

Article

# All That Is Solid Turns into Sand: *Woman in the Dunes* across Page and Screen

Xinyi Zhao 

Department of East Asian Languages and Cultures, Columbia University, New York, NY 10027, USA; xz2468@columbia.edu

**Abstract:** This paper attempts a close study of Abe Kobo's novel *Woman in the Dunes* and its screen adaptation (dir. Teshigahara Hiroshi 1964). Engaging adaptation studies, media studies, and sound studies, this paper moves from the conventional focus on the linear transfer of text from a source to a result, to examine adaptation as a multilevel, multisensory, and multidirectional process of remediation. By mediating documentary cinema and avant-garde tradition, the filmic adaptation, as the paper argues, not only provokes and enhances its literary original, but also illuminates existentialist concerns that gained critical currency in the 1960s. The paper moves on to analyze Takemitsu Toru's score in relation to Teshigahara's surrealist imagery; in doing so, it elucidates the way the film gives the sand a form of human agency alluded to yet not fully realized in Abe's novel. Scrutiny of Abe and Takemitsu's early years in Japan-occupied Manchuria further connects Abe's work to the issue of postcolonial identity while opening *Woman in the Dunes* to more interpretative possibilities as an I-Novel. Through mediating collective history and personal memory, adaptation opens a dialogic intersubjective horizon where questions of identity and affect intersect in the post-war media environment.

**Keywords:** Abe Kobo; adaptation; film sound; I-novel; neo-documentarism; Japanese literature



**Citation:** Zhao, Xinyi. 2022. All That Is Solid Turns into Sand: *Woman in the Dunes* across Page and Screen. *Humanities* 11: 144. <https://doi.org/10.3390/h11060144>

Received: 29 September 2022

Accepted: 14 November 2022

Published: 17 November 2022

**Publisher's Note:** MDPI stays neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.



**Copyright:** © 2022 by the author. Licensee MDPI, Basel, Switzerland. This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the Creative Commons Attribution (CC BY) license (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/>).

## 1. Introduction

This paper is a close study of Abe Kobo's existentialist masterpiece *Woman in the Dunes* (*Suna no Onna*, hereafter *Woman*) and its screen adaptation (dir. Teshigahara Hiroshi 1964). Internationally acclaimed and stylistically distinct, both versions have become objects of intense scholarly fascination, yet discussions on the process of adaptation are curiously scarce. This is due in no small part to the disciplinary boundaries between literary studies and cinema studies, which may stem from the desire for both forms to achieve "purity": literature as the guardian of the word and film as the guardian of the image.

For this particular instance of adaptation, one might well say that the fact that Abe Kōbō wrote the script himself and the "fidelity" of the adaptation leave less room for discussion about the dialectical tension between the adaptation and the original. Judging a film in terms of fidelity, however, falls back on the deeply entrenched assumption that casts cinematic adaptations as culturally inferior to the literary original for its relative immaturity as an art form. Sticking to notions of "purity" and "fidelity", I want to argue, should lead to more porous and flexible understandings of both literature and cinema, as well as a renewed conception of adaptation not merely as the transfer and transformation of form and contents but as *event* and *encounter*, which involves "not only all sorts of supplementary texts but also the dialogical response of the reader/spectator" (Stam 2005, p. 27).

My point of departure here is the fact that the film *Woman*, as it were, is as much a screen adaptation as it is a collaboration between three auteurs. Yoshiyuki Tomoda (2012) places the collaboration (*kyodō*) between Abe and Teshigahara within a larger "debate around text and image" (*gengo to eizō wo meguru ronsō*), imposing the dialectics between literature and cinema schematically onto the relationship between Abe and Teshigahara.

Tomoda's research rightly indicates that their relationship ought not to be understood as "help" (in the sense that Teshigahara "helps" Abe transfer his text onto the screen); rather, the two auteurs each constitute their own subject (*shutai*) of collaboration. However, the Abe–Teshigahara collaboration cannot be reduced to the relationship between novel/screenplay (text) and film (sound and image) because, as I will show, the boundary between the literary and the cinematic is significantly blurred in the process of adaptation. Whereas Abe's involvement with cinema is mostly thought to be his close collaboration with Teshigahara in the 1960s, his early writings from the 1950s already displayed a keen interest in cinema, not to mention his participation in the Documentary Arts Group (*Kiroku Geijutsu no Kai*). In the course of filming *Woman*, both Abe and Takemitsu were not hesitant to advise Teshigahara on the look of the film *Woman*. Such a close collaboration significantly complicates the notion of authorial singularity; it is, moreover, overly simplistic to say that Abe wrote the screenplays, Teshigahara provided the imagery, and Takemitsu composed the musical scores because each of the three provoked and enhanced the work of the others.

Beginning with a brief revisit of adaptation theory, I explicate why the screen adaptation of *Woman* invites a reconsideration of the relationship between the source novel and screen adaptation. Next, I situate the film in contemporaneous cinematic discourses in Japan and demonstrate the way in which the film mediates documentary and avant-garde cinema to register the existentialist concern imbedded in the novel. I then move on to analyze Takemitsu Toru's score in relation to Teshigahara's surrealist imagery and elucidate the way in which the film imbues the sand with a form of human agency alluded to yet not fully realized in Abe's novel. This part is followed by scrutiny of Abe and Takemitsu's early years in Japan-occupied Manchuria, which further connects Abe's work to the issue of postcolonial identity while opening *Woman* to more interpretative possibilities as an I-novel.<sup>1</sup> As I will examine in the following pages, the process of transferring *Woman in the Dunes* from page to screen particularly illuminates a new methodology of adaptation studies that favors hybridity over purity, becoming over being. By placing adaptation in a wider framework of intertextuality and intermediality, I seek to open both versions towards hitherto underexplored interpretive arenas.

## 2. Adaptation Theory Revisited

It should be noted that the proliferation of heterogeneous conceptions of intertextuality and heterogeneous ways of using the term have led to no less misunderstandings than insights, hence the importance of clarification. Rooted in Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of dialogism, the idea of intertextuality was later expanded by the post-structuralist Julia Kristeva into a concept deducing that every text functions in an intertextual relation to other works. Kristeva's approach regards every text as an accumulation of an infinite number of preceding texts (pretexts). Building upon Bakhtin and Kristeva, Gérard Genette coined the more inclusive term "transtextuality" to encompass "all that which puts one text in relation, whether manifest or secret, with other texts" (Genette 1992, pp. 83–84). Extrapolating the notion of transtextuality for film and for adaptation, Robert Stam argues for reconceptualizing adaptation as "the infinite and open-ended possibilities generated by all the discursive practices which 'reach' the text not only through recognizable citations but also through a subtle process of indirect textual relays" (Stam 2005, p. 27). The idea of transtextuality not only deconstructs the rigid boundaries between original and copy, but also sheds light on the many directions—back, forward, and sideways—that the adaptation points to.

With hindsight, one could argue that the film *Woman* points backward to Abe's early years in the desert wilderness of Japanese-occupied Manchuria, an experience that also informed such works as *At the Guidepost at the End of the Road* (*Owarishi michi no shirube ni*, 1948) and *Beasts Head for Home* (*Kemono-tachi wa kokyō wo mezasu*, 1957). The existentialist concerns registered in *Woman* point further back to Nietzsche's and Heidegger's philosophies that influenced Abe in his early years.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the film points forward to his later works such as *The Box Man* (*Hako-otoko*, 1970) and *The Face of Another* (*Tanin no kao*,

1966), another collaboration among Teshigahara, Abe, and Takemitsu heavily invested in the exploration of identity. It points sideways to Abe's multimedia experiments across theater, photography, and radio.<sup>3</sup> Given the scope of this paper, I will not be able to exhaust every possibility of transtextual reading mentioned above. What I am suggesting here is that reading transtextually can help us move from the conventional focus on the linear transfer of text from a source to a result, to interrogate film adaptation as a multilevel, multisensory, and multidirectional process.

It is commonly believed that literature and cinema are fundamentally different in their modes of address, one is linguistic while the other is visual. However, the final pages of Abe's novel visually present the Missing Person Report and Verdict as clearly separate and boxed "document pages", drawing attention to the visual functionality that the novel itself possesses and blurring the boundaries between seeing and reading. Apart from the multiplicities mentioned above, I want to stress the *processive* nature of film adaptation. The film *Woman* is, to borrow Linda Hutcheon's formulation: "a derivation that is not derivative—a work that is second without being secondary. It is its own palimpsestic thing" (Hutcheon 2014, p. 9). Abe's novel, for instance, starts with an announcement that "a man is missing" and the remainder of the story is told retroactively in the third-person vantage point. In Abe's screenplay for the film, however, he aligns the viewer's perspective with the protagonist via voice-over narration in the opening sequence, thereby inducing a strong sense of the present. The issue of narratology aside, in the Missing Person Report attached at the end of the novel, the year of issue is Showa 37 (1962), the publication year of the novel, while the film version altered the year to Showa 39 (1964). The temporal gap between the two versions revealed by the Report on the one hand introduced a sense of historical indexicality to the two versions and, on the other hand, prompted the viewer/reader to reflect on the passing of time essential to her/his own lived experience.

For the reader/viewer, if recognition and remembrance are part of the pleasure of experiencing an adaptation, so too is variation. More crucially, subtle changes as such open up, to film historians, interesting avenues to interrogate a film adaptation as an always unfinished process rather than as a closed project. The relation between the source novel and screen adaptation is, in this light, less similar to that between the original and copy, than that of a symbiosis evolving in historical time, constantly open to new interpretations and different modes of affective investment.

### 3. Between Avant-Gardism and Neo-Documentarism

As noted, Abe already showed ardent passion in cinema prior to his collaboration with Teshigahara. As one of the founding members of the aforementioned Documentary Art Group, Abe was a persistent advocate for the "documentariness" (*kirokusei*) of the filmic medium, which he sees as a testing ground for capturing the contingency and chance encounters in daily life. Two years after the launch of Documentary Art Group, he published an epochal essay "In Support of the New Documentarism" in the July issue of the literary journal *Thoughts* (*Shisō*). He notably coined the term "neo-documentarism" (*shin-kiroku shugi*): "There is no documentary without fiction. It is only within the realm of fiction that documentary becomes possible. Specifically, fiction is a general method (*ippanteki hōhō*) that makes arts possible in the way hypothesis does science, while documentary can be seen as a special method (*tokushu na hōhō*) that casts light on the part of reality yet to be grasped by our conscious mind (*ishikika sarete inai bubun*)" (qtd. in Tomoda 2012, p. 146). Unlike surrealism, which focuses only on interiority and the unconscious, Abe's notion of neo-documentarism, echoed by a number of New Wave directors including Matsumoto Toshio, aims to capture the dialectical relationship between inner and outer worlds. For Abe, arguing for the documentariness of cinema is therefore not to set documentary and fiction against each other, but rather to synthesize both forms in order to engage with the reality that cinema should not only see but also *see through*.

The novel *Woman*, though not a documentary, is exemplary of his dual focus on subjectivity and objectivity. Much of the tension in the story revolves around the Niki's

engagement and his shifting relationship with the external environment that he inhabits. The story ends with the Niki's "discovery of landscape", for better or for worse. In Abe's words: "The change in the sand corresponded to a change in himself, perhaps, along with the water in the sand, he found a new self" (*mō hitori no jijun wo hiroidashi te kita no kamoshire nakatta* (Abe 1962, p. 214).<sup>4</sup> Alternatively monolithic and destructive, fluid and nurturing, sand, the locus of Niki's captivity and confinement, is also a central metaphor for the changing reality in which the hero must grip himself and his surroundings, find meanings for his existence and discover who he is.

Mindful of this, Teshigahara adeptly mobilizes various cinematic techniques to render the sand at once realist, physical and tangible, and artistic, imaginative and metaphorical. Normally, landscapes in cinema provide a requisite backdrop for the unfolding narrative, thus subordinated to characters and actions in the foreground. However, in Teshigahara's film, sand strikingly assumes a position on a par with human agents, carrying with it performative and allegorical charges. The opening sequence of *Woman* is of many instances where Teshigahara translates Abe's vision of neo-documentarism to the screen. The film opens with a shot of a huge crystal thing that seems to be in a motionless state. The camera slowly pulls back until revealing that the huge crystal is in fact a sand grain in motion. With the help of a microscopic camera, the sequence registers the existentialist anxiety faced by the protagonist in urban society: the camera makes the sand grain stand out as an individual briefly, yet when it appears as a group, it is just one featureless and insignificant existence among many.

While this sequence can be easily read as a visual critique on the relationship between individual and society, the notion of neo-documentarism adds to the interpretation by bringing the tension between arts and science into play, a tension already encapsulated in Abe's novel. A fiction notwithstanding, it contains numerous "documentary moments", such as "scientific" descriptions of the sand in a "Gaussian distribution curve with a true mean of 1/8 mm", and is interspersed with loan words and terminologies (Abe 1962, p. 14). The microscopic images in the film, I argue, are not unlike "documentary moments" that at once display and interrogate the technologized visuality brought by science. Simultaneously displaying disorienting abstraction and microscopic vision, the microscopic close-up evokes two sharply distinct traditions of cinema: the avant-garde and the science film. Born roughly in the 1930s under the umbrella term "culture film" (*bunka eiga*), the science film burgeoned again in the 1950s as a subgenre of documentary cinema with output from Iwanami Productions, Tokyo Cinema, and other studios. The use of micro-cinematography in the opening sequence markedly recalls the microscopic visions in science films such as *Snow Crystals* (Yuki no kesshō, dir. Yoshino Keiji), *The Birth of Frogs* (Kaeru no hassei, dir. Yoshida Rokurō, 1955), and *Microworld: Tracing the Mycobacterium Tuberculosis* (*Mikuro no sekai: Kekkakukin wo ōtte*, dir. Okada Sōzō, 1958). The science film impression is enhanced by a series of extreme close-up shots of insects; all are subject to the "scientific gaze" of the protagonist Niki, an amateur entomologist coming from Tokyo. Niki takes photos of and collects insects—his object of scientific research—while his acts of inspection and photo-taking reflexively remind the viewer of her/his own viewing position. Following Abe's conception of neo-documentarism, Teshigahara neatly captures the dialectics between the objective material reality associated with the documentary form (science film) and the internal mental reality that avant-garde cinema is particularly suited to represent.

A filmmaker interested in exploring the world anew, Teshigahara would, throughout the film, visualize the microscopic world of a sand grain or an insect, so that the tiny objects fill up the whole screen and transform themselves into something hardly identifiable. Mary Ann Doane, invoking Walter Benjamin's discussion of the "aura" premised upon distance, argues that the defining desire of the masses in an image-saturated society is a desire for closeness; that is, in effect, "a desire for the close-up" (Doane 2003, p. 92). While fulfilling the desire for proximity, these objects "larger than life" also shock the viewer. In a similar spirit, if contemporary image-making media play with public desire for a closeness, they simultaneously unsettle their consumers as they confront reality in

extreme proximity and unusual scale. Psychically engaging the viewer while commenting on the proliferation of image-making media in the 1960s, the microscopic close-up not only addresses Abe's neo-documentarist concern with both objective and subjective realities, but also self-reflexively critiques contemporary media that simultaneously entertain and traumatize, inform and disorient.

#### 4. Sand Given Life through Sound

Since the advent of film sound, cinema has been, in Michel Chion's words, "voco- and verbocentric." Takemitsu's scores, however, powerfully subvert the sonic hierarchy that privileges the verbal over the non-verbal and the human voice over other sounds. In *Woman*, Takemitsu's use of non-diegetic sound is minimalist—only about 15 min of the lengthy film is scored. The soundtrack with prolonged silence nevertheless allows the film to achieve greater intensity at certain moments than would a soundtrack infused with music. "Timing is the most crucial element in film music," Takemitsu noted, "where to place the music, where to end it, how long or how short it should be" (qtd. in Westby 2017). In fact, even unscored sequences of the film are rich with the ambient sounds: sizzles or hisses stemming from the ceaseless movement of the omnipresent, all-enveloping sand, surrounding the viewer indirectly by surrounding the characters in the film.

In *Woman*, Takemitsu's scores are almost always heard during moments of heightened tension between Niki and the sand, or between Niki, the woman, and the sand (opening sequence, sand collapsing, intercourse, escape, etc.). The sound design features a string ensemble consisting of portamentos that resemble the sliding sand itself. Interspersed with unexpected electronic distortions that often coincide with the rhythm of montage, Takemitsu's score works effectively with the image to enhance the film's surrealist and expressive qualities. The tone of the music is ominous and mesmeric, arousing mixed feelings of fear and anticipation without ever building to any kind of catharsis. Moreover, Takemitsu avoided pedal tones in the score—no security anywhere. The lack of security in the soundtrack provides a fitting soundscape for Abe's narrative. The feeling of insecurity, as it were, strikes Niki before he even arrives in the dunes, as he "was seized from time to time by hallucinations in which he himself began to move with the flow" (*jibun jishin ga ryūdō shihajimeteiru yōna sakkaku*) (Abe 1962, pp. 13–14).<sup>5</sup>

Sparse but repetitive, the sound design endows the film with a strong and cohesive mood. One of the key examples here is the montage sequence of Niki's first night spent in the sandpit. Starting with a close-up of his watch, the sequence stages a number of superimpositions that bridge the transition between shots: close-ups of Niki in contemplation, the contours of the woman's body in sleep, and long static shots of the natural pattern of the deserted landscape. Takemitsu distorts the string ensemble precisely at the moment when another layer of sand pattern superimposes on the current one to form a grid pattern, generating an unsettling dissonance that compliments the visual motif of entrapment. The series of images finally dissolve into the woman's naked body, accompanied by another distortion in the soundtrack. The unpredictability of distortions perfectly registers the unpredictability of the sand dunes, constituting an unsettling and otherworldly environment. Sharp distortions aside, the minor tonality, slow tempo, and dark instrumentation all accentuate the unsettling quality of Takemitsu's score. The music not only bridges the spatially discrete images in the montage sequence, but also effectively works with the surrealist imagery to render both the sand and the woman's body menacing, foreshadowing Niki's doomed entrapment in the sandpit.

Another memorable use of sound comes with Niki and the woman's sexual intercourse. The soundtrack is initially dominated by the woman's gasp and moan as Niki cleans her body, before Takemitsu's score fades in and coexists with the sounds of the couple. The noticeable but gradual transition from diegetic to non-diegetic sound is followed by the image that shows their bodies collapsing to the sand-covered floor. As the sand once again covers the couple's bodies, their sounds eventually vanish and give way to the eerie music that has been, through repetition, closely bound up to the sand. The camera captures

their movements—hands grasping at a back, lips kissing, face buried in the chest—in shots alternately closeup and so extremely closeup as to highlight the sand on their gritty bodies. Sensually charged close-ups include sand particles sticking to sweaty skin pores, necks, fingers, backs, and hair. The non-diegetic replaces the diegetic in the soundtrack, paralleled to the way the sand comes to the foreground even during such a moment of intimacy.

While creating the film, Teshigahara frequently commented that the film had three main characters, not two: the man, the woman, and the sand. Decades after completing the film, he repeated: “The sand has its own identity . . . Additionally, without Toru’s help, we never would have been able to realize this fully” (qtd. in Grilli 2007) Indeed, the sex scene in Abe’s novel does not foreground the intrusive existence of the sand. As I have analyzed, Takemitsu’s score not only provides a soundscape for Abe’s narrative, bringing unexpected psychological depth to his words, but also gives the sand a form of agency far more powerful than the agency of the humans in its domain.

### 5. Colonial Afterlife: *Woman in the Dunes* as I-Novel

Abe, like Takemitsu, spent his formative years in Japanese-occupied Manchuria, where he spent countless hours wandering through the semi-desert land, the vastness and barrenness of which find no geographic equivalence in Japan. It is not hard to argue that Abe’s Manchuria experience had a profound impact on his writings. I suggest that a close scrutiny of Abe’s early years in Japan-occupied Manchuria further extends the source novel and the film to a broader lineage of imperialism. Being able to trace back his early days in Manchuria, I argue, is key to understanding the central motif of sand and the cultural concerns shared by many other repatriated writers and artists of the era.

In “Discovery of Landscape”, Abe writes about the sand dune behind his middle school in Manchuria. With the annual spring floods, the sand dune moved toward his school by one meter every year. When Abe was in middle school, he examined the sand dune’s movement as part of science class. “I somehow liked the view of the dune. I was secretly expecting that the dune would continue moving and overtake the school someday” (Abe 1973).<sup>6</sup> Another reference to the sand appears in “Thoughts on the Sand”, in which Abe recounts his complicated love–hate relationship with the harsh climate in Manchuria. “On the days of sandstorm, the sky turned dark brown, and the sand almost suffocated me. No matter how many times I rubbed my eyes, the sand persistently came in. However, along with frustration I also felt cheerful expectation . . . because sandstorms are heralds of the spring that follows the long winter of this continent” (Abe 1965) (Translation mine). Likewise, in *Beasts Head for Home*, an adventure fiction about the Manchuria-raised Japanese youth Kuki Kyuzo, who journeys through the harsh wasteland of Manchuria to reach an ancestral homeland he has never seen, the sand dune in Manchuria moves northward by twenty or thirty centimeters toward the protagonist’s mother’s grave. “Before long it would overtake his mother’s grave, swallowing it up”. He continues, “After several hundred years, in the sandy plains created after the sand dune had swept through, what would someone think if they came across those crumbled, yellow bones?” (Abe 2017, pp. 18–19).

These are amongst a much longer list of Abe’s works that register a mixed feeling of awe, fear, nostalgia, and aspiration for sand. For Abe, the significance of sand is manifold: an object of scientific studies, a source of entertainment during boring school days, a herald of the spring, an irresistible force that sweeps through the land and engulfs everything in its way, and the list stretches further. The all-encompassing, ever-encroaching, and ever-shifting sand in Manchuria not only provided a key motif for Abe’s writing, but also prompted him to reflect on the uncertainty of the environment and human existence within it, as I have touched upon earlier in this paper. Niki, alternatively fascinated with, overwhelmed by, and eventually finding inspiration from the sand, self-reflexively encapsulates the complexity of Abe’s experience as a youth and adolescent in Manchuria. Situating *Woman* within the intertextual web of Abe’s writings from the late 1940s through the 1960s reveals unexpected interpretive possibilities: though not normally associated with the I-novel form, *Woman* allows an examination within that interpretive framework.

After all, the I-novel itself, according to Tomi Suzuki's seminal study, is not "an inherent literary genre with identifiable textual features", but rather "a mode of reading" by which "any text can become an I-novel" if the reader expects and believes in "the single identity of the protagonist, the narrator, and the author of the given text" (Suzuki 1996, p. 6).

The retroactive interpretation of *Woman* as I-novel enables a productive understanding of Abe's uneasy relationship with such ideas as "homeland" and "Japaneseness" and the condition of possibility for the later Abe–Teshigahara–Takemitsu alliance. Following Japan's surrender in 1945, Abe was not immediately repatriated but was left behind in Manchuria, a land that suddenly descended into anarchy; Japanese was no longer the official language and the privileged colonizer suddenly became an "other" to be excluded. His sense of alienation from society did not stop with his repatriation to Japan. "I remained in Manchuria for a year and a half after the war and witnessed the complete destruction of social order there", Abe noted in a conversation with literary and art critic Hariu Ichiro, "That made me lose all trust in anything stable" (Abe 1974, pp. 158–59) (Translation mine). Abe's feeling of alienation, displacement, and disorientation found a perfect embodiment in the fictional character Niki, a modern, civilized subject thrown into a universe of absurdity and primitiveness, where the rules of modern society no longer apply. He is no longer Niki Junpei but a nameless and absolute individual driven by the imperative of survival. Niki's schizophrenia, I argue, exposes Abe's own divided existential reality, in which the consciousness of being "Manchuria-raised Japanese" collided with the identity of the "pure Japanese" from mainland. In hindsight, one may argue that the adventure story *Beasts Head for Home* could also be read retrospectively as an I-novel about Abe's memories of Manchuria and his painstaking process of returning home amid the chaos of defeat. For the protagonist Kyuzo, Manchuria's wilderness contrasts starkly with the idealized, civilized image of Japan, while the latter is ultimately something he imagines through textbooks. Kyuzo constantly imagines and defines Japan and "Japaneseness" in his process of heading home, only to realize the impossibility of returning to his true home because he does not have one. Reading *Beasts Head for Home* within the framework of an I-novel allows us to see how Abe articulates his own convoluted identity and his rootlessness through Kyuzo's impossible return. Moreover, Abe's unusual experience as a Japanese outsider in Japanese culture granted him an uncommon viewpoint from which to observe not only the existentialist strains of modern Japan, but also the universal entrapment of modern subjects around the globe.

Having spent his childhood in Manchuria and been conscripted into military service as a teenager, Takemitsu similarly had an ambivalent relationship with Japanese culture. By his own admission, Takemitsu's early aversion to traditional Japanese music stems from the years when that music was used as a propagandistic tool of the militarist regime and came, in his mind, to represent the war. Almost exclusively focused on Western musical styles and genres in the early phase of his career, Takemitsu did not begin to explore traditional Japanese music until early 1960s, when a performance of *Bunraku* puppet theatre caused him to suddenly start to recognize and appreciate his Japanese identity (Deguchi 2012, p. 50). Hence, his scores for *Woman*, composed at a transformative stage of his career, offered pivotal insights into the way in which he negotiated between the two very different musical traditions.

Crucially, Abe and Takemitsu's impetus to reach beyond the limitations of cultural and geographic borders accorded strongly with Teshigahara, who commented in an interview that "You could find such a sandpit in New York or San Francisco, or anywhere in the world" (Mellen 1975, p. 176). Their shared concern over human conditions within modernity allowed for a broad audience identification in the 1960s, which paved the way for the film version's international recognition at the 1964 Cannes Film Festival. After *Pitfall* (*Otoshiana*, 1962) and *Woman*, Teshigahara went on to adapt two of Abe's novels: *The Face of Another* and *The Man Without a Map* (*Moetsukita chizu*, 1968). It was from the acclamations that these films are "modern", "atypically Japanese", and "international" in international arthouse cinema that Teshigahara established his fame as one of the most globally recognized Japanese

filmmakers. Adaptation, through mediating collective history and personal memory, opens a dialogic intersubjective horizon where identity and belongingness are at once affirmed and challenged in an increasingly borderless world of images and texts in motion and flux.

## 6. Conclusions

Cinema's status, both in its creative process and mode of reception, as a syncretic art consisting of visual, verbal, and aural registers, caused it to be the perfect medium for Teshigahara, Abe, and Takemitsu to bring their artistic expertise into cross-pollination. Quite apart from cinema's intermediality, the vibrant atmosphere of avant-garde art in the 1960s, where radical experiments were taking place in, amongst other things, literature, painting, music, dance, and photography, provides a rich ground for them to engage in a dynamic, interactive, and generative process of transtextuality.

To return to my starting point, much of traditional adaptation discourse engages the notion of a film's "fidelity" to a prior text, whereby films are praised for having caught the "essence" of the novel or condemned for having missed it. Examining *Woman* across page and screen, however, lays bare the constraints of such an approach. As I have argued in this paper, the instance of the Abe–Teshigahara–Takemitsu collaboration allows us to conceive of novel-to-film adaptation—habitually understood in terms of a one-way transfer from the original to the adaptation—afew as a multidirectional a process of becoming. The ensemble of cinematic, literary, and historical discourses acknowledges, amplifies, and, most importantly, transforms the source text in the transfer of creative energy and multiplication of registers. As a metamorphosing, fluid, and manifold medium, the sand not only serves as a linchpin in Abe's novel, but also provides an apt metaphor for the polysemy and transnational, cross-medial fluidity of the story.

**Funding:** This research received no external funding.

**Institutional Review Board Statement:** Not applicable.

**Informed Consent Statement:** Not applicable.

**Conflicts of Interest:** The author declares no conflict of interest.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> The I-novel (*shishōsetsu*, *watakushi shōsetsu*) is a literary genre in Japanese literature that focused on the author's personal experience. Events take place in an I-novel usually correspond to the author's personal life. There are also instances where the author uses third-person pronouns or a named main character to present the stories as the experience of others, but the protagonist functions as a stand-in for the author himself. See also Suzuki (1996).
- <sup>2</sup> For more discussion on existentialist writers' influence on Abe, see Tanaka (2012).
- <sup>3</sup> The radio drama version of *Woman* was released just a year before the film.
- <sup>4</sup> For English text, I am using E. Dale Saunders (1986)'s translation. See Abe (1986, p. 236).
- <sup>5</sup> I am again referring to Saunders' English translation. See Abe (1986, p. 15).
- <sup>6</sup> Translation mine.

## References

- Abe, Kōbō. 1962. *Suna no onna*. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- Abe, Kōbō. 1965. *Sabaku no shisō*. Tokyo: Kōdansha.
- Abe, Kōbō. 1973. *Abe Kobo zensakuhin*. Tokyo: Shinchōsha, vol. 15.
- Abe, Kōbō. 1974. *Kaitai to sōgō*. In *Hassō no shūhen Abe Kōbō taidanshu*. Tokyo: Shinchōsha.
- Abe, Kōbō. 1986. *Woman in the Dunes*. Translated by E. Dale Saunders. North Clarendon: Charles E. Tuttle.
- Abe, Kōbō. 2017. *Beasts Head for Home: A Novel*. Translated by Richard F. Calichman. New York: Columbia University Press.
- Deguchi, Tomoko. 2012. Procedures of Becoming in Toru Takemitsu's 'Piano Distance'. *Indiana Theory Review* 30: 45–73.
- Doane, Mary Ann. 2003. The Close-Up: Scale and Detail in the Cinema. *Differences: A Journal of Feminist Cultural Studies* 14: 89–111. [\[CrossRef\]](#)
- Genette, Gérard. 1992. *The Architext: An Introduction*. Berkeley: University of California Press.

- Grilli, Peter. 2007. The Spectral Landscape of Teshigahara, Abe, and Takemitsu. *The Criterion Collection*, July 10. Available online: <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/607-the-spectral-landscape-of-teshigahara-abe-and-takemitsu> (accessed on 22 September 2022).
- Hutcheon, Linda. 2014. *Theory of Adaptation*. London: Routledge.
- Mellen, Joan. 1975. *Voices from the Japanese Cinema*. New York: Liveright.
- Stam, Robert. 2005. Introduction: The Theory and Practice of Adaptation. In *Literature and Film: A Guide to the Theory and Practice of Film Adaptation*. Edited by Robert Stam and Alessandra Raengo. Malden: Blackwell.
- Suzuki, Tomi. 1996. *Narrating the Self: Fictions of Japanese Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Tanaka, Hiroyuki. 2012. *Abe Kōbō Bungaku no Kenkyū*. Osaka: Izumi Shoin.
- Tomoda, Yoshiyuki. 2012. *Sengo zen'ei eiga to Bungaku: Abe Kōbō x Teshigahara Hiroshi*. Kyōto-shi: Jinbun Shoin.
- Westby, Alan. 2017. The Music of Tōru Takemitsu and Japanese New Wave Cinema. *Los Angeles Public Library*, May 26. Available online: <https://www.lapl.org/collections-resources/blogs/lapl/music-toru-takemitsu-and-japanese-new-wave-cinema> (accessed on 22 September 2022).