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Seicho's Vessel of Sand

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The representation of montage in Matsumoto Seicho's *Vessel of Sand*

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Although Matsumoto Seicho's novels, especially *Vessel of Sand* and *Points and Lines* have been translated into many languages, there is any obvious lack of literary analysis of his work from North American and European scholars. This oversight is peculiar considering that there has been, in recent years, a strong interest in Japanese detective novels, especially from North American researchers¹. To date, the article in English with the most impact focuses on only one short story, "Painting on a Black Canvas". Written by Michael S. Molasky², it looks at Seicho's work in the context of the American occupation of Japan and focuses on the writer's racist depiction of African-American soldiers. Although Molasky mentions the importance of Seicho for Japanese literature and admits that, even with racist epithets, he was probably the first to highlight the plight of African-American soldiers for a Japanese audience; the general impression coming out of the article is that Seicho had a

¹ Paradoxically, in Japan, there has not been the same interest for detective novels in general, but there is a lot of research on Matsumoto Seicho, thanks in part to the funding provided by the "Matsumoto Seicho Society" and the numerous activities and exhibits of the "Matsumoto Seicho Memorial Museum". Furthermore, Seicho's presence is still felt today in the Japanese cultural landscape because of the numerous movie and television adaptations. It is interesting to note that there are no manga or video game adaptations of his work, even though the material seems more than appropriate. This is due in part to the various copyright holders' desire to limit the scope of media support for Seicho's story in order to keep the quality and the historical dimension of his work. To be fair, Seicho was and still is criticized by many Japanese intellectuals and scholars for what appears to be a lack of style, racist or misogynistic statements, and his fictionalization of true events through the prism of popular culture. The credit he had acquired through the Akutagawa prize at the beginning of his literary career (he became a recognized fiction writer fairly late, at 41 years old) vanished quickly due to his publication of many popular novels. The most striking example of this is Yukio Mishima's refusal to include Seicho's complete works in the prestigious collection published by the *Chuo Koron*.

² Michael S. Molasky, *The American Occupation of Japan and Okinawa* (Routledge : London, 1999), pp.82-93.

racial bias and was condescending towards groups he saw as less civilized than Japanese society at least in this short story. This had undoubtedly a negative impact on his reception, especially in university circles. In fact, there has not been one comprehensive study of his work in English. Even now, although he achieved success in Japan after the war as a writer of mystery with a social dimension, he is perceived by North American and European critics as being less avant-garde and less able to express a critique of modernity than, for example, his most famous predecessor, Edogawa Ranpo, who was very active already in the Taisho period³. For this reason the reception of these two writers is very different in North America. In recent years, there has been a strong emphasis on writers who are perceived as able to criticize as well as overcome the ideological and aesthetic impacts of modernity in Japan⁴. Even though they would usually be associated with popular literature, these writers, from the perspective of cultural studies, are often perceived as essential to our understanding of what is considered to be our postmodern world and are used to articulate a critique of media⁵. Even though it might be more subdued, Seicho's writings possess, it seems, such a dimension. His conception of society is not as conservative as some people want to believe. Even if he does not seem as avant-garde as Ranpo, he brings some elements that could allow us to rethink many of our conceptions on the idea of overcoming modernity through

³ Except for some conceptions of montage and music that will be discussed in other sections below, this article aims to analyze Seicho based on North American and Japanese sources. Still, we can easily argue that the situation in Europe is fairly similar. Seicho is mostly ignored by critics, even in discussions of postwar Japanese popular literature. For example, Cecile Sakai in her *Histoire de la littérature populaire japonaise : Fait et perspectives (1900-1980)* barely talks about Seicho and does not seem to believe in his potential to bring something new to the field of popular literature.

⁴ The most famous work to date on this topic is *Overcome by Modernity : History Culture, and Community in Interwar Japan* by Harry D. Harootunian. Although not a full discussion of the detective stories, the book still addresses this literary genre and its social impact, mostly in regards to Ranpo's novels.

⁵ When comparing Ranpo's and Seicho's English translations a few differences appear. First, university professors translate Ranpo's novels, short stories, and essays, while non-specialists usually translate Seicho's novels or short stories (his essays have not yet been released.) Thus, on the one hand, Ranpo's translations are sometimes published in critical editions with notes and analysis reflecting the result of research on his work and Japanese modernity. For example, University of Hawai'i Press has released a translation of one of Ranpo's most famous stories, *Strange Tale of Panorama Island*. On the other hand, Seicho's translations are not contextualized by any scholarly footnotes and, in some cases, they are abridged translations distributed by publishing houses specializing in detective novels aimed at mass-market appeal. The disinterest by English speaking scholars for Seicho's work has a direct impact on the quality of the work offered to the readers as well as its reception.

literature.

In this context, it is important to reassess Seicho's work based on recent research on Japanese mysteries as a genre, as well as from a more global perspective looking at the epistemological implications of the birth and evolution of the mystery novel in parallel with the evolution of other literary genres and forms of media that have followed a similar trajectory, which was influenced in part by social and technological changes beginning at the end of the XIXth century. In order to do this, we will focus on one novel, *Vessel of Sand*. We have chosen this novel because it offers a unique perspective on the evolution of the mystery as a genre in Japan in relation to other genres and media⁶. Although praised by critics (except for one aspect of the novel that we will discuss in later sections, mainly the fictional device called *choonpa*) and adapted for film and television, the radical nature of this novel has never been explored. In fact, the numerous adaptations have tried to hide the novelty of this work by relying on stereotypes associated with their own media. In order to fully understand how *Vessel of Sand* is representative of Seicho's conception of the mystery novel and how it should relate to society and other media, we will analyze the text from three different but complementary perspectives: first, we will consider the novel as representative of the detective/mystery genre, then we will look at how the novel relates to film or more precisely to a certain filmic essence, or *cinematic*, through the idea of montage, finally, we will briefly see how it situates itself within the debate of the representation of the body that was omnipresent after World War II through the concept of "organs without bodies" as it is understood by Žižek as based on a reading of Gilles Deleuze. Through this analysis, we will show that Seicho's novel is not simply a mystery novel with a social dimension, but a self-reflexive text thinking through the problems of representations and discourse based on a generic paradigm. The multiplicity of points of view and the apparent polyphony are not only stylistic devices to make the motive of the killer

⁶ In this paper, the term *mystery novel* will be used to refer to the genre as a whole, without historical difference. *Detective novels* will refer to novels written mostly before the Second World War and *novels of detection* will be used when writing about novels written in Japan after the WWII. Some scholars, like Sari Kawana argue that there is no difference between detective novels and novels of detection, but we believe that the historical context and the desire by many Japanese writers to highlight the evolution of the genre before and after WWII need to be taken into account.

more believable or to appeal for social reforms (what is usually considered to be the foundation of the genre called “the mystery with a social dimension”), they are the *raison d'être* of the novel. *Vessel of Sand* is not simply a text addressing a specific generic convention in a dialectical manner, it is a text about texts, about how discourses are constructed and then interact together for better or for worse.

Vessel of Sand : plot summary

But, before delving into a concrete analysis of the novel, we will first give a brief summary of the plot. Although an English translation exists, we will only refer to the Japanese original with, when necessary, our translation. This is due to the fact that the current translation is abridged and is filled with disputable choice of words that do not convey the Japanese original, beginning with the title, *Inspector Imanishi Investigates*⁷. Thus, even though it lacks convenience, the Japanese text will be used as a reference.

Vessel of Sand starts with the investigation of the murder of an unknown man found on a train track. He is disfigured and he does not have any identification papers on him. Before his death, he was seen in a snack bar nearby talking to a younger man. The only clues the police can garner from the staff and the patrons are that both men, especially the older one, seem to be speaking in a dialect of the northern region of Japan and that they mention the word *Kameda*. In short, spoken words are the only clues available to the police. The issue of regional dialect is also an important part of the story. The investigation is led by Imanishi, a family man in his forties. Contrary to other detectives in literature, he is not a genius with a multiplicity of talents. He lives a quiet life with his wife and son, he enjoys going for drinks at local bars (*izakaya*). Besides his tenacity and a certain form of stoicism associated to a form of work ethic, the only aspect of his personality that stands out is his passion for writing *haiku*, a traditional form of short poem. More importantly, he almost never reads novels⁸. His investigation will take him all over Japan in

⁷ Although other Western languages decided to keep the rather poetic title *Vessel of Sand*, the English version opted for a more prosaic choice. (see the bibliography)

⁸ The narration directly states Imanishi's indifference towards this art form. 簡単な本棚には警察関係の図書があるだけだった。小説などあまり読まない男である。(下、27ページ。)

order to find the meaning of the word *Kameda*, the name of the victim as well as the identity of the killer. Compared with other detective novels who focus almost exclusively on the real clues that make the plot move forward, the narration in *Vessel of Sand* describes in detail Imanishi following clues that lead nowhere, spends many pages describing investigative work that will not have a direct impact on the outcome of the story. His investigation seems to reach a dead-end more than once, though he prevails and finds the culprit. At the end of the novel, Imanishi explains that the killer is a young musician (28 years old) by the name of Eiryō Waga (his real name is actually Hideo Motoura), respected in some circles for being able to adapt a new genre of music born in France, *musique concrète*, to the Japanese taste. He belongs to a group of intellectuals named *nouveau groupe*⁹ and is engaged to the daughter of a powerful politician. Besides the first murder, he killed others to cover his tracks using a machine producing high wave frequency (*choonnpa*¹⁰). He killed these people to hide his humble origins, his real name, and especially the fact that he was the son of a leper. Despite the fact that he was not a carrier of the disease, he felt this was a social stigma that would hinder his ascension to power and wealth in the Japanese society of the time, which was, in fact, not without prejudice. To borrow an expression from Pierre Bourdieu, his need for “symbolic capital” overcame his ethical beliefs. Even if he was not essentially evil, the social climate forced him to act in a certain way. The novel, which is more

⁹ 「ヌーボー・グループって何だい？」今西は知らなかった。「新しき群れ」とでも言うのでしょうかね、進化的な若い文化人ばかりで会を組織しているので（中略）「いろんな人が集まっているんです。いわば進歩的な意見を持った若い世代の集まりと言った方がいいでしょうか。作曲家もいれば、学者もいるし、小説家、劇作家、音楽家、映画関係者、ジャーナリスト、詩人、いろいろですよ」（上、101-102ページ）

The description of the group itself is vague enough to give birth to a wide range of speculations about the actual model Seicho used. But, it is probably an amalgam of personalities representing a general trend in Japanese society at the time. It also can be related to Seicho's position on culture and its role in society as it is expressed in his essay on the place of mystery novels in literature *The Black Notebook* (not translated, 『随筆黒い手帳』)

¹⁰ The choice of a fictional invention, belonging to the science fiction genre, for a murder weapon has been widely criticized by Japanese readers. It is the main reason why the novel was not well-received by some critics. It is completely absent from the film adaptations, probably because it was considered to be unnecessary and confusing for the viewers. The difficulty of representing the device on the screen is also an issue here. We will show that on the contrary, the device is an integral aspect of the plot and is needed to understand the structure of the novel.

than a thousand pages long in Japanese, has many subplots, making it an ambitious representation of different social strata in the tradition of the naturalist novel. Although we will not summarize these subplots, their existence is important to understand the general structure of the novel; they indirectly carry some meaning. Even though they sometimes are not connected together at the level of narrative and do not provide concrete means for the plot to evolve, these subplots have many aspects in common, mainly a desire to represent travel by train and different form of artistic representations, both associated to high and low culture (movies, theater, music, literature, etc.). This is even more important because *Vessel of Sand* is a work that aims to articulate how different media and modern discourse can interact within the space of a mystery novel in order to give a new point of view on modernity. This is due in part to the origin of the mystery novel, which can be traced to the end of the XIXth century, coincidentally at a time when other forms of discourse present in the novel, such as the cinema and science fiction, started to take shape.

Mystery novels as a new form of discourse

It is well-known that the detective story started to appear at the end of the XIXth century, partly thanks to Edgar Allen Poe's ground-breaking *The Murders in the Rue Morgue* published in 1841, which is recognized as the first story belonging to that genre. The birth of a new genre does not only mark the beginning of a new type of story, it also signifies a new way to structure and represent the real, a reality in constant evolution. As Tzvetan Todorov has shown, it has an organic dimension that allows it to transform and integrate itself based on its environment¹¹. We can go as far as the say that it is a new discourse synthesizing a multiplicity of preexisting or emerging discourses. When it takes form, it is like a work of art : it reflects as well as creates a new conception of the world we live in. Actually, the detective story that was the first declination of this specific genre was followed by the detective novel (and in Japan the detective novel, or *tanteishōsetsu* was followed by the novel of detection, or *suirishōsetsu*). Both the detective story and the detective novel

¹¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *The Fantastic : A Structural Approach to a Literary Genre* (Ithaca : Cornell University Press, 1975), 190p.

have in common a desire to reconstruct the real, although with different levels of intensity, to anticipate and borrow a word from the deleuzian terminology. Actually, they both are telling us that the modern world is scattered and needs to be reunified and that the modern subject is fragmented and needs to be reconstructed. This affects both the content of the story and how it should be told, especially the narration. Obviously, this crisis is not the purview of detective genre. It is also present in other modern novels not associated with popular culture or paraliterature, although both aesthetics have a different solutions to the problems exposed above. To borrow from Slavoj Zizek :

[...] both the modern novel and the detective story are centered around the same formal problem—the *impossibility of telling a story in a linear, consistent way*, of rendering the “realistic” continuity of events. [...] There is a certain self-reflexive strain in the detective novel : it is a story of the detective’s effort to tell the story, i.e., to reconstitute what “really happened” around and before the murder, and the novel is finished not when we get the answer to “Whodunit” but when the detective is finally able to tell the “real story” in the form of a linear narrative¹².

Even though the distinction between detective story and detective novel made by Zizek in order to show the correlation between the rise of the modern novel and the detective novel in the 1920s can be discussed, he really articulates one of the central problems of the genre as well as its main source of appeal. Without a doubt, one of the pleasures of the detective stories and detective novels is seeing the detective making sense of things and recreating a linear narrative. This is the case in *Vessel of Sand* as well. Even though we know the identity of the killer, we wait for Inspector Imanishi to tell us the story, to put together all the pieces of the puzzle. The reader has seen these pieces, but he does not exactly know how they fit together, he wants to see the big picture. This corresponds to the pages 480 to 492 in the second book. During this long monologue introduced by the phrase 「次に今西榮

¹² Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry : An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1991), p.47. (Zizek’s italics)

太郎が立ちあがった。彼は自分で整理した資料を見ながら話をはじめた（中略）
（480ページ） and ending with Imanishi's last comment : これから皆さんの質問
を受けましてお答えいたしますが、そのご判断によって、和賀英良に対する逮
捕状の請求をお願いしたいと思います。（492ページ）。

This relates directly to the idea of montage that we will explain in the next section. It is thus important to emphasize the relationship between cinema and the genre of the detective story from their beginnings.

The detective story started to appear a few decades before cinema¹³, but its popularity coincides with the rise of the new medium. At its origin, the grammar of cinema was quite simple, the first films consisting of only one shot without any forms of montage. Cinema was focusing on immediacy and there existed no stylistic device to signify the return to the past (now the overused flashback). For this reason, detective stories and films seemed to be far apart, the former being impossible to be adapted by the later. As Dean Defino writes :

One of the problems filmmakers have traditionally had adapting detective fiction is that it tends to focus on the intellectual activity of logical deduction: mental and verbal activities, which little lend themselves to primarily visual medium. This problem posed a particular difficulty in the silent era, where verbosity meant a lot of tedious reading for the audience. In effect, silent detective films were compelled to circumvent the primary feature of the form. The long explication of Sherlock Holmes gave way to action-adventure heroics and romance. When in 1929 then-rookie director Howard Hawks' contract with Fox studios obliged him to make a silent version of E. C. Bentley's classic whodunit, *Trent's Last Case*, his solution was to handle the text as a farce.

At the center of the problem is the detective story's backward glance. Rather than showing what happens, it explains what happened. Here the cinematic flashback would be put to good use, as well as dramatic re-creations and

¹³ Although most textbooks, depending on their national preference, usually date the "birth" of cinema to 1894 (Edison's kinetoscope) or 1895 (the Lumière brothers' *cinématographe*) it is hard to date cinema as a concept. There many precursors to traditional cinema as well as a great number of theoretical essays anticipating the invention. The idea of recording the world visually in order to understand it was a very important idea in the XIXth century (the work of Étienne-Jules Marey).

pantomimes. But while these techniques made it possible to describe events of the past, they were less successful explaining them. Cinema tends toward representation rather than exposition. Film flashbacks could easily *show* (or at least speculate) by linking scenes and creating a unity of action, but we do not read detective stories merely to see what happens. We read them to see how and why the detective makes the links that establish the unity of action¹⁴.

It seems that the need for new and exciting stories (the lack of scenario is a problem plaguing the movie industry even today) precipitated the film adaptation of detective stories, although not in a faithful manner. To a certain extent, the relationship to memory and how it was represented (or not) seems different in both forms of expression, but there was still something that united the detective stories and cinema from the beginning : the obsession with the visual. Both of them derive their power from the desire to show, to dissect with the eye, or magnify with something even more accurate than the normal human eye (the camera, a genius detective), the reality that surrounds us. The reality portrayed can be presented in two seemingly contradictory, but actually complementary ways : first, as an objective reality, the result of empirical observations, based on a scientific methodology, second, as an illusion, a criticism of the eye as a source of true knowledge. There are many examples of both of these points of view existing in parallel or even coexisting. For example, the history of cinema is both based on the desire to learn through the camera what the human eye cannot perceive (the work of Étienne-Jules Marey cited above), as well as an obsession to trick the eye like magicians, especially popular in the XIXth and the XXth century (the famous short films by the Lumière brothers, *Démolition d'un mûr*, and most of the movies by George Méliès). In the same manner, detective stories often portray a detective being able to perceive clues left behind by the perpetrator and deduce logically how these clues fit together (Sherlock Holmes would be the most obvious example), but some writers of detective stories enjoy immersing readers in a maze of visual illusions. In Japan, Edogawa Ranpo, known for integrating optical devices and mirrors in many of his stories, is

¹⁴ Dean Defino, "Killing Owen Taylor : Cinema, Detective Stories, and the Past", *Journal of Narrative Theory*, volume 10, number 3, Fall 2000, pp. 319-320 (313-331)

probably the best example of a writer who celebrates as well as denigrates the power of the visual (see for example *Strange Tale of Panorama Island*). Also, his stories are usually based on what he calls “tricks”, referring again to the world of illusionists.

As cinema grows in social importance and its grammar becomes more complicated, including for example, flashbacks and montage, the comparison with the detective story or the detective novel, as well as their later avatars, are even more obvious. Looking at a novel like *Vessel of Sand* as an effort to represent within the space of a novel both the conception of the visual deriving from the detective story as well as from the movie tradition, becomes a necessary step to understanding the novel.

This is even more important that the novel is influenced by the idea of movie making and montage on two levels : at the narrative (in the form of a theme) and the metanarrative level (a way to structure the story). The narrative is filled with direct references to the social act of watching movies and going to the movie theater. This is not surprising considering that movies achieved a peak in popularity around the writing of *Vessel of Sand*. However, the emphasis is important enough to categorize movies as an important theme of the whole book. Incidentally, the word movie (映画) including all of its compound forms like the word movie theater (映画館) appear in Japanese 16 times in the first book and 146 times in the second book (the latter number can be explained by an important lead found by Imanashi relating to a movie theater). Furthermore, the novel is concerned with understanding the meaning behind the word *Kameda* with the goal of giving it a stable origin, a stable sign, a body that can be seen (kanji, at the beginning of the novel *Kameda* is written in katakana in order to show its undetermined origin). Lastly, there are some cultural practices, like the writing of haiku poetry that can be compared to movie montage (see the section below).

At the metanarrative level, the novel itself is structured like a montage. Episodes with detective Imanashi and his family and co-workers are written in parallel to episodes related to the *nouveau groupe*. Finally, the chapter appropriately titled “Transmission” (放送) focuses on a long monologue by Imanishi explaining to his colleagues (and the reader) the reasons and the methods behind the killing. This monologue is not without reminding the reader of a montage of the clues gathered by Imanashi and other detectives throughout their investigation.

We just gave an overview of the relationship between detective stories and cinema as a medium, as well as how it can be seen in *Vessel of Sand*. We will now focus on only one aspect of the film representation, montage, as it appears in Seicho.

Montage in *Vessel of Sand*

As we have mentioned in the previous section, *Vessel of Sand* is filled with references to movies and going to the movie theater. Although not a movie by itself, the key to solving the murders can be found in a local movie theater, in Ise. In other words, the novel is an integral part of the culture of the “frenzy of the visible¹⁵”. But, in order to render visible a certain reality, movies as well as mystery novels need to rely on a technique or narrative device to give coherence to something which otherwise would be unrelated of events. In the case of movies the technique of editing, or in French *montage*, is the most obvious way of giving coherence and sometimes add meaning to a series of actions. Actually, the word *montage* in English is usually used to signify a practice that seems close, but is in fact very different from editing¹⁶. On the one hand, editing usually refers to seamless editing : a practice that consists in connecting images in such a way that the spectator does not realize that he or she is seeing the product of an artificial construction. The spectator has to forget she is watching a movie, her experience can be associated (even though it is a problematic concept in cinema studies) with looking through a window. On the other hand, montage is not supposed to be seamless. It is used to create new meaning by associating two images that, for narrative or ideological reasons, normally would not coexist. Through the contrast a new meaning is created. The spectator is not passive; she has to work in order to create meaning in her mind¹⁷. Although seamless editing and montage often coexist in films (in this case

¹⁵ This expression is borrowed from a famous book by Linda Williams on the history of pornography. Here, we use the same expression, but we give it a broader meaning. Linda Williams, *Hard Core : Power, Pleasure, and the “Frenzy of the Visible”* (Berkeley : University of California Press, 1989), 380p.

¹⁶ The following argument is based on the entry for editing in Susan Hayward, *Cinema Studies : The Key Concepts* (London : Routledge, 1996), pp.109-113.

¹⁷ It can be argued that the spectator has to create in her mind the relations between different images even in seamless editing, but the effort is less and less conscious. We could even say that the process, mirroring dreaming, is almost unconscious.

montage is only used as an effect in order to put emphasis on a specific aspect of the film), some films are structured around the idea of montage. This is what we will now explain.

A lot of things have been written by movie critics about montage. Often considered to be the essence of films, or cinematic, in other words what makes film a radically new media or form of expression, montage is associated not only with linking images together in order to bring coherence, but as a way to create meaning by associating two or more images, as well as images and sound, which seem to have no relationship to each other, thus shocking the viewer by making him reconsider his presuppositions about the order of things. The main theorist of montage Sergei Eisenstein wrote : “In my opinion, however, montage is an idea that arises from the collision of independent shots — shots even opposite to one another : the “dramatic” principle¹⁸.

As Eisenstein emphasizes, here the word dramatic refers to an aesthetic principle not to an element of the story. It is not used to only surprise the viewer, it also gives him a new perspective on society, new ideas that he might not have considered without the aesthetic impact of montage. Obviously this refers to Eisenstein political views, but this does not mean that it cannot be applied to other authors with different ideologies. Actually, some scholars have even used montage to understand the workings of a society at a precise point in history. A study of particular interest to us is Miriam Silverberg’s book on Japanese mass culture in the 1920s and 1930s. In it she discusses montage as a way to understand Japanese integration of foreign modes of discourse, especially modernity : “I presuppose that montage in print culture and on the street generated an energy among the Japanese consumer-subjects of the modern years. My use of the term, which was listed in a leading Japanese dictionary in 1934 as *montaaju* — where it was associated with the terms *assemble* and *combine* — is formal, theoretical, and political¹⁹”. She conceptualizes montage as a world view connected to cultural consumption that allows the coexistence of a multiplicity of ideas and forms of expressions. In a sense, it is

¹⁸ Sergei Eisenstein, *Essays in Film Theory : Film Form*, trans. by Jay Leyda, (San Diego : Harcourt, 1949), p.49.

¹⁹ Miriam Silverberg, *Erotic Grotesque Nonsense: The Mass Culture of Japanese Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), p.31.

close to our conception of polyphony in *Vessel of Sand*, but Seicho is not as intercultural (especially considering what we have explained in the introduction) as the writers and thinkers she analyzes. In fact her analysis is more social than literary and does not focus on the structure of specific novels. Nevertheless, it is important to acknowledge that the aesthetic of the 1920s and 1930s had a direct influence on Seicho, and that the idea of montage was present in Japanese society, an idea close to Eisenstein's conception.

Eisenstein has an ideological view of montage, but it still relates in part to what Seicho is putting in place in his novel as a way of thinking about discourse and its relation to the text²⁰. The correspondences are even easier to make because of the orientalist tendencies of Eisenstein to see Japanese culture as a culture of montage based mostly on his (partial) understanding of Chinese characters (*kanji*) and the kabuki theater which unites sight and sound through a system of overlap²¹. Even though we cannot be but critical towards this conception of Japanese culture, it can still be used as a model to understand what is at stake in Seicho's novel, especially since there is an opposition between traditional Japanese culture and modern Western culture within the novel as well as a reflection on the possible connections between sight and sound through issues of speaking and writing (the word *Kameda*). This is clear when we look at the difference between Imanishi's aesthetic taste and the *nouveau groupe*'s ideology. Imanishi is a practitioner of haiku, a traditional form of poetry, possessing a popular appeal since its origins compare to other fixed forms like tanka²². Haiku is an excellent example of *montage* as described by Eisenstein because it unites in the first two verses two images that usually do not go together. This new meaning is reinforced by the third verse that confirms the association often through a seasonal word (*kigo*). Obviously the diversity of haiku production presents many exceptions to this pattern, but it is impossible to deny that it is part of Seicho's structure of cultural form of representations

²⁰ We might add that Seicho was influenced by the proletarian literature movements and was shocked by the death of so many, some of them friends, at the hand of the police through the war years.

²¹ See "The Unexpected" and "The Cinematographic Principle and the Ideogram", p.18-44.

²² Imanishi is not the only one to practice haiku in the novel. Other secondary characters not related to the *nouveau groupe*, are interested in this art form, reinforcing the impression of a mass cultural phenomenon. See

in the novel. It is an extension of Imanishi's work as a detective trying to find coherence among the difference narratives he has been given. On the other end of the spectrum, some members of the *nouveau groupe* rejects traditional form of representation in order to offer another take on montage completely outside of the usual narrative model. Even though Imanishi often says he does not understand the meaning of the aesthetic endeavor advocated by the *nouveau group*, and even if the members of the *nouveau group* would not be interested in Imanishi's poetry, they still can be considered two sides of the same coin, since they both struggle to bring coherence to what they perceived to be a reality *a priori* without a narrative structure. The only difference is the result : Imanishi, especially through his work as a detective is able to bring coherence to a multiplicity of narratives in order to find the truth leading the criminal's life experience as a source of motive for the crime. The *nouveau groupe's* aesthetic of montage is mostly portrayed as an ideology that simply denies the reality of a coherent narrative or, in the worst case scenario, as a way to obfuscate the truth (the best example of this would be the *musique concrète* composed by Waga). It is defined within the story as a form of montage. When Imanashi is looking for an explanation of *musique concrète* he finds this in the encyclopedia : 「音楽たると否とを問わず、存在する限りのあらゆる音響を素材とし、それらにさまざまな（電氣的・機会的）加工を施すなどして、テープ・モンダージュの方法により構成した音楽。（中略）『具体的な内容』とか『描写』などという事柄を意味しているのではないことに注意しなければならない²³」。 Obviously, the word montage is very important in this explanation. According to the explanation given in the novel, this new form of music is based on a montage of sounds, often recorded where they originated. These sounds are then mixed in order to create some kind of musical “objet”. The adjective “concrète” meaning concrete in French relates to this idea of finding the sound in its natural state without having to create it through musical grammar in order to recreate it with musical instruments. French theorists of this new kind of music, especially Pierre Schaefer, intended it to be more in touch with the essence of what music is supposed to be. But in Seicho's universe, it gives the opposite impression. It is presented as a kind of music devoid of content. It does not try to represent anything. This is the

²³ 下,p.18

most appropriate music for Waga, always trying to hide his past and his true identity. Compare with Imanashi's effort to connect real impressions (his haiku) and facts (his investigation) in order to make sense of reality, Waga's life as a musician is closer to a work of obfuscation²⁴. Furthermore, *musique concrète* is usually theorized as a form of music made partially with acousmatique sound. This aspect of sound is very important in music as well as cinema. It deals with how our body and organs relate to the world. As Zizek explains :

The corresponding status of the voice as object was developed by Michel Chion apropos of the notion of *la voix acousmatique*, the voice without bearer, which cannot be attributed to any subject and thus hovers in some indefinite interspace. This voice is implacable precisely because it cannot be properly placed, being part neither of the diegetic "reality" nor of the sound accompaniment (commentary, musical score), but belonging, rather, to that mysterious domain designated by Lacan as "between two deaths"²⁵.

This device of a voice without a body is often used in cinema to frighten the spectator, like in Hitchcock's *Psycho*. In *Seicho*, it reinforces the impression of disconnection between Waga and his own identity. This is also related to the famous fictional device called *choonpa* used by Waga to kill people who know too much about his past.

²⁴ From this perspective, the most famous movie adaptation of *Vessel of Sand* (the title for the movie in English is *Castle of Sand*) by Nomura Yoshitaro (1974) is giving a completely different perspective on the story. Waga is a romantic pianist who uses music to express his childhood trauma. Far from Seicho's conception of *musique concrète*, the main theme, titled *Destiny* (『宿命』) is used, to amplify in the melodramatic style very prevalent in cinema, the ordeal lived by Waga and his father. Waga is absolutely not trying to hide his past through his music. Also, there is not a direct conception of montage associated with his compositions. But, the ending of the movie can be considered a long montage showing in flashback the ordeal of the father and son almost without using any spoken words. The visual aspect of the movie is very strong in the last 30 minutes. Although, from the perspective of montage, the melodramatic music must be considered redundant.

²⁵ Slavoj Zizek, *Looking Awry : An Introduction to Jacques Lacan through Popular Culture* (Cambridge, MA : MIT Press, 1991), p.126

浜中氏は顔に微笑をつづけている。「それはですな、つまり、音ですよ。」
「音？」「はい、ちょっと解説的に言いますとね。私どもは毎日いろいろな音の中に生活しているわけですね」浜中氏はやさしい言葉を捜すようにして言った。「その音も音楽みたいな音楽みたいな音楽もあり、そうではない雑音もあります。その中で、特に不愉快な感じを持つ音というのがありますね。たとえば、鋸の立てるキイキイする音とか、ガラスに爪を立てたときの歯の浮くような音などです。(松本清張『砂の器 下』1961年 p.399-400)

そこで和賀は宮田の口を封じるため、電子音楽と超音波とを併用して心臓麻痺を起こさせ、殺人をやったのです。このとき、宮田は私と銀座で会う約束があり、劇団の帰りに和賀の家を訪ねたのですが、おそらく、数時間もの間、あの楕円形のスタジオに閉じこめられて、奇怪な電子音楽によって精神を惑乱させられ、さらに気分の悪くなったところへ、超音波を断続的に当てられたと思います。(p.658)

It is portrayed as something that attacks directly the organs, mostly the heart, without touching the body. It creates a body without functioning organs, faced with the inevitability of death. It makes sense that Imanishi is trying to fight this disruptive force trying to make organs without bodies and bodies without organs. In order to fight this mostly invisible enemy, he relies on his ability to find clues in the infinite possibility of everyday life. He can select and find ideas, even the ones that come from pure coincidence, in order to organize the truth in a comprehensive narrative through montage. For this reason, he might be considered the paragon of detectives. He can differentiate good and bad clues, he never gets lost in a “forest of symbols”, and he never gets caught in a hermeneutic circle. He often stumbles upon clues that are visual and auditory in nature and mixes them together in order to get to the truth. For example, we could say that he is the opposite of the protagonist in Witold Gombrowicz’s novel *Cosmos*, who finds patterns where there is only pure coincidence (we could thus interpret *Cosmos* as the ultimate parody of the mystery novel). This appears clearly, when we realize that the people surrounding Imanashi seem to make an effort to always have conversations about things that are on his mind. It is as if people from different social strata, with different occupations all come together in a sort of polyphony in order to defeat acousmatique sound creating

bodies without organs and organs without bodies. For example, Imanishi often gets clues from listening to conversations between his wife and her sister who do not know anything about his work.

その話で、ふと頭をかすめた記憶があった。ずいぶん前のことである。あれは女房と川口の妹が、横で映画の話をしているときだった。今西はその会話をまだ憶えている。(映画も、本モノよりも予告編がおもしろいわよ) 妻の声である。(そうよ。だって予告編はあとから客を呼ぶために、おもしろいところだけを編集しているんですもの) 妹の返事だった。その声が耳に残っている。そのときは、今西の目は新聞の活字を拾い、耳は会話に奪われていた。今、彼が思い出しているのは、あのとき気乗りしないで見ていた新聞のことだった。事実、それは興味をそそらない科学記事だった。突然、今西の記憶に浮き上がったのも久保田教授の話聞いてからだった。(松本清張『砂の器 下』1961年p.439-440)

In this excerpt he remembers a conversation between his wife and her sister (which also gave him a clue about previews at the beginning of films as a possible reason for the first victim to visit the same movie theater in Ise) that helps him remember an article in the newspaper. Thus, sight, sound and coincidence unite in order to give him clues about the murders. This kind of polyphony and this idea of montage in order to create meaning and some form of the truth are somewhat close to Eisenstein and can give us ground to say that the social realism associated with Seicho's mystery novels is not limited to the content of the plot, especially the emphasis on the suffering of outcasts. It is also a narrative and stylistic device embodying not only his conception of society, but also his vision of the art of the novel and its artistic role in Japanese culture.

Conclusion

Matsumoto Seicho is a writer struggling with issues related to modernity, Western influence and new media. Besides showing the plight of ostracized individuals, the conclusion of the novel seems to give a rather conservative take on the conception of the body and the place of people in Japanese society, especially compared with

Edogawa Ranpo. Nevertheless, the structure of the novel, related to montage, offers a new form of representation within the structure of Japanese mystery novel that give a new definition of the relation between the society and mystery novels that is close to some revolutionary ideas expressed by Eisenstein. Through a better understanding of Seicho's conception of the novel, the place of the body, and the conception of modernity, it would be interesting to reassess his portrayal of women, especially in the following three novels : 『わるいやつら』, 『けものみち』 and 『黒革の手帳』.

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