

**Erkki Kurenniemi: Diaries, 1980s.**

EKA, CAA, FNG, photo: Jenni Nurminen

## Slimy Traces: Memory, Technology and the Archive

Susanna Paasonen

As I open the notebook, I notice wads of hair that have been glued on several pages. Darkish, slightly curly and falling off the pages, hair is trickling onto the table, my hands and my lap. Having read many of Erkki Kurenniemi's diaries, and having watched numerous hours of his video diaries, I realize that this is pubic hair – either his own hair or a partner's – that he was fond of cutting and shaving. Sitting at a desk at the Central Art Archives of Finnish National Gallery, I ponder on a practical

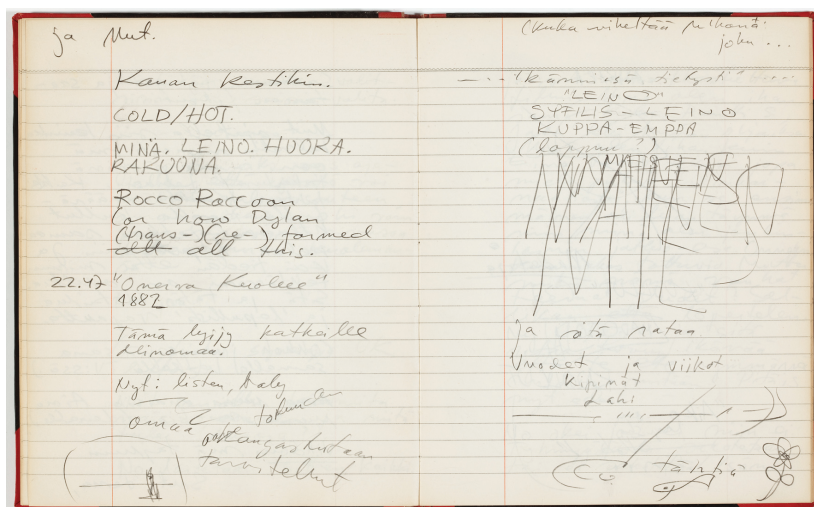
dilemma: how to get the hair off my hands, off the desk and back on the pages of the notebook (titled in bold as a “Very hairy dagbok”) from which it has become unglued. This is, after all, original archival material that should not be lost or tampered with – and certainly something that one should not carry out of the premises on one’s person.

Blowing the hair back between the diary pages, I was palpably struggling with the materiality of the archive: the traces written, drawn, typed, recorded, edited or glued in, organic and inorganic, human and machine, and the different ways in which they matter. In its viscosity, the anecdote is an appropriate point of departure for discussing Kurenniemi’s personal archive since, on the basis of the multimedia diary records, his activities have been driven by three intermeshing key interests or passions: a passion for theory (e.g. the mathematical theory of harmony and the theories of physics), a passion for technology (e.g. the synthesizers he developed from the 1960s to the 1980s, robotics, computing and consumer electronics) and a passion for sensory stimulation (e.g. sex, pornography, alcohol, drugs and combinations thereof), the last one of these regularly taking the front stage. Consequently, any boundaries drawn between art, science, science fiction, pornography and the documentation of everyday life in the diary logs remain porous at best. Conventional divisions and hierarchies of value and importance that are set to separate the highbrow from the lowbrow, or the

theoretically speculative from the manifestly banal, simply do not exist or matter. For Kurenniemi, both theory and carnal pleasures involve potential pleasure, affectation and intensity of experience – they are all about some kind of high.

11/3/1987

$Zeus = ((1\ 1\ 2)(1\ 2\ 2)) = (((1\ 2)(1\ 2))((1\ 1)(3\ 3))((2\ 3)(2\ 3)))$ . Will not be solved today. Will probably dream tomorrow night. Please note that I don't want to rush. It'll surely come and I want to play with this pleasure. These are my orgasms. Now I'll go to bed, and since I've already jerked off today, there ought to be enough time.



**Erkki Kurenniemi: Diaries, 1980s.**

EKA, CAA, FNG, photo: Jenni Nurminen

5/7/1987, 0:07

*Only now starting with the Midi [Vin rouge du Midi, one of Kurenniemi's regular affordable wine brands]. Read Lucretius in the afternoon. Watched the porn video I made with X yesterday and after that, the noise on the screen. I could see molecules and particles.*

In Kurenniemi's logs, the details of the theories developed, the people encountered, erections and ejaculations achieved, sandwiches and bottles of wine consumed, commutes and travels made, urinations planned and experienced, dope smoked, casual yet systematic observations made of passers-by, and things planned, imagined and remembered, follow one another and overlap, with just occasional asterisks (\*\*\*) separating one strand of thought from another. Analyses of science fiction narratives merge with remarks on intimate bodily odors while video material of streetscapes intermeshes with home-made porn and candid shots of neighbors going about their everyday lives. There is no Goffmanian backstage to be observed, no simple division intended between the public and the private, the micro and the macro. Details of reading academic journals such as Science and Nature are presented alongside those describing the most recent issues of porn magazines like Penthouse and Razzle; observations on fractal theory and brain research are



provided in the same detail as plans and experiences of shaving pubic hair:

26/12/1977, 00:23

*Now I've been in the bathroom for quite a while and shaved off all possible hair, apart from the hair on my head, with an electric razor. The machine grew all hot. My cock hair is all gone, as is my leg hair, and partly even my arm hair. Isn't this truly wonderful. So I thought all along. Still don't know. My ball sacks sting a bit. Now I've reached this low communication chain haaa fuck. Still holding a full glass of wine. Lovely in a way.*

14/11/1987, Wed 23:15

*How can one be this neurotic. Is this only vertigo or is my consciousness still growing. Is there an afterlife, I mean that magical synergy. Perhaps the whole thing has a simpler, yet entirely surprising, explanation. The root of new science. Mathematical perhaps. The nature of systems. ... Could it only be the kind of collective consciousness that is simply dispersed? There is a current in each. Had a totally new idea when taking a leak! Cell consciousness. That may just about explain all peculiar phenomena, including religion. Even explains AIDS. A photon field.*

6/12/1998, Sun

13:53 ... [in English] \*\*\* *Consciousness is the process of communication between brain areas. ...*

15:26 [back to Finnish] *Fontana, ham quiche, guests have change, now the third and final cigarette, a beauty came beside me, unfortunately with a blond tough guy, the main thing that she pays attention to. Don't know what kind of route I manage to take, if I should take a crap here.*

The overall horizontality of the archive can be explained through the principles and aims of the documentation, which is premised on the inseparability of perception and consciousness. In accordance with his transhumanist theory, Kurenniemi wanted to record his consciousness for future access (and sharing) by recording the flow of his everyday life: memories, logs and documentations became data to be stored. In order to access this database, the algorithmic structure of one's persona would need to be mapped and relocated, or installed on some computational substrate such as a computer or brain tissue grown from stem cells (Kurenniemi 2001). To a degree, this view – be it a theoretical hypothesis or a futuristic science fiction fantasy – resonates with Henri Bergson's (2007) view of consciousness as inseparable from the sensory experience, and of the immediate data of consciousness as lacking any juxtaposition of events. Rather, for Bergson, consciousness is a multiplicity of horizontal threads and vibrations that resonate according to a particular personal rhythm. This rhythm applies both to perception and to recollection as embodied processes of

different kinds: perception is about affectation with or by external images, memory being a more introspective activity.

“But, if you abolish my consciousness, the material universe subsists exactly as it was; only, since you have removed that particular rhythm of duration which was the condition of my action upon things, these things draw back into themselves; and sensible qualities, without vanishing, are spread and diluted in an incomparably more divided duration. Matter thus resolves itself into numberless vibrations, all linked together in uninterrupted continuity, all bound up with each other, and travelling in every direction like shivers in an immense body.” (Bergson 2007, 276.)

In the Kurenniemi archive, various traces and records can be found that may somehow resonate with those browsing through it, but they can never vibrate as they would in his consciousness, with its particular rhythms, layered histories, interests, desires, fixations and drives (that are fleshy indeed). What can be resurrected from the archive is always a different patchwork creature, or assemblage, strung together from various files and transcripts. Traces and resonances linger on, but they do so at another speed and frequency.

Like any other archive, the Kurenniemi archive has developed through “mutations of connection and disconnection” (Foster

2004, 6), such as constant shifts and transfers of text, images, sound and video, from one media format to another. Kurenniemi's stroke and his ensuing loss of ability to form sentences is the most dramatic and fundamental of these mutations. With the loss of the main curator-archivist, the connections between the different items in the archive have been cut, chronologies have become patchy, and the ties between data and metadata are mostly lacking. The result is a disjointed and excessive assemblage of highly edited works and random flotsam. This is unavoidable since horizontality was Kurenniemi's underlying principle of accumulation: everything is regarded as potential data, from the brands of toilet paper he used to the tickets of events he visited, Christmas cards, business cards, receipts, and advertisements received – all this has been preserved in a lateral manner. The ambition was to save and record both the material traces of his everyday life and the trajectories of his thoughts, desires, fantasies, theoretical speculations and memories.

In *Practicalities*, Marguerite Duras (1990, 45) dryly notes that “[i]f you don't part with anything, if you try to hold back time, you can spend your whole life tidying life up and documenting it”. While Duras connects the meticulous – and ultimately useless – accumulation of mundane objects and records with female domesticity, practices of personal preservation and stowage cut across any simple division of gender. When going on overdrive,

these practices transmute into compulsive hoarding where no objects are discarded and new ones are constantly accumulated. Randy Frost and Gail Steketee (2011, 13–15) associate hoarding with a *psychology of opportunity* where every object, no matter how standard, mundane or broken, is seen as rich in detail and therefore as important, valuable, meaningful and potentially laden with information that will be lost if the objects are given away (Ibid. 27, 30, 138). Were this to happen, hoarders would be disconnected from a part of their past, or even from a part of themselves (Frost and Steketee 2011, 46). As with the Kurenniemi archive, the constant accumulation of matter means that there is never quite enough time to revisit and organize the collections so that they might be put into use: eventually, matter starts to take over. The problem, in sum, is one of inability to archive properly, to discard and to select.

Showing Kurenniemi's oeuvre in a museum context necessitates heavy editing: since permissions cannot be obtained from the people appearing in the videos and photographs, most of them have to be omitted. A large portion – even the majority – of the visual material can be categorized as pornographic. In the video diaries, diary logs and voice diaries, sexual fantasies, memories and acts are perpetually present as an organic element of the recorded everyday life. Attention constantly revolves around, focuses and clusters on the sexual in terms of potential events, fantasies, memories and observations. On the plane of the visual,

pornography – homemade porn, porn images harvested online, from films, television and magazines – abounds. Since such material cannot be shown when the archive is presented publicly, the image of the whole grows decidedly warped and distorted. The archive becomes a different creature that is void of much of the fleshiness and minute attention to the sexual, the embodied and the pornographic that characterizes – and in fact animates – his logs.

27/5/2000, Sat

1:22 *Porn is on full speed, I'm drawing another slice [Kurenniemi is watching free porn on television]. Will there be anal? Now the man ejaculates on the woman's breasts, nipples are erect, post-sucking. But this is American narrative porn.*

1:29 ... *I get an erection. I take off my pants and check the windows (all were dark when I last looked) ... Fuck, I left the REC function on. Well at least caught all those almost-piss-bits. End of scene, worth taking. The real estate agent has rather luscious tits. ... The Koivistos [a former presidential couple living on the same street] can now see in here and watch my wanking. Hope Tellervo has a good zoom camera ... I watched tapes [private VHS recordings] that were at least from the beginning of 1989. The first bit was so well organized that I dare not touch it although the best bits are probably there. But the unmarked ones must be watched first so that indexing will be as complete as possible even if they are left unfinished. So, I will next choose from the 1990s shelf.*

If perception, memory and consciousness are all considered matters of particular rhythm and intensity, then the diary logs make evident the pivotal role of the libido in and for Kurenniemi's particular rhythm, for his way of being. Before digital video cameras became affordable, Kurenniemi shot on VHS in a more selective manner. Due to the selection processes, the tapes are rich in pornography that remains, throughout his personal records, an area of particularly intense interest. The large volume of porn clips, photos and textual accounts is revealing of the way his interest and focus constantly zoom in on the sexual and the particularities of human bodies.

## **Material media**

Ultimately, the archive raises the elusive question of what makes life life. Is life a matter of biography, the sum of perceptions translating as consciousness, or a more elusive intensity, "a current", as Kurenniemi himself put it? It could also be asked what makes an archive an archive, considering the possible hoarding tendencies addressed above. Kurenniemi himself would probably call it a database, a more or less organized collection of data not to be used for studying the life and times of Erkki Kurenniemi but for accessing – and indeed living – his perceptions and consciousness. Here, the storage media is granted an ideal transparency as a means to an end.

At the same time, the affordances and tactile materiality of the storage formats deployed are highly particular, and their form and content impossible to decouple. A typed diary in PDF format allows for easy access and searchability. Reading the same hand-written diary – same in the sense of containing the same textual “data” – affords an additional exploration into texture, style and temporality. The backs of the diaries are stained by tobacco smoke, some of their covers have been worn from use, some are decorated with drawings or splashes of color, and others are otherwise marked. Inside the diaries, drawings, lists, graphs, photographs, receipts, clippings and bits of paper – as well as genital hair – are glued in to accompany the logs. Some of the diaries involve a multimodal, collage-like aesthetic while others remain more straightforward textual exercises. Kurenniemi’s handwriting alters according to the situation and the amount of intoxicants used, ranging from neat composition to large, restless scribble.

Despite the volume of these mundane records, years of notes are missing. Tapes breaking down during digitization have also generated some archival gaps while, on a more fundamental level, the affordances of different storage media condition and dictate what can be seen and heard of the archive. In the case of the voice diaries recorded on C-tape, noise and information (Kurenniemi’s own voice, radio shows, music and ambient



sounds) are often impossible to separate. The soundscape grows noisy and fuzzy, and it is difficult for the listener to decide what to focus on and listen to. The 8 mm and 16 mm films are silent (with soundtracks added later), some videos shot with mobile phones have very poor image quality and sound resolution, and videotapes come with considerable noise to the degree that the “data” of image and sound may be barely accessible. In other words, the balance and ratio between the signal and noise is constantly unsteady and the processes of mediation far from smooth.

Media theorist Friedrich Kittler (1999, xl) argues that what “remains of people is what media can store and communicate.” Furthermore, what “counts are not the messages or the content with which they equip so-called souls for the duration of a technological era, but rather ... their circuits, the very schematism of perceptibility” (Kittler 1999, xl–xli). Kittler argues for the primacy of media and their specificities beyond any personal recordings or impressions. What matters for Kittler is not the photographs, films, texts or data inasmuch as that which different media render perceptible. Such a hierarchy of importance appears irrelevant in the context of the Kurenniemi archive. On the one hand, the specific circuits and perceptibility of media matter – for they condition what remains. On the other hand, the scenes, scenarios, moments, dialogues, monologues, fragments, objects and people conveyed in the recordings are of

equal importance. The style, feel and modality of the archive owe equally to both form and content: both are crucial to how the recordings reverberate in our acts of sensing and making sense.

On one level, Kurenniemi positioned himself as a masterful designer, builder and operator of technology. On another level, the relationship was manifestly a prosthetic one. As prosthetic, externalized memory reserves, the material particularities and affordances of storage media limit and constrain what he would later recall of the past (cf. Lury 1998). Acts of recording and re-watching the recordings involved the simultaneous externalization and internalization of perception and memory as conditioned by the affordances of storage media. And on yet another level, Kurenniemi defined humans, himself included, as organic slime machines, the memory functions of which are interchangeable, and bound to be fused with, the technological.

In addition to its main function of data preservation, the archive has offered the technology for recollection and a source of enjoyment: Kurenniemi details a constant revisiting of earlier diary inserts, reworking and editing them, transferring them to different formats, masturbating to and watching video recordings alone and together with others, going through archives of still images, digitizing and manipulating them on his computer:

21/2/1988, Sun 23:43

*It's been a pretty good Sunday ... I preached the virtues of Hypercard and started to shoot X without a tape in the camera. Managed to create a joyous "Draculina" pile where X strips for about 30 frames. This morning as we woke up she said that she should've had a garter belt as an accessory. Got rid of my impotence by a degree.*

10/7/2000, Mon

0:06 *Well the day changed. Good luck. Empty head, probably need to get high and start editing some old stuff. ...*

1:03 *March 1999 pre-edited, all there and date headlines. Now the laborious part begins, going through it, the tagging and the transfer, at least when it comes to sex. Now ATV [a television channel showing free night time porn] on, despite everything.*

3/5/2001, 00:03

*X found out that we'll get our own videos on VHS. Y shouldn't have told X. An intense weekend again. Didn't finish going through the photos from today, X asked for a break. But she stayed the night, lovely ... Now a bit of reading of dendrites or Vámos or some magazine.*

Recording mundane events and revisiting them seems to add to the overall intensity of experience: paraphrasing Bergson, it is not only the images and bodies of the external world that affect

Kurenniemi, but also the acts of recording and reconfiguring images, as well as watching recorded images of his own body and those of others. Affective feedback loops form, accumulate and center especially on sex – and pornography – as the topics which Kurenniemi most carefully tagged, edited, saved and revisited. Yet he also describes the act of connecting a computer to a network as “small heat”, a moment of intensity similar to the moments spent working on theoretical dilemmas. As different as such actions may seem, they all involve an intensity of experience resulting in an affective rush, or at least in the potentiality of one. It is the more or less playful quest for affective rushes and sensory highs that characterizes the flow of the diary logs.

### **Differences of kind**

In the video diaries, passers-by on the street are seen to react to Kurenniemi's camera, hence transforming the urban landscape he is recording into mediated and reflexive spaces; dialogues are enacted just as much for his camera as for himself; and diaries read aloud and sexual scenarios recorded on camera become performative actions, as the mundane flow of everyday life is set for, seen and revisited through the lens of the camera. The perceptions and observations that Kurenniemi recorded in order to reproduce his consciousness are media-saturated and inseparable from the technologies used to record them. The

possibility and pleasure of recording and of capturing these moments obviously intensified both his sensation and perception. It is therefore something of an understatement to note that the practices of documentation had an impact on how Kurenniemi experienced his everyday life – just as “what is no longer archived in the same way is no longer lived in the same way” (Derrida 1996, 18).

In the sexual activities performed for, and recorded in, the video diaries, Kurenniemi's partners display their body parts for the camera to zoom in on, and Kurenniemi recurrently asks them to face the camera – or a monitor attached to it – rather than to have eye contact with him. This produces a kind of doubling of the sensory experience where attention and presence is constantly split between the physical act of sex and the static “objective” perspective of the camera. Temporality is similarly split between the present tense and the future tense of a replay. The present is always folding into the future, the revisited and the re-edited. The camera is very much an active agent in the network of actors – and the dynamics of desire – comprising the scene.

Autobiography 3.fm file, chapter 2: A letter addressed to X  
31/1/1990, 1:29 ... *Now I'm making my life into a tape, "Video Verité Totale", so that when I bought a camcorder after you left, I got an idea to shoot everything 24/7. That would be boring and for*

*the moment too expensive but the idea is realizable. For now I've even used the principle in a deconstructive manner, I won't see people who are allergic to camcorders. Like this Y from Pori. Z is all game but she's found a way to tease me: when the tape ends, she joyously spreads her cunt, and only then. This is what relationships degenerate to, or how would one take it because of our genes. ... The camera is more important than you or me since it constantly makes imperishable history of both of us. We feel "the wing of history" touching us and go crazy.*

26/8/2000

*23:55 Yeah fuck, nothing works. So I've lost some PAL component from the system. Must take care of that next. Fooling around in Paris is actually deadly. I'm too drunk. I'm shown there with my shaft painted red. Ah, I can make a beautiful stereo or at least a macro of the urinary opening. Could do it now but prefer to do it more easily in connection to a larger project. Gould's playing sometimes grabs me in a paralyzing way. Perhaps I'll close the camera. Video struck back and I'm getting Freudian. In fact my anus and shaved balls make quite fine visuals. X is good. But now I need to come up with some other form of fun ... Women have left me, even these last resorts. Fine, I'll watch online porn then.*

As Jacques Derrida argues, an archive is stored for the future but engaged with the ever shifting present, with specific aims and purposes in mind (Derrida 1996, 68). As Kurenniemi revisited,

edited and made comments on his diary notes, reflexivity extended back and forth in time, both towards the past self and future potentiality; both to reflections of finitude (of his own life) and immortality (of his virtual, algorithmic life). The camera, more than any other medium, lies at the heart of this split temporality as the instant generator of historical records that will linger on to be relived. The year 2048, as the locus of both Kurenniemi's transhumanist project (when his consciousness is to be available in machine form) and of the science fiction narratives he imagined and composed throughout the years, remains the end point of the archive's explicit futurity. As a site of fantasy and theoretical speculation, the year 2048 is the moment when machines will forever revisit earlier memories and records made by humans in fleshy form.

Archives are defined and driven by the dynamics of forgetting and extinction. The futurity of the archive is conditioned by nothingness and death, just as accumulation and preservation of the archive assumes the threat of effacement and eradication. Or, as Derrida puts it, "[t]here would indeed be no archive desire without the radical finitude, without the possibility of a forgetfulness" (Derrida 1996, 19). Kurenniemi's "archive fever" is fuelled by such awareness of imminent loss. His processes of accumulation and storage of everyday events were a means of warding off erasure and the limits of human existence – their

temporality is geared simultaneously towards both annihilation and eternal life (in 2048, and after).

Rooting for a machine future, Kurenniemi remained firmly fascinated by the slimy machinations and dense materiality of the human sensorium. There is, then, an obvious and tenuous tension between the detailed fleshiness of the logs and the idea of uploading them into machine-readable format that is to be used by future machines, cybernetic or cloned human organisms. For what sense would a machine make of the acts and sensations accounted? How would they translate into data?

7/8/1989, Fri 00:41

*Now as I'm writing this I'm wondering if this could be the phenomenon of "ringing" [in English]. Too trivial in any case. Then X asked me if my orgasms have changed. I couldn't answer. Before I started licking, and early on when licking, my cock was erect but then became flaccid. This is, however, an old phenomenon and didn't fool X. After a moment's rest she started licking and soon moved to a better position between my legs and performed fellatio flawlessly. I didn't try to prolong or speed up. I watched X's head and lips on my shaft and wondered if I'm excited by looking or by the action potentialities coming from my cock. Both are somehow "unnatural" but perhaps only "culturally". Can't be bothered to clarify now. When X is sucking, orgasm shapes up altogether differently than when jerking off. (01:17) I start shaking all over and*



*even my breath starts to cramp. And when it comes, it comes a little too soon, then one notices the desire to hold back a little and to elevate, modulate the intensity higher. As if one gave up a little.*

3/8/1987, 23:27

*Ykä [a male neighbor] jerked off standing. Now I'm naked too. He's a southpaw, jerked off with his left hand and took the spunk in his right palm. Now turned off the lights. One and a half centiliters [of wine] in the glass that will be the last one. Tomorrow at nine, coffee to celebrate the return from the holidays so... I'm writing "The World of Sound."*

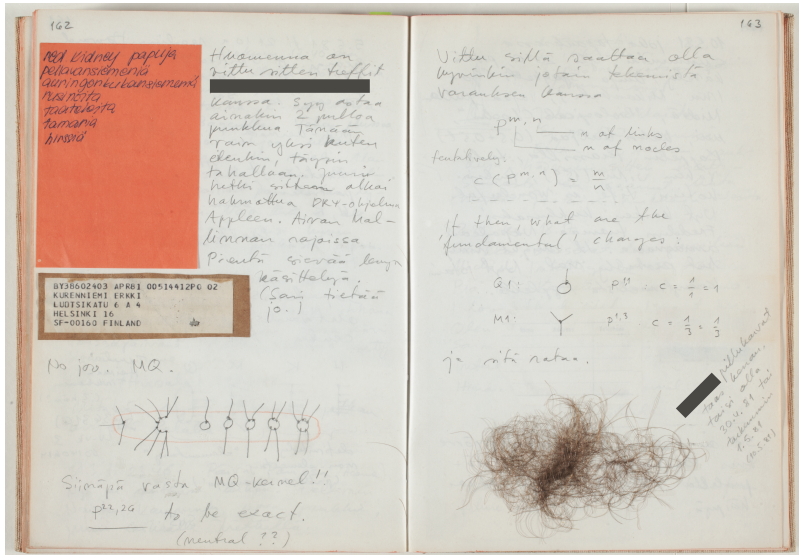
Considering the inseparability of sensing and making sense, and the particularities of the human sensorium, I argue that such accounts would poorly translate as data to be processed by artificial intelligence. While processes of storing and accessing memory are common to human bodies and intelligent machines, the forms of memory in question are hardly the same. In fact they are radically distinct. As Jean-François Lyotard (1991, 15) points out, human thought "doesn't work with units of information (bits), but with intuitive, hypothetical configurations": it "isn't just focused, but lateral too" – much like the archive in question. For Lyotard, the complexity of human thought and cognition are inseparable from the carnal specificities of human embodiment. Similarly, a camera sees differently than the human eye, and a microphone records

sounds differently than the human ear hears them. A human sees and hears without knowingly looking or listening, but equally fails to see and hear as her attention constantly shifts, oscillates and reorganizes. Contrary to the contingency of the human sensoria, cameras and microphones steadily record the audiovisual in the confines of their technological make-up and configuration without moments of heightened attention or intensity (unless the operator of the camera zooms in or angles the microphone accordingly). Accessing video footage of an event is, then, a fundamentally different experience from accessing a particular person's perception of the same event. Paraphrasing Bergson, these are differences of kind, rather than ones of degree.

Kurenniemi's archive is ironic in the sense that this fundamental tension, or incongruity, between the human and the machine forms of memory and perception is always present. Consequently, the key point of the diary logs is not merely the rhythm of Kurenniemi's consciousness, perception and memory or the possibilities of reproducing it in algorithmic form. Rather, the diaries make evident how this rhythm meshes in with, and is reconfigured by the affordances, modalities and tempos of different storage media and – following Lyotard – by the inhuman modes of memory that differ in their materiality, organization and access from the human ones. As these rhythms and materialities – both human and nonhuman – resonated in

the acts of recording and performing the everyday life, the rhythm of Kurenniemi's consciousness also oscillated and changed. The precise rhythm of his consciousness would indeed be hard to tear apart from the technological networks and prostheses that it constantly moved with.

In the diaries, the fantasy of an uploaded consciousness that would keep revisiting the times past for all eternity is much less pronounced than the pleasures that Kurenniemi enjoyed in his archival practice: the rhythms, intensities and tempos of recording, editing and revisiting. Here, the joys of theory and defecation are cut out of the same fabric of embodied practice, of potential affectation, intensity, experimentation and play. Living, again, becomes an archival practice of ambiguous temporality that is driven by a quest of affectation and where the past and the future constantly fold into the present. Despite Kurenniemi's transhumanist fantasy of overcoming the slime-based human embodiment, these slimy traces nevertheless remain the key focus of the archive that records his life.



**Erkki Kurenniemi's diary from the 1980s.**

EKA, CAA, FNG, photo: Pirje Mykkänen

Translations of the diary excerpts from Finnish are by the author. All names, apart from those given by Kurenniemi to people he did not actually know, have been removed and replaced with the alphabets X, Y, Z, etc. In order to preserve anonymity, no particular alphabet is associated with any individual person.

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