***Nihilism and Reality in Akira Kurosawa's movie 'RASHOMON'(1949)***

**"In a becoming world, 'reality' is always just a simplification for practical purposes, or an illusion based on gross organs, or a gap in time of becoming.**

**Denial and nihilization of the world through logic stem from the fact that we oppose the terms 'being' 'non-being', and thus the concept of 'becoming' is denied. "**

**Nietzsche, Posthumous Fragment, SW, v.12, Fall 1887**

**"Against positivism, which holds in the phenomena, and says that 'there is only fact situations', I would say no, just no fact situations at all, there are only interpretations. We cannot find any 'in itself': it may be absurd to want something like that. "**

**Ditto, in The Will to Power, a New Principle of Disposition Securities, HW, 2, p 337**

**1) First Scenes**

**Under the abandoned porch of medieval Kyoto, whose name is Rashomon, three people meet: a wandering monk, a woodcutter and a walker for protection against a heavy rain. Lumberjack and monk report their horror at a history of rape followed by violent death, about which they had been called to testify before a court. The walker listens to the monk, to his pious and hopeless words, about never having seen anything so shocking: not even the worst crimes nor wars, nor fire, nor epidemics. Scorning his words, the walker interrupts the monk's speech, warning not to be there to hear sermons, and utters that only interesting stories deserve to be told. Even lies may be worth a story, being enough that they are able to catch our attention. And just for sermons! The woodcutter comes up then and begins to tell his own version, the one he had reported to the police. Right now, the scene shifts to the room inquest, and thereafter to the woods.**

**2) The version of the Lumberjack**

**As did every morning, he went out in search of good wood in the forest. About a bush was faced suddenly with some unusual things there: a woman's hat, pieces of clothing, "all of no value". Until he saw a corpse and, terrified, ran into town to report the finding to the police. When the judge asked him if he had seen there a dagger, the woodcutter denied it vehemently.**

**3) The Monk's Testimony**

**He told to the judicial authority, in a melancholy tone, that he had crossed with the man now dead, when the latter was coming down the road on foot, pulling the horse on which his wife followed. That happened about three days ago. She wore a wide-brimmed hat with a veil to cover her entire face.**

**The monk ended his brief report saying that he could never have foreseen that such husband would end up that way, but adds that human existence is very fragile, "evanescent as the morning dew, and brief as lightning." He reports nothing on the woman's body or on her beauty.**

**4) The Policeman**

**Proud of his achievement, the cop said to have caught Tajomaru, the most dreaded and wanted bandit ever, easily since he was lying on the floor on a riverside, certainly shot down by a stolen horse. This way he would have been punished in a fair payback for the wrongs he had committed. He ended this report uttering that among this bandit's crimes, the now investigated one might surely count.**

**5) The Version of Tajomaru**

**Upon hearing his captor say that he would have been knocked off the horse as punishment, Tajomaru bursts into laughter and says he was there, by the river, shot down by fatigue and thirst: perhaps had drunk contaminated water from some source ... Despite saying he had killed, yes, that man, he explains that at first, he intended differently.**

**---"On an extremely hot afternoon, I was lying under the canopy of a tree by the roadside, when a gentle breeze woke me up.**

**"Were it not for that breeze, and nothing at all would have happened."**

**He saw then a man driving a horse upon which followed a most beautiful woman. As they passed right in front of him, a few meters far, the same breeze lifted the veil with which the traveler lady covered her face, and an urgent desire to rape her sprang up in Tajomaru's soul. He would kill her husband if necessary, but also thought he could get rid of him otherwise.**

**So, he let them follow for over a stretch of road and through a shortcut amidst the dense forest and then suddenly jumps in front of the couple. Skullduggery he showed and offered an 'invaluable' sword to that man, telling him he could buy it for an 'incredibly low price'. And not only the sword since there were many other precious objects withdrawn from ancient tombs by himself. For that purpose, it would be enough to walk along tracks into the forest, till reaching the hideout of all these goods.**

**And such did both men, leaving the woman alone beside the horse on the road. Amid the forest, Tajomaru captures his rival, and holding him with ropes and gag, leaves him sitting in a small clearing, incapable of any kind of movement. The bandit runs now toward the place they left the woman, who would now be an easily prey.**

**When he found her, told that a snake bit her husband. With no veil, her face denoted a very intense suffering, and this display of a strong attachment for her husband, confesses Tajomaru, had aroused intense jealousy and hatred within his heart. Moved by these emotions, he changed his plans, having then decided to take her to the clearing where her husband stood shackled and, to humiliate him to the maximum, and to rape her violently in front of him.**

**And Tajomaru did it again exactly what his emotions commanded.**

**At this point, however, it supervenes then an unexpected deed: the raped wife relents to her rapist and takes an active and voluptuous role in that intercourse.**

**Still according to the bandit, the outcome of this story would not have been a murder if not for her reaction after the enjoyment when he saw that Tajomaru wanted to go out alone. She broke out in supplication, saying she wouldn't be able to remain alive this way, and that one man would have to die. Saying to the judge, haughty, he had no special liking in raping that female - 'like so many others' - he feels himself driven to the proposed fight as a to his pride. After freeing his rival, he gave him a sword. Fierce fight ensues, in which the husband seems to be the best of all swordsmen he ever faced, but despite this, was defeated and died by sword.**

**Finished the duel, he would not have seen the woman who probably fled terrified amid the fighting.**

**When the judge asked him if he had seen there a dagger, Tajomaru confirms and says it was a valuable one, adding that leaving it amid that clearing was a "silly distraction."**

**At a first analysis, Tajomaru seems to have only a single reason to lie: pride. Being a dangerous and murderer bandit, wanted by the authorities for a long time, he would be punished with death anyway. It would be quite useless for him to deny any participation in this crime.**

**But would there be any reason for him to assume a false guilt?**

**6) The Raped Wife**

**After being raped she began crying in the middle of the clearing, until she looked at her tied husband. This stared at her with intense hatred and disdain: gazing her with cold and terrifying eyes. She begged him to stop looking at her that way, many times without being heard. She then implored him to kill her, but he hinted not to be even interested in that and kept with that hideous stare directed at her face, whose despair only grew. Until she grabbed the dagger and slowly drove it into his chest. But she might not be sure about having killed him, because suddenly she fainted and, upon waking, her husband was in fact killed by a stab in the chest. She guesses that only her own hands may have hit his chest, even if she was already unconscious.**

**She finishes her version crying and reporting a suicidal attempt when she had, soon after all that, launched up to a river.**

**7) The Dead Man's Version (told through a medium)**

**"The dead do not talk," says the woodcutter, mocking this report.**

**"The dead do not lie," retorted the monk, who is narrating what the medium said. The scene then changes again to the woods.**

**After the rape, Tajomaru tried to convince the woman to run away with him, leaving her husband forever. He would do whatever she wanted to reach this, letting his wandering life to live as another humble city worker. In such moments, right after the rape, the dead man said he never had seen his wife so beautiful, so splendorous. Being then sure she would not give in to the bandit's plea to follow him to a new life, he got completely disappointed by watching her accept that invitation, and worst of all, asking her rapist to cowardly kill him.**

**Both men became extremely outraged by her proposal, and Tajomaru then turned against the woman. Mastering her body by force, he asked the husband whether the wife should be at once killed. The bound man didn't answer.  
"At this moment I forgave Tajomaru for all he had done".  
Then the woman ran away through the woods and the rapist went after her. Sometime later, he returned to the glade and loosened the ropes, saying words of comfort to the other man: "now is caring for life". Nonetheless, the so fresh memory of all those events in the woods lead him to kill himself burying a dagger into his own heart.**

**After some time, a person approached his body to take out the dagger from chest, but it was already impossible for him to recognize anyone then, because of being finally dead, already amid an overwhelming darkness. That same darkness from which his testimony to the judges was coming.**

**8) The Second Version of the Lumberjack**

**Under the Rashomon gate, the woodcutter insists this latest report is also untrue, since there was no dagger and some sword fight did happen between those men. But how could he know this with such certainty if only he said he had arrived well after the rape, violence and death? The walker challenges him to tell the truth, once it became clear that he lied in his account.  
He admits then he had lied to the police, not to get involved, and tells a new sequence of events: on reaching the woods, he saw Tajomaru trying to convince the woman to flee with him, without success. The husband remained tied by ropes, watching everything. Pondering the rapist's invitations, she replied that a woman is unable to utter a quick and clear answer to this kind of question. Suddenly, she took a sword to free her husband, thereafter, throwing herself to the ground, halfway between both men. The bandit said he was ready for the duel, proposed by her. His rival, however, stood up and said that for such a kind of woman he would no longer fight, Tajomaru was free to take her if so wished. Feeling intensely humiliated then she instigated them to fight by calling both of cowards.**

**The sword fight, however, is told now as quite different from that described by Tajomaru. This latter trembles with fear, and both rivals flee from each other more actually fight. They rarely if ever cross swords. Thus, the outcome is favorable to the rapist by mere chance.**

**He insists there was no dagger at all.**

**How could he be so sure?**

**9) Final Scenes**

**Woodcutter, walker and monk are still together under the Rashomon, watching a downpour. Its noise might drown out the sound of the stories that told by human beings. Eventually, the wanderer says to the monk: humans are always in need to forget something, and for such they make up so many lies. And this same walker said in the first scenes: "I do not mind with lies, if they are interesting." Besides having said that he hates sermons. He turns now to the humble forest worker and says not to believe in his version of the crimes, because surely, he must have stolen the dagger. Angrily, the woodcutter says he is not a liar, when the drifter retorts that nobody warns you before lying. The accused then falls silent.**

**Soon after that dialogue, a newborn cry is heard coming too from under the Rashomon. The walker quickly goes after the kid. But the monk and the lumberjack exasperated at the sight that he had not gone to rescue the child, but quite on the contrary only to steal his amulet intended to be a symbol of protection. They vehemently reproach him, because that would be a heinous crime. The accused argues in its defense that the actual criminals were the parents of the baby, who had their enjoyment, and now throw the baby away.**

**"But think on how its parents suffered to make that decision," said the woodcutter.**

**Nothing however changes the mind of that wanderer, who makes himself the owner of the amulet, and flees those ruins.**

**The monk is now with the child in his arms, as if to protect it from the nonsensical world on which it has just arrived. The peasant tries then to pick up the baby, causing the religious to react fearfully sudden. But this gesture reveals itself as unjustified since that humble man was trying to keep the child with him.**

**"Having already six children at home, a mouth more would not make things harder".**

**Sorry for that abrupt attitude, the monk apologizes and gives him the baby. Thanks to the spontaneous and humble attitude of the woodcutter, he says he regains his faith in mankind.**

**The rain ceases, the peasant takes the baby with him, the movie ends.**

**10) Comment and Only Solution that Synthesizes the Whole Plot**

**Let's quote Nietzsche once more:**

**Critique of Nihilism**

**The Nihilism as a psychological state must supervene, at first, when after seeking a 'sense' in every event, a sense that is not there at all, those who look for such a meaning finally lose any courage. Here nihilism is to become aware of the great waste of strength, is the torment of 'all in vain', the uncertainty, the lack of condition for, in one way or another, recover strength or be able to still rest on something. It is shame before us, as if we had lied for too long ...**

**That meaning could have been: either the achievement of a higher moral canon in every event, or of the moral order in this world, or the growth of love and harmony in the relationship between humans, or the nearing of a state of general happiness, or even the dissolution into a state of nothingness - a goal is always a sense. What is common to all these forms of representation is that something must be achieved through these processes - until one realizes that in this world of perpetual becoming nothing is achieved, no goal is reached ...**

**(...)**

**Nihilism as a psychological state happens a second time, when a totality is conceived, or a systematization, or even an organization that should concern every event, all that happens. (...). The underlying here is that man loses belief in his own worth, when  he does not act through an infinite and valuable whole, that is to say, man conceives all such powerful entities just to be able to believe in his own value.**

**Nihilism as a psychological state also has a third and final form. Given these insights that nothing will be achieved through the eternal becoming, and that in this latter nothing larger acts, which the individual could soak completely, as an element of greater value. Thus, it stays the excuse to judge this whole becoming world as illusion, and invent up another one which, beyond this here, one feels as if a real world. As soon as, however, man discovers that this latter world was built only from psychological needs, and that these in no way have any right to such deed, then emerges the final form of nihilism, which brings on the disbelief in a metaphysical world, - and also prohibits the belief in a true world. Under this view, the reality of eternal becoming is taken for the only reality, it forbids up all sorts of dodges by the worlds beyond, as well as to prohibit the false divinities - but no longer supports over this world, which no longer whether to deny ...**

**- What happened, basically? The feeling of absence of values ​​was achieved when it became clear that neither with the concept of "goal," or with the concept of "unity" or with the concept of "truth" might we construe the overall character of existence. By those ways, nothing is achieved, no goal is achieved; a lack of totalizing unity of multiplicity happens: the character of existence is not "true" is false ... We simply no longer have any reason to believe in a true world ...**

**In short, the categories 'goal', 'unity', 'being', which we lay with value in the world, are again taken from us - and then the world seems worthless ... "**

***Excerpt from* 'The Will to Power', `Der Wille zur Macht`*, a work of great significance for Heidegger, despite the acknowledged problems in the choice of its contents. Colli and Montinari, editing we use, dilute their texts in "Posthumous Fragments" [SW, v 13]***

**There seems to be no possible reconciliation between the various accounts of the events that followed the rape, and that culminated in that violent death. Before being mere collections of lies, those so different versions point to an undeniable human characteristic: we are incapable of disinterested glances to what happens around us, or even to ourselves. Nonsense to talk about any neutral prospects, disinterested points of view. Our passions always lead us, they are our engine, whose motto, yes this could be "Non ducor, duco."**

**On the other hand, we can ask who might be looking for the fact, the actual event:**

**1) The police-judicial authority, that we are led to believe, will kill Tajomaru, more than by this crime for its antecedents. No matter his role in the investigated death;**

**2) The viewer of the Kurosawa film, which tries during the plot to decipher the puzzle, finding a unique sense that could connect all those contradictions, and reach the final reality of Rashomon. A not so simple deciphering that soon approaches becoming an impossible task. Would such an attempt really be justified?**

**The Only Solution?**

**"The dead do not lie," says the monk.**

**The reason to lie for Tajomaru was his explosive passion for the raped. Were if not for chance, which the Greeks said to be governed by moirai goddesses, and that soft breeze at thug's face and no crime had occurred. He takes the blame for death to save the confessed killer, since they lived a very intense passion before, during and after the rape. The wife's report also had a certain degree of verisimilitude: having fainted, she could not see the suicide, so it would be possible that she had killed him, even though in an unconscious trance. Then, the maddened lovers flee through the woods, she ahead. Amid this whirlwind of emotions, the desperate woman tries suicide throwing herself into a river, but Tajomaru saves her from death.**

**Recall that the policeman who brags about such important capture did it at the edge of a river, where the rapist was prostrate, without any condition to resist.**

**The monk, who is also a wanderer, shows up as hopeless because of so disparate versions about the dreadful event, he searches for a single truth but stays unable to find it.**

**Behind the multiplicity of human perspectives, there is no immanent unity. Anybody who looks for the latter finds nothing, loses his forces and chooses to want nothingness.**

**If only through a dead version, obtained through a mediumistic contact you can have access to the truth, devoid of any passion, any interest derived two conclusions:**

**1) Life's meaning does not belong to this world. There is neither a directly graspable, nor any rationally deductible sense in our lives. This implies the actual impossibility for humans to know absolute, definitive facts, but rather only partial perspective truths. Absolute reality, whether such an expression can have any sense at all, is transcendent, quite inaccessible to human beings.**

**This implies that it is impossible for mankind to know any definitive facts, but only partial, provisional, perspective truths. Absolute reality, whether such an expression can have any sense at all, is transcendent, quite inaccessible to human beings.**

**2) For those who believe in spirits, perhaps the real is accessible by trance, as in Rashomon. For others, reality will always remain a fiction**. **The unchanging being of Parmenides, or absolute reality, can only be conceived through the perspective of Nothingness.  
Another approach is to see the version of the dead man as so much logical as meaningless. Reality is nothing more than fictionas much as is the belief in spirits.**

**Only the becoming exists, as Heraclitus wanted.**