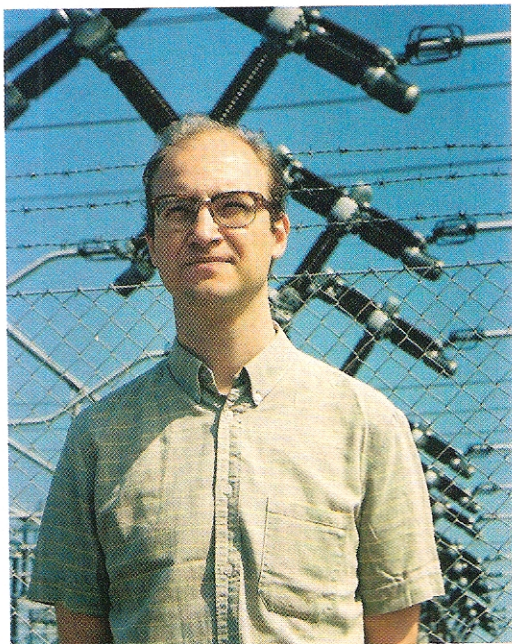
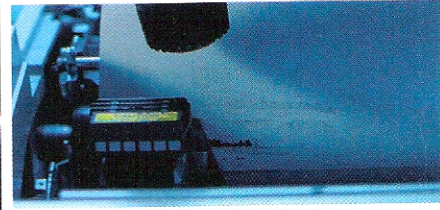
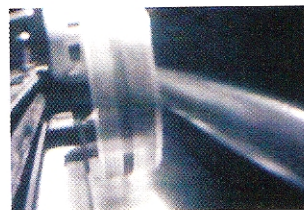
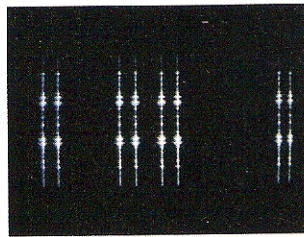
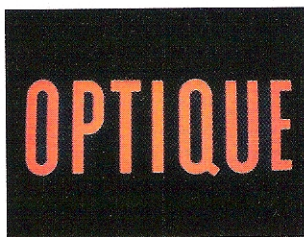


Cross Platform Sound in other media



Celluloid speculator: Mika Taanila



Stills from *Optical Sounds* (2005)

Finnish artist Mika Taanila explores retro visions of the future in his short films and documentaries. By Ken Hollings

The future is a joke we keep playing on ourselves: we only get to live in someone else's, never our own. What we plan for ourselves will be seen by eyes other than ours and probably found wanting. "My films are constructions put together piece by piece," Finnish artist and film maker Mika Taanila observes in the prefatory notes to *Aika & Aine*, a new DVD collection of his recent work. "They float in the temporal dimension like some light cubistic sculptures. They are kind of speculative time travels in the type of future we are inevitably headed for."

With a background in cultural anthropology and video design, Taanila's films are best appreciated as intricate collages of lost and found footage, archive material and a subtle array of post-production effects. Usually accompanied by an electronic score, they concern themselves with past visions of the future: ones that have either ended in failure, sidetracked by events, or show no signs of ever ending at all. They are also extraordinarily beautiful: complex and neatly balanced expressions of light, colour, movement and sound. Covering Taanila's core output from 1998 to 2005, *Aika & Aine*, a title that translates into English as *Time And Matter*, also stands as a declaration of aesthetic intent.

"Time and matter are basic elements of moving image and sound," Taanila explains. "When I was 15 or 16, I saw a few of Eino Ruutsalo's hand-painted collage films on a big screen. I was shocked and wrote a school essay about them the next day. It was the first time I realised that films could be much more than just storytelling. Ruutsalo's short films were all about action, colour, speed and sounds."

From the enigmatic shorts, *A Physical Ring* and *Optical Sound*, to the longer documentaries *Robocup 99*, *Futuro: A New Stance For Tomorrow* and his renowned biographical portrait of electronic arts pioneer Erkki Kurenniemi, *Future Is Not What It Used To Be*, the films contained on *Aika & Aine* are closely linked to each other through Taanila's highly developed sense of what works onscreen.

"All these films were primarily created to be seen on a big screen as 35mm celluloid prints," he remarks, "and this is especially true of *Optical*

Sound, which is shown in super-wide Cinemascope format, but I'm also really happy about the technical quality of how these pieces appear on this DVD."

The impression Taanila's films often make is that where we're coming from is a good deal weirder than where we're heading. *Robocup 99* takes the viewer through the deciding rounds of RoboCup 99, a soccer tournament in which teams of robots play against each other on a scaled-down pitch before cheering crowds of AI specialists from around the world. In a wry comment on technological progress, Taanila contrasts the spinning and lurching of the intrepid robot players with the wild cavorting of human spectators they can neither perceive nor understand.

What helps it all along is a bustling energetic soundtrack of pounding breakbeats and dismantled techno from the likes of Shizuo and Rehberg & Bauer, whom Taanila credits as "a big source of inspiration in planning the whole thing before shooting". It also lends a mock-heroic urgency to the players' encounters with each other, cranking up the tension as team after team either malfunctions or gets eliminated.

Assembled from interviews and archive footage, news clippings and amateur home movies, *Futuro: A New Stance For Tomorrow* tells the story of a revolutionary new housing unit, designed by Finnish architect Matti Suuronen. First introduced in 1968, its elliptical shape reminded the public of nothing so much as a flying saucer, especially when seen being lowered into place by helicopter. Made entirely of plastic, the *Futuro* ended its days as the backdrop for a pornographic photo-spread in a Swedish magazine, after a steep rise in petrol prices forced it off the market during the early 1970s.

"The films really start to breathe only in the editing room," comments Taanila. "When I put images on the timeline colliding with each other for the first time, add a little music and some sounds, it all becomes real and exciting. Before that it's only a collection of plain, almost lifeless material. For me, the montage period is definitely the most important part of film making."

A key element of this process is Taanila's use of music. Produced in 2002, *A Physical Ring* sets fragments of found footage documenting an anonymous Finnish physics experiment that took place in the 1940s to a specially commissioned score by Panasonic's Mika Vainio. The undulating circles and spinning radii of this apparently purposeless experiment are transformed by Vainio's pulsating electronics into an early piece of kinetic art.

The most recent film in the collection, *Optical Sound*, made in 2005, captures in sumptuous detail a live performance of the *Symphony For 12 Dot Matrix Printers*, created by Canadian duo [The User]. Salvaged from the early 1990s, banks of dot matrix printers run through lines of text specially prepared for their musical effect, which are then channelled via 30 separate microphones into a live mix. Taanila cuts together close-ups taken inside the printers performing the piece with images of the ASCII files being played, photocopied directly onto the film, and time-lapse exteriors of office blocks in Helsinki.

The relationship between humans and technology depicted in Taanila's films remains an inherently social one. "Our senses are used to the grey noise of technology that floats among us all the time," he says of *Optical Sound*. "It's time, for a change, to listen to that technology. The film is critical of the 'brilliance' of technology: the intentional misuse of technology becomes art. While contemporary technology is trying its best to be smooth, invisible and fast, the film makes it visible and plays around with it."

And what about when the camera stops recording such moments of invisibility? Is Taanila, for example, still interested in robot soccer?

"Yes, I've been following it a little bit," he admits. "The goal of the RoboCup Federation is to have a fully autonomous team of robots to play against the ruling human World Cup champions in 2050 and win. When I first heard about it, I thought it was a joke. Now, seven years later, I feel it will most likely become true." □ *Mika Taanila's Aika & Aine DVD is out now on Reel23*