

Article

Slowly Moving Bodies: Signs of Pictorialism in Aki Kaurismäki's Films



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ABSTRACT

Aki Kaurismäki is arguably the best-known Finnish filmmaker, owing largely to his feature films such as *Crime and Punishment* (*Rikos ja rangaistus*, Finland, 1983), *Calamari Union* (Finland, 1985), *Shadows in Paradise* (*Varjoja paratiisissa*, Finland, 1986), *Hamlet Goes Business* (*Hamlet liikemaailmassa*, Finland, 1987), *Ariel* (Finland, 1988), *The Match Factory Girl* (*Tulitikkutehtaan tyttö*, Finland, 1990), *I Hired a Contract Killer* (Finland/Sweden, 1990), *La vie de bohème* (Finland/France/Sweden/Germany, 1992), *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatiana* (*Pidä huivista kiinni, Tatjana*, Finland/Germany, 1994), *Drifting Clouds* (*Kauas pilvet karkaavat*, Finland, 1996), *Juha* (Finland, 1999), *The Man Without a Past* (*Mies vailla menneisyyttä*, Finland, 2002), *Lights in the Dusk* (*Laitakaupungin valot*, Finland, 2006) and *Le Havre* (Finland/France, 2011). A large body of his work has been made in Finland, but also in countries like France and Great Britain. Besides feature films, he has also made documentaries and short films, as well as musical films with the group *Leningrad Cowboys*. In a broader context, Kaurismäki has a unique place in Finnish and international film history, as well as in media and communication culture. Kaurismäki's cultural context includes elements that have been turned into national and transnational symbols of social communication and narrative interaction by his stylisation. The director's cinematic strategy investigates and makes choices evoking a social understanding of characters that has special communicative value. Kaurismäki's films have been scrutinised for over thirty years.

INTRODUCTION

The Finnish (and international) landscape, urban feelings, time, movements and nostalgic images are bound together in Aki Kaurismäki's films. The article focuses on the pictorial narration of his works and the attentive duration of the filmic experience that works together with his stylistic and compositional features. Attention is paid to the way Kaurismäki achieves specific pictorial states through his audiovisual design, which enables the viewers to access the visuality of the shots in a phenomenological way.

The method that I employ is 'cognitive mapping', which usually means a combination of individual and collective perceptions. Cinema can establish a common perception since it expresses the point of view and style of the filmmaker that is then offered to the audience. Afterwards, the audiences interpret it both literally, differently, and complementarily, changing and contrasting the meanings that have emerged.¹

According to Julian Hochberg, the viewer's construction of the edited space can be compared to cognitive mapping, since a filmmaker's task is to have the viewers pose visual questions which they answer (Hochberg 1978: 208). In cognitive mapping, individual and social perceptions are combined. Furthermore, cognitive mapping enables the viewer to practice distinct perceptual and cognitive activities.²

A MATTER OF APPROACH

The relationship between cinema and pictorialism has been overlooked in film research for decades. I have been working on this issue for a long time, and have written on pictorialism in several publications (Valkola 1993, 2000, 2003a, 2003b, 2004, 2007, 2012). Historically, pictorialism has been connected to photography and painting. In

photography, pictorialism was a style in the early 20th century. Pictorialist photography was characterised by techniques and effects borrowed from the graphic arts. In many cases, a pictorialist image came from a sharply defined negative image; the often extensive darkroom manipulations involved in transforming the image from this hard-edged reality meant that each print could be said to be unique.

Generally the photographic dimension of stillness is strongly rooted in the essential nature of photography itself, and is usually understood as a photographic freeze of a living image. The immobility of the image increases its expressive strength. However, the use of this immobility in a moving media like film has other consequences. Pictorial stillness in film means that the image itself can appear in a frozen form in the middle of narration, but since it is used in a filmic connection, its 'form' acquires an additional level of meaning.

In painting, the roots of pictorialism lie in the painting traditions of Western art, namely in the Flemish, Dutch and German tradition of landscape painting during the 16th century, and in the early naturalism of pictorialist photography. Since the 16th century, the question of the pictorial qualities in visual arts has been presented as a crucial feature through a variety of aesthetic strategies that are connected to the asserted ability of art to represent the spatial (and temporal) deployment of characters and bodies in space (Hollander 1989: 90–94).

From Renaissance aesthetics to the birth of cinema, a painting or sculpture was supposed to be linked influentially to the representation of individual events in history through a certain perspective. Based on this idea, the artist was responsible for the choices made in the pictorial plane. In the wake of these processes, pictorialism increased during the era of early filmmaking. Visual design became part of the filmmaking process and new ideas were spread.

In film studies, pictorialism has been a slowly emerging subject, consisting mainly of the general use of the term.

1 For instance, perception is an active and constructive process. It does not come straight from sensory information but is more like a combination of the interaction between sensory information, internal hypotheses, expectations and knowledge. In this way, sensory information forms a basis for larger processes (see Hochberg 1978, Persson 2003).

2 As an extension of this, Teresa Castro (2010: 144) has called cinema's exploration of urban space 'visual mapping'.

Still, there have been scholars who have taken a closer look at the subject, including Jacques Aumont, Pascal Bonitzer, Giuliana Bruno, Brigitte Peucker, Ron Burnett, Kristin Thompson, David Bordwell and Paul Schrader.³ My approach differs from their points of view because, for me, pictorialism represents a phenomenon that is clearly connected to film language. In a broader context, my interdisciplinary and comparative approach exists in a variety of theoretical and other debates dealing with these issues. General questions related to the forms of art and their overlapping dimensions provide clear pictorial inferences, and also aspire to define the continuities between the different art forms, especially the connections and linkages between painting, architecture, photography and film.⁴

It is essential for cinema to produce views and depict pictorial space; and these spaces (and places) can turn into subjective memory, *a lieu de mémoire*, as Pierre Nora has aptly said (1996: xxvii). As a practice of visualising the depicted space, cinema is enacted with art, history and the pictorial dynamics of stage setting, set design and depiction of cityscapes. In this regard, cinema follows the legacy of pictorial architecture and landscape painting. This is similar to the pictorial affections emerging in art studies and adds an important aspect to the potentially affective research between art and cinema. It is also considered in the broader scope of relations in cultural history.

From my viewpoint, pictorialism means an attempt to define the pictorial qualities of narration, suggesting the overall audiovisual structure of the cinematic experience. This is comprised of associations and connotations at the level of cinematic narration and the spectator's imagination, including the mental aspect of the narrative. For me, pictorialism rep-

resents a theory and practice of art that is trying to depict the artist's audiovisual creations, ideas and thoughts through pictorial expression. In cinema, pictorialism can be understood as a tension between a mode of distanced vision (from afar), where objects are presented as forms and figures in space, and a mode of vision that appeals to tactile connections on the surface plane of the image.

These fundamental ideas have obviously affected the structure of this article, which is based on style, although this will not be the only aspect to be analysed. In fact, my discourse covers several fields of study; namely, film studies, history, aesthetics, phenomenology, cognitivism and image studies.

STYLISING TRANSFERRED MODERNISM

Contemporary cinema is a pivotal site for pictorial experimentation and Kaurismäki's films are an example of this cinematic layout. In his films, the spectators construct a spatial whole out of the pictorial bits that are offered to them. In this regard, Kaurismäki's classical editing supports this orientation. He uses the process of the viewer expectation as a part of the flow of the on-screen and off-screen space, connecting these spaces with shots reminiscent of a question-and-answer game, dealing in this sense with the aims of classical narration. Kaurismäki connects the camera position to editing thereby creating consistency in his narration. His films are partly national, at least when dealing with Finnishness. They are also partly transnational, in the broader sense of how films can 'experiment and explore new territories, not only spatial, but existential, affective, aesthetic, communicative, political'; as Laura Rascaroli (2009: 190) has effectively said.

This article is focused on style, approached in a way that makes it possible to analyse the style of a filmmaker from one film to another. Due to the limited space available here, I can only focus on some films as examples of Kaurismäki's stylisation. I want to focus on the visuality

3 See about pictorialism, Aumont 1989; Bazin 1967: 164–169; Bruno 2002; Bonitzer 1985; Peucker 1995; Schrader 1972; Burnett 1995; Thompson, Bordwell 2003; Bordwell 1997; Valkola 2004.

4 Contemporary aesthetics form a continuing basis for pictorial and other experimentations, the various forms of composition, movement, expression, time and other operations.

of his style and analyse his pictorial worlds, focusing on the structures of the images and space in his work. This is to say that I will try to decode Kaurismäki's pictorial narrative, describe his images through forms and explain the cinematic devices at work there. The structure of this article is also based on style, which is the main aspect analysed here. My discourse is related to film studies, but it also presents perspectives related to aesthetics, architecture, photography, painting and contemporary art studies.

One question about Kaurismäki's style deals with the idea of how to pictorially reflect the space of film – space as a social and spatial practice and as a representational space related to the images and symbols that are attached to it. This is all related to the act of perceiving, conceiving and experiencing the space of film. The starting point for this visual analysis is expressed by Rudolf Arnheim in his book *Visual Thinking* as follows: 'Visual perception is visual thinking' (1969: 14). What makes this approach especially interesting is the conviction that the cognitive operations called thinking are not the privilege of mental processes above and beyond perception but essential ingredients of perception itself (Arnheim 1969: 14). In this regard, perception and thinking are not separate phenomena, but they more likely work together to create the final impression of a film.

Another thing that especially interested me in Kaurismäki's films is the way the characters move inside the narrative structure. In ordering his sequence of events, Kaurismäki's perspective is minimalistic, and this method brings his films closer to the origins of cinema and takes it further away from its Hollywood evolution. By minimising the narrative development, Kaurismäki preserves its 'magic', a process through which a film can take on new meaning following the insertion of the filmmaker's initial intention. For Kaurismäki this method enables him to search for the conventions and techniques that are specific to cinema, providing reasonable autonomy and positioning the evolution of film in relation to painting and photography.

This is clearly visible in the structures and images of films like *Crime and Punishment* (*Rikos ja rangaistus*, Finland, 1983), *Calamari Union* (Finland, 1985), *La vie de bohème* (Finland/France/Sweden/Germany, 1992), *Juha* (Finland, 1999) and *Man Without a Past* (*Mies vailla menneisyyttä*, Finland, 2002).

(Figure 1)

Kaurismäki has explained his ideas concerning the film *La vie de bohème* as follows:

The characters are from Balzac's novels or from Jacques Demy's films, tuned up to walk from one film to another. Their nearest are not forgotten, whether they are alive or dead, real or fictitious. This degree of 'unreality' and belief in fantasy that is connected to it – these are the finest qualities of silent films. Art and the making of art, these are the main things, impressionistic in the French spirit. (Von Bagh 2007: 140)

His characters 'act without words ... using all the classical narrative; he reverses them, showing them as natural actions with plain ups and downs, in which, decidedly, there is no morality involved ... this de-dramatisation creates a droll evenness' (Biro 2008: 189). Photography is the celluloid structural unit of film and Kaurismäki does not hesitate to explore the photographic dimension of cinema. He uses 'photographic immobility' as a mean of introducing photographic stillness into his narrative. In the same sense, he turns his camera into a means for the pictorial observation of daily life by producing images that are stilled in the photographic sense of the word. This effect can occur not only during a solitary moment, but also in the middle of a conversation; for instance, in the films *Shadows in Paradise* (*Varjoja paratiisissa*, Finland, 1986), *The Match Factory Girl* (*Tulitikkutehtaan tyttö*, Finland, 1990), *La vie de bohème*, *I Hired a Contract Killer* (Finland/Sweden, 1990), *Man Without a Past* and *Lights in the Dusk* (*Laitakaupungin valot*, Finland, 2006).



FIGURE 1. *La vie de bohème* (1992).

This viewpoint means that Kaurismäki thinks about his cinema in resonance with his characters and film sets. He sets into play a variety of aesthetic devices that turn film into a medium that investigates and echoes the historical past on several levels. In this regard, Kaurismäki injects a melancholic and nostalgic attachment to his cinema, connected to a specific pictorial stillness in which the sense of duration is essential. This is a developed modality in which our perception of the single image is made more attentive. Our 'cognitive mapping' of details and other essentials is aroused in moments when the camera holds the image for a while.

This relates to the director's dissatisfaction related to the development of cinematic language, which he states clearly:

Those, who during the breakthrough of sound film said that sound will destroy the cinema, were right. The narration of silent film had developed into perfectness: especially during the beginning of sound film, technical clumsiness turned it back to filmed theatre, which still exists despite its seeming smoothness. (Von Bagh 2007: 172–173)

In this regard, *Juha* is the last silent film of the 20th century, an authentic piece of work that demonstrates its respect for the masters of silent cinema. As it pictorially holds its shots, it discloses the tensions between the photographic stillness and filmic movement. In its landscape images, we can experience the pictorial stillness in full, especially in the moments when a character leaves the frame, which is then left open (and still) for a few seconds to make a lasting environmental impression.

This description indicates how these processes are used in Kaurismäki's cinema and how the creating of a filmic space (and time) resonates at the level of perception and creates a cinematic reality that has historical attachments. This is further connected to Kaurismäki's pictorial attempt to resist the

disappearance of filmic images into the past and to slow down the narrative process in order to let his images (and sounds) speak of history and 'historical reality', which could be potentialised in the present.

VISUALISED CONVERSATIONS

Kaurismäki's stylisation changes from one film to another, from fiction to documentary, but there are some features that are recurring. Generally, the capture of light and movement on film is the essence of cinema and Kaurismäki plays with light and perception in his films, going back in time and questioning what one sees when watching a film. A typical feature of this cinematic recycling in Kaurismäki's films is the nostalgia for old objects, which can become a referential practice inside the narrative. In a theoretical sense, this can also mean an influence on memory, and what we as spectators can share, and what remains and stays with us after the screening. Here, I would like to use the French idea of *visualisation croisée* (cross-over visualisation), meaning a kind of double vision inside a single scene used, for instance, when two people meet, or to be enlarged into the whole narrative in a larger frame.⁵ In this case, the visualisation has temporal dimensions, due to the process of going back in time.

Technically this is close to the old version of the shot/reverse shot structure used in classical Hollywood cinema, which establishes a graphic continuity between the characters, usually in a dialogue. In silent films this idea of visuality was closer to the meaning. The French scholar André Bazin established the basic ideas behind this model. According to Bazin, the verisimilitude of the space is important, since the position of the performer (actor) is determined even when a close-up eliminates the décor. Furthermore, the purpose and effects of the cut are always dramatic or psychological (Bazin 1967: 31–32).

5 This is actually my development of the original French term *conversation croisée*, which means a double dialogue between the characters in film. See, for instance, Bénézet 2014: 127.



FIGURE 2. *Shadows in Paradise* (*Varjoja paratiisissa*, 1986).
Matti Pellonpää as Nikander.

FIGURE 3. *Shadows in Paradise* (*Varjoja paratiisissa*, 1986).
Kati Outinen as Ilona.

But the modern version deals more with the length of the shot. Since Kaurismäki has reduced the amount of spoken dialogue in his films to a great extent, the director is using this dialogue more visually and expresses the emotions of characters through this visual display. A good example is the encounter between the main characters in *Shadows in Paradise*, where Ilona (Kati Outinen) and Nikander (Matti Pellonpää) meet several times during the narration. **(Figures 2 and 3)** Pictorially, their faces are highlighted and Kaurismäki uses eyeline-match cutting and character glance as a cue to link the shots. Cutting within a locale is most likely to be centralised upon eyeline-matches and upon shot/reverse-shot patterns. Thus, the classical construction of space participates in the hypothesis-forming. Narrative rhythm is created through the use and repetition of the director's concentration on rhythmic pulses inside the narration. In Kaurismäki's case, he produces a moment-by-moment pulsating of the narrative and creates expectations of further moments by focusing the pictorial values expressed at the image-level.

Generally, Kaurismäki creates a filmic tableau that includes a specific architectonics of minimalism. This minimalism entails a scenography of changing, but in many scenes, ultimately a fixed, static and almost motionless view. Kaurismäki's pictorial composition is primarily frontal, especially when two persons are involved. Sometimes he also uses other positions and figurations to connect the space and the characters. His static camera is connected to the composed environment and often a silent communication develops between the characters and the environment. Kaurismäki seems to prefer static shots because they can stimulate the spectator; they pictorialise the frame (the composition) and invite the audience to look at the details that might be unnoticed at first sight. This model also acts as a frame for the action, meaning that when the character leaves the cinematic space, the camera often continues to shoot the scene for a few seconds. This makes it possible for the edit-

ing to continue according to the spaces. In a sense, we are cutting from one space to the next and, in this regard, the choices made by the filmmaker are clearly connected to the overall plan of editing a film. The editing of the sequences can be planned through these 'environmental images', gaining new ground for the narrative to proceed.

The most remarkable feature of Kaurismäki's films is their tendency to integrate personal accounts and statements within their narratives in order to leave evidence of the filmmaker's existence. When creating *Take Care of Your Scarf, Tatiana* (*Pidä huivista kiinni, Tatjana*, Finland/Germany, 1994), the director announced:

My camerawork is, in any case, a certain puzzle, like moving a clothespin that affects the direction of the look. This is more a question of editing in which the actors have to have faith that during the editing process their interpretations are honoured. (Von Bagh 2007: 149)

Kaurismäki compels us to think about the progress of this kind of performance; and how it is experienced as a happening in a space where new aspects reveal new dimensions and where figures are usually subordinated to the overall stylisation. In this way, Kaurismäki is very attentive to the duration of the filmic experience, to the art of sensibility and to a particular mise-en-scène of audiovisual possibilities. In this mode of representation, the physical setting provides the framework, and the structure of the performance is derived from the interaction of the pictorial traces it leaves within us.

Conceived in this way, the sequences created by Kaurismäki comprise the essence of stylisation. In Kaurismäki's carefully constructed filmic world, the founding of which is based on detachment, time emerges precisely within the visual unfolding of the performers' attempt to enact and visualise the characters of the narrative and the viewer's acknowledgement of their on-going effort to cope with the possibility

of change in this re-enactment. It is clear, however, that the characters inscribe themselves into this phenomenology of spatial and temporal parameters. Indeed, at the start of the narrative, the performers have the mentality, control and perfection of 'models' of a certain 'history' connected with their outlook: often they stand motionless and in photographic stillness. But as the performance unfolds in time, as the 'living' component of the performance deploys itself in the duration of the scene, the movement sets in and the narrative turns into a voyage through space.

LANDSCAPES OF EMOTION

These are Kaurismäki's aesthetic choices, fabricated around the architecture of the landscape with which the characters are intimately connected. Kaurismäki's cinematic views are steps in the reconfiguration of the characters' existential and emotional situation. The director's handling of these situations works through the framing of essentials. The physicality of the existence is there, and in the visual arts and the language of cinema, the recognition of images can be compared with previously un-experienced targets or views with insufficient information, both of which require more specific perception than a familiar view. Needless to say, the perception of images requires some thinking, comparison, knowledge, experience and attention. So far, we might think that, through experience, an observer works toward a solution that is highly appropriate and this process leads to interpretation. At most, it shows that the process is partly unconscious and that is why an observer sees the target through image perception and does not consciously consider all of one's choices.

In Kaurismäki's cinema, we travel with the characters, and their motions become our emotions with a specific connection to everyday occurrences. His world is composed of still-life combinations, which are framed symbolically so that, in some connections, they look like slowly moving landscape paintings. Kaurismäki has a specific ability to 'animate' these painting-like affections into his

compositional design. In matters of reception, Kaurismäki's choices affect the way the viewer makes sense of the structures of his films. Kaurismäki calls on his viewers' intention, their sense of empathy and compassion, by touching emotions with his narratives. Rethinking film language, we can state that the perception of filmic narration through cognitive and phenomenological perspective should acknowledge the creative possibilities of visual composition, framing, extending, freezing or fragmentising and, in some cases, expand the role of images and sounds into a philosophical argumentation. The audiovisual world of cinema includes its own icons and, in film, the artist's craft includes both abstract principles and particular practices and tactics. In narrative film, this requires an understanding of materials, especially how they are deployed in structural and stylistic patterns, and how the viewer is incited to dynamically develop those temporal patterns during the process of narration.⁶

In regard to Kaurismäki's films, these are questions of calmly opposed movements, changes and the eternal passage of time unfolding these phenomena and structuring our comprehension of the relations between human beings and their environment. Nowhere is this more evident than in *The Match Factory Girl* where an exploration of the space occurs already in the early moments of the narrative. As the director builds a moving space of shifting compositions, we as spectators are called to participate in it. Stillness and momentary silence require us as viewers to be still, to observe, watch and have the patience to wait for the emerging solutions.⁷ It allows us to make observations that might normally be left unnoticed. The photographic dimension of cinema lives in these moments. In this regard,

- 6 Perception, memory and imagination are keys to the phenomenological approaches to cultural analyses.
- 7 The theme of silence, and also loneliness, connects Kaurismäki's films with paintings of the American painter Edward Hopper. In his book, *American Silences: The Realism of James Agee, Walker Evans and Edward Hopper*, Joseph Anthony Ward writes: '[S]ilence is also the subject of many of Hopper's most important paintings. Hopper's paintings are uniquely silent, conveying a sense of unnatural stillness. The silence is more active than passive' (Ward 1985: 169). This applies perfectly to Kaurismäki's films.

Kaurismäki's films also renew our viewing habits by requiring an intense following of the events and heightening our perceptual acuity.

Kaurismäki is exploring the pictorial dimensions of cinema. His use of 'pictorial stillness' in film means that the image itself can appear in frozen form in the middle of the image-narration, but since it is used in a filmic connection, its 'form' acquires a supplemental level of meaning. This is clearly exemplified in silent films like *The Passion of Joan of Arc* (*Le Passion de Jeanne D'Arc*, France, 1926) by Carl Theodor Dreyer and *Nosferatu: A Symphony of Horror* (*Nosferatu, eine Symphonie des Grauens*, Germany, 1922) by Friedrich Wilhelm Murnau, and in sound films like *Vertigo* (USA, 1958) by Alfred Hitchcock, among others. And this extended signification is aligned with the pictorial production of images through this operational stillness. The aesthetics of pictorial stillness are based on understanding the motionless being of a single image inside the linear roll of the cinematic images. The same freeze that controls the photography's immobile artistry also affects the style and existence of paintings. Similarly, a single painting appears as a frozen, motionless 'image' or as a single 'photograph'. However, the moving features of film – when aligned with immobile imagery – create an extended outcome producing the represented image embedded with pictorial stillness and duration. This durational aspect of the moving image has the ability to 'hold' the mental attention of the spectator longer than usual, and to my mind, this is the crucial effect – the presence and existence of a still-life vision through which we can approach the significance of pictorial stillness, especially in cinema.⁸

Based on this, Kaurismäki's film narrative extends into a perceptive modality that considers the importance of body movements, creating a specific continuity of expression – continuity at the level of film

narration and at the level of mental acts, including perception, representation, attention and judgment.

SCULPTING THE FORM

In Kaurismäki's filmic strategy, the narrative path – into which the characters are sculpted – is transformed into a storyline depicting mainly Finnish destinies under a signified discourse.⁹ His work confirms that cinema has the ability to link the affective life of human subjects with their surroundings and to visualise the emotive impact of the environment and the objects. The elements of performance in Kaurismäki's films are related to theatricality. Juhani Pallasmaa has approached the nature of Kaurismäki's reality with a notion that it 'leaks', and he believes that

simultaneously, the reality of the filmmaking and the acting, as well as the reality of the story, [exists] so this split-reality experience of the film often makes the viewer's consciousness waver between external observation and emotional immersion in the story, and a consequence of this is the theatrical nature of the film experience. (Pallasmaa 2005: 23)

Therefore, in this context all the physical elements through which dramatic storytelling is possible are included, i.e. the actors, voices, sets, props, lighting, colours, costumes and possible special effects, which are all connected to each other through the shooting and editing processes. For example, sets play a major role in Kaurismäki's films. They create the atmosphere and images of the mood. Consequently, the setting is strictly controlled by the director and is connected with the plot line and the development of the story.

Considering the sets, for example, the Dubrovnik restaurant in *Drifting Clouds* (*Kauas pilvet karkaavat*, Finland, 1996) is an

8 In pictorialism, film is also estimated in its intermediality as a phenomenon situated between photographic, architectural and a painting-like approach, mainly to realise the filmic conventions and their connections to other forms of art.

9 Kaurismäki also has films in which non-Finnish destinies are depicted, films like *I Hired a Contract Killer*, *La vie de bohème* and *Take Care of your Scarf, Tatiana*.



FIGURE 4. *Lights in the Dusk* (*Laitakaupungin valot*, 2006).
Janne Hyytiäinen as Koistinen.

elegantly stylised location, a space specifically designed for Kaurismäki and a place of 'an instantaneous configuration of positions', as Michel de Certeau has defined the role of a place (1984: 117). Later, in the narrative of *Drifting Clouds*, when Ilona (Kati Outinen) is working at a shabby bar, the setting straightforwardly symbolises her career downfall. Kaurismäki's 'emotion pictures' examine the construction of our sense of the space of a place, exemplifying the importance of intimacy and physicality in embodying the filmic eye that controls the filmic gaze. We might note that this kind of exploration of the physical world uses our re-collective memories and cinematic experiences as a springboard for further revelations in connecting our inner world of intimate aspirations to the reflections of cinema. Moving beyond the physiognomy to make the inner world of a character visible, Kaurismäki uses body language as a source of vision. Physicality and intimacy are connected in the images of *Crime and Punishment*, *Shadows in Paradise*, *The Match Factory Girl*, *Juha*, *La vie de bohème*, *Man Without a Past* and *Lights in the Dusk*. (Figure 4) The labour of emotion in film turns into images related to the physiology of passion. In this sense, the body of the performer is a mapping site. The characters' way of moving around the space where the filmic drama unfolds, becomes a readable pattern of slowly moving bodies that move inside an architectural space.¹⁰ There is also the idea of perceptual and temporal connections, since, the actions in a pictorial film, for example, do not correspond to the exact time that it takes for them to develop, but more crucially to the time it takes to perceive them.

At certain moments, a single film can attain a pictorial state of expression by holding the views (images) long enough to make a lasting impression on the spectator. Of course, the questions are, how long will this 'hold' continue? And how long is

it possible to hold the spectator's attention? The answers vary and there is no definitive answer, since a pictorially-minded cineaste aspires to fulfil the requirements for this specific occurrence in a director's oeuvre. Space, time and the movements of the performers and film camera gain new meanings and dimensions through this pictorially-oriented examination of ideas and viewpoints.¹¹ This has a lot to do with the aesthetics of the film form and the atmospheric quality of expression and cinema's own, very specific communication styles. It features an understanding of the details and context of any art and other influences that can introduce emotional cues and their psychological equivalences through which the spectators work out various stimuli in their minds. Through these pictorial aspects of film's audiovisual interaction between images and sounds, filmmakers can develop various stages of expressive moments; by 'painting' and planning them in their minds, staging the pictures and creating montages of images and sounds, or montages-in-the-image, through their pictorial angle of visual design.

A structural theme could be involved in a work of art that is suggested by the subject matter, but comprised primarily of a configuration of perceived forces. For example, a cinematic close-up is immediate and personal. Close-ups as signs of vision can sometimes reveal the psychic contours of film language. The emotional and dramatic sources can reflect Rembrandt's paintings. As Ron Burnett has maintained, 'it would be difficult to talk about an image without also talking about the pictorial essence of it' (1995: 68–69). He means that the pictorial is an essential quality of the image and not a simple sense of the visual. The visible in an image is, in this sense, a fragment of what is signified since images do not simply reconstruct reality. They may hint at it, but it is still more like a reflection. The image presents a relationship among the various levels of meaning. Furthermore, it is a ques-

10 Thinking about the significance of bodies and space, there is the discipline of *kinesics*, the study of body motions (blushes, shrugs or eye-movements) that communicate. For instance, Ray L. Birdwhistell (1970) has found that 65% to 70% of face-to-face interaction is non-verbal, involving a complex system of micro-gestures, which are integral to the study of bodies in filmic space.

11 For further theoretical speculation, see, for example, Merleau-Ponty 1962, Lefebvre 1991, Bronowski 1978, Perkins 1981 and Roskill 1989.

tion of interaction between the different elements of the image. Burnett explains,

[a]s a result, images do not depict a real that is absent from the photograph and then brought to life by interpretation or viewing. The process is neither mechanical nor linear. There are no prior moments outside of the image, no history that doesn't at one and the same time declare itself as image and as discourse and as evenly tradition in order to render the psycho-physiological states of mind, the inward, hidden emotions. (Burnett 1995: 68–69)

Kati Outinen's facial expressions in *Juha*, *The Match Factory Girl* and *Le Havre*, with their openly sympathetic intimacy, demand a curious and empathetic response. This is the realm of close-ups in which the viewer is 'forced' to share the performer's feelings. For example, in *Juha*, the intensity grows between Marja (Kati Outinen) and Shemeikka (André Wilms) mainly through the close-ups of the images and looks inside them in a painting-like way. The experienced immediacy is openly present. Visual continuity flows carefully in these moments and the close-up image scale conveys the characters' emotions with precision. The viewer responds with an intense sharing of the emotions, and a cinematic continuity, both structural and mental, unfolds. Cinematic representation involves a central, constant and inescapable contradiction. Many three-dimensional, unlimited spaces appear as one-sided, flat and limited spaces; and many separated moments in time appear consecutively. In essence, filmic continuity does not seek to deny these contradictions, but to resolve and surmount them by reconciling the scenic spaces with the screen's graphic space. In principle, one construes the succession of scenic chunks more swiftly when they coincide with one's real physical space. This means that the graphic consistency furnishes quick clues to spatial orientations.

Related thereto, one could say that continuity editing in film maximises the coherence and consistency between the pictorial space and the spectator's real space (Valkola 2012: 357–361). In Kaurismäki's films images are not simply reproductions or duplicates of the real, but new realities, partly because they are responsible for the configuration of our cognitive mapping, which is an important feature of our post- or hypermodern times. This demonstrates the ability of Kaurismäki's images to condition and determine the perception of the depicted everyday environment, as well as the perception of the places in his films.

Continuity is sometimes described as the art of implying connections. But it is also the art of avoiding confusing connections or admitting them very selectively, which is usually more difficult. The procedures that suffice to imply a connection may not necessarily rule out alternative, and therefore, contradictory connections. Thus continuity is not only constructive, but also prophylactic and precautionary. Since the spectator uses all the elements in shots to relate them, constant vigilance is required. Luckily, assumptions derived from context can override several potential confusions. Nonetheless, continuity rules, although simple in their basics, can very quickly become quite complicated, to the point that even experienced and sophisticated directors can heatedly disagree on how a cut will read. Just like the use of language, the craft of continuity is not a science but an art.

ENLARGING THE IMAGES

Consequently, the wider shot scales have a distant and relaxing effect on the viewer, usually because the viewer is sharing the character's feeling of relative security. Occasionally, Kaurismäki uses this predisposition of the viewer to relax by using wider images to undercut the viewers' expectations. For example, in many films the use of landscape images tends to neutralise the medium and long shots at the beginning of a scene when the viewer is lulled into a sense of the space. There is tension in anticipation of a character

entering the scene. The landscape images function phenomenally in creating distance. Still, one should remember that wider images not only convey a character's (and viewer's) sense of distance, but also suggest a kind of detachment from human problems. In most of his dramatic scenes, Kaurismäki uses medium or full shots of the characters as a counterpoint to close-ups. The effect is not to free the viewer from their involvement in the dramatic emotions of the scenes, but to set up a visual tension similar to the dramatic tension that the characters are experiencing.

For example, in a scene from *The Man Without a Past*, the man referred to simply as M (Markku Peltola) asks Irma (Kati Outinen), a woman from the Salvation Army, to visit his humble shack in the dockland area where he lives. Medium and full shots cover this sequence. Also some profile images are used. The wider images of this sequence provide more distance between the characters. The mood is a kind of quiet melancholy and Kaurismäki saves the close-ups for the closing of the scene. Playing with the images in this scene has a somewhat more complex effect on the viewer. The close-ups in the scene's opening involve the viewer with the protagonist's emotions. After all, the close-ups depict the characters' emotions most clearly, but these images also prompt questions about their motives and set up somewhat ironic comparisons to their earlier behaviour, as well as a curious anticipation of their future actions. In any case, the wider images exist in a tense counterpoint to the close-up approach.

While wider images and shots usually show characters in action, close-ups capture their passive reactions. This is crucial for Kaurismäki since passivity is a form of his characters' reactions. The viewer shares this passivity and experiences this flow of emotions connected with the existentialist attitude of Kaurismäki's characters. The existentialism includes a form of Nordic melancholy that entails wider implications since it has been present in the filmic narrative from the silent era. Kaurismäki manipulates the viewer's responses to establish the dramatic importance of an

image. In the close-up shots, focusing on an object, the viewer frequently shares a sudden realisation or wonder with a character. This use of close-ups is one of the foundations of Kaurismäki's identification approach. Since the viewer sees what the characters see, it is possible to identify with their point of view. As M in *The Man Without a Past* finally realises that he has lost his memory, the camera provides the viewer with a close-up, in which he is alone at the centre of the frame. We as spectators go along with him, mentally sharing the discovery. This use of the close-up encourages our tense involvement in the uncertainties of the character. Consequently, this technical device practically demands that we enter the melancholy world of the film.

Closer image scales can be seductive, causing us to ignore other elements of the image. The images can be proportionally correct, but Kaurismäki quite often changes the perspective for motional accuracy. The close-ups are psychologically appropriate, since they convey the significance of these views. By enlarging an object of intense interest in proportion to its importance to a character, Kaurismäki enables us to share the very specific quality of the character's thought processes. M in *The Man Without a Past* acts silently, without any great passion, by looking and listening: his diligent manners are 'like a slow river that finds its destination' (Biro 2008: 190).

Like most long shot images, the camera distances us from a character's motives and encourages the viewer to consider the character's emotions in a more functional light and actions in a more neutral light. At most, such images induce a mild curiosity or a vague phenomenal apprehension in the viewer. Sometimes the close-up revelations are meant only for the viewer and, in this sense, are withheld from the characters. In this situation, our involvement as spectators is tense, but not always as intimate as when we are directly sharing a character's emotions. This special, private glimpse, withheld from the characters, maintains the viewer's curiosity. More than dramatic irony, such privileged views promote a tense curiosity in

how the characters will react to the knowledge. More closely, this power of the close-ups to deny the viewer the distance to evaluate carries with it the potential for deception, either self-deception on the part of the viewer or character or misdirection by Kaurismäki. Since a close scale image strikes the viewer's eye with such concentrated focus, it sweeps the mind towards immediate conviction. Generally, images are constructions and basic visual units. Static images are already endowed with significance, because they are in the flux of changing fields and located amid the stimuli that race perpetually behind and beyond these fields.

In *Juha*, Juha's (Sakari Kuosmanen) fears are visualised in the point of view through close and subjective shots of portentous images. We can sense the melodramatic nature of these views and Kaurismäki is able to add references to the use of light and human presence in these moments thereby creating concrete, but still poetically spirited, indications to the narrative events. His technique of using perceptual patterns has a specific force – it uplifts the performances and provides an ability to create and employ nuances and sudden surprises to redirect his game of themes and movements inside the narrative. This provides the ground for the viewers to feel that they are very close to Marja's character in these moments. Especially in regard to these aspects, the narrative of *Juha* captures an authentic historical process and idea of an individual destiny seen through concrete and referential refractions. **(Figure 5)** Many common references are derived from the history of silent cinema and familiarity greets us in the plot construction, although it is based on a Finnish novel. However, Kaurismäki has moved this storyline into a more or less timeless sphere and invested the narrative with a version that has universal appeal.

TEMPORAL CINEMATIC ARCHITECTURE

'The narrative of the film does not occur in a particular unbroken epoch, but within the internal and mythical time of the narrative' (Pallasmaa 2005: 25). This notion

concerns Kaurismäki's *The Match Factory Girl* and explains how his films move in time. Kaurismäki's Deleuzian 'time-image' is a fluctuating entity, consisting of elements from various temporal epochs. Consequently, in Kaurismäki's cinema, the experienced present of the narration has a nostalgic yearning for the past, but the past is not simply located in one's memory as an isolated temporal element. It is felt as a *duration*, of which the spectator is immediately aware. At the same time, the present of a Kaurismäki-film has a specious quality, since it develops as an interval between the past, and performs as lived duration.

A scene **(Figure 6)** from *The Match Factory Girl*:

A family dinner: the father pours vodka first into his glass and then into his wife's glass. The daughter of the family brings in the plates and serves a portion of meat soup to everyone. They start to eat. Nobody talks and one can feel the power of silence. After they have eaten, they all go about their business. Television delivers only bad news: Ayatollah Khomeini, the Iranian leader has died; a gas pipe in Russia has exploded, resulting in fatalities; at Beijing's Tiananmen Square, tanks have crushed a student uprising, killing many.

These are images, sounds from Aki Kaurismäki's *The Match Factory Girl*. Addressed in this way, the main questions lie in the inscription of the cinematic narration, personal identities, ambiguity of gestures and expressions, bodily signs and dialogue between individuality and universality. He asserts a personal imprint on his films. His conceptions of the audiovisual possibilities of cinematic narration, with all their pictorial, aural, editing, compositional, acting, setting and lighting possibilities, have had a role in both Finnish and international perspectives. What is important and interesting is the film's particular method of cueing the viewer to develop certain

hypotheses and inferences, which will then be tested and refined as the film progresses. Art is a kind of mental exercise. For me, it is accurate to think of film as a collection of unique aspirations raising specific historical, social, psychological and ethical questions and endorsements of cultural representation. The immediacy of experience is essential to my approach. I think that Kaurismäki's personal concept of cinematic language is demonstrated in his films with all the audiovisual and phenomenal experiences linking to the meaningful levels of his presence. The characters face the significance of the everyday, the conflict between reality and dreams, between society and their personal freedom, saturated with melancholy.

With Kaurismäki, images are full of wordless, visual constructions, image-like atmospheres and spheres of pre-logical thinking. He has the ability to turn film into a pictorial observation of the everyday by producing these 'stilled' performances, bringing forth a photographic and architectural vision of film's potentiality. In *The Match Factory Girl*, Kaurismäki uses stylistic and narrative conventions, a pre-meditated and recurrent organisation of events, and arranges them into repeated and motivated patterns of variations that include central identifiable markers of his narrative logic and permanent choices. Melodrama plays with silent, understated patterns. The unfolding of things is connected to a minimal decoration of spaces, clearly making Iris's (Kati Outinen) presence and thinking prominent. The focus of the narration is centred on her lonely figure and Kaurismäki's narrative understanding has clear meanings that vary constantly. This enables the director to use his mind and imagination to create a series of instantaneous story actions that are based on his rotational spiral of filmic material.

Kaurismäki's cinematic architecture is negotiated and embedded onto the very surface of the film language and spectatorship, involving specific filmic constructions and interpretations of the physiognomic signs offered by the filmmaker. One of the

central features of Kaurismäki's films is his specific ability to unite very acute everyday realism, a perception of the 'real' (shown in the objects, setting, dialogue and sound of the film) and the world of the fairytale. These contrasting elements, which are almost dialectical, are joined together in a very natural way. Kaurismäki's films are fairytales without exactly being fairytales. The fairytale element creates a sense of hope, of wishes and dreams that might come true. In *The Match Factory Girl*, Iris reads Angelika novels, which her mother (Elina Salo) buys for her daughter as a birthday gift. When Iris is putting on her makeup and looking at herself in the mirror, we start to hear a melody called *Fairytale Land* (*Satunmaa*) sung by Reijo Taipale. After that, we see Iris sitting on a bench in a dance hall, waiting for someone to pick her up, but nobody does.

Kaurismäki's Finland is a reconstructed filmic entity, filled with signs of the past, objects and memories. Tangos represents old Finnish music, introducing nostalgia and memories, and reflecting a kind of lure of the past, fantasy, a special way to fancy or daydreams of a better future. It is a reflection of the dialectics between seeming necessity and freedom, between work and leisure. For Kaurismäki, the past unfolds too quickly, meaning that it must be slowed down. The scenes of *The Match Factory Girl* represent his pictorial attempts to compensate for the disappearance of cinematic images into the past. His films are declarations of a filmic historical reality with references to the recent and faraway past, concentrating on the remains of it, and creating a stream of spatial and temporal flux. Kaurismäki highlights a potentialised perspective of the present by assessing the elements of the past. This reconnection is necessary due to the nature of film's connection to perception (Ross 2012: 118). Our vantage point of a single image is made more observant in the pictorial moments when the camera holds the image long enough to create a lasting impression. A sense of duration discloses the tension between the 'photographic' stillness and



FIGURE 5. *Juha* (1999). Sakari Kuosmanen as Juha.
FIGURE 6. *The Match Factory Girl* (*Tulitikkutehtaan tyttö*, 1990).

slow moments inside the image. The pictorial dimension is articulated and the movements trigger our mental activity, producing series of thoughts that create the possibilities to look at pictures, images in a way that is embodied within our comprehension of their structures. In these moments, a phenomenology of perception is activated by less narrative-inclined purposes and a specific focus on the structurally active forces of the mind. The multivalent expression in addressing pictorial states is crucial here. Kaurismäki is returning to the origins of cinema, finding a new voice for the 'silent' language of movement.¹²

Based on Jean Mitry, we can state that the image is an objectified perception related to whatever caused it and with which it identifies (Mitry 1988: 31). Consequently, as emphasised by Michael Roemer:

There is something to be learned here about the entire process of perception in film. If we are explicitly told something, as we are in most pictures, we remain passive and essentially outsiders. If, however, we have to draw our own conclusions on the basis of evidence presented, as we do in life itself, we cannot help but participate. We become actively involved. When we are told something explicitly, we are in a sense deprived of the experience. It has been digested for us and we are merely informed of the results, or the meaning. But it is experience we are after, even if it remains vicarious experience. (Roemer 1964: 19–22)

The Match Factory Girl is Kaurismäki's most Bresson-like film, as Paul Schrader explains:

Any possible shot – high angle, close-up, pan – conveys a certain attitude toward a character, a 'screen' which simplifies and interprets the character. Camera angles and *pictorial* composition, like music, are extremely insidious screens; they can undermine a scene without the viewer's being aware of it. A slow zoom-out or a vertical composition can substantially alter the meaning of the action within a scene. (Schrader 1972: 67; my emphasis)

CONCLUSIVE IDEAS

Kaurismäki reveals the pictorial dimensions of his work, elaborating, for example, the structural depth of his visuals, juxtaposing the represented figures and their movements with the represented screen. The director observes how art has focused on these views and brought shifts and transformation from the bygone era into the present. In Kaurismäki's works, the filmmaker is attentive to the shifts that allow the viewer time to read the picture-plane inscriptions. This allows him to be attentive to the changes on the surface of the screen as a combination of specific film-structural operations. These consist mainly of developing the horizon of the represented space, featuring the position of the figures usually in symmetrical groupings toward the camera. The visible structure of the perspective controls the overall view as it locates the viewpoint on the pictorial plane. In many cases, Kaurismäki has also concentrated his observation on the central harmonic points of the foreground composition. In these lateral movements over the film canvas, the viewpoint of the representation, i.e. the viewpoint of the camera, becomes the nexus of visual design promoting the status of the central events towards which the gaze of the viewer is also directed.

12 The pictorial dimension of the image occurs in surprising contexts; for instance, in the Soviet montage tradition, used not only by Sergei Eisenstein but also by Aleksander Dovzhenko. In *Earth* (Земля, Ukraine, 1930), Dovzhenko provides pictorial entities, landscape and nature figurations that speak for themselves and allow the viewer to access the pictorial emphases of the shots. It also increases the structural activity of the spectator's perception by pointing out the phenomenological affects of narration.

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