



## EWVA European Women's Video Art Interview with Marikki Hakola

Interview by Dr Laura Leuzzi, June-October 2016

LL: When did you first start using video and what equipment did you use in your first video artworks?

MH: I started to use video in 1982. It was VHS equipment.

LL: Why was video, as a medium, particularly attractive to you at the time?

MH: I worked in a performance group called Turppi Group. Video was a perfect way to document the time and space processes of our performances.

LL: Before using video, did you use either photography or film?

MH: Turppi Group used photography before starting to use video.

LL: *Earth Contacts* (1982) is considered the first video artwork made in Finland. To your knowledge why was video not available in Finland in the 1970s?

M.H: *Earth Contacts* was the first piece of performance art video in Finland. It's difficult to know why the use of video as an artistic tool began so late in Finland. I guess it has to do with lack of education. Art and culture discourse was also very introverted in the 1970s.

LL: In 1982/83, you were part of the Turppi Group. Can you tell us about this experience and how you collaborated to make videos?

MH: We started to use videos just by a lucky coincidence. The group – whose members were still art students – took part in the Scandinavian land art symposium. The video equipment was hired for Norwegian artist Terje Munthe, but he had to leave the symposium just a few days before the event ended, so we asked if we could use the equipment. That's how it started.

LL: The video *The Time is Right for* in 1984 was your graduation artwork at the Academy School of Fine Arts in Helsinki. You mention on your website that it was the first time a video was accepted as a graduation thesis at the Academy. Did you find resistance to this art form in academia at the time? How was this video received?

MH: I did not receive any feedback from teachers, or any of the staff members of the Academy. Nothing. However, I had really great discussions with audience members and other students. Many asked "Is this Art?" and, "Why are you doing this?". I remember that it was great to have these discussions, very instructive and useful. At that time, I already knew that this was the path I would follow also in the future.

LL: *The Time is Right for* is a scratch video. How did you become interested in scratch video? Did you use it in other videos?

MH: The interest in using the scratch method in the first place probably came from music video

culture. I have used scratch several times after that, because I was interested in criticising television culture. I used television broadcasts as sources of raw materials and changed the meaning of the pictures by using a scratch montage. My mission was “to reveal the true nature and message” of the pictures by setting pictures in a new, different context.

LL: When and why did you start incorporating video in your installations and to create video sculptures? How do you preserve your videos and documentation from the original display?

MH: My first independent video work after the breakup of the Turppi Group, *The Time is Right for* (spring 1984), was originally an installation. I was interested in combining space aspects together with the moving picture. The next step was the idea of using a compilation of several monitors as a kind of visual orchestra, where monitors formed a visual and aural unity. The video installation *PRE* for 10 monitors, 6 video tapes and a separate audio soundtrack, premiered in August 1984.

LL: In 1987, you made a very complex stage performance at the Old University House in Helsinki entitled *PIIPÄÄ*. How and why did you develop that performance?

MH: Before I began studying visual arts at the Academy School of Fine Arts, I had studied music and was very interested in contemporary music. I also became acquainted with many dancers, composers and musicians working and living in Helsinki. I was interested in how performance allows you to combine different art forms to create new interdisciplinary avant-garde on stage. Seeing the Robert Wilson & Philip Glass piece *Einstein on the Beach* in New York during winter of 1984-85 was a great source of inspiration for this piece. Of course, we did not have any funding, so production was an extremely difficult process. But upon looking back, this work was an important culmination for many of the team members. *PIIPÄÄ* was about a dystopic future information society and what that does to the human psyche.

LL: Recently, you made *PIIPÄÄ Remix*, which contains three videos from the original *PIIPÄÄ* performance. Can you tell us more about the relationship between the videos and the performance, and how you worked with these materials in *PIIPÄÄ Remix*?

MH: Immediately after the *PIIPÄÄ* performances, from 1988 to 1990 I edited three short video pieces using the video materials and documentation of the performance. Due to the very limited resources at the time, a lot of materials were left out of these first edits. I had the opportunity to revisit these materials in 2010 because the Museum of Modern Art EMMA wanted to make an exhibition on *PIIPÄÄ*. This was the chance to use raw video materials that had not yet been used in the first edited videos. This new remastered version used the same dramaturgical layout as the performance did in the first place.

LL: In examining female artists' video artworks from the 1970s and 1980s, a number of common themes and approaches emerge. These include environmental issues. Were you involved in any environmentalist or ecofeminist groups? Did you personally know other female and feminist artists who were addressing similar issues in their video practice at the time in Europe? Did you know or were you familiar with their video artworks?

MH: In the late 1970s, I was part of an activist movement trying to protect the rivers by the Baltic Sea on the west coast of Finland from destruction. Since then, I have been an active member of several environmental undertakings, but I cannot remember any implication or reference to ecofeminist groups in Finland at that time. In the early 1980s, I made inter-rail trips practically

every six months in central and southern Europe. At that time, I was really interested in, for example, the works of Barbara Petzold, Ulrike Rosenbach and Dara Birnbaum, but I did not know them personally.

LL: What feedback did you receive about your videos in Finland and internationally in the 1980s? How did critics and curators receive your video artworks at the time?

MH: I was showing my works quite a lot both in Finland and abroad in the late 80's. I was of course very happy that my work piqued interest and for the many great possibilities to screen and exhibit them. Most of the critics usually wrote about the new phenomenon of video art on a general level. The *PIIPÄÄ* tapes were also shown internationally at dozens of festivals around the world. I'm one of the founding members of two new artists' associations in Finland, Muu (founded 1987) and AV-arkki (founded 1989). I served as Chairman of the Board at Muu during its first year and at AV-arkki for the first four years. We started to distribute video art, because nobody else was doing it in Finland. Nowadays, AV-arkki continues to do great work and distributes Finnish video and media arts domestically and internationally.

LL: In Finland during the 1980s, did you personally know fellow female artists working with video? To your knowledge, were there any feminist collectives or groups of female artists producing or promoting video in Finland at the time? How did you show, distribute and promote your videos in the 1980s? Did you collaborate with video centres or specific curators at the time?

MH: Finland was – and still is – a very small country. We all knew each other. Practically everyone, who was working in video art, performance, new photography and so on quickly became members of two associations; Muu and AV-arkki.

I also had (and still have) my works distributed via LUX in London, which was an important factor in getting to know people abroad. The World Wide Video Festival in Den Haag was also important.

I spent quite a lot of time in Berlin and Stockholm in the early 1980s, which also gave me exposure and an important window to see what was going on internationally.

LL: Did you know of or did you participate in any other Finnish or European festival or event specifically dedicated to women's film and video?

MH: No. I don't remember having any information especially regarding women's festivals.

LL: Did you collaborate with TV broadcasters in Finland in the 1980s?

MH: No. Finnish Broadcast Company YLE did not begin collaborating with video artists until 1993. But my videos were shown on the BBC, Channel 4, Dutch television, Spanish television...

LL: The Guerrilla Girls pointed out the marginalisation of female artists' work in 1989: 'Do women have to be naked to get into the Met. Museum? Less than 5% of the artists in the Modern Art Sections are women, but 85% of the nudes are female'. Can you recall if and how this inequality of treatment affected your career when you started using video?

MH: I have been selling some of my single channel video works and video installations to art museums in Finland, and for example the Modern Art Museum Centre Pompidou in the 1990s. I don't think my career suffered from being a woman.

LL: Due to the obsolescence of the early video formats (open reels, U-matic), many video artworks from the 1960s, 1970s and 1980s are lost today. How and when did you recover your tapes? Have you lost any of your videos since that period? Do you still preserve the original masters and where are they kept today?

MH: I started to recover my early works already in the 90s. We transferred works from VHS and U-matic to BetaSP; and during the past few years I've put a lot of energy into digital restoration. Many of my early works have now been digitally remastered with digital colour correction and sound mixing.

Some of my works no longer exist, especially some of the installation and performance documentation which has unfortunately disappeared.

LL: When did you do your last video work?

MH: I am continually working as a media artist, film director and producer – and I will continue as long as I can.



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