

AKIRA KUROSAWA'S MISE-EN-SCÈNE DESIGN: THE EXAMPLE OF THE FILM "DREAMS"

Dr. Adrian P. Moreau

Department of Film Studies and Visual Culture, St. Aldwyn University, Paris, France

Dr. Eleanor K. Whitfield

Centre for Cinema, Aesthetics and Media Arts, Norchester Institute of Arts and Humanities, Edinburgh, United Kingdom

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Abstract

This article examines Akira Kurosawa's film "Dreams" through a qualitative mise-en-scène analysis that focuses solely on its visual and cinematographic choices. Two episodes selected from the eight dream episodes in the film were chosen as the sample for the study, and each episode was analyzed systematically based on two main parameters and their subcategories: (1) Framing, Composition, and Spatial Arrangement, (2) Lighting, Color, and Visual Arrangement. Coding and scene analysis of the selected shots reveal that Kurosawa constructs the dream experience not only at the narrative level but also through the design of the frame, the color palette and the dramaturgy of color, and the position of the camera.

Keywords: Akira Kurosawa, mise-en-scène, visual design, framing, lighting, color

1. Introduction

The director, who determines the look and feel of a film, also has many vital touches, from the camera's position according to the action to where the actors and objects will stand. The process, which begins with reading the script, follows a flow from a stylistic approach to the material. The director's shooting method, emphasis on editing, understanding of reality, visual arrangements in time and space, narrative style brought to life with the camera—camera movements, height, angle—image editing, lighting, and many other cinematographic elements are the keys to his style. The necessity of arranging all elements in the picture composition in such a way that they serve the narrative within their spatial and temporal context and become part of the structure they are in has become an indispensable requirement in the history of cinema. The goal is not to create a beautiful image on its own, but to achieve an image that serves the film as a whole. When the purpose of each visual element is evaluated in light of the narrative as a whole, it conveys to the viewer the general tone of the film. The director skillfully plays with the elements of visual structure. In doing so, he arranges them effectively, carefully selecting what will remain in darkness and what will be illuminated. He challenges symmetrical or asymmetrical arrangements. He blurs; he sharpens. He makes choices between simplicity

and intensity. In this way, he gradually builds clues for the audience about how to navigate this magical world and what they will ultimately achieve with their patience.

Reality, captured by the camera and thus transformed, takes on a cinematic structure. The language of film, emerging from the arrangement of images, is shaped by the director's artistic perspective and acquires new meanings. This creates a context that adds meaning beyond the mere image. Considering all this, cinematographic practices, which are the product of an evolving common language and a rich heritage from silent cinema to the present day, will continue to exist in order to produce creative and new solutions in the future, as they have in the past. This study examines the First Dream, "The Fox," and the Second Dream, "The Peach Garden," in Akira Kurosawa's film *Dreams*.

2. Cinematographic Narration from Silent Cinema to Our Time

In the article, the Lumière brothers, who did not include elements such as screenplay, actors, or decor, merely confined themselves to capturing external reality; events, constructions, and current developments. These elements, which would later form the basis of fictional cinema, had not yet been discovered at that time. Cinema quickly realized its unique qualities. The camera gained speed, successive genres emerged, shooting scales were discovered, and the way was paved for cinema (Yıldız, 2014: 95).

The cinematographic image is based on the establishment, organization, and simulated recreation of external reality. External reality was artificially recreated and transferred to the cinema screen. The emergence of cinematography as an element of art and a cultural phenomenon is related to a series of technical inventions (Yıldız, 2014: 53-62).

When the movie camera was invented at the end of the 19th century, the first works directly recorded simple events: a man watering the garden, workers leaving the factory, a train entering the station. When filmmakers turned to dramatic productions, they designed them as "filmed theater." They placed the camera in front of the stage as if it were a spectator sitting in the theater. Watching these types of films created a feeling in the viewer that they were looking at the scene from a detached, impersonal perspective. Filmmakers realized that the flatness of the screen and other limitations needed to be addressed. The first response to this was to break up the movement into shots and sequences composed of these shots (Brown, 2008: 2).

In the early days of cinematography, the audience had great credibility, making no emotional distinction between the image and reality. It draws the viewer into the feeling of being confronted with a real event, a real object. The director creates his own cinematic time and space by combining the elements of reality according to his own wishes, in his own chosen order, and by shortening them (Yıldız, 2014: 63-65).

Through composition, the director tells the viewer where to look, what to look at, and in what order to look. An image should be able to convey meaning, style, spirit, mood, and subtext on its own, without the help of voice-over, dialogue, or other explanatory tools. Cinema experienced this in its purest form in silent films; however, the principle still holds true: the image must stand on its own two feet (Brown, 2008: 2).

For directors, the composition of images is an important means of storytelling and conveying ideas. An important feature of a composed image is the position of the frame. The frame can be close to the object being filmed or distant. Each of these arrangements produces different semantic effects (Ryan and Lenos, 2012: 49).

Today, *mise-en-scène* encompasses the organization of objects within the camera frame. Everything framed by the camera is part of the *mise-en-scène*; the actors, their performances, the lighting, the costumes, the decor, the colored lens effects, the placement of the actors in the space; all these elements are brought together to create a cinematic sense of place for the audience (Hunt et al., 2012: 118).

When controlling *mise-en-scène*, the director stages an event to be filmed. However, a comprehensive explanation of cinema as a medium does not end with what is placed in front of the camera. The shot does not exist until the models are recorded on film. The director also controls the cinematic qualities—not only what is filmed, but also how it is filmed. The photographic scope of the shot includes three areas of choice: the frame of the shot and the duration of the shot (Bordwell and Thompson, 2009:167).

Although the audience is aware that the images are artificially animated, they get carried away in the flow of the film and experience intense emotions such as sadness, excitement, love, hatred, and a very intense emotionality. Through the lighting effects and set design on stage, the camera movements in the shots, the special impact of sound and effects, and the specific editing techniques employed, the director has the ability to simultaneously transport the audience to very different places and times, keeping their attention constantly alert (Yıldız, 2014: 69-70).

In addition to all this, how shots are framed is an artistic choice, but it is also a means of storytelling. When telling a story, the viewer may only be given access to part of the information, while at the same time, when the camera moves from a special position that hides the information, only then does that information become visible (Brindle, 2013: 42).

Anything and everything in the composition of a shot is interpreted as being there because it has a relevant and necessary function for the viewer to understand the story they are watching. This has been one of the unwritten rules of storytelling for thousands of years and has retained its importance from the day it was first used. The location, size, and visibility of everything in the frame have also been effective in helping the audience understand its importance within the subject (Mercado, 2011: 18).

Every film consists of hundreds of different shots; each of these shots adds specific meanings to the film. Everything visible in the frame is selected for its meaning. The camera angle, its distance from the subject, and other elements will load specific meanings onto the frame. The camera does not merely record reality. From the moment of recording, it takes pieces of reality from their places in life and reflects them on the silver screen. In doing so, it changes its nature and gives it new meaning. When images are arranged one after another, that is, when the language of film is created, more meaning is loaded onto it; a context that gives meaning to it beyond the image is created (Hunt et al., 2012: 118).

The image is open to a series of readings depending on the type of shot. The volume and size of the objects in the shot provide the first basic semantic reading; the angle of the shot also shapes the meaning or the 'preferred' reading at a basic semantic level. All these preferred readings or traditional cinema codes and conventions must be read accordingly. However, most filmmakers have not adhered to these rules. As a result of their 'breaking', bending, or overturning these rules in accordance with general filmmaking practices, viewers can say that the films they shoot have characteristic features (Hyward, 2012: 110-187).

Images are thought of as words. Different shooting angles, heights, and types have meanings that have been established through their use in thousands of films over more than a century; however, this always varies according to the context of the narrative. Directors always use their plans as they wish, either to create the opposite effect or to be ironic, rather than just following the rules (Hunt et al., 2012: 120,122).

In connection with this topic, Orson Welles, in the film *Citizen Kane* (1941), used a pit dug specifically for the camera to film Kane at his lowest point after his electoral defeat from an extremely low angle. Even though he has no power, Kane appears enormous in the eyes of the audience. Similarly, in *Taxi Driver* (1976), Martin Scorsese placed the film's protagonist, Travis, at the edges of the frame. This signals his marginality as a person on the fringes of society. (Hunt et al., 2012: 120,122-124).

The arrangement of objects within the frame obeys certain common-sense principles of value assignment. Directors generally assign more importance and value to characters in the center of the frame or in the upper half of the image. Characters with less value or who are secondary are positioned in the lower half of the image or closer to the sides of the frame. The lower half of the image generally serves the function of devaluation (Ryan and Lenos, 2012: 49).

Despite commonalities in composition and lighting, each studio developed its own distinct *mise-en-scène*. By the 1930s, each had established its own general style with its own experts, producers, directors, cinematographers, and art directors. MGM provided concrete examples of bright, narrow focus, while Warner Brothers used more dynamic camera work, often employing different compositional strategies and subdued lighting—particularly in the famous Busby Berkeley musicals, which not only choreographed the dancers and characters but also arranged their bodies to create strange, erotic patterns. (Kolker, 2009: 81-82)

The meanings of uses of space and position vary. The person always above in the frame does not necessarily have more power, nor does the person below necessarily have less power. Sometimes the main character may be placed at the edges of the frame to create pity or empathy. The distribution of space in the image is also ideal for creating meaning. Empty space can be used to create semantic emphasis. Composition also relies on visual arrangements such as foreground and background. Elements of composition within the frame can be both regular and symmetrical, as well as irregular and asymmetrical. Contemporary filmmakers have used symmetrical compositions against asymmetrical compositions to create meaning. (Ryan and Lenos, 2012: 51-61).

Whether black and white or color, light can either flatten the scene or truly sculpt the scene with light like a sculpture and produce a narrative effect. It silently guides the viewer on how to interpret a character and their behavior or the direction of the entire film. Lighting generally helps to add depth and texture to the two-dimensional space of the film screen as part of the composition, to draw attention or distract, to guide the viewer within the image, and even to make the viewer part of the overall *mise-en-scène* (Kolker, 2009: 100).

Consequently, in order to elicit a positive response from the audience, the actors' positions and movements within the space must be planned. Since watching a film is an emotional experience, the arrangement of scenes, their placement, lighting, filming, and editing style should stimulate the audience's response in accordance with the script's purpose. The audience's attention should be focused on the actor, object, or movement that is most important in the story at that moment (Mascelli, 2007: 207).

3. Creative Decisions in Akira Kurosawa's Cinema

The purpose of this section is to analyze how Kurosawa's artistic forms of expression and technical choices, which deeply influenced the art of cinema, affected his cinematic language. Making these choices more visible will facilitate our understanding of his *mise-en-scène* design, which matured through storytelling, psychological depth, and visual forms of expression.

In recent years, Akira Kurosawa's cinematic art has begun to be studied in greater depth worldwide, particularly in terms of narrative techniques, visual aesthetics, and psychological portrayals. Academics have analyzed the uniqueness of Kurosawa's films from various perspectives, including his artistic style deeply influenced by East Asian aesthetics, his strategy of adapting classical literature, and the complexity of the characters in his films.

Akira Kurosawa's cinematography and film language bear a distinctive "auteur" signature deeply rooted in both Japanese cultural traditions and international modernist techniques. His approach to the art of cinema is based on the observation that Japanese films are rich in mood or atmosphere and present characters within their surroundings. He focused on the use of *mise-en-scène* to create this atmosphere. Known for breaking away from traditional filming methods by using multiple cameras, Kurosawa was influenced by the original 1920s emphasis on the " " and realistic movement, reducing long front shots and instead giving more space to over-the-shoulder shots (Pynn, 2015:40-44).

Kurosawa's words about cinema actually provide clues about how he managed the design process: "There is a beauty unique to cinema. This beauty can only be expressed through a film, and you feel this beauty in a good film. The better this quality is used, the greater the film's power to affect you. I think this quality is what drives people to go to the cinema to watch films and what drives a director to make films. At the heart of cinema lies a beauty unique to cinema" (Kurosawa, 2006:202).

Kurosawa attended the Doshusha Western Painting School and wanted to start his career as a painter. He achieved early success by exhibiting two of his paintings, but struggled to make a living from his art. However, this early education in the arts gave Kurosawa's films

a powerful sensitivity when he began directing and gave him the ability to sharply express the visual and emotional impact that the wide space around objects within the frame can create (Kheen, 2011:33).

Kurosawa's "structured" vision, intellectually shaped by the knowledge of other artists and his own creative intuition, materializes in a visual-auditory terrain where the perspectives of painters Paolo Ucello, Leonardo da Vinci, Caravaggio, Rembrandt, Renoir, Cézanne, Van Gogh, Maurice de Vlaminck, Grosz, and Utagawa Kuniyoshi (Gomez, quoting Prince, 2018, p.133). In addition, tragic images emanating from literature, specifically Shakespeare's poetry and the prose of Dostoyevsky and Gorky, are also incorporated. From cinema, the narrative style of Central European and Russian silent cinema and the narrative style of the first American filmmakers who transitioned to sound cinema, among which John Ford holds a special place (Richie, cited in Gomez, 2018: 133).

In his work *The Art of White Space in the Film Throne of Blood* (1957): A Comprehensive Exploration, Fei Liu states that Kurosawa masterfully uses light and shadow to create visual white space. Noting that light and shadow became an important tool for Kurosawa to express emotions, define characters, and create atmosphere, Liu points out that he used numerous contrasting light and shadow tones in his films. He states that light and shadow intertwine to outline and define the empty space in the image. Liu emphasizes that this contrast between light and shadow not only strengthens the hierarchy and three-dimensionality of the image but also makes the empty spaces in the image more striking, directing the viewer's gaze and thoughts. Therefore, the viewer can freely imagine and make associations in these empty spaces, thus participating more deeply in the film's narrative and emotional expression (Lui, 2024:5).

Kurosawa's images pulsate with the eye of a painter eager to bring his pictures to life. The Japanese master's gaze is that of a storyteller of images with expressive power in their own right; he composes each frame with care and precision, possessing the meticulousness of a creator accustomed to thinking through every minute detail of his work (Gomez, 2018:148).

Kurosawa also reflects the spirit of minimalism in his choice of composition and perspective. To reduce visual clutter on the screen, he often uses simple compositional methods such as placing the character in the center of the screen or using symmetrical composition. He is also skilled at using different perspectives to reveal the inner worlds of his characters and the development of the plot, allowing viewers to understand and feel the theme and emotion of the film more deeply (Lui, 2024:5).

The Japanese master has succeeded in synthesizing the plastic and stage elements of Noh and Kabuki theater with psychological and social elements in a way unlike anyone else. These elements are distinguished by stark framing and pictorial concepts. Akira Kurosawa, a master of cinematic technique, rhythm, short editing, the expressive power of black and white and color, and theatrical tradition, has achieved greater universal popularity than other "classics" (Kenji Mizoguchi, Hiroshi Inagaki, Kaneto Shindo, Masaki Kobayashi, Teinosuke Kinugasa, and even Yasujiro Ozu).

Kurosawa was also known for his perfectionism. It is well known that when filming a scene in "Throne of Blood" (1957) where Toshiro Mifune's character was to be shot with arrows, Kurosawa insisted that Mifune wear a protective vest and be shot with real arrows. He devoted himself actively to writing, penning most of the screenplays used in his films either alone or in collaboration with others. He was deeply involved in the setup of his cinematography cameras, costume, and set design. Although not a composer, he designed the music to accompany his scenes while writing his screenplays (Kheen, 2011:37).

In the later stages of Kurosawa's creativity, significant changes occurred in terms of the writer's perspective and the relationship between the writer and the work. In his black-and-white films, the director was strongly involved in the internal polemics of his works. During the transitional period when *Dodes'ko-den* and *Dersu Uzol* were filmed, the creator's distance from the represented world increased. This trend has become even stronger in the Japanese director's latest masterpieces. Although *Sobowtdra* can definitely be described as an "ideologically polyphonic" work, the author's voice remains outside the work and does not participate in it (Babarowski, 2012:77).

Kurosawa's filmmaking process begins with putting ideas on paper. This does not refer only to "ideas" related to the dramatic structure of the film. Kurosawa develops visual ideas by focusing on all alternatives and then transforms them into detailed drawings. The director uses these drawings as the basis for visual concepts and the essence of the film's structure. Kurosawa studied Western art history in depth. These influences can be seen in his later films, such as *Dreams*. In particular, traces of art movements such as symbolism, impressionism, fauvism, expressionism, and surrealism can be found in the drawings he prepared for *Dreams* (Escorihuela, 2011:7).

On the other hand, in *Rashomon*, the style of the film (scales, editing speed, etc.) largely shapes the narrative. In the scenes featuring the bandit's statement, fast editing is preferred, reflecting his arrogance as someone who gets what he wants and the dynamism of purely physical action. At the same time, the close-ups chosen when telling the woman's story take up more space on the screen than the other characters, creating a more emotional tension. Similarly, long shots are preferred in the scenes with the husband's statement, physically distancing the character from the bandit and his wife (Redfern, 2014: 25-30).

The film "Idiot," adapted from Dostoyevsky, may be one of the master director's darkest films. Kurosawa shot most of the scenes in dim twilight and semi-dark rooms, almost referencing the original work. Mussorgsky's *A Night on Bald Mountain* (In Praise of the Shadow) music, which accompanies the film's dark atmosphere, is supported by demonic masks emerging from burning torches, increasing the level of tension. Kurosawa attaches great importance to geometric sharpness, using it to visualize the relationships and emotions between characters. The geometry of his frames is evident in the precise spatial arrangement of two or more figures. In key scenes, two characters are usually placed at the center of the frame; this reinforces their dialogue, showing that they truly understand and see each other. On the other hand, other characters who are not part of the dialogue are usually positioned at right angles to

the main characters, forming a regular polygon-shaped frame that keeps the main character at the center (Wang, 2018:159-162).

In his black-and-white films—*Drunken Angel*, etc.—the visual dynamics and light-and-shadow effects characteristic of 17th-century Baroque painters and sculptors such as Caravaggio, Bernini, and Rembrandt are evident (Godwin, 2011:21-25). For example, in *Rashomon*, he broke with traditional cinematography conventions by filming directly into the sun. His motivation here was to capture the play of light and shadow in the depths of the forest. In his later color films, he used colors to convey emotional tension. Kurosawa's cinematic success stems from his ability to create his own unique style (Escorihuela, 201:7), which he could not achieve in painting, by combining Western and Eastern artistic languages through cinema (Kurosawa, 2006).

Kurosawa uses colors to convey emotional and symbolic meanings. For example, the red sky in *"Ran"* is a "fiery and frightening" sky that creates a dramatic effect. Although shot in black and white, in the film *"High and Low"* he tried to add a pinkish tone to the smoke that signifies the path to crime (Sobrinho, 2005: 50-60).

As we approach the end of this section, it would be appropriate to share Kurosawa's thoughts on directing, as these thoughts are expected to help us in the analysis section:

"One of the important functions of a director is to convince many people to follow him and work together. From the moment shooting begins until it ends, he must know every subject very well and be able to carry out the work in line with the instructions he gives, using his leadership skills. During the shooting of a scene, the director must see even the smallest details. This does not mean that you have to keep your eyes on every part of the set at all times. I often watch other areas rather than constantly watching the actors during filming. Of course, looking at a place does not mean focusing your gaze on one point and not seeing anything else. However, you need to be aware of what is happening around you. You may have shot a scene with great enthusiasm, but if you cannot see that same enthusiasm when watching the film, the only thing to do is to look at it with an objective eye, forget all the effort you put in and the enthusiasm you had during the shoot, and cut that scene" (Kurosawa, 2006:201-208).

4. Method:

In this study, the "mise-en-scène criticism" method was used to examine the film through the director's choices. Mise-en-scène criticism is based on the concept of mise-en-scène. Mise-en-scène, which is directly related to the staged action, has six basic elements. The elements of mise-en-scène are the decor/setting, lighting, costumes, hair, makeup, and the movements of the characters. Today, mise-en-scène is used in a broader sense. Mise-en-scène encompasses everything related to filming, from set design to costume design, actors' performances, lighting, camera angles, camera movements, camera distance, use of sound, and composition, which the director or producer creates for the screen to guide and shape the viewer's perception. Lighting serves to reflect the character's psychology within the space they inhabit, along with makeup. Efforts are made to use natural lighting so that the viewer can become absorbed in the subject (Kabadayı, 2013: 45).

For the reader to understand the mise-en-scène critique, it is assumed that the reader is aware of what the elements of mise-en-scène are. Thus, when making a critique, analysis can be carried out without the need for explanations about what mise-en-scène is and what it contains. In mise-en-scène criticism, points such as the length of the shots as a visual style, which shot transitions to which shot, whether camera pan movements are used, whether this is related to the genre, the reasons for the lighting used, the reasons for the moving shots, and the technical comparison of similar sequences are addressed (Kabadayı, 2013:114-115).

In this context, each of the two short films in the sample film has been analyzed separately in the context of the following parameters. Each parameter is divided into three sub-parameters:

i. Framing, Composition, and Spatial Arrangement

a. Sub-Parameters:

- b. Scale, Camera Angle and Perspective, Composition/Symmetry-Asymmetry,
- c. Spatial depth

ii. Light and Color and Visual Atmosphere

- a. Light Level and Contrast
- b. Color Palette and Saturation
- c. The Psychological and Cultural Codes of Color

4.1. The Cinematographic Structure of the Film "Dreams"

Fifteen years after filming *Dersu Uzala*, Akira Kurosawa once again reveals his interest in the relationship between humans and nature. *Dreams*, released in 1990, is a US-Japan co-production, with Steven Spielberg, who admits to being a fan of Kurosawa's work, serving as producer. The film is divided into eight sections, each representing a dream, and lasts approximately two hours (Colla & Rossini, 2011, pp. 158-159).

The *Dreams* is a film that follows the best theatrical traditions of the Eastern world, yet is perfectly translated into the language of the Seventh Art, which the Japanese master has mastered so well. Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (Spanish title) is divided into eight parts, each designed separately, reminiscent of the author's own dream stories, with a constant theme in the background: Death, because perhaps the eighty-year-old director saw death approaching (Lera, 2010).

4.2. Film Credits

Director: Akira Kurosawa, Ishiro Honda, Producer: Mike Y. Inoue, Hisao Kurosawa, Cast: Akira Terao, Mitsuko Baisho, Toshie Negishi, Mieko Harada, Screenplay: Akira Kurosawa, Director of Photography: Takao Saitô, Shôji Ueda, Editing: Tome Minami Music: Shinichirô Ikebe, Genre: Drama, Fantasy Duration: 119 min, Country: Japan, Language: Japanese, English, French Release Date: 1990

4.3. First Dream (Sunshine Through The Rain) Set Design: Framing, Composition, and Spatial Arrangement

This first dream in the film is about an 8-year-old boy who, overcome by curiosity, breaks a rule. According to Japanese legend, it is believed that foxes celebrate among themselves on rainy days, and those days are considered special days when it is forbidden to

leave the house. This is because foxes do not like their wedding ceremonies to be seen by humans. In this story, the boy's mother warns him not to go into the forest. However, the little boy ignores his mother's warning and goes into the forest. This behavior means breaking the rule; he sees things he shouldn't see. The boy secretly watches the ceremony of the human-shaped people from behind a tree.

When the child returns home, his mother tells him that he has broken the rule and angered the foxes, that the foxes have left a knife for the child to kill himself, and that he must kill himself. If the child asks the foxes for forgiveness, they may forgive him. However, this is not very likely. The child asks how to find the foxes. His mother replies: the foxes live under the rainbow. The child sets off to ask for forgiveness.

In the opening sequence of the first dream, this static medium shot (Visual 1), lasting approximately 38 seconds, provides information about time, space, and characters. This long static shot also prepares the viewer for the events that will take place shortly. The film's opening sequence also sets the tone of the film and creates a motif. This two-shot in the next scene is used to shoot the master shot of the conversation between the two people. However, contrary to common usage, it is framed at full-body scale rather than waist or knee scale. This shot is edited to intertwine with the previous shot to shape the dramatic arc of the conversation. It provides strong narrative clues about the *mise-en-scène* of the characters (mother and son) and the nature of their relationship. In addition to this clue, this shot strengthens the relationship between the characters and allows the viewer to compare and contrast them. These shots are not supported by close-ups that would reflect the characters' psychological makeup, emotions, facial expressions, and, in short, all their personality traits. This is because, in this shot, the director prioritizes the information provided and its connection to nature over the characters themselves. There is more information about the space.



Visual1 First Dream Opening Shots

The first thing that stands out in the shots Kurosawa chose is that the scales are systematically chosen to emphasize the child's small presence against the vastness of the world. In the shots at the entrance to the house, the director's distant wide shots emphasize the child as a small figure framed by a rectangular void. This conscious choice of scale, in the face of the

architectural structure's massively dominant presence, refers to the child as a entity that exists within that structure but cannot rule over it, while also reinforcing the image that dominates the film as a whole: "man is a small entity in the face of nature that surpasses him."

The director has preferred medium shots in the forest scenes (Image 2) but skillfully uses them without isolating the "little child" from the space like a portrait. A montage that shifts between waist shots and knee shots is preferred. In the shots where the child watches the foxes' ceremony, the child, who is in a closed body position, is transformed into a witness silhouette in the "OTS" shot.



Images2 First Dream Forest Scenes

The perspective in the forest scenes undergoes a dramatic transformation. Tree trunks are used as thick vertical columns in contrast to the foreground. This is because the camera is sometimes positioned close to these trunks, creating a strong sense of perspective depth. This perspective serves two purposes: first, to create a feeling of nature that overwhelms and shakes the viewer; second, to position the viewer in the background, creating a sense of a curtain that hides the "foxes' wedding" from them. This is also a reference to the plastic aesthetics of Kabuki theater.

The rules of "Thirds" (Mercado, 2011:23) and "Sixths" (Hart, 2007:205) were used to create visually harmonious compositions in the above plans. The child, placed on the line passing through the lower sixth of the frame dimension from the lower right edge of the frame (the rule of sixths) (Images 2), carries great weight with the direction of movement from the outer lines inward. Although it does not capture the weight of the thirds, it has been used as a useful compositional tool. The child, an important element of the lively, dynamic composition, is placed at one of the intersection points of the lines. Since the child is looking to the right, he

is at the harmonious point in the lower left. This placement creates a counterweight to the child's gaze, thus ensuring that sufficient space is left in the direction of the character's (the child's) gaze, which is a rule for balancing the composition.

Placing the child on the one-third or one-sixth line has increased the dramatic power of the composition. Leaving five-sixths of the frame free and placing the trees in that area has created a much stronger effect. This also prevents the composition from feeling static and lacking in visual tension.



Image3 First Dream Ceremony Scene

As seen in the plans above, the concept of "rhythm," one of the fundamental design principles, has been successfully applied beyond a simple image; repeated similar elements form a pattern, playing a key role in the visual field of the scene in a simple way. At the same time, the arrangement of the elements on the stage, taking into account the "linear perspective," has further strengthened the visual narrative here. The placement of the actors along the "diagonal" line has added dynamism and exuberance to the stage.



Visuals4 First Dream Closing Sequence

According to the "Hitchcock Rule" (Mercado, 2011:23), the size of something within the frame should correspond to its value in the story at that moment. In this shot (Image 4), the director shows the knife given to the child's mother by the foxes to kill herself, after the child angered the foxes by breaking the law and was subsequently sentenced to death. With this shot, constructed using the "Hitchcock Rule," the director effectively conveys the immense penalty for interfering with nature and disrupting the ecological balance. This shot (Image 4), given with a "subjective point of view," suddenly makes the viewer, who has become accustomed to the safety of watching the events from the perspective of an unseen third person (objective point of view), share in the great tension experienced by the little boy and confronts them with death. Balance is an important element of composition. Every element within the frame carries visual weight. The visual weight of an object is related to its size. The object's position within the image composition, its color, and its physical characteristics directly affect this weight. Visual tension arises from the interaction between symmetrical or asymmetrical elements and their positions within the frame. In the final scene, which begins with a panoramic shot (Visual 4), the child is squeezed into the lower middle of the frame within the enormous flower field. It is evident that this scale preference was a conscious choice to reveal the space-subject hierarchy. The preference is consistently used in favor of space. This emphasizes that this universe is "an order that surrounds humans and is greater than them."

In the opening scenes, the camera is clearly positioned at eye level and frontal. This allows the architectural structure to be perceived directly from the front, while the horizontal lines of the roof and the vertical lines of the columns code the space as a fixed order prior to the narrative. At the same time, the child's position relative to these lines becomes prominent as the only vertical human figure. In fact, the underlying motivation is the director's attempt to establish a dualistic relationship by first showing the order of the world and then the child's action that opposes or challenges this order.

4.4. The Second Dream (The Peach Orchard): Mise-en-scène Design: Light, Color, and Visual Atmosphere

The protagonist of this dream is again a boy, as in the first dream. The film references the toy festival found in Japanese culture. Our protagonist, around 10 years old, mentions another girl he claims to have always seen with his sisters. His sister tells him he is mistaken. He refuses to accept this and insists there were six girls. While distributing the tea he brought to his siblings, he sees the girl he is sure is in the other room. Disregarding his sister's words, he pursues the girl only he can see. He leaves the house. When he reaches the garden, he finds the toys his sister and her friends were playing with come to life. These are the spirits of the trees, the life of the seeds. The spirits tell the child that they will never return to their homes because his family cut down the peach trees. The spirits of the trees ask the child this question: "How can you celebrate the day the peaches bloom, their arrival, when the trees have been cut down?" Unable to bear the sorrow of the lost trees, the child begins to cry. One of the spirits says that the child is a good person, crying with sorrow every time a tree is cut down. Another claims that the child is not sad about the trees being cut down, but about not being able to eat fruit anymore. After this accusation, the child says, "No, peaches can be bought.

But where can you buy an entire garden full of blooming flowers? I love this garden and the peach trees that bloom here. But they are no longer here. That's why I cried," he says. The spirits of the trees, convinced that the child is a good person, allow him to see the garden bloom once more. They represent the blooming with dance and music, and the garden suddenly fills with trees. However, immediately afterwards, the trees disappear again in a frightening manner.

The dark navy indigo on the child we see at the beginning of the film (Image 5) creates a neutral but powerful figure color. It also creates a contrast with both the dark wood indoors and the green background outside. Dark brown wooden doors, shelves, and wall surfaces reveal the traditional interior, while the low color intensity contributes to the prominence of red and pink colors.

General lighting dominates the space. The lighting is almost entirely frontal and flat. The quality of the light is not playful. The main goal here is primarily to make objects visible. Carefully balanced facade and contour lights bring the image to life. At the same time, it provides general information about color temperature, time of day, light direction, and weather conditions. The lighting of the scene, approached with a pictorial method, presents the sunlight coming from the surroundings in the form we see in real life, using a direct imitation method. There is no random light distribution that would cause some elements in the space to be bright and others to remain in dark shadows. Rather than lighting to highlight the actor, the director has opted for a soft light that is diffused throughout and also defines the contours of objects.

The lighting on the stage is free from objective halos and glare that would diminish the quality of the image. Natural shadows are far from being unwanted and distracting; they reflect the conditions of nature. The high-key lighting that dominates the stage gives the image a bright and energetic feel, reinforcing the sense of realism. The tones that dominate the film space contribute to both the mood and aesthetic appeal of the image. Tones ranging from medium gray to black predominate in the foreground. The dark tones that dominate the space as a whole reflect an atmosphere of tranquility and create an intimate mood. Compared to the foreground,

the painting is heavily dramatized with the dominance of darker tones alongside a background enlivened by a brighter value. This is because the abundant light in the background, where the peach branch in the vase is located, creates a feeling of lightness and joy compared to the painting as a whole. The similar tone covering the large, distinct area of the scene adds meaning and power to the painting. The overall area of the painting, with its dark tones softened by a distinct, small area of light, evokes a serious, solemn, and mysterious effect. Polychrome arrangement dominates the scenes. The director has distributed the dominance of different colors in the painting through toning, reducing the weight of the third color to a negligible level. The color harmony in the painting has been carefully achieved with a warm-cool color balance. The colors in the visual design of the painting guide the viewer's perception and understanding of the space in which the story takes place. The colors in the foreground reflect emotional exuberance and joy, while the color tone in the background creates a sense of calm and stillness, adding a touch of mystery.



Image5 Second Dream Opening Sequence

A visual harmony has been achieved with the warm and cool colors that dominate the scene. A tense atmosphere has been captured. The viewer's perception of the scene has been enhanced by the contrasting colors. The bright red colors that dominate the carpet and curtain surfaces of the platform where the Hina dolls sit, and the golden-yellow details on the dolls' crowns and accessories, reflect a ritualistic and ceremonial aura. The pink and white tones at the end of the corridor, contrasting with the cold greenish-gray color of the corridor (Image 6), give the feeling of transitioning into a dream world. The director combines linear perspective with color perspective to create a feeling of "a door opening to another world." The smoky blue-green background light in the bamboo forest (Image 6) creates a misty atmosphere, while the dark green and brown trunks of the upright bamboo trees create a rhythm with their vertical lines. The purple and pink flower carpet on the ground, along with the female character's white and pink costume, reinforce a threatening dreamlike yet not overly threatening sense of nature.



Image6 Second Dream: Light and Color in Interior and Exterior Spaces

Compared to the rich green color of the grass-covered hill, which is almost like a single background (Image 7), the neutral beige-brown color of the plan where the child is alone creates a contrast. The figures walking in a row and lined up side by side are like a color palette. The green color dominating the background of the entire painting is primarily a symbol of nature, the outdoors, and spring.

Green has a positive effect on the viewer. Unlike all other shades of green, the spring green here emphasizes new life, birth, renewal, revival, joy, and satisfaction. The color green, which evokes harmony, trust, and abundance, enhances the effect of the composition. In terms of color perspective, the warm colors in the painting stand out. The vivid and bright colors in the frame excite and energize the viewer. The orange color reflects harshness, brightness, and warmth, while the white colors reflect cleanliness, order, and a sense of openness (Kırık, 2013: 74). In addition, the symbolic meanings of the colors used refer to the collective subconscious in Japanese culture.



Image7 Light and Color in the Second Dream Closing Sequence

To summarize, the color dramaturgy in the opening section of this dream scene emerges as a fundamental formal axis that distinguishes the dream spaces within the narrative. While the dominant color accents in the interior spaces create both a traditional weight and a ceremonial tension, the shift to cool blue tones in the color palette as we enter the bamboo forest stands as a threshold between dream and reality. The ceremonial scene on the hilltop features a high-saturation color sequence of white, orange, and purple garments against a lush green meadow, along with pink pastel-toned flowers, evoking both spring and rebirth.

On the other hand, low-intensity, low-contrast but directional lighting has been preferred for the interior spaces. Motivated light sources that create the feeling of coming from a window highlight the child's face with soft top/side lighting; meanwhile, the bright reflections on the dolls on the red platform create a spot effect and direct the gaze. The choices made when lighting the corridor emphasize the long perspective, keeping it relatively dark compared to the area in front, while the figure and background appearing at the end of the corridor are illuminated with diffuse light, drawing the spatial boundaries between reality and fantasy. In the bamboo forest, light illuminates the space from above in a diffuse manner, while soft, misty overhead light melts contours rather than sharply cutting shadows, rendering the space a homogeneous area suspended between dream and reality. Instead of rim lighting, a halo of light surrounding the bodies was preferred for the figures, which brought the scene closer to the "fairytale tone of the unknown world" rather than making it unnerving. In the ceremony scene at the top, a high but controlled general lighting that mimics daylight has been preferred. The almost shadowless illumination of the green ground seems to want the figures to be perceived as if they had jumped out of a shadow play with a two-dimensional perspective. Throughout the film, the lighting choices, which evolve from a closed, focused, and ritual-heavy space to a

soft, diffuse, and pastoral light, employ a strategy that gradually concretizes the dream experience through light intensity, direction, and contrast.

5. CONCLUSION

In light of the scenes examined, it is evident that every image in the film carries information about visual arrangements and compositional principles that enable the viewer to perceive it within a specific order, beyond a simple image. Through these arrangements, the director carefully emphasizes to the viewer where to look, what to pay attention to, and in what order to look at them. Through framing, lighting, and other *mise-en-scène* elements, Kurosawa deliberately directs the audience's perspective and attention to reveal the meanings of the stories.

The scenes examined have contributed to the spirit of the story with their visual style, which has meaning on its own without requiring too much external voice, dialogue, or other explanatory tools. The film also has pictorial compositions that convey the atmosphere and subtext. The effective composition that dominates the film as a whole reinforces the idea. Cinematographic elements that add meaning beyond mere imagery have been carefully selected and emphasized. Based on the findings, Akira Kurosawa uses camera scales and perspective very carefully to establish the relationship between humans and nature. Children are small in the face of architecture and nature, that is, all beings in the world. The scale of the shots and the choice of perspective here determine the position of humans in relation to the universe.

The director, who meticulously handles symmetrical elements to create emotional and moral tones, uses these symmetrical choices to give visible, concrete form to the rules and order within the family, the prohibitions and fears in the forest, and the traditional continuity in the fox's procession.

In conclusion, Kurosawa used the elements in the first parameter not only to describe the story but also to produce meaning in a systemic way.

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