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On the Heterogeneity of Cinematography in the Films of Aki Kaurismäki

Jaakko Seppälä

Abstract: Aki Kaurismäki's feature-length fictional films are often discussed as a stylistically homogenous group. Because critics have looked for similarities, they have neglected differences among the films. This article tests prevailing arguments about the cinematographic style of Kaurismäki's films in a quantitative analysis of shot lengths, camera movements, reverse angles, point of view shots, and shot scales. The analysis indicates significant similarities and changes among the films and notable stylistic changes. The results of the study complicate existing claims about Kaurismäki's style. Mismatches between impression and fact are best explained by analyzing the parts of Kaurismäki's style that "stand out" and the reasons why they do so.

Keywords: cinematography, cinemetrics, film style, impression, Aki Kaurismäki, quantitative analysis

A consensus exists in critical work on Aki Kaurismäki that he is a master of film craft, "one of the most important auteurs in today's European art cinema" (Vincendeau 2007: 70). "As I understand," Kaurismäki (1990) postulates, "the word auteur means nobody is telling you what to do, there is no producer outside you." Kaurismäki is speaking of himself; he has not only written and directed all 16 of his feature-length fictional films, but also produced and edited many of them. Kaurismäki's control over the finished product has made him the point of convergence of all his films. Such filmmaker is a figure that exists outside the films but always in relation to them, directing them from that position with the result that his touch can be sensed within the filaments of the works (Gunning 2009: 8, 6).

The cinematographer Timo Salminen has shot all of Kaurismäki's feature-length fictional films. Finnish film reviewers have taken delight in Salminen's cinematography since Kaurismäki's 1983 directorial debut film, *Crime and Punishment*: "A lot of the credit belongs to the cinematographer Timo Salminen whose camera depicts Helsinki in an unusually sensitive and poetic manner" (j.p. 1984).[1] Comparable statements were given in relation to Kaurismäki's second feature, *Calamari Union* (1985). "One of the forces that holds *Calamari Union* together is Timo Salminen's stylish, angle changing black and white cinematography" (Kellokumpu 1985). *Shadows in Paradise* (1986) was met with even higher respect:

> A part of the praise goes to Timo Salminen who has done fine work. Salminen really knows how to shoot: he magically casts on film a squadron of garbage trucks bathing in a golden morning sun and then subtly changes time, place and style to an almost neorealist emptying of garbage cans without losing even a hint of his touch. (Manninen 1986)

The cinematography of each film Salminen has shot for Kaurismäki has been met with praise. Five of them have been awarded Jussi Awards (the Finnish equivalent of Oscars) for Best Cinematography. "You can usually tell a Kaurismäki film by a single shot" (Romney 2003: 44), is the opinion of various critics. Responses such as these indicate that cinematography is a major aspect of Kaurismäki's aesthetics.[2]

Kaurismäki's internationally recognized films are habitually experienced as strange, and this "otherness" is often seen to result from the style of the films. Style is best defined as "systematic and significant use of techniques of the medium" (Bordwell 1997: 4). His atypical use of cinematic techniques has made him a celebrated filmmaker of whose cinema books and articles have been written about. Even in revisionist studies Kaurismäki's films are

typically discussed as a stylistically homogenous group. The often-repeated argument is that Kaurismäki's "films display a continuity of narrative, style, and mode" (Nestingen 2013: 15), as a result of which his cinema is "remarkably consistent" (Saint-Cyr 2014: 17). Many talk about "a confidently idiosyncratic Aki Kaurismäki style" (Kääpä 2010: 99). He is seen as a "film-maker with a recognizable cinematic world and a thematically and aesthetically consistent output" (Peden 2012: 13), because for many "it is clear the films have been made with the same auteur toolbox" (Schepelern 2010: 90). It has even been claimed that Kaurismäki's whole oeuvre can be thought of as one episodic film (Kyösola 2000: 292), as his is seen as "one of the most accomplished and coherent bodies of work of any European filmmaker to emerge since the 1970s" (Brooke 2012a: 19).

Considering the quality and quantity of these statements, one could easily suppose that Kaurismäki's style has been carefully studied. Surprisingly, this is not the case. It is rather the contrary that is true, because when it comes to Finnish- and English-language film studies there is only one article that discusses systematically Kaurismäki's style while a few are dedicated to certain aspects of it, none of them being cinematography. According to Henry Bacon (2003), Kaurismäki's films are characterized by distinctive "poetics of displacement." He bases his notion of this particular style on the films' impassive acting style, laconic and often absurd dialogue, long silences, caricature-like characters, minimalist sets, restrained use of color, static camera, economical narration, and nostalgic music. Together these create a sense of day-to-day reality that is nonetheless something different than day-to-day reality as we know it, for Kaurismäki's films are characterized by a certain twistedness. The weakness of Bacon's analysis as an account of Kaurismäki's style in general stems from it being based on the analysis of a single film, *Drifting Clouds* (1996). The mistake of other critics, as I see it, has been to accept the notion just because it feels right

instead of questioning it and then building upon it. When arguments about a filmmaker's style are based on the analysis of a single film, his oeuvre is bound to look homogeneous.

The problem is that no one has examined whether Kaurismäki's films are stylistically alike, which is surprising, because one could just as easily argue that Kaurismäki's films are stylistically diverse. For example, *Calamari Union* is largely an improvisation, *The Match Factory Girl* is a carefully constructed Robert Bresson imitation, and *Juha* is a silent film. Kaurismäki himself said that his style has evolved over the years. According to him (von Bagh 2006: 31), *Crime and Punishment* is "half classical film narration to which too many tracking shots have been added." A few years later he also stated the following: "I want the audience to follow the story. I don't want any camera movements to spoil their experience. That's why my storytelling is becoming more and more simple" (Hammond 2012: 65). Critics have not taken these comments into account because their impression is that "the facts refute him" (Vergou 2012: 70). As Kaurismäki's statements strongly suggest that the prevailing notions about his style do not fully correspond to the films, it is time to rectify the mistakes.

Because critics have looked for similarities between Kaurismäki's films, they have neglected whatever differences there may be between them. Instead of looking for similarities alone, the search needs to be broadened to include differences; only then can one achieve a rich and truly productive understanding of Kaurismäki's style. In other words, I am not saying that the critics I quoted above are entirely wrong, merely that their arguments only concern the other side of the coin, so to speak. I demonstrate this idea with an analogue. There are many who think that all classical Hollywood films are stylistically alike; and in a sense they are, as David Bordwell (1985) argues. Yet several directors managed to develop a distinctive personal style within the parameters of this style (Bordwell 1997: 4). As a result we can appreciate the genius of the system, along with the genius of a filmmaker like Otto

Preminger or Alfred Hitchcock. The point is that stylistic similarities can, and in most cases do, exist alongside stylistic differences. [Callout 1 About Here] This is not only true of group styles, but of personal styles as well. Kaurismäki would be the first to agree. "Everybody has one story and they're making variations of it,. . . . That's what makes it interesting, how the variations change during the years. If you're polite, you call it style" (Brooke 2012b: 17). It is not just that stylistic similarities are important, but also the differences, as they too direct the audience toward certain emotions and interpretations of the films. According to Kaurismäki, "A director who can't manipulate a spectator's feelings and make him/her laugh or be afraid should change his or her profession." (Smith 2011). What one needs to realize is that both stylistic similarities and differences are means of such manipulation.

There are, of course, critics who have noticed that Kaurismäki's style has undergone changes. Jarmo Valkola (2012: 233) postulates that even though "Kaurismäki's style as a whole is consistent, it can also vary from one film to another." This is a good start, but the usefulness of this observation (and others like it) is severely limited by the fact that it is not based on systematic tracking of stylistic continuities and changes. It is difficult to pinpoint just what Valkola thinks has changed and how; he merely mentions that Kaurismäki's "style develops towards more rigorous and simple formations" (Valkola 2012: 40). This is vague, to say the least. If one wants to acquire a good understanding of the stylistic similarities and differences in Kaurismäki's cinema, one cannot afford to overlook statistical analysis. András Bálint Kovács (2013: 5) is spot on in saying that "[q]uantitative analysis is useful in comparing individual works of a corpus in order to find out if there is any significant change, and if there are any significant trends in the change." Statistical analysis can be used to build a strong empirical basis on which qualitative analysis can/should be built,[3] answering questions such as why something has changed and what the change means. In the following

sections of this article I present my quantitative analysis of certain significant cinematographic similarities and differences in Kaurismäki's feature-length fictional films.

The Length of Takes and the Question of Slowness

I will begin my statistical analysis of the cinematography in Aki Kaurismäki's feature-length fictional films by looking at average shot lengths (ASL). The ASL is the length of a film divided by the number of shots in it. The figure intersects with issues of editing and cinematography, as it indicates how often the filmmaker cuts and for how long his shots last. The ASL is not a concept that filmmakers use, but they certainly think about the length of their takes and editing rhythm. The ASL is useful in the analysis of style, as it tends to correlate with the use of various cinematic devices, as well as with the tempo in which the story is told. In short, the ASL is a trace and an indication of an attempt to achieve significant effects through choices to do with how the film's action will be presented.

When editing rhythms and shot lengths have been described verbally, the conjectures have been vague and often wrong (Salt 2009: 155). This is also true in relation to Kaurismäki's cinema. Lauri Timonen (2005: 60), for example, has estimated that *Juha* (1999) contains twice or thrice as many shots as Kaurismäki's other films, but this statement does not stand up to scrutiny. The usefulness of the ASL lies precisely in that it is comparable, unlike the number of cuts in a film. The smaller the ASL is, the higher the number of shots is in relation to the film's running time and vice versa. Table 1 shows the ASLs of Kaurismäki's feature-length fictional films accompanied by median shot lengths (MSL) and standard deviations in seconds (StDev).[4] As credit sequences carry aesthetic functions in Kaurismäki's films, they are included in these figures.[5]

[Table 1 About Here]

The numbers show that there is stylistic variation in Kaurismäki's cinema in terms of editing and shot lengths. The mean ASL of Kaurismäki's films is 12.4 seconds, the median 10.9 seconds. The latter figure might be more useful in analyzing his oeuvre for the reason that it is not distorted by the deviant cases, as the ASLs of Kaurismäki's films vary from 8.1 seconds to 21.5 seconds, which is a lot. However, there is certain regularity in the way ASL has changed over his career, allowing for detecting stylistic periods. Kaurismäki's first film, *Crime and Punishment*, is his fastest in terms of the editing tempo and the length of takes. The next five films from *Calamari Union* to *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* have fairly similar ASLs in the region of 10 to 11 seconds. Looking at the median ASL, these are typical Kaurismäki films in terms of editing and shot lengths. Kaurismäki's ASLs took a great leap upward in *The Match Factory Girl* and reached a peak in *Drifting Clouds*, which is the deviant case. Before it premiered it was *The Match Factory Girl* that was the unusual film. *The Match Factory Girl* was the precursor to what I call Kaurismäki's "slow period." [Callout 2 About Here] During this period, in which Kaurismäki preferred slow editing rhythm and relatively long takes, he made *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana* (1993), *Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses* (1993), and *Drifting Clouds* (1996). It is tempting to place *The Match Factory Girl* and *The Bohemian Life* into this category as well, but because *I Hired a Contract Killer* (the ASL of which sits comfortably in the range of ASLs of the earlier films) was made between them, it is more productive to view these three films as transitional in terms of their ASLs. After *Drifting Clouds* Kaurismäki made *Juha* and returned to what I call his standard editing rhythm. In *Juha*, as in the following three films, the ASL is relatively close to the median of the ASLs, which, to reiterate, is 10.9 seconds.

In each film Kaurismäki's StDev is higher than his ASL or MSL, and in some cases significantly so. The mean StDev of his films is as high as 15.1 seconds. These facts signal uneven editing and variable length of takes, both issues to which critics have not paid enough

attention. While the long take style is often contrasted with the montage style (Bazin 1967), Kaurismäki undoubtedly draws from both filmmaking trends. To give an example, when Hamlet is about to cross the channel in *Hamlet Goes Business* (1987), two thugs spy on him as he reads a secret business document he is carrying with him. In the next shot we see him walking across the ship's deck and the thugs following him from a distance. These shots are fairly typical for Kaurismäki in terms of length, as they last 31 and 16 seconds, respectively. The audience is then shown a 36-second long montage sequence that consists of eight shots (including one black shot) in which the thugs attack Hamlet with the result the one falls overboard and the other is knifed to death. The montage sequence ends with an extreme close-up of a limp hand of a body that is being dragged away. This metonymic shot of the hand (it tells us the man is dead) lasts 7 seconds, which means other shots in the sequence are significantly shorter. In his cinema Kaurismäki contrasts such short takes with long takes,[6] the longest of which in *Hamlet Goes Business* runs as long as 2 minutes and 20 seconds. In this shot, Hamlet is working out in a gym and talks about his miserable life to his chauffeur. This take is unusually long even for Kaurismäki, but when it comes to his long takes, it is representative in that it contains very little action: the two men mostly sit and talk. The high StDev in Kaurismäki's films results from his tendency to splice both long takes and montage sequences (or individual short takes) between his takes of more typical length. [Callout 3 About Here]

[Figure 1 About Here]

Figure 1: Many of Kaurismäki's long takes are static and contain little if any action.

The long take is a relative concept. As Jeff Scheible (2014: 273) argues, "there is no precise numerical value that qualifies a filmic sequence as being 'long.'" What matters are the textual and extra textual contexts in which the take occurs, he points out. The same could be said of short takes. The long take is often seen as a characteristic of slow cinema (Jaffe

2014: 3), a category into which Kaurismäki's films could be slotted. One spectator (Tikkinen 2007) wrote about her viewing experience in the newspaper *Savon Sanomat*: "By the way, am I the only one who finds Kaurismäki's films tiring? Lines are sparkling. —Do you take coffee? (Five minutes of staring.) —Why would I?" The spectator implies that Kaurismäki's major stylistic tactic is radical continuity, in this case the representation of *temps mort* with long takes: five minutes of silent staring before the answer is delivered. Even though the statement is hyperbolic, it indicates that in the contemporary media environment Kaurismäki's films are experienced as slow. The reason for this is that his editing rhythm is unhurried and most of his takes are long in comparison to mainstream films. In today's Hollywood films ASLs are often around 2 seconds, but more typically in the region of 4 to 5 seconds (Salt 2009: 377–378). Even more significant in this respect is the apparent simplicity of Kaurismäki's films: nothing much happens in many of his shots. Even those 7 seconds of the limp hand in *Hamlet Goes Business* might feel extended for the reason that there is little for the audience to grasp after understanding its narrative function, which does not take long. Albeit Kaurismäki's cinema can be described as slow, his ASLs are not even near the extremes of slow cinema such as that of Béla Tarr, whose ASLs vary from 32 to 240 seconds (Kovács 2013: 91), and other contemporary long take filmmakers. Kaurismäki differs from them in that a major stylistic characteristic of his is the counterbalancing of long takes with short takes.

Invisible Camera Movements

Critics have frequently claimed that Aki Kaurismäki rarely relies on camera movements. The often-repeated argument is that Kaurismäki's "stylistic consistency is ... evident in the films' static camera" (Nestingen 2013: 15) "that resembles still photography" (Werner 2004: 70); such cinematography has been seen as a key characteristic of his style (Bacon 2003: 91). In a

typical Kaurismäki film, the argument goes, characters' "verbal and emotional reticence is captured in the protracted stillness of a fixed-plan camera" (Smith 2010: 232). Others emphasize that the camera moves, but rarely and only little. Claims like "[i]n his films the camera movement is most often limited to a minimum" (Soila 2003: 12) and "[t]he camera does not move much" (Valkola 2012: 167) are common. Kaurismäki's statement that his camera has become less mobile over the years suggests that these notions about his oeuvre are misleading, even if they are fairly correct when it comes to some of his films. Table 2 shows the percentages of different camera movements of all shots in Kaurismäki feature-length fictional films.[7] The only type of camera movement that is missing from the table is the crane shot. Crane shots were excluded because they are rare in Kaurismäki's films.[8] According to him (von Bagh 2006: 175) "a camera that hangs in a crane is always in the wrong place." [Table 2 About Here]

Clearly, Kaurismäki's camera is not even nearly as static as the critics would have it. [Callout 4 About Here] The amount of camera movements from all shots in his films varies from 11 percent to 34 percent. On the average, there is a camera movement in as much as 20 percent of all takes in Kaurismäki's cinema. This is, perhaps, a small figure when compared to contemporary mainstream films in many of which camera is "waved around *ad libitum*" (Salt 2009: 377), but it does show that Kaurismäki's camera is often on the move. To give another comparison, the amount of camera movements of all shots in Hollywood films in 1999 was 19 percent (Salt 2009: 371), which is about the same as the mean in Kaurismäki's cinema. The figures I have presented in table 2 support my argument about the stylistic diversity of Kaurismäki's cinema. The films that contain most camera movements are *Calamari Union*, *Shadows in Paradise* and *Ariel*. Kaurismäki made all these in the early years of his filmmaking career. During these years it was *Hamlet Goes Business* that was the outlier in terms of camera movements, as it contains relatively few of them. *Leningrad*

Cowboys Go America was the turning point while *The Match Factory Girl* marked the beginning of new, more static style of filmmaking. Since its premiere the percentage of camera movements from all takes in Kaurismäki's films has not risen above 20 percent, except in *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana*.

It is not just that the number of camera movements has dropped, as much as the number of certain kinds of camera movements. Throughout his career Kaurismäki has preferred pans, tilts, and combinations of the two. Thus, it is the number of different kinds of tracking shots that has decreased significantly. *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* was the turning point in Kaurismäki's employment of camera movements precisely for the reason that it contains fewer tracking shots with pans and tilts than his earlier films. However, the number of standard tracking shots was still high in the film.[9] Since *The Match Factory Girl* Kaurismäki has used even these rarely, except in *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana* and *Juha*. While 9 percent of all shots in *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* are tracking shots, the same number is only 3 percent in its sequel *Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses*. After making the film, Kaurismäki said: "I believe that I have ahead of me some kind of 'Blue Period.' Dialogue is decreasing (still) and the camera does not move" (anonymous 1994). The notable discovery here is that even films that are thematically alike or belong to a same trilogy can be cinematographically different, as Kaurismäki's stylistic periods do not always correspond with his themes and trilogies. This indicates that similar narrative forms or genres do not necessarily produce similar stylistic solutions. [Callout 5 About Here] There is, however, one type of tracking shot that Kaurismäki has systematically used throughout his career: tracking shot forward (and occasionally backward as well). Kaurismäki typically uses track forward shots to reveal character subjectivity. For example, when the protagonist, Iris, in *The Match Factory Girl* (1989) learns that she is pregnant, the camera tracks forward towards to her face and in so doing expresses her strong emotional reaction. The track is important for the reason

that Kati Outinen's, who plays Iris, acting (like acting very often in Kaurismäki's films) is deadpan. Therefore the camera movement does more than her acting to express the impact of the news on her.

Even though Kaurismäki's camera is often on the move, the critical reception indicates that it is often experienced as static and immobile, which indicates that there is a noteworthy discrepancy between the fact and impression. There are at least three reasons for this. First, the camera feels immobile in comparison to cameras in contemporary mainstream films that move in ways that are more extravagant. The vast majority of Kaurismäki's camera movements are small and understated, a far cry from Max Ophuls's calligraphy or Orson Welles's bravura, to use the words of Ginette Vincendeau ([2003] 2009: 151). A second-by-second (rather than a shot-by-shot) measurement, which András Bálint Kovács (2014) has used in his analysis of shot scales distributions, could also be used in the analysis of Kaurismäki's camera movements. Such measurement would probably indicate that in most of his films the camera spends relatively little time on the move, but by the same token the figures would obscure how often the camera moves. Now this raises an important question that cognitive-formalist scholars cannot yet answer: when it comes to one's film experience, is it the duration of camera movements or the frequency of camera movements that is more important? The same duration/frequency question can be asked in the context of any given cinematic device. Second, most camera movements in Kaurismäki's films perform narrative functions, which means they are motivated. Kaurismäki's camera often follows movement by a character, follows a glance or reveals subjectivity. Edward Branigan (2006: 26) lists seven narrative functions by which camera movement can be motivated, all of which Kaurismäki relies on. According to Branigan, motivated camera movements are "invisible" whereas unmotivated camera movements attract attention. When the audience follows characters and their actions, which the mobile camera only supports, the camera movement goes easily

unnoticed. Kaurismäki has said (Piela, 1983): “I have basically strived for rather classical, or should I say Hawksian, narration in which the spectator should not notice the movements of the camera or cuts, except on those rare occasions when it serves a purpose.” This is in accord with the principles of the classical Hollywood style (Bordwell 1985). Third, the impression of immobility has probably been strengthened by long static takes and sequences in which the audience would expect the camera to follow action, but it refuses to do so. To give an example, in *Lights in the Dusk* (2006) the weak security guard Koistinen exits a bar with three thugs who have mistreated their dog in order to “talk” with them outside. The camera, contrary to conventions of the classical style, refuses to follow them and stays inside (Figures 2 and 3). This makes its immobility noticeable. The thugs soon return to the bar sniggering, but Koistinen is nowhere to be seen; the audience learns that the thugs took Koistinen to the yard only to give him a beating.

[Figure 2 About Here] [Figure 3 About Here]

Figure 2: Security guard Koistinen tries to talk with three thugs in a bar.

Figure 3: When the men go outside the camera does not follow them but stays inside.

Claims like “[w]hen talking to each other, the characters seldom look at each other” (Soila 2003: 12), suggest that Kaurismäki uses reverse angles and point of view shots rarely. “In certain conversation sequences there are fewer shot-reverse-shots than the dialogue would allow in the classical narration,” Henry Bacon (2003: 91) observes in his analysis of *Drifting Clouds*. Arguments such as these have been used to support claims about the camera’s immobility. Table 3 shows the percentages of reverse angles and point of view shots of all shots in Kaurismäki’s feature-length fictional films.[10] [Table 3 About Here]

On the average, 34 percent of all shots in Kaurismäki’s films are reverse angles. The median is slightly lower at 30 percent. When it comes to point of view shots the same figures

are 22 percent and 24 percent, respectively. The percentage of reverse angle shots in Kaurismäki's films varies as much as from 20 percent to 60 percent of all shots, the percentage of point of view shots varies slightly less, from 7 percent to 39 percent. These figures, too, indicate that Kaurismäki's films are cinematographically diverse. Kaurismäki probably uses less reverse angle shots than most contemporary mainstream filmmakers and it has caused the impression that he is reluctant to use such shots. Furthermore, there are scenes in his films when one would expect him to use reverse angles, but he refuses to do so (Figure 4), as Bacon observes. It has been estimated that in 1999 the amount of reverse angles of all shots in Hollywood films was 40 percent (Salt 2006: 334). That same year the amount of such angles was only 20 percent in Kaurismäki's cinema.

[Figure 4 About Here]

Figure 4: As Inspector Monet is taking orders from Mr. Prefect, Kaurismäki does not cut to a reverse angle, thus keeping the latter hidden from our sight.

The percentage of reverse angle shots in Kaurismäki's films began to drop somewhat steadily compared to *Crime and Punishment*. The development would have been linear if it were not for the transitional films (*The Match Factory Girl*, *I Hired a Contract Killer*, and *The Bohemian Life*) in which the number of reverse angles began to grow. After these films the reverse angles reached a low point in the slow films—*Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana*, *Leningrad Cowboys Meet Moses*, *Drifting Clouds*—and *Juha*, which was made immediately after them. In these four films the percentage of reverse angles was constantly close to 20 percentage, which is significantly less than the average and the median of such shots in Kaurismäki's oeuvre. Because *Juha's* editing rhythm is significantly faster than that of his slow films, it serves to remind one that the oeuvre could be divided into different categories according to different criteria.[11] From *Juha* the percentage of reverse angles grew back to the

level of the 1989 and 1990, but never reached the level of the early 1980s. When it comes to the films Kaurismäki has done so far, in terms of cinematography one can roughly divide them into a stylistic early period, mid period (or slow period) and a late period, which is also the case with editing rhythm and length of takes, as I demonstrated above. The films made between early and mid-periods are transitional in terms of ASLs and reverse angels. When it comes to reverse angles, the late period is marked by a return towards the conventions of the early period.

Kaurismäki's use of point of view shots, in contrast, does not seem to follow any clear pattern. This suggests that their use is more closely tied to the needs of the films than to any stylistic periods. It is nonetheless worth recognizing that the percentages of point of view shots of all shots were rather low during Kaurismäki's slow period, which further suggests that these films are cinematographically unusually austere even for him.

Shot Scales and the Screen Time They Get

Critics have repeatedly claimed that close views are rare in Aki Kaurismäki's cinema. One argument is that the camera "keeps its distance to the characters showing them in long or medium shots" (Soila 2003: 12). Others say "the actor is rarely seen in a close-up, although there are exceptions" (Valkola 2012: 168). These claims are misleading, to put it mildly: Kaurismäki has systematically used all shot scales throughout his career. Table 4 shows the percentages of different shot scales of all shot in Kaurismäki's feature-length fictional films.

[Table 4 About Here]

Acronym	*Definition*
ELS	Extreme long shot (human body small in the frame)
LS	Long shot (human body and some surroundings)
FS	Full shot (whole human body)
LMS	Long medium shot (human body from the knees up)
MS	Medium shot (human body from the waist up)
MCU	Medium close-up (human body from the chest up)

CU	Close-up (head and shoulders)
ECU	Extreme close-up (a detail of human body or an object)

The close-up, confounding the critics, is by far the most common shot scale in Kaurismäki's cinema, just as it is in contemporary Hollywood cinema (Salt 2009: 369–370, 378). [Callout 6 About Here] In Kaurismäki's films the percentage of close-ups of all shots varies from 9 percent to 41 percent, but on the average 22 percent of all shots in Kaurismäki's films are close-ups and their median is about the same, 24 percent. This indicates that his use of the close-up is somewhat constant, even though certain trends can be detected, as I will indicate in a moment. In Kaurismäki's cinema the second most common shot scale is the medium shot (on the average 17% of all shots belong to this category), followed by the long medium shot (15%), the medium close-up (15%), the full shot (10%), the extreme long shot (9%), the long shot (6%), and the extreme close-up (5%). To exaggerate a bit, the larger the shot is the rarer it is in Kaurismäki's cinema. This shows that in terms of shot scales the camera does not keep its distance from the characters. The opposite is true. This finding is closely related to the numbers of reverse angles and point of view shots in Kaurismäki's films. A common strategy of his is to represent conversation sequences with shot-reverse-shot patterns using small shot scales. As a rule of thumb, the higher the number of close views, the higher the number of such shot-reverse-shots. The highest numbers of large shot scales (extreme long shots, long shots and full shots) can be found in the films that Kaurismäki made in his slow period that lasted from 1993 to 1996. Conversely, in these three films close-ups are used more sparsely than in the other films. As in the classical style, one reason why the high number of large shots scales correlates with the slow cutting rate is that the audience needs more time to scan large images than close views, from which narratively important elements are much easier to spot.

The critics' experience of Kaurismäki's reluctance to use small shot scales is best explained with his editing rhythm. Even though the close-up is the shot scale that Kaurismäki

uses most often, it is not the shot scale that gets most screen time. Even though the number of close-ups is large in Kaurismäki's cinema, the audience spends relatively little time looking at them. Another reason why critics have not paid attention to close views is that medium shots and larger shot scales tend to be more memorable, as they contain more information. A good example of a memorable shot is the extreme long shots in *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana* in which the protagonists, two Finnish men who are giving a Russian and an Estonian lady a ride through Finnish countryside to the harbor, rest before continuing their road trip. As these four characters enjoy their time in a ramshackle barn they are shot from a high angle. The men sit on a broken couch, the other drinking coffee and the other Koskenkorva (Finnish vodka brand), while the ladies who crave for their attention dance to old rock song in front of the doorway. Even though these people are supposedly spending time together, the shy men just stare ahead and concentrate on their drinking without even looking at the ladies or each other (Figure 5). This is an outstanding emblematic shot that emphasizes the disconnectedness of the characters that could be close to each other, even romantically involved. Close-ups in Kaurismäki's films, on the contrary, more often than not represent characters' somewhat stoic faces when they are having a conversation. These shots rarely encourage the audience "to identify larger meanings from the connections and associations contained in the visual elements" (Mercado 2011: 107) like emblematic shots do. Because Kaurismäki's use of close-ups is most of the time more functional than expressive and symbolic, it is not as memorable as that of larger views. [Callout 7 About Here] And because the number of memorable close-ups is small, one easily thinks that the number of close-ups in general is small.

[Figure 5 About Here]

Figure 5: Large views are often the most memorable in Kaurismäki's cinema.

The smallest and largest amounts of certain shot scales can be found in the films Kaurismäki made before 2000, especially from those of his early and slow periods. This indicates that in the recent years his cinema has become even in terms of shot scales. Kaurismäki's first three films are distinguished by their greater use of close shots other than the extreme close-up. In the films from *Hamlet Goes Business* to *The Bohemian Life* Kaurismäki made a greater use of the extreme close-up with the close-up remaining prominent. These films saw some reduction in the use of longer shots. In these years it was *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* that was the outlier in terms of shot scales. *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana* marked the beginning of Kaurismäki's slow period. The three films made in this period are cinematographically distinct from Kaurismäki's other films because they witness a radical shift to the greater use of large shot scales at the expense of closer views. The late films witness a shift back to the pattern evidenced in the films from *Hamlet Goes Business* to *The Bohemian Life*, but here *Juha* is something of an outlier. If there is a dominant pattern, it is defined by these eight films with a greater emphasis on the shorter shot scales and less on the larger ones.

András Bálint Kovács (2014: 52) is of the opinion that a shot scale distributions cannot possibly be a product of conscious decision. While it is true that filmmakers do not consciously think how many times they want to use certain shot scales in their films, they probably feel what is right for their films and this produces regular patterns. Kaurismäki himself is of the opinion (Pasanen 1983) that a film director does not make films consciously but instinctively. Therefore, of the six candidate hypotheses that Kovács (2014: 67) thinks can be used to explain regularities in shot scale distribution, I think the "author hypothesis" is the best one as long as we do not think that author's decisions need to be "conscious," whatever that means.

Conclusions

I have questioned the prevailing arguments about Aki Kaurismäki's style, calling for nuanced and clearly argued understanding of his systematic and significant use of cinematic techniques. Concentrating on the cinematography, I have tracked similarities and differences in terms of which Kaurismäki's feature-length fictional films can be roughly divided into three style periods: early films (1983–1989), slow films (1993–1996) and late films (1999–2011). The films made between the early films and slow films can be viewed as transitional in terms of their ASLs and reverse angles, but in terms of their shot scales they are fairly close to the early films. The early films are characterized by the prevalence of small shot scales and frequent use of camera movements and reverse angles. These films, excluding *Crime and Punishment*, have fairly similar ASLs in the region of 10 to 11 seconds. The slow films, the name of which I derived from the editing rhythm, are sluggish and contain many lengthy takes. Their ASLs vary from 16.5 seconds to 21.5 seconds. In these the camera is quite static (*Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana* is the notable exception), shot scales large and the amount of reverse angles small. The films that belong to the third category, Kaurismäki's late films, preserve the relative immobility of the camera, but the number of reverse angles is higher, though not on the level of the early films. In the late films the use of shot scales resembles that of the early films. Furthermore, so do the ASLs, which are close to the median that is 10.9 seconds. It is a task for future research to assess to what degree narrative and stylistic features outside cinematography are characterized by variation and correlate with the three indicated periods. It is worth emphasizing that the transitional films and the many outliers I have identified act as an alert to the fact that neat stylistic interpretations can be problematic. The point is that there is also considerable variety in Kaurismäki's cinema that does not admit a comfortably neat summary.

In light of these and other empirical observations I have made in the course of this article, I argue that the cinematography of Kaurismäki's films is significantly more complex, multifaceted and heterogeneous than critics have realized. Just because Kaurismäki's oeuvre is recognizably different from that of other filmmakers, does not mean it is stylistically homogeneous. The diversity of my findings suggests that the poetics of displacement, if understood strictly in terms of systematic and significant use of cinematic techniques,[12] is only one aspect of Kaurismäki's style, an aspect that is operative within a wider stylistic framework of his that is yet to be explored and understood.

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Notes

[1] All the translations from Finnish to English are the author's.

[2] Aki Kaurismäki has time and again expressed his admiration for Timo Salminen's cinematography. According to Kaurismäki, he and Salminen have learnt to understand each other so well that they often do not even have to discuss things such as camera placement and framing (Lindqvist 1996). At times Kaurismäki emphasises that he frames the picture while Salminen does the lighting (Fisher 1989: 253).

[3] Quantitative analysis of style has its limitations. Certain cinematic techniques, a good example of which is the long take, can be reasonably analyzed with the means of classification, measurement, and numeration. However, there are various techniques, such as acting techniques, that resist these methods and are better analysed by the means of verbal description; this is not to say that quantitative analysis could not shed at least some light on these matters as well.

[4] The MSL is that length for which half the shots in the film have longer lengths and the other half have shorter lengths. The median indicates the likely shot length, because it does not let deviant cases distort the data. The StDev measures the extent of the spread of the data about the mean value, signalling whether the editing is even or not. The higher this figure is, the more variety there is in the editing rhythm and vice versa.

[5] Film scholars have not reached a consensus on whether opening and closing credits should be taken into account when measuring ASLs. As Edward Branigan argues (2006: 71), "one critic's camera is not necessarily that of another critic." The way I see it, a film begins when its first reel starts running and it ends when its last reel ends, not necessarily when its last sequence ends. I believe that spectators experience credits as shots. In Kaurismäki's cinema they carry aesthetic value; there are films in his oeuvre in which credits are intercut with shots (*Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatjana*), superimposed over shots (*Hamlet Goes Business*), or shown against a black background (*Crime and Punishment*).

[6] The numbers of exceptionally short and long takes in his films varies, as the StDevs that differ from 11.1 to 23.4 seconds indicate.

[7] Slight reframings have not been taken into account for the reason that cameramen do them automatically, keeping characters and moving objects in frame. Also, I have counted shots in which the camera moves, stops and then moves again as a single camera movement for the reason that such movements are done in one take.

[8] Even though Kaurismäki has sporadically relied on such shots, they are so few in numbers that they do not show properly in percentages.

[9] Most of these tracking shots are point of view shots taken from a moving car.

[10] Reverse angles are shots made of the same scene for which the lens axis has been moved through more than 90 degrees from that of the previous shots. Point of view shots are taken with the camera placed approximately where the character's eyes would be, showing what the character would see. This is a loose definition of the concept, because it does not demand that a character looking is portrayed in the previous or subsequent shot; it is enough that the spectator is guided to understand the shot is as character's optical point of view.

[11] Instead of slow films one could talk about films of the mid- and late 1990s in which the number of reverse angles is low.

[12] The poetics of displacement could also be seen as a feature of the way Aki Kaurismäki's films appear as existential statements.