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Film Discussion Group
March 2019

Shoplifters (dir. Hirokazu Kore-eda, 2018)

On Camera

Shota Shibata (boy): Jyo Kairi: 12-year-old actor with two TV series and this film as credits
Yuri (young girl): Miyu Sasaki: 7-year-old actress who has also appeared on Japanese TV
Osamu (“dad”): Lily Franky: Kore-eda’s *Like Father, Like Son* (13), *After the Storm* (16)
Nobuyo (“mom”): Sakura Andô: *Love Exposure* (08), four-hour film about Japanese youth
Aki (“sister”): Mayu Matsuoka: Small role in *Love Exposure*, with Sakura Andô
Hatsue (“grandma”): Kirin Kiki: Several films for Kore-eda; passed away last September

Off Camera

Director: Hirokazu Kore-eda: Leading Japanese filmmaker; 14 films in 25 years
Cinematography: Ryûto Kondô: new addition to Kore-eda’s crew, but multiple other credits
Original Score: Haruomi Hosono: First film in ten years, and first time with Kore-eda
Film Editing: Hirokazu Kore-eda: Like Alfonso Cuarón, edits most of his own movies

Other films directed by Hirokazu Kore-eda...

Maborosi (1995) – Kore-eda’s first film was about a young widow named Yumiko, whose husband may or may not have committed suicide; she marries again years later, to a widower, but neither of them has stopped thinking of their first spouses. A favorite of Roger Ebert’s.

After Life (1998) – Incredible movie set in the afterlife, in which everyone crossing the pearly gates must select the *one* memory from their time on earth they would like to inhabit for the rest of eternity, which a team of celestial filmmakers then tries to reproduce perfectly.

Nobody Knows (2004) – A clear predecessor for *Shoplifters*, about four siblings, ages 5-12, who are abandoned by their beloved but childlike and irresponsible single mother and must raise themselves, without alerting authorities. The 14-year-old lead won Best Actor at Cannes.

Still Walking (2008) – A major critical success for Kore-eda, capturing 24 hours in the life of a Japanese family who are mourning the loss of their eldest son. Another favorite of Ebert’s.

Like Father, Like Son (2013) – Melodrama about two families, one rich and one poor, who learn that their young sons were inadvertently switched at birth years ago; the families must now decide whether to “keep” the children they have been raising or swap for their biological kids.

After the Storm (2016) – Male divorcée who has had trouble keeping a job or paying child support gets into a rivalry with his adult sister, each of them believing the other exploits their aging mother (*Shoplifters*’s Kirin Kiki) to subsidize their lives. Quiet, well-acted, wonderful drama.

The Third Murder (2017) – Major change of pace. A lawyer, defending an alleged murderer who has already confessed and has prior convictions, nonetheless suspects he may be innocent.

Facts about *Shoplifters* you may appreciate...

Hirokazu Kore-eda has been a critical favorite in Japan and around the world since his first feature in 1995, but he has not become as famous to U.S. audiences the way earlier directors like Akira Kurosawa or Yasujiro Ozu did, in large part because the U.S. distribution of foreign films and the English-language critical commentary surrounding them are so much less vigorous today than they were in the mid-20th century. Steven Spielberg saw Kore-eda's *Like Father, Like Son* at Cannes, where his jury gave it a prize, and he loved it so much he has talked often about remaking it in English. *Shoplifters*, finally, was his biggest U.S. hit and Oscar breakthrough.

Kore-eda arrived at *Shoplifters* partly through a series of news articles in Japan about families who were not reporting the deaths of older relatives so as to keep drawing their pension checks—usually because they had no other means of supporting themselves. As often happens, Kore-eda doesn't foreground “politics” in his films but still makes points about societal problems.

Kore-eda started shooting some scenes in summer 2017 before he had finished most of the script, to gauge how the actors were playing the characters, what dynamics formed among them, and how that might inspire a larger plot. They reunited in autumn to finish the fully-written movie.

Many actors in *Shoplifters* are repeat collaborators with Kore-eda. A major exception was Sakura Andô, the actress who plays Nobuyo, the “mother” in the family. Several other filmmakers had recommended her, but at 31 years old, she was significantly younger than the character in the script, who was written to be in her mid-40s. Kore-eda was so impressed when they met that he gave her the role regardless. She was won or been runner-up for several Best Actress prizes.

Kore-eda withheld the whole script from the child actors, opting to feed them individual lines, one at a time, and see how many different expressions and line readings they were able to offer over the course of several takes with their adult colleagues. Neither the boy playing Shota nor the girl playing Yuri ever totally knew the content of the whole story. Since he knows this is how he works, Kore-eda structures his audition process this way—testing kids' ability to retain an assigned line and say it different ways, without worrying about the context of the story.

The outside of the Shibatas' home is a real location, but most of the interior scenes were filmed on a set, built to match the interior of the house but also to keep the characters in a cramped series of boxed-in spaces that still allowed them to share a warm and inclusive domestic bond.

Shoplifters won the top prize at 2018's Cannes Film Festival over a very competitive field that also included Spike Lee's *BlacKkKlansman* (which won second prize), Oscar nominees *Cold War* and *Capernaum*, the South Korean hit *Burning*, the Italian historical/fantasy film *Happy as Lazzaro* (viewable on Netflix), and two thought-provoking films coming soon to Chicago, the Iranian drama *3 Faces* and the Chinese gangster film-turned-melodrama *Ash Is Purest White*.

Kore-eda is currently shooting a feature in Paris called *The Truth*, starring Juliette Binoche, Ethan Hawke, and Catherine Deneuve. It's the first film he has made outside his home country and native language, a choice that has become increasingly common for top global film directors.

Broad conversation topics...

Family: One might guess that, after having his own children, a filmmaker would insist more strongly on the automatic bond tying parents, children, and other “actual” family members together. In Kore-eda’s case, though, he says that since losing his own parents and becoming a father, he’s grown *more* sympathetic to the idea that “family” is about more than blood relation. How did *Shoplifters* most memorably or powerfully communicate its points about chosen families? Would the film have affected you more if the Shibatas really *were* relatives? Was there a particular member of the family who most consistently drew your eye or elicited your interest and sympathy? Did this “focal character” shift for you during the film?

Crime: After making so many intimate family dramas in the early 2000s, then diverting into a crime story with last year’s *The Third Murder*, Kore-eda has said that *Shoplifters* represents his fusion of those two genres—though it was important to him that the “crime” in question be something with which the audience could sympathize, related to the characters’ need for survival. The Shibatas actually commit a few interconnected transgressions: continuing to draw the pension check of Hatsue’s late husband (to say nothing of continuing to wheedle money out of his children by another woman!), stealing food and other commodities from nearby stores, and “rescuing” Yuri from her natural family’s home and keeping her as their own...which the law would describe as kidnapping. Did the film disarm your impulse to judge these characters for their misdeeds, or did you feel alert throughout that what they were doing was wrong? Did one aspect of their illegal behavior upset you the most, or least? Do you feel Yuri was best-served by living with the Shibatas, or is that a selfish rationalization?

Japan: Some audiences in Japan fretted that *Shoplifters* did not paint their country in the best light, either because of the misdeeds of the Shibata “family” or the lack of steady jobs and social welfare that has prompted them to live this way. Did you experience the movie as a social critique? If so, did that critique feel *specific* to Japan, or some idea you have of Japan, or do you think the same story could just as well be told in the US? As we move around Tokyo, following the different characters, what glimpses of the country most surprised you?

Technique: When *Shoplifters* earned the top prize at Cannes from Cate Blanchett’s jury (which also included U.S. director Ava DuVernay, actress Kristen Stewart, and *Arrival* director Denis Villeneuve), their comments at the subsequent press conference revealed they were all struck by a perfect calibration in each scene. That is, without any one scene feeling like “the” climax to the movie, or any grandstanding showcase of directorial style, the camera was always in the ideal place for each shot, the other aspects of craft quietly supported the script and the actors, and the characterizations of the whole ensemble and their family’s situation emerged clearly. The contrast with *Roma*, the Venice Film Festival winner, might be worth considering, since that film also examines dynamics within a family, some spoken out loud and some implicit. Both include a meticulous study of the city the filmmaker calls home. But whereas *Shoplifters*’s style is intimate and self-effacing in tone and technique, *Roma* is full of virtuoso shots, scenes, and visual choices that call considerable attention to filmmaking. Do you have a natural preference for one approach or the other? Did you experience *Shoplifters* as quietly exquisite, the way the Cannes jury did, or did it feel more muted or flat to you?