

Film style and narration in *Rashomon*

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Abstract

This article analyses the use of film style in *Rashomon* (Kurosawa Akira, 1950) to determine whether the different accounts of the rape and murder provided by the bandit, the wife, the husband and the woodcutter are formally distinct by comparing shot length data and using multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to look for relationships between shot scale, camera movement, camera angle and the use of point-of-view (POV) shots, reverse-angle (RA) cuts and axial cuts. The results show that the four accounts of the rape and the murder in *Rashomon* differ not only in their content but also in the way they are narrated. The editing pace varies so that although the action of the film is repeated the presentation of events to the viewer is different each time. Different types of shot are used to create the narrative perspectives of the bandit, the wife and the husband that marks them out as either active or passive narrators reflecting their level of narrative agency within the film, while the woodcutter's account exhibits both active and passive aspects to create an ambiguous mode of narration. *Rashomon* is a deliberately and precisely constructed artwork in which form and content work together to create an epistemological puzzle for the viewer.

Keywords: Kurosawa Akira, *Rashomon*, narration, film style, statistical analysis, multiple correspondence analysis

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Under the ruins of the Rashomon a woodcutter and a priest tell a commoner of a puzzling case in which a woman was raped in the forest, her samurai-warrior husband killed, and a bandit arrested for the crime. They recount four different versions of these crimes told by the bandit, the wife and the husband (via a spiritual medium), and of the woodcutter himself as an unseen witness to events. Each version of events differs from the others in several key respects: the bandit claims that he killed the husband in a sword fight after the wife demanded the two duel to save her from dishonour, a tale seemingly backed up by the woodcutter who also describes a fight to the death at the request of the wife. The wife confesses to murdering her husband with a dagger after he spurned her following the rape, while the husband's account concludes with his ritual suicide after the departure of the bandit and the wife.

Since the film's release critics have been fascinated by the irreconcilable narratives of Kurosawa Akira's *Rashomon* (1950) and have sought to define the meaning of a film that permits no privileged interpretation. Surveys of contemporary reactions by American and European critics by Smith (2002) and Van Es (2002) emphasize the film's themes of selfishness, the nature of truth, and the construction of social reality, often presenting *Rashomon* to western audiences as an 'Oriental' enigma. Academic criticism has focussed on the irreconcilability of the four narratives and the motives that drive the narrators. The film has been understood as a statement on phenomenology that affords the viewer an experience of the fact that nothing has a definite nature and that illusion is the way things are (Linden 1973); a conundrum that strikes at the heart of our perception of human reality (Castle 2003); and as a 'vast distorting mirror or, better, a collection of prisms that reflect and refract reality. ... the world is an illusion, you yourself make reality, but this reality undoes you if you submit to being limited by what you have made' (Richie 1996: 76). The source of the distortion in the different narratives is attributed to the egotism that drives the participants to present the version of events that portrays themselves in the best possible light, and though none can be said to be lying each shapes the facts to fit their character and situation. Van Es draws these elements together, describing the film as 'multi-perspectivism with a moral edge':

The film offers an interpretative labyrinth by showing us seven different stories from six perspectives. On crucial points the stories are in conflict. This leads to an unsolvable epistemological problem: we do not know what exactly happened in the woods and who is responsible for what. In this sea of ambiguity people are thrown back upon themselves. The two core themes of the film are the social construction of reality and egoism (2002: 117).

However, *Rashomon* does not lead us to despair of the world. Yoshimoto (2000: 183-84) interprets the film from a humanistic perspective by noting the source of the social chaos of the film's setting is the egotism that motivates each narrator to tell the version of events that presents them in the best light, but which may be overcome by the capacity for human compassion that leads the woodcutter to care for the foundling discovered in the film's final scene.

Rashomon's view of human memory, perspective and narrative has been extraordinarily influential, and the 'Rashomon effect' is a well-established psychological phenomenon of interest routinely invoked as an explanation by anthropologists, sociologists and legal researchers for differences in personal perspectives of a single event (see, e.g., Heider 1988). This effect has even been noted in statistical science when several models offer a multitude of descriptions of a data set with about the same minimum error rates (Breiman 2001).

Much less attention has been devoted to the functions of style in *Rashomon* and its role in narration. Yoshimoto (2000: 185) writes that what makes *Rashomon* a special film is 'first and foremost its formal experiment, particularly its audio-visual form and narration. The focus of the film is how the story is presented as much as what it is about'. However, there have been no attempts to discover if the four accounts of the rape and the murder are stylistically distinctive. In part this is because style is considered by some critics to be of no consequence to the film's central premise about the nature of truth and reality, if it can be said to be of note at all. Prince argues there is little to be discovered by looking at form in *Rashomon* because it has no relevance to the central problem of the film:

The ambiguity within the film – the question of reliability of the various stories – is psychological in nature, issuing from the characters and the reasons they have for lying. It is not an ambiguity of form, located in the visual and aural organization of the film. As Kurosawa said, the paradoxes of the film are those of the human heart. They are not those of the image itself (1999: 131).

Similarly, Kovács (2007: 252) argues that in *Rashomon* 'narration is considered problematic not because of the problematic nature of narration but because of an extreme existential situation where everybody lies'; and that the relativism of the film is moral in nature and not something proper to art or narration. Some critics do not find much to admire in the style of *Rashomon*. Japanese critic Tadashi Iijima thought the film to be a failure because of 'its insufficient plan for visualizing the style of the original stories' (quoted in Richie 1996: 80), while George Barbarow stated baldly that 'what interests the director in this picture is evidently the employment of whatever good idea he happens to think of, and these improvisations are in without much regard for the entire pattern of the film. Indeed, the picture's pattern is merely fortuitous' (1952: 421). Barbarow denies the film is a masterpiece because a masterpiece 'is not confused and confusing, as *Rashomon* is'.

A second factor is that when discussing film style in *Rashomon* in more positive terms critics have subsumed variations in style between the different parts of the film under a larger artistic scheme that maintains an aesthetic principle of formal unity: the idea of 'threeness'. Tyler places *Rashomon* in a tradition of multi-perspectivism in modern art, concluding the film's aesthetic unity

lies in the fact that however different are the imaginations of the four witnesses, whatever harsh vibrations their mutual contradictions set up, the general design (as the film-makers have molded it) remains and dominates the work's final aspect of great beauty and great truth (1987: 158).

Linden (1973) describes *Rashomon* as Kurosawa's attempt to 'exhaust' the triangle, with three different styles used for the three different parts of the film (a 'conventional style with many cuts and close-ups' at the Rashomon, a 'sedate compositional' style for the court scenes, and the use of a 'fluid impressionistic montage' in the forest sequences), along with three different types of sound (Western music, Japanese music' natural sounds). Yoshimoto (2000: 185–88) also identifies a formal unity and coherence to the film based around the number three as a structural element (three locations, three principal characters in each location, the three days between the trial and the gate scenes, three characters in the gate's sign); and contrasting the vertical compositions of the gate scenes and the horizontality of the trial sequences, while the scenes in the forest bring these two planes together with the verticality of the trees set against the horizontal movement of the camera. Richie also praises the film for achieving a formal unity despite being made up of 'various parts, all of

which work admirably together' to produce 'a kind of rhapsodic impressionism which from time to time carries the story and creates the atmosphere' and which is fully realized in the woodcutter's walk through the forest (1996: 77). He goes on to discuss the use of contrasting shots, held for equal amounts of time, and of single close-ups to emphasize the triangular nature of the story, while also observing that Kurosawa had probably never moved the camera more than he does in *Rashomon*. The tendency to privilege formal unity over formal variation as a measure of the quality of an artwork is common to discussion of aesthetics in general and film style in particular, but it ill serves our understanding of a film like *Rashomon* where the irreducibility of difference lies at the core of the work.

In this article I analyse film style in *Rashomon* to determine if the different versions of events presented to the viewer are formally distinct by comparing shot length data and using multiple correspondence analysis (MCA) to look for relationships between shot scale, camera movement, camera angle and the use of point-of-view shots, reverse-angle cuts, and axial cuts. Quantitative studies of literature have shown such methods to be effective in distinguishing between different narrative voices within and between texts by examining a large number of factors simultaneously (see, e.g., Tabata 1995; Stewart 2003; Hoover 2003), but this will be the first time such methods have been applied to the cinema. The next section describes the variables used in the study and the statistical analyses employed; and in the third section I discuss the editing structure of *Rashomon*, the relationships between and functions of the different aspects of film style, and how style creates the perspectives of the four narrators.

Methods

The version of *Rashomon* used in this study is that distributed on DVD by Optimum Releasing (catalogue number: OPTD1131).

Variables

I collected data for one continuous variable (shot duration) and four categorical variables of film style (shot scale, camera movement, camera angle and shot type) each with several modalities. The duration of each shot was recorded in seconds, and, as a PAL DVD source is used, I applied a correction factor of 1.0416 to the raw data. The twelve shots of the *Rashomon* under the opening titles are not included.

I collected data on a range of categorical variables describing the properties of shots in *Rashomon*. Scale of shot describes the distance of the viewer to the framed material, and I use seven shot scales based on the relative position to the subject, which is typically the human body (see Thompson and Bowen 2009: 12–20): big close-up (BCU), close-up (CU), medium close-up (MCU), medium shot (MS), medium long shot (MLS), long shot (LS) and very long shot (VLS). Camera angle describes the vertical position of the camera relative to the framed material, with shots classed as either a LOW angle with the camera placed below the subject looking up, NEUTRAL looking straight-on into a scene irrespective of camera height, or a HIGH angle with the camera placed above the subject looking down onto a scene. *Rashomon* uses several different types of camera movement but since the low frequency of some movements may affect the statistical analysis I assign shots to one of four broader categories: shots in which the camera does not move but the lens is rotated (RO) in the horizontal and/or vertical planes (pan, tilt, pan-and-tilt, etc); mobile shots (MO) in which the camera itself moves (tracking or dolly shots, etc); hybrid shots (HY) such as track-and-pans in which the camera both moves and the lens RO; and static shots (ST), in which there is no camera movement. Three shot types are included in the study. Point-of-view (POV) refers to shots framed from the position of one of the characters such that

viewer is able to see what he or she sees. Shots not framed from a character's position in a scene are classed as not point-of-view (X.POV). Reverse angle (RA) shots are photographed from the opposite direction as the preceding shot, typically as part of a shot/reverse shot pattern or POV shots. Shots that do not meet this definition are classed as not reverse-angle shots (X.RA). Finally shots are classified as either being framed along or very close to the axis of the lens (AXIAL) of the previous shot or not (X.AXIAL).

Not all aspects of style in *Rashomon* are amenable to this type of analysis. Mise-en-scène is consistent across the film and does not vary from narrative to narrative, and while performances may differ between tellings (e.g. Mifune Toshiro's portrayal of the bandit in the first and last narratives) they show no contrast at smaller scales (such as scene-by-scene or shot-by-shot). Consequently, these aspects of film style cannot meaningfully be described by a set of nominal variables (though it may be possible to do so for other films) and so they do not form part of the analysis presented here.

Statistical analyses

Editing contributes to the experience of pace and rhythm in the cinema by controlling the rate at which the viewer's attention is directed, with changes in shot duration associated with transitions between narrative sections, localized events of high dramatic import, and the emotional tone and intensity of sequences (Dorai and Venkatesh 2001; Hanjalic and Xu 2005). (Motion magnitude and sound energy also contribute to the viewer's experience of pace in the cinema, but as yet there is no generally accepted method for quantifying these features.) In this article, two methods are used to describe the editing of *Rashomon*. First, a *trendline* is fitted to the time series using locally weighted regression (LOESS). LOESS regression is a non-parametric method that uses a low-order polynomial to fit a trendline to a time series by using only those data points in the neighbourhood of a specific point in the time series rather than fitting a trendline globally. This neighbourhood is called the span and is a fraction of the whole data set used to estimate the trend at a given point. The resulting trendline provides a smoothed description of the shot lengths that reveals the underlying structure from the noise of the raw data. Second, the five-number summary describes the distribution of shot lengths in *Rashomon* as a whole and each of the narratives, and by comparing these distributions we can determine if the duration of shots in one part of the film tend to be shorter than the shots in another part. Specific sequences in the narrative are described in terms of their number of shots (n), the total duration of the sequence (Σ), the median shot length and the interquartile range (IQR). All times are given in seconds (s).

Film style is a complex dynamic system comprised of many aspects (mise-en-scène, cinematography, editing, sound, etc) and any proper understanding of how the different elements of a film's style are organized into its formal structure requires analysing several variables simultaneously. This is a challenging prospect given the number of shots in a film may reach the thousands while the number variables potentially relevant to any particular analysis may also be very large. If each element of film form is considered in isolation the full structure of the data collected about a film's style will not be revealed, but applying multivariate analysis allows us to overcome these problems so that we do not overlook interesting features.

Multivariate statistical analysis is the *simultaneous* statistical analysis of a collection of variables, which improves upon separate univariate analysis of each variable by using information about the *relationships* between the variables. Analysis of each variable is very likely to miss uncovering the key features of, and any interesting 'patterns' in, the multivariate data. (Everitt and Hothorn 2011: 2, original emphasis)

Though such methods have not yet been applied to film style they have enormous potential to expand our understanding of how form functions in the cinema.

To analyse the data collected on the multiple levels of the four categorical variables described above I use MCA as a descriptive method of revealing patterns in complex data sets by locating subjects and variables in low-dimensional space. MCA is an extension of correspondence analysis which allows for the analysis of a range of categorical variables, and is performed by applying correspondence analysis to the indicator matrix of n rows (the individual shots) and m categories whose elements are 1 indicating the category of each variable to which a shot belongs and 0 elsewhere (see Greenacre 2007: 137–44; Le Roux and Rouanet 2010). Interpretation of the representation of the variables in MCA is based on the geometry of points in low dimensional space: proximity between different variables indicates they tend to occur together, and proximity between different levels of the same variable indicates the associated groups of observations are similar. In this study, MCA was applied to those shots that comprise the narratives of the rape and the killing as told by the bandit, the wife, the husband and the woodcutter. Shots of the bandit, wife and medium speaking to the judge in the courtyard are not included since these are at a different level of narration and are not present in the woodcutter's account. Not included in this data set are the framing scenes under the *Rashomon* between the woodcutter, the priest and the commoner, the woodcutter's walk through the woods and his discovery of the body, and the testimonies of the priest and the police agent. All the shots included in the data set contribute to the construction of the axes. The narrators were added to the variables map as supplementary points and so were not used in defining the distances between the individual shots. MCA was performed using the FactoMineR package (Husson et al. 2013) for R (R Development Core Team 2012).

Film style and narration in *Rashomon*

Figure 1 presents the time series for the whole film with the separate narratives indicated, and Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the shot length data for *Rashomon* as a whole and for each of the four narratives with the courtyard scenes removed. The main feature evident in the time series of *Rashomon* is the shift to a slower cutting rate after the end of the bandit's testimony. Although he does not wish to 'bore the reader with an extended discussion of the number of seconds' duration each phase of the film takes', Linden (1973: 400) claims to have noted a change in tempo over the course of the film and that the 'main blocks of the form move in accelerating time spans, thus adding momentum to the movement of the whole'. However, it is clear from Figure 1 this claim is categorically wrong. The editing over the course of the whole film actually slows down, and while the tempo of the tales of the bandit and the wife do show a trend to shorter takes as they progress this not the case for those of either the husband or the woodcutter which show a rising trend in Figure 1. There is also a slight tendency for shots in the sequences under the *Rashomon* in the latter half of the film to be longer than those in the opening scene of the film: the 28 shots in the opening scene at the gate in which the commoner first encounters the woodcutter and the priest have a median shot length of 11.8 seconds (IQR=11.3s), while the 53 shots at the gate after the bandit's tale tend to be slightly longer (median=14.5s, IQR=17.2s). The longest takes in each of the sections associated with a narrator are those in which the characters speak directly to camera in the courtyard scenes.

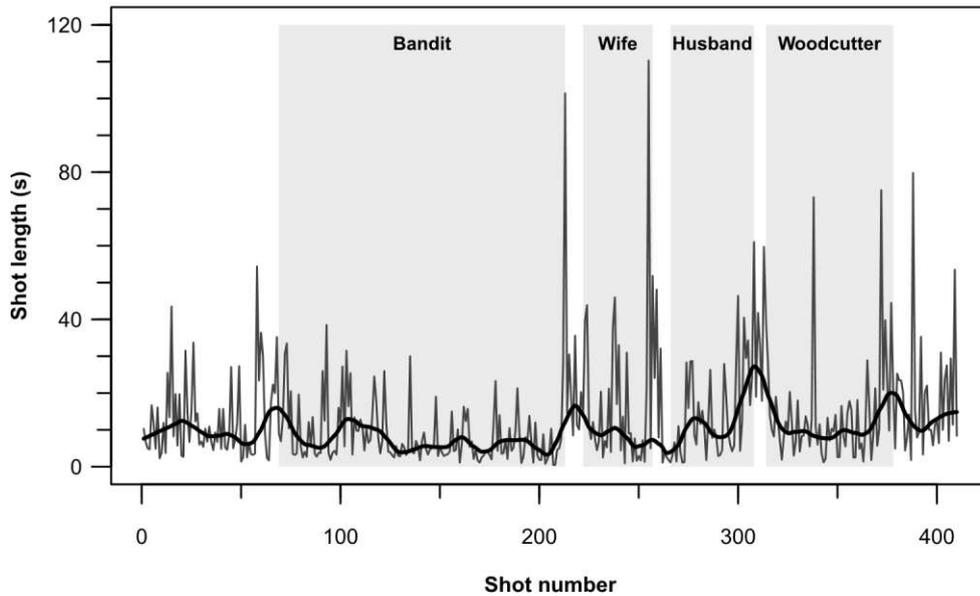


Figure 1 Times series of *Rashomon* (1950). The four different narratives are indicated by the shaded areas.

The shot length data (excluding the courtyard scenes) confirms the bandit’s version tends to be edited more quickly than the other three versions and that the later sections of the film are edited more slowly. The husband’s version shows much greater variation in shot lengths than the other sections and, in particular, has more takes in the twenty to 40 seconds range. The four narratives can be split into two pairs based on the action presented, with the bandit and the woodcutter narrating the sword fight and the wife and husband narrating their emotional confrontation after the rape. The distribution of shot lengths in each pair is opposed so that while each action is presented twice it features once edited relatively quickly and then again more slowly. For example, the bandit’s account of the sword fight is 25 shots long and runs from shot 188 to shot 212 for a total of 171.1 seconds, with a median shot length of 5.0s and an IQR of 6.9s; whereas the woodcutter’s telling is edited much more slowly (shots 344–372, $n=29$, $\Sigma=353.8s$, median=9.6s, IQR=10.5s). The sword fight as narrated by the woodcutter is altogether a more uncertain affair than that recounted by the bandit, presenting the duellists as hesitant to initiate combat and clumsy in their footwork and swordplay rather than the dynamism of the pure physical action of the bandit’s account that flatters his vanity as conqueror of a samurai warrior, and this difference is reflected in the pace of the editing. The difference in the editing pace of the wife’s and husband’s narration also corresponds to the difference in the emotional intensity of these sequences, contrasting the increasing cutting rate as the wife directly confronts her husband with the passivity of the husband who must wait and listen as his wife pleads with the bandit to accept her. This difference between the activity and the passivity of narrators is a key organizing principle of the film and is discussed below.

Film style and narration in *Rashomon*

Table 1 Descriptive statistics of the complete shot length data for *Rashomon* (1950), and for the four versions of events in the forest (data for the four narratives does not include shots in the courtyard).

| | <i>Rashomon</i> | Bandit | Wife | Husband | Woodcutter |
|--------------------|-----------------|--------|-------|---------|------------|
| Shots | 410 | 139 | 29 | 26 | 65 |
| Length (s) | 5375.4 | 1110.0 | 318.8 | 407.1 | 915.6 |
| Minimum (s) | 0.5 | 0.5 | 0.9 | 1.8 | 1.2 |
| Lower quartile (s) | 4.1 | 3.3 | 4.0 | 6.5 | 6.0 |
| Median (s) | 8.5 | 5.0 | 7.5 | 11.1 | 10.3 |
| Upper quartile (s) | 16.7 | 10.5 | 13.6 | 25.7 | 16.5 |
| Maximum (s) | 110.3 | 38.5 | 46.0 | 46.4 | 75.1 |

Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for the categorical variables of film style in *Rashomon* and for each of the four different narratives.

Table 2 Frequency of shot scale, camera movement, camera angle, and shot types for *Rashomon* (1950), and for the four versions of events in the forest (data for the four narratives does not include shots in the courtyard).

| | <i>Rashomon</i> | Bandit | Wife | Husband | Woodcutter |
|------------------|-----------------|--------|------|---------|------------|
| Shots | 410 | 139 | 29 | 26 | 65 |
| Big close-up | 8 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 3 |
| Close-up | 60 | 20 | 8 | 4 | 12 |
| Medium close-up | 90 | 39 | 11 | 4 | 7 |
| Medium shot | 137 | 47 | 2 | 10 | 22 |
| Medium long shot | 17 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 5 |
| Long shot | 64 | 18 | 3 | 3 | 9 |
| Very long shot | 34 | 9 | 2 | 3 | 7 |
| Rotated | 64 | 28 | 0 | 2 | 12 |
| Mobile | 62 | 14 | 6 | 5 | 9 |
| Hybrid | 9 | 2 | 2 | 1 | 1 |
| Static | 275 | 95 | 21 | 18 | 43 |
| Low angle | 131 | 42 | 10 | 3 | 12 |
| High angle | 88 | 36 | 8 | 4 | 16 |
| Neutral angle | 191 | 61 | 11 | 19 | 37 |
| Point-of-view | 70 | 37 | 11 | 3 | 15 |
| Reverse-angle | 153 | 77 | 15 | 6 | 24 |
| Axial | 49 | 11 | 3 | 9 | 12 |

The map of the variables in Figure 2 shows there is a difference between shot types associated with the first dimension (POV, RA, AXIAL) and the positioning of the camera relative to the subject (SCALE and MOVEMENT) associated with the second dimension. This is a distinction between the narrative function of shots and the visual qualities of those shots, between those variables that describe the perspectival attributes of shots and those

that describe presentational attributes. ANGLE is approximately equidistant from both dimensions and has both perspectival and presentational aspects since angle is both a matter of interpretation and of framing. Of course, scale and movement can also be used to create perspective in narrative, but this does not appear to be the case in *Rashomon*. The supplementary variable NARRATOR also lies close to the first dimension indicating that the key factor in distinguishing between different narrators is associated with shot types used to create the perspective of different characters rather than with presentational features like scale and movement.

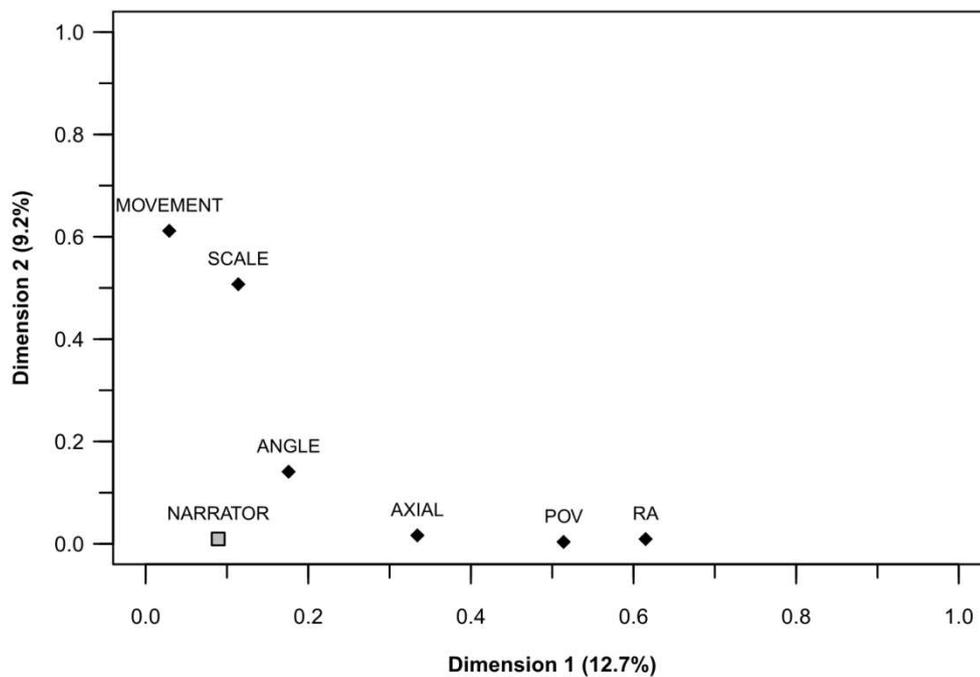


Figure 2 Variables map of film style for the four different accounts of the crimes in *Rashomon* (1950) resulting from multiple correspondence analysis. ‘Narrator’ is shown as a supplementary variable.

In order to get a better understanding of the relationship between film style and narration in *Rashomon* it is necessary to look at the different categories of the variables. Figure 3 presents the categories plot resulting from the MCA for the different accounts of the crimes with the individual narrators added as supplementary points. The first dimension contrasts the different shot types in the film. POV and RA shots are closely related, a natural relationship since POV shots are typically framed from the reverse angle to the preceding shot. Shots not cut along the lens axis are also closely associated with these types of shots, while shots that do lie along the axis relative to the preceding shot are associated with non-POV and non-RA shots. The narrators are orientated along the first dimension according to how their perspective is created for the viewer. In terms of film form, the bandit’s narration is most similar to that of the wife and both are most dissimilar from the narration of the husband. The narratives told by the bandit and the wife feature a large proportion of POV shots (27 and 38 %, respectively) and make extensive use of RA cuts (55 and 52%), whereas shots framed along the lens axis relative to the previous shot account for only 8 and 10%. In contrast, the husband’s narration uses fewer POV shots

(12%) and RA shots (23%), and axial shots occur much more frequently (35%). The version of events told by the woodcutter falls in between these extremes. In this final narrative, POV (23%) shots and RA shots (37%) are more frequent than in that of the husband's and occur less frequently than in those of the wife and the bandit (albeit only slightly less in the case of the latter). At the same time, axial cuts (18%) account for more shots than in the tales of the bandit and the wife and for a smaller proportion of shots than in the husband's tale.

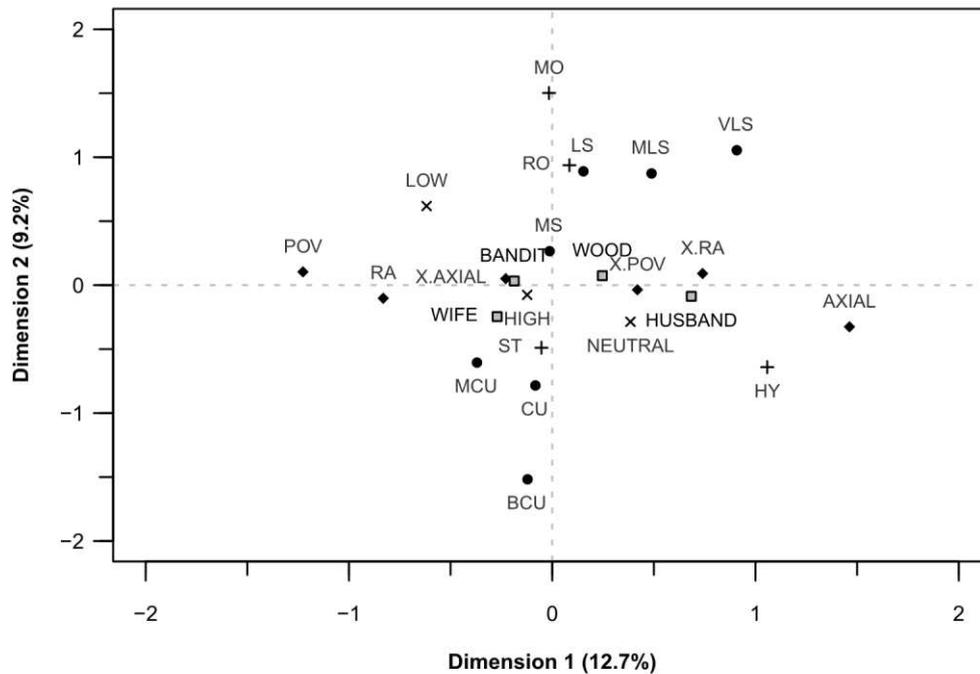


Figure 3 Relationship between categories of film style for the four different accounts of the crimes in *Rashomon* (1950). The narrators (the shaded squares) are shown as supplementary points.

Camera angle follows the same pattern as shot types, with the participants of events in the forest differing greatly from one another while the woodcutter exhibits features common to all three. The bandit and the wife's versions have similar profiles with a greater proportion of high angle shots (26 and 28%, respectively) than in the husband's sections (15%), and they also have more low angle shots (30 and 34%) compared to the husband (12%). The husband's version is strongly associated with shots framed at a neutral angle (73%) compared to the other two (44 and 38%). The woodcutter's narrative exhibits a stronger tendency to neutral shots (57%) than the bandit and the wife but at the same time a weaker tendency than the husband. The proportion of high angle shots in the woodcutter's version (25%) is similar to that in both the bandit and the wife, but has fewer low angle shots (18%).

The second dimension of Figure 3 contrasts shot scale and camera movement. There are no particular relationships between these presentational variables and the different shot types described above indicating that Kurosawa varies the positioning of the camera and its movement when creating a character's perspective rather than relying on a subset of stylistic choices for each narrator. Nonetheless, there are some key differences in the use of scale and movement between the different narratives.

Static framing is opposed to those shots in which the lens is rotated and those in which the camera moves, though hybrid shots are distinct from the other categories of camera movement because such shots occur only occasionally in the sample (accounting for just 2 per cent) and the distance of this point from the origin and from the other movement categories in Figure 3 is a reflection of their low frequency. Though the fluidity of Kurosawa's camera has been noted by many critics, the camera does not move in the majority of the shots in the film and this is the case for all four narratives, in which the camera is static for between 66 and 72 per cent of shots. However, when the frame does move the type of movement differs between narratives. The narratives of the bandit and the woodcutter have a greater proportion of shots in which the lens is rotated (which are mostly pans), whereas those of the wife and the husband have greater proportions of moving camera shots. This is due to the difference in the content of the narratives. In the versions told by the bandit and the woodcutter there is considerable movement of characters within the frame. In the bandit's version, he and the husband run through the forest to the glade where they fight for the first time, and he will also later drag the wife to the same place to see her husband bound; and both the bandit and the woodcutter recount the sword fight resulting in the husband's death. The accounts of the husband and the wife do not include the movement of the characters through the forest or the sword fight and focus instead on the reaction of the husband to the rape of his wife. Instead of panning shots, Kurosawa employs dolly shots to bring the viewer into the intimate space of the couple. Camera movement in *Rashomon* is associated with *what* happens in the forest rather than *how* those events are perceived by a particular character and functions purely in presentational terms.

Looking at shot scales, close shots are opposed to distant framing in Figure 3. BCU and medium long-shots rarely feature in any of the four narratives, and, in fact, account for very few shots in *Rashomon* overall; while the proportion of LS and VLS are broadly consistent across all four narratives and with the style of the film as a whole. The supplementary point for the wife in Figure 3 lies slightly off the first dimension and shows some (small) correlation with the second dimension thereby distinguishing her narration from those of the male characters. This is due to a tendency for shots in the wife's account to be framed closer than in those of the other narrators. Unlike the versions related by the three male characters where the most frequently occurring shot scale is the MS (between 34 and 38%), in the wife's tale only 7% of shots are framed at this scale; and the wife's version has a greater proportion of CU (28%) and medium CU (38%) than the others. This distinguishes the wife's version from that of her husband so that although they narrate the same events the presentation of on-screen space is emotionally heightened in the wife's narration while the more distant framing in the husband's tale physically distances him from his wife and her attacker. There are no such notable differences between the narration of the bandit and the woodcutter though they tell the same tale. Again this aspect of film style is not associated with any particular shot type and functions presentationally.

The results of the statistical analysis of film style in *Rashomon* reveal the different ways in which the perspectives of the narrators are created. The perspectives of the bandit and the wife are created through the use of POV shots, providing direct access to a narrator's perspective so that the viewer sees what they see and, at the same time, is given access to how they imagine others see them. For example, the wife's testimony includes an exchange of nine POV shots between her and her husband: the shots of the husband from the wife's position show the viewer what she saw (the contempt on her husband's face); while the shots framed from the husband's position show us how the wife imagines herself to be seen as she pleads for understanding. Similar exchanges occur early in the bandit's narrative as he first sets eyes on the wife and later in the three-way exchange of POV shots after the rape

and between bandit and husband as they prepare to duel. This use of POV shots establishes the bandit and the wife as active narrators, not merely recounting events of the past but aligning the viewer physically and psychologically with their perspective.

Burch (1979: 298) notes that Kurosawa makes extensive use of contrasting shots and of the 180°-reverse angle cut and it is clear that such editing plays an important role in narration, but did not identify any variation in the use of this type of editing between the different narratives. In the husband's narrative it is the absence of such shots that stands out. The husband is a passive narrator forced to watch events but unable to affect them, and by using axial cuts in place of POV and RA shots Kurosawa shows us events happening before the husband and then his response to them without admitting the viewer direct access to his perspective. We do not see how the husband conceives of others or as he sees himself in their eyes. POV editing depends on a two-shot structure showing both the glance and the object-glanced-at (Carroll 1993), but Kurosawa's use of axial cuts refuses to complete this pattern either by showing the look on the husband's face and cutting along the axis to reveal both him and the object of his glance in a single frame divided into background and foreground or by using over-the shoulder shots to conceal the husband's glance and then cutting along the axis to focus on the object of his attention. In both instances we follow the husband's glance but in neither case do we gain access to his physical position in the grove because the RA cut is denied. Bordwell (2009) notes that the axial cut is a 'stylistic fingerprint' of Kurosawa's films, and it is clear that in *Rashomon* such a spatial relationship between shots plays a specific function in creating a unique narration for the husband. Kurosawa signals this difference in moving from the framing scenes at the gate to the courtyard scenes and the narratives they contain: CUs of the woodcutter and the priest are used to indicate which of these characters will relate to us whether they recount the testimony of the bandit or the wife, but the disembodied narration of the deceased husband (via the medium) is prefaced by two shots of the disarticulated head of a statue linked by an cut along the axis of the lens.

This active/passive distinction is also evident in the use of camera angles: the use of high and low angles in the bandit's and the wife's versions contribute to their narration by defining relationships between characters in terms of their dominance and sub-ordinance to one another, whereas the high frequency of neutral angles in the husband's narration refuses to establish these types of relationships for the viewer. This distinction also reflects the level of agency of the characters within the film: the bandit initiates events in the forest through his sexual desire for the wife while the duel for her honour is fought at the wife's insistence, but the husband has no such power and is forced to react to the other characters.

As a witness to events in the forest, the woodcutter is the source of the only first-hand witness account available to the priest and the commoner (and, by extension, to the viewer). His version of events is presented as an apparently objective account from a third-person narrator standing outside events and able to describe the actions of those he observes in all their complexity without the prejudice of their own self-serving perspectives. The content of the story he tells combines some material from each the prior three versions (the duel, the husband's rejection of the wife, the wife's flight, etc), thereby corroborating some part of each without definitively ruling one version more reliable from the others. At the same time his account employs elements of the narration from the other three versions combining some of the active components of the testimonies of the bandit and the wife and some of the passivity of the husband's narration. POV shots are used in the same way as the narration of the bandit and the wife, cutting between the bandit and the husband as they stalk one another prior to the duel, or the fraught exchange of glances between wife and husband; and axial cuts are used to show the character's looking or being looked at while refusing the glance/object structure of the POV shot, even repeating some

of the set-ups from the husband's section. One key difference from earlier narration is that some axial cuts are now associated with the bandit as well as the husband, attributing to him a more passive demeanour, especially at the beginning of the swordfight which (as noted above) lacks the virility of his own narrative.

However, the truthfulness of the woodcutter's narrative is in doubt. Because he has already lied about his knowledge of events having originally claimed earlier in the film to have discovered the body of the husband while walking in the forest and because he may have stolen the dagger from the corpse of husband, we are not bound to accept the putative objectivity of his account. This affects how we understand the narration in this part of *Rashomon*, and, when considered in the context of the film as an 'interpretative labyrinth', it becomes apparent that in this final version the use of film style in the narration of events serves a different function than in the other three versions.

If we accept the thesis that egotism drives each character in their construction of the narrative of events in the forest it is easy to see how the use of different shot types create self-serving narratives for the bandit, the wife, and the husband that portray them in the best light. The bandit lies to preserve his reputation as a courageous warrior and a virile lover, the wife to preserve her virtue, the husband to maintain his social status by his suicide. The narration of their accounts reflects the level of activity/passivity each lays claim to in admitting to a crime to sustain their self-image. The woodcutter's story is equally self-serving but for very different reasons: he lies to conceal his own involvement and so his tale may be nothing more than a mixture of three versions already told in an attempt to draw attention away from his own culpability. By adopting elements of the narration from the other versions he conceals his own position. Where the perspectives of the bandit, the wife and the husband are known and conflicting, the perspective of the woodcutter is unknown.

We do not know what events transpired between the bandit, the husband and his wife in the forest. In part, this is because we have conflicting accounts from the three participants that cannot be reconciled. But it is also because the woodcutter's account does not help us to solve this riddle, shrouding already uncertain events in another layer of uncertainty. The woodcutter's version is inherently ambiguous because it denies us the perspective we need to make sense of the information in this and the other narratives.

Conclusion

In this article I used time series analysis and, for the first time in film studies, MCA to study the functions of film style in *Rashomon*. The results show that Kurosawa varies the pace of the editing so that although the action of the film is repeated the presentation of events to the viewer is different each time; there is a distinction between presentational (shot scale and camera movement) and perspectival (shot types) aspects of style depending on their function within the film, while other elements (camera angle) fulfil both these functions; and different types of shots are used to create the narrative perspectives of the bandit, the wife and the husband that marks them out as either active or passive narrators reflecting their level of narrative agency within the film while the woodcutter's account exhibits both active and passive aspects to create an ambiguous mode of narration.

A detailed analysis of film style and narration in *Rashomon* such as that presented here does not solve the epistemological problem at the core of the film. Indeed, it is only by examining simultaneously the various aspects of film style across hundreds of shots do we begin to understand the fundamental role played by film style in creating the ambiguities at the heart of the film through the representation of the perspectives of the different narrators. Contrary to the opinion of Iijima, film style in *Rashomon* is carefully planned to

present the subtleties of narrator's perspectives of events in the forest. Contrary to the opinions of Prince and Kovacs there is ambiguity at the level of the image and the relativism of the film is a matter of perspective created by the material process of narration. The pattern of the film is most certainly not 'fortuitous' as Barbarow claimed; rather it is a deliberately and precisely constructed artwork in which form and content are unified in creating the 'Rashomon effect'.

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