

# Where the human heart goes astray: *Rashomon*, *Boomtown* and subjective experience

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## The city makes men

In his article on the city and mental life,<sup>1</sup> Simmel examines the relationship between the city, as an economic centre where large numbers of people live, and its inhabitants' 'mental life;' that is: the sorts of relationships they are able to form and experience. It is a case of humans make the city, but the city then makes a new sort of human being, one whose relationships are more 'rational' than those of country dwellers who have intense emotional relationships with all their neighbours. Urban relationships are more distant and it is in the urban that the concept of the stranger<sup>2</sup> is elaborated. In small towns or villages, strangers who come to visit are quickly sent on their way; in cities, they dwell amongst us – alienating, alienated and catalysts for change. This implies a tension between the greater freedom a human experiences in the city, freed from the close scrutiny of neighbours that is common in smaller towns and villages; and the way in which the city dweller can experience the narrowness of being watched over by their 'circle' of friends, equals, workmates.

Equally, it should be added, the urban dweller can also exist as an unknown and feared intruder. While Simmel discusses how the rapidity of experience in the city and the multiplicity of urban lifestyles lead to the development of a blasé attitude – it takes a lot to excite, interest or shock the city dweller – he only implies the other problems created by the subjective experience of the city. It is Harvey<sup>3</sup> who develops these ideas for the postmodern city, elaborating on how late capitalism creates what Bourdieu<sup>4</sup> would term various habitus in which different classes of

people are alienated from each other and thus inhabit different spaces, while living in the same place. I believe that it is this quality which allows for Bruno<sup>5</sup> to build on Jameson's ideas about postmodernity, city life, the stroller – in the Deleuzan sense – and the 'schizophrenic' breakdown between signifiers à la Lacan, as well as allowing her to develop ideas about the place pastiche occupies in this setting. Bruno's discussion of postmodernism and *Blade Runner* '... involve[s] a consideration of questions of identity and history, of the role of simulacra and simulation, and of the relationship between postmodernism, architecture, and postindustrialism.'<sup>6</sup> I, on the other hand, want to explore the subjective self created by the city, the self that finds itself enmeshed in the questions of identity and history, simulacra and simulation that Bruno explores. If meanings are multiple in postmodernity, as implied by the use of the term 'schizophrenia' to describe the non-fixed relationship between sign and signifiers, how then is it possible that city dwellers, while feeling blasé, generally continue to act as if aware of what Žižek, again using Lacan, calls 'The big Other?'<sup>7</sup> Or, to put the question in a more mundane way: how is it that there still exist essentialised categories of crime and justice, innocence and guilt in postmodernity?

## And in a pre-modern city somewhere, somewhen

I begin with these points because this article is about a film that would appear to have nothing to do with the city nor with modernity, let alone postmodernity: *Rashomon* (1950) (Figure 1).<sup>8</sup>



• Fig.1: The *Rashomon* (1950).

Famously, the main action in this Japanese film directed by Kurosawa, as it is told and retold by various characters, takes place outside a medieval city: by a stream where the bandit is captured and, most of all, in the forest where the woman may have been raped and her husband killed, although we never know by whom. Kurosawa famously said that the western interest in this film was because 'it was about a rape,'<sup>9</sup> but for him the central point of the story was that it took place in the forest, 'where the human heart goes astray.' In an essay by Parker Tyler<sup>10</sup> on the film, however, he asks us to think of the film as analogous to a Picasso painting, in which what we see is not necessarily the same as what we understand or know. In a similar manner I want to argue that in *Rashomon* what we see is only half of a story, the other half is to be understood through implication, through an absence that is somehow also present.

That absence is the city itself. The film begins at a gate, the *Rashō* or demon gate, a famous gate known to Japanese as the site of many stories from the medieval era. This gate to the former feudal capital city Kyoto is occupied by a demon, and is the setting for stories in which all sorts of terrible events are set: rapes, deaths, fights. It is also a gate, like all large gates in traditional Japanese cities or towns, that marks the boundary between what is safe and inside, the *uchi*, the city itself; and what is unsafe, outside, the *soto*, a place where not only demons might dwell, but also gods might wander at will. The

gate stands, as Simmel<sup>11</sup> noted about bridges and doors, 'in every moment inside and outside.'<sup>12</sup> However, as the devastated gate also implies, such boundaries can easily be destroyed. Cities are not free from nature, much as they try to keep it at bay: disease, war and natural disasters happen inside cities as well as outside because that which is meant to keep them separate, the gate, also serves to connect the two domains. The gate is also the locus where disparate characters can come together: where the blasé city dweller meets the priest and woodcutter, waiting out the rain after a trial that has shocked them to the core. This city dweller dismisses their pain, chuckling at their incredulity upon learning that their fellow humans could be so 'bad'; although this man is not just injured to the suffering of others, he is also morally suspect: by the end of the film we find him trying to rob an abandoned baby of a protective amulet. This is Kurosawa's allusion to the original short story, *Rashomon*,<sup>13</sup> by the writer Akutagawa, in which an old woman strips a corpse of all its possessions. In the story, poverty and hunger have robbed the old woman of her humanity, in the film we are told of the disasters that have shaken the city, but we don't see their effects beyond the ruined gate itself and the behaviour of the man who has laughed off the tales of Tajomaru's, the bandit's, rapes and murders. Kurosawa merges this story of urban depravity and callousness with Akutagawa's *The grove*,<sup>14</sup> the story of a rape and murder told by seven, in the original version, different witnesses.

The film however gives us four versions: the bandit Tajomaru's; the samurai wife Masago's; her dead husband Takehiro's; and then the woodcutter's story. Contrary to some readings of the films, we are never, as audience, told which version is true. And we must be careful of the reliability of these narratives, for although recounted and shown as subjective events, they are narratives retold by the priest and the woodcutter to the third man – thus they are filtered through two more subjective layers. How accurate can their retellings be? And can we trust the woodcutter who appears to have stolen a knife from the couple? Richie,<sup>15</sup> rather tongue-in-

cheek, tries to use the traditional methods of detective fiction to answer these questions, only to conclude that they cannot be definitely answered at all. I raise the issue of detective fiction here for various reasons, but before moving onto the subject of 'solving the crime' as it were, I want to very briefly make a point about the tension between the rural as a place that is perilous, full of dangerous characters and the city as a place that makes for a different sort of criminality and cruelty.

As the city dweller tells the woodcutter and priest: 'Because men are weak, they lie to deceive themselves,' an interesting statement to make in a film where everyone – except perhaps the woodcutter who claims not to have killed the husband – is *not* lying. Subjective as their stories are, each character is telling a version of *their* truth. The city dweller's statement, as with the shock of the priest, seems oddly out of place in this context. What is so shocking about each character assuming a burden of guilt? Is not guilt, in Buddhism as well as Christianity, part of being human? The answer, I would argue, lies specifically in the film's Japanese historical context. Kurosawa made it near the end of the Allied Occupation (1945–1952), a seven-year period during which, as both western and Japanese historians point out, most Japanese found a way to avoid admitting any shared guilt for the war or any of its atrocities: it was the fault of the country's leaders, or the Japanese themselves were victims (the more so for the atomic bombs dropped on Hiroshima and Nagasaki). Kurosawa himself, in his autobiography, acknowledged feeling guilty for keeping his head down during the war and not protesting.<sup>16</sup> Then in 1950 he made a film in which everyone confesses to the crime of murder. Given that its intended audience was Japanese – he had no idea it would be shown internationally – it seems Kurosawa was making a very dark joke indeed about the human propensity to lie. And this lying, this deception of the self, is something he associates with the human condition. What is specifically 'urban' about the Kurosawa story is that only the city dweller is blasé enough to know this and not be stunned by it. The human heart

might go astray in the forest, but only in the rational experience of city life can we find a way of explaining it away. However, the sentimental ending where the woodcutter takes the foundling and adopts it, makes another point also, that perhaps, only outside the city are some fundamental and important human emotional values still maintained.

In an article of this length, we cannot spend too much time unpacking the film, but I want to be clear that the city, never seen, but only implied through the ruined gate (and only implied because Kurosawa ran out of money and could not film a market scene he had planned, cf. Yoshimoto)<sup>17</sup> is the backdrop to this tale. That the city is the 'cause' of all the film's effects, seems obvious. The couple are travelling from the city, city slickers, perhaps, to be easily misled and destroyed by a bandit, whose livelihood depends on such travellers. The woodcutter probably depends on his livelihood from the city, supplying wood for urban consumption; and the priest is travelling to, we could assume, one of the many temples within Kyoto's walls. The trial scenes seem to be outdoors, but the white wall behind the kneeling witnesses signifies the interior courtyard of some feudal lord, never seen, who is sitting in judgement. The city is almost visually absent, but it is definitely present as a central factor; it has made the circumstances that lead to the mysterious death of the husband; it the place where the 'truth' of the matter will be assessed. Yet the audience is never given the court's judgment, as a mystery the film leaves us as lost as if we were in an unknown forest or a labyrinthine city. This famously annoyed the film's producer and confused Japanese as well as non-Japanese audiences. In fact, a later Japanese version of the Akutagawa story, *Misty*,<sup>18</sup> offered a final, 'true' version of the murder – so not knowing is not some Zen concept that only Japanese would understand, but a strategy, I would argue, on Kurosawa's part to critique post-war Japan.

In fact, without the term yet existing, it could be claimed that Kurosawa was already aware of the problem of meaning that would come to the fore in discussions of postmodernity. Logically, for

him, the film depicts the way in which the city dwellers develop separate mental lives. Lives in which everyone is capable of experiencing a shared event differently. As Richie points out, the versions they tell are not lies<sup>19</sup> – they only seem to be if we are concerned with finding one single true version of events. In fact each character is so locked within their own sense of self, that they all remember the event differently: the bandit is brave, not cowardly in his version; the wife is virtuous and badly treated by both men in hers; the husband is betrayed by his wife in his; and the woodcutter sees a group of people all behaving badly in his narrative of the rape and murder. Each subjective recounting is true, as far as the individual is concerned, for it is *has* to be given who they are. Who they are, in turn, is defined by their relationship to the city: Tajomaru is outcaste, fearsome and feared; Masago is upper caste and, almost by definition then, meant to be virtuous and modest; Takehiro as part of the samurai ruling caste, should be brave and tolerant; and the woodcutter is both an outsider and voyeur. The priest, the one character we might count on to see through to some sort of truth, instead is shaken to the very foundations of his faith especially at the idea that the spirit of the dead man, called up by a medium, might also be capable of lying. That reality is an illusion might well be a core tenant of Buddhism, but, ironically, the multiple subjective claims to being guilty of the same crime are capable of undermining belief.

The priest cannot bear the idea that humans are so debased that they all want to believe that they are capable of murder. And what the unseen judge, the big Other we might say, thinks or decides, is something that the audience is never told. Are the priest and woodcutter in shock because two people, the woman and bandit, were punished? This also we are never told. What the judge (an arbiter of reality) decides is never articulated. As if in a dream, both court and city dissipate and the truth is left for us to choose: was it all some sort of illusion? But what sort of illusion is it? If, as Žižek argues, reworking Freud, '[t]he crucial point is that this "illusion" structures our (social) reality itself: its disintegration leads to

a "loss of reality" "<sup>20</sup> what was Kurosawa trying to say about a loss of reality, history and identity in 1950s Japan? Confronted by the daily drama of the Tokyo war crime trials, what lesson were the newly liberated, increasingly democratised and westernised Japanese to take from this film? That there could be no single truth? Welcome, then, to postmodernity, or should we say, the desert of the real?

### Fixing meaning

In many ways *Rashomon* could be seen to be part of what was, in the mid-1950s, a well-established western and *modern* genre: film noir. It has many of the genre's elements: it explores subjectivity, offers insights into the human psyche, has complicated flashbacks, unreliable narrators, and a woman who might be an angel or just another lying dame, manipulating the men around her. It should be no surprise then that the 'rashomon technique,'<sup>21</sup> that is, the technique of telling one story through various flashbacks each relating to a different point of view, was almost immediately added to the film noir canon – first of all in Kubrick's *The Killing*.<sup>22</sup> Film noir and its related genre, the police procedural, both rely on the modern, post-enlightenment figure of the detective. This single-minded individual who finds the truth based on reading clues as simple signifiers that clearly relate to undeniable facts, appears as an often duped figure in film noir, which makes him unlike his tougher more Holmes-like cousin in the police procedural. It could be said that Dr Watson, the scientist who is all too idealist and human, survives in the former, while Sherlock Holmes, logical and cynical, dominates in the latter. Both figures, however, have a very modern relationship to the truth: it can be found, dissected, and understood if one is objective enough to pursue 'the facts'. How a film like *Rashomon* which questions the very possibility of the singular nature and singularity of 'the facts' came to be linked to these sorts of films and television programmes, is too long to describe here;<sup>23</sup> we must take it as given that this association, this postmodern pastiche of meaning, has occurred.

What is interesting, however, is that this appropriation of a technique, or narrative strategy, has been thoroughly urbanised: for the detective is most necessary (apologies to Christie's Miss Marple) in the city where strangers dwell side-by-side. In these variations on the *Rashomon* theme, the city is never absent or implied, the crime is, more often than not, the result of the urban mentality and its detective is normally an urbanite par excellence. Nowhere is this more obvious than in the series hailed as *Rashomon*-like in the 'best' possible manner: *Boomtown*,<sup>24</sup> shown in the USA in 2002 and in the UK in 2003.

The main reason for this acclaim was the complicated narrative structure in which each episode consisted of at least seven flashbacks. The core seven flashbacks, each week, were that of the seven main characters: four police officers, one district attorney, one paramedic and a woman journalist. Occasionally the points of view of other characters were also included. The flashbacks, each representing the subjective experience of a different character, often overlapped, but generally were not repeat showings of entire events. Taken together, they often led to a conclusion: some weeks a mystery

would be solved, others, a death would occur, or a criminal captured. Later in the series, personal issues involving the main characters would be highlighted, one character, for example, was a Gulf War veteran. There are many ways in which the *Rashomon* comparison could be denied: obviously the Japanese film never leads to neat conclusions, the setting is medieval, not modern, the city is only implied, etc. However there are some interesting ways in which we could also think of the series and the film as having similar aims.

First, however, let us consider the setting: *Boomtown* takes place in Los Angeles, the city in which many of the original film noir were set (Figure 2). In contrast to the original genre, the LA of this series is often bathed in light, the homes and haunts of the rich are only occasionally visited, and the focus, on four police officers, would seem to place it firmly in the realm of the police procedural genre. It is, however, the tone of the series, as we shall see, that makes it akin to if not clearly part of the film noir canon. As well as alluding to *Rashomon*, the series' opening sequence also refers to *Chinatown* (1974),<sup>25</sup> showing how the city grew out of nothing. Moreover, the character of the



• Fig. 2: 'Opening Credits: The City', *Boomtown* (2002).

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journalist, Andrea Little, is the granddaughter of the man who sold most of the original orange groves in the area, making himself rich and helping to build the city. It is the grove, nature, that is absent in this story, just as the city is absent in Kurosawa's film. The characters we have in this series, are entirely urban – they are of the city and made by the city in their dealings with each other and in their work.

The series as a whole cannot be discussed here, but I will consider the episode which refers most clearly to *Rashomon*, that is 'Home Invasion', number 13 of the first series. This episode begins with the capture of a man, inside his own home, by two men who beat him, tie him up and then rape and kill his wife and daughter in front of him, before killing him. This turns out to be the second of such crimes, and the first police detectives on the scene, Fearless and Joel, discuss how their job involves dealing with things that ordinary people could never understand – an echo of the Kurosawa film where the woodcutter and priest keep saying that they 'don't understand'. Fearless, however, adds that a crime like this is 'a betrayal of everything that is human,' indicating that even for these hardened professionals, there are some crimes that shock. Thus while *Boomtown* echoes Kurosawa, it also strives to depict the level of humanity that must be maintained by professionals in order to be able to do their job honestly and honourably. This theme in the series is further represented by the two uniformed officers, Tom and Ray – the former the son of a corrupt cop and the latter the partner of another corrupt police officer and still under suspicion himself for taking bribes – as well as by the character of the Deputy D. A. David McNorris, who despite hating his politically corrupt, hard-drinking and womanizing father, seems to be following in his footsteps.

The thin line between policing others and policing the self, maintaining a moral stance, is the subject of almost every episode. In 'Home Invasion', the ways in which such lines are crossed by the main characters, and yet how they somehow remain on the side of right, is explored through the platonic romance that Joel, whose wife is suffering from post-natal depression, has

with Teresa the paramedic; reminders that Fearless was sexually abused as a child, but has refused to be a victim or become an abuser himself; that Andrea has ended her affair with McNorris because it was wrong; and, we learn, that Teresa helped her mother, who was suffering from cancer, to kill herself. No-one, we are reminded in this series, who is human, is free from guilt of one sort or another. That the experience of guilt might be subjective is also touched on: Joel agonizes over an attraction that isn't really an affair, and his guilt, we learn by the end of the series, that his baby died because he fell asleep, is also misplaced; Fearless blames himself for a death of a friend in battle over which he had no control; McNorris drinks to hide his sense of guilt but has never crossed the line into corruption; Tom suffers for his dad's corruption while being a clean cop himself; and the only mystery seems to be whether his partner, Ray, who professes innocence, might, like the woodcutter, be guilty. Thus, for very different reasons and within different cultural contexts, *Rashomon* and *Boomtown*, offer similar morals: it is human to feel guilt. And the way in which those 'shaped' by the city live their lives is more contained, freer but also more cut off from their fellow men, so that each the characters' experiences seem separate from each another's. The subjective flashbacks serve not only to show us how different all the characters of *Boomtown* are, or how the pieces of the puzzle come together, but also to give us a sense of how alone they all feel. As alone as the bandit who is suddenly moved by the sight of a beautiful woman; as alone as that woman feels when her husband fails to protect her; as alone as the husband feels when he sees his wife in the bandit's arms; as alone as the woodcutter feels when he doesn't intervene in the rape; as shocked and alone as the young priest feels to learn how complicated human life is.

While Kurosawa's film offers the sentimental conclusion that involves the adoption of a baby and the possible shaping of a new innocent life outside of the city; 'Home Invasion' ends in a way that is almost a parody of the *Death Wish*<sup>26</sup> genre: Carl, the third victim selected by the

criminals, who allows the police to set up a trap in his house, is dying of cancer. And Carl wants to show that he *can* protect his family: he stays behind after the police try to get him to leave and ends by shooting and wounding one of the would-be killers. When he reloads his rifle to kill the man, Joel tries to talk Carl out of the crime by appealing to his humanity and arguing that he doesn't want to be a murderer. But it is Ray who tells Carl to 'Go ahead,' who manages to get through to him. Once more the humanity of a character is preserved – he doesn't cross the line. If *Rashomon*, with its trial scenes represented something of postwar Japan; this episode of *Boomtown* is clearly post-9/11: the average man's reaction to a home invasion is to take up arms and solve the problem himself, but his conscience prevents him from murdering the other. Both stories act as mirrors that reverse: in the Japanese film everyone makes a claim to a crime they can't have all committed; in the US series, the issue of what is an appropriate response and who should respond is shockingly portrayed. Neither represents what was actually occurring in the country at that time.

In both *Rashomon* and *Boomtown*, we could argue, it is absences that make their presence most felt: it is what we don't see, but whose effects we can trace; what we don't do, but wish we could; what has been lost – all of these become the sum total of what it is to be alive. It is what we experience, the burden of memory and the solitude of living in the city that makes all the characters what they are. That the city itself represents some sort of betrayal of a primal state of innocence, a rather Christian conceptualization, was shown every week in the opening sequence of *Boomtown*: as the city sprouts and grows, the camera zooms into a building and we see Andrea Little moving restlessly in her bed, next to her on the night-table is an interesting picture of a monk offering a little native girl what looks like an apple (Figure 3). Religion, civilization – that other part of social life that the city represents – all of that is shown to us in a scene that alludes to the fall of humankind from paradise. As the city dweller says in *Rashomon*: 'Because men are weak, they



• Fig. 3: 'Andrea's Picture', *Boomtown* (2002).

lie to deceive themselves.' To deceive themselves about what, we could ask? That what we experience, that what we think we know, that the truth we tell others and ourselves, all of that, in those of us shaped by the city, are no more than illusions. That as the city makes us, it shapes our subjectivity and because of that subjectivity, because of the blasé attitudes we develop, we must dig deep and work hard to remain human – the forest in which our hearts go astray is not just outside the city walls, but inside them as well.

### Plus ça change . . .

I have argued that the link between *Rashomon* and *Boomtown* is that of a connection forged by the urban, a space in which strangers who live by side by side, are able to lead very separate lives and, perhaps, commit terrible crimes. One of the key ways in which the rashomon technique has been represented in *Boomtown*, and in its much more successful 'cousin', *CSI*,<sup>27</sup> has been as a technology for solving murders. There is a much irony in this fact for two reasons. The first reason is simply that a film which should be heralded as prefiguring the condition of postmodernity – a film in which clues and facts, signs and signifiers, are not neatly connected and lead to no accurate assessment of the truth – has been appropriated and its title used to describe a narrative technique that almost always arrives at a solution. An incontrovertible, seen-as-true solution. Have we travelled back in time? Of course not. But if we do not want to agree with Latour<sup>28</sup> that we have never been modern, let alone postmodern, we need to consider this.

Jameson's<sup>29</sup> claim for the disjuncture, the freedom, in the relationship between a sign and its referent grows out of his discussion of the logic of postmodernity. In early capitalism, he argues, this relationship was seen as unproblematic and we were able to scientifically make neat and tidy correlations between a sign and its referent. This very process, he continues, led to the dialectical reversal in which the two became disjointed. So far, so very *Rashomon*, but what Jameson does not take note of is how, under the logic of capital, or the logic in which sign and referent were not disjointed, the very loss of the magical language which it had superseded, did not result in the disappearance of that previous form of logic. In fact, as Caplan argues,<sup>30</sup> it is during the rise of the cultural dominance of science that we also get the rise of fundamentalist religious movements. If the culture of postmodernity uses the trope of nostalgia as a key element for its pastiches, then it should be no surprise that in postmodernity, in which there is a disjuncture or schizophrenic break between sign and meaning, we see a tremendous nostalgia for the logic of modernity. Science can uncover facts, the facts tell a story and the story they tell is true. Mysteries are solved, the criminals are caught and justice will be done – and it all happens several nights a week on our television screens.

The second irony of how *Rashomon* has been appropriated is a more disturbing one. Kurosawa said, as noted above, that the film was about a rape. This appears to be lost in almost every permutation of the story, in almost every analysis of the film.<sup>31</sup> While the mystery of who killed the husband has dominated, the question 'was the woman really raped?' – the event that leads to the husband's death and the conflicting versions of the murder – is not tackled. Who is telling the truth? The bandit, who is so sure of his animal sexuality that in his version it is a powerful seduction, leading to his willingness to do anything to have the woman for himself? The husband, who sees his demure wife act with passion, thus betraying him and their marriage, who then kills himself? The woman, who tells the tale of being twice violated, once by the rape,

then again by her husband's anger and revulsion afterwards, leaving her so frightened of the consequences and damaged by his lack of understanding, that she stabs him? Or the voyeuristic woodcutter, who is not willing to act, does not understand what he sees, but interprets its aftermath – a cowardly sword fight between the two men egged on by the vindictive woman – as a sort of performance in which he cannot intervene?

We, the audience, become not just his fellow voyeurs in this peepshow, but, later, we become the judge and jury. Did the woman faint? Did she consciously submit? Did she actively take part and enjoy herself? That we are never given an answer, leaves it to us to decide. The fact that this is an issue rarely discussed in relation to the film reveals the continuing taboo surrounding the topic of rape and begs the question of how frank any discussion of sex in the city can ever be. The problem of defining what constitutes rape, or willing consent, and the negative portrayal of women who are raped continues to run and run in Anglo-American societies, as well as Japan, where, only recently have women dared to talk to the police about being forced to have sex. And, the problem of definition has made it virtually impossible to legally convict men of the crime of rape. In *Rashomon*, the dropping away of the issue of rape to be replaced by the question of murder, leaves the woman as the very sort of object that she, in her heartfelt plea at the trial, reveals she is. The woman's growing awareness of herself as she tells her story, her becoming a subject, is an awareness that it would have been best if she had not survived the rape. The unfolding of this self-awareness during her trial also marks a transition that leaves the audience with an element of doubt about Masago – are not such self-aware women the very stuff of femme fatales (Figure 4)? In 'Home Invasion' the problem is solved through an escalation of the violence: the men rape *and* kill the women, before they kill the watching man.

The question, then, if it is somehow the woman's fault for having attracted the gaze of the rapist (in *Rashomon* because a breeze blows aside her veil, in 'Home Invasion' because of



• Fig. 4: 'Masago tells her Story', *Rashomon* (1950).

using car valets when going out to dinner, that is, being conspicuous by their mode of consumption) is never raised in the postmodern variation on *Rashomon*. It is both a politically incorrect and dangerous question to pose; dangerous because it undermines the very idea that gender relations in postmodernity are governed by a different logic than that of traditional or modern societies. Female subjectivity may well be more frequently discussed and feminist philosophy may be an more acceptable part of our academic canons, but in the forest where the heart can go astray, in the cities where we dwell in our isolation and in our imaginations where the two are connected – or at the Rashō gate – woman as a sign remains unreadable and unknowable, the illusion that structures our social reality.

## Notes

- 1 G. Simmel, 'The Metropolis and Mental life', in D. Firsby and M. Featherstone (eds) *Simmel on Culture* (London, Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 17–85.
- 2 G. Simmel, 'The Stranger' in Kurt Wolff (trans.) *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), pp. 402–408.
- 3 David Harvey, *The Urban Experience* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989).
- 4 P. Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice* (Cambridge: CUP, 1977).
- 5 Giuliana Bruno, 'Ramble City: Postmodernism and Blade Runner' in A. Kuhn (ed.), *Alien Zone* (London, Verso: 1990), pp. 183–95.
- 6 *Ibid.*, p. 183.

- 7 S. Žižek, *Looking Awry* (Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1992).
- 8 Akira Kurosawa, *Rashomon* (Daiei Studios, 1950). Rashōmon is the correct Japanese spelling of the word, but the title of the film is frequently spelt 'Rashomon' in English, which I will also do in this article.
- 9 D. Richie, *The films of Akira Kurosawa*, with additional material by Joan Mellon, Berkeley, (California: University of California Press, 1996 [3<sup>rd</sup> edn]).
- 10 Parker Tyler, 'Rashomon as Modern Art' in *Focus on Rashomon*, D. Richie (ed.), (Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 149–58.
- 11 G. Simmel, 'Bridge and Door' in D. Firsby and M. Featherstone (eds) *Simmel on Culture*. (London, Sage Publications, 1997), pp. 170–174.
- 12 *Ibid.*, p. 174.
- 13 Ryunosuke Akutagawa, 'Rashomon' in *Focus on Rashomon*, Donald Richie (translator and ed.), (Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 97–101.
- 14 Ryunosuke Akutagawa, 'In a Grove' in *Focus on Rashomon*, Donald Richie (translator and ed.), (Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 102–112.
- 15 D. Richie, 'Rashomon' in his *Focus on Rashomon* (Rutgers University Press, 1987), pp. 1–22.
- 16 Akira Kurosawa, *Something like an autobiography*, Audie E. Bock (trans.), (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1982), p. 145.
- 17 Mitsuhiro Yoshimoto, 2000 *Kurosawa: Film Studies and Japanese Cinema* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2000), p. 189.
- 18 Kenki Saegusa, *Misuti* (1998)
- 19 D. Richie, *The films of Akira Kurosawa*, p. 19.
- 20 Žižek, *Looking Awry*, p. 71.
- 21 There was nothing new nor Oriental about what is now called the rashomon technique. In film it was famously used by Orson Welles in *Citizen Kane* (Mercury Productions and RKO Radio Pictures, 1941) and, less well-known, in John Brahm's *The Locket* (RKO Radio Pictures, 1946). In novels, we could argue, it was a technique explored by Dickens and best analysed by M. M. Bakhtin in his *The dialogic imagination: four essays*, edited by Michael Holquist, translated by Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Austin Press, 1981). Sociologists also use the term 'rashomon effect' to describe the subjective and differing statements made by witnesses.
- 22 Stanley Kubrick, *The Killing* (Harris-Kubrick Productions, 1956).
- 23 I discuss this process in great detail in my forthcoming book, *Remaking Kurosawa*.
- 24 Graham Yost, *Boomtown* (2002–2003).
- 25 Roman Polanski, *Chinatown* (Long Road, Paramount Pictures and Penthouse, 1974).
- 26 Michael Winner, *Death Wish* (de Laurentis Productions and Paramount Pictures, 1974).

- *Rashomon*, *Boomtown* and subjective experience

- 27 Anthony Zuiker, 'CSI – Crime Scene Investigation' (2000–).
- 28 Bruno Latour, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Catherine Porter (Trans.), (Cambridge, Mass., Harvard University Press, 1996).
- 29 F. Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Culture of Late Capitalism* (New York, Duke University Press, 1991), pp. 94–5.
- 30 L. Caplan, 'Introduction' in his edited *Studies in Religious Fundamentalism*, (London, MacMillan Press, 1987), pp. 1–24.
- 31 Except for a very nuanced discussion in J. Mellon's 'Rashomon' in her *The waves at Genji's door: Japan through its Cinema* (New York, Pantheon Books, 1976), pp. 34–44.