

[WiderScreen.fi 2/2007](#)
8.10.2007

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**Aki Kaurismäki and Nation:
The Contrarian Cinema**

Andrew Nestingen
Assistant Professor
Department of Scandinavian
Studies
University of Washington

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Aki Kaurismäki and Nation: The Contrarian Cinema (1)

Is it useful to study Aki Kaurismäki as a national auteur? Many critics and officials wish he would accept that role, but Kaurismäki continually bedevils their wishes. His contrarianism is evident in his subversive performances for the press and public at events ranging from interviews to galas. In a well-known 1999 interview with *Dagens Nyheter* Kaurismäki remarked that "*of course you understand, I used to love Finland. Now I don't even like myself. We're losing everything: style, morality, solidarity – even Formula One. Idiots are leading Finland*" (Jutila 1999). "*Varför dricker Kaurismäki hela tiden?*" (Why is Kaurismäki always drinking?) read the headline of a note published in the *Hufvudstadsbladet* the next day. The article on the *Dagens Nyheter* interview was widely distributed through the national press service [(STT) 1997].

Kaurismäki also routinely subverts his auteur status in public appearances. Representing his *The Man Without a Past* (Mies vailla menneisyyttä, 2002) at Cannes in 2003, Kaurismäki famously took exception to his packaging as national public relations representative, smashing a mobile phone on the ground during a press conference and mocking a surprised minister of culture Suvi Lindén by dancing the swing on the red carpet before the screening of his film (Nyytäjä 2002). On his way to collect the Jury Prize, rather than the Palme d'Or prize as he arguably expected, Kaurismäki acted out vocationally when he stopped and leaned down to say a few words to jury member David Lynch; the American director responded with a puzzled and pained look. Kaurismäki reportedly declared: "As Hitchcock said, 'Who the hell are you?'" (Mann 2003). So much for accepting gracefully the role of auteur among auteurs. Kaurismäki's career includes many performances that reject nationhood and refuse the role of auteur offered by critics and officials.

Critics have tended to overlook or treat humorously such remarks and performances while scholars have limited themselves to wry remarks about them. When scholars have sought to situate Kaurismäki's cinema, their methods have tended to privilege textual interpretation. Whether arguing that the films express some element of nationhood (Kyösola 2004; von Bagh 2002, 2006; Toiviainen 2002), or that they cannot be denominated by a singular national identity (Kääpä 2004; Mazierska and Rascaroli 2006; Nestingen 2002), methods have focused on unpacking the cultural identity encoded in mise-en-scène, intertextual allusion, and other formal and substantive elements. The issue has been the extent to which nationhood—or the aspects of speech, habitus, and cultural reference that tend to be understood as particular to a nation-state and its history—finds or does not find expression in the films. The tendency to use textual analysis in interrogating the issue of nationhood is perhaps related to the continued pervasiveness of expectations about national cinema as an auteur cinema in the Nordic countries. Tytti Soila, for example, has suggested that critics in Sweden have continued to enforce textual interpretation of the "*personal film*" as the measure of cinema; among critics, the director is responsible for a film, and we must interpret the film to assess its critical success (Soila 2004, 14).

But what is the relationship between Kaurismäki's media performances and the films? We might conjecture the relationship is at least characterized by conflicts of authorial and national codes. While the critical and scholarly arguments have often sought to interpret Kaurismäki's films, the director's remarks have most often clashed with such interpretations. While discourses around the films have located uniqueness in their directorial signature style, the films' style in fact has privileged repetition and intertextuality with Kaurismäki undermining his authorial status in word and deed. Yet by examining the discontinuity and clashes within the films, as well as between the films and the discourse around them, a different perspective emerges on Kaurismäki's films.

The discontinuities are worthy of study, for they indicate the need to revise our use of categories like nation and authorship in film studies to account more richly for films like Kaurismäki's, but also to make sense of film production and reception in Finland and the other Nordic countries. Nordic cinema has since the 1990s come to be shaped by ever more complicated and contradictory relations of production and reception. How do 'nation' and 'auteur' help us account for the many quarters across Europe involved in financing Nordic cinema, the diverse production personnel, the complicated distribution and festival releases, the many languages, and modifications of genre and auteur styles evident in the work of filmmakers like Josef Fares, Bent Hamer, Aki Kaurismäki, Mika Kaurismäki, and Lars von Trier?

By insisting on the relevance of putatively immutable categories such as nationhood and auteur in explaining the work of Nordic cinema, we overlook the very reasons these filmmakers' work resonates with diverse audiences and makes Nordic cinema broadly interesting to critics and scholars. By looking to some of the discontinuities in Kaurismäki's cinema, we can stage in miniature some of the issues and questions that are most significant in Nordic cinema since the 1990s. Kaurismäki's contrarian cinema resists categorization in terms

of nationhood and authorship by creating conflicts of codes that do not fit expectations associated with these categories. These many levels of conflict and contradiction are in fact what make Kaurismäki's cinema intriguing and important for film studies.

Stars, Auteurs, and National Cinema

This claim about conflicts of code draws on arguments that have figured prominently in star studies and which have also informed revisionist approaches to auteurism that have recently attracted scholarly interest (Dyer 1979; Autio 2004). (2) Star studies and these revisionist approaches to auteurism refuse to assume that a unified entity, the person or the author, underpin and thus potentially explain the 'star,' the 'auteur,' or the 'film.' Richard Dyer famously argues that analyzing stars' hold on the public imagination involves recognizing the disjunction between divergent levels of performance: the star-as-person and star-as-image; the star-as-self and the star-as-role; the star-as-star and star-as-actor (Dyer 1979, 182-184). While the star as person may be formed by the primary attachments of family and youth, the star as image may appear as a sex symbol. Likewise, while the star-as-self may have become a prominent actor through a carefully cultivated network of acquaintances and a series of well-marketed early successes, the star-as-role may associate the actor with a persona of effortlessness and indifference to social approval that directly contradicts the agency that led to the star's roles. And so forth on many different levels. Dyer asserts that we need to study the way these levels cohere, or clash in contradiction. To be sure, in analyzing the status of an auteur in a non-Hollywood context, we cannot simply import Dyer's categories, for he is talking about the commodified status of the star in Hollywood. We can, however, take as a point of departure his theoretical point that a public persona consists of divergent levels of representation, which often contravene each other.

For our purposes, the auteur also consists of divergent levels of representation. The auteur is the artist designated creatively responsible for the film. The auteur is also a character: the figure who speaks to the media as the person responsible for the text, but also an artistic figure about whom circulate many narratives. The auteur is a person, as well: the biographical figure who is an object of media attention. Further, the auteur is a role: the person who defines him or herself as a biographical figure in the eyes of the media. The auteur is finally a role for critics and journalists, who construe the person and the films within the context of their own wishes to construct the auteur as artist, national subject, and social person. We can conceptualize authorship and the auteur in a rich and complex way when we parse the competing codes that make up the auteur's image and status.

Drawing on the arguments of star studies, recent scholarship on film and authorship has maintained that performances, interviews, and images form a discourse that constitutes the filmmaker as a maker of meaning. In other words, many representations of authorship coalesce (or fail to) into a narrative of authorship. In David Gerstner and Janet Staiger's *Authorship and Film* (2003), Staiger argues that such a view has risen in prominence as film scholars have revitalized their interest in authorship following early notions of the auteur's intention as origin of meaning, and later poststructuralist deconstructions of this notion. Yet the poststructuralist critique of the author involved an ethos of suspicion, treating authorship as politically retrograde because dependent upon a romanticized, humanist notion of individual agency.

This suspicion has continued to concern scholars who have sought to return to questions of the auteur, while seeking to balance their studies with the ethos of poststructuralism. Staiger argues that film scholars' concern with avoiding a return to the 'author as authority' has led to various 'dodges' aimed at arguing for the significance of the auteur, while methodologically separating the argument about authorship from a romanticized notion of the auteur. One way of recognizing the critique of the author as creator while recognizing the importance of authorship is to understand authorship as a 'site of discourse' (Staiger 2003, 46-49). That is, in production, circulation, and reception authorship involves varying citations of the conventions sketched of authorship.

Staiger's argument about the subject of film authorship extrapolates Michel Foucault and Judith Butler's arguments about the productive function engenderment of the subject (ibid. 51). On this view, acts of authorship and consumption constitute the director. Authorship does not emanate from the director's essential 'identity' or 'intentions' as 'creator' of a work. Thinking of authorship in this way, we can begin to see the relevance of Dyer's argument about the multiple levels involved in stardom. Authorship involves citations of the auteur as artist, the auteur as character, the auteur as person, the auteur as a role, and so forth. For example, the author may situate him or herself as a 'national auteur' by using intertextual allusions to films assigned to a national canon and by speaking of his or her reverence for that canon. Such statements not only depend on conventions of national cinema, insofar as they invoke an ostensibly stable national canon, but also invite a specific reading through the use of citational practice. Yet such citational practices constitute a continually changing authorship.

Practices of authorship in this discussion also raise the notoriously slippery term of nationhood and its corollary national cinema. National cinema in the present discussion is a historicist term denominating the repetition of economic, aesthetic, and institutional conventions in making and viewing movies; these conventions, then, come to be viewed as constitutive of the institution of cinema associated with a particular nation state (see Higson 1995, 4-5; Rosen 2006). In the Finnish case such conventions have included, among others, a preference for rural melodrama, from the series of films about Niskavuori Farm to Markku

Pölönen's films of the 1990s and 2000s; mise-en-scène featuring countryside settings; affirmation of rural cleverness, and suspicion of urban sophistication; a deep regard for the nation's historical experience during its wars: a cadre of prominent stars, varying by historical period, and so on (Laine 1999; Koivunen 2003).

Since this article concerns Aki Kaurismäki's filmmaking in the period of the 1980s to the 2000s, the relevant conventions include shared participation in a specific mode of production involving the Finnish Film Foundation (*Suomen Elokuvasäätiö*), a set of correlated aesthetic tendencies associated with auteur cinema, not least linguistic in this case, and relevance to a specific group of Finnish commentators and their readership. At the same time, these conventions have undergone significant changes since the 1990s. European Union initiatives such as EURIMAGES have impacted financing and production, as have regional institutions such as the Nordic Film and Television Fund and DVoted, just as local institutions such as Film i väst in Trollhättan and the Villilä Studios project near Pori, among others, are influencing production environments –even if they have not directly affected Kaurismäki's cinema. What is more, the shift to a blockbuster model, in which pre-sold products such as detective novels, celebrity biographies, and adaptations of cartoons have been released with between 45 and 75 copies as media events has impacted expectations about domestic cinema. National cinema remains salient as a category that identifies a coherent repetition of the same, an identity within a diverse body of texts, yet it is clearly undergoing significant changes.

This provisional definition accounts for national cinema as the repetition of a set of conventions. It is evident that citation of these conventions assumes the existence of national cinema, thereby maintaining it; but citation can also take critical distance from conventions through subversive citation. For example, a commentator may cite aspects of the national cinema to distance a film or film figure from the tradition. Alternatively, a filmmaker may parody a convention as a means of distancing a film from that tradition. On the other hand, in discussion of a film and in production and reception of a film, ignoring national convention may be a way of opting out of the discourse of national cinema. Given the many levels or codes of authorship involved, the list of possible types of affirmative and subversive citation could be lengthened a good deal.

When we draw together arguments about film authorship and national cinema to examine Kaurismäki, we see that in his performance of the role of the auteur and his filmmaking practice his use of citational practice does not repeat conventions of Finnish national cinema in a way that necessarily identifies his cinema as an instance of national cinema. He has provocatively varied the acts and statements that might provide a basis for making arguments about his status as a national auteur, establishing an ambivalent relationship with what has become the prevailing consensus that his films are best understood as an expression of a national sentiment. What is more, when we approach the textual codes in his films that ostensibly express the most profound aspects of national sentiment, we find that they can easily be understood as a citational practice that is not a repetition of national sentiment at all. This combination suggests that Kaurismäki's films are best understood as a *contrarian cinema*, which cannot easily be assimilated to any tradition. In cultivating the contrarian cinema, Kaurismäki certainly undermines his categorization in terms of national cinema. The director's remarks on visual clichés, the Finnish language, and his use of language in the films, as well as the famous silent longing of his characters, furnish us with relevant examples.

Kaurismäki and National Cinema

Kaurismäki's remarks about national cinema have alternately derided and praised it, but what is consistent about these shifts is their attempt to define a role for Kaurismäki as an ambivalent outsider in relation to the national cinema. While his remarks exhibit attachment to the national cinema, he continually distances his cinema from the conventions of national cinema. The remarks that construct this role also make evident the salience of discerning the various discursive levels that make up his cinematic authorship. The definition of the outsider role dates to the beginning of Kaurismäki's career. In a 1984 interview, just after his debut film *Crime and Punishment* (*Rikos ja rangaistus*, 1983) but before the release of his second film, *Calamari Union* (1985), Kaurismäki dissociates himself from Finnish cinema when he distinguishes international and national cinema in terms of Finnish cinema's repetition of narrative and visual cliché. "*International cinema means avoiding a set of stock phrases: you do not have Santa Claus, with a mask on, loaded up and sorting reindeer, bottle of booze in hand, and he does not fall into the bushes and flop about, digging around down there. That's what is seen as a national film, and its opposite is international*" (Hyvärinen 1985). As he does here, Kaurismäki not only parodies the repetition of visual and narrative clichés, but also positions himself as an observer, outside the national cinema.

On the other hand, in interviews during 1984 and 1985, Kaurismäki regularly praised the potential of Finnish cinema, yet in a way that entailed the same positioning as an outsider. In one interview, he says: "*We have not always been able to answer [the question about the future of Finnish film] with the excitement that we can these days, since national cinema is on the upswing. If the same progress continues, in five to ten years we will see miracles from an international perspective*" (Naski 1985). Progress in this remark equates with learning from the mistakes of national specificity, and instead developing a style legible to transnational audiences. In context, such remarks implied that the transformation of national cinema would be brought about by Kaurismäki and those involved with the production company Villealfa at the time (Veikko Aaltonen, Mika Kaurismäki, Pauli Pentti, Timo Salminen, etc.) While we always need salt with Kaurismäki, a remark like this indicates at least ambivalence to

bundling his films under the rubric of national specificity inasmuch as his remarks situate him both as an outsider and as having a transformative impact on the aesthetic conventions of Finnish cinema.

Remarks by Kaurismäki about his linguistic choice of a formal "book Finnish" (*kirjakieltä*) for his films exhibit the same ambivalent character. Crime and Punishment "divided viewers," with some critics finding the formal idiom irritatingly artificial ("*Kaurismäen elokuva talvipäivien kohokohta*" 1984). In response to such criticism, Kaurismäki again seeks to create a space for himself as a dissatisfied outsider. This positioning is evident in a 1984 interview where Kaurismäki says:

"The only stable, enduring and indivisible thing we have in this country is the Finnish language. It's perhaps the only area where I'm patriotic. And the more I'm criticized for using a formal style of language, the greater the mathematical certainty that I'll use it. If people can't understand their native language, they can go home" (Hämäläinen 1984, 53).

While ostensibly taking a patriotic position, Kaurismäki rejects the commonplace national-romantic notion that spoken dialects are a form of beautiful personal and national expression. At the same time, he parodies criticism of his film's linguistic choices to again position himself as anterior to the national cinema, as someone with a distinct and different perspective. Kaurismäki has indeed stuck to his formal idiom, and it has continued to work in a way that locates his films outside of the realist linguistic conventions of dialogue. His films' characters have always spoken in an artificial and unique style as strange to Finnish ears as the delivery of the English in *I Hired a Contract Killer* is to English ears. While *I Hired a Contract Killer* takes place in East London, its characters' speech is washed of class dialects. A *Sunday Telegraph* reviewer called the language in the film "just English" (Tookey 1991). Kaurismäki's comments on language, and the dialogue in his films, exhibit the same kind of ambivalent positioning that we see in Kaurismäki's comments about national cinema.

In addition to these few comments on national cinema and the Finnish language, as is well known, Kaurismäki has spoken on a huge variety of topics, from his decision to move to Portugal, to parliamentary debates on nuclear power, to cars and style, to his low opinion of the glossy aesthetics of Finnish culture today (Hammarberg 2002; Stecher 2002). In many of these comments, the attitude is ambivalent and contrarian, refusing to be categorized in singular terms. In this attitude, many critics have found an artistic ethos, critical, reflective, and uncompromising. By contrast, some critics have criticized Kaurismäki for cultivating an ambivalent public role as a means of manipulating the attention he receives. The *Iltä-Sanomat* gossip sheet columnist Jyrki Lehtola, for example, ripped into the Kaurismäki brothers in a 1999 column commenting on Aki Kaurismäki's interview with *Dagens Nyheter*. "*They haven't become spoiled children, as their reputation suggests. They always have been,*" he writes (Lehtola 1999). While oversimplified psychologization and polemical tone draw attention, Lehtola's point here and in the article is that Kaurismäki has sought to be socially relevant and an outsider, both insulating himself from critique, by feigning the indifference of the outsider, and maintaining relevance through the use of controversial statements that bid for journalists' and the public's attention. What we see in Kaurismäki's positioning is a refusal to repeat statements and conventions that would define a role sympathetic to the national cinema, while he has presented himself to the public as an outsider, a role that stereotypically conforms to notions of the artist and intellectual's critical positioning. Kaurismäki's multilayered auteur role fosters ambivalence through contrarian positioning.

Authorship and Recursive Structure

A second feature relevant to understanding Kaurismäki's cinema as a contrarian one is the films' use of recursive structures. The films regularly repeat formal elements within a single film, elements from Kaurismäki's previous films, and from other filmmakers' cinema. For example, in *Lights in the Dusk* (Laitakaupungin valot) Kati Outinen appears in a cameo as a grocery store cashier, reprising her role in *Shadows in Paradise* (Varjoja paratiisissa, 1986). Narrative and formal recursiveness can also be seen in the films' regular use of mise-en-abyme structures, mise en scène, humor, intertextuality, and so forth. While a minor example, the moment of repetition in *Lights in the Dusk* points to a larger pattern in the films. Repetition and identity, rather than novelty and difference, define the style of Kaurismäki's films.

Are recursive structures a means of staging nostalgia, the affective register among spectators, which critics attribute to the films? One of their prominent types of repetition occurs in the films' mise-en-scène, which repeatedly include timeworn transistor radios, cardboard suitcases, dated glassware and fabrics, anachronistically decorated stores and restaurants, and the like. When critics argue that such recursiveness is nostalgic, however, they tend to downplay or overlook the role of formal repetition. They focus instead on spectator affect in responding to the elements that putatively express nostalgia, and attribute the creation of nostalgia to the filmmaker's intentions. But another way of explaining the affective register is to look at its source, which is often a recursive structure. Many of the important emotional moments actually involve repetition that cannot be simply explained as an expression of nostalgia or national identity, but which instead are structures that seem to cultivate the ambivalence and ambiguity we noticed in Kaurismäki's definition of the role of the auteur. The films often 'cite with a difference' as a means of creating questions and ambivalence. Recursive structures, then, are arguably a textual element that roughly corresponds to the ambivalent authorship and national identity we have outlined. The films' use of these structures works to create more ambivalence in the category of authorship.

This argument becomes evident through an analysis of the famous seven-shot "Satumaa" (Fairyland) sequence of *The Match Factory Girl* (Tulitikkutehtaan tyttö, 1989), in which Iiris Rukka (Kati Outinen) visits a tango hall to find romance, but finds no partner with whom to dance. The scene lends itself to a reading that interprets it as an expression of nostalgia as well one that expresses a nationally constructed emotional register of silent longing (von Bagh 2006; Koivunen 2002). Yet the sequence can also be richly understood through its recursive structure, a mise-en-abyme that cites the carnival scene early in Robert Bresson's *Mouchette* (1967), in which Mouchette rides the bumper cars. When we study the mise-en-abyme structures in Kaurismäki's film, we find the sequence lends itself to an equally rich reading, which emphasizes intertextuality and citational practice.

In her visit to the dance hall, Iiris enters a fairyland of romance, described in the evocative words of the famous song *Satumaa*. The sequence begins at Iiris' home, where she applies make up as a news report from Tiananmen Square plays in the background. Through a musical dissolve, the report gives way to *Satumaa*, which creates a musical bridge to the dance hall, executed with a cut to a long shot of Taipale singing on stage with dancers swirling about the floor below him. The one-minute take of Taipale on stage coincides with his delivery of the tango's first verse. As the musical refrain begins, the film cuts to a medium shot of Iiris, sitting among four women, who await the invitation to dance. During the course of this third shot, whose duration is forty-four seconds, each of the women but Iiris receives an invitation, and Iiris is left alone with the shadows of the other dancers playing over her and the wall. The film cuts back to Taipale in close up, when the second verse has commenced. After a twenty-two second close up of Taipale, another cut brings us into the sixth shot, forty-three seconds in duration, which is a long shot of Taipale shot from straight ahead, exhibiting the stage's set more fully. The sequence concludes with a twenty-six second medium close-up of Iiris, shadows again playing over her, as she finishes a bottle of soda then puts it on the floor among a number of others she may have also consumed.

The sequence is a multilayered mise-en-abyme, for Taipale's performance stages and represents Iiris' feelings of romantic and sexual longing, which motivate her throughout the film. The sequence condenses the film as a whole. Such a point, however, does not necessarily contradict the nostalgic and national reading, for certainly some viewers may regard the strains of the tango and Iiris' silence as national expressions. The silence is complicated, however, by the structure of the sequence and the set.

The sequence is constructed to stress Iiris' isolation, her inert presence in a place of excitement and romance. While the long takes and shot scale scene establish Iiris' isolation and discomfort in relation to other figures in the frame, they also work to underscore Iiris' imaginary projection of herself into the lyrics of the song. Long shots, encompassing the stage, its set, and the proscenium, stand in juxtaposition to medium shots of Iiris, sitting on the bench, shadows playing over her. The sequence's editing follows the usual progression from long shot to close up, but in this sequence, it is used to suggest that Iiris figuratively projects herself behind the proscenium, into another world. Indeed, the sound bridge that brings her from home to the dance hall is indicative of the sudden magic of film editing, just as the dancers' shadows remind us that in the cinema, shadows come to life, as shadows imprint the film to bring life to the cinema.

It is also striking that behind the proscenium is a set far different from the naturalist mise en scène typical of Kaurismäki's films. Again, the choice of set subtly hints at Iiris's exteriorization through the music. In the initial long shot of Taipale, shot from an angle, we notice the angular cardboard forest that is the backdrop to the performers. When the camera later moves directly in front of him, we see the gaps in the forest, indicating it is made of cardboard. The angular cardboard forest calls to mind most distinctively the angular, cardboard town of an expressionist cult film like *Das Cabinet des Dr. Caligari* (Tohtori Caligarin kabinetti, 1920), and its famous preoccupation with the externalization of subjective turmoil through the set. The cut at the musical refrain that marks Iiris' projection into the music, and the cues the set give us, leave us no doubt that this mise-en-abyme conveys a salient emotional theme of isolation and loneliness.

While mise-en-abyme is itself a recursive structure, the *Satumaa* sequence is also recursive in its citation of a similar mise-en-abyme sequence in Bresson's *Mouchette* (1967). As in *The Match Factory Girl*, mise-en-abyme works in Bresson's fifty-four-shot sequence of *Mouchette* and the bumper cars to highlight the young woman protagonist's isolation and romantic and sexual longing, and to place emphasis on a fantasy of escape. Like *The Match Factory Girl*, Bresson's film narrates the unhappy life and exploitation of a young woman, *Mouchette*. As in Kaurismäki's film, cinematography and sound work to convey the silent longing of the protagonist in a site of sociality. The *Mouchette* sequence in question follows *Mouchette* from working in the village bar, to the bumper cars of a visiting carnival, to a tentative approach to a boy, to an intervention by her father.

While the rapid cutting in the bumper cars part of the sequence differs from the slow rhythm of the sequence discussed in *The Match Factory Girl*, the principle of projection of romantic escape into an imagined space is the same. Bresson's sequence begins with diegetic carnival music, then (as *Mouchette* sits down on the café veranda with her father) makes a transition to nondiegetic strings and woodwinds interspersed with diegetic carnival noise, before initiating the mise-en-abyme with nondiegetic surf guitar, which carries on until the conclusion of the sequence. The nondiegetic surf guitar correlates with rapid editing that ties together the shots of *Mouchette* and a boy running into one another on the bumper cars. When *Mouchette* magically passes beneath the canopy of the bumper cars, and begins her sexualized collisions with the boy, she seems to be imagining in the same way that Iiris does when she projects



herself beneath the proscenium in *The Match Factory Girl*. In *Mouchette*, when the ride is complete, the boy does not seem to recognize Mouchette, for she has imagined the bumper cars as a world of romantic satisfaction, just as Iris imagines dancing at halls and clubs.

As Mouchette stares longingly at patrons driving the bumper cars, her actual entry into the cars also bears the mark of fantasy, for it is the unexplained generosity of a woman with a baby that allows her to enter the ride. This sequence, like that in *The Match Factory Girl*, also stands in contrast with the naturalism of the rest of the film. So too the sexually charged interaction with a boy her age and her smiles are exceptional for the film – the cars furnish her a singular moment of happiness. So too the expressionist aspects of Kaurismäki's sequence echo the carnivalesque in this sequence of Bresson. For according to Mikhail Bakhtin, the carnival is a site for collective performance, transformation, and transgression, just as it is in Bresson, and the dance hall and the disco are in Kaurismäki's film – a site for imagining and trying out fantasy roles. What is more, Kaurismäki has expressed his enthusiasm in print for this sequence's use of music (Kaurismäki 1998), and, according to Kaurismäki's friend and colleague, Jim Jarmusch, *Mouchette* is the seminal link between Kaurismäki and Bresson (Andrew 2003). When we note the connections in these mise-en-abyme sequences, Kaurismäki's tango sequence begins to look like a creative interpretation of Bresson's mise-en-abyme. Both *Mouchette* and *Iris*, just as the two films, are concerned with fantasies of escape and transformation, which are condensed in the sequences here.

When we realize this connection, we can see that even at a moment of ostensible national expression, Kaurismäki's use of the mise-en-abyme puts citation above nation, homage to Bresson above nostalgia for a lost Finnish reality. Both are present, to be sure, but with both present, we must recognize an oscillation much like that we recognized in Kaurismäki's remarks about national cinema and the Finnish language. What is being repeated in these contradictory citations? The questions of repetition, authorship, and national cinema certainly take on a much greater complexity when we recognize the extent to which the films and the director's public persona are multiply constructed. Their multilayeredness becomes clear when we see that the director's public person and his films involve complex and clashing codes, which raise questions about creative inspiration, cultural context, audience address, and the status of national cinema.

National and Regional Cinema

Kaurismäki's statements about national cinema, his ambivalent performance of the role of national auteur, and the mise-en-abyme structures I have noted create what Dyer in his analysis of stars calls a "*clash of codes*" (Dyer 1979). Dyer has argued that stars tend to manage and resolve ideological contradictions in the relationship between their onscreen performances and public image, but also that they can create contradictions that open a space for alternative or oppositional understandings of their work and social contribution (ibid. 38). The ambivalent citational practices I have identified in Kaurismäki's public image and films open such a space. This positioning is intriguing, for it helps us to see some of the ways Kaurismäki's films have meant so many different things to different spectators and audiences.

This positioning is also significant inasmuch as it constitutes a case study for understanding the way Nordic national cinema is changing today. In bringing together many social and aesthetic registers in the relation between film and a director's public persona, Kaurismäki indicates that the semantics of terms like national cinema and auteur themselves require revision, if we want to understand Nordic cinema in the context of its circulation through local, national, and global media environments. At the same time, as layers of production, financing, marketing, circulation, authorship, and audience also figure in the way we understand cinema, Kaurismäki's films point us toward a critical re-examination of authorship and nationhood. Just as we have seen efforts to make cinema a national brand, we have seen increasingly complex and transnational forms of creative and economic collaboration involving local, national, regional and European layers. By paying attention to the multiple significations of authorship and national cinema, we will fathom the transformation of Nordic cinema since the 1980s more fully, and be better positioned to explain it to colleagues and students who would like to learn more about it. The clash of codes that runs throughout Kaurismäki's contrarian cinema helps us do this.

Andrew Nestingen

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Notes

1. I am thankful to Anna Hollsten and Jyrki Nummi for conversations that helped inspire this article, although all of the article's infelicities are of course mine alone. [\[back\]](#)

2. Orgeron offers a helpful overview of recent contributions to revisions of auteur criticism (62). [\[back\]](#)

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ISSN 1795-6161

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