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Freezing Life: The Erkki Kurenniemi Archive

How can we freeze life for future purposes? And how can life be reanimated after death? These are some of the questions the Finnish artist engineer Erkki Kurenniemi tried to solve through the last 40 years of his active life as a scientist, artist and computer engineer. “Man is a machine. A machine produced by evolution. I find it impossible to think that for mere nostalgic reasons, such a slime-based system would be preserved,” Kurenniemi writes in his manifesto for a future archive, which should create the foundation for human life outside earth and “after Nature.” In the years 1960 – 2005 Kurenniemi attempted to archive his own life through connecting it to a plethora of media devices. He used non-biological external storage media to preserve his own life, and he dreamed of the day when these media would become ubiquitous and so flexible as to replace biological life altogether. He wanted to extrapolate a “systematic model for a template of all human life.” He relied on future quantum computers to make sense of it all. By 2048, he believed that technology will be ready for the advent of this new artificial form of intelligence. Recently, a selection of the Kurenniemi files has been reanimated through the efforts of the Active Archive initiative in Brussels. I will probe Kurenniemi’s works and data files to investigate what kind of “life material” he wanted to archive and how “life” and “living” was defined in this context, and how the Active Archive seeks to instantiate these ideas.