



Absence, Death, and Editorial Ethics: Reframing the Cut in Hirokazu Kore-eda's *Maborosi* and *Still Walking*

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Abstract

This paper posits that editing as a practice in the cinema of Hirokazu Kore-eda is an ethical practice that redefines the image of death through absence and not visualisation. By referring to *Maborosi* and *Still Walking*, the paper presents the idea of editorial ethics of absence to explain how off-screen death, dilation of time, withheld flashback, and narrative ellipsis create a spectatorship mode, which is based on uncertainty and attention. Based on the realism of Andre Bazin, the time-image of Gilles Deleuze, and ethics of alterity by Emmanuel Levinas, the article shows that the editing of Kore-eda does not want the spectacle and explanatory closure. The paper examines the cut as a moral boundary that indicates the boundaries of representation through close examination of key sequences to demonstrate how the cut does not act as a device of narrative control. Temporality of grief, in which loss has not been resolved, makes the spectators align themselves with the lived in-betweenness of grief in the cinema of Kore-eda, which turns absence into an ethical form. The article adds to film theory by rebranding editing as a place of ethical containment and a broadening of debates on cinematic death beyond representation to the politics of not showing.

Introduction

Existence in cinema has traditionally dealt with death in terms of visibility. From classical narrative cinema to modern spectacle-based filmmaking, death is often presented as a climax, and it is achieved by enhanced editing, music, and acting. In these situations, the cut serves to intensify emotional effect (and to organize moral meaning). Death is made visible and narrative.

But this paradigm has an ethical question: what is it to demonstrate death? To be more precise, what are the implications of turning death into something that can be consumed, interpreted and resolved?

The film of Hirokazu Kore-eda is a good substitute. *Maborosi* (1995) and *Still Walking* (2008) do not depict death but hold back on it. Editing does not heighten the death situation; it erases the situation. It is not absence as lack, but absence as form.

This paper suggests that the editing practice of Kore-eda is an editorial ethics of absence where the act of not showing is then a moral choice. Instead of an event, his movies build death as a time state, an aspect that defines life but is not entirely depictable.

Methodology and Approach

In this analysis close textual analysis is used together with philosophically informed film theory. The methodology is organized on the basis of three principles:

Scene-based analysis - analysis of editing patterns in certain sequences.

Temporal analysis - analyzing duration, rhythm, ellipsis.

Spectatorial positioning - investigating the effects of editing on the viewer experience.

Editing focuses on:

- Shot duration
- Transitions (cuts, fades, ellipses)
- Availability/unavailability of reaction shots.
- Flashback (or not used)

This method enables one to comprehensively explain the construction of absence on a formal basis.

Theoretical Framework: Editorial Ethics of Absence

Bazinian Realism and Moral ambiguity:

To Andre Bazin realism is not only aesthetic, but also moral. Cinema enables the audience to experience reality instead of getting a predetermined meaning by maintaining ambiguity. Kore-eda takes this argument to its extreme by not portraying the most decisive moment of death at all.

Deleuze and the Guatemalan Time-Image:

The time-image by Gilles Deleuze is an explanation of a cinema where time is no longer structured by action. Kore-eda has made death in his films not to play a role of narrative resolution but of unresolved temporal presence.

Levinas and the Ethics of the Other:

The philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas lays stress on the irreducibility of the Other. The danger of figuring death is a danger of totalizing the subject--to reduce them to image. Kore-eda avoids the depiction of death, which is in accordance with the ethics of Levinasian: it maintains alterity.

Maborosi: Death as Something unknown

The Withheld Death:

In Maborosi, the husband of the main character is killed in a questionable manner. More importantly, death is not portrayed in the movie. Rather, presence to absence editing creates a hole that will never be filled.

It is this gap that creates epistemological uncertainty. The viewer, similarly the main character, is unaware of how and why death has taken place.

Scene Analysis: The Train Tracks:

The suggestion that the husband could have strolled towards train tracks is one of the most talked about scenes in the film. Never is this moment however directly shown.

Editing strategy:

- No description of the act
- No intent confirmatory reverse shot
- No flashback reconstruction

Narrative closure is opposed by the absence. Death can never be transformed by the viewer into knowledge.

Duration and Grief:

The editing style of the film is dominated by long takes. The shots tend to go beyond the need of the narrative, producing a time suspension.

Grief is not portrayed in dramatic scenes but is marked by time:

- Waiting
- Walking
- Looking

Mourning enters as time.

Still Walking: Death as Everyday Presence

Refusal of Flashback:

Contrary to most movies concerning family memory, there are no flashbacks to the dead son in Still Walking. Memory does not visualize in editing.

Rather, memory is created by:

- Dialogue fragments
- Repetition of routine
- Spatial absence

Scene Analysis: The Meal Sequence:

The main meal sequence is an example of editorial restraint.

Editing characteristics:

- Minimal cutting
- Long conversational takes
- Lack of emotional emphasis

The scene does not escalate dramatically even though it is emotional. The deceased son is there because he is not.

Temporal Repetition:

The structure of the film resembles a yearly rite. This is supported by editing, as it repeats the gestures-cooking, serving, cleaning.

Death is not a discontinuity, but a form of absence organization.

Comparative Analysis: Two Forms of Absence

| Aspect | <i>Maborosi</i> | <i>Still Walking</i> |
|--------------------|-----------------|----------------------|
| Mode of Absence | Uncertainty | Integration |
| Temporal Structure | Disruption | Continuity |
| Editing Strategy | Ellipsis | Repetition |
| Spectator Position | Not knowing | Living with absence |

Both the movies deny representation, though they differ in terms of absence.

Spectatorship: Ethics of Not Knowing

The editing puts the viewer in a state of uncertainty by Kore-eda. This has far reaching ethical implications.

Instead of:

- Knowing → judging

The viewer experiences:

- Not knowing → attending

This shift makes the movie a zone of ethical interaction and not moral teaching.

Editing and the Limits of Representation

The work of Kore-eda is an indication that some experiences are impossible to capture without being distorted, especially death.

Editing recognizes this constraint.

The films do not strive to depict all but embrace incompleteness as a state of ethical fairness.

Addition to Film Theory

Three important concepts are added to this article:

1. Ethics of absence as editorial editing - moral restraint
2. Death as Temporal Condition - beyond event-based representation
3. Spectatorship as Ethical Attention- not knowing as engagement

In summary: The Ethics of the Cut:

The cut is a moral gesture in *Maborosi* and *Still Walking*. It is the marking of what cannot be displayed, what cannot be explained, and what ought to be open.

Kore-eda's cinema does not represent death—it **respects it**.

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