



Back to the Future? Two Musical Pasts and Their Futures

ACADEMIC
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The past supplies us with a vast amount of futures: past visions and horror scenarios about anything from nuclear wars or welfare states to space invasions. In our age they are given a second life as alternatives to the present – and its dominant futures. In these futures we sketch our dreams, wishes and utopias but also nightmares, dystopias and fears.¹ Today, we are constantly surrounded by more or less explicit projects of rediscoveries and enactments of past futures – longing gazes to past utopias and visions that we might call «futurist nostalgias». These re-uses of past futures contain luring mirrorings and sign plays.

In this article I wish to ponder how past futures are put together and brought into use in the present. That I choose to use music as the centrepiece for this discussion is definitely not an accident. As many have noted, music reveals an extraordinary capacity to embody or reverberate with place (e.g. Feld 1996, Stokes et al. 1994). The same can be said for its capacity to reach out across time, to move listeners and performers into other times, and be a key resource in popular forms of «time travel», to futures, nearer self-experienced pasts or more distant ones. Sometimes, whole genres have acquired a role of «future music», such as progressive rock of the 1970s or synthpop of the 1980s (cf. e.g. Martin 1998). At other times, an entire field of popular culture has – at least to some – seemed innovative, promising an exciting future (cf. Reynolds 2011, 428).

The aim of this article is to discuss how we might understand and conceptualize nostalgia for past futures, focusing on two different examples from the late 1990s. First I will sketch a 1950s and cold war nostalgia, where the electrophonic instrument *theremin* played a central part. I will focus this first discussion on one key interviewee from Sweden, both in his role as an important actor in local networks and as a member of transnational networks involving other parts of Europe, the US and Japan. Then I will go on to portray another futurist nostalgia, namely the welfare state utopias that were evoked in varying musical pensioners' events in Sweden in the 1990s. I will discuss how these two scenes for nostalgia for past futures can be understood with the aid of Jean Baudrillard's analysis of non-functional value systems. I will analyse the organization of historical remnants into larger, working *retrologies*² – orderings of bits and pieces from the past – as a complex combination of anachronism and diachronism. The empirical material that forms the basis for my discussion dates back to the latter half of the 1990s, and includes archive material, interviews, internet research, field notes and

recordings.³ The material on the uses of the theremin dates back to research I conducted in the spring of 1998 for the exhibition «Seklets spegel» (*Mirror of the century*) that portrayed a century through its material objects, in which my task was to approach the question from a musical angle.⁴ The material on pensioners' events is the result of fieldwork conducted intermittently from 1995 to 2000 for a doctoral dissertation on pensionerhood and music (Hyltén-Cavallius 2005, Hyltén-Cavallius 2012).

Two Retrologies: Anachronic and Diachronic

The continuously growing field of memory studies could be described in two strands: On the one hand studies, of how more recent national, ethnic or international traumas are displayed and contested in monuments, heritage sites and what Paul Connerton phrased as «inscribed memory» (cf. Olick & Robbins 1996, Zerubavel 1996, Connerton 1989). On the other hand, studies of how often more distant pasts are creatively imagined and re-enacted (Gustafsson 2002, Handler & Gable 1997). The starting point of my discussion here is something of a mixture of the two: ways of handling a more recent past in practices in the present that make use of fragments of a more recent past. Fragments that in the described cases point as much to the future as to the past.

To understand the interplay between present, past and future in this work, I employ the term *retrologies* (cf. Hyltén-Cavallius 2010). For many reasons I think neologisms ought to be avoided as far as possible in scientific research, but in the case of retrology, I believe the term could replace some more or less apt metaphors that have come to guide thoughts on popular historiographies. Discussions about constructions of the past have tended to use metaphors such as «narrative», «enactment» and «history use» – thereby pointing to a specific kind of structure, such as chronology or causality – and suggesting the past as a script, as something more or less fixated and ready to use (e.g. Aronsson 2004, Gustafsson 2002). Retrology, being a neologism, escapes these associations, and points to the organization of remnants in the present rather than the remnants themselves. It can also be applied to any constellations of fragments from the past – be it sounds, clothing, re-enactments, corporeal practices, or narratives for that matter – that might not always be so easy to conceive of in the other terms mentioned.⁵ As previously stated, the notion of retrology supposes some kind of ordering or organizing. Rather like the syntagmatic chains in Vladimir Propp's analysis of narrative, elements in retrologies are not random but seem to follow certain patterns where specific elements are possible to attach to specific others (Propp 1959). For example, in sonic retrologies certain past sound qualities, melodic fragments or vocal styles can be attached to certain others. In order to explore such organizing principles I have been inspired by the French philosopher Jean Baudrillard.

In a discussion of the value systems of objects, Baudrillard points out three different temporal dimensions (Baudrillard 1990, 35ff). The *synchronic* dimension has to do with ambient or atmospheric value, the object's relation to other contemporary objects, and the *diachronic* dimension with symbolic value and the relation between objects over time (Baudrillard 1990, 35, Baudrillard 2005, 85).⁶ As I understand this, these two dimensions compete in any given object depending on context - at first glance, the antique painting in the museum seems to have a higher diachronic value compared to the dish brusher in my kitchen, that has a higher synchronic value. As Baudrillard phrases this, the synchronic system tends to empty objects of meaning while the diachronic system empties them of function. However, it seems objects will rarely be strictly functional or non-functional: the dish brusher might also have some symbolic diachronic value - for example as a locus of memories (a value that will expand for example if placed in a museum exhibition on contemporary everyday life), and the painting might under certain circumstances also have a functional value. To these two dimensions Baudrillard adds the anachronic dimension: here the object gains its value from its temporal contrast to other objects. The more «out of time», as it were, the higher its value.

In the following I will approach the question whether it is possible to understand retrologies in the two futurist nostalgias through the two dimensions that deal with relations over time - the diachronic and the anachronic. By diachronic retrology I will refer to an order that places phenomena in a before and after, older and younger, cause and effect. A diachronic retrology creates connections and chains, and places the retrologist him/herself in the chain. The diachronic retrology also establishes diachronic links: it shows how it is by showing how it was. It focuses on connections and coherence, and pays attention to affinities between events and phenomena. An anachronic retrology in contrast avoids pointing out larger connections and instead interests itself in accidental and random chains - since it is organised around contrast rather than continuity - where the retrologist appears in passing by, as a guest in the hallway. If diachronic retrology aims to explain or understand, the anachronic avoids logic. Now, I will turn to the first case, the theremin.

From the Harmony of the Spheres to the War of the Worlds

In October 1928 the new electro-acoustic instrument *theremin* - or *aeterophone* or *thereminvox* as it was alternately called - was presented at shows in Stockholm, Lund, Malmö and Copenhagen.⁷ It was actually the inventor of the instrument himself, the Russian engineer Leon Theremin (born Lev Termen), who originally travelled around and demonstrated the instrument in connection to performances accompanied by orchestra. Apparently the events had a character of show music - high romantic passion with a tremendous vibrato that made the more highbrow critics turn away. There wasn't very much art music composed for electronic instruments at all,

and the shows were of course also intended to display the technical possibilities of the instrument, apart from displaying a modern invention in general – of equal interest to anyone, beyond musical preferences. The shows contained music by Jaques Offenbach, Edward Grieg, Peter Tchaikovsky, Giuseppe Verdi and Wilhelm Stenhammar. Newspaper announcements told of «The Music of the Spheres», and many musical critics associated the sounds to heavenly bodies and space in general, but also to female voices. One critic admitted that the instrument produced a lovely sound, but that the two gentlemen Tcharikoff and Henkin demonstrating the instrument that evening played with such endless tremolo that it more reminded him of «music from Hawaiian lovesick cats» (Teater- och musiknytt in *Svenska Dagbladet* 1928). Carl Nordberger in *Svenska Dagbladet* (September 28th 1928) commented the monotony of the instrument, and said that it had to be played with constant vibrato in order to «be animated». On the other hand were voices that signalled a hope for future musical possibilities. Walter Meyer-Radon, conductor of the Malmö Symphony Orchestra, was quoted in *Sydsvenska Dagbladet* (October 6th 1928) as saying:

I've long heard about Theremin and his so called ether wave-music, that is I've followed what's been said about it in foreign press since the appearance of the phenomenon about a year ago, but I could never have imagined that the innovation, already at its present early stage could represent such positive values as it does. I'm simply «sprachlos» [German: speechless], he says, and does an enthusiastic gesture towards the spheric spaces.

Dagens musikevenemang på Grand.

3. 10. 1928



PROFESSOR LEO THEREMIN I FULL AKTION.

Den märkliga Thereminska uppfinningen, som i afton demonstreras i Grand Hotells stora sal, blir säkerligen ett evenemang av unik art.

I går skedde installerandet under ledning av en tysk ingenjör, anställd i den elektriska firma i Berlin, som tillverkat prof. Theremins instrument, och han visade och konstaterade, att det är en både stor och kostsam »apparat», som måste sättas i gång, när professor Theremins uppfinning skall demonstreras. Det är också endast i de stora världsstäderna, som uppträdande kan ske, men av en tillfällighet — efter konserter inför fulltalig, entusiastisk publik i Köpenhamn och Stockholm — har Theremin-trion förmåtts att på genomre-

san till kontinenten göra ett uppehåll i Skåne för att konserter i Lund och Malmö.

Programmet, som blir synnerligen rikhaltigt, upptager sådana kompositörer som Järnefelt, Offenbach, Grieg, Tschalkowsky, Verdi och Stenhammar.

Det gives tillfälle för publiken att själv få pröva instrumentet efter det ordinarie konsertprogrammets slut liksom fallet var i Stockholm, där ett flertal av artisterna vid operan passade på tillfället.

Biljetterna till konserten, vilka under de gångna dagarna rönt livlig efterfrågan, säljas hela onsdagen i A.-B. Ph. Lindstedts universitetsbokhandel. Eventuellt överblivna kunna erhållas vid ingången.

One might say that it was the technical innovation that impressed the most, its musical value far less. Right from the start, the theremin was seen as an instrument of the future. Comments in the press speculated about its potential role for the grandchildren's coming generation (*Sydsvenska Dagbladet* October 5th 1928). Already at this point, some critics were afraid that the instrument in the future might make orchestras and acoustic instruments useless, foreshadowing discussions that would half a century later surround the synthesizer (Théberge 1997), perhaps also due to the special way of playing the instrument, which implies no physical contact with the instrument.

During the latter part of the 1920s and the major part of the 30s Leon Theremin and the Russian born thereminist Clara Rockmore earned their living by conducting tours with the instrument in above all the United States. After returning to the Soviet Union, Theremin worked as a developer of electronic and notably espionage equipment, more or less forgotten as an inventor of musical instruments. From the 1950s and onwards the electronics used in the instrument became an important inspiration in Robert Moog's development of the synthesizer, and in the following decades up until the present day it has now and then been used in popular music (cf. Théberge 1997, 43-44).⁸ In the 1980s young enthusiasts looked up the aged Leon Theremin and performed interviews and did research on the instrument, and in 1994 a documentary was produced about his life and work.⁹ During the 1990s it seems the theremin attracted a growing number of performers and enthusiasts. An example of Clara Rockmore's playing can be seen and heard [here](#):

The story of the theremin could have ended as a somewhat obscure invention that slowly sinks into the depths of oblivion. As I said, not that much new music was written for the instrument in art music, and the repertoire was constituted largely by violin and song parts from the canon of romantic western art music. Apart from the almost clean sinus tone with few under- and overtones it was also hard to nuance and colour the tone, as noted by the critic quoted above a tremolo (periodic variation in pitch) or vibrato (periodic variation in volume) seems to have been dominant in the performances. But during the 1940s and 50s the instrument becomes a soundtrack to films that move in various human borderlands – most strikingly in science fiction and horror movies.¹⁰

On the small street *St Paulsgatan* in Stockholm you could during the last years of the 1990s find a small shop called «Subliminal sounds and stuff». The shop window exposed a wooden surfboard, records and tiki art, that is exotic art that evokes western dreams of the pacific that today stands out as «exotic kitsch» with patina. These items were displayed against a backdrop of a little bamboo palisade. Inside the store you would meet young men in Hawaii shirts, film posters from horror, science fiction or B movies in general of which a few also displayed pornographic content, books on erotic and

exotic art, loads of records, and more tiki art. This enormously wide range of products at first made me think that the only common denominator was that everything in the store had at some point in time been sorted out for various reasons. A kind of *dustbin aesthetic* if you will, that collects everything that is thrown away and deemed bad, ugly, of poor taste, obscene or immoral. «Everything we like and we think is fun», the (at the time of the interview) 35-year old storeowner summed up the range of things sold (interview Jan 20th 1998). By this time he had owned the shop for a few years, but had been engaged in the Stockholm underground music scene since the early 1980s. A former musician in the garage punk band the Stomachmouths, he had in the late 1980s started the record label Xotic Mind and by 1996 also Subliminal Sounds, on which he released for example Attilio Mineo's music for the 1962 Seattle World Exhibition (*Man in Space with Sounds*, 1997) and Swedish exotica band Bo Axelzon and his Exotic Sounds (*Bo Axelzon and his Exotic Sounds*, 1996). The wider interest in cold war pop culture, from space age dreams to exotic fantasies, united people from many parts of the world. The owner himself was a member of networks connecting other parts of Europe but also the US and Japan. In that respect, the storeowner exemplified attitudes and values common to not only other staff and music networks in Sweden, but also social - and during that time increasingly web-based - transnational networks of which he was a part.

It would be tempting to read this interest in exotica and space fantasies as some tongue-in-cheek recycling, but to the contrary their interest seemed profound and sincere. In the storeowner's words, his ambition was a kind of «archaeological work», a way to dig deep into popular culture's forgotten treasures. If we think of for example tiki, it consists of objects that later have been judged as stereotypic and cliché – not least in comparison to the supposedly more nuanced ways of interpreting the foreign in subsequent generations.¹¹ The sound of animals could constitute an acoustic backdrop, and one could also mix various exotic instruments, from sitar to congas. The owner also asked himself how much further a phenomenon such as world music had come in relation to pioneers of exotica such as Martin Denny or Les Baxter. The theremin would on occasion also come to use in exotica, but his interest in exotica had less to do with this than with the fantasy-evoking qualities of the genre.

Leon Theremin as a person became important in the owner's description of his interest – like the fact that Theremin had spent half his life developing bugging devices that the US supposedly had been terrified of. In this way Theremin and the instrument were associated to the Cold War and the east-west tension. He also mused on the fact that several of these often theremin-accompanied future scenarios of the 1950s and 60s took place in our time. The series *Lost in space* took place in a future 1998, another series, *Space 1999*, was supposed to take place only a year from when we performed our interview. In the 1950s and 60s he saw a faith in the future – and importantly,

a faith in progress – and as a further example he mentioned the series *The Jetsons* – a future variant of *the Flintstones* from the early 1960s where every family member owned his or her own spacecraft. Space and the future was thus closely intertwined in these scenarios. But, his argument ended, it was not in space but in cyber space – with computers and the Internet – that we actually ended up in. The future did not turn out as we had thought it would, but something else happened instead. Seen in this light, the past future not only is a past faith in or expectation on the coming, but also develops an alternative present, a parallel universe where things are different. A «today» as it could have become. This is a rhetorically strong figure with the capability to question basic social orders: if this had happened instead, everything would have been different. And we recognize the basic idea, from academic and literary counterfactual history to retro-futurism in the creative arts.

Another interviewee, a 29-year old musician (interview January 22nd 1998), claimed that even if he was not as deeply into the historical uses of the theremin as other enthusiasts, he found the black- and white photos of men in white laboratory coats playing the instrument both exotic and appealing. It's as if the instrument's place within a highly modern engineering context could be almost as exotic as the "pacific" sounds on Baxter's and Denny's exotica recordings.

How then might one understand this cold war-oriented futurist nostalgia? The Cold War also strikes me as a frightening era, with both the arms race between the super powers and the feeling at times that the cold war would transform into a nuclear conflict. Even if Sweden's neutrality during the cold war might evoke an exotic distance to the period and its tensions, the storeowner, some five years older than me, must definitely have experienced the same awareness and fear of the nuclear arms race. We both belonged to a generation who grew up with anti-nuclear arms demonstrations, a Baltic Sea with arms-carrying submarines, and a popular culture ranging from Hollywood's «War Games» to songs such as «Warhead» (UK Subs) and «Missiles» (The Sound), just to name a few. On top of this, it seems that the US-dominated popular culture that he referred to represents a time before the popular breakthrough of the civil rights movement, before the political changes and the counter-culture of the 1960s. But were the transnational networks in which this futurist nostalgia was shaped then a conservative cultural movement? Was it nostalgia that fuelled his interest in an American middle-class idyll where kids follow the adventures of a nuclear family in space suits on TV? Where the past future promises stable social patterns against a backdrop of technical revolution? Or is it possible to find signals of mode here – that point to irony, travesty, pastiche or paraphrase?

The dustbin aesthetic – encompassing a mixture of «failed» pop culture, avant-garde, obscure or at least rapidly forgotten mainstream – united not only people in different parts of the world but also bits and pieces of the popular culture of a near past. Neither completely ironic nor wholeheartedly

nostalgic, these constellations brought together a loosely knit retrology, characterized more by playfulness than by order or chronology. In her book *Retro: the culture of revival*, Elizabeth Guffey points out this dimension of playfulness and bricolage, in contrast to memory or context, as central to understanding retro culture (Guffey 2006). Seen in this way, this aesthetic might be understood as a principle underlying an anachronic retrology. The anachronic retrology combines elements in a seemingly erratic way, relying more on «fun» than on memory or chronology. This retrology builds on the obsolete, the obscure, even the obscene. Its elements are bound together through the effect of contrast, its retrologists relating to historical performances of an exotic Pacific with the same exoticising interest as to the musical space age engineering of Leon Theremin. In the transnational networks that coalesced in this store in Stockholm in the late 1990s, a nostalgia for nostalgia itself – a nostalgia for a 1950s longing for the natural tropics – met with a nostalgia for past futures, a nostalgia that reverts orders of past and present, using pieces of history to point to alternative presents. But if nostalgia is defined as a longing back in space (as it originally meant) or a longing back in time (as it seems to primarily refer to today), then this is first and foremost a longing back to future scenarios (cf. Boym 2001).

Folk Homeland Tones

During the 2nd half of the 1990s I followed music and music making in a number of contexts directed at pensioners in Sweden.¹² I visited service flats and followed music events at nursing homes, but also observed the musical worlds of pensioners' organizations, commercial concerts for pensioners, and pensioners' magazines. The by far most dominant tendency in this material is the retrospective perspective. «Our music» or «their music» depending on who is speaking, is in this material usually equivalent to «music from our/their common past».¹³ But what then ends up there, in the music of the pensioners' past? Some common traits are:

- that it is *the most widely spread music* that is given place. A musical «lowest common denominator», consisting of music that many people might have heard through significant music-carrying nation-wide media such as films and the national radio channel. As a summary of far-reaching music it is apt, but it likely follows the individual life-courses of very few.
- that it is music that hopefully won't offend anyone, music that seems *neutral* in some way. Thus music from important political or other movements (such as the temperance movement) are not given place, while music with religious motifs occupies a central position. From geriatric care to the national pensioner organizations, it seemed as if music for elderly people should not stir certain kinds of loyalties, while other were deemed proper.
- that the music should follow some harmonic patterns and keep within a certain sound frame: this sorts out music from a number of fields

– much of jazz, art music and not least folk music from both Sweden and other countries fall outside these boundaries, while Swedish evergreens from the 1950s fall within. A man engaged in doing radio shows at nursing homes could for example describe jazz music as «loud»

– a description that certainly might be proper for some jazz, but not for other (interview with Fritz Holm, April 6th 1995). «Difficult» was another term that could be applied to both jazz and art (or «classical») music, which could also be taken out on the basis of it being «lengthy».

In this way it is possible to piece-by-piece pull out what binds this music together and sets it apart from other music. But one can also point to the specific story that this music conveys about the past. Facing an audience with an age span of up to 40 years, that have lived through a century characterized by enormous social, political and medial transformations, the project to tell a common musical history becomes a highly complicated one. The history that is told is a specific selection of the past where some parts are foregrounded and others are forgotten. On one hand, music was selected on a temporal basis: the musical past that was represented was gathered mainly from the 1930s, 40s and 50s. But it was also a cheerful and from a 1990s horizon fairly dashing past. Compared to contemporary popular music in Sweden, which displayed emotional qualities from cheerfulness to anger or dejection, a major part of the music directed at pensioners came forth as conspicuously happy, dashing and optimistic. More rare in performances but common in music programs and pensioner media was the sentimental evergreens that a number of the prominent Swedish crooner singers from the 1930s and onwards had based their careers on (Strand 2003). The past was thus framed in a limited set of modes, from the cheerful and optimistic to the sentimental. Perhaps we can understand this with the aid of Swedish musicologist Lars Lilliestam (1996), who claims that popular music in our time has been given a broader emotional register than in the popular music from the early 1900s. But the selection also tells us something about the purposes that the past might serve.

In the music making of the pensioner events a specific representation of a past Sweden was formed, where a cheerful attitude and optimism was mixed with a longing back to a safer world with natural lyrical contents. So how could one here talk of futurist nostalgia? The song «Vår generation» («Our generation») can serve as an example. Originally performed by the nationally well-known artists Annalisa Eriksson and Sickan Carlsson in a show in Stockholm in 1933, it re-emerged as an introduction to a nationally broadcasted pensioner's event 60 years later.¹⁴ The lyrics portray a young generation ready to take its place in society, in opposition to older generations. The music with its swift tempo in a two-fourths meter and a melody with an ascending, cheerful introduction, and the high-pitch singing, combines well with this message to convey a spirit of optimism and expectations on the future. The two performers were still in their teens in the

original show, but had by 1993 become key figures in the Swedish pensioners' movement. To myself, as an observer, it seemed that it was precisely this combination of present nostalgia and a past future-oriented optimism that gave energy to their performance. A large part of the music played in these contexts was music that had once upon a time formed a sonic backdrop to the early Swedish welfare state. Music that on a textual level embodies the tension that Marshall Berman (1985) argues characterizes modernity – the faith in progress, development and the promises of technology, together with a longing back to the well-known, the complete relations, a place of origin and belonging. In the selected music from this era the faith in progress and evolution are combined, but it also conveys a world built on common experiences: a world where the fields, the lake surrounded by birch-trees and the red-painted cottage were assumed to be part of a common frame of reference. If the music of the pensioners' events on the one hand formed a common retrospective timespace, on the other hand it told of a time when everything was possible. Here a *longing back for a longing for the future* and a *longing back for a longing back* was put across. This complex combination of futurist nostalgia and nostalgia for nostalgia itself comes across as nearly reminiscent to the combination of pacific exoticism and space age nostalgia of the theremin context. Apart from the political struggle and the need to unite elderly people, this longing back for a longing for the future might also be understood as responding to a common condition for audience and artists alike: given their age span, the future was more abundant in their past. And, one might add, a time when also nostalgia was more abundant – whether for the exotic pacific of the 1950s or the pastoral imagery of the welfare state's popular music. This diachronic retrology that shaped the pensioners' events – in which context and memory play an important role, and where relations between objects over time are more important than their temporal otherness – still seems to build on the same combination of futurist nostalgia and nostalgia for nostalgia. In both retrologies, the past imagined future comes along with a past equally imagined past. The key difference seems to be the content, the relations and relatedness of contents, and the more general importance of context.

Past Futures: Continuity and Disruption

To begin with, it is safe to say that any futurist nostalgia bears moral undertones – it doesn't necessarily claim that it was better in the old days, but that the future was better in the old days. In the case of the theremin enthusiasts a more playful, technically more exciting and not least expanding future. In the case of the pensioners' events, a brighter and more cheerful future, seen from the angle of an earlier life phase. What happens when these two futurist nostalgias are treated as examples of anachronic and diachronic retrology?

Looking back at material gathered over fourteen years ago I was first struck by how the networks of the shop owner and the other theremin enthusiasts built on a similarity in affectively relating – and relating to – different aesthetic expressions. Playfulness could be seen as one component. A kind of playfulness in relation to past ways of imagining «unknown» in both time and space, that from today's horizon seems to unite cold war tiki art, exotica music, science fiction-movies and the theremin. And where one places oneself in a past when technological inventions could open up for almost any advances. In his book on the history of technology in music, Paul Théberge notes how it is first by the late 1970s that electronic instruments come to be regarded with suspicion (1997, 2). Before that, he claims, the use of new electronic instruments by musicians such as Jimi Hendrix or Stevie Wonder mainly caused excitement and a belief that these innovations would enter the mainstream instruments in different pop genres. The remembered era is an era before technoscepticism, and before technonostalgia. In this sense, it bears a resemblance to the pensioners' events – also they seemed to long for a past with a more promising future.

But in contrast the music of pensioners' events stands out as a context that requires common experiences – as something directed to those who had been there, something that refers to and establishes a common generational history. In this picture the anachronistic bricolage of the shop owner appears open for anyone, while the diachronic organization of a generational past appears more closed. The pensioners' events relied on collective memory in the strict sense of a collective actually remembering (cf. Halbwachs 1980), and were you not part of that collective – in this case what Mannheim would have called an «actual generation» – you could not take part in the remembering except as an onlooker (Mannheim 1952).

But my next thought is that there surely is an exclusivity – if not generational – among those who have got hooked by the theremin and the future of the 1950s – perhaps in a mode related to paraphrase rather than irony, where everyone agrees on the more problematic aspects of the past. And perhaps there is also an anachronic defiance in the pensioners' music – where it is exactly the music that could point to continuance and similarity across time that is sorted out. Perhaps also the theremin world is characterized by diachronic retrologies – where the eclectic picking of seemingly unrelated bits and pieces works side by side with chronologically ordered knowledge of music, films and media history. The past future that is put together is maybe always a combination of the anachronic and the diachronic – and always tells us something about the present that it is shaped by.¹⁵

In this article I have demonstrated how two futurist nostalgias – longings for past futures – can be seen as different ways of approaching and piecing together elements from the past. Suggesting the concept of retrology for various ways of arranging pieces and fragments from the past in the present, together with Baudrillard's notion of object value systems, I have discussed

differences between diachronic and anachronic retrologies. If the diachronic retrology seems to work from context and memory and the anachronic retrology works from temporal contrast and bricolage, their futurist nostalgias also come along with a nostalgia for nostalgia in itself – a longing for an exotic pacific imagery or for a rural Swedish pastoral idyll. To conclude, the article suggests that these organizations of past futures both display diachronic and anachronic features: even if they foreground order and chronology on the one hand and anachronistic playfulness on the other, at a closer look they seem more similar and show both sides.

→ footnotes

- [1.](#) All futures are thereby expressions of moral and political visions, problems and agendas, on an individual and/or group level.
- [2.](#) From greek retro (backward) and logos (logic, word).
- [3.](#) An earlier and shorter version of this article was presented at the 39th World Conference of the ICTM in Vienna, July 2007.
- [4.](#) The exhibition was a part of Stockholm European Capital of Culture 1998. My research came to focus on two phenomena: the theremin and instrument builders – enabling an interesting combination in order to discuss issues such as music and materiality, and traditions of/and modernity.
- [5.](#) For further discussions of the concept cf. Hyltén-Cavallius 2010 and Hyltén-Cavallius & Kaijser 2012.
- [6.](#) Ambient and atmospheric are taken from two different translations of *Le système des objets* (1968).
- [7.](#) I wish to thank Hans Riben at the Music Museum in Stockholm for kind help in finding material on the shows from the main Swedish newspapers of the time.
- [8.](#) «Good vibrations» (1967, from the record Smiley Smile) by the Beach Boys and «Whole lotta love» by Led Zeppelin (1969, from the record Led Zeppelin II) are two examples.
- [9.](#) Theremin: an electronic odyssey (1994).
- [10.](#) Examples include *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951) and *Spellbound* (1945).
- [11.](#) For examples of tiki, please cf. Kirsten 2000.
- [12.](#) The results were presented in my dissertation (Hyltén-Cavallius 2005). For an extended discussion of some of its results in English, cf. Hyltén-Cavallius 2012. NB that 'pensioner' (pensionär) is in everyday Swedish used for retired citizens in general.
- [13.](#) To many that I've been speaking to over the years – scientists as well as people from outside of Academia – this is something basically self-evident, something that needs no reflection: it is "natural" that if pensioners would have any music of their own, it would stem from their adolescence or early adulthood.
- [14.](#) The event, Seniorchansen («the Seniors' opportunity»), was a touring performance competition for senior citizens with nine local competitions followed by a final, aired on Swedish national TV channel 1, June 3rd 1995.
- [15.](#) I am thinking here of the missed playfulness, the longing back for a more intergenerational socializing of the shop owner. And the pensioners' music that within the movement seemed to wish for a more homogenous, and at the same time more solidarity-driven, society.

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