

1. Today, the museum goes by the Swedish National Museum of Science and Technology.

2. Knut Wiggen, program statement, 1966.

3. Dagens Nyheter, 29/4, 1966, translation found in Fylkingen Archives.

4. Runar Mangs, Ett perfekt misslyckande, Dagens Nyheter 23/9 or 24/9, 1966.

Visioner av Nuet was an international festival that took place from September 19–25, 1966, at Tekniska Museet,¹ Teknorama in Stockholm. The festival was organized along various themes: Technology (teknik), Values (värderingar), Image (bild), Music (musik), Language (språk) and Environment Design (miljöskapande), and had a full schedule that began at 10 a.m. and ended with concerts at 8 p.m.

According to the program, the overall purpose of the festival was to, ‘sharpen our awareness of and use of all our senses and our imagination with the help of the latest technology and to share in the work of pinning down the reasons as to why we do not utilize these enormous technical resources in a more satisfactory way.’²

SANNE KROGH GROTH

The Stockholm Festival, 1966

This meant discussing the relationship between the rapidly advancing technological developments that characterized the postwar period and how human beings should relate to and engage with new technology. Or, as expressed in an open letter published in Swedish daily newspaper Dagens Nyheter signed by prominent researchers and businessmen in Stockholm:

In Sweden over 1,400 million kronor is being invested in scientific research and technological development. The result of these vast investments — which are increasing all the time — will influence and alter our external environment. This in turn will bring about a change in the way we see the world around us, in our perception of reality. If we are to keep external events under control, it is vital that we should be aware of such changes in reality. The investments being made to alter our external environment should therefore be followed up by investments which will make it possible to express this change in our perception of reality. One of the fields that could well become the object of investments to this end is that of the arts, the field which is specifically concerned with needs, emotions, and evaluation. The aim of our symposium is to continue discussing the theoretical problems and artistic results of work in this field, to show what multichannel electronic sound reproduction and modern computer techniques can do as tools for the artist in his endeavours to express our changing reality.³

The purpose of the festival was to invite both artists and scientists to discuss these issues. But, according to the program, what actually happened was that a great majority of the participants ended up being theoreticians giving lectures or participating in panel discussions, presenting their points of view on the raised issues.

Among the theoreticians were international guests such as American scientist John R. Pierce from Bell Laboratories, Greek-French philosopher Kostas Axelos, Hungarian-born French architect Yona Friedman, visual artist Anthony Hill and the architect and composer Iannis Xenakis. From Sweden were pianist and musicologist Ingmar Bengtsson, composer Karl-Birger Blomdahl, Professor Gunnar Fant from the Speech Transmission Laboratory at KTH Royal Institute of Technology and doctor of philosophy and psychoanalyst Carl Lesche, who was also closely involved in the development of some of the fundamental ideas of the seminar.

A broad and heavy program was presented, ranging from architecture and philosophy to musicology and engineering. The fundamental idea was to open a spirited dialogue between humanity and exact science — namely, to address the relationship between art and technology — and how results from such a dialogue could best lead into the future.

Reviews in the daily newspapers were mixed. A few mention a major technical problem: A simultaneous translation into Swedish took much longer than the ordinary tempo of speech, and tripled the program’s duration. One can only imagine what that must have been like. A few journalists found the subjects interesting, but some considered the festival a disaster, one evening especially. The speeches were apparently boring and the art presented — Alvin Lucier’s work, *Music for Solo Performer* — was characterized more as a technical demonstration than a piece of art. One reviewer noted, ‘Wednesday evening in Fylkingen’s *Visioner av Nuet* was such a perfectly carried out failure that it eventually took on a character of tragic brilliance.’⁴

Only a few artists participated in the festival, and even fewer got to present artistic work. The works were nearly all characterized by the use of advanced technologies, which were pushed as far as possible to their technical limits.

Among the artistic works, a significant one was an installation by Nam June Paik consisting of televisions showing compositions based on the principle that, ‘scanning pattern, the path of the electron beam, is altered, regardless of whether any video-signal is fed in or not.’

Another is the above-mentioned Alvin Lucier live performance of *Music for Solo Performer* (1965), performed by the artist himself. The sounds of the piece were controlled by alpha rhythms in the performer’s optic nerves. Electrodes were placed on the back of Lucier’s head, so that Lucier by opening and closing his eyes was able to control and perform the composition. From the loudspeakers sounded prerecorded modified brain waves, which corresponded to the thematic content of the piece. Some of the loudspeakers were also used in order to physically resonate percussion instruments placed on stage, so that acoustic sounds would accompany pre-recorded material from the loudspeakers.

Karl-Birger Blomdahl’s electronic piece *Altisonans*, and Ralph Lundsten’s work *EMS 1* are also worthy of mention. Blomdahl’s piece was a ‘ljud-bild’

composition (tape-performance accompanied by film). The idea behind the piece was that certain satellites sounded like the call of the Redwing bird. 'There is, therefore, a natural melodious bird work down here on earth and an artificial one several hundred miles or more out in space,' Blomdahl writes in the program statement (1966). With the use of recorded birdsong, sounds from satellites and from magnetic storms occurring from the sun (both registered at an observatory in Kiruna, in the north of Sweden), the two worlds are contrasted, combined and brought into dialogue within the composition. The visual material is also based on registers from Kiruna, modified in a television studio.

While Lucier's electrode performance was met with criticism, the Swedish pieces were generally well-received. Each of these artists would go on to gain international acknowledgement for their work with new media, so even though the artistic program wasn't as impressive as first planned — a point to which I will return later — important artists were still presented.

Norwegian composer Knut Wiggen (b. 1929) initiated the festival. At the time, Wiggen was both the chairman of experimental music society Fylkingen and the director of the electronic music studio EMS, Centre for Swedish Electroacoustic Music and Sound Art, which was established in 1964 as a division of Radio Sweden.

Throughout the 1950s and 60s, Wiggen was by all accounts the most significant spokesperson for electronic music in Sweden, a forerunning idea generator and enthusiastic entrepreneur within the development of electronic music. The archives of both EMS and Fylkingen contain numerous examples of his forward-looking and strategic ideas, along with vast correspondence that testifies to his close ties with an international network of experimental music pioneers like John Cage and Pierre Schaeffer. With encouragement from Wiggen's mentor, the Swedish composer Karl-Birger Blomdahl, and help from colleagues like Lars-Gunnar Bodin and Sten Hanson, Wiggen transformed Stockholm into an international hub of electronic music. It is also no secret that Wiggen was a very controversial person, who in his eagerness to realize his ideas, was not afraid to argue until he got his way. During the late 1960s and early 70s, this resulted in continuous debates among the Swedish cultural milieu, which eventually led to Wiggen's replacement as chairman of Fylkingen in 1969 and dismissal from EMS in the mid-70s.

But, at the time of *Visioner av Nuet*, it appears that the entire board of Fylkingen was in agreement about the significance and planning of the festival.⁵

Visioner av Nuet was in itself a manifest event, with content that spoke for itself, but also tapped into larger artistic and ideological developments taking place among Swedish composers of experimental music. The developments had the overarching goal of engaging with the latest technologies in order to create the right music for the future. Parallel with the planning of the festival, one of the world's first hybrid studios (a digitally-controlled analogue studio) was developed at EMS. The festival not only served as a forum for investigating and discussing relevant questions, but undoubtedly also served as political legitimation, a way of showing politicians how important these issues were both to Swedes and to an international audience. The strategy

worked, and by the end of the 1960s the EMS studios were upgraded with a very large computer paid for by the state.

Being both the chairman of Fylkingen and the executive director of EMS, it was necessary for Wiggen to hold a strong position in order to make his ideologies realizable. Changes were therefore also to be found in the core of Fylkingen's work, which originally was a concert union playing chamber music. During the 1950s, Fylkingen gradually changed its repertoire to more modern pieces, later shifting its focus entirely to contemporary performance.⁶

In the beginning of the 1960s, Fylkingen's focus shifted from merely presenting contemporary music to a more active attempt to participate in and influence various areas of musical life. In order to activate members, working groups were established. The theory group held a prominent position, since their topic of focus, art and technology, was the core of Fylkingen's aims and activities.

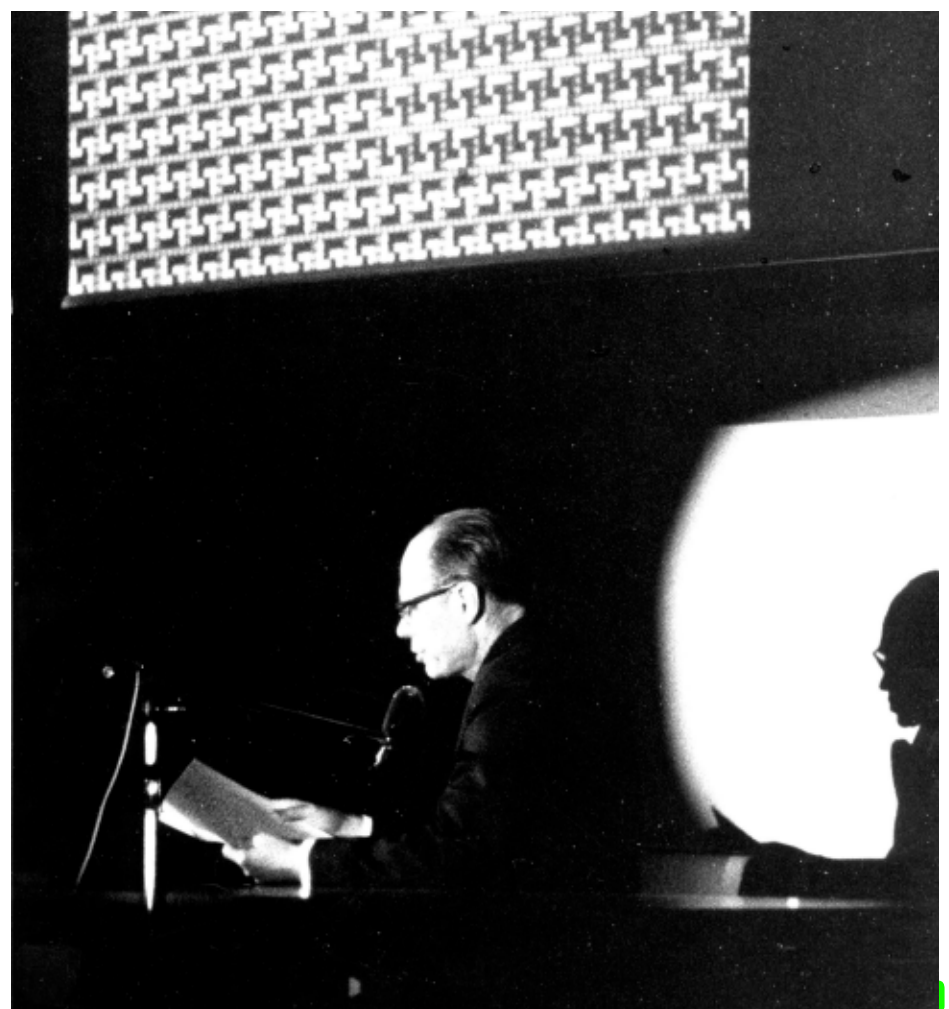
The group's members argued that this focus should be maintained. Along with Wiggen, the psychoanalyst Carl Lesche stepped forward in this debate. With his professional insight into psychotherapy and epistemology, Lesche often published articles and appeared in public debates. He also played a central role in Fylkingen's internal discussions, and was on the board of the electro acoustic music studio EMS.

Lesche has explained the theory group's work in these terms: 'What the theory group could do is to see what kind of worldview and values lie behind the work, regardless of whether the artist has explicitly expressed them or not. [...] I imagine that the situation might arise of an artist putting his proposal to his group, but having difficulties justifying the proposal. Then he could call on the theory group to help him formulate justifications and values. Similarly, the theory group could analyse the values behind the intuitively creative artist's work.'⁷

5. This is explicitly written in the statement 'Fylkingen — (i dag for sista gången)' in Swedish daily newspaper *Aftonbladet*, in which the program of the festival was discussed.

6. During the spring of 1966 it was even suggested that no instrumental music — only electronic music — should be performed at Fylkingen from then on, a proposition that Fylkingen's members promptly rejected. (Jan W. Morthenson: Memorandum angående framföranden av instrumentalmusik inom Fylkingen, 15/4/66 and Wiggen: PM Idébakgrund till konstnärlig manifestation 28/2 1966)

A lecture by John R. Pierce, director of Bell Laboratories Research-Communications Sciences division, at *Visioner av Nuet*, 1966.



7. 'Referat av Fylkingens Målsättningsdebatt', Bilaga nr. 5, Fylkingens protokoll 15/3 1967, p. 2–3 [Fylkingens arkiv: F7]. Idébakgrund til konstnärlig manifestation 28/2/ 1966).

8. Emma Eldelin: De två kulturerna' flyttar hemifrån, Linköping 2006, p. 10.

9. Letter from John Cage to Fylkingen, 29/8 1966 and 3/10 1966.

10. Letter from Fylkingen to John Cage 22/12 1966.

Ten years previously, the group had defined itself in terms of a desire to analyse musical material and enter into dialogue with artists; now it had changed character and was focussed instead on analysing artists' perception of the world and their work in general. The theory group presented their work as a kind of systematised production of composers' strategies of legitimation; but according to the group, this work was not biased, but completely neutral.

Lesche's idea of a neutral position, combined with an insistence on the focus on art, technology and knowledge, is also found in the contemporary Swedish reception to the English writer, social debater, and former scientist C.P. Snow's (1905–1980) polemical essay *The Two Cultures*, from 1959. The essay was translated into Swedish in 1961, *De två kulturerna*, and was a central point of reference for many debaters of the day.

C.P. Snow's *The Two Cultures* is a 50-page essay building on his experiences with British academic society, which he regarded as being clearly divided into two groups, scientists and literary intellectuals:

Literary intellectuals in particular were a societal hindrance, since they had such great influence on public debate, but totally ignored the importance of technological and scientific progress. The conflict between the two groups could even become an obstacle for levelling out the wealth of the world. Snow was convinced that biological and technological progress had to be spread to developing nations.⁸

Snow's thoughts were met with enthusiasm in the contemporary Swedish debate, but also got their own reception. One example is that the Swedish translation of Snow's dichotomy, 'literary intellectual' was translated more broadly as 'humanist'.

Another example is that the Third World never came to be developed. Instead, Snow's political message was left stranded in the shadow of the concept that dominated 'the two cultures' in Sweden at the time — namely, education, scientific knowledge, and culture. Another difference was that, in Snow's English point of reference, literary intellectuals shadowed the natural sciences, while the relationship was virtually opposite in the Swedish electronic music environment. Here, the natural sciences overshadowed aesthetic discussions.

As we can read from Wiggen's statement of intentions for *Visjoner av Nuet* introduced in the beginning of this text, the original idea was to engage with practical work and artists to a much greater extent than what actually happened at the festival. The festival was originally planned as a co-production with the Swedish, New York-based electrical engineer Billy Klüver, who, together with John Cage and Robert Rauschenberg, was supposed to present major performances in both Stockholm and New York. In addition to Cage and Rauschenberg, the artists who were scheduled to visit were all prominent names from the experimental scene in New York, including Lucinda Childs, Öyvind Fahlström, Alex Hay, Debbie Hay, Claes Oldenburg, Steve Paxton, David Tudor and Robert Whitman.

Unfortunately, disagreements about economical and technological solutions led to a cancellation of the cooperation one month before the event was to take place. Archival documents and debates in

public newspapers witness the situation growing tense. Fahlström and Klüver stood on one side, while Wiggen and the board of Fylkingen were on the other. They raised their conflict in public, trying to make clear that cancelling was the other part's fault. Personal letters from John Cage in Fylkingen's archive urge Wiggen to let go of the conflict⁹ but Wiggen and the board members of Fylkingen were firm in answering him: 'You can help us by telling them that Fylkingen acted correctly and that you apologize for trying to give the public an impression of the contrary.'¹⁰

Instead the event *9 Evenings: Theatre & Engineering* took place in New York on October 13–23, 1966, and *Visjoner av Nuet* happened separately in Stockholm. Both events — and especially *9 Evenings* — are now historically regarded as canonical, symbolising progressive thoughts on art and technology at the time.

Telling the story of *Visjoner av Nuet* is telling a story of what happened — and telling a story of what could have happened. From the position of the present looking back at the past, it does not matter whether the festival succeeded or not. What are of interest today are the questions that were raised at the time, why they were raised, and how they unfolded artistically and theoretically.

Many of these questions are still of interest to a present reality, where new digital developments constantly affect our daily lives and routines. From my point of view, engagement with these new media and technologies demands even more critical awareness than the partly-analogue, partly-digital solutions did back then. The otherness of technology has disappeared as it's become more and more integrated and invisible in our everyday life. Just as artists were invited to join the discussions, artistic tendencies of the present might also help us to engage critically with our surrounding technology: Close investigations of media separated from a cultural context could be one way of questioning the very function of media (found within the field of media archaeology). DIY and hacking tendencies could be another.

Common to these tendencies are that they are approaching technology from a critical point of view in order to offer the audience alternative ways of experiencing and using well-known media. Hereby an utopian alternative to life is presented: the establishment of a common dream that might help us to cope with issues that are either not understandable or bearable within the present.

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