaphor for the unemployed coal miner driven out from society's system, a symbol of the impoverished and the uprooted. Earlier on in the film, a stray dog enters the miner's hut smelling about for scraps before fleeing into the night, prompting the miner to sigh, "For both dogs and coal miners, it's better to run away." Later, he encounters the shopkeeper of a neglected candy store at the edge of a deserted coal-mining town. Left behind to wait for a friend to send for her, the woman (Sasaki Sumie) is a foil for the runaway miner. When he asks her why she too did not leave, she laughs, "We're not stray dogs, you know...you can't just leave without a destination." Yet Teshigahara undercuts her hopefulness as well. The image of squirming ants struggling to stay afloat in a bowl of water becomes a reflection of the abandoned mine, heightening a sense of being trapped, and foreshadows not only the miner's fate but her fate as well. As the following shot description shows, she is presented as a forlorn figure, stripped of her individual dignity, reduced to picking ants from a box of candy with chopsticks: "A woman absent-mindedly moving her hands. Her lifeless expression" (87-88).

In the end, Teshigahara chose to insert the shot of the stray dogs immediately following the film's climax, in which the chief of the Second Union, Ôtsuka (Igawa Hisashi), and the vice-chief of the First Union, Tôyama (Yano Sen), fight to the death. From a long shot of the mountain dogs on the ridge of a slagheap, Teshigahara cuts to Ôtsuka's body on the muddy shore, then pans to Tôyama's body floating in the pond, concluding the sequence with the image of a headband immersed in the filthy water as the word "Solidarity" is gradually obscured. In a follow-up shot of the dogs crouching on the ridge, one suddenly rises and begins to walk away, anticipating the action of the boy. As the sole survivor at the film's conclusion, like a dog turned wild, he runs off into the distance (where another giant slagheap is visible) into an uncertain future.

Ashton points out that traces of Luis Buñuel's influence can be observed in *Pitfall*, including the adoption of a documentary style "put into the service of a subjective expression of political and social situations":

The impact of Buñuel's *Los Olvidados* can be felt in many of Teshigahara's choices of imagery on location. Buñuel had filmed Mexico's street urchins in starkly calculated black and white. He focused his camera frequently on details that expressed his views on poverty and sometimes depravity, eliminating the need for dialogue. Above all, he relied on the sweep of his camera's view to not only set the scene, both indoors and outdoors, but to describe the circumstances governing the miserable lives he reported.¹⁹

Like Buñuel whose work he admired so much, Teshigahara lets the camera linger on those "details that expressed his views," allowing the images to speak for themselves. These images, at times grotesque, succeed in capturing the poverty, sense of abandonment, and uncertainty of the lives of coal miners, allowing Teshigahara to fully and poignantly "describe the circumstances governing the miserable lives he reported."

¹⁹ Ashton, 87.

Watching Eyes, Silenced Voices: ‘Real’ and ‘Symbolic’ Meaning

In an article appearing in the *Mainichi Shinbun* daily on July 16th, 1962, *Pitfall* is praised for its honest depiction of “the impoverished, harsh reality of Japan” and the anxiety pervading Japanese society at that time: “What is portrayed is the internal strife surrounding the split within a coal miners’ union, and the invisible pressure moving behind it.”²⁰ This “invisible pressure,” the ‘black mechanism’ conspiring against the interests of the common worker is made tangible in the form of a human figure, the mysterious white-suited killer (Tanaka Kunie), perhaps a hit man hired to trigger an irrevocable break in the union. Yet it would be a mistake to limit one’s interpretation to what is represented on the surface of the narrative. Ogi Masahiro writes of the “stereo effect, pan-focus” style of filmmaking demonstrated by *Pitfall*: “Two representations, what is visible on the outside and what is visible on the inside, are developed and advanced at the same time and, while clearly distinguishing the two, are ultimately shown as one total vision.”²¹ Teshigahara takes Abe’s satire, symbolized through highly fanciful forms, and expresses it in tangible, visible form using an “on-site report style of realism.” As Ogi points out, the key to *Pitfall* is the density of its images: “At all times, a given image holds two meanings, the meaning as it is expressed on the outside and the meaning hidden below.”²²

Similarly, Dore Ashton remarks on the bringing together of contradictory elements—the film’s documentary-like realism and its theatricality:

²⁰ *Mainichi Shinbun*, “*Otoshiana Surudoï Fûshigeki*,” *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, 174.

²¹ Ogi, 9.

²² *Ibid.*, 9.

Teshigahara's seemingly documentary technique, recording the abandoned mining town, is contradicted by the orchestrated appearance of ghosts that function much as a Greek chorus or the chorus in Noh drama. The tension between the camera-eye realism and the fantasy heightens the troubling situation. In real terms the film describes a nasty labor dispute. In allegorical terms it is an exposure of human frailty and psychological desolation.²³

Although his comparison with the chorus in Noh drama may not be entirely appropriate, Ashton makes an important point in regard to the paradoxical nature of the film, which Teshigahara described as a "documentary fantasy." While a Noh chorus normally exists outside of the narrative action, performing such extra-diegetic functions as narrating the events or describing the thoughts and feelings of the characters, the ghosts in *Pitfall* are not endowed with omniscience but, on the contrary, are treated in the same way as their worldly counterparts, as further descriptions of "human frailty and psychological desolation." Nanbe Keinosuke notes that the ghosts in *Pitfall* possess a clear-cut human nature and, in that sense, are "very modern."²⁴ Eschewing more conventional cinematic representations, Teshigahara's ghosts are not mysterious, transparent figures that haunt the living. They cast shadows, they experience hunger, they feel helpless, they seek answers—"Why was I killed?" In a word, they are very 'human'. For Nanbe, the strength of the film is this mode of representing ghosts—their familiarity and, paradoxically, sense of "realness."²⁵

The rows of identical, abandoned huts lining this ghost town come to represent the lives of the dead miners. Over a shot of the empty street, Teshigahara superimposes the image of a blot spreading across a surface and, gradually, the figures of people appear. An old man leaning against a wall, coal miners walking by, children playing on

²³ Ashton, 90.

²⁴ Nanbe Keinosuke, "Yûrei: Otoshiana no Nôto," *Art Theatre* 1.3 (June 1962), 29.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

the street—ghosts of the past toiling silently, senselessly. Like the living, they are inexplicably drawn to this bleak landscape and, as Abe described, are like “parallel lines so lonely that they carry over, without any change, into the world after death.” Yet what is the function of the ghosts in *Pitfall*? After his death, the miner visits the woman in the candy shop and realizes, “The voices of ghosts cannot be heard by the living.” The ghosts are presented as ineffectual figures; they cannot communicate with the living but can only observe the action, much like the little boy (and us the audience as well). Searching for meaning is a vain pursuit. The miner despairs, “I want to know why. Why did I have to be killed? ...If I don’t know why, I can’t rest in peace.” Another ghost, the victim of a cave-in accident, attempts to discourage him from pursuing the matter any further, saying, “You’re dead, so no sense in getting involved with the living, it’ll just frustrate you. Let’s go, don’t concern yourself about others.” Thus, the theme of failed communication implied by the labour dispute, the ostensible subject of the film, is echoed in the impossibility of interaction between the dead and the living. In this way, the fragmentation of people sharing the same interests, as embodied in “real terms” by the divided union, is reconsidered here in “allegorical terms” within the supernatural context of the film.

Teshigahara captures the motif of ‘watching eyes’ succinctly in a single shot—the image of the young boy peeking into the candy shop through a knothole. The image of an eye detached from its face, the mouth remaining concealed behind a wall, encapsulates the problem of communication in the film through its associated ideas— looking without speaking, peering through walls, separation, alienation. The close-up shot of the boy’s ‘watching eye’ is inserted strategically into a scene in which a reporter is heard saying,

“There was an eyewitness. A woman in a candy shop near the scene of the crime saw everything.” However, we (and the ghost of the murdered miner) know that she was coerced (and bribed) into giving a false testimony. The ghost watches in disbelief, frustrated by his inability to inform the living of the truth. What is seen is destined to remain unheard, a point underscored by the subsequent slaying of the woman. A postman arrives with a letter, perhaps the long-awaited correspondence from her friend. Yet communication between the living and the dead is impossible as highlighted by the futility of her attempts to pick up the postcard from the floor on which it lies: “I have no idea what’s written, but I can’t make it anymore...it’s too late.” Like the unemployed miner before her, she becomes a victim of circumstance, a pawn manipulated by the hands of an unknown—and unknowable—‘black mechanism’ for reasons just as unclear. As ghosts, they can do no more than observe the action and ask searching questions, beseeching the killer for an explanation: “Who are you?” “Why did you kill me?” “Who gained from my death?” Powerless to obtain answers, solve anything, indeed change anything, they can only watch what unfolds, like the boy, like us the spectator. As in the other films of Abe and Teshigahara’s collaborative oeuvre, the ending is left ambiguous. However, as Ogi observes, *Pitfall* is constructed in a way allowing for the widest interpretability without diminishing the power and urgency of its appeal:

What is the ‘ghost’ of that miner? Is it a symbol of the ‘victimized common person’ whose voice and protest against the world’s mechanism has been muzzled? ...How about that ‘man in white’? ...Is he the capitalist’s dog? Or is he the symbolic hand of the vast organ moving the world somewhere unbeknown to the people? –They can be interpreted in any way. Furthermore, no matter how they are interpreted, in the end, this film is made so that you encounter the

author's fear and indignation at this eerie, inhospitable world, the same way you surely felt about it.²⁶

Anticipations

In addition to his treatment of the landscape, *Pitfall* displays other elements that would become hallmarks of Teshigahara's work in film, such as his fondness for extreme close-up. Nanbe Keinosuke praises the "fresh expressiveness" of Teshigahara's close shots, adding, "In particular, the foreground depictions (objects close to the camera) evoke a striking skillfulness and power."²⁷ Furthermore, Dore Ashton notes the "incidental scenes of people making things" often included in Teshigahara films, scenes that at first glance seem unimportant for narrative development but in fact express the director's philosophy, in this case his respect for the universal human impulse to create:

In the opening scene in Teshigahara's first full length film, *Pitfall*, his camera focuses on a thin, grubby child, the son of an impoverished miner, who plays concentratedly with mud, fashioning small, sculptural shapes—one of many scenes in Teshigahara's films showing human hands at work, inventing.... The solemn boy in *Pitfall*, deprived of all enriching privileges, nonetheless instinctively fashions the mud surrounding his hut into objects.²⁸

In his next film, *Woman in the Dunes*, the use of extreme close-up would be further developed and applied effectively as a tool for pursuing the dialectic of word and image, for 'rediscovering' reality by shedding light on those details normally overlooked. Likewise, those images depicting "human hands at work" would carry greater relevance to the film's theme.

Looking back on his debut effort, Teshigahara concedes that the objects were too neatly fixed within the confines of the shot: "Having tried filmmaking and noticing that,

²⁶ Ogi, 10.

²⁷ Nanbe, 30.

²⁸ Ashton, 13-14.

in cinema, the ‘objects’ unexpectedly tend to fit nicely within the frame, my next task is for a stronger *mouvement* to break out of the frame.”²⁹ Be that as it may, the cinematographic style of *Pitfall* proved appropriate for the purposes of supporting its plot and reinforcing its theme. The fixing of actors and objects within the frame reflects the fixed course traced by Abe’s ‘parallel lines’. Yet, as Teshigahara himself acknowledged, such an approach fails to draw on the particular strengths of cinema. According to Jurij Lotman, “In none of the visual arts do images which fill the inner bounds of artistic space attempt so actively to break it up, to surge beyond its boundaries.”³⁰ The idea of *mouvement* bursting out of the frame has implications that go beyond the aesthetic, encompassing the thematic. It is from this aspect that I wish to consider Teshigahara’s attempts at capturing ‘movement’ (or lack thereof) in my examination of the other films.

²⁹ Quoted in Ogi, 8.

³⁰ Jurij Lotman, *Semiotics of Cinema*, trans. Mark E. Suino (Ann Arbor: Department of Slavic Languages and Literature, University of Michigan, 1976), 83.

4. THE FACE OF ANOTHER

“The face is expression. Expression is...how should I put it? In a nutshell, it is like an equation that represents your relationship with others. A passageway connecting you to others.” (142)¹

This idea forms the basis of the plot in Abe’s *The Face of Another* (*Tanin no Kao*, 1964), a novel that explores questions of identity in terms of how it is constructed and its impact on our relationships with others. The narrative revolves around a scientist who is forced to ponder such questions after his face is disfigured in an industrial accident. Wrapped in bandages, he perceives a change in his social relations. He is ostracized in public, alienated at his workplace, and, even at home, his relationship with his wife grows farther apart. At the same time, he becomes increasingly defensive, regarding others with suspicion and resentment for the way he is treated. Whether that treatment is characterized by deliberate avoidance or excessive sympathy, it only emphasizes his position as an outsider. His sense of isolation sets him off on a quest to reintegrate himself into society through the construction of a prosthetic mask and, with the aid of the mask, to rekindle the flame in his marriage by seducing his wife.

The new face offers the protagonist a new identity and new opportunities, but it also creates new challenges. Is this new identity authentic or artificial? Is he free to shape this identity or is it being determined for him? What is the purpose of the mask? Is it to hide the self in order to establish new relations? Could the mask, as Okaniwa Noboru

¹ All translations of the text are my own. Page numbers refer to the version reprinted in *Abe Kôbô Shû* (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1970): 127-286.

suggests, itself be the true face?² In attempting to answer these questions, I will pay particular attention to the formal reworking of the source material in Teshigahara's film adaptation (*Tanin no Kao*, 1966). The novel's focus on the inner experience of the character made its adaptation to film a daunting task, as Abe himself acknowledged, stating that the challenge for Teshigahara would be to capture visually the subtle inner changes brought about by the "mask worn over everyday relations."³ Through innovative editing, Teshigahara conveys the impression of a fragmented self, while montage is used to throw the socio-political aspect of the theme into sharper relief by way of a parallel narrative concerning a girl scarred during the war. I hope to demonstrate how Abe and Teshigahara, in rethinking the original text in light of the capabilities of cinema, can use the process of film adaptation to enhance creative treatment of the theme.

Urban Alienation: 'Abstract' Human Relations

The image of a bandaged face serves as a poignant symbol of alienation. Through the construction of a mask, the individual appears to enjoy new freedom. Yet underneath this apparent freedom is an unbearable sense of loss. The protagonist suggests, "My own fate, the loss of a face requiring the aid of a mask, was not an exception but rather the common fate of modern people" (222). What Abe seems to be implying is that the mask is a modern phenomenon, a response to the need to conceal the loss of self behind an anonymous generality: "Crowds don't form because people gather. People gather because the crowd exists. ... Just for a short time, even if it's just a fantasy, they come to lose

² Okaniwa Noboru, *Hanada Kiyoteru to Abe Kôbô: Avangarudo bungaku no saisei no tame ni* (Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1980), 104.

³ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 20 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997), 129.

themselves in the crowd, trying to become a nobody” (211). What is presented is the image of an abstract mass formed of abstract individuals. This theme is first addressed in the film through a montage accompanying the opening credits. From photographic images of faces, Teshigahara pulls back, filling the screen with countless faces too small to distinguish. He concludes the sequence with newsreel footage of a crowd in a congested urban space. Keiko McDonald comments on this montage:

A shot of a face on a registration card yields to another of many such faces. These are the labeled and sorted faces of a social identity. A shot of such faces crowding a busy street suggest humanity in close contact but not in touch in any genuine sense. *Homo sapiens* has become *homo incommunicado*.⁴

The relationship between the protagonist and his wife can be viewed as a microcosm of such a society, as Timothy Iles notes: “The subtle tensions between lovers who remain strangers to one another become the metaphoric representations of social tension and isolation....”⁵ Abe makes the sense of alienation clear through the man’s difficulty in expressing himself to his own wife.

The novel is structured primarily as a confessional journal the protagonist leaves at his secret hideout for his wife to find, condemning her for rejecting his ‘true’ self in favour of his ‘mask’. In the opening line, the narrator informs us, “You [that is, both the reader and the wife] will finally arrive here after passing through the folds of a lengthy maze” (127). Ostensibly, the “lengthy maze” refers to the labyrinthine city the wife must navigate in order to arrive at the rendezvous location. However, it is also a metaphor for

⁴ Keiko McDonald, “Stylistic Experiment: Teshigahara’s *The Face of Another* (1966),” *From Book to Screen: Modern Japanese Literature in Film* (Armonk, NY: M.E. Sharpe, 2000), 276.

⁵ Timothy Iles, *Abe Kôbô: An Exploration of his Prose, Drama and Theatre* (Fucecchio, Italy: European Press Academic Publishing, 2000), 75.

the man's inability to communicate. The apartment is empty save for a letter addressed to the wife and a set of three notebooks:

You peer in seeking 'him'. But not even 'his' shadow is to be found, much less 'him'; just a dead room filled with the smell of ruin. You shudder at the walls that look back at you with forgotten expressions. Guiltily, you start to turn back but your eyes are caught by the three notebooks on the table, along with a single letter; at last you realize that you've also been caught in a trap. No matter how bitter the thoughts that come welling up, the temptation of its significance cannot, after all, be overcome. With trembling hands, you break the seal and now begin to read this letter...(127)

We realize that what is being described is not a recounting of events but speculation on the part of the writer. Thus the reliability of what is being narrated is uncertain for the simple reason that the narrator is not present. The fact that the couple is spatially apart is significant—the husband can only communicate with his wife indirectly through the medium of writing.

The wife's response to the confession is communicated in a letter that she in turn leaves for him to find. She claims to have seen through his guise, writing,

You misunderstood everything. You wrote that I rejected you but that's a lie. You rejected yourself, didn't you? I knew how you must have felt [after the accident]. I had already resigned myself to sharing in your suffering. Which is why your mask made me so happy. (276)

Thus the protagonist fails because he disowns the mask, treats it as a foreign object, denies that it is an expression of himself, of his desire to reconnect with his wife. As Okaniwa Noboru points out, "The line that cannot be crossed between the mask and the face was drawn by his own hand."⁶ Timothy Iles discusses the alienated form of interaction between husband and wife:

What this exchange demonstrates is the complete gulf of incomprehensibility which bad faith can generate between two people, the great impenetrable void of misunderstanding which can stand between two ostensible lovers, once apparently

⁶ Okaniwa, 112.

intimate but now worse than strangers to each other. ...So great is this gulf that the two even seem to exist in different times. Throughout the novel the couple almost never converse, and so it is significant that this exchange takes the shape of letters, of a mediated form of communication left, in fact, abandoned for the other to find or not, depending on the whims of chance—in this modern, urban age, these haphazard dialogic confessions of deceit and created alterity pass for the meaningful speech-acts of more hopeful times.⁷

Abe describes this condition as “the abstraction of human relations” (222). The paradox of abstract human relations is that only through the abstraction of the face can a more physical contact be made. Yet the protagonist’s success in restoring a physical connection with his wife only deepens his alienation from her. We realize that this is not due to the impossibility of reestablishing the passageway to her, but rather his failure to determine his own identity. Overcoming the abstraction of human relations must begin by first remedying the abstraction of the self. As Kawashima Hidekazu points out, “The distress of not possessing the passageway to others is not distress toward another person but rather the distress of not holding the passageway to the self—distress toward the self itself, so to speak.”⁸

In the film adaptation, an alienated existence is explored visually by representing it through visible phenomena. Teshigahara conveys the nature of the couple’s relationship within the shared space of a single frame. During the early scenes at their home, the man (Nakadai Tatsuya) sits in the foreground, facing the camera, while his wife (Kyô Machiko) moves behind him in the distant background. The physical divide caused by positioning the characters in different depth planes reflects their emotional distance. This composition recurs later during the scene at the hideout where, in a departure from the

⁷ Iles, 78-79.

⁸ Kawashima Hidekazu. “*Tanin no Kao: Henbôsuru ‘Sekai’.*” *Kokubungaku: kaishaku to kyôzai no kenkyû* 42.9 (Aug. 1997), 51.

novel, the two will eventually confront each other. The only difference in this case is a reversal of positions. The recurrence of the ‘alienating’ composition indicates that nothing fundamental has changed in their relationship, foreshadowing the break in their marriage.

The ‘Material’ Face: Urban Corporeality

The theme of the loss of personal identity is foregrounded by Marukawa Tetsushi, who writes, “in order to produce a ‘face’, it is necessary to reproduce a ‘prototype’; thus one must inevitably borrow the face of another.”⁹ In other words, the creation of a mask can only be a replica—a reproduction of *another* face. Teshigahara introduces this theme at the beginning of the film, which opens with the image of prosthetic body parts floating in a water tank. The voice of a doctor (Hira Mikijirô) explains to the spectator that these are not mere “imitations of the human body.”¹⁰ We learn that the doctor is in fact a psychiatrist who uses prosthesis not to treat physical injury or disfigurement but to fill a spiritual void within his patient. Yet his approach is limited to repackaging the surface in order to achieve an outward conformity, applying a ‘face-lift’ rather than healing the inner self. The emphasis on mechanical reproduction rather than production is noteworthy. Man is treated like a machine with replaceable parts.

In adapting the novel for cinema, Abe added a number of new characters, the most significant being the doctor who takes on the task of constructing the mask. What this does is externalize the force that drives its creation, and which effectively guides,

⁹ Marukawa Tetsushi, “Shokuminchi no Bôrei,” *Teikoku no Bôrei: Nihonbungaku no Seishinchizu* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2004), 119.

¹⁰ All translations of dialogue from the film are my own. The original screenplay is available in *Abe Kôbô Eiga Shinario Sen* (Tokyo: Sôrinsha, 1986): 137-167.

monitors, and controls its existence. Through cinematography, Teshigahara produces a vivid impression of imposed authority in the scene at the doctor's clinic when the protagonist tries on the completed mask for the first time. After administering a sedative, the doctor explains, "As you get used to the mask, you'll become another person, a completely unregistered nobody. Psychologically, an invisible man, so to speak." Defiantly, the man retorts, "I'm me!" Suddenly, the camera rotates so that the doctor literally towers over his sedate patient. The heightened sense of imposition, vulnerability, and submission established by this image anticipates the implications this power dynamic will have for the subjectivity of the protagonist.

The mask reflects a 'commodified' or 'manufactured' identity, and this is emphasized in the film. In the early stages of the mask's creation, the doctor and the protagonist visit a department store cafeteria where they make a transaction, purchasing the right to use another man's face as a cast. Throughout the scene, the protagonist remains silent, allowing the doctor to speak on his behalf. An image of the protagonist looking out the window provides a visual analogue to his passive role in the construction of his identity. It is a point of view shot from behind the man as he gazes outside at a construction site. In the distance, workers and machines can be seen putting together the skeleton of a new building, mirroring the man's own process of having an identity put together. Through the camera, outer reality is used to represent inner reality, the inverse of the novel's apparent design, which is an intensely personal and internal character study functioning as an allegorical commentary on modern society. In this way, Teshigahara applies his documentary approach, catching the spontaneous elements of reality and finding meaning in the urban landscape serving as the backdrop for the narrative action,

indeed using it to express implicitly the subjective experience of the character situated within it.

The association of the mask with commodities is reinforced when the protagonist shops for clothing and other items for his new identity. A disjointed sequence of freeze-frame images of various products is followed by the image of the man similarly 'captured' within a freeze-frame. The items he purchases are used to furnish a secret hideaway serving as a home for his alter ego. However, as a reflection of this new self, the home lacks any traces of human life. When the wife later visits the apartment, she comments, "It has neither the smell of a man or a woman." In discussing Abe's treatment of modern man in his fiction, Timothy Iles writes, "He becomes victim to a technologically advanced world of mass-produced things, of imitations and simulacra which absorb him, ultimately to displace and replace him."¹¹ The novel suggests that the mask, as an imitation or simulacrum of a face, usurps the body of the protagonist, leading to the fragmentation of the self.

A mask that has become a face is treated as a marker of identity that normalizes the individual. Abe addresses its implications: "Too much reliance on the importance of the face has narrowed human relations, forcing people into set molds. For example, the prejudices based on the colour of skin. ...Relying on the face as a passage to the soul is to treat the soul with neglect" (145). In the film, Teshigahara challenges such preconceptions through careful manipulation of the visual field. A freeze-frame of one of the female servers at a Bavarian beer hall is shown briefly and without explanation. The significance of this interruption in the narrative is not immediately clear. However, when

¹¹ Iles, 37.

the voice of a woman is heard singing a German waltz later, the singer is revealed to be the server glimpsed earlier. The vividness of the latter image produces a striking contrast with the earlier freeze-frame, demonstrating its objectifying nature. In a way, the woman's face had initially suggested a mask depicting 'Japanese-ness'. After being 'fleshed out', though, the mask is undermined and we instead discover something unique about her identity. Her face now suggests a multiethnic actuality, perhaps symbolizing the possibility of a new 'face' of Japan. Teshigahara thus rethinks notions of cultural identity.

Alternate Montage: An Alternative 'Face'

While viewing *The Face of Another*, the spectator will notice occasional interruptions by a second narrative concerning a beautiful girl with a scarred profile. In both novel and film, this 'story within a story' is revealed to be a film the hero watches one afternoon at a theatre. However, in the adaptation, the embedded narrative is enhanced, becoming a parallel thread that serves as a foil for the main thread. Teshigahara chose to make abrupt transitions between the two by way of the jump cut. Susan Hayward discusses the effect and function of jump cuts:

Between sequences, the jump cut has quite the reverse effect of the standard cut. The narrative is transposed from one time and space to another without any explanation such as a [placing] shot or voice-over. This fragmentation of time and space can either produce a disorientation effect (within the diegesis and for the spectator) or put in question the idea that all lived experience can be explained by the comforting cause-effect theory.¹²

¹² Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies: The Key Concepts*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2000), 205.

According to David Bordwell, the weakening of causal connections typically leads to the foregrounding of parallels: “The films sharpen character delineation by impelling us to compare agents, attitudes, and situations.”¹³ Thus the girl functions as a counterpoint to the protagonist.

The parallel narrative also provided the opportunity for Teshigahara to comment more overtly on the socio-political situation in Japan during the postwar period. We learn that the girl was scarred from the explosion of an atomic bomb (Hiroshima is mentioned in the novel, Nagasaki in the film). There is no place for her in the postwar world save for her volunteer work at a mental hospital for former soldiers. She, like the patients, can only exist in a suspended past. The girl’s fate calls to mind the experiences of those like Abe who grew up in Japanese colonies during the war. Their repatriation entailed a re-conceptualization of ‘home’ in a Japan they only knew vaguely. Their upbringing in places like Manchuria formed a large part of their identities, yet were also disgraceful reminders of a past that Japan hoped to dissociate from in its efforts to rebuild and, thus, were excluded from public discourse. Marukawa Tetsushi explains:

Due to the defeat in the war, the colonial Japanese, while having to abandon their hometowns and memories, were forced to reconstitute the spiritual support which is ‘home’, or else settle with the failure of that reconstitution. However, that very failure, hidden in the shadows of the postwar cries for ‘re-departure’ and ‘recovery’, would have been difficult to materialize in Japan’s public sphere. That failure, in some shape or form, is perhaps what continued to inform Abe’s activities of expression in the postwar period.¹⁴

Abe’s concern about the impact of the legacy of the war is addressed in the novel through the embedded narrative of the film:

¹³ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 207.

¹⁴ Marukawa, 101.

The camera, for the girl's sake, moved through the whole city, but all it captured was excess and waste. A sea of thick exhaust fumes, numberless construction sites, the groaning chimneys of garbage disposal plants, fire trucks running about, the frantic crowds at recreation grounds and bargain counters, the continuous ringing of police phones, the ceaseless hollering of TV commercials, ..." (283)

Abe thus presents a bleak picture of the impersonal 'mask' covering the collective scars of society, the urban sprawl built over the ruins of the war. As Marukawa points out, "there was, on the one hand, the resurrection of those who reconstructed the post-war establishment while, on the other hand, the 'scars' brought about by the former colonial system and its collapse that were left behind."¹⁵

The topic of *hibakusha* ("atomic bomb victims") was one close to Teshigahara, as he himself was emotionally affected by the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. Having witnessed the event from afar while working in nearby Yamaguchi Prefecture, "the appearance of the mushroom cloud was to remain with him."¹⁶ The attitudes of Teshigahara and his generation were shaped by the legacy of the war. In one of the scenes from the film, the director is able to impart his viewpoint obliquely by imbuing a single image with political meaning. In a carefully arranged shot, the scarred girl sits in the foreground along a beach while, in the distant background, a firing squad clad in military uniform engage in target practice. The girl lifts her head and a light breeze reveals the keloid scars that had been hidden. Just as the wind stirs her hair, we hear shots in the distance and see disturbances on the sandy ridge behind the targets, indicating that the marksmen have misfired. In this way, Teshigahara is able to address the atrocities of

¹⁵ Ibid., 120.

¹⁶ Dore Ashton, *The Delicate Thread: Teshigahara's Life in Art* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1997), 41.

war through “subtle, psychological effects rather than violent illustrations.”¹⁷ We are left with the forlorn image of the girl, a victim of collective mistakes and deserted by a society that has yet to come to terms with its past.

Teshigahara’s use of crosscutting, or what Christian Metz terms “alternate montage,”¹⁸ serves to set the two narrative threads against each other. Here, we are presented with contrasting relationships: the girl and her brother, and the man and his ‘unsuspecting’ wife. Images from the girl’s trip to the seaside with her brother are captured as reflections on the ocean surface, exuding a sense of fluidity, openness and naturalness. The man’s image, on the other hand, becomes trapped in mirrors, causing him to be fragmented from his wife and his surroundings. In his analysis of Abe’s short story *Red Cocoon* (*Akai Mayu*, 1950), William Currie, while referring to “Heidegger’s inauthentic way of being-with-others,” writes about the protagonist as follows: “The hero becomes an object among other objects, the ultimate stage in the process of alienation from one’s self and from one’s surroundings.”¹⁹ The mirror could also represent duplicity, as Keiko McDonald suggests:

[T]he mirror can only reflect the “real” mask, not the real self. ...Having fabricated an identity, he loses contact with himself. Having become entirely reflective in the mirror-image sense, he has no capacity for reflection in the moral sense. Having vanished as a person, he survives as image only.²⁰

In other words, the man has been replaced by the carefully constructed image he prepares in front of the mirror, a simulacrum resembling a human being but lacking anything

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 79.

¹⁸ Quoted in Seymour Chatman, *Coming to Terms: The Rhetoric of Narrative in Fiction and Film* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 174.

¹⁹ William Currie, “Red Cocoon,” *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Short Story*, ed. Kinya Tsuruta and Thomas E. Swann (Tokyo: Waseda University Press, 1982), 3.

²⁰ McDonald, 285.

genuinely human. When the man and the woman finally make love in the hideaway apartment, Teshigahara films the couple from behind a curtain, suggesting an alienated voyeurism. In the novel, Abe describes the presence of an alter ego watching the couple from a detached perspective: “I bound myself hand and foot with straw rope, locked myself inside a bag with only peepholes, and was forced to watch you be violated” (257). Thus the camera could represent this disembodied ‘other self’. Earlier in the film, when the man is shown sneaking in and out of his secret apartment, Teshigahara similarly uses handheld camera to follow and observe the man furtively from a distance, conveying a sense of self-estrangement.

As the action of the two narratives converge, Teshigahara makes a juxtaposition that demands a comparison of its two central characters. From a close-up of the man’s head as he reapplies his plastic face, the director cuts to a close-up of the girl’s face as she ties her hair back, revealing the keloid scars. This crosscut constitutes the “homogeneity of gesture” that Sergei Eisenstein believed could serve as an “associative link” between the different subjects in cross montage, achieving an emotional intensification or dynamization of the subject.²¹ When considering the function of these contrasting faces, we should first consider the similar fates shared by the two characters. One could even interpret Abe’s descriptions of the man’s disfigured face as a reference to the devastation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. As Marukawa observes, “The scientist’s ‘face’ displays keloid scars that call to mind the atomic bomb attack but, moreover, the dark crevices carved out on that ‘face’ tell of the subject’s fundamental absence.”²² The

²¹ Sergei Eisenstein, “A Dialectic Approach to Film Form,” *Film Form: Essays in Film Theory*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1977), 57.

²² Marukawa, 119.

fundamental absence of the scarred girl, her position as outsider being firmly established through an incestuous act with her brother, has tragic consequences as she resolves to drown herself in the ocean. The relationship between the girl and her brother could symbolize an “unfettered possibility” that is finally “repressed through the imposition of social expectations” when actions clash with taboos.²³ As we see the figure of the girl disappear under the waves, Teshigahara shifts the camera’s focus toward the horizon, concluding the sequence with an iconic shot of an enormous rising sun, once again infusing his images with a political dimension latent in the original text.

To elaborate on the meaning embodied by the face of the scarred girl, I wish to borrow a passage from John Fowles’ *The French Lieutenant’s Woman* (1969). I find the description of the title character, shunned for defying the prevailing Victorian morality of her era, relevant to a discussion of the scarred girl, who is similarly ostracized:

[I]t was an unforgettable face, and a tragic face. Its sorrow welled out of it as purely, naturally and unstopably as water out of a woodland spring. There was no artifice there, no hypocrisy, no hysteria, no mask; and above all, no sign of madness. The madness was in the empty sea, the empty horizon, the lack of reason for such sorrow; as if the spring was natural in itself, but unnatural in welling from a desert.²⁴

The girl in *The Face of Another* is the natural spring at odds with her desert-like environment. In fact, in the film, she is associated with naturalness through the motif of a light breeze.²⁵ The image of her flight down the stairs as she escapes the asylum foreshadows her flight from society. Yet her only recourse is into an “empty sea” and toward an “empty horizon,” where her figure is gradually assimilated into a postcard-like

²³ Juan Bruce-Novoa, “From Text to Film and Back: The García Ponce-Gurrola Collaboration in *Tajimara*,” *Discourse* 26.1 (2004), 163.

²⁴ Quoted in Chatman, 170.

²⁵ McDonald, 282.

representation of a rising sun, an ultimately empty icon that will endure unscathed and unquestioned. As Abe suggests in the novel, “A nation itself is one big mask, where insisting on wearing a different mask is something that’s frowned upon” (236). Thus a ‘collective face’ is implied, a ‘common sense’ that is imposed on the individual, the scarred girl being rejected by this common sense and, therefore, having her face nullified.

The Divided Self: Alienation ‘Embodied’

Christopher Bolton suggests, “The involved internal dialogues and claustrophobic psychology of *The Face of Another* do not easily make the transition to film, even with Abe supplying the script.”²⁶ However, I would argue that Teshigahara is able to effectively render the claustrophobia and inner turmoil plaguing the protagonist by dramatizing it through his interactions with the doctor, especially in the scenes they share at the beer hall. In both cases, the brightly lit room suddenly darkens and the background noise is removed, obscuring and silencing the crowd surrounding the two. The theatrical presentation of the dialogue, spotlighted against a dark backdrop, completely isolates them from their surroundings and creates an interior space. The doctor cautions the man about his growing attachment to the mask: “The morality that regulates human relations will be completely overturned. Human beings, essentially, will no longer have anything to do with registered labels, such as a name, a status, and an occupation. Everyone will be a total stranger.” The doctor appears to function as a voice of reason. Perhaps he represents an impersonal objectification of the common sense, or a ‘subjective other’

²⁶ Christopher Bolton, “Abe Kôbô 1924-1993,” *Modern Japanese Writers*, ed. Jay Rubin (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 2001), 11.

internalized by the protagonist that “ponders his actions in an impersonal way.”²⁷ In any case, their dynamic provides a vivid portrayal of the conflict when freedom of expression and movement is “challenged and restricted by the voice of social authority.”²⁸

A similar figure appears in Abe’s short story *Dendrocacalia* (*Dendorokakariya*, 1949), a mysterious superintendent of a botanical garden who attempts to persuade the hero to take up residence (that is, become captive) in his garden as one of the plants. Appropriately named Komon-kun (“Mr. Common”), the hero resolves to slay the superintendent with a knife. However, when confronting him at last, he realizes his powerlessness. As Fumiko Yamamoto writes, “Yielding apathetically to the superintendent’s suggestion that the garden is ready for his entry, Komon-kun gives up his human body and transforms himself into the plant.”²⁹ There is a strong sense that he lacks individual will, and this is reinforced at the conclusion when the superintendent affixes the label “*Dendrocacalia Crepidifolia*” to the hero’s stem, thereby classifying him, indeed determining his very identity. The ending marks a striking contrast with how Abe chose to conclude his adapted screenplay of *The Face of Another*. Unlike Mr. Common in *Dendrocacalia*, the man, also brandishing a knife, eventually succeeds in using it to free himself from the oppressive control of the doctor.

The protagonist’s fragmented self suggests a symbolic death, and he is left to roam the streets without a cohesive identity. Teshigahara effectively conveys this impression through the jump cut, this time applied to a single sequence depicting the man walking along the street. The director disrupts the flow of the continuous action through

²⁷ Bordwell, 226.

²⁸ Bruce-Novoa, 163.

²⁹ Fumiko Yamamoto, “Metamorphosis in Abe Kôbô’s Works,” *Journal of the Association of Teachers of Japanese* 15.2 (November 1980), 175.

splicing a number of unmatched shots of the approaching man in rapid succession. According to Susan Hayward, the sensation of discontinuity and jerkiness created by the jump cut, within a single sequence and applied to the same character, can “suggest madness or, at the least, a state of extreme instability.”³⁰ The protagonist now claims, “I’m nobody.” If we recall his insistence on being “me” in the earlier scene at the doctor’s clinic, we can trace an evolution from the assertion of identity to its denial. Randomly attacking a female passerby, he has become a sociopath desperately seeking human contact but who can only impose his presence on others violently. The novel describes the protagonist as assuming a hostile attitude toward his wife and indeed the rest of society, suggesting that his mask no longer represents something human: “Next time, you should be careful. Next time, what attacks you will be a wild beast-like mask” (286). In his analysis of another Abe novel, *The Beasts Go Homeward* (*Kemonotachi wa Kokyô o Mezasu*, 1957), Hisaaki Yamanouchi states, “The divided self symbolizes the loss of identity. ...[I]n a state of deprivation man embodies beast-like instincts devoid of reason and confronts his fellow men as enemies.”³¹

Abe concludes *The Face of Another* with the image of the protagonist hiding in the shadows of a dark alley, pistol in hand. He is unwilling, or at least unaware of how to create positive channels of communication with others. The very last lines imply that he has put down his pen, his ‘mediated form of communication’, and will seek a more direct, albeit antisocial form of human interaction: “Footsteps were approaching. ...But, from now on, there will likely be nothing more to write. The act of writing is probably

³⁰ Hayward, 205.

³¹ Hisaaki Yamanouchi, *The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 156.

necessary only when nothing happens” (286). In a way, the adaptation of the novel into film gave Abe the opportunity to explore this implication further. Certainly, the film’s final sequence picks up where the novel ends. Having been arrested for his assault of the woman, the man is released from police custody by the doctor. As the two leave the police station, a mob of pedestrians approaches them from the opposite direction. In the screenplay, Abe makes the following annotation: “To the man, for some reason, the crowd’s faces all appear exactly the same.”³² To render this abstract concept through concrete images, Teshigahara presents the crowd with indistinguishable, expressionless masks. Furthermore, he once again relies on a theatrical effect by spotlighting the event against the darkness of the surrounding cityscape, coding the scene as a subjective experience. However, he then cuts to an image of the doctor’s face as he stares pensively off-screen. Teshigahara thus plays on the ambiguity of perspective, suggesting that it is interchangeable between the two characters. This supports the notion that the doctor functions as the embodiment of an authoritative voice of reason that, in the novel, is an internalized aspect of the protagonist’s character.

Suddenly, the doctor demands the return of the mask. Rather than acquiescing to the doctor’s wishes, the man pulls out a knife and stabs him to death. I suggest that it be viewed as a symbolic killing signifying the protagonist’s desire to act rather than be acted upon, especially when comparing him to the heroes of Abe’s earlier fiction. In a way, the man severs his connection to the normalizing force that controlled and claimed ownership of his identity. He is now free to define his identity on his own terms, to claim the face as his own. The film’s conclusion is significant in light of a change made to the screenplay.

³² *Abe Kôbô Eiga Shinario Sen*, 166.

Originally, the man rejoins the throng, becoming literally ‘lost in the crowd’. However, Teshigahara chose a more nuanced ending. The man walks in the opposite direction and, instead of vanishing into obscurity, we are left with a freeze-frame of his face in close-up. If we recall the sequence of images at the opening of the film, the final frame could be viewed as its reversal—the singular face is removed from the abstract mass, suggesting the privileging of individuality over anonymity. Yet the image also implies immobility and uncertainty. According to David Bordwell, “The unexpected freeze frame becomes the most explicit figure of narrative irresolution.”³³ What Abe and Teshigahara achieve through the adaptation of *The Face of Another* is the vivid presentation of urban alienation and the fragmentation of the self. By realizing that the mask is the corporeality of the urban mode of existence, we the spectator can become aware of the dynamics of alienation, “the everyday image of reality that assumes its upside down appearance like a natural phenomenon,”³⁴ and understand the need to overturn such a norm.

³³ Bordwell, 209.

³⁴ Okaniwa, 115.

5. THE MAN WITHOUT A MAP

“The city—a bounded infinity. A maze in which you’re never lost. With exactly the same numbers on every block, a map for you alone. So even if you lose sight of the road, you can never lose your way.” (287)¹

Thus reads the epigraph to Abe’s *The Ruined Map* (*Moetsukita Chizu*, 1967), a novel in which the city itself is treated thematically. The protagonist is a private detective hired by a woman to search for the whereabouts of her missing husband, though he is not given very many clues or leads. As the investigation drags on, various people connected to the case appear and disappear, one after the other. Gradually, the detective begins to feel as if he is in fact chasing himself. The narrative culminates in a surreal sequence, the raw material of which was borrowed from an earlier short story titled *Beyond the Curve* (*Kâbu no Mukô*, 1966), which finds the protagonist in the absurd situation of having lost all memory of where he is and who he is. The city is presented as a labyrinthine space, both fragmented and fragmenting, while the movement of the individual trapped within it is one of drift, with no clear direction or destination. Maps are created for fear of losing one’s way, but the question is raised whether one is free to follow one’s own map, “a map for you alone.”

Teshigahara’s film version was released the following year, in 1968, under the English title *The Man Without a Map*. In the adaptation, one can observe a more conscious attempt to generate meaning through the cinematography. Camera position, angle, and distance are used effectively to capture the labyrinthine space of the city and the sense of drift and alienation plaguing its inhabitants. *The Man Without a Map* was

¹ All translations of the text are my own. Page numbers refer to the version reprinted in *Abe Kôbô Shû* (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1970): 287-466.

also Teshigahara's first feature film shot entirely in colour, and he made good use of this added dimension. Colour and its manipulation become additional sources of meaning within the cinematic image. What is hinted at in Abe's epigraph is a utopian vision of an ideal city, an ideal community with no concept of 'disappearance'. Through his film adaptation, Teshigahara hints at what form of 'movement' the formation of such a community entails—an independent, self-determined one.

A Fragmented Society, the Fragmented Individual

During a roundtable discussion with Teshigahara and the critic Sasaki Kiichi at the time of *The Ruined Map*'s publication, Abe discusses his view on the changing nature of human relations, comparing agrarian societies to modern, industrialized ones:

Human relations in agricultural societies are, if anything, fatalistic interconnections. In industrial societies, they become more variable and ambiguous. Were you to suppose, then, that the interconnections are weaker than in agricultural societies, it is only that they have become more complex; in fact, they are rather strong.²

According to Abe, the 'taxi driver' epitomizes the urban mode of human relations:

“While in contact with countless people, he is always alone. All year round, constantly running around, but never toward his own destination. That is the quintessential existence of the modern city dweller.”³ Significantly, the missing man in *The Ruined Map* is linked to an underground taxi operation, perhaps having become one of these 'runaway' drivers.

Timothy Iles identifies the central issue of the novel: “It is within the city that identity is

² *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21 (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1997), 315.

³ *Ibid.*, 318.

lost; this loss, in the form of a physical disappearance, provides the premise of the plot.”⁴

Modern society is presented as oppressively regulated and regimented, the individual an alienated cog lacking self-determination. The housing complex (*danchi*) becomes a poignant symbol of compartmentalized urban life, “a filing cabinet of identical lives” (289). Abe sets the novel’s tone through his bleak descriptions of a dehumanized, automated society. The following passage on ‘morning rush hour’ provides an example:

On the signal of the first beat of the city’s heart, the locks on hundreds of filing cabinets are opened simultaneously, within a space of at most five minutes; a herd of commuters, not exactly alike but nevertheless indistinguishable, like a wall of water cascading out of the floodgates of a dam, suddenly spread out across the breadth of the road, that hour of life. (296)

Like the ‘antiheroes’ of film noir, whose adventures are the vehicle for an exploration into the dark underbelly of city life, the protagonist of *The Ruined Map* is the archetypal hard-boiled private detective, alone with no attachments. Discussing such a character-type in relation to cinema, David Bordwell writes, “the drifting protagonist traces out an itinerary which surveys the film’s social world.”⁵ While, on the surface, *The Ruined Map* appears to be tracing out its social world—the world of modern, urban Japan—in fact, it is really tracing out the inner world of its protagonist, a world both complex and absurd. To try and make sense of it is a futile endeavor, as demonstrated by the frustration of the detective’s efforts to unravel the mystery behind the missing man’s disappearance. Clues are scarce, and any inroads into the case he seems to make only lead to dead ends. This absurd process is repeated during the final act, in microcosm,

⁴ Timothy Iles, *Abe Kôbô: An Exploration of His Prose, Drama and Theatre* (Fucecchio, Italy: European Press Academic Publishing, 2000), 79.

⁵ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 207.

through the protagonist's failed attempts to piece together his own identity. Thus physical disappearance is treated as a metaphor for spiritual disappearance.

Sasaki praises the novel's literary style for its expression of the modern, urban experience, a mode of existence where the puzzle pieces often do not connect to complete a clear picture. Discussing the conventional approaches used in the crime fiction genre, Sasaki states, "The aspects all connect rationally. There is continuity. This novel severs that continuity. There are various leaps, and the aspects unfold haphazardly. ...Perhaps capturing modern reality is impossible without adopting such a method of disconnections and leaps."⁶ Likewise, Teshigahara reveals his impressions of the novel: "The sequences are all very disconnected and abstract. The assembly of such detailed depictions of things forms the human being's inner landscape."⁷ In other words, man's inner reality is treated as a reflection of his outer reality. Abe later adds, "The very fact that an inner landscape is possible may after all be a characteristic of the city."⁸ In *The Ruined Map*, Abe reduces the outside world to the interior of the self, sketching the portrait of an "internal urban landscape," as Sasaki put it. The task for Teshigahara was to find cinematic means of representing this process of putting together an individual through the details of his environment.

For Dore Ashton, the strength of *The Man Without a Map* is its depiction of the city and urban life, how the individual becomes lost within its clutter:

Teshigahara's frequent moving shots of the city, his deft use of mirrors—car mirrors, side mirrors, reflections of the detective's face on a shiny plastic

⁶ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 315.

⁷ *Ibid.*, 315.

⁸ *Ibid.*, 320.

table—and his views of Tokyo’s streets with the stampede of feet and clutter of traffic were frequently of exceptional quality.⁹

As Ashton points out, the “self-estrangement of mirror views” was a favourite motif of Abe’s.¹⁰ Teshigahara’s use of reflections in the film is disorienting and serves to frustrate the spectator’s attempts to engage with the action and to navigate its environment. In this sense, the spectator’s experience reflects the protagonist’s own self-examination—the difficulty of charting his inner terrain, the ease in which all sense of direction is lost. Images of people passing through mirrors could also symbolize the fragmentation of human beings, trapped within the very structures of their making. Thus, throughout the film, the human image is presented as something unclear, unstable, and ephemeral.

In many of his works, Abe depicts the city as a wilderness, “a vast, dark, sprawling city the borders of which shift by the hour stranding their inhabitants in deserts of concrete bereft of signposts or allies.”¹¹ In *The Ruined Map*, this fast-growing urban sprawl is linked to the loss of the individual. Timothy Iles writes, “It is significant that the missing husband was a fuel-supplier for the newly-formed suburbs of this expanding metropolis: as the city grows larger and larger, the individual disappears into its progress.”¹² These small-scale propane providers live and die by contracts that are “ephemeral things.”¹³ Once the new wards become sufficiently developed, they are incorporated into the city and the responsibility for providing gas is taken over by public utilities: “By the city’s growth, they thrive, and by the city’s growth, they perish—what

⁹ Dore Ashton, *The Delicate Thread: Teshigahara’s Life in Art* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1997), 101.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 85-86.

¹¹ Iles, 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, 81.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 79.

an ironic business! They are sentenced to death the same day they reach their prime, a fate that will move anyone with sympathy” (334). In other words, the prosperity of the city comes, paradoxically, at the expense of the individual’s well-being.

In his discussion of *The Ruined Map*, focusing specifically on those aspects that comment on Japan’s rapid urban development at that time, Marukawa Tetsuya makes an interesting comparison, likening urban expansion to ‘colonization’:

Throughout the 1960s, the suburban development within the [Japanese] archipelago caused the propagation of inorganic ‘bedroom suburbs’ that resembled ‘colonies’. In the birth, amid the rapid growth during the ‘60s, of these ‘suburbs’ completely out of touch with the context of the land, Abe seemed to sense an ominous impression of the ‘past’.¹⁴

In his 1968 essay “The Frontier Within” (“Uchi naru Henkyô”), Abe treats the city as a borderland, a living space for ‘non-citizens’ who have renounced citizenship to their country of origin. Referring to this essay, Marukawa argues:

This concept of Abe’s, unexpectedly, can be read as a theorization of the fact that ‘The Nation of Manchuria’ was, in principle, a false state out of touch with the land and, moreover, that the ‘bedroom suburbs’ of the 1960s were constructions in complete disregard of the context of the land.¹⁵

Marukawa discusses urban and suburban zoning space as the reappearance of the colonial structure in a new form, and suggests that this notion informed Abe’s portrait of the city in *The Ruined Map*: “The landscape of suburbia constructed by Abe is *an extension of ‘colonization’*, and must be understood as one mode of the postcolonial / postmodern city (suburban) structure.”¹⁶

Not only is the diminished presence (and subordination of) the individual associated with urbanization in Abe’s world but, as Timothy Iles observes, “violence and

¹⁴ Marukawa Tetsushi, “Shokuminchi no Bôrei,” *Teikoku no Bôrei: Nihonbungaku no Seishinchizu* (Tokyo: Seidosha, 2004), 108-09.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 109.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 110-11.

expansion of the city” are also closely connected.¹⁷ The intermingling of these two thematic elements is best captured in a scene at the construction site for a new subdivision, where a riot erupts among the workers and leads to the gang rape of three prostitutes. For Abe, such morally bankrupt behaviour is a symptom of urban alienation. The detective himself displays such tendencies. When staking out his client’s apartment one night, he encounters a woman walking alone on the poorly lit sidewalk and is overcome by a depraved fantasy in which he knocks her to the grass, she being acquiescent to his every whim. Underneath the dead leaves with which he covers her body, she is naked. However, when a strong wind blows away the leaves, instead of the naked body he expects, what appears before his eyes is “nothing more than a black hollow” (303). What this episode implies is the absence of the individual, the impossibility of making ‘real’ contact with another human being. As Iles points out:

It is the apparent fear which the woman offers to the unknown detective, her resistance to him as a stranger, which triggers this violent, sexual fantasy in him as a means of breaking down the barriers her trepidation raises between them ... violence is left as the only means through which to open a channel of communication between isolated city dwellers who have no other course towards intimacy.¹⁸

In the city, people simply fade into the woodwork, disappear into their separate homes within the same nondescript housing complexes, lock themselves inside their ‘filing cabinets’, hide behind their walls: “A crowd of people hurrying home, becoming invisible with every step” (464).

Throughout the novel, the protagonist exhibits inertia, displaying very little (outward) reaction to his various encounters, both sexual and violent. When his persistent

¹⁷ Iles, 82.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 82.

inquiries into the underground taxi operation provoke the ire of the coffee shop denizens who then brutally attack the detective, his pain does not transform into anger, nor does it push him to retaliate. Instead of being driven to action, he is held back by his “apathy, resignation, and carefree attitude.”¹⁹ The narrative is set against a background infused with the mood of floating, modern urbanism: the frivolous consumption of commodities, an interior “washed away” of excess emotions and desires, the pleasure of privacy, the repetition of a mundane everydayness.²⁰ It is what Kawamoto Saburô describes as “the process whereby the ‘individual’, having lost his continuity with ‘society’ or a ‘community’, has been laid bare as a single faded self.”²¹ Although modern society has allowed an unparalleled degree of freedom, there is also “an unbearable sense of loss” lurking beneath the hobbies and amusement the individual is free to enjoy. Rather than confront this sense of loss, the individual allows himself to be distracted by trivialities and frivolous pleasures, preferring to delight in objects and pastimes. Indignation at the world, at society, is replaced by an attachment to, indeed a fascination with, objects—the artificial, inessential goods consumed on a daily basis, the everyday trifles and diversions. In *The Ruined Map*, this aspect of modern life is represented through the missing man’s eclectic interests, his “mania for licenses” (364). For him, “licenses are life’s anchors” (366). They are countermeasures against a reality in a constant state of flux. Furthermore, the man’s ‘schizophrenia’, his branching out into miscellaneous fields

¹⁹ Kawamoto Saburô, “Murakami Haruki no Parareru Wârudo,” *Murakami Haruki Sutadîzu*, ed. Kuritsubo Yoshiki and Tsuge Teruhiko, vol. 2 (Tokyo: Wakakusa Shobô, 1999), 39.

²⁰ Kasai Kiyoshi, “Toshi-kankaku to iu Inpei,” *Murakami Haruki Sutadîzu*, vol. 1, 208.

²¹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 208.

of specialization, though never long enough to ever achieve a high level of expertise, is also another sign of a fragmented self.

The function of these leisure activities that conceal the loss of self (or that allow the individual to avoid confronting this loss) is mirrored by the modern city, which Abe described as “a graveyard carnival, cosmetics for covering ruins,”²² a likely allusion to the ruins of the past, that is Japan’s wartime past. In this way, Abe ties together inner and outer reality, micro- and macrocosm, the individual’s loss of identity and Japan’s collective identity crisis, allowing the two to comment on each other allegorically. Kasai Kiyoshi argues that, on the social-collective scale, a void is inevitably filled by ideology, a ‘common sense’. The ‘urban sensibility’, Kasai suggests, is “none other than the ‘common sense’ of advanced civil society.”²³ Teshigahara represents the void underlying the frenzied activity of the city through a hauntingly surrealistic sequence. Cacophonous images of congested streets and crowded corridors, interspersed throughout the film, are contrasted at the film’s climax by images of a deserted city, the eerie silence and emptiness of a barren wasteland. According to Kasai, the loss of reality, the loss of the world becomes an urgent call, an impetus for movement toward “the conceptual recovery of self.”²⁴

Space as a Labyrinth: Movement as Existential Drift

In tracing the protagonist’s ‘inner urban landscape’, what emerges is the portrait of an emotionally stunted individual cast adrift in the big city. Mieke Bal specifically addresses

²² Appendix to *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 13.

²³ Kasai, 231.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 222.

how such an inner self can be represented spatially in her discussion of the use of space in narratives, and the movement of the protagonist in relation to that space:

If such an experiential aim is lacking, even implicitly, the movement, totally aimless, can function simply as a presentation of space. The move can be a circular one; the character returns to its point of departure. In this way, space is presented as a labyrinth, as unsafety, as confinement.²⁵

In *The Ruined Map*, this labyrinth is one that is absurd and resembles a bad dream. The dreamlike quality of the narrative is effective in capturing the urban mood, “the terror suggested by a vague ‘everyday’.”²⁶ As if to mirror this labyrinthine space, and the circular movement of the drifting protagonist trapped within it, the narrative structure itself is cyclical: the ending returns to its point of departure. At the novel’s opening, the protagonist rounds a curve in the road leading to the housing complex in which his latest client, the missing man’s wife, resides. The last act begins with him standing before the very same curve, hesitating, unsure of what lies beyond the curve as a result of his sudden amnesia. In the film version, parallel scenes at a coffee shop provide an equivalent function. Timothy Iles observes, “This return to the beginning serves both to set the story out anew and to cast hallucinatory suspicions over all that has gone before, and all that is about to follow.”²⁷ Perhaps everything that preceded this point was a figment of the protagonist’s imagination, an elaborate story he concocted to help explain (albeit fancifully) his loss of identity; or perhaps it is a dream, an outlet for the anxieties tormenting his unconscious, a cocktail of repressed elements re-embroidered into a nightmare, turning his ‘figurative’ loss of identity into a ‘literal’ one.

²⁵ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 137.

²⁶ Suda Tadahiro, “Abe Kôbô,” *Da Vinci* 30 (Oct. 1996), 181.

²⁷ Iles, 80.

The loss of memory is linked to the loss of identity. Abe himself suggests that the amnesic protagonist represents the ‘average existence’: “I think it is an everyday thing, the universal inner structure of those who believe they are the most normal.”²⁸ If we examine more closely the events leading up to this memory loss, we can trace the detective’s growing awareness of this actuality, the omnipresence of the ‘missing man’:

Gaping black holes, overlapping one another, in some corner of the cityscape. The shadow of ‘he’ who does not exist ...If you think about it that way, it’s a dreadful city full of holes. Indeed, if those are ‘his’ shadows, then ‘he’ is not alone; there exist countless ‘hims’. (390)

In other words, the city is filled with people who, like ‘him’, are (spiritually) lost. As Abe indicated in the notes he kept while writing *The Ruined Map*, “Everybody is lost internally. Everybody is a spiritual missing person.”²⁹

The images of the missing person and the detective hired to track him down begin to overlap. The investigator becomes the subject of his own investigation: “The darkness that I’m searching through is, after all, nothing more than my own inner recesses. My own map, projected on to my mind” (435). He finds himself standing outside the window of his client: “Intending to follow ‘his’ map, it was my own map that I followed; intending to pursue ‘his’ tracks, it was my own tracks that I pursued” (436). The client’s home, from which the missing man disappeared, suddenly and inexplicably becomes the detective’s own home to which he feels he must return. A scene in which he makes love to the missing man’s wife precipitates the ‘restarting’ of the narrative. However, the ‘reality’ of the scene is immediately brought into question. At one point, the woman’s figure appears to vanish: “I look for her but she is nowhere to be found. Then where am I

²⁸ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 320.

²⁹ Appendix to *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 18.

who is being watched by she who isn't there" (449)? Teshigahara reveals his own reading of the novel's conclusion: "At the end, everything completely changes. As if positive turned to negative."³⁰ This may have been one reason why the director chose to mark this turning point in the film through a sudden colour inversion. Teshigahara represents the lovemaking scene through a montage of abstracted images of undulating, entwining bodies, rendered in extreme close-up and with distorted colours, a visual effect produced by solarization. Such stylized cinematography may, as David Bordwell suggests, "code the scene as both 'reality' and 'fantasy'."³¹ Thus colour distortions function as a cue, perhaps the disorienting transition from a dreaming to a waking state, or vice versa.

An Alienated Self: The Disembodiment of the Camera

In the film, the sense of detachment from one's inner self, from one's own absurd labyrinth, is represented by a voyeuristic camera that follows the protagonist from a distance, observing him furtively from behind objects and walls, through windows and mirrors. While the novel establishes an intimate relationship between reader and protagonist-narrator, a tone appropriate for the introspective nature of the narrative, the film employs a narrational strategy that underscores the impersonal nature of that introspection. There is no voiceover giving the spectator access to the protagonist's thoughts; the emphasis is strictly on exteriority. The camera's detached perspective becomes an obstacle hindering the spectator's ability to participate emotionally in the narrative, and serves to "allegorize the position of the alienated modern self."³² As David

³⁰ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 315.

³¹ Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film*, 225.

³² Iles, 35.

Bordwell points out, “the refusal of [a] camera to enter the action could bespeak an alienated voyeurism.”³³

Mieke Bal examines the implications of voyeurism for the individual’s sense of self: “The voyeur is constantly in danger, since alienation robs him of his self when he is not interacting with the other.”³⁴ Referring to Kaja Silverman’s notion of ‘heteropathic identification’, Bal talks about “identification based on going outside of the self, as opposed to idiopathic or ‘cannibalistic’ identification, which absorbs and ‘naturalizes’ the other”³⁵:

The contemplation of the spectacle afforded by the other is a photographic act. For a brief instant, the looking I/eye wavers between the disembodied retinal gaze of linear perspective and the colonizing mastery it affords, and the heteropathic identification that takes him out of himself with body and soul to ‘become’ other.³⁶

Bal’s use of the term “photographic” is clearly germane to a discussion of cinema, especially *The Man Without a Map* since photography is used metaphorically to not only describe the nature of human relations, but the very nature of the self in modern society. In both novel and film, the missing man’s existence is represented in the form of a photograph. The detective’s idiosyncratic method for ‘entering’ the mind of the subject of his investigation involves a ‘communion’ with a photographic image, getting ‘acquainted’ with his subject by viewing a photograph through a pair of binoculars until “the intertwining of each other’s nerve endings” allows the detective to catch “a moment of ‘his’, a lonely expression never shown to anybody” (373-374). If the investigation is

³³ David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 58.

³⁴ Bal, 169.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 168.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 169.

indeed an allegory for the protagonist's self-examination, then this act becomes emblematic of self-detachment and self-estrangement. As Bal states, "The 'truth' of photography is this stranger, this unknowable person, cut off from the familial, affective gaze by photography."³⁷

Discussing his approach to writing *The Ruined Map*, Abe makes an interesting comment, suggesting that he used a "cinematic technique."³⁸ In response, Sasaki Kiichi qualifies Abe's statement, arguing that, "the final, closing fantasy scene would be hard to bring out through cinema. It may, after all, be something that can only take shape in a novel."³⁹ Claiming that the camera cannot reveal the inner "contents" of a character, Sasaki's insistence on the impossibility of adapting the scene for cinema is challenged by Abe, who argues, "In truth, the camera must try to discover such things."⁴⁰ Notwithstanding the resistance to cinematic transfer of such a scene, Abe nevertheless maintains that it is a challenge incumbent on the filmmaker to face and overcome. So how did Teshigahara fare? Unfortunately, not as well as he may have hoped.

In the novel, the amnesic protagonist sits in the coffee shop, trying to piece together his life, his very identity, through the contents of his pockets, objects now strewn on the table. What this scene brings into question is the logic of regarding objects for what they signify—for example a memory or a clue to one's identity—instead of examining *why* these memories and identities are signified by *objects*. The implication is that living through objects is a characteristic of modern, urban society—indeed, our lives may very well be defined by them. This scene is considerably downplayed in the film,

³⁷ Ibid., 169.

³⁸ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 315.

³⁹ Ibid., 315-16.

⁴⁰ Ibid., 316.

although perhaps unintentionally. The style of the film, willfully sustained by Teshigahara, seems to get the better of it. The impenetrability of the protagonist's psyche prevents the spectator unfamiliar with the novel from fully comprehending and appreciating this pivotal moment in the narrative. Although the film is by no means obligated to its source material, the inclusion of this scene in the script suggests that Abe recognized its importance, making the failure of its execution all the more costly. What we are left with is a puzzling scene that falls short of its potential as a function of the film's thematic fabric. Reflecting on the film years later, Teshigahara appears to admit responsibility for such shortcomings:

When I look back on *The Man Without a Map*, I was quite restricted by the scenario. Although there was a heightening need for a cinematically free representation, I got too caught up in Abe's words, which only narrowed my field of vision, and I now regret this.⁴¹

Escape and Disappearance: Toward a Freer, 'Incandescent' Movement

For Abe, the ideal community is one that can accommodate a reality in which disappearances occur everyday in various forms, a community with no concept of 'disappearance': "Disappearance is, at any rate, disappearance from some community. When a community is made that is so free that disappearance is impossible, or rather disappearance has no meaning, then this, for the first time, will be the next phase of community."⁴² Sasaki Kiichi addresses the related issue of individuals who, conversely, seek deliverance by *belonging* to a community. He states, "It is those who always feel a

⁴¹ Abe Kôbô and Teshigahara Hiroshi, "Jiyû o Masaguru Eiga: *Samâ Sorujâ* o Megutte," *Kikan Firumu* 11 (April 1972), 34.

⁴² *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 319.

sense of alienation while being a part of the community to which they belong that disappear. ...They yearn for a closer-knit community.”⁴³ Abe adds:

It is a case of belonging to the most clear-cut community and, by virtue of belonging, to actually be escaping. ...Going home and escaping have, after all, merely been turned inside out within the consciousness, and have become the same thing. I believe there is a different kind of escape, a more conscious escape.⁴⁴

According to Sasaki and Abe, joining a close-knit community is a form of escape, one that paradoxically promotes alienation by reinforcing the distinctions that set people against one another. Such a mode is embodied by the wife’s younger brother, a member of an organization resembling the yakuza, a world that “demands blind obedience to its discipline and rules in exchange for sanctuary.”⁴⁵ The brother represents structure and safety measures, “a map necessary for life” (301). As Tsuruta Kinya points out, such structures, rules, and maps reflect “a fear of things that flow, fear of the flowing nature of life.”⁴⁶ In this way, the brother is like a wall that “separates things, restricts freedom, and stops the flow of movement.”⁴⁷

This may be one reason why the detective regards the brother with caution. In fact, throughout the novel, he is distrustful of the brother, his sister, and the various other people involved in the case that he encounters during the course of his investigation. Barry Lewis discusses ‘paranoia’ as a recurring trait found in the heroes of postmodernist fiction, a characteristic that captures the distinctive sensibility, mood, and attitude that is a consequence of and reaction to advanced urban society:

⁴³ Ibid., 319.

⁴⁴ Ibid., 319.

⁴⁵ Tsuruta Kinya, *Akutagawa, Kawabata, Mishima, Abe: Gendai Nihon Bungaku Sakuhin Ron* (Tokyo: Ôfûsha, 1973), 191.

⁴⁶ Ibid., 196.

⁴⁷ Ibid., 192.

To compensate for the hopelessness of their predicaments, these paranoids long for a state of complete fluidity and openness. However, their impulse towards freedom is tainted both by their terror of the actual open road and their cynicism about possible escape.⁴⁸

The desire to “keep on driving” is countered by the fear of an “endless” road (398). Thus we become aware of the detective’s conflicted desires, “his wishing to enter a state of fluidity and his hoping to reach an end point.”⁴⁹ The detective’s terror of the open road is reflected in the character of Tashiro, the missing man’s subordinate at the fuel company. Abe even hinted that Tashiro, in a way, is the protagonist’s “other self.”⁵⁰ He is portrayed as the model employee, though he harbours “a pent-up hostility toward society and bitter feelings of alienation.”⁵¹ Like the detective, he admires the missing man’s courage to disappear yet lacks the fortitude to carry out his own escape. Teshigahara captures Tashiro’s inner weakness and ineffectuality through cinematic means in a momentary shot of his face reflected in a martini glass, creating the striking image of a face that is distorted and lacking consistency.

In his analysis of *The Ruined Map*, Tsuruta Kinya makes an interesting observation, likening the client’s “lemon-coloured apartment” to a “womb” by focusing on the warmth it implies as a counterpoint to the cold that distinguishes the environment outside.⁵² Yet Tsuruta also stresses the ambiguity of what the apartment signifies, suggesting it could be both a nurturing womb or a terminus, while the wife could symbolize both “a lemon-coloured warmth that thaws the coldness and rigidity of the

⁴⁸ Barry Lewis, “Postmodernism and Literature,” *The Icon Critical Dictionary of Postmodern Thought*, ed. Stuart Sim (Cambridge: Icon Books, 1998), 130.

⁴⁹ Tsuruta, 215.

⁵⁰ *Abe Kôbô Zenshû*, vol. 21, 317.

⁵¹ Tsuruta, 193.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 206.

social reality” or an immobilizing needle that pins you down.⁵³ If the urban reality is cold and rigid, then the ‘black holes’ that permeate the city suggest individuals in alienation from one another. Gradually, the detective himself is engulfed by such a hole. In the last scene of the novel, the amnesic protagonist, wandering through an unfamiliar city, enters a phone booth and calls a number scribbled on a scrap of paper he finds in his pocket. The voice of a woman answers, somebody apparently close to him but whose exact relationship to him remains unknown. Heeding his appeal for help, she agrees to meet him at the phone booth. While waiting for her arrival, the man slips into the shadows of the city, which shrouds his figure in darkness. According to Tsuruta, the protagonist’s inclination to “return to the womb” is counteracted by the dark hollow, preventing him from uniting with the woman at the novel’s close.⁵⁴ However, if home represents a ‘filing cabinet’ life, then disappearance could also be the “conscious escape” Abe advocates. Perhaps what the protagonist yearns for is a place that lies between the separateness of modern society and the togetherness of an enclosed domesticity.

At first, the protagonist is a would-be nomad secretly longing for the life of “a wandering individual shunning settlement for the transient’s freedom.”⁵⁵ Unable to reconcile such aspirations with his surroundings, he is trapped within a spiritual labyrinth as tortuous and disorienting as the labyrinthine city he inhabits. However, as the novel returns to its point of departure, there is a discernible shift in his disposition. The mode of existence he now appears to embrace is what Timothy Iles refers to as “nomadism within an urban setting,” a choice requiring an abandonment of one’s present social position “in

⁵³ Ibid., 209.

⁵⁴ Ibid., 218.

⁵⁵ Iles, 13.

order to create—or at least seek out—a new position within a new society.”⁵⁶

Symbolically, the coffee shop functions as both a dead end and a new point of departure. The detective’s investigation effectively ends at the coffee shop where he runs afoul of the underground taxi drivers, malcontents who wish to lift their personal ‘anchors’ in order to float away. Yet the detective’s violent encounter at the coffee shop also sets in motion the turn of events that will inaugurate his new relationship with his surroundings.

Tsuruta comments on the protagonist’s change of character through a comparison of the narrative’s two ‘beginnings’, noting the similarities of the scene (the man ascending a slope) and its differences (namely his mode of travel). While the novel opens with the detective driving his car up a slope, heading toward the home of his latest client, its finale begins with the protagonist in a very similar situation, except for two key differences: first, he does not know why he is on the slope as a result of his memory loss and, secondly, he is on foot. In particular, Tsuruta draws attention to the protagonist’s alternate encounters with a boy on roller-skates who suddenly emerges from around the curve, gliding down the slope from the opposite direction. While, in the initial encounter, the swerving of the man’s car causes the boy to fall sideways against the guardrail, in the subsequent encounter, the man yields the way: “He is walking and, as if to imply a fluid state at the end of the work, the boy on roller-skates glides right by him.”⁵⁷ Tsuruta suggests that this scene reflects the man’s new way of relating to his surroundings, linking the state of fluidity it implies to the birth of a new self:

The amnesic protagonist, completely freed from the anchors of the memories of his past, is in a state of flow. ...Not only have the things of the outside world that

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁷ Tsuruta, 223-24.

supported his identity become obscure, but his very identity has become blurred as well.⁵⁸

Thus, the loss of memory can also be viewed as the opportunity for a fresh start, for a transformation into something new. The man is now free to draw his own map, choose his own world, create his own identity. He reflects to himself, “What I now need is a world of my choosing. My own world, chosen of my own will” (466). He steps out of the shadow and walks not toward the woman, but in the opposite direction.

Teshigahara subtly hints at this ‘crossroads’ by capturing, in the background of the scene, a street sign with a double arrow pointing in opposite directions. Man (Katsu Shintarô) and woman (Ichihara Etsuko) find themselves on opposite sides of the road, separated by a ceaseless stream of traffic. A sign reads ‘No Crossing’. As the man walks away, he spots the remains of a cat flattened on the pavement, ignored by motorists in a hurry to reach their respective destinations. He muses to himself, as if referring to himself, “What’s your name? I guess it’s impossible to know anymore. Well, in the meantime, I’ll think of something. A good name, one that won’t be forgotten again.” Still, the sense of understated optimism at the novel’s conclusion is not as strongly felt in the film, due in large part to the inaccessibility of the protagonist’s thoughts.

However, in a single fleeting image earlier in the film, a fugitive moment seemingly unimportant to the development of the plot yet conspicuous in its inclusion, Teshigahara may have revealed the attitude informing the protagonist’s last act, the significance of his movement toward the edge of the film’s final frame. The shot is of the detective driving in his car while being overtaken by another man dressed in red, riding a red bicycle. The image is a striking statement by the director, the favouring of a

⁵⁸ Ibid., 224.

physically propelled movement over a mechanized, automotive one. The image is even more revealing when comparing it to a passage in Abe's novel that may have provided Teshigahara with its inspiration. The detective is aimlessly driving on an open highway, enjoying "a pure time, time spent without a purpose" (389). That is until he reaches a tollgate and is forced to return to the city, as if awaking from a dream, and must endure the sinking feeling of "knowing that you are turning back, the emptiness of having no choice but to turn back" (389). This sinking feeling is initially ascribed to the emasculation of "being overtaken by a red sports car" (389). Indeed, this episode reflects the man's weakness of character, his lack of control over his life, his disempowerment. Teshigahara's choice to substitute the sports car with a cyclist certainly enhances the thematic significance of the scene.

Another point of interest is the director's prominent use of the colour red as a vivid contrast to the predominantly sombre, subdued palette of the concrete jungle. Gilles Deleuze, alluding to Goethe's *Theory of Colours*, discusses colour gradations in cinema as movements of intensification:

Goethe clearly shows that the intensification of the two aspects (yellow and blue)⁵⁹ did not stop at the reddish reflection which accompanies them as the growing effects of brilliance, but culminated in a vivid red, as third colour which has become independent, pure incandescence....⁶⁰

Thus the image becomes an appeal for a freer, more independent movement, one that is more closely linked to the dynamics of the human body (and spirit). At the end, the man no longer moves within the framework of a machine. He now walks freely on his own

⁵⁹ According to Goethe's *Theory of Colours*, yellow is a light dampened by darkness while blue is a darkness weakened by light.

⁶⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986), 53.

power. Having discarded his car, the symbol of a dehumanized, automated existence, he appears to begin to regain his humanity.

6. WOMAN IN THE DUNES

“Don’t oppose the sand; follow the sand and make use of it ... all it takes is a change in your way of thinking.” (80)¹

With these words, the protagonist of Abe’s *Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no Onna*, 1962) urges the villagers he encounters in the desert to give up their vain efforts to protect their homes from the encroaching sand, adding, “There’s no need to go to such lengths to stick to the old lifestyle” (80). Near the beginning, after arriving at the desert, he ponders a number of interesting philosophical questions about sand:

Certainly, sand is not suitable for living. However, is being fixed really vital for existence? Isn’t it precisely because we stick to set ways that the unpleasantness of competition begins? If we gave up being fixed and let ourselves be carried by the sand’s flow, competition should no longer be possible. The fact is that even in the desert, there are flowers that bloom and insects and beasts that live. Making use of a powerful ability to adapt, they are creatures that have escaped to a domain outside of competition. (11)

In other words, does the concept of a fixed identity create contestation, confrontation, and dispute? Is salvation possible through the ability to adapt to a constantly changing environment? Certainly such questions are just as relevant today as they were back in the 1960s, when Abe witnessed Japan’s rise from postwar ruin to economic prosperity. What he explores in *Woman in the Dunes* through allegory is the individual’s response to change, perhaps the social changes brought about by industrialization, modernization, and even globalization. Abe gives us a possible clue to his own view about how best to approach these challenges when he concludes his contemplations on sand with the following description of his protagonist’s psyche: “While picturing the image of the

¹ All translations of the text are my own. Page numbers refer to the version reprinted in *Abe Kôbô Shû* (Tokyo: Shinchôsha, 1970): 5-126.

flowing sand in his head, he was occasionally overcome by the illusion that he himself was beginning to flow” (11). In other words, we are presented with the image of a human being in a fluid state, moving in harmony with the flow of his surroundings.

What is interesting to consider is how Teshigahara, in the film adaptation (*Suna no Onna*, 1964), re-imagines the text for the cinematic medium, translating abstract literary images into concrete visual images, as he does with his two other adaptations of Abe novels. Yet, as Isogai Hideo suggests, what sets *Woman in the Dunes* apart from Abe’s other works is not the choice of theme but, rather, its “fleshing out”: “The abstract theme is held sufficiently by a power that is not schematically but sensorially permeating.”² Discussing what he believed to be the success of the novel, Okaniwa Noboru writes of the varied impressions sand can evoke, “from physical and sensory texture, to an almost *intellectual response*.”³ What Abe always strived for in his work was the presentation of theme in concrete rather than abstract form. As Okaniwa points out, “Of course, it is impossible for a work to exactly put into practice its methodology, and from a theoretical standpoint, there is always at least some dissatisfaction.”⁴ Perhaps adaptation allowed Abe, with the help of Teshigahara, to try through cinema what was simply impossible through literary means. In many ways, it was the ‘materiality’ of Abe’s central metaphor of sand that made *Woman in the Dunes* conducive to adaptation, and that contributed to the success of the cinematic treatment of its theme.

Woman in the Dunes is also remarkable in that its setting could relate allegorically to just about anywhere in the world. Filming on location in an unpopulated and

² Isogai Hideo, *Senzen · Sengo no Sakka to Sakuhin* (Tokyo: Meiji Shoin, 1980), 254.

³ Okaniwa Noboru, *Hanada Kiyoteru to Abe Kôbô: Avangarudo bungaku no saisei no tame ni* (Tokyo: Daisan Bunmeisha, 1980), 93.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 96.

nondescript stretch of desert, Teshigahara avoids confining the narrative to a determinate moment and place. Going beyond Japan to transcend national boundaries, both novel and film reject the question of what it is to be ‘Japanese’ in favour of the question of what it is to be a person of the modern era. This helps to explain why *Woman in the Dunes* seems to anticipate the issues that have become relevant today, such as the transnational exchanges arising from globalization, and the clashes between tradition and modernity. Concerns continue to be raised about the potential implications of these cross-cultural encounters. Will the diminishing role of traditional values and customs lead to a disappearance of cultural identity, or does this ‘hybridity’ allow for the creation of new, freely determined identities? I hope to address these questions while examining how the theme is presented cinematically and, by doing so, demonstrating the strengths and capabilities of adaptation in what is widely considered Abe and Teshigahara’s most successful collaboration.

The Close-up: Finding New Meaning in the ‘Object’

One of the distinguishing features of the film version of *Woman in the Dunes* is the prominence of images captured in extreme close-up. Teshigahara’s skillful use of the close-up reflected a general trend, not only in cinema,⁵ but in the world of photography as well. According to Toba Kôji, from the late 1950s to the 1960s, there was a growing interest among photographers for “detail and texture.”⁶ Abe himself took an interest in this trend. In a 1960 article based on an interview with the photographer Tômatsu Shômei,

⁵ Demonstrated, for example, by the French director Alain Resnais in *Hiroshima, Mon Amour* (1959), which incidentally featured Okada Eiji, the actor who would be cast in the role of ‘Niki Jumpei’ in *Woman in the Dunes*.

⁶ Toba Kôji, *Undôtai Abe Kôbô* (Tokyo: Ichiyôsha, 2007), 273.

he writes, “Photography today is the destruction of a system through discovery of the accidental.”⁷ The writer describes Tômatsu’s approach as follows:

Though his appearance is very much that of a wanderer, he is indeed a bona fide wanderer, without a fixed abode, randomly searching on the spot everyday for any inexpensive inn, moving between stops it seems. If you ask him, it is owing to a love for the details of reality. If you have some goal—for example, returning home—then the process of reaching it becomes abstract, and it is missing those precious details that makes him uneasy.⁸

For performing a close-up on those “precious details” often overlooked in our everyday lives, Abe praised the photographer’s work. Discussing a series of his photographs centred on the theme of ‘home’, Abe writes, “While directing his love toward details, he pushes away the whole. With an astonished eye, he watches over the images of his own home that are decaying and fading away, yet is never saddened by them.”⁹ For Abe, an in-depth ‘gaze’ is valuable as a tool for exploring details with the aim of attaining a new awareness of reality. It was such an approach that Abe likely sought to integrate when writing *Woman in the Dunes* and which was later realized cinematically by Teshigahara in its film version. By making use of a cinematic resource, Teshigahara could attempt what Abe hoped to achieve through his writing—to reevaluate the environment and shed new light on the ‘background’ of reality.

The close-up enables the filmmaker to fragment the visual field in order to focus more sharply on individual aspects of a scene or to alter point of view. As Gilles Deleuze states, “the close-up endows the objective set with a subjectivity.”¹⁰ Yomota Inuhiko comments on Teshigahara’s “naturalism”—his detailed depictions of “small creatures

⁷ Quoted in *ibid.*, 260.

⁸ Quoted in *ibid.*, 274.

⁹ Quoted in *ibid.*, 275.

¹⁰ Gilles Deleuze, *The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986), 30.

starting with insects,” his ability to find “analogies between small creatures and human beings.”¹¹ Yet Teshigahara’s use of the technology was not limited to expressing his naturalist inclinations, but also allowed him to realize what Abe sought through his prose. In the same way as the ‘concretized form’ Alan Spiegel argues is exemplified by James Joyce’s prose, the camera respects “the integrity of the seen object and...gives it palpable presence apart from the presence of the observer.”¹² Discussing the notion of the camera as representing “the male gaze of dominance,” Juan Bruce-Novoa suggests how such a gaze can be undermined:

[The male gaze] is destined to fail when confronted by a world of objects with their own subjectivity. The most one can do is give up trying to make sense—impose logical order—and evoke images within a space where they can be observed repeatedly in their ephemeral apparitions.¹³

In *Woman in the Dunes*, Teshigahara is able to endow such ‘background’ elements as insects and birds with subjectivity. Sudden close-up views of these organisms allow the spectator to adopt a new perspective, presenting forms of existence suited to the desert environment. Like the creatures he attempts to capture and study, the protagonist must learn to likewise develop “a powerful ability to adapt” (11).

Even the sand is given a “palpable presence.” Keiko McDonald points out “the importance of texture” in the film, how it is “replete with cinematic metamorphoses of

¹¹ Ôkôchi Shôji and Yomota Inuhiko, *Zen’ei Chôsho: Teshigahara Hiroshi to no Taiwa* (Tokyo: Gakugei Shorin, 1989), 90.

¹² Quoted in Brian McFarlane, *Novel To Film: An Introduction to the Theory of Adaptation* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996), 4.

¹³ Juan Bruce-Novoa, “From Text to Film and Back: The García Ponce-Gurrola Collaboration in *Tajimara*,” *Discourse* 26.1 (2004), 160.

sand that create vibrant, sensory impressions.”¹⁴ As McDonald observes, “Inanimate sand, always moving through these metamorphoses, becomes as animate as the *dramatis personae* and gradually commands closer attention from the viewer.”¹⁵ Teshigahara explains his approach to filming the sand, treating it as something organic:

At the time of *Woman in the Dunes*, I was quite concerned with the ‘object’, how to push sand so that it can be turned into an image. Together with capturing the human beings, it became the greatest task.

Sand changes dramatically; a single gust of wind can completely transform its appearance. Therefore, once you are actually on site, you are offered so many things that you never lose interest, and it possesses the terror of something that moves as well. It was as such an ‘object’ that I captured the sand.¹⁶

Throughout the film, sand is also treated in a way resembling water. Teshigahara interrupts the narrative action with shots of sand represented in waves, streams, and cascades. Such images evoke freedom and fluidity. The cascading, curving, sweeping lines “visually represent the desired escape from limits,” a material embodiment of both “freedom and fluid movement.”¹⁷ McDonald notes how the director “presents a vast stretch of sand, like a rippling ocean.”¹⁸ Even when the *mise en scène* is reduced to the smallest scale, such as a close-up of the protagonist’s back, “grains of sand adhere to his skin like innumerable beads of sweat.”¹⁹ Thus the spectator is confronted by images that challenge his or her preconceptions about the nature of sand. The thematic implications of this are significant, as will be discussed later.

¹⁴ Keiko I. McDonald, “Sand, Man, and Symbols: Teshigahara’s *The Woman in the Dunes*,” *Cinema East: A Critical Study of Major Japanese Films* (Rutherford, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1983), 37.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 37.

¹⁶ Quoted in Ôkôchi and Yomota, 90.

¹⁷ Bruce-Novoa, 162.

¹⁸ McDonald, 37.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 37.

For Teshigahara, the close-up also provided the means to capture the texture of human emotion. Discussing the role of eroticism in his films, Teshigahara insisted that he approaches sex as an “inevitability” existing within the flow of the drama, the outcome of the tension between two characters brought together by circumstance. To render this “emotion” into images, he cites the aesthetic presentation of the body and its movement, of the contact between two bodies: “Through imagistic expression, my intention is to capture a part to suggest the whole.”²⁰ In this sense, the close-up can perform a metonymic function. During an interview with Yomota, Teshigahara elaborates: “The skin itself is not something that is carefully observed so, when extracted by the frame, there is a peculiar sensation. ... For example, when just a fingertip is filmed and it resembles a thigh, it can become a very erotic expression.”²¹ Referring to Abe’s discourse on word and image, Toba Kôji argues that Abe attempted to apply the dialectic to his prose in *Woman in the Dunes*, suggesting that the writer was able to achieve “the verbalization of the sense of touch.”²² One could argue that Teshigahara was able to achieve the ‘visualization’ of the sense of touch in the film adaptation. As Katsuragawa Hiroshi pointed out, “It is when looking through a camera lens that he fully captures the sticky, damp feel of the material or the physical sensation of human beings.”²³

Furthermore, as Tomoda Yoshiyuki observes, the adaptation also allowed the two artists to discover new meanings within the landscape by using the technology of cinema:

²⁰ Teshigahara Hiroshi, “Yûga na Hakuryoku ‘Teshigahara-ryû’,” *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, ed. Sôgetsu Shuppan Henshyûbu (Tokyo: Sôgetsu Shuppan, 1982), 146.

²¹ Quoted in Ôkôchi and Yomota, 93-94.

²² Toba, 277.

²³ Katsuragawa Hiroshi, *Haikyo no Zen’ei: Kaisô no Sengo Bijutsu* (Tokyo: Ichiyôsha, 2004), 363.

What Abe-Teshigahara put into practice through *Woman in the Dunes* is what could be called the ‘relativization’ of the landscape. Questioning its self-evident nature, and by attempting the re-allotment of meaning, they asked again how it would be possible to capture and express as images the part that is the film’s background.²⁴

Teshigahara himself emphasized this point, insisting that, whether it is the discovery of the various expressions of sand or its almost physiological movement, “when viewing the sand with fresh eyes, various things happen.”²⁵ Alluding to the difficulties of filming on location within a desert environment, the director explained, “From my battles with the sand, I learned that sand flows, that it possesses a mind of its own, that it symbolizes both beauty and solitude.”²⁶ It was the versatility of sand, both in terms of its physical property as well as its function as metaphor, which enabled Teshigahara to utilize it for the purposes of capturing the theme, accentuating the development of the drama, and hinting at the *inner* ‘movement’ of the protagonist. Rather than present a static picture of the characters and the action, he endeavored to use the sand to represent the narrative dynamically: “I considered variously how sand as a third party can intermingle with and unsettle the human beings, carried through to the ending.”²⁷ The ‘visualization’ of turning points in the narrative, such as when the man and the woman first make love, when the brutal demands of the villagers escalate into a sort of initiation ceremony, and when the man unexpectedly discovers water within the sand, were all carefully conceived as “something that would become a change (*tenkan*) within a single image”²⁸ In other

²⁴ Tomoda Yoshiyuki, “Fûkei to Shintai: Abe Kôbô / Teshigahara Hiroshi Eiga *Suna no Onna Ron*,” *Nihon Kindai Bungaku* 74 (May 2006), 282.

²⁵ Teshigahara Hiroshi, “Gaudi kara no Shuppatsu,” *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, ed. Sôgetsu Shuppan Henshûbu (Tokyo: Sôgetsu Shuppan, 1982), 182.

²⁶ Teshigahara Hiroshi, “Suna to no Tatakai,” *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, 183.

²⁷ Teshigahara, “Gaudi kara no Shuppatsu,” *Teshigahara Hiroshi Katarogu*, 182.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 182.

words, the adaptation into film of *Woman in the Dunes* provided Teshigahara the opportunity to consider how the narrative, “as a flow that contains meaning, could accurately become something visual.”²⁹

A Grain of Sand in the Desert: The Individual in Modern Society

Teshigahara introduces Abe’s concern for the modern individual’s relationship to society through the metaphor of the individual grain lost in a sea of sand. The film opens with a montage—from single grains magnified in extreme close-up, Teshigahara pulls back to reveal a windswept desert. The initial shot of sand particles has a disorienting effect since they are unrecognizable when taken out of context and depicted on a much larger scale. They are unique minerals with unique qualities. When put into their ‘proper’ context, though, they are properly ‘identified’. Yet, at the same time, they lose their individual presence. Like the sole grain, Abe and Teshigahara suggest that the modern individual is lost in society. When part of the mass to which he or she belongs, the individual is insignificant, struggling to be noticed and appreciated. Indeed, the final image of countless grains caught up by the wind and moving in unison across the desert’s surface certainly calls to mind an overcrowded city with its “ever-flowing organic urbanity.”³⁰

When the protagonist arrives at the seaside locale, he is defined through his membership in society, as manifested in the certificates and documentation he carries with him. Teshigahara subtly establishes this theme during the opening credits through the motif of *hanko*, an official name-seal used in Japan in place of a person’s signature. Personal identity, as it exists through these official designations, becomes signified by an

²⁹ Ibid., 182.

³⁰ Bruce-Novoa, 163.

object—a carved piece of wood. The implication is that such credentials establish society's ownership over the individual, symbolizing what David Desser describes as “the increasingly bureaucratized, depersonalized quality of modern life—the ‘plastic culture’.”³¹ In a sequence not included in the original screenplay, the man (Okada Eiji), an amateur entomologist in search of rare beetles and exhausted from a day of insect-collecting, dozes off inside the hull of an abandoned boat. Dream and reality are blurred as he becomes lost in reverie and we are allowed access into his thoughts via inner monologue:

In order for people to make sure about each other, there are all sorts of certificates: contracts, licenses, identification cards, user permits, deeds, authorization papers, registration papers, carrying permits, union membership cards, testimonials, bills, proofs of debt, temporary permits, consent forms, proofs of income, proofs of custody, and, to top it all off, pedigrees. I wonder if that's really the last of the certificates. Could there be some other thing needing proof that was forgotten?³²

Clearly, he is troubled by the constant demand for ‘proofs of identity’ in human relations, and the source of this anxiety is given a more concrete representation in the form of an unnamed woman whose image emerges from the landscape and invades the man's daydream. Of course, it is important to point out that the woman is not granted a voice (she literally remains silent). Yet she appears to mainly serve a metonymical function, standing for the man's malaise. Emphasizing the surrealistic quality of the sequence, a superimposed image of her face is projected onto one of the dunes, a blending of conscious and unconscious elements within the man's psyche. Thus we are given a subtle indication of what may have motivated him (consciously or not) to flee the city.

³¹ David Desser, *Eros plus Massacre: An Introduction to the Japanese New Wave Cinema* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 78.

³² All translations of dialogue from the film are my own. The original screenplay is available in *Abe Kôbô Eiga Shinario Sen* (Tokyo: Sôrinsha, 1986): 97-135.

Teshigahara occasionally interrupts the narrative with images in extreme close-up of the insects the man collects. These insects are unidentifiable until captured, classified and labeled. The connection between the fate of these insects and the man is clear, as Keiko McDonald points out:

The irony lies in the shared fate of the tiny insects pinned down to the board and the entomologist who pinned them there. Both are helpless victims; just as the insects are classed into some genus and species, so is man forced into a socially fabricated identity. Like the insects, the man is pinned down by the forces of society.³³

The hunter himself is led into a trap when, coming across a forgotten village half-buried in the sand, he is deceived by its residents into spending the night at the dilapidated home of a young widow (Kishida Kyôko), located at the bottom of a sandpit. The next morning he realizes his predicament, having been effectively recruited to help the woman eke out her sand-bound existence: “Are you trying to make me a prisoner? This is no joke! I’m not a tramp, you know. I’m a respectable worker. I’m properly registered as a citizen!” The man’s first instinct is to assert his “properly registered” identity as a member of society, to appeal to the very mechanism that pins him down.

The woman’s situation is no different. As a member of the village, she is pinned down by her duty to help preserve it by shoveling the encroaching sand on a daily basis. She explains the importance of her task for not just her own sake, but also the sake of the village as a whole: “If my place gets buried, then the house behind here will have a hard time.” Her sense of obligation to her neighbours is all the more startling by the fact that there is no direct interaction between them. The image of people isolated from one another by walls of sand calls to mind the modern city dweller. For the woman, her life

³³ McDonald, 43.

has meaning so long as it is devoted to the community; her self-worth measured by her ‘hometown spirit’, the village motto. Yet hers is a narrow worldview. The perspective from the bottom of the sandpit is one that is restricted to the walls of sand and the sky immediately above. In other words, it is an existence oriented by an ignorance of the outside world. As an ‘outsider’, the man sees the sand-bound existence for what it really is—the absurdity of human beings forced into performing endless, meaningless labour. He laments to the woman, “Don’t you think doing this sort of thing is futile—do you shovel sand in order to live or do you live in order to shovel sand? ...It’s truly incredible how you can put up with being locked up like this.”

Of course, the woman’s absurd attachment to her home and to her everyday routine is analogous to the man’s life back in the city, where he makes a living as a schoolteacher. Abe describes his attitude toward his job as follows: “The students, year after year, surpassing themselves like the water of a river, flow away while, at the bottom of that flow, only the teachers, like rocks buried deep, are always left behind” (42). Therefore, we must question the man’s desire to return to his own absurd everyday, a rigid existence lacking fluidity. In an interview with Joan Mellen, Teshigahara provides insight into the universal relevance of the act of shoveling sand:

In many cases, living is comprised of continuing to do things the way they have always been done. Digging the sand reflects how people structure their lives according to custom. In this sense it is a metaphor. The society is the whole assembled by the small radius of each individual’s activity. The woman is not protecting herself *against* society. Rather, she is performing her duty as a member of society.³⁴

³⁴ Quoted in Joan Mellen, *Voices from the Japanese Cinema* (New York: Liveright, 1975), 176.

The performance of her duty allows the woman to derive her purpose in life. When the man suggests that she might be better off outside the hole, she explains, “But, if it wasn’t for the sand, nobody would care about me.” Abe poses this form of existence as problematic, suggesting that it is dehumanizing for an individual to be valued only as “a cog propelling the village’s daily affairs” (62). It is what Timothy Iles describes as “the agrarian notion of communal rigidity,” where “the individual is but a machine fulfilling a function, the end product of which is the continued prosperity of the community.”³⁵ We are made to question the communalism of the village since the terms of its membership, where provisions such as water are distributed in rations contingent on the performance of one’s duties, take the form of an involuntary conformity. The man’s forced integration into this community leads to a gradual internalization of its underlying logic, as Abe describes in the novel:

When the man actually set to work, for some reason he didn’t feel as much resistance as he would have thought. What could possibly be the cause of this change? Could it be the fear that the water would be cut off, indebtedness toward the woman, or due to the nature of labour itself? Certainly, even labour without a clear purpose can be a sort of support for man, making the passage of time all the more bearable. (84)

Boundary Space: A Clash of Cultures

The space in which a character is situated or, alternatively, is not situated can be of great significance in the analysis of a narrative. Mieke Bal states, “Both inner and outer space function, in this instance, as a frame. Their opposition gives both spaces their meaning.”³⁶

³⁵ Timothy Iles, *Abe Kôbô: An Exploration of his Prose, Drama and Theatre* (Fucecchio, Italy: European Press Academic Publishing, 2000), 13.

³⁶ Mieke Bal, *Narratology: Introduction to the Theory of Narrative*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1997), 134.

Yet *Woman in the Dunes* presents space as unstable and, therefore, the system of meanings is likewise undermined. As Linda C. Ehrlich and Antonio Santos observe, “The pit and the desert are represented as places of synthesis, based on a dynamism of opposition and of merging rules.”³⁷

Namigata Tsuyoshi notes that, in the novel, “the cultural boundary within Japan is set between the urban and the rural.”³⁸ In the film, clothing is used as a visual representation of this cultural divide. When he first arrives at the desert, the protagonist appears in a modern outfit, carrying modern accessories. These items come to reflect the attitude of modern man, his attempt to conquer and impose order on his environment. Yet we quickly realize that the man’s very ‘modern-ness’ is ill-suited to his circumstances. This becomes visibly clear when his bright, white clothes become filthy from sweat and sand. As the days go by, he clings to his modern clothing as persistently as he clings to his past identity. Even when attempting to escape the hole, he unnecessarily burdens himself with his belongings. As Judith Shatnoff observes, “he carries his paraphernalia on his back—he tries to climb the cliffs with the net, the camera, the specimen box, the flasks. Spiritually, he is trapped.”³⁹

In the novel, the relationship between the protagonist and his partner back in the city is described more elaborately, with Abe treating it as a reflection of the commercialization or ‘commodification’ of sexual relations. The man recollects how “that woman” (*aitsu*) characterized their relationship: “Isn’t our relationship, at any rate,

³⁷ Linda C. Ehrlich and Antonio Santos, “The Taunt of the Gods: Reflections on *Woman in the Dunes*,” *Word and Image in Japanese Cinema*, ed. Dennis Washburn and Carole Cavanaugh (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 89.

³⁸ Namigata Tsuyoshi, *Ekkyô no Avangyarudo* (Tokyo: NTT, 2005), 247.

³⁹ Judith Shatnoff, “*Woman in the Dunes*,” *Film Quarterly* 18.2 (Winter 1964), 43.

a lot like the exchange of sample merchandise? ...If you are not satisfied with the product, we will accept its return at any time” (71). Tsuruta Kinya draws attention to “the intervention of a condom” beleaguering the protagonist.⁴⁰ However, he is able to momentarily free himself from his hang-ups, to transcend the synthetic culture and “shed the rubber goods that are a part of industrial society” through his relations with the woman in the sandpit.⁴¹ The critical point in the narrative when the nature of their relationship begins to change occurs when they first make love. Noting that condoms “block the sense of touch,” Toba Kôji observes how the protagonist’s relationship with the woman in the dunes is represented through “the texture of details, things relating to touch.”⁴² Rather than be “dominated by commodities, the fetish, the article of clothing, the partial object and the memory-object,” the man’s passion is freed and, to convey this unfettered emotion, Teshigahara presents the intertwining bodies through a montage of close-up shots that capture the texture of the sand granules clinging to bare skin, revealing “grace under a coarse appearance.”⁴³

This is the first indication of the man’s willingness to shed his modern trappings, providing a glimpse, however brief, of what Ehrlich and Santos describe as the dissolution of dichotomies central to the film:

At first it seems that *Woman in the Dunes* will be a film of stark contrasts: poor villager versus intellectual, man versus woman, dry versus wet, entrapment versus freedom. As the film progresses, however, shades of gray enter, and these seeming dichotomies are revealed to be less absolute than they seemed at first.⁴⁴

⁴⁰ Tsuruta Kinya, *Akutagawa, Kawabata, Mishima, Abe: Gendai Nihon Bungaku Sakuhin Ron* (Tokyo: Ôfûsha, 1973), 231.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, 240.

⁴² Toba, 272.

⁴³ Deleuze, 79.

⁴⁴ Ehrlich and Santos, 90.

Similarly, Tomoda Yoshiyuki describes the film as presenting “a visual experience that disturbs the conceptual framework of binary oppositions.”⁴⁵ By allowing the protagonist to “realize the necessity of redrawing the cultural borderlines,” Namigata argues that the woman serves “the function of a medium that disturbs the fixed positioning of the self the man had held prior to his arrival in the desert.”⁴⁶ Following the consummation of his physical attraction for the woman, he gazes outside and is overcome by a hallucination in which the image of water is superimposed on the sand, anticipating the dissolution of perhaps the principal dichotomy of the narrative. Such dissolution also has implications for the ‘space’ represented by the sandpit. As Bal notes, “the boundary that delimits the frame can be heavily invested with meaning. Narratives can endorse that meaning, reject or change it, or play on different ways in which characters are situated in relation to it.”⁴⁷ In other words, the meanings assigned to the spatial dynamic are not fixed and, therefore, the way a character relates to it may change.

Over the course of the narrative, the man begins to abandon his urban attire to become better suited to his new environment. He is shown in the more traditional costume worn by the other villagers. This also allows him to blend into his surroundings. As Abe hints in the novel, his outward conformity to the village ethic may be strategically motivated:

With the intention of hibernating, the man adjusted to life in the hole and devoted himself to lowering the villagers’ guard. They say repeating the same form is an effective camouflage. By blending into the simple repetitions of life, sooner or later it wouldn’t be out of the question if he were to disappear from their consciousness. (111)

⁴⁵ Tomoda, 282.

⁴⁶ Namigata, 249.

⁴⁷ Bal, 134.

Yet will the change in appearance have a corresponding effect on the man's psyche, causing him to lose his sense of self and individual will? Abe addresses this possibility when he muses, "Hibernating sounds fine, but could it be that, somehow, he had turned into a mole, losing the will to face the sunlight forever" (112)? Certainly, this is a valid concern worth exploring further. In a way, the protagonist undergoes a process of depersonalization and dehumanization. His resistance to the village only imprisons him further by leaving him vulnerable and dispirited. Indeed, his spiritual decline can be tracked over the course of his repeated attempts at escape that invariably end in failure. After his most successful attempt lands him in quicksand, he is forced to endure the shame of being saved by his captors and "lowered once again into the hole like a piece of baggage"(107). The man is presented as an individual stripped of his dignity, as if his self-worth were left buried under the sand.

The man's degradation reaches its lowest point when he willingly submits to the villagers' wishes to commit an act that not only disgraces him but the woman as well. His request to temporarily leave the hole, if only briefly, is granted on the condition that he and the woman give a sexual performance in front of the other villagers. The image of the villagers, torches in hand, crowding around the edge of the hole is described in the novel as being "like the bonfires of a night festival" (120). In the film, this feeling is greatly enhanced through the visual and aural dimensions of cinema. Tribal drumming, dance, and costume (including masks) transform the event into a sort of initiation ceremony, which brings the community together. According to Teshigahara, the scene was intended to portray "the whole process of an outsider becoming an insider. Through the sexual act,

the man is integrated with village life.”⁴⁸ As Olof G. Lidin explains, an activity can become “socialized” by a ceremony since such events are a “means to collectivize man. ...A simple sexual act becomes communal when circumscribed by an official ceremony.”⁴⁹ In the novel, there is a strong sense that the protagonist and the villagers have become united in their perverseness: “The man imagined that their wings were his own. ...They were a part of him” (120). Teshigahara captures this sense rhythmically. As the drumming and dancing build to a frenzy, the man’s actions grow increasingly violent. Yet the woman resists his persistence and strong-arming, eventually kicking him in the groin and leaving him prostrate on the sandy floor.

Teshigahara thus constructs the image of a psychologically and spiritually broken man, overwhelmed by forces outside of his control. On one level, these forces are represented by the sand itself. Keiko McDonald suggests that the sand is an “index of society,” adding, “It demands that the individual conform on its terms.”⁵⁰ At the same time, the village cooperative is likewise symbolic of an oppressive power. As McDonald notes, “Teshigahara presents the man completely at the whim of the villagers above.”⁵¹ They are the embodiment of what Shatnoff refers to as “the oppressive unknown ‘them’,” the social abstractions that dictate human behaviour.⁵² Thus the rope ladder these outside agents manipulate from above comes to symbolize “the false hope of freedom, reduc[ing] the individual to a helpless victim.”⁵³ This impression is heightened during the ‘festival’

⁴⁸ Quoted in Mellen, 177.

⁴⁹ Olof G. Lidin, “Abe Kobo’s Internationalism,” *Rethinking Japan*, ed. Adriana Boscaro et al., vol. 1 (Sandgate, England: Japan Library Limited, 1991), 5.

⁵⁰ McDonald, 40.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵² Shatnoff, 44.

⁵³ McDonald, 41.

by the high angle shots from the vantage point of the villagers, who use torches to form a spotlight on the diminutive figures below them. Under the glare of the spotlight, the man cannot see his audience though they can see him—he is a mere object for their voyeuristic pleasure. Through alternating camera angles, Teshigahara is able to represent the power dynamic effectively.

The scene presents the violation of space, both in terms of the village imposing its presence on the couple's domestic space as well as the man's attempted violation of the woman. The link between these dual violations is reinforced by the correspondence of the man's actions with the villagers' demands. According to Bal, "rape of women is allegorically related to invasion and destruction of space."⁵⁴ This of course has implications for the man's own sense of self, of "having the domain of his identity encroached upon."⁵⁵ In that sense, the festival could be viewed as marking an "initiatory death." As Chigusa Kimura-Steven discusses, a symbolic death is necessary for rebirth, that is to say "birth to a higher mode of being."⁵⁶ However, in order to do so, the sandpit must be transformed into something revitalizing. Such a possibility is suggested, ironically, by the festival, which calls to mind a fertility rite. Kimura-Steven points out that, "In many agrarian societies, a sexual act was performed as part of the ritual to encourage the successful germination of seeds as well as a good harvest."⁵⁷ Although the man's 'seed' fails to germinate successfully within the woman's womb, the festival does

⁵⁴ Bal, 135.

⁵⁵ Namigata, 249.

⁵⁶ Chigusa Kimura-Steven, "The Otherness of Women in the Avant-Garde Film *Woman in the Dunes*," *Gender and Power in the Japanese Visual Field*, ed. Joshua S. Mostow et al. (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2003), 160.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 171.

succeed in the ‘fertilization’ of the barren sandpit, heralding the discovery of water within its depths.

The underlying tension caused by the man’s arrival in the community stems from what Timothy Iles describes as “the clashing ideologies of the individual and the group.”⁵⁸ Coerced into assimilating into a community, into (outwardly, at least) accepting its common sense, the man simultaneously distinguishes his ‘self’ from the community, secretly plotting to rebel against its coercive pressure. The individualism represented by the protagonist is revealed in his desire to preserve his name for posterity. Through the discovery of a new subspecies of beetle, his name will be immortalized, “attached to the insect and forever enshrined in an insect book.”⁵⁹ Yet it is also a source of competition, a sense of opposition to other members in a community. Thus the communalism of the village represents the opposite pole, “a monolithic communal organization capable of, and in fact intent on, crushing opposition to its traditional entrenchment.”⁶⁰ Neither the protagonist’s egotism nor the villagers’ “dogmatically imposed social cohesion”⁶¹ are presented as positive. Yet the encounter between these ideological extremes at the bottom of the sandpit does not lead to a smooth reconciliation either. In fact, it leads to a perversion, which is encapsulated in the ‘festival’ scene, a product of the man’s desire for preferential treatment within a group context of imposed uniformity. Eventually, the blending of these opposing views, metaphorically embodied in the physical union between the man and the woman, produces an extrauterine pregnancy, an abnormal condition that threatens the health of the woman.

⁵⁸ Iles, 71.

⁵⁹ Shatnoff, 43.

⁶⁰ Iles, 72.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 74.

Fluid Perception: Turning a Desert to a Well

In the adaptation of *Woman in the Dunes*, Teshigahara makes full use of the visual dimension of film to present its theme graphically. Even the design for the title credits is imbued with meaning, introducing certain aspects of the theme. Tomoda Yoshiyuki discusses the significance of the contour lines that are a main component of the design, and the human figures, name seals, and fingerprints integrated among the lines. He points out the possibility of interpreting it as a commentary on urban alienation, stating, “To the extent that they appear to be in close proximity to each other, the contour lines that are in fact the layout of distance in terms of difference in altitude could also be viewed as symbolizing human relations in the congested condition of a city.”⁶² Furthermore, the substitution of name seals for heads on the human figures could represent the expression of a socially (and artificially) determined identity. Tomoda continues, “Name seals that designate identity mark the map on which topography has been signified and, moreover, fingerprints that, while being a social proof of registration, belong to individual bodies are also incorporated.”⁶³ The graphic artist Awazu Kiyoshi, who was responsible for the title design, explained that through the contour lines, he intended to capture “the rhythm of nature.”⁶⁴ As Tomoda observes, “The topography of the natural world and the fingerprints that are a part of the body can be expressed in a unified way as signs resembling contour lines.”⁶⁵

The imprints of civilization on the topographical representation of landscape could also signify man’s efforts to conquer his environment, to impose logic and order on

⁶² Tomoda, 277.

⁶³ Ibid., 278.

⁶⁴ Quoted in *ibid.*, 278.

⁶⁵ Ibid., 278.

an irrational and chaotic natural world, the futility of which is a feature of the philosophy of the Absurd according to Yoseph Milman:

Nature, of its very character, opposes the anthropocentric, instrumental meaning projected upon it by man. In moments of revelation, when the Absurd consciousness is awakened, the world refuses to accommodate itself to the forms and blueprints which have, from the outset, been stamped upon it by man, rejects the décor which habit has hidden from our sight, and withstands with all its 'density' the efforts of the human mind to conquer it and the efforts of consciousness to unite with it.⁶⁶

Throughout the novel, descriptions of the sand imply its destructive influence on the protagonist: "It's as if the sand that stuck to his skin penetrated his veins, shaving off his sensations from the inside" (20). Teshigahara does a superlative job of making his audience keenly aware of the omnipresence of the sand through extreme close-up shots of grains clinging to the skin of both the man and the woman. As Keiko McDonald remarks, "Teshigahara films the sand so that it becomes a part of their very corporeal existence."⁶⁷ Thus the futility of the man's efforts to shake off the sand from his hair, clothing and skin is clearly represented. He cannot avoid coming to terms with the reality in which he is immersed. Christopher Bolton writes of Abe's concern about "the necessity and the difficulty of breaking out of hardened patterns of thinking grounded in our limited everyday experience."⁶⁸ Thus what Abe calls for is a renewed awareness of the everyday, "the décor which habit has hidden from our sight." In that sense, the sandpit represents the everyday. Perhaps it is the very 'unreality' of the sandpit that allows it to throw into sharp relief the actuality of the everyday, an everyday that is so inextricably a part of

⁶⁶ Quoted in Iles, 43.

⁶⁷ McDonald, 37.

⁶⁸ Christopher Bolton, "Abe Kôbô 1924-1993," *Modern Japanese Writers*, ed. Jay Rubin (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 2001), 8.

human existence, like sand to the body, that we fail to notice its nature, its actuality, until it is presented in a grotesque form.

The narrative concludes with the woman needing medical attention for the complications of her pregnancy and, very reluctantly, being escorted out of the hole by the villagers in order to be taken to a hospital. The villagers, either intentionally or not, leave the rope ladder in its place. Yet the man, now free to leave the hole, chooses to remain. At first glance, his decision is perplexing and frustrating. However, it is necessary to look beyond the surface level of meaning in order to understand the value and significance of his choice. After all, the struggle in the sandpit could relate to the human condition itself, as discussed by Jean-Paul Sartre:

[A]lthough it is impossible to find in each and every man a universal essence that can be called human nature, there is nevertheless a human universality of *condition*. It is not by chance that the thinkers of today are so much more ready to speak of the condition than of the nature of man. By his condition they understand, with more or less clarity, all the *limitations* which *à priori* define a man's fundamental situation in the universe. His historical situations are variable: man may be born a slave in a pagan society or may be a feudal baron, or a proletarian. But what never vary are the necessities of being in the world, of having to labor and to die there. These limitations are neither subjective nor objective, or rather there is a subjective and an objective aspect to them. Objective because we meet with them everywhere and they are everywhere recognizable; and subjective because they are *lived* and are nothing if man does not live them—if, that is to say, he does not freely determine himself and his existence in relation to them. And, diverse though man's purpose may be, at least none of them is wholly foreign to me, since every human purpose presents itself as an attempt either to surpass these limitations, or to widen them, or else to deny or to accommodate oneself to them. Consequently, every purpose, however individual it may be, is of universal value.⁶⁹

In other words, each individual must ultimately choose *how* he or she relates to those limitations. At the conclusion of *Woman in the Dunes*, the protagonist is confronted by

⁶⁹ Jean-Paul Sartre, "Existentialism is a Humanism," *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, ed. and trans. Walter Kaufmann (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1956), 303-04.

this choice—to escape and, therefore, deny the sandpit, or to accept its inevitability and begin to accommodate to it. When he climbs the rope ladder, he enters what David Bordwell terms a ‘boundary situation’, “a crisis of existential significance” that forces the protagonist to choose a course of action even if its outcome remains uncertain.⁷⁰ Having reached the top of hole at last, the man’s encounter with his boundary situation is described in the novel as follows: “He tried taking a deep breath but the air was coarse—not the taste he had been expecting” (125). Perhaps he realizes the meaninglessness of returning to his old home, where the pressures and demands of a thankless job and unhappy relationship await him. Thus his being in the desert is itself an escape from a sandpit that may even be deeper and more burdensome than the one he now inhabits.

In the novel, Abe refers to “round-trip tickets” and “one-way tickets” as a way of differentiating between opposing philosophies about the concept of home. Those who are on round-trip tickets have a fixed home to which they always return. Those who are on one-way tickets are constantly moving from place to place, never settling in one location. The man begins to view a ‘one-way ticket’ mode of existence favourably:

In the desert, the only things capable of harmonizing their life to the scenery are special mice that drink their own urine as a substitute for water, insects that feed on rotten meat, and nomadic people who, in all honesty, know only about one-way tickets. If, from the beginning, you regard tickets as only being one-way, you wouldn’t make vain attempts like trying to cling to sand by imitating an oyster stuck to a rock. (96)

Although it is with the woman in mind that the man expresses these views, it could just as easily be him who, like an oyster, is clinging to an obsolete life, one based on outmoded ideas. If, in Abe’s view, modern society is like an ever-shifting desert that causes the

⁷⁰ David Bordwell, *Narration in the Fiction Film* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1985), 208.

individual to be fragmented, then perhaps ‘nomadism’ is a mode of existence better suited to it. Teshigahara picks up this theme and provides a visual analogue near the beginning of the film through the image of a boat in the middle of the desert, its body half-submerged in the sand. In a way, the boat functions as a microcosm of the village—both are no longer viable and, therefore, must be re-invented. The village itself provides an example of such adaptability. Formerly a fishing community, those who were too poor to relocate banded together to earn a livelihood collectively by selling sand to the city for construction projects. The man, of course, must learn to do the same, to stop clinging to an identity that is unfulfilling at best and stifling at worst. At the end of the narrative, he appears to realize this, though the exact reason for his decision to return to the sandpit remains elusive.

Yet the value of that decision may have less to do with any rational explanation for it. In fact, it may lie, paradoxically, in its apparent irrationality. In “Notes from Underground,” Fyodor Dostoevsky, who incidentally was one of Abe’s favourite writers, argues that there is something innate in all human beings that is enshrined as the most important property, something that not only defies reason but indeed challenges it:

The fact is, gentlemen, it seems there must really exist something that is dearer to almost every man than his greatest advantages, or (not to be illogical) there is a most advantageous advantage (the very one omitted of which we spoke just now) which is more important and more advantageous than all other advantages, for the sake of which a man if necessary is ready to act in opposition to all laws; that is, in opposition to reason, honour, peace, prosperity—in fact, in opposition to all those excellent and useful things if only he can attain that fundamental, most advantageous advantage which is dearer to him than all. “Yes, but it’s advantage all the same” you will retort. But excuse me, I’ll make the point clear, and it is not a case of playing upon words. What matters is, that this advantage is remarkable from the very fact that it breaks down all our classifications, and continually

shatters every system constructed by lovers of mankind for the benefit of mankind. In fact, it upsets everything.⁷¹

Later, Dostoevsky identifies this veritable ‘wedge’ that can be driven into the barriers that constrain the individual, man being confined within the very walls of his making:

One’s own free unfettered choice, one’s own caprice, however wild it may be, one’s own fancy worked up at times to frenzy—is that very “most advantageous advantage” which we have overlooked, which comes under no classification and against which all systems and theories are continually being shattered to atoms. And how do these wiseacres know that man wants a normal, a virtuous choice? What has made them conceive that man must want a rationally advantageous choice? What man wants is simply *independent* choice, whatever that independence may cost and wherever it may lead. And choice, of course, the devil only knows what choice.⁷²

The choice made by the protagonist at the end of *Woman in the Dunes* is valid precisely because it is *his* choice. Dostoevsky states, “it preserves for us what is most precious and most important—that is, our personality, our individuality.”⁷³

I will now begin to address the implication of the protagonist’s decision for his individuality. Many critics have argued, and I tend to agree, that the man’s chance discovery of how to extract pure water from the sand serves a symbolic purpose in this regard. By burying a barrel up to its rim, he is able to collect water by making use of the sand’s capacity to function as a natural pump. The discovery represents a departure “from conventional thinking to arrive at an unexpected new hypothesis.”⁷⁴ The man’s ‘unearthing’ of a new hypothesis about sand replaces the old hypothesis, a belief he previously held so rigidly that, when confronted by a view that contradicted it—the woman’s assumptions about the presence of moisture in the sand—he had dismissed it

⁷¹ Fyodor Dostoevsky, “Notes from Underground,” *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 68-69.

⁷² *Ibid.*, 71-72.

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 74.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 8.

categorically. In a way, his ongoing research on the capillary action of sand and the perfecting of his invention also gives him a life-affirming purpose he hitherto lacked. Dore Ashton makes the point that he “reaches a heightened condition of self-awareness, but only when he has undertaken meaningful work, when finally he creates something.”⁷⁵ It is a creative breakthrough that disrupts the monotony of an oppressively regulated existence. As Arthur Kimball states, “Out of the apparent absurdity of life he has learned to extract meaning. He has been ‘set free’ in the metaphysical sense, and ‘escape’ is no longer necessary.”⁷⁶

It is easy to draw comparisons between the protagonist of *Woman in the Dunes* and the mythical figure of Sisyphus, condemned by the Greek gods to push a boulder up a mountain only to have it roll back down to the bottom each time he nears the summit. Albert Camus regarded Sisyphus as an exemplar for finding meaning within the eternal damnation of futile, hopeless labour. In discussing the moment when Sisyphus sees his rock roll down to the plain below, Camus has the following to say:

It is during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus interests me. A face that toils so close to stones is already stone itself! I see that man going back down with a heavy yet measured step toward the torment of which he will never know the end. That hour like a breathing-space which returns as surely as his suffering, that is the hour of consciousness. At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock.⁷⁷

Here, Camus celebrates the idea of discovering the purpose of one’s existence within the absurdity of life. In a way, the protagonist of *Woman in the Dunes* must learn a similar

⁷⁵ Dore Ashton, *The Delicate Thread: Teshigahara’s Life in Art* (Tokyo: Kodansha International, 1997), 91.

⁷⁶ Arthur G. Kimball, *Crisis in Identity and Contemporary Japanese Novels* (Tokyo: Charles E. Tuttle, 1973), 136.

⁷⁷ Albert Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus,” *Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre*, 314.

lesson. The image of the man descending the rope ladder and returning to the bottom of the sandpit certainly mirrors Camus' description of Sisyphus' triumph—"when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate." As Linda Ehrlich and Antonio Santos declare, "Like Sisyphus (in Camus's interpretation), the man will be spiritually reborn when he realizes that his real identity is buried in the depth of his prison."⁷⁸

The knowledge of how to draw fresh water from the sand is, of course, valuable due to its scarcity in an arid environment. In that sense, the man's invention could form the basis of a new mode of relations with the villagers. Like the unexpected solution to a difficult problem, his chance discovery is a departure from fixed ways of thinking (about the nature of sand) that "reveals a new relationship between the elements."⁷⁹ This could also metaphorically refer to his relationship with the village. At the end of the novel, he appears to realize this as he concedes that his invention is more meaningful if others know about it: "Upon further reflection, his heart was bursting with the desire to speak to somebody about the water-collecting device. If he were to do so, who would make better listeners than the people of this village" (125)? Teshigahara, recognizing the importance of this insight, decided to reproduce the line (which was not in Abe's original screenplay) through an inner monologue at the film's conclusion. By sharing his discovery with those who will benefit from it the most, the man's existence will be valued. William Currie observes, "He can now be related to his world productively, and not be dominated by it; he can contribute to the society around him and is anxious to share his discovery with

⁷⁸ Ehrlich and Santos, 95.

⁷⁹ Bolton, 8.

others.”⁸⁰ In the process, he will also achieve the sort of recognition and appreciation that he originally sought through the discovery of a new strain of beetle. Instead of the entomological community, the village offers him this possibility. Thus the potential for a mutually beneficial relationship informs the conclusion.

The film (echoing the novel’s last lines) concludes with the man reflecting, in voiceover, “I was in no particular hurry to escape. The destination and place of return on the round-trip ticket in my hand could be filled in as I wish.” The very last shot of the public report officially declaring him a missing person, his whereabouts still unknown after seven years, suggests he remains trapped in the pit against his will. Therefore, one could argue that he failed, that his sense of obligation got the better of him and paralyzed him. Could it be that, indeed, he had turned into a mole and become so used to waiting in the dark that, when the time came to leave, the light blinded his eyes, preventing him from coming out of his hole? Yet it is also possible to argue that the man is now self-empowered—he *chooses* the terms of his ticket rather than having them determined for him. The formality and impersonal nature of the ‘Notice of Disappearance’ reflects the ‘plastic culture’ of the society that he ultimately rejects. Thus it serves as one last document to add to the identification papers listed at the beginning of the film, implying the symbolic death of his ‘plastic identity’. The artificial or depersonalized nature of this identity is emphasized by its association with the identification papers and documents with which the man parts. In fact, we only learn the protagonist’s name, Niki Jumpei, through the ‘Notice of Disappearance’. Even in the novel, the protagonist is not referred

⁸⁰ William Currie, “Abe Kôbô’s Nightmare World of Sand,” *Approaches to the Modern Japanese Novel*, ed. Kinya Tsuruta and Thomas E. Swann (Tokyo: Sophia University, 1976), 16.

to by name, but simply as *otoko* (“the man”). The identity by which the man is known in the city is treated as something nominal, lacking any real significance. Timothy Iles even makes the observation that the very name ‘Jumpei’ suggests a plainness and blandness of character⁸¹—the Chinese ideograms could mean “obedient and ordinary.”

It is interesting to point out that the man’s water storage apparatus, which he had earlier named ‘Hope’, was originally conceived as a trap for catching crows, a bird “often associated with an unpredictable fate and death.”⁸² For the man, the crow is a potential messenger, a means of sending for help by way of attaching a note to its leg. However, unable to catch even a single crow, communication with the outside world proves impossible. Rather than seeking salvation from without, the man must find it from within. In a way, the discovery of water inside the trap, preceded in the film by the image of crows circling the sandpit, signifies the ‘death’ of his past self. Abe may have hinted at what he regarded as an ideal mode of existence in a passage early in the novel, when the man daydreams of people living in countless ships floating on sand, of “flowing homes, shapeless villages and towns” (25). This utopian vision of a borderless world where people move freely conveys Abe’s desire for the freedom from being fixed. Such a notion is echoed in the film when the man condemns the woman’s sense of place attachment, saying, “It’s like trying to build a house on water, even though a boat would be more convenient. How inflexible! For it to have to be a house.” Yet the woman points out, “You yourself want to go back home, don’t you?” This seems to provoke the man, as he proceeds to empty the contents of his specimen box into the fire, a renunciation of the last attachments to his past, a rejection of his past identity. As Keiko McDonald states, “The

⁸¹ Iles, 44.

⁸² Ehrlich and Santos, 101.

equation of the insects with himself, a social insect, is thus nullified. The gesture indicates his chosen course of action: repudiation of his artificial identity.”⁸³ The man’s metamorphosis is symbolized by a sequence of close-up shots at this critical juncture in the film. A shot of the woman’s hands stringing beads together precipitates the action, beginning with the frustrated man suddenly flinging the beads into the sand and concluding with him offering his emptied specimen box as a container for the beads. A close-up image of beads being sifted from the sand not only serves as another instance of sand resembling water, but also anticipates the discovery of a new self from within the sand. The sequence ends in a close-up shot of the specimens burning in the fire, suggesting ‘cremation’ of the old self.

The strength of Teshigahara’s film is how he is able to capture the protagonist’s inner transformation through perceptible images. This is best demonstrated in the final scene through a noteworthy addition made to the screenplay. After descending the ladder, the man goes to check on his invention and, dipping his hand into the water, stares at his own reflection. As the water swells, we see a distorted image of the man’s face on the agitated surface. Could this be a visual clue, hinting at the valorization of a fluid identity? At one point in the novel, the man discusses sand’s liquid properties: “Even though sand is a solid, it has the properties of a fluid force. ...Sand doesn’t just flow, it is fluidity itself” (53). Therefore, can a human being demonstrate fluidity as well? In a way, the opening montage of sand anticipates the evolution of the protagonist. From an unknown and unidentifiable mineral to immobile grains of sand, Teshigahara concludes the sequence with the depiction of sand flowing like water. Over the course of the narrative,

⁸³ McDonald, 45.

the man likewise transforms from a rigid entity to a fluid matter. Like the sand, he allows himself to slip out of form, shifting with the changing winds, and is able to redeem himself. But he can only do so after changing his attitude, adjusting the way he relates to the world as represented by the sandpit. Rather than attempting to conquer his environment, he makes use of it, extracting meaning from the very substance constituting his existence. The moment of his epiphany is described in the novel as follows: “The change in the sand coincided with a change in himself. From inside the sand, along with the water, he may have found a new self” (124).

As his ‘old self’ is rendered unrecognizable on the undulating, rippling water, the man suddenly notices the distant reflection of a young boy looking down at him from the edge of the hole. The exact significance of this addition to Abe’s original scenario is open to interpretation, but the boy could easily function as a metaphor for the birth of a new self. This is suggested in the image of the man looking at his own reflection in one hole (that of the barrel of water), while simultaneously being watched by the boy from the rim of another hole (the sandpit). In other words, it serves as a ‘mirror-image’, establishing a link between the two figures. Perhaps it suggests the man has been reborn as a villager since the boy, dressed in traditional garb, is identifiable as a member of the village. Alternatively, it could be a visual expression of the man’s new perspective on his situation, no longer seeing himself as ‘trapped’. In the novel, the man’s euphoria at the moment of his discovery of water is described in such a manner: “Even though, still, there was no change in his being at the bottom of the hole, he felt like he had climbed to the top of a tall tower. It was as if the world had turned inside out, projections and hollows having become inverted” (123). Thus the protagonist’s worldview is completely

overturned. This change in perspective is reflected in the transformation of the man's invention (and the sandpit itself) from a trap into a well. In the film, Teshigahara reveals the protagonist's metamorphosis through the image of the man peering into his invention and seeing a 'new self' reflected on the water's surface. In this way, within a single frame and without using any words, Teshigahara cleverly uses the visual dimension of film to crystallize an abstract concept.

Abe and Teshigahara seem to associate fluidity with the dissolution of dichotomies, the breaking down of walls. As Tsuruta Kinya suggests, "Fluidity is the condition of walls being collapsed, of artificial divisions having disappeared."⁸⁴ So how does the message of a fluid conception of identity relate to our situation today? I think both Abe and Teshigahara would have favoured a mode of relations where each person's individuality is nurtured rather than suppressed, where identity is something to be explored freely rather than imposed. As I indicated earlier, the richness of Abe's allegory allows such a message to be universally applicable, and is especially relevant today as we face a globalizing world that is changing at an ever-rapid pace. In discussing the film, Teshigahara adds,

The story could take place in any corner of the world. The sandpit is meant to have an international meaning, not one particular to the Japanese. It symbolizes society itself. You could find such a sandpit in New York or San Francisco, or anywhere in the world. Like society, it is ever shifting and continuously moving. It doesn't rest a moment. It is relentless.⁸⁵

Within each sandpit, personal redemption is possible through self-creation, a notion Dostoevsky likely would have endorsed since he argued that it is man's destiny to continually strive to create:

⁸⁴ Tsuruta, 248.

⁸⁵ Quoted in Mellen, 176.

I agree that man is pre-eminently a creative animal, predestined to strive consciously for an object and to engage in engineering—that is, incessantly and eternally to make new roads, *wherever they may lead*. But the reason why he wants sometimes to go off at a tangent may just be that he is *predestined* to make the road, and perhaps, too, that however stupid the “direct” practical man may be, the thought sometimes will occur to him that the road almost always does lead *somewhere*, and that the destination it leads to is less important than the process of making it, and that the chief thing is to save the well-conducted child from despising engineering, and so giving way to the fatal idleness, which, as we all know, is the mother of all the vices. Man likes to make roads and to create, that is a fact beyond dispute.⁸⁶

Here, the significance of sand as metaphor is once again germane. Over the course of the film, Teshigahara presents sand as a destructive force through the man’s repeated struggles to scale the walls of the pit and the constant threat the sand poses to the woman’s home. However, by the end, the man is able to harness the creative potential of sand in order to find new meaning in his life. Sand can be either destructive or creative depending on one’s perspective. All it takes is a change of perception, a change in your way of thinking. Yet the joy of creation, of creating your own personal road, is precisely in “the process of making it.” Likewise, the search for identity is an ongoing one, as Hisaaki Yamanouchi points out:

Abe seems to say that identity cannot be found anywhere, but consists in a continuous search in the new homeland, which in this case is symbolized by the dunes. Since the dunes never stay stable but move continuously, man, as in the myth of Sisyphus, can never cease in his toil, for then he ceases to exist at all.⁸⁷

⁸⁶ Dostoevsky, 76-77.

⁸⁷ Hisaaki Yamanouchi, *The Search for Authenticity in Modern Japanese Literature* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1978), 157.

CONCLUSION

In all four of Abe and Teshigahara's collaborations, fluidity is enshrined as favoured concept. It can relate to the 'movement' that is a principal feature of cinema and which gives the artistic medium its dynamism and vitality. It can also relate to 'transformation', both in terms of inner subjective reality and the contingencies of the outside world. And, of course, it relates to the theme of identity. Yet fluidity can only be conceived in opposition to the concept of being fixed, thus inevitably forming another binary, the unambiguous demarcation of which Abe and Teshigahara's work supposedly cautions against. This apparent contradiction may stem from the instability, the contradictory nature of language itself. Hence the function of film adaptation as an attempt to communicate, through 'new images', concepts that transcend the linguistic structure which is founded on binary oppositions, the discovery of new concepts which make possible a new awareness of reality. In that sense, Abe and Teshigahara's approach to adaptation, and the theoretical discourse underpinning it, seems to anticipate future developments in literary and cultural theory, namely post-structuralism. As a reaction to structuralism, which argued that reality (or, at least, the experience of reality) is constructed through language, certain theorists, notably Jacques Derrida, proposed that the unconscious dimension of a text should be uncovered through deconstruction, "to make the not-seen accessible to sight."¹ In many ways, Abe and Teshigahara's 'new image' was intended to perform a similar function, to make visible new concepts yet to be uncovered.

¹ Jacques Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, trans. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1976), 163.

The difficulty of reconciling the various factors that impinge on the notion of identity may be partly due to the elusiveness of defining 'identity' as a term. Identity is necessarily a balance between the individual and the social. How we identify ourselves is influenced both by our individual choices and the community (or communities) to which we belong. Through his work, Abe suggested that, in modern society, there exists a power imbalance, and that having the balance tipped too far in favour of the collective is not only undesirable, but can be dangerous and frightening. *Woman in the Dunes* is one of the writer's best illustrations of this concern. Certainly the binary of fixed versus fluid runs the risk of 'essentializing' the two concepts, thereby imposing a clear-cut dichotomy between two aspects of human existence that belies the truth of their complexly interconnected nature. Which is why I believe the image of the man's reflection in the water at the conclusion of Teshigahara's film is perhaps an attempt at communicating this complex interconnectedness, of crystallizing the synthesis of opposing concepts in ways that language cannot. That image, so powerful and so profound, may be the best demonstration of the strengths and capabilities that adaptation offers.

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