



# Listening Through The Cut: Performance, Improvisation, And Ethical Editing In Kore-Eda's Cinema

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## Abstract

This paper focuses on performance, improvisation, and editing in the film of Hirokazu Kore-eda by suggesting that his approach to editing consists essentially of an ethics of listening. Although the studies of Kore-eda have focused on humanism, familial structures, and narrative minimalism as the main aspects of films, the role of editing in reaction to performance but not in control has received little attention. By comparing and contrasting some of the filming sequences of *Shoplifters*, *Broker* and *Nobody Knows*, this paper suggests the idea of the so-called responsive-editing to explain how Kore-eda has made his unique style. The paper, which uses film-philosophy, performance theory and ethical spectatorship, illustrates how long takes, shots of deferred reactions and elliptical continuity enable performances, particularly of children and non-professional actors to develop with autonomy. The paper states that the editing done by Kore-eda creates an ethical space where viewers are welcomed to listen and not judge. By doing so, the paper adds to the wider discourses of performance-based editing and ethics of cinema in the modern East Asian film practice.

## Introduction

The cinema of Hirokazu Kore-eda is often characterized by emotional restraint, humanism and focus on ordinary life. However, beneath these common labels is a very advanced editorial philosophy that has not been properly theorised. The films by Kore-eda are not simply about listening, care, and relational intimacy, but their structure is based on it. In his work editing seems to be less interested with the efficiency of the narrative as with the integrity of the performance.

This paper promotes one main argument: Kore-eda cuts by listening. In other words, his styles of cutting are determined by the sensitivity to the actor's rhythm, hesitation, and improvised gestures. Instead of foisting meaning on to the montage, his approach in editing gives performance room to breathe. It is especially noticeable in the scenes with children, non-pro actors and family interactions.

The continuity editing present in mainstream cinema is usually performance-subordinating. Emotional clues are given by reaction shots; conversational rhythm is controlled by shot-reverse-shot patterns; editorial control is provided by coverage. Kore-eda applies these conventions systematically to loosen them. His cuts are often late, even surprisingly so. Reaction shots are withheld. Emotional beats are not permitted to reach climax but to dissipate. The effect is more of a cinema that is not assembled together as much as it is ethically seen.

This paper thus redefines the editing by Kore-eda as an ethically responsible process, which is based on responsiveness. By the analytical examination of the main movies, it claims that editing in his work:

- Maintains independence of performance.
- Promotes the attention of spectators.
- Resists emotional coercion
- Creates moral misunderstanding.

## **Literature Review**

### **Kore-eda Scholarship:**

The current research on Kore-eda has been more or less centered on:

- Family structures
- Memory and loss
- Documentary influence
- Child subjectivity
- Social marginality

Often critics place him in a tradition of Japanese humanist film-makers, with his emphasis on temporality of the everyday and emotional delicacy. Nevertheless, the majority of the analyses consider editing to be an open support but not an active ethical agent.

Where editing has been mentioned, it is most commonly in connection with:

- Observational realism
- Long-take aesthetics
- Narrative minimalism

The interrelation between editing and the performance, especially improvisational or semi-improvised performance is what is underdeveloped.

## **Editing and Performance in Film Theory**

The conflict between montage and performance has been mentioned in film theory irregularly. Soviet montage at the beginning gave priority to editing as a major source of meaning, usually placing actors in a secondary position and rhythmic construction. The traditions of later realism, particularly realism after Andre Bazin, claimed the moral value of keeping performances intact, adding lengthy takes and cutting to a minimum.

Of particular interest is Stanley Cavell, who discusses film as recognition and not interpretation. According to Cavell, moral encounters may be achieved through cinema where the characters may be seen but not described. The editing of Kore-eda is in full compliance with this philosophical tendency.

## **Ethical Spectatorship**

The theory of ethical spectatorship suggests that it maintains that the audience is ethically engaged in the process of viewing. The editing has a decisive role in this since it organizes:

- What we see
- When we see it
- How long we remain with it

The editing in the films by Kore-eda will often lack any attempt to lead moral judgement, making the viewer more responsible in interpretation.

## **Theoretical Background: Responsive Editing**

In order to learn the practice applied by Kore-eda, this article brings the concept of responsive editing.

### **Definition**

- Responsive editing is a form of editorial where:
- Reductions are the result of performance and not its determinant.
- Behavioral ambiguity is maintained within temporal gaps.
- Reaction shots are morally censored.
- Emotional climaxes are toned down.

### **Listening as an Editorial Process:**

Kore-eda has frequently referred to the fact that he likes watching actors as opposed to telling them where to go emotionally. This is critical because of his background in documentary filmmaking. As a documentarist, one is taught to be patient, to be able to wait until reality has played itself out and then come in.

Kore-eda puts this sensibility into fiction by translating rhythms of editing that are patient instead of assertive.

### **Ethical Stakes:**

What is the moral significance of this?

Since traditional editing usually dictates how one should feel. The editing by Kore-eda rather challenges the viewer to listen.

This change turns the passive consumption to active ethical participation.

## **Shoplifters and Performance and Editorial Space**

### **Ensemble Intimacy:**

Shoplifters shows, perhaps, the most obvious example of performance-reactive editing of Kore-eda. The impromptu family of the movie is built not so much by exposition as by behavioral details made over time.

The features of editing are:

- Long periods of residence within the household
- Minimal coverage cutting
- Soft scene transitions
- Emotional deferral

### **The Dinner Table as Editorial Laboratory:**

The film incorporates dinner scenes that testify to the fact that Kore-eda adheres to the concept of ensemble listening. Instead of dividing the space by forceful shot-reverse-shot, the editing tends to:

- Holds medium-wide framings
- Permits overlapping conversation
- Preserves awkward pauses

This establishes what can be called ethical simultaneity- several emotional states exist without any emphasis on hierarchy.

### **Child Performance and Temporal Patience**

The editorial restraint is particularly relied upon to support the performance of the children. Some of the instances in which children are permitted by Kore-eda:

- Hesitate
- Mispronounce
- Look away
- Break expected rhythm

In traditional editing, these instances could be cut. They are kept here and create authenticity, as well as ethical openness. The viewer will have to interpret and not get cues.

### **Broker, Improv and Editorial Drift**

#### **Road Movie Structure:**

Broker involves more spatial mobility and the same listening based editing used by Kore-eda. The road movie structure may have prompted the viewer to expect a quicker pace, but the movie has a slowish rhythm.

Key features:

- Delays of emotional climaxes
- Cutting patterns - fluid but calm

### **Conversational Ethics:**

The conversations in cars are particularly exposing. Instead of cutting dialogue closely, the editing tends to:

- Let's conversations breathe
- Admits interlineal silence
- Disapproves of reaction-shot punctuation

This creates what we may refer to as conversational ethics-this is whereby the viewer has to listen.

### **Emotional Withholding:**

The moments that could be easily turned into melodramatic are softened by the editor, particularly those that involve the child as the main character of the story. There is a sparse use of the music cues; the cuts come softly, not harshly.

This has no emotional impact but is rather an ethical respect of uncertainty.

### **The Radical Patience of Nobody Knows**

#### **Duration and Childhood:**

Nobody Knows is one of the most formally strict works of Kore-eda. The protracted time frame of the film, which shows children living alone months on their own, is very dependent on editorial forbearance.

Potentially eye-catching content (abandonment, neglect, death) is dealt with very sparingly.

Editing avoids:

- Shock cutting
- Rapid escalation
- Emotional manipulation
- Rather, affliction is a process of cumulative nature

### **Spectator Responsibility:**

The lack of dramatizing the crisis according to the traditional norms makes the viewers uncomfortable because of the editing. This unease is a morally fruitful one: it compels identification as opposed to devotion to anguish.

## Comparison and Contrast: Ethical Listening of Editing

In these movies, there are a few editorial conventions:

### **Late Cutting:**

The cuts generally come a little later than the classical norms.

This creates:

- Behavioral spillover
- Emotional ambiguity
- Observational realism

### **Withheld Reaction Shots:**

Kore-eda avoids over-coding in terms of emotions by reducing the number of reaction shots. Viewers need to make inferences about the inside worlds.

### **Elliptical Continuity:**

The narrative information is often left aside. This creates ambivalence of morality and averts early judgment.

### **Performance Priority:**

Nevertheless, most importantly, editing is secondary to performance. This is a reverse of the hierarchy of mainstream cinema.

## Ethical Spectators and Politics of Attention

The editing by Kore-eda ends up redefining the position of the spectator.

Instead of:

- judging
- consuming
- emotionally reacting on cue

The viewer is encouraged to:

- watch carefully
- listen patiently
- remain uncertain
- accept ambiguity

This has wider political implications. The films of Kore-eda require slow ethical viewing, in a time of heightened media intake.

## Conclusion

This article has presented the argument that the cinema of Hirokazu Kore-eda is organized in terms of editorial ethics of listening. His films create spaces of moral ambiguity that are difficult to judge through the responsive editing practices of late cuts, reticent reaction shots, elliptical continuity and performance-based rhythm.

The research helps advance three aspects of film discourse, namely, by prefiguring the connection between performance and editing:

- Theory of performance-centered editing
- Ethical spectatorship research
- The modern film critique of East Asia

The piece by Kore-eda makes us remember that editing is not just an assembly process. It is a moral act. To cut is to make choices about what, when and how powerfully to feel. This is a success of Kore-eda because he does not cut too soon and too hard.

His cinema listens. And in so doing, it also requests us to hear.

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