

Filmmaker Mika Taanila has made documentaries on Erkki Kurenniemi, the Futuro House and RoboCup as well as several experimental films and installations. Last year Ekstro records released his Musiikkivöry recordings.

Apparently you started out as a cultural anthropology student. How did you end up making films?

MT: I started to dream about doing something in film-making when I was in high school at the age around sixteen. I started going out to the screenings of the Finnish Film Archive and was mesmerised by the films of Cocteau, Vigo and Anger. When Godard's Alphaville was broadcasted late one evening by YLE, I remember discussing the distorted story the whole next day at school with my mates. Individual films were very electrifying at that age. And era! I think those films changed my life. I was not accepted to film school, but I decided to give a try every year. Meanwhile, I had to find something to pass the time, so I got into the University of Helsinki to study cultural anthropology. There was this great ethnographical film-maker Heimo Lappalainen, who runs regular courses in Visual Anthropology. He screened us 16 mm prints of Rouquier, Rouch, Leacock and the like. Heimo talked endlessly how film-making is not about sharing information but about the passage of time. He opened my eyes to the art of non-fiction film. That's the path I needed to follow. A bit later, I later did get into a film school to start practising.

My first encounter with your work was the stunningly beautiful installation Zone of Total Eclipse (2006) that consists of re-edited scientific film footage from a solar eclipse. Where did you find this material?

MT: Well, this story is boring. An archivist at Finnish Film Archive phoned me up the other day and said that he has something for me. I've known this Ilkka for quite some time and he knew what sort of stuff fascinates me. He said that he doesn't know what this 35 mm footage is, but the sound is soooooo loud and reminds a smith's hammer. So I went there and Ilkka was right. I wanted to start working on that footage and find out what those celestial black & white images and eerie sounds meant.

The only information on the film can said that the reels were deposited there a long time ago by The Finnish Geodetic Institute. This is where it started getting interesting. I went there and studied the history of the footage and was told by professors that it dates back to a total eclipse of the sun in Kokkola, May 1945.

Here the film medium was used for the first time in history of solar eclipses as a tool of science. The purpose was to measure the exact geographical distance between European and North American continents, by using cinematic observations, sound signals beamed into the space and recorded after a while accompanied by complex mathematical calculations.

The experiment was carried out by a group of astrologists from The Geodetic Institute. The measurement was not successful, however, due to big problems in synchronisation of sound and image. The newly introduced 35 mm sound cameras featured many optional running speeds, which was only realized after the shooting in observing the footage in the lab. The project was a bizarre series of unfortunate events and technological collapses. My film includes all those original mistakes and severe synch problems. My film is an homage to early pioneers of scientific film: a celebration of interplanetary shadows at work. The duration of my film is exactly the same as the actual eclipse event in 1948: six minutes.

The Future is Not What It Used to Be (2002) documents the life and work of the eccentric artist, scientist and electronic music pioneer Erkki Kurenniemi. How did you meet Kurenniemi and is his obsession with the future also yours?

MT: I phoned him up, because I was doing research for a film which was supposed to feature a group of people who made their own musical instrument. Kind of portraits of lesser known DIY artists. I knew that Erkki had also designed and built instruments at his time, but little did I know! It turned out to be much wider, totally new world that Erkki introduced me to. I was happy to learn and so it became a film on it's

own pretty quickly, actually after the first visit to his home. This earlier project with instrument-builders never saw daylight, but my short film Optical Sound (2006) was later produced as a result of that research and interest. The past, present and future are all equal in my films. I like to see my works as pendulums. We stand looking back in time and sense the vision of the future there. It all goes back and forth constantly. Middle is where we stay today.

Finnish label Ekstro Records released teenage recordings by you under the moniker Musiikkivöry. Could you tell us something more about these recordings and the label?

MT: Musiikkivöry was my first art project. I did music by intuition in my room, like so many teen-agers. This was 1980-81, the era of independent labels and international cassette culture. Together with my friend Anton Nikkilä we founded Valtavat Ihmesilmälasit label and released C66 tapes. It was great time to grow up in a musical era like that. So much unpredicted innovations happening every week in small studios and basements around the world. Punk opened up the gates for the arts of the future, at least so we felt at the time.

Last year Jussi Lehtisalo of Circle, who also runs his own Ekstro label, heard these two Musiikkivöry cassette albums that we had put out and wanted to do re-release. Circle is one my all-time favourite groups, especially live, and now I'm so proud to be on the same label with them.

What project(s) are you currently working on?

MT: I'm doing a long-term follow up film on the construction of the OL3 nuclear power plant in Olkiluoto, on the Finnish west coast. We started shooting there already in 2004 and the work is heavily delayed and still going on. It's supposed to be the most powerful station in the whole world. I'm also planning to make some new short films and maybe also putting together some compilation of post-Valtavat tracks by Musiikkivöry 1981-85. I need to do a lot of digging up tapes before I know if there's something really worth releasing. And I need a second opinion, from Lehtisalo or somebody else. To make sure that it's not just my pendulum, that's stuck in the nostalgic far end of my own teen-age.

