Writing and Unwriting (Media) Art History: Erkki Kurenniemi in 2048

By Joasia Krysa and Jussi Parikka (ed)
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Writing and Unwriting (Media) Art History: Erkki Kurenniemi in 2048 is an edited collection of essays that present the work of artist-engineer Kurenniemi as a locus for thinking about media art history. The book stems from the major presentation of Erkki Kurenniemi's work at the dOCUMENTA 13 exhibition in Kassel in 2012. The interconnection of his work now located at the Central Art Archive at the Finnish National Gallery in Helsinki and the concept of the archive is just one strand in which the reader can engage with this book. The work of Kurenniemi does not sit neatly into one discipline or another rather, as the editors highlight; Kurenniemi was a pioneer of electronic music, computer arts, an experimental filmmaker, inventor, archivist and futurologist. For *Writing and Unwriting (Media) Art History* he is the encapsulation of the artist - engineer who elides the traditional academic and museological categories.

The editors, Krysa and Parikka, see Kurenniemi as illustrative of post WWII art that sits across numerous disciplinary boundaries "from the aesthetic to the scientific and technical". This book is aimed at those who are following the various paths of media archaeology, museology, computer arts, electronic music, curators and art historians and all those concerned with the question of how we store and retrieve knowledge.

Divided into six sections: Archival Life, Visual Archive, Artistic Practice, Science/Technology, Music, and Interviews each section is introduced by various contributors. The "unwriting" of the title presents a thread in which one can begin unravel the work of Kurenniemi, the idea is taken from his thoughts in a letter, where he sees the possibility of "unwriting poetry", a to and fro between the sciences and the arts, to articulate through one practice, or algorithm, which has been unpacked, understood and recast elsewhere, reformulated with a deft precision and conciseness. The book brings together much of the fragments of Kurenniemi's work, finished and unfinished projects, inventions and diary entries all to reframe media art history by understanding the interconnectedness of art and technology.

Sections such as *Archival Life* present Kurenniemi's "lifelogging", the everyday documentation of his life presented across different media – photographs, video, film, audio recordings, writings (diaries). The section deals with both, Kurenniemi's own take on his archival practice which starting from the 60's and had no distinct philosophy, and archiving itself. In *Fleshy Intensities* Susanna Paasonen presents the idea that Kurenniemi can stave off the erasure of life, human existence and annihilation, and simultaneously move towards eternal life and the reconstitution of himself through his archive in 2048 this she sees as his archival fever. The *Visual Archive* presents pictures, articles, and sketches from the Kurenniemi archive which for those not familiar with the scope of Kurenniemi's work offers an introduction.

In *Artistic Practice* the elaboration of Kurenniemi's ideas on art and technology are developed through his own writings, Joasia Krysa highlights that his interdisciplinary perspective shows that art is just one of many possible outputs for his work. His ideas are also explored in the work of the media art collective Constant. *Archiving the Databody: Human and Nonhuman Agency in the Documents of Erkki Kurenniemi* is perhaps the stand out chapter in the book in presenting a tangible exploration of the notion of "unwriting". Constant, investigate the archive of Kurenniemi in the project *Preliminary Work* the chapter looks at the efforts to align the idea of the archive with computational processes, with the understanding that for Constant, archives are a collection of materials that are readable, writable and executable, and thus subject to certain ethical standards. Other sections in the book explore science and technological shifts that are apparent in Kurenniemi's work and in society, such as the shift from analog to digital, as well as a section aimed at the specific contribution that Kurenniemi made to electronic music.

The book brings together a number of approaches and recent scholarship on media archaeology and the archive. The editors note the contradiction of disciplinary boundaries in relation to the structuring of the book, and the interdisciplinary nature of their subject. The book is best understood as standing in for just one evocation of a body of work that is formulated across many media. For the Kurenniemi enthusiast there is much material to immerse oneself in, and the book is admirable in its attempts to visualise a project that was the dOCUMENTA 13 exhibition in print. The main proposition of this book, that examining the work and life of Erkki Kurenniemi opens up those discrete disciplinary boundaries to the artist-engineer as an exemplar of how media, media arts and art history need to be rethought in the light of scholarship on media technologies, is well evidenced. The book is situated within the media archaeological canon, which is currently being constructed and so readers will struggle to find other forms of cultural, political and aesthetic criticism within this collection. *Writing and Unwriting (Media) Art History: Erkki Kurenniemi in 2048* serves as a source document or manual to a set of practices that have been alluded to across the fields of computer arts, expanded cinema, electronic music and experimental film. This text works best in combination with access to and use of the archive and work of Kurenniemi, either in the museum, cinema or online through projects such as Constant's active archive.