

OUTSIDERS OF THE SEVENTH ART

Finnish Experimental Cinema 1933–1985

In this essay, I use the rather broad term 'experimental cinema' to describe all independent and artistically ambitious efforts in the field of moving images that have consciously sought to question conventional ways of interpreting and making films. Experimental film-making is often more or less an underground undertaking, sometimes even anti-social, and research in this field in Finland has consequently remained almost entirely in the blind spot of the rear-view mirror of history.

The principal material for my essay has, naturally enough, been the films themselves. Many of them have disappeared over the years. Fortunately, however, the Finnish Film Archive has managed to preserve many of the works in satisfactory condition for screening. The present, fragmentary essay into the history of experimental cinema in Finland covers only works made on film (8 / 9.5 / 16 / 35 mm) up to 1985.

In gathering material for the essay, I have met with those principal auteurs who are still alive. The facts and quotations in the text are from these meetings or from telephone conversations, unless otherwise indicated in the endnotes. I would like to thank especially Ilkka Kippola from the Finnish Film Archive for arranging the screenings and for tireless discussions. Thanks are due also to Anton Nikkilä and Eero Tammi for their perceptive comments on both the content and style of the text.

PROLOGUE

"Having got hold of a number of clothes brushes I had to saw a few of them in two, I don't know why." – Eino Ruutsalo¹

One of the first clues to an experimental attitude slips into Finnish cinema in the vicinity of Esplanade Park in Helsinki. The surrealist short *May Day Revel*¹ (*Vappuhumua/Första maj glädje*, 1933) is about a man waking up to May Day with a serious hangover.

As the protagonist steps out into the street after partying all night, in his sensitised state he sees the city awakening around him as a surreal stage about to come down over his head. Horse carriages move backwards, the streets appear upside down or skewed, the female figure of the Havis Amanda statue is distorted and turns upside down when the hero wipes his sweating brow. In an explosion of double and triple exposures Helsinki looks like a modern metropolis. The film foregrounds the movements of the city, its shapes and lights – in a positively anguished mood. *May Day Revel* was commissioned by Suomi-Filmi and represented a rare genre for its time, an independent short film. The film was 'composed', that is, shot, directed and edited by **Armas (Ama) Jokinen**. Jokinen

¹ Translated titles are used in the text, with original title(s) given in parentheses, except for those films whose original title is in English.

was a so-called itinerant cameraman, who shot many short films for different companies and with different directors. Ignoring the film's gauche and didactic hangover context, in its wildest optical tricks *May Day Revel* exudes a genuine joy of discovery and gleeful transgression of the limits of convention. What was new about the narrative was the powerful way in which it identified with the inner emotional state of the hero at the expense of the story itself. The modern and unfettered feel of the film is also emphasised by the unrestrained way it steals music as well as many images (metropolitan neon lights shot in different cities) from other films of the production company.

The next year saw the launch of the first Finnish film club, Projektio (Projection). The architect Alvar Aalto and the critic Nils Gustav Hahl had become acquainted with film clubs in their travels to London and Paris. Aalto knew the famous Hungarian theorist and avant-garde film-maker László Moholy-Nagy, and had himself been filming since 1929.² Aalto and Hahl were inspired to spread the gospel of artistically ambitious cinema to Finland. Together with the critic Hans Kutter they founded the Projektio film club. For the first test screening in November 1934 to attract members to the club, they contacted Gösta Werner who ran a similar club in Sweden and asked him for a copy of René Clair's wild dadaist outburst, *Entr'acte* (1924). Scripted by Francis Picabia, the film eschewed all conventional logic and starred such names as Man Ray, Marcel Duchamp and Erik Satie. As an interesting historical aside it might be mentioned that *Entr'acte* is considered one of the first cross-disciplinary films and was produced entirely outside the film industry.³ It was not made to be shown in cinemas, but was commissioned to be screened during the intermission of *Relâche* (or *Performance Suspended*), a performance by The Swedish Ballet.⁴

When Projektio was finally operational in March 1935, its programme from the outset included a series of the latest French, German and Soviet avant-garde films. The animated discussions that followed the performances were usually presided over by Alvar Aalto. The club was a success and its membership soon grew to nearly three hundred.⁵ One of the active members of Projektio from the start was **Nyrki Tapiovaara**. He had a fanatic interest in the language and laws of cinema. In December 1937, Tapiovaara was in Paris where he saw new avant-garde films – including shorts by Fernand Leger, Viking Eggeling, Man Ray, Hans Richter and Joris Ivens – and wrote enthusiastic reports of his impressions for readers of the Finnish film magazine *Elokuva-aitta*: "The key to the secret is undoubtedly that we are witnessing the sudden appearance of modern man in the game, an emphatically modern man with consciously modern senses. Their art is not blooming, nor is it always very mature. It is battle art, painfully wrought pioneering art that is creating tools for those who will come later, to allow them to cultivate the cleared land easier to make flourishing art. But it is characterised by a certainty of direction. It is sure of its mission, even though it admits to being an experimenter."⁶

That same year Nyrki Tapiovaara got to direct his first film with the help of Heikki Aho and Björn Soldan. Characteristically, all his movies are conscious of the medium's potential. We can still identify Tapiovaara's trademark: powerful, expressionistic stylisation and visually inventive solutions. He was able to incorporate both the classic and the avant-garde idioms of his time into his own work. This is particularly true in the

genre hybrid *Mr Lahtinen Makes Himself Scarce* (*Herra Lahtinen lähtee lipettiin*, 1939). After the war, all that survives of the original 76-minute film is a restored version lasting 40 minutes. Tapiovaara was obviously aiming for a mix of styles and genres unprecedented even internationally. "Even the surviving sequences attest to a wealth of material and genres: realistic narrative is interspersed with fairy tale, satire, musical and dream sequences, streams of consciousness or the parallel and simultaneous presence of several consciousnesses, concentrated and dilated time, surprising shifts in time and place, experimental use of sound and editing, surrealistically spiced 'pure visual narrative'," writes the film researcher Sakari Toiviainen.⁷ Tapiovaara only had time to direct five feature films in a very short time before he was killed in the Winter War at the age of 28. Tapiovaara is to this day considered one of the first and perhaps the all-time greatest talents of Finnish cinema.

Of course, early Finnish cinema had other powerful and visionary directors as well, such as Teuvo Tulio and Valentin Vaala. They were able to inject international influences effortlessly into Finnish cinema while preserving a personal and recognisable style. However, their contribution was restricted almost entirely to feature films, commercial productions intended for the general public.

It was not until the 1950s that the first short films that embodied the personal visions of their makers were made in Finland. Film was for the first time seen as an intimate art form comparable to painting or the short story, a work of art signed by the author's inimitable hand. **Jörn Donner**, known initially as a writer and later as a film critic, begins his first short film *Morning in the City* (*Aamua kaupungissa*, 1954) by signing it directly with his inimitable voice: "Jörn Donner presents the film *Morning in the City*, which was shot by Carl-Gustav Roos...". The film is a laconic, yet hyper-romantic occasional portrait of Helsinki, filled with ironic observations and formalist visual narrative. Donner's modernist style is devoid of all superfluous emotional turbulence; the author of the film is a cool, external observer. By contrast, emotions steal the show in **Maunu Kurkvaara's** short film *The City* (*Kaupunki*, 1957). The film is its author's personal statement, showing Helsinki as an anguished, inhuman machine. In a breathless collage sequence, we are shown power plants, factories, landscaped offices, stone walls, enclosures, department stores and other emblems of modern lifestyle, termed 'human prisons' by Kurkvaara. Here too the director explains his vision in voice-over narrative: "Names, numbers, cards, forms, sorting systems, directories. Pigeonhole, number, card – that is you, human being." From among cinephiles in southern Europe, auteurism had arrived in the North.

TOWARDS PURE CINEMA

One of the greatest auteurs in the history of Finnish cinema, **Risto Jarva**, was much interested in experimental cinema at the start of his career. Along with Jaakko Ylinen, Raimo Oksa, Pertti Maisala and Martti Tiula, Jarva was one of the leading figures in Montaasi, a film club established in 1957 for students of the Polytechnic in Helsinki. There was not yet a film school in Finland, and for members of Montaasi screenings,

systematic exploration of the medium, discussions and literary theorising were all part of a single undivided endeavour. Their interest was to deconstruct film into its basic components: form, rhythm and composition.

Jarva was particularly fascinated by the explosive opportunities of editing and motion, and he studied them by immersing himself in the history of cinema. "In an almost condensed way, his short films were a race to catch up with the greatest experimental films of the 1920s, for instance, an attempt to close in on things that had never been done here. And it all was informed by an aspiration to 'pure cinema'," Peter von Bagh has recalled.⁸

Jarva had been an active amateur photographer years before he made his first cinematic efforts. His 8-mm experiments *Urban Rhythm / Face of the City* (*Kaupungin rytmiä / Kaupungin kasvot*, 1957) and *Episode* (*Episodi*, 1959) are no longer extant. In Paris, Jarva together with a school friend, Juhani Jauhiainen, and Pirkko Katila made a short film *Spinning* (*Pyörä*, 1959). Representing Jarva's formalistic side and a kind of systematic appropriation of the medium, the film is an experiment that is almost abstract in its execution. The motion of a woman spinning around continues as a panning shot into the geometric textures of trees in a wood.

9 Poems (*9 runoa*, 1959) represents the culmination of Jarva's experimental period. The fluttering, expressionistic and high-contrast black-and-white film is a personal statement based on the use of symbols. The film consists of eight separate episodes or 'poems' that collectively constitute the missing ninth poem of the title. The episodes are *Disgust*, *Self-portrait*, *Memory*, *Brain Mechanism*, *Circle*, *Down to Darkness*, *Conscience* and *Confessional*. Each addresses a different aspect of human awareness through the use of powerful symbolism. The rapid crossfire of flickering images in *Brain Mechanism* represents perhaps the wildest expressionistic eruption of visual images in Finland up to that time. Flowing in dream-like eddies, the images transport viewers into the dark waters of the unconscious. "It is about Risto [Jarva] himself, a kind of visual first-person experience. In the film, Risto Jarva creates a self-portrait with all his youthful pent-up need for expression, with a directness that has no parallel in his later work," writes Sakari Toiviainen, adding in a more restrained vein: "*9 Poems* is characterised by fast editing, constant (and often circular) motion, a lurching camera, visible and undigested influences from Pudovkin's *Mechanics of the Brain* and *Chess Fever* and Buñuel's *Un Chien Andalou*. The result is a stream-of-consciousness portrait of anguish, effective in its surrealistic details, although the overall impression in all its tangibility and experiential consciousness remains abstract and artificial."⁹

In the opening credits of his first feature-length film *Day or Night* (*Yö vai päivä*, 1962), Jarva mentions two 8-mm short films by **Jaakko Ylinen**, *Landscape 1* and *Landscape 2* (*Maisema 1* and *2*), praising their "accomplishment as new ways for appreciating the value of nature". Jarva admired the way Ylinen used Kodachrome colours, claiming that they were more beautiful than anything else in the history of Finnish cinema, and called *Landscape* "pure cinema, consisting of nothing but rhythm and motion".¹⁰ Inspired by Ylinen, Jarva made one last formal experiment pertaining to the shooting of *Day or*

Night. Accompanied by an effective modernist score by Kari Rydman, *Kitka – A Poem in Living Water* (*Kitka*, 1963) is a sensual nature film shot in Kuusamo on 35-mm stock in the spirit of Ralph Steiner's *H2O* (USA, 1929). The opening credits of the film describe it as "a poem in living water". *Kitka* was awarded the State Prize for Art and received an enthusiastic critical reception.¹¹ Although the film depicts the rhythms of water and light and the textures of Finnish nature with elegance and technical skill, as a whole it remains strangely lifeless. "The first films I made at the turn of the '50s and '60s, although I haven't seen them [since], they seem very strange to me. They had to do with the kind of '50s aesthetic culture and all sorts of symbolism and stuff. Now with the '60s, social tendencies have come much more to the fore," Jarva commented on his cinematic experiments in a television documentary in 1971.¹²

Jarva abandoned formal experiments and moved on to socially conscious narrative cinema. Echoes of the director's avant-garde background and virtuoso mastery of the medium are most evident in the short film *Frozen Food* (*Pakasteet*, 1969). Commissioned by the Finnish food manufacturer Paulig to celebrate its 25th anniversary, the film is a rare example of meta-cinema, a parody of the making of a commissioned film executed in a playful French style. Shot in glaring colour, the film even features a sequence entirely in reverse motion, depicting the journey of a pea from the field to the freezer. The main actors of the piece are members of the crew, who converse in ironic dialogue. The electronic score, "frozen food sounds", was produced by Erkki Kurenniemi whose futuristic music was used by Jarva and the sound designer Anssi Blomstedt also in the films *Computers Serve* (*Tietokoneet palvelevat*, 1968) and *Time of Roses* (*Ruusujen aika*, 1969).

TARZAN IN A METROPOLIS AND AN ALEATORIC LIGHT SCULPTURE

In the 1960s many important cinematic influences – such as the French New Wave or the films of Michelangelo Antonioni and Alain Resnais – arrived in Finland with very little delay and had an immediate impact on the work of the young generation of enthusiastic feature film directors. In the field of experimental cinema, however, Finland remained very much on the periphery. Symptomatic of the situation at the time was the extensive and important cross-disciplinary happening called *Limppiece* organised in the Ateneum Art Museum in Helsinki in April 1964. The happening was planned by the composer and musician Otto Donner, the scenographer Ralf Forsström and the film critic Pertti Lumirae.¹³ It featured all kinds of artists from practically every field of art: the writers Bo Carpelan, Lassi Nummi and Jyrki Pellinen wrote texts in a live performance, the composer Kaj Chydenius greased his bare torso with Nivea, Erkki Kurenniemi from the Faculty of Music at Helsinki University created with M. A. Numminen an extremely slowly evolving electronic composition lasting for four hours, acting students fenced in the galleries, and so on. International influences were absorbed quickly, pushing the boundaries of art. Artists from the film world could not be found for the happening, however, so instead "Walt Disney's movies" were screened. Although the solution as such was conceptually ingenious, it also suggests that film-makers were not particularly interested in cross-disciplinary events, and also perhaps that artists from other disciplines

simply did not know how to shoot film.

At the same time behind the art museum, in the Ateneuminkuja arcade, the public could catch a glimpse of an entirely new kind of film. In a rented display case, the artist **Matias Keskinen** presented stills from imaginary movies. In the staged photos, some of them beautifully tinted by hand, the artist himself played the main role, dressed in the most fantastical costumes, in films with titles such as *Tarzan in the Metropolis*, *Jesus Speaks to People in Helsinki*, *Ivan the Terrible and the Fires of Hell*, *The Emperor and Women*, *The Sun King* and *Lev Tolstoy – Yasnaya Polnaya*. Keskinen's stills perplexed the movie-going public in Helsinki for several years, as his display case was right next to real film ads. No times or theatres were ever mentioned in connection with the photos. The only piece of information apart from the film titles was the name of the production company: "Ajan Filmi" (Film of the Times).

Initially, Matias Keskinen ran Ajan Filmi from a garage in the district of Lauttasaari in Helsinki until, in 1963–64, he rented empty ground-floor business premises in Helsinginkatu street. In addition to the display case project, the company's also organised "film camps" on Pihlajasaari island just off Helsinki. Keskinen placed ads in papers, advertising for people interested in film-making and becoming a film star. His utopian dream was to combine healthy living (physical exercise, games, outdoor sports) with collective art making (photography, dance, singing, music). Lots of photographs were taken in the film camps, as well as 8-mm films, which Keskinen later actually learned to develop with his assistant. The films were exercises and sketches for a future film project, but unfortunately it never developed any further. Keskinen believed in the healing power of art. He gave homeless people accommodation in the office of Ajan Filmi and earned his living by giving haircuts in a shelter for alcoholics. After the haircut, Keskinen sat his customer in an imperial chair, put a costume on him and took a photo of the ruler. In the narrow-minded society of the day, Keskinen was indeed regarded an odd fish, outside of all possible social frameworks and alone. In 1971 Keskinen left the restless city and withdrew to Pielavesi to make art. The public at large probably knows Keskinen best for a closing item in an MTV3 newscast in autumn 1989 which showed his life's work, a sculpture of the head of President Urho Kekkonen weighing 20 tonnes, tragically destroyed in Oulu. The extent and complexity of Keskinen's projects were revealed fully to outsiders only later in a documentary by **Veli Granö**, *The Imaginary Life of Matias Keskinen (Matias Keskinen kuviteltu elämä, 1991)*.¹⁴

The 16-mm short *Spring Rain (Kevätsadetta, 1965)* by the artist **Juhana Blomstedt** is probably one of the earliest Finnish films that intentionally broke with the conventional format of cinema. It was commissioned by the Student Theatre in Helsinki for a production of 'concrete theatre' of the same title. The production premiered at the Jyväskylä Festival¹⁵. The director of the Student Theatre, Jaakko Pakkasvirta, had also invited the director Otso Appelqvist, the composer/musician Otto Donner and the writer Markku Lahtela to participate in the project, with Blomstedt being in charge of art and set design. At the start of the show, the actors (Roope Alftan, Titta Karakorpi, Kalevi Lappalainen, Pentti Lähteenmäki and Seppo Miettinen) are on an empty stage. As the performance unfolds, they gradually fill the stage with the objects they use (tables, chairs,

tyres, ladders...) until the objects prevent the actors from moving at all. Blomstedt's film was projected from the wings directly onto the pile of things on stage using a mirror set at a 45-degree angle, providing the film with a three-dimensional projection screen. "The 'contents' of the shots disappear entirely when they are projected onto the assortment of objects; all that remains is a 'light storm' of colours and black and white, a pulse and a rhythm. It's a type of aleatoric light sculpture in time," Blomstedt recalls.¹⁶ The film *Spring Rain* itself is an amusing collage of found footage salvaged from the dustbin of the cutting room, about half of the shots projected upside down: a motorway at night, young people dancing in the street, dolly shots in an empty landscape, heart surgery, pictures from a brewery, a boy walking inside the scaffolding of a roller coaster in an amusement park, the film lab's fade marks, and finally sequences of a few frames from the feature film *Baron X (X-paroni, 1964, directed by Risto Jarva, Jaakko Pakkasvirta, Spede Pasanen)*. Blomstedt has presented this, his only film to date, only one time as an independent work, at a conference of the Finnish Painters' Union at the Old Student House in Helsinki in the early 1970s.¹⁷

THE KINETIC PILOT

Eino Ruutsalo performed his patriotic duty in the Continuation War from May 1942 to November 1944 as a pilot of a Fokker D.XXI. The experience left an indelible mark on the young man's life. "Flying, I got used to the fact that images that came in front of my eyes always moved on. They never stopped! It felt necessary to give paintings that same movement as in my experiences. It was on the fast track!" Ruutsalo wrote in his memoirs of the war. For him, the connection was inevitable: "I firmly believe that my kinetic painting as a whole can be traced back to my wartime experiences of lightness and weightlessness!"¹⁸

Eino Ruutsalo was an artistic Jack of all trades and a cosmopolitan. He published his first novel, *Toropainen Is Knocked Out (Toropainen tyrmätään, 1945)* when he was only 24. In the novel, he did not seem to place much value on the mythic connection between Finns and the forest: "Finland is a big, black forest. The forest is full of all sorts of four-legged creatures. The four-legged forest creatures are called Finns..."¹⁹ In 1949 Ruutsalo happened to see an advertisement in the paper and travelled to New York to study at the Parson School of Design. To support his family while studying, Ruutsalo worked on skyscraper construction sites. His first film, *New York – The Foggy Town (New York – usvainen kaupunki, 1952)* consisted of documentary street scenes and remained a rather timid opening into moving pictures in terms of its style.

After his return to Finland, Ruutsalo worked as a painter and made plans for more films at the same time. In searching for a style of his own he made several films, including the lyrical documentaries *Old and New Helsinki (Vanhaa ja uutta Helsinkiä, 1954)*, *The Attic in Action (Ullakko elää, 1958)* and *Talking Hands (Puhuvat kädet, 1958)*. Ruutsalo saw the laboratory as a crucial part of film-making, a stage where film really comes to life for the first time. In fact, Ruutsalo made nearly all his films in close collaboration with the laboratory technician **Aarne Syväpuro**. It is also noteworthy that Ruutsalo made all his experiments on 35-mm stock. The first four independent shorts were produced by Ruutsalo and Syväpuro together; all subsequent films were produced by Ruutsalo alone.

Of the four short films produced with Syväpuro, the most memorable is *Poems (Säkeitä Holapan runoista, 1960)*. The deliberately out-of-focus camera and skilful optical tricks created in the laboratory guarantee that the film is ultimately much more than just a slavish visualisation of Pentti Holappa's texts. Ruutsalo nurtures it into an all-embracing, neurotic and anguished statement on the contemporary human condition. The film presents a series of intense views shot in streets, yards, stairwells and in the port of Helsinki. Yrjö Jyrinkoski delivers Holappa's lines convincingly, supported by Herbert Eimert's electronic composition *Etüde über Tongmische*. *Poems* secured its place in the history of Finnish cinema as the first film to use electronic music in its soundtrack.²⁰

Ruutsalo continued to paint at the same time as he made films, but found himself at a dead end: "I had to get something more into the paintings; more motion. More expression. More everything."²¹ The decisive impetus for combining painting and film came to Ruutsalo in Yugoslavia at the Music Biennale Zagreb in 1963. Ruutsalo was impressed by the music of John Cage and the dance performances of the Ann Halprin Company: "I learned to understand the technique of alienation; when the artist has made an area of style functional and finished, he has the right to start destroying it, breaking it; to alienate the viewer and to continue on in some other area."²²

In the early 1960s Ruutsalo financed his art by making a few interesting short commercials. They allowed him to experiment with budding special techniques such as painting directly on the film stock and rapid animation. Clients of these 10- to 20-second films included *Apu* magazine (1960), *Amar* pantyhose (1961), *Pantteri* lozenges (1961) and *Telefunken* electronics (1961).

Ruutsalo also directed four full-length feature films. According to the film critic Eero Tammi, they "focus on discussing the fundamental inhibitions of predominant film culture".²³ The semi-documentary *Night Moments (Hetkiä yössä, 1961)* portrayed Helsinki at night in an impressionistic style, violating the conventions of plot and narrative with its heavy and slow-moving symbolism. The strange, disjointed love story in the existentialist film *Windy Day (Tuulinen päivä, 1962)* transported the young lovers to an island off the town of Kotka. Shot in Paris, *The Whistlers (Viheltäjät, 1964)* was an improvised and bold attempt by the international dandy to swim with the new wave of French cinema, while the superb *The Pier (Laituri, 1965)* was a satire on the 'creative agonies' of the literati in Helsinki. "*The Pier* is Ruutsalo's most disturbing film. An aggressive, provocative, super-parodic, misanthropically bent, consciously excessive film..." Tammi wrote.²⁴

Ruutsalo's work with film reached its peak in 1962–1967. During that period he created an amazing number of short films that were true oddities in the Finnish film world of the time. Ruutsalo himself called them 'experimentals'. They were concentrated bursts of energy whose real subject was the cinematic format and above all the material: the direct manipulation of film stock by hand resulted at best in a hysterically flickering impression of a kinetic, magical motion possible only in cinema. "I did not want to know film just theoretically, I wanted to have a direct, concrete contact with it. That was how I came into contact with material film, the emulsion itself. At that stage I had no camera, so all I

could do was make films without one," Ruutsalo wrote later. He summarised his aims: "[My] only concern now was the painterly life of the frame; the combination of [moving] images and painting."²⁵ Such cinematic abstraction was unheard of in Finland, as was Ruutsalo's exclusive focus of all his expressive efforts on the dynamic of individual frames instead of narrative and plot.

Kinetic Pictures (*Kineettisiä kuvia*, 1962) throws the opening gambit of Finnish abstract film into the viewer's face. It is Ruutsalo's first 'experimental' and also the purest example of his technique. The method of making the film is stated in the opening credits: "Designed and painted by Eino Ruutsalo." The film is created almost entirely without a camera, by painting, writing, etching, punching and scratching the film stock. Ruutsalo worked for two years on the film. The final five-minute collage is three minutes shorter than the original concept and consists of about 8,600 frames or 'individual paintings' as Ruutsalo called them.²⁶ *Kinetic Pictures* is like a series of stylised views taken from the cockpit of a low-flying Wasp-Fokker, and it bears a certain resemblance to a reconnaissance mission Ruutsalo himself had flown at Onihmajoki river: "I had never been this close to the enemy on the ground! There it was, a ribbon flying past me. It was now so close that the overall picture disappeared and all that was left were the details. They rose up in clear, big images. Was it because I approached their stations from behind? Everything just seemed to go round and round! I saw the dugout shelters, pits and mounds of sand, and trenches propped up with logs. I saw individual Russian soldiers when they ran out of the shelters. They didn't quite know where I was coming from. All they could hear were the engines, of course! Heads were turning, the men were turning..."²⁷ *Kinetic Pictures* is one of Ruutsalo's most famous and most frequently screened films, and even after all these years its loose and exuberant energy remains attractive. The improvised jazz on the soundtrack, played by Otto Donner (trumpet), Kari Hynninen (bass), Matti Koskiala (drums) and Kaarlo Kaartinen (saxophone), crowns the energetic piece and also ties it to its period. *Kinetic Pictures* was awarded an honorary mention at the Locarno Film Festival in Switzerland the year it was completed.²⁸ Subsequently both MoMA, the Museum of Modern Art in New York (1988), and Centre Pompidou in Paris (2003) have purchased 35-mm copies of the work for their permanent collections.

Two Chickens (*Kaksi kanaa*, 1963) was composed spontaneously on waste footage. The piece is a hysterical cavalcade of images featuring a nude female (actor Ritva Vepsä), awkward auditions, cream crackers, a floating feather and excessive amounts of paint and colour. The pictures fly past at a breathless pace, with Ruutsalo manipulating them in a fit of intuitive frenzy. *Two Chickens* could also be interpreted as an abstract war film and a reconnaissance flight. Perhaps the physical manipulation of the film stock (melting, etching, perforating, scratching) was a way for Ruutsalo to process painful memories of the war? *Two Chickens* contains so much visual stimuli packed in a short space (3 minutes 20 seconds) that after the initial shock you want to see it again and again. The sophisticated tape collage by Otto Donner on the soundtrack is a forgotten highlight of Finnish film music. *Two Chickens* is cinematic action painting, and in its condensed expressiveness, Ruutsalo's most idiomatic and durable masterpiece.

The Jump (*Hyppy*, 1965) has undeservedly been overshadowed by *Kinetic Pictures* and *Two Chickens*. True to Ruutsalo's idiom, it is an odd combination of black humour and

melodramatic anxiety. The procession of images is a natural blend of scantily clad ladies and concentration camps, hand-painted waste footage and studio shots of a man (actor Kaarlo Juurela) in felt boots. *The Jump* is not only Ruutsalo's funniest film, but it is also already a milestone by virtue of its soundtrack. The avalanche of electronic sounds by Erkki Kurenniemi and Otto Donner is still amazingly fresh and brilliantly effective film music, a kind of early prototype of minimalist techno. The deafening composition is paralleled visually by a brief sequence shot in a street where a group of men and children seem to be covering their ears in pain; originally their ears were stung not by electronic noise, but by the exceptionally freezing weather in a windy street. Ruutsalo briefed viewers on how to interpret the film: "The world is devoid of all humanity and warmth. As he regards his felt boots, the subconscious mind of the small man begins to rebel, the visual world opens up. The internal relationship between the views is hard to define exactly; an escape from mechanisation or scars on the conscience of humanity."²⁹

The parallel films *The Eagle* (*Kotka*, 1962) and *The Junk Artist* (*Romutaiteilija*, 1965) depict the processes of making art. *The Eagle* uses dance to express the eternal longing for freedom. The graphic and fast-paced camera choreography picks up speed throughout the film, culminating in a sequence where the flying bird (dancer Riitta Vainio) is shot down. The brisk film received an honorary mention at the Oberhausen International Short Film Festival.³⁰ *The Junk Artist* is an expressionistic portrait of Ruutsalo's artist friend Wiking Forsström who uses junk as his medium. In the film we see Forsström walking in a wasteland. His thoughts are conveyed to us through the movements of female dancers. The artist takes the junk he has found into a dark shed and begins to create. In hand-tinted and scratched sequences, the black-and-white picture changes to colour: "The billowing flames of the welding torch tell about feverish mental struggle. Motion, harmony, dynamics, form and love are pulsing in the air, spirits are at loose."³¹ Finally, the junk artist lands in a jam and is executed because of his art. The percussion-dominated score of both films was again composed by Otto Donner, and the choreographies were by Riitta Vainio, a pioneer of modern dance in Finland.

Human Signs (*Ihmisen merkit*, 1966) was made in collaboration with the Finnish author **Väinö Kirstinä**. The film is a 15-minute collision course of different signs and modern graphic symbols: tattoos, emblems, comics, money, traffic signs, symbols of power and ideology. Ruutsalo and Kirstinä's cinematic glide into a visual Esperanto and urban semiotics was a bold path-breaker to Lettrist film in Finland. Yrjö Tähtelä's narration plays with words, seeking meanings and associations: "A is for ammunition, B is for Brigitte playing in bed...". Basically a collage of images, *Human Signs* rests on Kirstinä's text; cinematically, it mostly resembles a lecture. The makers' ambitious goal was to convey a message about "the suffering and false ideological worship caused by signs".³²

+Plus –Minus (1967) represents the dramatic and political side of Ruutsalo. A boldly ascetic film in terms of its technique, *+Plus–Minus* consists of the silhouettes of actors (Yrjö Tähtelä and Leena Valasmo) shot in the studio, with the 'emotional states' of the characters painted over the silhouettes on the celluloid. An ascetic love story spiced with a pacifist theme, the work represents a departure from Ruutsalo's other experimental films in that the story occupies a central role in it. Perhaps because of its openly pacifist

message, *+Plus–Minus* was the most popular of all Ruutsalo's films in its time. It was screened at several international festivals and was included in the list of 'the world's 20 greatest short films' at the International Tournée of Animation in the United States in 1968.³³

ABC 123 (1967) is Ruutsalo's second Lettrist film and signals his return to a more open cinematic form. The raw material of the film consists almost exclusively of fragments from a book of typeface samples, which Ruutsalo tore into pieces and then animated and coloured. "In the '60s I was in the middle of an avalanche of elements, one of the most important of which were letters and montage. My material consisted of freely selected references from different areas of verbal culture which I wanted to read and rewrite in my own way," Ruutsalo recalled the period.³⁴ Once again the film includes references to war. There is a lot of funeral music on the soundtrack as well as sounds of warfare, airplanes in particular. The presence of death is almost tangible when the letters and graphic signs suddenly line up into a symbolic string of bullets when a machine gun sounds on the soundtrack.

The same year saw the film *Food* (1967), a perfectly absurd collage of images and sounds which seemingly have no rational connection with each other at all. "Our food is radioactive. Pollution falls down into our cities and over us. It is everywhere. The world is tinted with new colours, reality appears in the colours of views, values tumble, existence is a risk – only dreams and waiting remain," Ruutsalo wrote.³⁵ Resembling nothing so much as automatic writing, *Food* is the most liberated of Ruutsalo's works, a spastic synthesis of the potentials of kinetic cinema. All its images are made of waste footage from Ruutsalo's earlier films. There are sequences from *Two Chickens* and from commercials, commissioned films and home movies. The banal, speeded-up collage of taped sounds on the soundtrack gathers in the hectic stream of consciousness painted over the celluloid: scratched faces, the statue of Marshall Mannerheim, refrigerator doors opening by themselves, geometric shapes, spring mattresses, etc. *Food* was in part a collective work as long sequences of the film were painted by Ruutsalo's three children.³⁶

From the mid-1960s Ruutsalo vacillated constantly between absurdism and pacifism. *Is This the World of Teddy?* (*Tämäkö on Teddy-karhun maailma?*, 1969) signified yet another step forward on the path of pacifism. The film is made up of news photos and short dramatised fragments which Ruutsalo once again manipulated by painting. One of the greatest features of *Teddy* is the electronic score composed by Osmo Lindeman which was performed on Dico, an instrument designed by Erkki Kurenniemi.

Later on, Ruutsalo made a few more cinematic compilations in the spirit of nostalgia for the 1960s: *Memory of Yesterday* (*Eilispäivän muisto*, 1976–79) is yet another collection of discarded and overpainted footage. It is divided into two episodes announced by the intertexts *Grief* and *Joy*. The first consists of images of mechanical urban motion, traffic accidents, signs and graveyard views. On the soundtrack we hear Hitler's speeches and sounds of war. The second episode presents a cavalcade of images of the artist's friends and muses. The film wearily repeats old ideas from ten years ago and does not add anything new to Ruutsalo's output.

A much more interesting film is the partly documentary *Poems from the '60s* (*Runoja 60-luvulta*, 1987). In February 1968 Ruutsalo had an extensive solo show in the Amos Anderson Art Museum, entitled *Light and Motion* (*Valo ja liike*). It featured kinetic lightworks, movable sculptures, light reliefs, experimental films, alarm lights, audio tapes and pictures of letters. In conjunction with the exhibition, a cross-disciplinary happening was organised on 9 February 1968 under the title *ELECTRIC SHOCK NIGHT* (*SÄHKÖ-SHOKKI-ILTA*) with the poets Claes Andersson, Kalevi Lappalainen and Kalevi Seilonen reading their 'machine poems' while Erkki Kurenniemi and Otto Donner modulated their speech in real time with an 'electric sound machine' devised by Kurenniemi. Shot entirely in black and white, the film is an interpretation of the event. The soundtrack is a tape made during the rehearsals. The unique texture of the machine poems provides a fine counterpoint to Ruutsalo's stream of images, which consist mostly of discarded footage from his Lettrist films (*Human Signs*, *123 ABC*).

The Finnish Film Archive organised a retrospective of Eino Ruutsalo's films in the Orion theatre in Helsinki in 1991. For the short film series, Ruutsalo wanted to make one more film, his last. "Let's freak out with this one," Ruutsalo told his long-time assistant Anne Laitinen. Together they dug up previously unused footage from Ruutsalo's films from the 1960s. The material included random pieces from commercials, pictures of car crashes, discarded footage from *Night Moments* and *Windy Day*, commissioned films and kinetic experiments, as well as unexposed stock. Ruutsalo and Laitinen processed everything that came their way by crushing the celluloid, throwing it on the floor and walking on it. "I just hope we've enough sand on our shoes," Ruutsalo remarked. The 10-minute film consists almost exclusively of a stream of broken negative film. On the electronic soundtrack we hear a collective stream of consciousness by Donner, Kurenniemi and Ruutsalo from 1967. The destructive testament was christened *Kinescope* (1960–91). Ruutsalo never made any moving pictures after that.

It is difficult to say how much Eino Ruutsalo had seen of the international avant-garde cinema of his time. He once remarked that he was surprised when Jeff Berner, a critic from San Francisco, compared Ruutsalo's films with the works of Stan Brakhagen and Jonas Mekas in the latter half of the 1960s. "I had no connections with any such sector. [...] The similarity was something that came from the time."³⁷ On the other hand, Ruutsalo later wrote that the animated films of Jan Lenica and Walerian Borowczyk in particular were important and taught him a lot. He said he felt a strong kinship with "personal films", as he called them, made by other international visual artists. Ruutsalo felt that he was walking in the footsteps of Viking Eggeling, Hans Richter, Marcel Duchamp, Man Ray, Oskar Fischinger and Len Lye.³⁸

Eino Ruutsalo's output of short films is amazing in its scope and is stylistically uneven. In just a short time span, it includes abstract expressionism, collage films, symbolic dance film and, towards the end of the 1960s, political and pacifist films. The experimentation in Ruutsalo's short films was not appreciated by his Finnish contemporaries. The films were screened mostly at festivals in Central Europe, in Oberhausen, Locarno, Annecy and Cracow.³⁹

In the 1970s the versatile artist began making informational commissioned films, while also continuing to work with kinetic paintings, sculpture, collage and photography. The important thing was to keep moving. All in all, Ruutsalo made 132 "cinematic products" as he called them.

UNDERGROUND ARMY

Eino Ruutsalo's avant-garde shorts never got any followers in Finnish cinema. Examples of the free, new kind of cinema in the 1960s can instead be found within the underground movement. The vigorous movement brought music, literature, comics and pop art closer to one another, with frequent crossings of boundaries. Finland saw the arrival of psychedelic rock music, drugs, hippies and the political movement in opposition to the Vietnam War. High culture and popular culture began to mix. Young underground activists found it natural to operate in several sectors at once, free-form short films included. Their films were screened in new forums: rock concerts and happenings. The best short films of the period are a perfect reflection of the ideas of sexual liberation and expanding consciousness.

The famous Finnish underground band The Sperm, known for its spectacular performances, organised a festival called *International Organ 3* at Kulttuuritalo House in Helsinki from 21 to 26 February 1968. The programme also included a few screenings of Finnish underground movies.⁴⁰ The "42 viewers"⁴¹ who came were rewarded with the only public screening of **Erkki Kurenniemi's** film *Ex Nihilo* (1968). The 13-minute collage consisted of discarded footage and failed takes from Kurenniemi's earlier short films. Paradoxically, Kurenniemi had never shown any of these earlier films in public anywhere.⁴² The print of *Ex Nihilo* "disappeared somewhere right after its premiere."

Erkki Kurenniemi made altogether 14 films in the 1960s. He shot and edited them all by himself, and he also planned to make soundtracks of electronic music performed on instruments of his own making. Due to a lack of money, time or nerves, however, this last finishing touch was never realised. The reels remained in storage for years. Watching Kurenniemi's films today, they provide startling cross-sections of topics that were current at the time.

During his studies, Kurenniemi worked as an assistant at the Department of Nuclear Physics at the University of Helsinki and as a 'voluntary assistant' at the Department of Musicology. The inner life of computers and new electronic music developed into a vocation and a life's work for Kurenniemi when he began assembling a laboratory of audiototechnology at the Department of Musicology in 1961. In 1962–74 he designed and built several electronic instruments that were way ahead of their time.

In the satirical films *The Punch Tape of Life* (*Elämän reikänauha*, 1964) and *Computer Music* (1966) shot at the Department of Nuclear Physics and the Computer Centre at

Turku University, Kurenniemi intuitively explores the possibilities of a symbiosis between man and machine in the light of contemporaneous knowledge. The computer, a "giant brain", is a companion with whom we will build our future and which we can hate and mock at the same time. *Electronics In The World of Tomorrow* (1964) consists of photographs and geometric forms cut out from *Electronics Magazine* and placed on a spinning turntable, creating a vertiginous effect.

An incorrigible techno buff, Kurenniemi would occasionally get 'good vibes' also from nature mysticism. In the fantastically colourful *Flora & Fauna* (1965), close-ups of inchworms and spiders merge in double and triple exposures with shimmering water and the darkness of a dense conifer forest. The Pathé cine camera made it possible to mechanically rewind the film to shoot 'many layers' on the same frames. In *Fire and Water* (*Tuli ja vesi*, 1969) the primal force of nature meets a masturbating woman in a psychedelic whirl of double-exposed images. Liberated sexuality found its way undisguised also into Kurenniemi's semi-pornographic 'nude films' *Sex Show 1* and *Sex Show 2* (1970). Innocent fooling around is also the theme of *Coveted Beauty* (*Tavoiteltu kaunotar*, 1967) a film about a house party. Shot in Kurenniemi's flat, it shows artists (Otto Donner, Elina Salo, Otso Appelqvist, Peter von Bagh and others) letting their hair down. The main character is played – probably without her knowledge – by Eija Pokkinen, a photo model and actor.

Kurenniemi's projects with electronic instruments involved a great deal of travelling. *Winterreise* (1964), Kurenniemi's first film, is a fast-paced travelogue that makes use of the stop-motion technique. The film begins with a driving sequence shot in winter in Kurenniemi's home village in Taipalsaari, makes a smooth transition onto skis and a kick sled on ice, and continues through to the following summer, shot in the rural idyll at Työsaari in Joutseno at the summer cottage of Kurenniemi's friend and teacher, the famous musicologist Professor Erik Tawaststjerna. *Florence* (*Firenze*, 1970), an impressionistic, beautiful portrait of a city, was shot in part in summer 1968 when Kurenniemi was on his way to a conference on electro-acoustic music organised by Teatro Communale, where he delivered a lecture on the 'music terminal' he was developing at the time.⁴³ The double exposures were shot the following year in Finland. *Carnaby Street* (1971) is a spontaneous street movie, a record of 'swinging London' where Kurenniemi had travelled to assess the commercial potential of his instrument Dimi A. Kurenniemi also made films of entirely different kinds of travels. In dark, superimposed multiple exposures, the film *Morning Glory* (*Huumaava elämänlanka*, 1968) shows us scenes from life in a hippie community in Helsinki, shot under a red light. "Abuse of intoxicating cactus has not been observed in Finland," claims a newspaper headline glimpsed in the film. People involved in the sensual action include The Sperm members Peter Widén and Mattijuhani Koponen, as well as Kurenniemi himself. A more tranquil, weed-smelling parallel piece, the black-and-white *The House* (*Talo*, 1968) was shot in Kurenniemi's kitchen and features Sisko Hynninen (aka Sisko Ramsay aka Patti Bouncengård), the bass player of The Sperm, and Meri Vennamo. *Christmas Mystery* (*Joulumysteeri*, 1969) is Kurenniemi's only dramatised short film, a kind of overstrung pagan rite. Also shot in Kurenniemi's flat in Helsinki, the farce shows the Holy Spirit (played by Fredrik Lagus) clad in a bathrobe and an aluminium foil mask

having sexual congress with the Virgin Mary (Sisko Hynninen). The Three Magi (all played by Paavo Lehtonen) study the Tibetan *Book of the Dead*. The Infant Jesus (Erkki Kurenniemi) is born fully grown, wearing a Christmas cap and ski goggles – and lights up a cigarette.

One particularly important event for the underground movement in Helsinki was the cross-disciplinary art festival held in Dipoli on the campus of the University of Technology from 20 to 24 March 1968. The five-day festival was a great success, featuring a chaotic provocation by The Sperm, an enormous number of other events, including first-ever screenings of classic American underground films in Finland. Peter von Bagh, the newly appointed director of the Finnish Film Archive, had managed to get P. Adams Sitney, the American critic, avant-garde propagandist and future writer of *Visionary Film*, to visit the event as part of his European tour and to present an extensive review of New American Cinema – the most dynamic new cinema to be had at the time. Held partly in the Dipoli Building, partly in the movie theatre of the Finnish Film Archive, the five-day programme of screenings featured dozens of films, including Jack Smith's *Flaming Creatures*, Ron Rice's *Senseless* and *Chumlum*, Stan Brakhage's *Art of Vision*, Andy Warhol's *Harlot*, Gregory Markopoulos' *Himself as Herself*, as well as several works by Bruce Conner and Robert Breer. According to later accounts, Sitney's impassioned introductions and films unprecedented in these latitudes had a mind-blowing effect on nearly everyone regarding the new possibilities of cinema. "The audience sat as if it were in the movies for the first time, undoubtedly experiencing the same kind of joy as audiences at the beginning of the century, when they saw Lumiere's trains rushing towards them, or a child eating," Elina Katainen described the mood in *Kino* magazine.⁴⁴ "We were absolutely flabbergasted," recalls Erik Uddström who was studying photography at the time.

On the same occasion in Dipoli, **Timo Aarniala** organised a 'Warhol happening' in which the 20th Century Fox logo was projected in a 16-mm loop – possibly the first film loop in Finland – and the audience was handed 3D spectacles from the stores of the Universal film studios to watch it.⁴⁵ Aarniala got the idea from a flexi-disc that came with the *Aspen* art magazine. On the disk The Velvet Underground performs a piece entitled *Loop*.⁴⁶ At the end of the piece, the needle of the record player gets stuck in the locked groove, playing it again and again endlessly. The monotonous non-music that sounded like atonal noise was a revelation to Aarniala: "If you can make that repetition in music, hey! Why can't you do it with images too?"

Aarniala formulated his views in connection with a survey in the sample issue of the new *Filmihullu* (Film Buff) magazine in 1968: "I would like to make two- to three-minute long experimental short films. They would not be expensive to make, and you can say just as much in short films as in long ones."⁴⁷ Aarniala had already been a cinéaste for many years and was studying photography at the University of Industrial Arts in Helsinki in 1964. At no stage did he consider a career as a film director in the traditional sense, preferring to work with musicians. One of Aarniala's favourite bands was coming to Finland to give a concert: The Who, which was at the peak of its career at the time. Aarniala persuaded his fellow students Anki Lindqvist, Erkki Seiro and Timo Linnasalo

to pool their meagre university grants to buy as much 16-mm film as possible, and so they rushed to the airport to meet the band, with Aarniala in the lead. The result is an enjoyable music documentary of exceptional ruggedness and primitive power, where the film-makers follow the band at the airport and in their hotel, in addition to documenting the concert held at the new Hockey Stadium in Helsinki on May Day 1967. Shot in the spirit of the English Free Cinema movement, the dense occasional piece was first shown publicly in the 1990s under the title *The Who in Finland* or *The Who in Helsinki*. Three weeks after The Who concert, Jimi Hendrix gave a concert in Finland, but Aarniala was no longer able to acquire film for shooting.

This was a period when the idea of moving pictures expanded in scope. Celluloid was no longer the only material used for projecting images. The use of shocking colours, strobe lights and consciousness-expanding substances actually marked a kind of return to the pre-cinematic era, to the age of magic lanterns and early cinematographic innovations. Aarniala, Heikki 'Tooke' Junnila and Appe Vanajas developed, together with a motley group of friends, a psychedelic light show put on at all sorts of events, concerts and performances. The show included a light organ, photographic slides, found and stolen pictures, customised projectors and 'chemical slides' that changed their shape as they warmed up. In a trick adapted from Chinese shadow play, the silhouettes of a man and a woman looked over a view that changed constantly in front of their eyes. "Combined with the slides, the shadows were true cinema," says Aarniala. Sometimes the show also included traditional film, such as clips cut secretly from propaganda reels of the Finland-China Society. The title of the light show changed constantly. It could be called *Joyful Wisdom Enterprises*, or *TruColor Enterprises* in homage to the colour system in Nicholas Ray's film *Johnny Guitar*. The show was new and unexpected in its every incarnation. It evolved over time and, according to Aarniala, reached its zenith at a Sami culture event organised by Kaj Franck at the Helsinki School of Economics. Composed of nothing but abstract 'crystal slides', the performance depicted the magical flaring of the Aurora Borealis. In the late 1960s the Light Show was in a class of its own in Finland in terms of visual ingenuity.

Since those times Aarniala has made himself a career in visual art, comics and book and record covers. He has also organised eccentric screenings of mainstream films: *Jaws* (1975) was shown at the Yrjönkatu indoor swimming pool where you could watch the film either swimming naked in the pool or floating on a beach mattress. In the Heureka Science Centre, Aarniala showed the films *Back to the Future 1–3* (1985, 1989, 1990) as a simultaneous triple projection side by side on a single screen so as to "make the rules of American-style narrative clear once and for all."

A SUITCASE OF MULTI-IMAGES

"The language of the cinema is not a language. This is something the generation of literary film-makers has a hard time understanding. Cinema is energy transferred onto film," formulated **Peter Widén** in an essay written for *Iris* magazine published in 1970, when he was 24. Widén was the most famous member of the underground band The

Sperm. During the band's chaotic gigs, Widén rarely played any instrument, preferring instead to handle the visual side of the show by projecting his own 8-mm and 16-mm films for the audience simultaneously with the rest of the performance.

Taking photos and making films was for Widén a natural thing, like breathing. He actually thought in images: "Film for me is more real the more things there are in it". True to this idea many of his films were made by rewinding the film after shooting and exposing the same frames over and over again. Sometimes there could be as many as ten multiple exposures one on top of the other. "At that point it started getting kind of overloaded," Widén recalls. The original reason for the method was the high price of film stock, but over time Widén learned to enjoy the hysterical impression it produced. Writing about his film *Blue Ducks* (*Siniset sorsat*, 1968) Widén speculated about its aesthetics: "I think everything points to the fact that the basic idea of the film is as much the medium itself as its content [...] Its message is simple: in spite of its complex structure, the chaos of images is a precise depiction of what I see around me – not of what happens inside me. That is something for the viewer to experience, if possible."⁴⁸

Peter Widén had been an active photographer and had acquired his first 8-mm film camera when he was 14. When needed, he borrowed a 16-mm camera from his friend Herbert Yrjölä. "I always had some camera or other with me," he says, recalling the 1960s. A self-taught film-maker, he produced a number of restless films. Widén has said that he was inspired to make the films when he was visiting Erkki Kurenniemi in 1967, when the Swedish composer Ralph Lundsten was staying there. Lundsten had made a few experimental short films, and Widén especially recalls "a certain 16-mm film shot through a small hole, depicting the burning of a body in the oven of a crematorium" which Lundsten showed that night.⁴⁹ "The ultimate awakening" for Widén was Sitney's New American Cinema series, in particular Jonas Mekas's *Circus Notebook* (1966). Among Finnish film-makers, Eino Ruutsalo was by far the greatest inspiration for Widén. In long conversations in his studio, Ruutsalo encouraged his younger colleagues such as Widén to make non-commercial films: "Ruutsalo was my mentor." In 1966–68 Widén actually studied film-making in the night school of the Department of Photography at the University of Industrial Arts, although he says that instruction at the time was almost non-existent.

Widén estimates that the combined duration of his cinematic output is about ten hours. He never considered himself a 'director' but rather a 'film-maker'. In his shaky works it is often difficult to tell what is an intentional and exciting art of randomness, and what is merely boring trial and error. "For the most part they were aesthetic exercises, sketches, something indefinite for some future job which I didn't really know anything about, I just felt I was making a film."⁵⁰ While they were being made, the films had no titles. Later on it was practical to give working titles to some of the reels, although Widén himself never considered them finished 'works'.

The short format or apparent vagueness of Widén's films did not stop him from showing them in public, in fact rather the opposite was the case. He was always willing to show them whenever an opportunity presented itself. The silent reels were projected in slightly

different ways every time, accompanied by a record or as part of some larger whole, usually a concert by The Sperm or some other performance. The films were often projected as if they were a light show, not neatly in the middle of a screen, but on the performers on stage, on pillars and walls, using several projectors at once. Widén recalls that most of the performances took place at the Old Student House in Helsinki. Another important venue was at a hippie commune on Lönnrotinkatu street where Widén experimented using multiple projectors and prisms in front of the lenses. "The room was suddenly filled with pictures! I wanted to take multi-images further," he says. During The Sperm's summer tour in 1970, which lasted no less than three months without a break, Widén managed for the first time to acquire the back-projection screens he had coveted, as well as three projectors.

Peter Widén's projects were almost invariably sexually charged. His uncensored self-expression acquired programmatic, even obsessive, qualities as he spontaneously used film to shoot his sexual fantasies. Widén rationalised his motives in *Iris* magazine: "Sexual arousal can be stimulated freely, but no discharge is allowed; this is a prime cause of the anxiety in today's frustrated people. It is like an intercourse that keeps on being interrupted. You are stimulated. Desire arises, another stimulus arrives, kills one desire and kindles another. This would be to the good if it could be regulated by the individual, but society has passed its natural course ages ago and is now living in overdrive."⁵¹ Although Widén often shot his films alone, some of his projects were born out of collective effort, in many senses of the word. "Widén's films were based entirely on the idea of free sex. In fact he didn't have much else in them," the director-producer Claes Olsson recalls. "They were mostly group sex couched in a cinematic form."⁵²

The Death of Art (Taiteen kuolema, 1968) is Widén's most famous film, a so-called masturbation flick. The film contains shots of intercourse between a man (Mattijuhani Koponen) and a woman, of cats and ducks copulating, and of masturbation ending in ejaculation (Widén himself). Widén had shown the film as part of The Sperm's concert in Oulu, but it was not until it was screened in Helsinki at the Old Student House on 2 December 1968 that it made its way into the annals of Finnish film. The Central Criminal Police confiscated the film (2 minutes 45 seconds) and launched a public obscenity investigation. Widén received a two-month prison sentence, which he served in a labour colony. He is the only Finnish film-maker to have been sentenced to prison because of his work. The authorities destroyed the reel of *The Death of Art* by cutting it into four pieces with an axe and then incinerating them. Legend has it that in the same gig by The Sperm, the band's lead singer Mattijuhani Koponen had sex with a woman on top of a grand piano, resulting in a seven-month prison sentence.

Widén's longest work was *Finnish Winter War (Suomen talvisota, 1970)*, a "slightly more narrative" film designed and produced together with **M.A. Numminen** and the rest of the Suomen talvisota band. M.A. Numminen, who later made himself a career as a folk artist and a popular singer, was a cinéaste himself. As early as 1963 he had shot two silent movies on 9.5-mm Pathé stock at the Montaasi film club. *Brick Wall (Tiiliseinä, 1963)* is a barren, formalistic record of a wall on Aurorankatu street in Helsinki. The more dramatic *Glass of Water (Vesilasi, 1963)* features several clever stop-motion tricks, the

most memorable perhaps being the merging of a man's and a woman's face as they alternate frame by frame. Numminen describes the three-minute piece as "a surrealistic love story between two roommates, a dandy and a nurse, inspired by a screening of Buñuel and Dali's *Un Chien Andalou*".

Finnish Winter War was a collective improvisation shot by Widén and Numminen in the forests in Turku and Helsinki. The film shows members of the Suomen talvisota band rehearsing for some great, revolutionary operation, armed now with cap guns, now with electric guitars. In a tight spot, they read instructions from Mao's *Little Red Book*. In his uninhibited style, Widén intersperses scenes of the military manoeuvres with shots of the laying of the foundation stone of Finlandia Hall. The cast thus came to include also people such as President Urho Kekkonen and the architect Alvar Aalto. In addition to Numminen, the men shown fighting on the front included the poets Markku Into, Jarkko Laine and Pentti Kejonen, the singer Rauli Badding Somerjoki, the future Minister of Social Affairs and Health Vappu Taipale, and a group of actors from the Student Theatre. The film was completed just before one of the most legendary LPs of Finnish rock music, *Suomen Talvisota 1939-40: Underground-rock* (Love Records, 1970), was released. The shoots resulted in 25 minutes of finished footage, which according to Widén was shown a few times, spontaneously synchronised with tracks from the album.

Widén's next project was envisaged as "the same kind of movie with the band Wigwam, but I tried to plan it a bit more ahead, although it did not have a plot either." The idea for the film had come from the band. "They wanted to make it, and I never figured out why," Widén says. He managed to shoot 30–40 minutes before their ways parted and the project wound up. The Wigwam film was different from Widén's earlier works in that, apart from *Finnish Winter War*, it was the only one which had none of his hallmark, "double exposures". Widén describes the footage as lingering, "Antonionian" mood shots taken in the centre of Helsinki. He particularly recalls a long slow pan from the roof of the Hotel Tornio out over a hazy sea. The last time Widén used a film camera was in summer 1978. He shot a demonstration by the Finnish Army in Kaivopuisto Park in Helsinki, where the public was shown a manikin dressed in army clothes being burnt with napalm.

Peter Widén's movies met with a cruel fate. All that remains is a 14-minute sequence of *Finnish Winter War* which is in good condition. All his other films seem scandalously to either have been suppressed or to have disappeared. Working today as a restaurateur in Luleå in the north of Sweden, Widén recalls the suitcase in which he kept all his 8-mm and 16-mm reels in the early 1970s. M.A. Numminen recalls that the suitcase would have been deposited "in the attic of a certain dentist in Espoo". However, in some poetic way it is fitting that nearly all evidence of the work of one of the key film-makers of the underground movement in Finland has been destroyed. These films were not meant to be kept in museum collections, but were occasional, transient utility articles that opposed the 'system'.

MISCHIEF AT THE UNIVERSITY

Courses in film-making were introduced in the Department of Photography at the University of Industrial Arts in 1959. The courses varied in quality, and instruction was unsystematic. Financial resources were meagre and the students received only three minutes of film stock for their projects.

One of the students was **Ismo Sajakorpi**, who used his savings to buy another three minutes in addition to the stock he got from school. *The Hatch* (*Luukku*, 1967) is a powerful film of its time featuring young girls and boys hanging out in the square in front of the Bio Bio movie theatre. With a natural documentary approach, Sajakorpi and the cameraman **Sakari Rimminen** captured the easygoing loitering mood at a central site for drug dealing in Helsinki.

A rare thing in Finland at the time was *The Whole Truth And Nothing But The Truth* (1968, later presented also under the title *Arento*), a rigorously structuralist film shot on 35-mm stock. The piece was made as a collective effort by the students **Timo Aarniala**, **Pirjo Honkasalo**, **Anki Lindqvist**, **Timo Linnasalo**, **Inger Nylund** and **Erkki Seiro**. Here is a fragment from the team's notes from 1968: "The film was made as an exercise for the course in cinematic method for the 3rd-year class. The team has worked as a single entity without any division of tasks: the film has no director, cinematographer, etc. The film was made by reversing the usual order of production: the method was chosen first, and only then the subject. The idea was to adapt a musical structure into cinema. The only shot in the film was a 30-second take made in the Arento hairdressing salon. All other pictures were produced in the laboratory from this single shot by an optical copy machine. Realistic sound effects were produced using filters, plate reverbs, etc., and combining them into a kind of concrete music. The final result was created on the editing table."⁵³ The senior teacher of the school, Raimo Hallama, had made a deal with the laboratory of Suomi-Filmi where post-production took place. With the abstract partial enlargements of the one shot throbbing on the screen, it is the film's graininess that steals the show. The woman exits the salon again and again. Finally the original wide-angle shot – the whole truth – is seen in its entirety, and the setting becomes understandable. We hear a woman's voice saying: "Did I forget something?" The electronic soundtrack of the serial piece is made by manipulating the whirring sounds of equipment in the salon, transposing the mundane situation beyond realism, into a shadowy land of ghosts.

Dressed in national costume, the Maiden of Finland frolicks about on a romantic riverbank in the warm summer weather. Soon she is pleasuring herself with a dildo. A bearded man sits dejectedly on the edge of his bed. Elsewhere, a man and a woman are getting into bed. The sexual act is over before it has a chance to start as the man starts to masturbate wearily under the covers. Finally, two boys meet in a park and walk away together. The melancholy piece entitled *Beautiful People* (1969) is composed entirely of disjointed episodes. The three-minute movie by **Matti Kuortti**, **Erkki Peltomaa** and **Pekka Ervamaa** extols the theme of sexual liberation. "Our senior teacher Hallama liked everything that was perverted. He laughed his head off when he saw our movie," Kuortti recalls.

Nain, nein, nine (1969; the title is a play of words with homonyms of the English word 'nine': Finnish 'nain' means 'I fuck', the German 'nein' means 'no') by **Tero Saarinen**, **Tapio Suominen** and Sakari Rimminen is a film essay along the same lines. A man sits on a toilet seat, concentrating on emptying his bowels. In English, the voice-over lists observations of the human condition: "... tortured children, corruption, betrayal, violence, indifference..." The disturbing five-minute piece consists of short staged scenes and succeeds in alienating the viewer from all possible rational or sensible meanings. In the last take the man returns to the toilet seat and vomits.

Iconoclastic underground is the theme also in the film *Halleluja* (1969) by **Erkki Seiro** and **Elina Katainen**. Seiro recalls that Katainen got the idea for the film from a book of instructions for young people attending confirmation school, *Story of the Smooth Ring* (*Sileän sormuksen tarina*, 1955). *Halleluja* mocks the Christian-bourgeois norms and taboos of society by depicting the sexual desires of a young male student who moves into new lodgings. Because of the explicit depiction of onanism and blasphemy in the movie, it was immediately prohibited by the Finnish Board of Film Classification.

In 1969, Erik Uddström used his allocated 16-mm film stock and an open reel of his Nagra tape recorder to make a film entitled *Drink Piss Freak*. A man (Peter Widén) is lying on a bed. With a blissful expression on his face, he drinks his own urine from a bucket through a garden hose. A woman bustling about mixes her own elixirs into the drink. Cut to an 'underground night' at the Old Student House on 12 April 1969, into the midst of a psychedelic light show and a jam session by the band The Sikiöt (The Foetuses). Finally, Uddström completes the circle by returning to the flat we saw at the beginning, where the man is falling into rapture to the sound of Ravi Shankar's music.

The next year Uddström made a fascinating jazzy diary film about his girlfriend, the actress Terhi Panula. Uddström had admired the way John Cassavetes combined jazz and moving pictures "into a single resounding whole" in the film *Shadows* (1959). Entitled *Terhi* (1970), the fragile and personal work shows us the "everyday life of a movie star" – Terhi Panula had just become a star thanks to the film *Burrball* (*Takiaispallo*, 1970, dir. Veli-Matti Saikkonen). The intimate shots of her life in private are juxtaposed with glimpses from the *Suosikki* fan magazine and the *Terhi* paper doll, symbolic of the pressures of being a celebrity. In the symbolic final sequence, Terhi washes her blood-stained hands in a lake and sits in a tree sawing the branch she sits on.

PICTURES OF WOMEN, PICTURES OF MEN

In May 1968, **Jaakko Talaskivi** got a grant of six thousand marks for the production of the film *A Kiss One Suudelma*. Unfortunately, half of the grant remained unclaimed when the Board of Film Classification exceptionally prohibited all performances of the film, because it "showed simultaneously and in close-up the genitals of three naked women in a horizontal-vertical position."⁵⁴ Today Talaskivi's film no longer seems particularly indecent. In the opening sequence shot in a candid camera style, we see a couple kissing

and passers-by gaping at them. The body of the film has a lot of nudity and female-to-female tenderness in it, accompanied by a Japanese-style score. *A Kiss One Suudelma* consists of deliberately modernistic visual narrative from beginning to end, with many exciting solutions in composition and the use of colour. At times the picture zooms into the original frame with the help of an optical printer, sometimes it divides into a split screen with tiny frames. The movie was produced by FJ-filmi and it was apparently screened a few times at international festivals, despite being censored at home.

A couple of years previously, Talaskivi had directed a short impressionistic documentary about Jean-Luc Godard's visit to Finland. Commissioned by Suomi-Filmi, the black-and-white *Jean-Luc Godard vit sa vie (Jean-Luc Godard Living His Life, 1965)* is a quickly made report of the famous director's visit and also a parallel work to Aarniala's film about The Who. Godard had come to Finland for a festival of French cinema, and in Talaskivi's film he talks about his working method to reporters milling around. The work captures beautifully the spontaneity of the New Wave and disregards all normal conventions of commissioned films. For example, the film rests entirely on dialogue, yet it does not contain a single shot where the soundtrack is in sync with the picture.

In 1969, **Elina Katainen**, who later carved herself a career as an animator and editor, made commercials for *Filmihullu* magazine, shown in conjunction with screenings of the Finnish Film Archive in the Joukola cinema. Filled with explosive energy, the short commercials are almost all of them hand-painted naivistic mood pieces, distillations of the desires of cinephiles. In just a few dozen seconds, these short masterpieces employ both signs of the *zeitgeist* as well as cut-out frames from the films of Jörn Donner and Jean-Luc Godard. It is even said that President Urho Kekkonen and his wife once saw with their own eyes a pig chasing the Finnish flag, eating it and then defecating an advertising slogan, when one of Katainen's *Filmihullu* agitations was shown before the screening of Buster Keaton's *The Navigator* (1924) in the Film Archive.

In *Hermaphrodite (Hermafrodiitti, 1970)* by **Mattijuhani Koponen** and **Seppo Vesterinen**, Markus Heikkerö and Koponen play two boys making out, with a hermaphrodite (Matti Vartiainen) pouring eggs onto them. The idea was to show the film at the Old Student House on the 6th of December at an event entitled Teatterin suomalaisen elämänmuoto (The Finnish *Lebensform* of Theatre). The Film Classification Board had no eye for the finer points of the story and prohibited it for all audiences. This did not faze Vesterinen and his friend Appe Vanajas. They cut up the 16-mm copy into pieces and mounted the individual shots into frames to be shown as slides, since the prohibition only applied to moving pictures.⁵⁵

THE PLAGUE BEFORE A TIME OF SILENCE

Hitler's Clerk (Hitlerin kirjuri, 1966) was a short drama by **Kari Karmasalo**, an erstwhile student of interior design. The film depicted the plight of a disturbed voyeur in a city. Moving in the nether registers of slapstick humour, the film got branded with the highest possible age category marking: K-18. It could only be screened "on the condition that the film be shown solely at events organised by the Student Union of the University

of Turku in the Turku Art Museum during the 'Student Art Events 1966' festival between 26 and 30 October 1966".⁵⁶

Soon the Karmasalo team, **Kati Siikarla**, **Inger Nylund** and **Seppo Vesterinen** – also known as the Rutto-filmi (Plague Film) production company – released their first film, *Return of the Toilet Seat Man (WC-pyttymiehen paluu*, 1968), conceived and shot by Vesterinen. The programmatic three-minute piece features pissing on a scale model of the Finnish Parliament House, which is sent aloft in a red balloon at the end.

In 1970, the Rutto-filmi collective put together *The Swan of Konala (Konalan joutsen)*, perhaps the most famous underground film in Finland ever, one that has even achieved cult status. The film begins with a close-up of female genitalia, with Rauli Badding Somerjoki singing on the soundtrack: "In the beginning, the imperialists created war. And the earth became without form, and void. And the spirit of Nixon moved upon the face of Vietnam...". This was followed by a dynamic sequence of shots from a military parade. Heikki Liedes, "Associate Professor of Marxism", is shown eating breakfast cereals and driving absentmindedly around in his car. The soundtrack is a collage consisting of fragments of topical news and commercials: *Raid* insect repellent, *Heftaplast* weatherstrip, *Aktuell* dressing gowns, *Fairy* washing-up liquid... The camera records demonstrations against imperialism and militarism. Cut to a lecture hall at the University of Helsinki, where we hear a long, exhausting lecture on Socialism and the personal history of Karl Marx delivered by Liedes. At the end of the film, we are shown a demonstration with dogs trained for border guard duty and military parades. The visual style is slow and tentative. One senses a genuine need to take a stand and a desire to find an appropriate form for abstract political ideas, but ultimately the film remains cinematically formless. It did not pass completely unappreciated, however, receiving no less than two State Film Awards. According to Ilkka Kippola, researcher at the Finnish Film Archive, *The Swan of Konala* is "the most anarchistic film ever made in this country".

After this, underground emerged above ground, giving rise in a short period of time to some interesting 'subversive' underground-influenced feature films. These included the collage-like *Summer Rebellion (Kesäkapina*, 1970) by **Jaakko Pakkasvirta**; *Niilo's Apprenticeship (Niilon oppivuodet*, 1971), a collective improvisational experiment by Pakkasvirta and students of the Theatre Academy and the Department of Photography at the University of Industrial Arts; and **Peter von Bagh's** brilliant meta-film *The Count (Kreivi*, 1971) about the womaniser 'Count' Ylermi Lindgren. These films remain the wildest departures from the tradition of realist narrative cinema in Finland to have been made for the general public. *Poster Guerrillas*² (*Julisteiden liimaajat*, dir. **Tuomo-Juhani Vuorenmaa**, 1970) threw on the silver screen a vision of Finland as a police state that suppresses its rebels by violence. The film was released at the Tampere Film Festival as "the first Finnish underground movie". "There were about four hundred people in the audience, because it had been advertised extensively. When the film started, it was impossible to tell what was happening on the screen for the first 15 minutes. And it was the same for the second, and the third and the fourth quarter of an hour. The audience

² The title has also been translated as *Poster Stickers*.

began thinning out, until only a handful remained," programme planner Raimo Silius recalls the unlucky premier of *Poster Guerrillas*.⁵⁷ *Castle in the Air* (*Pilvilinna*, 1970), an quirky look at school democracy by **Sakari Rimminen**, was advertised in the papers through a paradox: "Not for priests. Not for the police. Not for bleeding hearts. Not for fossils. Not for parents. Not for relics. Not for those in denial. Not for jailors. A film for young people that also the intolerant should see."⁵⁸ The full-length documentary *Fuck Off! – Images from Finland* (*Perkele! Kuvia Suomesta*, 1971) was a manifesto against censorship and bourgeois society. The team consisting of **Jörn Donner**, **Erkki Seiro** and **Jaakko Talaskivi** used the alienating idiom of underground cinema to create shocking effects with no attempt to maintain any elegance or style. Discarded scenes from Seiro's and Elina Katainen's *Halleluja* were a useful source of material that supported the sexual-anarchistic overall mood of the piece.

The mid-1970s nevertheless seems to have been a quieter time in the field of non-commissioned short film. Apparently there were very few personal and idiosyncratic films made at that time.

NEW WAVE EVANGELISM

Amateur film-makers produced an enormous number of independent short films in the 1970s in Finland. Most of these Super 8 efforts were quite conservative, however, slavishly imitating the language of 'real films'. Yet there were exceptions among the more innovative amateurs, most notably **Pasi 'Sleeping' Myllymäki** from Hämeenlinna.

Myllymäki graduated as a graphic designer from the Lahti Institute of Crafts and Design in 1976 and got a day job in the Department of Visual Design at the Iittala glassworks. Inspired by the do-it-yourself spirit of the punk movement, he began planning Super 8 shorts of his own. "My aim from the beginning was to inject the fierce independence and unbridled frenzy of punk into film," Myllymäki says. He recalls being influenced by the Hungarian painter Victor Vasarely and the Canadian animator Norman McLaren, whose films he had seen at the Tampere Short Film Festival. Having no camera of his own, Myllymäki began collaborating with Risto Laakkonen, whom he met at the DIY film-makers' club in Hämeenlinna. The meeting proved propitious. Laakkonen, whose day job was in the printing industry, had grown frustrated with the stagnant ideas of the DIY film-makers and was already contemplating giving up film-making altogether, when he met Myllymäki whose mind was teeming with new ideas. Working at night, in the weekends and on holidays, the duo made altogether over 40 short films between 1976 and 1985. All films are finished works with magnetic sound, and nearly all are less than three minutes in duration.

Their first effort, *Omena The Apple* (1976) is a "posterish" trick film, according to Myllymäki. The fruit levitating over a table was done with the help of a stiff steel wire contraption in Myllymäki's parents' home in Turenki. The work was placed last in the local DIY film competition. From the beginning Myllymäki wanted to make his films as

cost-effectively as possible. There must be nothing superfluous or extra in them. Another important point was "perfect sound synchronisation" although the technical facilities at hand were just an 8-mm projector and Laakkonen's old Uher reel-to-reel tape recorder.

Pasi Myllymäki and Risto Laakkonen drew inspiration from the conventional circles of amateur film-makers, and many of their films were actually created as direct provocative gestures to the reviews of these marginal hobbyists. Yet the films remain universal in their themes. The "hypnotic experimental animation" entitled *Hyvää yötä Good Night* (1978) is based on a Polaroid picture of Pasi's face taken by Eino O. Koskinen, exhibition designer and Myllymäki's fellow employee at Iittala. Myllymäki enlarged the picture, rasterised it and turned it into a graphic, almost abstract, series of variations. The cinematic self-portrait was Myllymäki's breakthrough in the 8-mm film community. It was awarded the silver medal in the fantasy series of the Finnish DIY film-makers' competition, and was selected to be included in the international 'Olympic games' of amateur cinema, the Unica Annual Festival, held in Baku in the Soviet Union. The film was a comment on the sleepiness of the amateur film-maker circles, down to its very title. "It is visually a perfect synthesis of kinetics and surrealism. *Good Night* signifies a breakthrough into the bruised zone between insomnia and nightmare," Myllymäki wrote in his preface to the film.⁵⁹ "The long introductory sequence seeks to push the viewers even deeper into their somnolent state, and when this is accomplished, the film moves into a finale where the viewer's consciousness is torn to the margins of madness and the viewer is subjected to the hypnotic stare emanating from the film."⁶⁰

The film *Sleeping* (1979) continued the same theme: "It is a rousing stab into the gunky eye of Finnish amateur cinema. The cinematic eye of these circles is sleeping – WE MUST TEAR AWAY THE SCALES FROM THOSE EYES! It is stupidity to be napping when confronted by such a magnificent medium," Myllymäki wrote.⁶¹ The playful tone of the previous films had now become openly belligerent: "Film should no longer be experienced as a dream. Until now, viewers could watch safely from a distance what was happening to the actors. Now the film will happen to the viewers. The age of direct cinema has begun."⁶² The provocative *Sleeping* is easy to see as a programmatic key to Myllymäki's output. The extended television version of the film begins with a reference to Buñuel and Dali's *Un Chien Andalou*, a symbolic close-up of the cutting of an eye. We are treated to scratched, abstract film, followed by rapidly changing, perforated and scratched landscapes. The soundtrack is full of juicy, clever effects, starting with a racy guitar riff by Myllymäki played at high speed, reminiscent of the famous intro in the Sex Pistols' *Pretty Vacant*. One of the distinctive features in Myllymäki's later films is the way people, especially their faces, are covered up. This recurring motif appears in a memorable scene in *Sleeping* where a man (Myllymäki himself) walks about in the yard of an apartment building, repeatedly covering his face with a white sheet of paper. When his face appears from behind the sheet, it is scratched out. The images recalling the stream of consciousness technique present us with a disturbing sense of shame. All that remains is the landscape, the gesture and the act of watching.

The judges of the Finnish Federation of Amateur Film-makers did not appreciate

Sleeping, calling Myllymäki's movies "underground films". *Sleeping* was censored and the Federation refused to include it in its competition series. The year before, the same fate befell *Drive Carefully* (*Aja hiljaa*, 1978), a visualisation of a hit song by the band Kontra, which was described as "a road movie for people with the mental age of 12-year-old boys". Incensed, Myllymäki took the nickname 'Sleeping' and in March 1979 he founded a fanzine called *Maanalainen kaitaelokuva* (*MK*) (*Underground DIY Cinema*). *MK* was a small publication in all senses of the word: it was printed in A6 format, and in practice Myllymäki was its only active contributor, writing under pseudonyms such as Kai 'Kaitsu' Kiiskelä, Retsi Koivusalo, Sirpa 'Zeri' Kiiskelä, Kari 22 Ojala and Super-9-the-fire-filmer. Another factor contributing to the emergence of underground amateur cinema was the most famous punk fanzine in Finland, *Hilse* (*Dandruff*). It too was published in Hämeenlinna, and Myllymäki admired its combination of primitive style and strength. The articles in *MK* were personal outpourings, short asides about punk rock, but most of all stories about amateur film-making. With the help of the active alternative press circles, Myllymäki's propaganda spread throughout the country: "YOUNG PEOPLE ARE FED UP BEING SCREWED, DOUBLE-CROSSED AND CONNED. IT'S ENOUGH TO PISS YOU OFF! It's time to set your 8-mm camera on automatic fire and record your anger on celluloid."⁶³

UFO Rising from the Water (*Vedestä nousee ufo*, 1979) and *How a Mysterious Hitch-Hiker Picks Up Three Stones* (*Miten salaperäinen liftari poimii kolme kiveä*, 1979) are likeable special-effects movies about UFOs, shot upside down, in reverse and at overspeed. They are funny visual gimmicks which even the Federation's older generation could understand. Thanks to Myllymäki's tenaciousness, the Federation gradually began screening his films in its competitions. For example, it selected *Sleeping*, which it had previously rejected, to represent Finland in the avant-garde programmes at Unica in 1979, when the festival was held in Turku. At the same time, Myllymäki wrote satirical columns for *Kaitafilmi* (*DIY Cinema*) and *Filmaaja* (*Filmer*) magazines published by the Federation.

Horizontal (1979) is the most mysterious of all Myllymäki's films. It is a controlled formalist experiment with lights, colours and sound. The background of the film is made up of the swaying hum of an acoustic guitar produced by manipulating the speed of a reel-to-reel tape recorder. A sheet of paper folded into an accordion changes its colour as the lights change. According to Myllymäki, the purpose of the precise synchronisation of the film is to emphasise the underlying "concept of musical notation".

Another important forum for Myllymäki was the national MINI Film Festival for amateur movies under three minutes in duration, held annually in Turku. Since there were few opportunities to show films publicly, the official festival for amateur film-makers was a good reason to make two or three new movies. According to Myllymäki, one film in three that was screened at the MINI Festival in Turku in 1980 represented "new wave" cinema.⁶⁴

In response, *MK* magazine, together with the polytechnic students' film club Montaasi, soon began hosting the popular "New Wave DIY Film Festivals" that were held in 1980–81 at the Lepakkoluola punk rock venue and the Old Student House in Helsinki and at Dipoli in Espoo. In addition to Myllymäki's films, around 20 other Super 8 movies were

screened at the festivals, including Jarmo Skaup's *I Pogo* (*Pogoon*, 1980), "the first punk movie of Montaasi"; *Pro mise en scene* (1980), a primitive anti-movie by Erik Sutinen; *Chop* (1980), a film about street violence by Matti Kanerva; and works by Matti Alpolo, Osmo Karttunen and Olli Arola. The new wave films contained a genuine sense of joy in film-making, even though the exponents had not mastered the medium in the traditional sense of the word.

A film made entirely without a camera, *5 Holes in Celluloid* (*5 reikää selluloidissa*, 1980) features "the brightest white in the history of cinema". According to Myllymäki, the film was made by 22 Ojala and Kai Kiiskelä, both familiar from the editorial staff of *MK* magazine. "The light of the projector hits the silver screen unobstructed in all its whiteness through five bullet holes made directly in the celluloid," Myllymäki wrote about the concept of the film.⁶⁵ On the soundtrack metal tools are slowly being moved on a table. *3000 Cars* (*3000 autoa*, 1980) became instantly a minimalist film classic, and one of Myllymäki's best-known works. Using stop motion, Laakkonen and Myllymäki shot the front grilles of cars in the parking lots of supermarkets in their home town. Appearing always at the same point in the frame, the headlights create an extraordinary flickering effect as they flash by, frame by frame. A 13-second sequence repeats over and over again until the optimum duration of three minutes is reached. On the soundtrack, the monotonous ticking of Myllymäki's acoustic guitar is accelerated close to hysteria by increasing the playback speed. *Eorba* (1980), a nonsense film made in the punk spirit, embraced the motto of *MK* and Montaasi, "fill the screen with stuff": "Every movie ever made is much better than any unmade movie!" In this situation any idea or accidental shot was worth exhibiting: "The idea was to make every village self-sufficient in terms of cinema. Going to the cinema is so expensive these days that it's cheaper to make your own films."⁶⁶

Colouring Book. Now (*Värityskirja.Nyt*, 1980) is one of the most famous of Myllymäki's pieces. A felt-tip pen is colouring a black-and-white adult comic book. The picture becomes coloured. Nude photos from *Playboy* magazine are framed to exclude the women's faces. The scratching on the celluloid starting from their genitals is echoed on the soundtrack. The sound of the rubbing pen segues into the sound of Myllymäki masturbating. As the scratching continues, the people in the picture are replaced by others. "In order to understand the profound message of the film we must realise the symbolic, sexual and biological meaning of the area repeatedly framed into the picture," Myllymäki stated.⁶⁷ "*Colouring Book.Now* is a beautiful film about the yearning to return to the womb, to tenderness and peace. It combines childhood and sexuality with loneliness."⁶⁸ The film was disqualified from national competition. Myllymäki submitted a movie called *This Movie Must Not Be Given Any Prize* (*Tätä elokuvaa ei saa palkita*) to the MINI competition in Turku in 1981. The work has subsequently become generally known as *Gesture* (*Ele*, 1981). In the stark, overcranked motion study, a man with a black hood over his head (Myllymäki) is sitting on a bench in a park. The hum of an industrial plant (Iittala glassworks) is heard in the distance. The man raises his hand in extremely slow motion and grabs the trunk of a slender birch tree.

Made with the stop-motion technique, *Drive Around the World* (*Ajo maapallon ympäri*,

1981) is a satire on contemporary travel neurosis buoyed up by noise from a short-wave radio receiver. *Throbbing Landscape (Värinä maise massa, 1981)* was inspired by the Norman McLaren films that Myllymäki saw at the Tampere Short Film Festival. The film is shot entirely using the time-lapse technique. Life goes past our eyes. In the fleeting landscapes we again see a man (Myllymäki) and the childhood home.

Altogether only nine issues of *MK* magazine were ever published. The *MK 4* (1980) and *MK 8* (1982) issues "came out" only on Super 8, and *MK 6*, *MK 7* and *MK 9* as C cassettes by the band Sleeping & The Beds. *MK 4* contained glimpses from new wave concerts, featuring such Finnish artists as Kari Peitsamo, Se, Pelle Miljoona and Eppu Normaali. *MK 8* was an "election video" for the non-voters' candidate Sleeping Myllymäki. In 1980 Laakkonen was on a working visit to Japan, where he made a wonderful short film entitled *MK in Japan (Maanalainen kaitaelokuva Japanissa, 1981)*: he took the magazine he had taken to read on the plane and put it in the hands of passers-by, recording their spontaneous reactions on film.

The most productive year for Myllymäki and Laakkonen was 1982 when they made no less than 12 movies. The 40-second *As Systematic As Sperm (Systemaattinen kuin sperma, 1982)* was a "quivering 'scratchy' with changing colour backgrounds". The wailing soundtrack was made by manually turning the reels of a tape recorder. The theme of the anti-censorship piece *Five Words (Viisi sanaa 1982)* submitted to the Tampere national competition was taken from the pages of the Finnish dictionary: with cool clinical detachment, five Finnish equivalents for the words "cock", "cunt" and "fuck" are repeated over and over again. *Tape Recorder Is a Wonderful Invention (Nauhuri on ihmeellinen keksintö, 1983)* is a kind of epilogue in which a viewer pours out the emotional shock of seeing *Five Words*, the reactions thus resulting in a new film. *Song of the Pharisees (Laulu fariseuksista, 1982)* is a music video of sorts of the song *Jesus Is Castrated Again (Jeesus kuohitaan taas)* by Sleeping & The Beds. Consisting of only clear, unexposed film that is scratched and perforated, the viewer's attraction is drawn to the text concerning double standards and hypocrisy. The parallel work for this is a film about agitated viewer feedback, *Talking about Pharisees (Puhe fariseuksista, 1983)*.

Myllymäki took his mockery of DIY filmmakers to extremes in the inside movies *Café Rose (Kahvila Ruusu, 1982)* and *1982 – The Year of Censorship (1982 – sensuurin vuosi, 1982)*. The purpose of these films was to provoke discussion about the fussy attitude of the Federation towards Myllymäki's films and writings. The Federation interpreted the polemical attitude of the films as downright insults and intentional agitation. Myllymäki and Laakkonen submitted *Café Rose* to the competition under the pseudonyms Riitta Lehikoinen and Paula Mäkikylä to make the viewers' expectations of the film as relaxed as possible.

Around this time, the duo's movies began gaining a more political attitude and a broader scope. *SIC (Say It Coyly) (SSU (Sano se ujosti), 1981)*, *Radioactive Vibrations (Radioaktiivista värinä, 1982)* and *Black Front and End Credits (Mustat alku- ja lopputekstit 1982)* are all about the threat of the nuclear holocaust that was in the air after the catastrophe at the Harrisburg nuclear power plant. *The Curse Keeps Its Cruel*

Course (Kirous jatkaa julmaa kulkuaan, 1983) is another piece by Sleeping & The Beds, a forlorn portrait of indifference that continues across the generations.

The last film to date by Myllymäki is *Break break (Murra murra, 1985)*. It is exceptional in that it was made by Myllymäki alone, without help from Laakkonen. The movie is a jittery stop-motion impression where each frame is different and every second frame is entirely black at the outset. The electronic sounds of Herbie Hancock on the soundtrack are a perfect match for Myllymäki's kinetic flash experiment. The film was awarded an honorary mention at the Unica festival in Mar del Plata, Argentina, in 1985.

The output of Pasi Myllymäki and Risto Laakkonen presents a disconcerting whole. The degree of cinematic reductionism in the films is unprecedented in Finland. The situation is made all the more extraordinary by the fact that the films were practically never seen at official events, only in reviews by DIY film-makers and in new wave concerts, with some clips broadcast in television reports on youth culture.

Towards the end of 1982, Claes Söderqvist, a Swedish film-maker and curator of the Moderna Museet in Stockholm, visited Finland in search of interesting short films for the museum's extensive collections of Nordic film. Having reviewed Finnish films of the period, Söderqvist returned to Sweden with four films by Eino Ruutsalo and no less than ten films by Myllymäki and Laakkonen.⁶⁹ The museum enlarged Myllymäki's films into 16-mm format and purchased them for its permanent film collection. It was from the Moderna Museet that the same ten films ended up being screened in the United States. In a compilation entitled "Vanguard Sweden: Archipelago 8 – Contemporary Swedish (*sic*) Film & Music" they represented Sweden at The Kitchen in New York city in December 1982 and at Encounter Cinema in Los Angeles in January 1983.

Myllymäki recalls with amusement how "the fossilised old DIY circles in Finland would not believe their ears until they saw the authentic brochures and sniffed them for a while, apparently doubting their authenticity".

IN CONCLUSION

The films discussed in this essay show that in Finland, as elsewhere, the most interesting cinematic experiments have almost invariably been made outside the film industry proper. Their makers are people who come from entirely different areas of artistic practice. For the most part they have lacked all professional qualifications – they are the outsiders of the seventh art.

The desire to liberate moving images totally from the tradition of literature and theatre documentation has been ahead of the times in Finland. It was not until the 1980s, when Finnish artists began having access to video cameras, and also through the establishment of the Helsingin elokuvapaja ry (Helsinki Filmmakers' Co-op), that makers emerged to continue their pioneering work.

-Mika Taanila

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¹ Ruutsalo, 1969, 11.

² Schildt 1985, 114.

³ Dwoskin 1975, 28.

⁴ Renan 1968, 64.

⁵ Schildt 1985, 115.

⁶ Tapiovaara 1938, 29.

⁷ Toiviainen 1986, 116.

⁸ Von Bagh 1978, 12.

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- ⁹ Toiviainen 1983, 50–51.
- ¹⁰ Jarva 1961, 28.
- ¹¹ Toiviainen 1983, 79.
- ¹² Seikkailu ihmisessä: Risto Jarva. YLE TV1, 1971.
- ¹³ Elovirta 1995, 64.
- ¹⁴ Information about Keskinen's imaginary films in this article are also from Veli Granö.
- ¹⁵ Elovirta 1995, 76.
- ¹⁶ Letter from Blomstedt to the writer 2 March 2006.
- ¹⁷ Ibid.
- ¹⁸ Ruutsalo 1995, 119–120.
- ¹⁹ Ruutsalo 1945, 51.
- ²⁰ Kuljuntausta 2002, 580.
- ²¹ Ruutsalo 1988, 20.
- ²² Ruutsalo 1984, 90.
- ²³ Tammi 2005, 32.
- ²⁴ Tammi 2005, 33.
- ²⁵ Ruutsalo 1990, 7.
- ²⁶ Ruutsalo 1984, 92.
- ²⁷ Ruutsalo 1995, 57–59.
- ²⁸ Ruutsalo. *Kokeiluelokuvia* photocopy.
- ²⁹ Ibid.
- ³⁰ Ibid.
- ³¹ Ibid.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Ibid.
- ³⁴ Ruutsalo 1990, 8.
- ³⁵ Valo ja liike 1968, 17.
- ³⁶ Ruutsalo 1984, 94.
- ³⁷ Kuljuntausta 2002, 581–582.
- ³⁸ Ruutsalo 1984, 92.
- ³⁹ Ruutsalo: *Kokeiluelokuvia* photocopy.
- ⁴⁰ According to the Finnish Board of Film Classification, Peter Widén's 8-mm film *Edited Copy* (*Leikattu kopio*, 1968) was screened at Kulttuuritalo. **Herbert Yrjölä's** 16-mm *Unedited Copy* (*Leikkaamaton kopio*, 1968) was not screened, because the Board prohibited it for being "indecent and improper". According to Yrjölä, in his stop-motion film, "people kept popping up as flashes in all sorts of situations".
- ⁴¹ Lindfors – Salo 1998, 32.
- ⁴² Fragments of Kurenniemi's shorts were included in this writer's documentary *The Future Is Not What It Used to Be* (*Tulevaisuus ei ole entisensä*, 2002). Six of them were published later on in a DVD collection of work by Kurenniemi entitled *Dawn of Dimi* (2003). Kurenniemi's films have subsequently been screened also at film festivals and other functions.
- ⁴³ Ojanen, Suominen 2005, 20.
- ⁴⁴ Katainen 1968, 15.
- ⁴⁵ Lindfors – Salo 1988, 34.
- ⁴⁶ On the record sleeve, the song is ascribed to The Velvet Underground, even though John Cale apparently played it alone using an electric guitar and feedback. Aspen, December 1966, VOL. 1, NO. 3, edited by Andy Warhol.
- ⁴⁷ Suomela 1968, 14.
- ⁴⁸ Widén 1970, 26.
- ⁴⁹ This was probably *Hjärtat brinner* (1967), a film directed by Lundsten.
- ⁵⁰ Lindfors – Salo 1998, 135.

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- ⁵¹ Widén 1970, 26.
⁵² Lindfors – Salo 1998, 135.
⁵³ Notes of The Whole Truth team.
⁵⁴ Uusitalo 1984, 238.
⁵⁵ Lindfors – Salo 1988, 194.
⁵⁶ Uusitalo 1984, 380.
⁵⁷ Keinonen 1996, 22.
⁵⁸ Olsson, 1970, 17.
⁵⁹ MK 3, 1979, 5.
⁶⁰ Myllymäki 1980a, 27.
⁶¹ MK 1, 1979, 6.
⁶² Myllymäki 1980a, 28.
⁶³ MK 2, 1979, 3.
⁶⁴ Myllymäki 1980a, 28.
⁶⁵ Myllymäki 1980a, 28.
⁶⁶ MK 5, 1980, 18.
⁶⁷ Myllymäki 1980b, 14.
⁶⁸ Myllymäki 1980a, 29.
⁶⁹ Nordisk Film, 1983, 12-30.