

times, the material can be repetitive and, in my view, could have benefited from more stringent editing. It is most definitely an introductory book – not a criticism but observation.

I appreciated Brazier not shying away from the socio-political dimensions of therapeutic work; in her chapter ‘Environmentally-based therapy in context’, Brazier addresses the devastating impact neo-liberal policies and commodification has had upon our ecosystem, asking us to examine whether ‘individual psychology can be seen in isolation from our inter-dependence with the planet and to look at ways in which therapeutic work can address the human malaise in the face of the karmic consequences of our behaviour towards the ecosystem’ (p 194). In my view, we cannot separate the practice of psychotherapy from this. I am writing this review at a time where my own involvement with the Extinction Rebellion (XR) movement has facilitated huge shifts in my own thinking and life practices; indeed a number of ecotherapists have told me they have been inundated with requests for ecotherapy since the formation of XR. Eco-therapy is becoming, in my view, an increasingly important therapeutic space for both grieving and taking responsibility. As Brazier suggests, psychotherapists would do well to familiarise themselves with the work of Deep Ecologists Arne Naess and Joanna Macy (I would throw Gary Snyder’s exquisite writings in here too). For existential therapists interested in extending their therapeutic practice into a triadic relationship between client, therapist and nature, Brazier’s *Ecotherapy in Practice: A Buddhist model* would be a good place to start.

Rebecca Esho Greenslade

Shoplifters

Dir. Kore-eda Hirokazu. 2018.

What an absolute delight Kore-eda Hirokazu’s *Shoplifters* is. The themes of family (and what constitutes them), secrets, society and poverty within Japan’s modern underclass are deftly and intelligently handled, and the film manages to steer well clear of over-saccharined sentimentality and cloying morality one can only imagine Hollywood would imbue such a story with. Yet its heart is undoubtedly warm, if, as it turns out, a little dark. Inevitably, perhaps, a happy ending to such a story is impossible, but it manages to maintain a feel-good vibe that a sense of belonging and love, however fleeting, can be found in even the most desperate of circumstances.

Testament to what a great piece of filmmaking it is, *Shoplifters* has been nominated for an impressive ninety-one awards (winning just over half of them, including the Palme d’Or at Cannes in 2018), to my mind well-deserved recognition.

Osamu Shibata (Lily Frank) is a casual (in all senses of the word)

construction worker who jumps at any opportunity not to. He supplements his meager income by shoplifting with Shota (Kairi Jyo), to all intents and purposes his son, and selling the goods on or contributing them to the 'family' coffers back home. Osamu's wife, Nobuyo (Sakura Ando), is herself not adverse to a little light-fingered activity in her poorly-paid job as a clothes cleaner in a hotel, taking a 'finders, keepers' attitude to anything she finds left in pockets. So far, all very *Oliver Twist*. We learn over the course of the film that supermarket goods are not the only things the Shibata husband and wife are quite handy at purloining.

One particularly cold night after one of their regular raids, Osamu and Shota come across five-year-old Juri (played by Miyu Sasaki in an astonishing performance) rummaging through garbage, and she shows great reluctance to want to return to her home. They take her back to the family home, whose two other occupants are grandmother Hatsue (Kirin Kiki) and Nobuyo's sister Aki (Mayu Matsouka). Conditions in the small flat are cramped and border on squalid, with Shota's 'bedroom' in actuality a cupboard. Despite this and the obvious poverty, there appears to be a degree of harmony and contentment, even happiness. Everyone seems to be getting on just fine.

At first there is little enthusiasm amongst the family members for Juri's presence, particularly from Nobuyo and Shota, so home she must go. But when Nobuyo and Osamu arrive at Juri's house, there is an enormous row between the parents in progress, and we are left in no doubt that it is a violent one. Nobuyo has a change of heart and thus Juri becomes part of the Shibata clan, to the point that she quickly develops a desire to be taught the tricks of the shoplifting trade. What soon becomes obvious too is that she was badly abused by her parents, with bruises and burn marks, and a habit of wetting her bed.

This is in reality a makeshift family, a shelter in which its adult members are able to hide from their pasts, handily ignore the realities of the present and flee from what the future holds for them. And when a shoplifting sortie by Shota and Juri goes awry, things tragically spiral out of control with great rapidity and dark secrets, tacitly hinted at, erupt with a force.

Since the 1960s, in Western culture at least, there has been a gradual opening up and redefining of what family means. The increase in the number of people being married more than once in their life, blended families through divorce, IVF and surrogacy programmes, same sex marriage and same sex parenting have all gradually helped erode the straitjacket confines of the nuclear family and allowed for a reinterpretation of what constitutes togetherness. *Shoplifters* expands even further the concept in ways that are surprising. This is a family that has formed from misfortune, criminality, abuse, loneliness and betrayal.

Shoplifters plays with the notion that we can indeed choose our 'real'

as opposed to biological family. We get no say in the moment of history into which we are thrust, nor the culture, economic circumstance or, most importantly, the biological family. In almost all cultures, the narrative force-fed us is that our family is the most important and healthy tie we can possibly aspire to. But what happens when our biological family fails us? How healthy is this tie when a child is beaten, sexually abused, exploited or ignored by her or his parents? Or rejected because they don't 'fit in' within the boundaries of family expectations? Or our families abandoned us simply because we are ageing and considered just another burden?

In a scene where they are discussing Juri's arrival in their lives, Nobuyo responds to Hatsue wondering why the little girl chose to not to go home by asking "Do you think she chose us?". Hatsue replies "Usually you can't choose your own parents."

"But then, maybe it's stronger when you choose them."

"What is?"

"What is?... The bond. The bond."

To which Hatsue says: "I chose you."

In another scene Nobuyo remarks, "Sometimes it is better to choose your own family." These scenes had a particularly strong resonance with my own experience. For a number of years my sexuality was a thorn in my biological family's side, something left unacknowledged, let alone discussed. It led to a peculiar sense of alienation, which in turn led to such intense feelings of loneliness that at one point suicide seemed a viable option. In the years between me finally accepting who I was and my family being able to fully reach that point, the network of friends I developed became my true family, and part of that network endures thirty years later, to the point that my chosen family is the one I reach out to in time of crises or need. This is an experience shared by many of my gay friends and one that has also revealed itself in my clinical work with LGBT clients.

One reason why this film left such an impression on me is the way in which Hirokazu manages to take some pretty heavy subjects and imbue them with a beautiful gentleness. His directorial style is nowhere near as brutal as, say, a filmmaker such as Ken Loach, but his message is similar. It is a testament to the tenacity we can have to find a sense of our humanity in even the worst of circumstances. One of the most moving moments is when Nobuyo tells Juri, "When someone tells you they are hitting you because they love you, that is a lie", enfolding the child in a warm hug. "This is what you do when you love someone." It is obvious that this warmth is not something Juri is very familiar with. As the very last shot in the film attests, her familiarity with it proves only fleeting.

Apparently Hirokazu was inspired to make the film based on research into poverty in Japan and from a story about an abused child. The Japanese

prime minister was, unsurprisingly, not enamoured with it (Daily Beast, 2018). Hirokazu allows us a glimpse into an aspect of the culture we are rarely presented with. This is a family consisting of people who have been thrown on the societal scrap heap: exploited, as in the case of Aki, who to contribute financially works in a soft porn peep show; forgotten, such as Hatsue, who it becomes evident is the one who has brought this disparate group together to avoid the loneliness of old age; abused, as is Juri's situation; and desperate, as we see when things start to go wrong. So desperate, in fact, that Osamu and Nobuyo make morally questionable choices in order to survive. Yet, unlike the society that feels it must punish them for these choices, I found it impossible to judge them. If anything, my sympathy was increased.

For this reviewer, *Shoplifters* is a film that reinforces the idea that all societies, whether Eastern or Western, punish the poor and the abused for their very existence, as well as our ongoing refusal to be able to look into the mirror they hold up to us and admit that we so often get it so very wrong. It is at our feet that responsibility lies. It is an inconvenient truth.

Dean Andrews

References

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