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## Moral Ambiguity Without Judgment: Editing, Family, And Ethics In Shoplifters And Broker

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### Abstract

This article looks at the editing considerations in *Shoplifters* and *Broker* by Hirokazu Koreeda that create moral ambiguity without the delivery of moral judgment. Embodied in tight editing, elliptical transitions, and story denouement, the editorial practice of Koreeda opposes moral dualities about family, crime, and care. The analysis, based on film-philosophy, ethical spectatorship theory and close textual analysis, states that editing is an ethical tool that develops viewer responsibility as opposed to narrative conclusion. Through their prediction of time lapses, withheld responses, long takes, and non-hierarchical montage, Koreeda creates a cinema of care that favors relational ethics in lieu of legal or normative frameworks. By placing editing as a moral agent to modern East Asia filmmaking and broadening the arguments of family beyond biological and juridical descriptions, the article becomes part of the arguments about ethical cinema.

### Introduction

The work of Hirokazu Koreeda takes a unique place in the modern world of film due to the lifelong interest in issues of family, morality and social responsibility. With a documentary background, Koreeda has always extended an observational sensitivity of documentary filmmaking to fiction, making it hard to manipulate narrative or instruct morals. His films are sensitive to ambiguity, contradiction, and emotional obscurity rather than giving ethical climaxes. In *Shoplifters* (2018) and *Broker* (2022), this ambiguity is especially strong, as the characters of socially marginal groups who are on the border of legality and normative morality are foreshadowed.

The work of Koreeda has been discussed critically focusing on narrative humanism, performance realism, and thematic issues relating to loss, memory and kinship. Nevertheless, these strategies often relegate the importance of editing in the development of these ethical experiences. This paper claims that editing in the cinema of Koreeda is not a technical or narrative activity, but an ethical activity per se. With its tactics of ellipsis, delayed reaction shots, neutral cutting rhythms, and shirking of climactic resolution, editing takes away judgment and transfers moral agency to the viewer.

In terms of Shoplifters and Broker, this paper will discuss how editing is used to create what can be described as the state of moral ambiguity without judgment. Such movies challenge the audience to consider morally ambiguous cases of child neglect, theft, abandonment, and informal care giving, without giving any narrative hints on what is right or wrong. Rather, editing creates temporal and emotional space where characters are free to exist. Through such editorial techniques, the article places the work of Koreeda in a wider context of ethical filmmaking and audiences.

### **Literature Review: Ethics, Family and Editing.**

Ethical questioning has always been warped in the film theory especially in the debate of realism, spectatorship, and cinematic time. The ethics of the cinema championed by Andre Bazin makes the notion of long takes and deep focus place the ethics of cinema in respect towards reality and ambiguity, where moral meaning was formed by the engagement of spectators, and not by the control of the director. Stanley Cavell builds this point further by theorising cinema as a moral experience with the world and watching a movie as a moral act of acknowledgment and not judgment.

The time-image concept by Gilles Deleuze further disrupts classic moral frameworks by placing more emphasis on time; duration, waiting and indeterminacy than action-oriented stories. Ethical clarity is put on hold in time-image cinema, and it is common to find a character existing in a state of hesitation and uncertainty. The cinema of Koreeda is much in line with this tradition, especially the denial of causal resolution and narrative punishment.

Family Studies Scholarship on Japanese and Korean cinema has discussed the concept of kinship as a place of social criticism, where the concept of non-normative family disrupts state, legal, and cultural boundaries of belonging. Nevertheless, in these debates, editing is regarded as transparent or as secondary. The current literature on Koreeda has mainly focused on narrative themes, performance and autobiographical influence and so editorial practice has not been theorised well. This paper fills that gap by predicting editing as one of the main ethical processes.

### **Theoretical Framework: Moral ambiguity and Ethical spectatorship.**

The argument of moral ambiguity in films does not point towards moral relativism and ethical nihilism. Instead, it refers to the unwillingness to deliver a hierarchy of judgments on characters and actions. Ethical spectatorship theory suggests that audiences are moral agents whose meanings are determined through formal decisions. Editing has a decisive role in this process because it regulates accessibility of information, emotion and time.

In films by Koreeda, editing often postpones the recognition or discovery. Reaction shots are not provided, emotion stress is diluted with the help of ellipsis, and story climaxes are shifted. These tactics do not allow the audience to conform too readily to judgemental views. With reference to the idea of ethics as responsibility to the Other that Emmanuel Levinas provided, editing in the cinema of Koreeda can be interpreted as a denial of totalising characters in the context of moral systems.

Koreeda has avoided the manipulative montage and emphatic cutting, so that the ethical meaning can come out of the length of time and the co-presence. Editing therefore provides an ethical point of contact between display and viewer.

## **Editing the Chosen Family in Shoplifters**

The main family unit in shoplifters is built up by gradual revelation as opposed to exposition. Editing favors ordinary temporality--food, discussions, shared silence, etc.--instead of plot-motivation. The lack of the family legality narrative background forms the first gap that leaves an ethical gap to avoid pre-judging.

The elliptical editing is used to highlight the most important moments of the moral crisis like the moment the abuse is revealed or the moment the family starts to separate. Emotional climaxes are not exaggerated and even reaction shots are sometimes not included. The film does not allow the spectator an easy moral position by rejecting the melodramatic cutting. The editing options of children are often given precedence to the mustering of the observations instead of reactions by inherently matching it to the duration.

The last discovery of the artificiality of the family comes without an editorial in the film, further supporting the ethical standpoint of the movie: the sense of belonging is made by caring but not by being legal.

## **Reviewing Ethics in Broker: Transnational Moral Space.**

Broker takes the ethics of editing practised by Koreeda and transfers it to transnational Korean setting. The film is organized like a road story and discontinues moral confidence by breaking the story into episodes and shifting space. The lack of the traditional narrative climaxes reflects the shakiness of the moral stand of the characters.

With editing, no one moral opinion is favored. Negotiation and conflict scenes, emotional disclosure scenes are frequently separated by time or by a neutral transition. Reaction shots are either postponed or deferred, and it is up to the spectators to find their way through the moral ambiguity.

Broker maintains moral indeterminacy through modest editing and rhythmic restraint and predicts moral ethics in relationships. The editing of the movie is a reflection of the reality in which caring and not law makes ethical choices.

## **Comparative Analysis: Editing Without Verdict.**

Although Shoplifters and Broker have different settings and narration, both movies use editing as an ethical suspension mechanism. Shoplifters' places ambiguity in the domestic intimacy, but Broker relocates it in the mobility and exchange.

Moral closure is denied in both instances through editing. Lack of punitive resolution or redemptive climax is a revelation of Koreeda's devotion to ethical openness. Editing helps to make judgment always incomplete, which places spectators in the role of ethical participants and not as judges.

In conclusion, it can be said that editing, not control, is caring.

This paper has revealed that editing in Shoplifters and Broker is an ethical practice that avoids being judgmental and opts to take care. The editorial strategies used by Koreeda to avoid narrative control and emotional manipulation create a cinema of ethical responsibility.

Editing becomes an actor of morality and defines spectatorship by inhibiting and elusive means. The study furthers the arguments on cinema, morality, and care in the modern film culture in the context of foregrounding editing as ethical practice.

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