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Screenwriting without typing – the case of *Calamari Union*

ABSTRACT

The first part of this article is a practice-based case study of the making of the film Calamari Union *(1985), a Finnish cult classic written and directed by Aki Kaurismäki. I was the film editor of this film as well as of several other features and short films by Kaurismäki in the 1980s. From the point of view of screenwriting research,* Calamari Union *offers a thought-provoking example: it is a feature-length fiction film that was made entirely without a formal screenplay. In the case study I examine the effects of this method in the production and post-production of the film. In the second part of the article I discuss the definitions of a 'screenplay' and screenwriting in the context of alternative film-making practices, and the reasons for and consequences of the choice of such practices. I will also briefly visit the question of authorship in cinema and reflect on the birth of stories.*

KEYWORDS

Aki Kaurismäki
alternative screenwriting
improvisation
authorship
cult film
underground film
editing

THE CASE: *CALAMARI UNION*

Different sources define *Calamari Union* (1985) as a film that was made 'without a script' (Kääpä 2010: 76) or 'without a proper screenplay' (Toiviainen 2000: 433). As one of the two persons credited as the film editor of this film (in *Calamari Union* the director and I worked as a team, as hands-on editors) I can provide evidence of the circumstances of its making; but to affirm or

confirm either of the statements above is not possible without a clear understanding about how to define 'script' or 'screenplay' in the first place.

The principal document used as the basis of *Calamari Union* is preserved in the collections of the National Audiovisual Archives in Finland. It is a one-page drawing made with a ballpoint pen. On the page, there are arrows and lines running through it from top to bottom. Alongside the lines, some individual words are written in longhand; the names of actors and the names of some of the locations. There are also half a dozen words on the page that describe action such as 'car theft', 'fight', 'vanishes to the street' 'revelation'; and two whole sentences: 'Sakke takes care of the car' and 'Sakke remains on the beach'. Images of a cross are drawn here and there alongside the names of the actors. This one page was the only plan on paper depicting the structure and the content of the story that I ever saw. I know there had also been some scraps of paper with dialogue on them on the set on some of the days during the shoot. These notes, scribbled hastily by the writer-director just minutes before the camera would roll, were basically memoranda for the actors. They had disappeared by the time the editing phase started.

Calamari Union is either the second or the third feature film by Aki Kaurismäki, depending on how one counts. He co-directed a feature-length

Figure 1: The 'screenplay' of Calamari Union *(1985). Courtesy of Aki Kaurismäki.*

rock documentary *Saimaa-ilmiö/The Saimaa Gesture* together with his film director brother Mika Kaurismäki in 1981. Two years later he made his first fiction film as a director in his own right *Rikos ja rangaistus/Crime and Punishment* (1983), an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's novel. An inspiration for Kaurismäki, aged 26 at the time, was Alfred Hitchcock who, in an interview with François Truffaut, had said that one book he wouldn't dare to adapt was *Crime and Punishment* (von Bagh 2006: 28). Kaurismäki co-wrote the screenplay with Pauli Pentti, with whom he had earlier collaborated writing his brother Mika's breakthrough, *Valehtelija/The Liar* (1981). *Crime and Punishment* was a critical success. As his next film, in production one year later, Kaurismäki decided to do something entirely different. He has called *Calamari Union* an 'underground film' and his real debut (Toiviainen 2000: 433). It is a black and white, no-budget, dark comedy with sixteen main characters, fifteen of who are called Frank.

The story of *Calamari Union* is the story of a group of men making a journey from one part of Helsinki to another. The men form some kind of a brotherhood, the basis of which is never explained in the film.[1] Some of them sport sunglasses even in the dark of night and their dress code brings to mind the heroes of early 1960s French New Wave films – Kaurismäki has acknowledged influences from *The Blues Brothers* (1980) and Godard (von Bagh 1984). The men address each other by their first names, so the repetition of the word Frank creates a special surreal rhythm for the dialogue at times. According to the opening credits, the film is dedicated 'to those ghosts of Baudelaire, Michaux and Prévert who still hover on this Earth ...'. It demonstrates many signature traits of later Kaurismäki works: the comedy is understated and dark, the dialogue wry and leaning towards the absurd, there is rock music on a stage, allusions to the history of cinema and an ending that shows the characters embarking to sea. Many of the actors would later appear in leading roles in other Kaurismäki films: Matti Pellonpää, Kari Väänänen, Pirkka-Pekka Petelius, Sakari Kuosmanen and members of the group Leningrad Cowboys. Markku Toikka, the Finnish Raskolnikov of *Crime and Punishment*, is the only member of the brotherhood who is *not* a Frank, but Pekka.

As the film opens, we meet the men in a shabby restaurant and learn that they have decided that the time has come for them to make the big move and emigrate from the working class area of Kallio to Eira, an upper class neighbourhood by the sea. After discussing the dangers of the journey, they decide to divide the group into smaller units. The men set forth, and from now on the story follows the fate of individual Franks (or groups of Franks) as they try to get across the city and negotiate its perils. In reality, the distance between the neighbourhoods of Kallio and Eira is about 3.3 kilometres (two miles) across the historical centre of Helsinki, a very peaceful area. In *Calamari Union*, only two of the men survive the journey. The others meet their fate through different destructive forces present in the city, such as random violence, suicidal despair or the temptations of riches. The biggest danger comes in the form of women – mostly lovesick and demanding, sometimes hostile. 'In my youthful straightforwardness, marriage and death were the same thing to me', Kaurismäki has later observed (von Bagh 2006: 39). When the two surviving Franks reach the destination they immediately realize that they have been fooled: there is nothing glamorous in Eira. After spotting a small rowing boat on the beach, the men decide to continue their quest and start rowing across the sea towards Estonia – which at the time was still Soviet Estonia. Not known for anybody as the land of milk and honey. End of story.

1. The name of the film is a pun combining squids and Kalmar Union, a union between the Nordic countries 1397–1523, familiar to all Scandinavians from history textbooks.

Figure 2: A moment of doubt on the journey (Actors: Kari Väänänen, Markku Toikka, Matti Pellonpää and Pantse Syrjä). Photo: Villealfa Filmproductions/ Malla Hukkanen.

The film was shot in some twenty days in the autumn of 1984 with a small crew – never more than a dozen. The members of the crew received a nominal fee, and all the actors worked for free. No funding from the Finnish Film Foundation was applied for before the completion of the film. After the premiere, the project was granted 150,000 FIM (25,000 euros) by the Foundation (Toiviainen 2000: 433). Half of the stars of *Calamari Union* were professional actors and half were rock musicians. Everyone was busy elsewhere and, since no one was paid, they could not be obliged to appear on the set according to any schedule – they came when they could. A detailed screenplay for the film would have been of no use, since each day it was uncertain until the last moment which of the sixteen main characters would be able to participate on that shooting day. The story had to be made up on the go. The end result of the filming was some 50 separate scenes in which the Franks wander in the city in different groupings meeting various situations and obstacles on the way. For each of those who would never reach their destination, a scene depicting the moment of demise was also filmed. On the one-page drawing by Kaurismäki, the image of a cross alongside the name of an actor signified a scene of destruction.

The plan on the page was of no use for the editing, not even for a rough cut. During the shoot, no one had been able to keep track of the developments of the plot. Apart from the fixed action in the beginning and in the end, we had no idea about how to order the material. It seemed to be a random collection of sketchy scenes. An easy solution would have been to assemble it as a loose collection of little episodes, but the very nature of the basic idea of *Calamari Union* prevented this. When so many characters are destroyed on the way from one point to another, the order of events could not be random. Someone already dead could not appear later in the film. We had very few guidelines when planning the structure. I had studied Aristotle and

some basics of dramaturgy in film school, but the paradigm of three acts, as preached by the American screenwriting gurus, had not yet arrived in Finland. I remember Kaurismäki telling me that he had read somewhere that by 27 minutes, the audience must know what and who the story is about, and that we should try to keep this in mind.[2] Also, there was one scene, in which all the Franks participate in a rock gig that was supposed to be the dream of one of the men. For us, this was a 'big' scene, an emotional climax, that had to be placed somewhere within the last half an hour. Within this framework we tried to order the rest of the scenes.

Our solution was to approach the material with the technique of the documentary editor. All of the scenes were edited individually and kept on separate rolls, which were named and labelled. Next, we bought a stack of index cards and wrote the names of the scenes on the cards, and for each scene also information about who was in it and what happened. Then we started to build up the structure of the film using the cards as visual aids, spreading them out on a table and assembling them into different formations. This is a practice common in documentary film editing, but is also used in writing screenplays. Present day screenwriting software usually features an 'index card view' option. In 1984, there were no PCs and the card game was a truly concrete procedure. Sometimes it felt like trying to solve a crossword puzzle, and we worked on the problem for several days. After some juggling, however, one day, miraculously, everything seemed to fall into place and a correct spot on the timeline of the film was established for each scene. This moment of revelation was a powerful experience: it felt as if the story had suddenly found its form of its own accord, or exposed itself to us (more about this later). The final cut was then performed and the film was completed.

The end result was a success, especially when looked at from today's perspective. Although at the time of the premiere the reviews were mixed, *Calamari Union* did rather well at the domestic box office. But what has been

Figure 3: The two survivors reach the destination (Matti Pellonpää and Pirkka-Pekka Petelius). Photo: Villealfa Filmproductions/Malla Hukkanen.

2. Kaurismäki has continued to honour this rule. In his preface to the published screenplay of *Mies vailla menneisyyttä/The Man Without a Past* (2002) he defines some 'laws of drama': there should be three acts, the length of which is not fixed though; all characters must be introduced within the first 27 minutes of the film; dialogues should not exceed three pages and emotions should be revealed through action (Kaurismäki 2003).

remarkable is its long lifespan afterwards. The film has earned both respect and cult film status. French New Wave film-maker Jean-Pierre Gorin has defined it as '*I vitelloni*, directed by Dreyer' (von Bagh 2011) and for the Swedish critic Johan Croneman it is 'not a big film, but its screenplay is fantastic' (2007). In Finland, the film has been called 'the definitive cult film about Helsinki' (Helsinki Festival 2012), 'the domestic cult film of all time' (Anon. 2012) and 'a classic' (Anon. 2004), among other things. There are special screenings every now and then – in the summer of 2012 an open air screening in a Helsinki park attracted more than 1000 spectators representing all generations. In true cult film tradition, it was possible to hear members of the audience delivering the actors' lines just moments before they were actually spoken on the screen. Many fans know the dialogue by heart. A stage version has been produced in Finland (Markkanen 2012), and some years ago Helsinki Tourist Office published a map for the devotees indicating the locations of the film. *Calamari Union* has also an international following: a tribute remake was produced in Seattle, in the United States, *Calamari Union* (2008). Perhaps the most peculiar public homage to the film was paid by an established Finnish rock star of the younger generation, Herra Ylppö a.ka. Mikko Mäntymäki, who officially changed his first name to Frank in 2011 (Yle 2011).

A FILM WITHOUT A SCRIPT?

Was *Calamari Union* really a film made 'without a script'? Or would it be more correct to say that that one page and those few scraps of paper were the 'screenplay' of this film?

We certainly didn't have 120 pages of action and dialogue. But this does not mean that there was no plan. Ian Macdonald proposes the concept of a *screen idea*, which he suggests describes the source of a film much better than the conventional notion that focuses on the screenplay document. A screen idea is 'any notion of a potential screenwork held by one or more people, whether

Figure 4: Kaurismäki writing dialogue on the set of Calamari Union *(1985). Photo: Villealfa Filmproductions/Malla Hukkanen.*

or not it is possible to describe it on paper or by other means' (Macdonald 2004: 90). The text of a screenplay on paper is always only a partial record of the screen idea. Many elements of the final film are not mentioned in it, such as details of the visuals and the music score. A part of the screen idea is there on the page, but another part of it is present only in the minds of the people involved and in the discussions and negotiations between them. The screen idea exists 'within and around the screenplay' (Macdonald 2004: 91). Of *Calamari Union* it can be said that the part of the screen idea that was on paper was an exceptionally small one. The major part of the plan existed in other forms. But justifiably, that one page and those few scraps of paper *could* be defined as the screenplay of the film …

On the other hand, from the point of view of production practices, the answer is not that clear. Books on film-making often refer to the screenplay as something that is primarily a management tool for the production process, a blueprint (Maras 2009: 117) – for some, even, 'nothing more than a set of notes to a production crew' (Luttrell 1998: 10, in Price 2013: 90). The one-page drawing and the ad hoc dialogue notes of Kaurismäki provided practically no useful information for the production crew. There was not enough data on them for the purposes of budgeting and scheduling, for instance. From the perspective of production, those documents were not a screenplay, and consequently, the film was made *without* a screenplay.

I propose that there was a screenplay – only it existed in an alternative form. I am aware here that the word 'alternative' implies that there is a norm. To call 'alternative' all deviations from the present day manual-prescribed Hollywood convention simplifies the history of screenwriting. The practice of screenwriting has taken various forms in different cultures and historical periods. For Ken Dancyger and Jeff Rush, 'alternative' means mainly 'going beyond the rules' of storytelling. While acknowledging alternative notations, they nevertheless highly recommend sticking to the conventional text-based screenplay form (Dancyger and Rush 1991: 184). For many others 'alternative screenwriting' is above all any practice that challenges the screenplay as a stack of pages typed in Courier 12 and used in the 'assembly line' mode of production. This can mean the use of improvisation or visual aids and models. With the emergence of digital film-making there are increasingly more examples of these practices – Steven Maras proposes the term 'scripting' to describe them (2009: 2–4, 180). But, as Kathryn Millard notes, even as the digital tools have made the relations between planning, shooting, editing and post-production 'fluid', the alternative practices (the less pre-planned working processes) have been there since the early days of cinema (2006). Kaurismäki's alternative method was in fact a very primitive one: he worked on the set exactly in the same manner as Mack Sennett's directors at the Keystone Studios while making silent comedies around 1910. The director communicated the contents of a scene by simply explaining it orally to all parties concerned. On the spot, only moments before the action would start. The method is (somewhat bafflingly) defined by Marc Norman: 'All Keystone writing was in the oral tradition' (2007: 57).

Improvisation in film-making can mean many things. *Calamari Union* was not improvised in the way someone such as Mike Leigh or John Cassavetes would have done by letting the actors create the scenes in rehearsals (Maras 2009: 172–73). Kaurismäki explains his method: 'The actors don't improvise at all but I improvise' (Concannon 2012). Millard has called this approach 'improvisation with the camera'. She cites Atom Egoyan, who also

makes a distinction between the improvisation of the actors and the improvisation of the film-maker around the other elements of the film, such as its design and the choreography of camera movements. Millard lists other contemporary members of this school of thought: Wong Kar Wai, Wim Wenders and Gus Van Sant (2006). Jim Jarmusch and David Lynch could be counted in as well (see Murphy 2010). In the history of cinema, film-makers as diverse as D.W. Griffith, Charlie Chaplin, Jacques Tati, Miklós Janscó, Michelangelo Antonioni and Jean-Luc Godard are known to have developed the scenes on the set, with or without pen and paper (Bordwell et al. 1985: 139, 382–83).

Where and when did this 'screenwriting by oral narration' of *Calamari Union* take place? In the production *Calamari Union*, the plan for the film evolved throughout the time of its making, up until the end of post-production. In this process, the conception and execution of the film happened not one before the other, but in bits and pieces, and in turns. During the editing, individual scenes were polished while the plan for the structure of the whole was still a work in progress. Our editing method was a hermeneutical spiral. Parts of the film were completed, then some time taken off to contemplate the result. After that, the material was revisited. George Lucas uses this non-assembly-line approach in digital film-making. He terms the practice 3D film-making or 'layering'. For Lucas, the process is similar to the work of a painter or a sculptor. 'You work on it for a bit, then you stand back and look at it and add some more onto it, then stand back and look at it and add some more' (Kelly and Parisi 1997).

Even in conventional practices the development of the story does not stop at the beginning of the shoot. Marja-Riitta Koivumäki defines film-making as a series of dramaturgical choices that starts with the choice of an idea and progresses through pre-production, production and post-production. For Koivumäki, all decisions that define the performance and thus the viewer's experience of the film are dramaturgical choices. In a larger context, the process also includes choices regarding distribution, venues and marketing – which also have an effect on the viewer's experience (Koivumäki 2010). The marketing slogan chosen by Kaurismäki for *Calamari Union* certainly was a dramaturgical choice that influenced the mood of the audience, and propelled the film towards cult status. It was: 'The film contains lousy scenes. Please, stay at home!' (Hyvärinen 1984).

CHOOSING THE METHOD

Why did Kaurismäki decide against writing a conventional screenplay? At the time, writing itself was not foreign territory for him. He had already written or co-written four produced screenplays, worked as a journalist and critic, and published essays on cinema. His original dream had been to become a novelist (Forss 2005). However, he has often claimed that he does not like writing screenplays, 'especially prior to the shooting' (Kaurismäki 1990: 12). The production circumstances of *Calamari Union* allowed a free choice of method. According to Janet Staiger, the screenplay as a standardized document was established at the same time as the central producer system became the norm in the film industry. One of the functions of the screenplay was – and is – to be a control tool for the producer (Bordwell et al. 1985: 136). In the making of *Calamari Union*, there was no need for extra control: the writer-director was also the producer of the film. Also, as there was no budget, there were no financing bodies that had to be impressed by presenting a screenplay to

them. From a different perspective, it can also be said that the choice to make a no-budget film led to a situation in which it was impossible to use a detailed screenplay even had the director wished to do so. As mentioned above, plans had to be revised on a daily basis during the shoot based on the availability of the volunteer cast.

Another reason for the choice of method was perhaps generational. In the eighties, there was something in the Zeitgeist that made film-making through improvisation very appealing. For many young directors, Alexandre Astruc's idea of the 'camera-stylo' was an article of faith: an auteur is someone who 'writes with the camera like a writer writes with the pen' (1948). I recall that, for most of my fellow film students, this idea was somehow distorted to a more radical form: a true film-maker is someone who writes only with the camera and not with the pen at all.

Kaurismäki's choice of method was also a personal one. The practice has remained a part of his repertoire of film-making also later. He has used complete, detailed screenplays in his other films to varying degrees, depending on the nature of the production. While writing, he avoids too much conscious effort. After getting the basic idea of the story – the main character and his or her 'problem' – he intentionally tries to forget it (Smith 2011).

> When I write, I almost completely work in terms of my subconscious. I digest the theme of the film and what I know of the basic story. Then I wait for three months for my subconscious to finish its work. My writing is very unanalytical, but the final outcome is a pretty precise script, regardless of whether it's good or bad.
>
> (von Bagh 2011)

Kaurismäki claims that for the physical act of writing a feature film screenplay he normally needs some twenty to 30 hours (von Bagh 2006: 120). He repeatedly emphasizes how important it is to refrain from analysing, to consciously keep the themes hidden even from the writer himself (von Bagh 2006: 120; Ylänen 1996). Otherwise, there is not much difference for him between writing prior to the filming or during it. 'I can write very fast and the ideas are there so it doesn't matter if I write the film or improvise, it's the same thing' (Concannon 2012).

At times there is a partial screenplay. *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* (1989), which I edited, had a screenplay of 38 pages containing only the beginning of the story. The middle and the end were improvised on the road while filming. Kaurismäki prefers an unfinished screenplay: 'A finished script absolves the director from all intellectual effort' (1990: 12). He considers the work of a director on the set extremely boring. According to Kaurismäki, it is imperative to be sober when writing or editing a film, but when directing it does not matter (Hattenstone 2012).

What are the implications for the end result of working without a formal screenplay? Both Millard and J. J. Murphy suggest that improvisation on the set and other alternative 'fluid' methods lead to films that are less based on the importance of the conflict-driven story, and have less of a plot. Alternative approaches supposedly also produce more complex characters and add to visual storytelling (Millard 2006, 2010; Murphy 2010). I argue that alternative methods can be used to produce all kinds of films, some of them heavy on plot, others less so. *Calamari Union* and *Leningrad Cowboys Go America* may be episodic, but the central conflict is quite clear in both films: there is a group of

men trying to get from one geographical point to another and they encounter obstacles on the way. The characters are definitely not complex. There is also a lot of plot in the films of George Lucas, despite his fluid method of 'layering'. The same can be said of the Keystone Kops movies, which were the outcome of 'writing in the oral tradition'. And anyone familiar with the output of European state-supported national cinemas knows that it is perfectly possible to produce a film that is absolutely not plot driven and barely has a story at all, but is firmly based on a detailed screenplay that has gone through many drafts. Kaurismäki, despite his art house audience, is not one to endorse slack storytelling:

> A director who can't manipulate a spectator's feelings and make him/her laugh or be afraid should change his or her profession. The manipulation is what people are paying for when they go to cinema.
>
> (Smith 2011)

I argue that alternative screenwriting methods are chosen for a variety of reasons. Sometimes there are aesthetic goals involved: a desire to find new storytelling strategies, often emphasizing those elements of cinema that are hard to describe verbally: gestures, rhythms and sound (Millard 2006, 2010; Murphy 2010). Second, the circumstances of production dictate or enable a choice of practice. Murphy notes that alternative methods are often time-consuming and thus more feasible in small-scale independent film-making and not in big-budget mainstream productions (2010). But the freedom of choice is there for anyone independent or powerful enough even in films that cost a lot. Chaplin was his own boss, and he improvised and experimented on the set for months on end, never bothering to be cost-effective by more detailed pre-planning (Robinson 1985). It is as much about power as about the size of the production. George Lucas has chosen to be producer-director in order to have control of his own material and work on it as he pleases (Kelly and Parisi 1997). 'Because I improvise, I have to be the producer myself', Kaurismäki observed early on (Aromäki 1990).

A third factor that influences the choice of method is the personality of the film-maker, his or her way of experiencing reality in general and the language of cinema especially. In my first career as an editor, my second one as a screenwriter and as a long-time film school teacher I have worked with dozens of directors, screenwriters and film students. I find it endlessly fascinating how different people are in how they perceive the world around them and how they approach film-making. Some people write pages and pages of formless text and spend a tremendous amount of time reshaping and editing their material into a screenplay. For others, the story comes like a revelation – very much like Kaurismäki recounts – precise in its structure and rhythms even in the first draft. Some directors see the film directly in their mind's eye as shots, or as a storyboard. For others, the story happens in a three-dimensional space in the imagination and they have little interest until very late in how the action will be framed into pictures. Also, in my experience, directors are very different in the editing room. Some barely notice if a scene is remade using different takes, trimmed or even partly deleted. Some are able to discuss cuts on the level of 'let's nip two frames here, and it will be smoother'. People simply perceive differently. The New Zealand educator Neil Fleming has developed a model that classifies people into four different types of learners: visual, aural, read–write and kinesthetic. The categories describe how individuals take in and

convey information – and think. For most people, one of the modes is dominant (Fleming 2012). When creating a film, a visual person certainly chooses different strategies than an aural, read–write or kinesthetic one – because he or she also perceives the world differently. This could be one explanation as to why people choose different methods of screenwriting and directing: for different persons different approaches just come naturally.

AUTHORSHIP

If film-making is understood to be a series of dramaturgical choices that go on until the end of post-production or even further, what are the implications of this definition for the notion of authorship? Astruc's description of the auteur suggests a film-maker who works like a writer, alone and independently. This is very far from the reality of film-making, which is always a collaborative effort. But disputes concerning authorship in cinema are not triggered only by the collective nature of the process – at least as important a factor is the assembly line mode of production.

Robert Bresson has described the process of film-making as a series of deaths and resurrections:

> My movie is born first in my head, dies on paper; is resuscitated by the living persons and real objects I use, which are killed on film but, placed in a certain order and projected on to a screen, come to life again like flowers in water.
>
> (1977: 7)

In film school we learned that a film is always 'written' three times: first on paper, then on the set and, for the last time, in the editing phase, sometimes called by the professionals 'the last rewrite' (Fairservice 2001: 298).

Who is the creator of the film – is it the person who invents the story from scratch in the beginning or the one who decides about its form and content in the end? In other words, the writer or the person who has the final cut rights, usually the producer? Or is the creator the director – even when he or she may have nothing to do with the conception of the original idea nor with the finishing touches of its execution? More often than not, and in contrast to Astruc's implied assessment, the one who starts the job, the one who carries on in the middle of the process and the one who finishes it are not the same person. In spite of this, it has become customary in popular opinion as well as in academia to attribute all films to their directors.[3] For someone familiar with how films are made, defining authorship is not always a given. Hollywood practitioner George Lucas finds it difficult, too: 'I'm not completely sure whether it is the producer, the director, the writer, or all three' (Kelly and Parisi 1997). The authorship of Lucas, who *is* all three, is of course undisputed. The same applies to Kaurismäki. But I argue that, in general, there is always a potential conflict of interests between the originator of the story and the person who has the right to the final cut, in cases where they are not the same person (and sometimes maybe even then).

Different aspects of film-making have been appreciated as the central arena of the creative work in different times. For the great Soviet directors of the silent era, it was editing – *montage* – that defined the very essence of cinema. For them the advent of sound had the potential to destroy the idea of the primacy of montage that had 'become the indisputable axiom upon which

3. Attributing films to the directors only was not the norm before the auteur theory. For example, in Finnish film magazines of the 1930s films were identified in a variety of ways – by actor, studio or original book for instance (Talvio 2010).

world cinema culture rests' (Eisenstein et al. [1928] 1988: 234). The Soviets were correct in their fears. Nine years after their 'Statement on sound', David O. Selznick explained the recent changes in film production in a lecture at Columbia University. According to Selznick, in the silent days:

> Scenes that were intended for reel four could be put in reel one; maybe the middle of the scene was taken out and a close-up from some other scene inserted, and even though the lips moved, the film could be matched with no one being aware of the change. But in talking pictures you are limited by dialogue. Cutting today hasn't nearly the range of possibilities in the changing of the film that it had in the silent days. And that means, of course, that you have to be much more right with your script than you were in the silent days. In the silent days you could save a bad film simply with cutting and clever title writing. Those days, as I say, are gone.
>
> (1981: 475)

Screenwriting and editing can be seen as opposites to each other – or the two ends of the same continuum. There are parallels also regarding the conditions of the work and the respect it commands. As Kaurismäki observes while lamenting the loneliness of writing:

> The writer's only friend is possibly the editor, but they never meet. They are united by two factors: they work alone […] and they are both forgotten if the finished product is a success (and vice versa).
>
> (1990: 14)

In the history of cinema, there are numerous examples of films that were distorted, destroyed – or saved by editing. Robert L. Carringer considers the fate of *The Magnificent Ambersons* (1942) – a film that was re-edited by the studio – 'one of film history's great tragedies' (1993: 1). At the same time, the vital role of editor Elmo Williams in the success of *High Noon* (1952) is an indispensable part of the lore of the trade (Rosenblum and Karen 1986: 3). After editing, in the final film, sometimes the whole meaning of a story, or the meaning of an individual scene or the traits of a character are completely opposite to what was the definition on the page. Parts of the plot can be deleted in editing, the structure changed and new elements added – like on occasion: a completely new voice-over. Today, even the general audience has the opportunity to see some films in two incarnations, sometimes in the cinema but more often on DVD. I think it is worth noting here that, while there is a director's cut and a final cut (i.e. a producer's cut), there is no such thing as the screenwriter's cut.

In recent years, screenwriters' organizations have attempted to challenge the tradition of auteurism. The Federation of European Screenwriters (FSE) published a manifesto in 2006. Its first chapter states:

> The screenwriter is an author of the film, a primary creator of an audiovisual work.
>
> (FSE 2006)

This definition was repeated three years later in the declaration of the first World Conference of Screenwriters (WCOS) in Athens, organized jointly by the FSE and the International Affiliation of Writers' Guilds (2009). The European

writers' manifesto prompted a response from the Federation of European Film Directors (FERA); while the organization 'does fully recognise the screenwriter as the author of the screenplay and as a co-author of the audiovisual work', it cannot endorse the manifesto (Despringre 2007). FERA's home page defines:

> A film director is the primary creator of an audiovisual work.
>
> (FERA 2012)

A close reading of the statements reveals the depth of the disagreement. While the writers say they are *a* primary creator, the directors claim to be *the* primary creator. Furthermore, the use of the adjective primary is a confusing choice here – or a clever one as could be expected from the writers. 'Primary' can mean two things: the one who is most important or the one who was there first.

Film-making is a collaborative art but not all the members of the collective are equal. There is no universal formula to assess the contributions of different professionals in the process, so the tensions are unavoidable. However, as Federico Fellini has generously reminded, every participant counts. Fellini described film-making as a journey that 100 people take together. All kinds of things happen along the way and everything has an impact on the end result (Fellini 1976: 162).

CONCLUSION: 'GO WITH THE FILM'

Let me return to the instant of revelation that we experienced the moment the index cards found the right formation, almost as if by themselves, during the editing of *Calamari Union*. In my professional experience, incidents like this are not uncommon, and I consider them a central part of the work of an editor or a screenwriter. Many film-makers have referred to this phenomenon as the film having a life of its own. Francis Ford Coppola describes editing:

> After you've shot the picture you must be willing to admit that the film you are having in your hand is neither the footage you thought you shot, nor the script you thought you wrote. It is what it is, and you will have to put it together in its own terms. The important thing is to *go with the film* and let it be what it is – under your guidance of course, and according to your own intentions.
>
> (Baker and Firestone 1973: 57, emphasis added)

For Fellini, writing and directing was not a process of inventing, but of discovering. 'I go to a story to discover what it has to tell me', he wrote (Fellini 1976: 104). He also described how, at a certain point, the film 'has begun to direct you' and it invents itself, step by step (Fellini 1976: 162). Following the lead starts early on:

> Everything goes ahead as if, at the beginning there were an agreement between the film that is to be born and me. As if the finished film already existed quite outside me just as – on a very different scale – the law of gravity existed before Newton discovered it.
>
> (Fellini 1976: 104)

Different approaches to screenwriting, whatever they may involve – oral narration, diagrams, pictures, meticulous writing through several drafts – are hopefully

employed in order to find the best possible way to reveal the story, the particular story at hand. In an ideal world, the right method would be found based on the nature of the story and the inclinations of the people involved. I argue that a production culture that allows more freedom with respect to choice of method can produce a variety of successful results. This, I think, should be remembered when developing company policies, national funding schemes and the curricula of film schools. The case of *Calamari Union* proves to me that an unusual, spirited approach can provide ample challenges and rewarding experiences for those participating in the project as well as for the members of the audience.

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