

Are friends **Electro Hypersensitive** ?

EHS (electro hypersensitivity) affects a small percentage of people. They develop an aversion towards electric and electromagnetic fields emitted by PCs, TV screens and other essential 21st century devices. Finnish DP Jussi Eerola found his directorial debut on a documentary about the condition, not only a challenge on choice of equipment to use, but also how to portray these isolated people without making them look crazy.

Before Jussi Eerola even lifted a camera to film his documentary *Refugees of Technocracy*, he had a specific image in mind. It was to be a long shot of one of his central characters in different environments: walking at night in the centre of a deserted Helsinki and another in the wilds of Lapland. According to Eerola "... those particular images were the key to getting the right look for the film. I used a 12mm lens which turned out to be my normal lens for the whole film."

Isolation

The themes of emotional isolation, alienation, loneliness, were even more interesting to Eerola than the relationship between humans and technology; "To me the film is more about people trying to find a place where they can feel safe, because they don't feel secure in their daily lives." Translating that into images led him down a different path than he first imagined. "I had this strong image with a grainy, harsh look in mind before I had met these people. When I got to know them I found myself choosing a very different approach. I did not want to either over-stylize or shroud them in mystery," he explains. "Instead I choose to look at them in a more objective and natural way."

Whatever his visual look was going to be, Eerola needed to think carefully about how he was going to capture them. Unpack his usual Sony XD-CAM and Eerola's EHS subjects would have bolted for the door. "I first thought that I would film almost everything with a spring-wound Bolex which didn't need

electricity," recalls Eerola. "That would have meant not using sync sound because of the camera noise." Luckily most of the people he ended up filming were not as sensitive at the time of the shoot as they had been when they first became hypersensitive and the Bolex only came out for a few sequences. "The Aaton XTR and LTR were our main cameras. The fact that we didn't use any electronics, such as monitors, meant that we could get close to our EHS subjects." Lighting too was a problem. Eerola obviously couldn't use any equipment other than reflectors and negative blacks, but that turned out to be an advantage as it helped get the natural look he wanted.

Choosing stock for interiors was also critical to Eerola's hypersensitive filming, where his subjects couldn't tolerate electric lights. Early in the filming he used KODAK VISION2 500T 7218. "I did push 7218 one stop in some scenes with very good results. I even test-pushed it two stops and the results were a bit milky and soft, but with still no grain," he recalls. Later he used KODAK VISION3 500T 7219, with startling results. "I was amazed to see how much into the highlights that film could see! I even mistakenly underexposed it once, thinking that otherwise the exterior landscape behind my interior character would be washed out."

Yet as DP-turned-director it is the people that made more impact on Eerola than his stock's capabilities. In one of his favourite scenes an EHS character uses an old wired telephone to call a docking ship from his harbour-side apartment. He asks the captain to switch off the ship's radar when staying in harbour. He tells him that he can feel the radar and explains about his EHS. "I like that scene because that particular character is not afraid of authority and is openly showing his anger - something that Finns find hard to do," explains Eerola. "That man makes a huge impact on my film. I'm very thankful to him and all the other brave and wonderful people I got to know. That is what I will remember most about this film."



1 DP Jussi Eerola and soundman Mika Niinimaa in Lapland