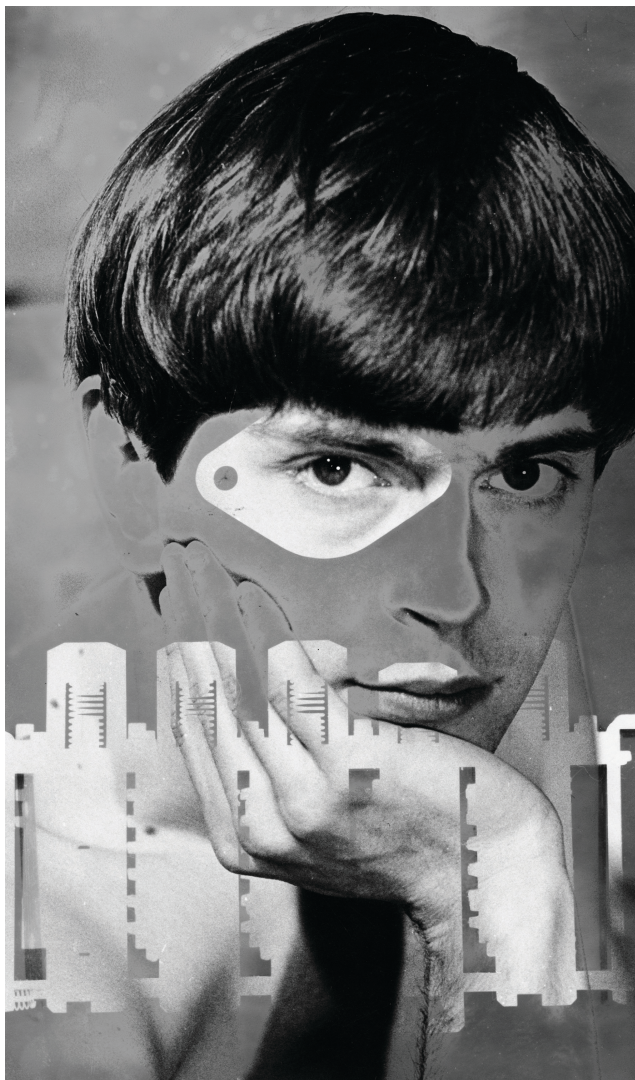


## PART 1



**Erkki Kurenniemi. 1960s.**

Photo: EKA, CAA, FNG

## **Following the thread of Erkki Kurenniemi's life**

Maritta Mellais

Erkki Johannes Kurenniemi was born in Hämeenlinna, Finland, on the 10th of July, 1941, as the first child of Tauno Kurenniemi (1907–1977) and Marjatta Kurenniemi (1918–2004).

His father, Tauno Kurenniemi, was a Doctor of Philosophy and a mathematician, and he introduced Erkki to mathematics and electrical engineering at a young age. Erkki's mother, Marjatta Kurenniemi, was a children's author. When Erkki was a schoolboy, he showed a talent for mathematics and developed an interest in amateur radio. Later, he also became interested in computers and electronic music. Considering Kurenniemi's later career, a trip to France with his father turned out to be crucial: during their stay they visited the factories of Compagnie des Machines Bull, a manufacturer of computers. The role model of young Kurenniemi, the future developer of Finnish electronic music, was Max Mathews (1926–2011), the American pioneer of computer music (Framework 2/2004).

In 1960, Kurenniemi entered the University of Helsinki, where he studied mathematics, theoretical physics and physics. He worked as a research assistant at the university's radio astronomy station in 1961, as an assistant at the Department of Nuclear Physics in 1962–68, as a researcher at the Research Institute for

Theoretical Physics in 1969–72, and as an invited, unpaid assistant at the Electronic Music Studio of the Department of Musicology in 1962–72. In his article on Kurenniemi's studio, Mikko Ojanen observes that this small studio, which was located in the corner of the professor's office, was progressive even by international standards.

In 1970, Kurenniemi founded a company called Digelius Electronics Finland (1970–76) together with Jouko Kotila and Peter Frisko. The company specialized in the production and marketing of electronic equipment. In his article, Jari Suominen discusses the history of Kurenniemi's construction of musical instruments not only during that period but also before and after the Digelius era. Erkki Kurenniemi is especially well known as an innovator of Finnish electronic music. In his article, Kai Lassfolk discusses the history of Kurenniemi's musical production and locates Kurenniemi within the field of contemporary electronic music.

In 1976–79, Kurenniemi worked as a designer of guiding systems for industrial robots at Oy W. Rosenlew Ab in Pori, and proceeded to work for Nokia Cable Machinery (1980–86), where he was a designer of industrial automation and robotic systems. In 1987–99, he worked as a special designer and design manager at the Finnish Science Center, Heureka, after which he became an independent researcher.

Kurenniemi also took part in actions of two Finnish artists groups Dimensio and Datart, from the early 1970s to the late 1990s.

Erkki Kurenniemi's life has always been about searching for something. He has been an insatiable seeker, who, after solving one question, has always continued to look for new, unsolved ones. Erkki Kurenniemi's archive is the result of his search: the archive presents parts of the life of this incurable seeker from the 1970s to the 2000s through diaries, sound and video recordings, photographs, receipts and personal documents.

Kurenniemi started to document his life at the beginning of the 1970s by making notes of his instrument designs (Kurenniemi's diary, 1970–71). Roughly at the same time he began to take notes of his everyday life. This practice lasted for decades and resulted in over seventy hand-written diaries, which have later been converted to digital form, into an electronic archive. Kurenniemi's archive includes photographs from the early 1950s to the 1990s, sound recordings from the early 1970s and video recordings from the 1980s onward.

But when was it that Erkki Kurenniemi came up with the idea to document his life with such precision that he could later, in the fictive future of 2048, be recreated? Kurenniemi's work revolved around the development of musical instruments until the

mid-1970s, and in 1976 he began working on the development of robotic technology at Oy Rosenlew Ab. By that time, the documentation of his life had extended from written notes and photographs to receipts, bank documents etc. Kurenniemi always paid close attention to the most recent technological literature, and Jyrki Siukonen notes in his article that the idea of rebirth can be traced back to the technological optimism of the 1960s and 1970s, with elements from science fiction. It is possible that Kurenniemi came up with the idea of personal archiving already then.

Kurenniemi had started tinkering with electronic equipment and radios already as a child. As he grew up, he became interested in computers and electronic music, and he consequently started to do research on digital electronics as he constructed his musical instruments. In his article, Jussi Parikka discusses the significance of Kurenniemi's working methods, emphasizing Kurenniemi's ability to connect concreteness and DIY construction with vision.

Susanna Paasonen focuses on Kurenniemi's habit of documenting the intimate side of his life. She points out that Kurenniemi's archival process is so balanced that it reveals facts about him which would typically be hidden within the confines of a personal archive. Paasonen also emphasizes the differences of different recording media when documenting a person's

experiences and ponders on the question of whether pleasure can be transferred into future as data.

While we wait for 2048, the year of Kurenniemi's rebirth, his archive lives a life of its own. It will only provide some limited answers to the questions posed by researchers. These answers cannot be predetermined, just like it is not possible to tell which questions will be asked or how the archive is interpreted at any given time. As the ink on the receipts and printouts fade and the floppy disks become unreadable, a public institution continues to do its best to preserve Kurenniemi's vision, an ephemeral art.



**Erkki Kurenniemi. 1990s.**

Photo: EKA, CAA, FNG