

ESPEN GLEDITSCH

«Friedrich, you are being observed ...»



*Death is not what most people consider it to be.*  
– Friedrich Jürgenson

It is a warm summer's day in the picturesque village of Mölnbo, some 60 kilometers south of the Swedish capital of Stockholm. The cherry trees are in blossom, and from early morning till sundown the sweet summer air is filled with the sound of singing birds.

Friday 12th of June Friedrich Jürgenson and his wife Monica have left behind their Stockholm apartment for a quiet weekend at their summerhouse. Little does Friedrich know of the dramatic events that are about to change his life for good.

After enjoying a day of sunbathing by the lake Friedrich strolls back to the house around four o'clock. From the trunk of the car he gets the tape recorder he has brought with plans of capturing the estates rich birdlife on tape.

With the tape recorder in hand Friedrich heads up the staircase towards the attic. He installs the equipment with the microphone situated in front of an

open window facing the garden. With a brand new tape in the recorder he starts the machine, in hope of capturing the song of a chaffinch sitting in a tree outside the window.

The bird's song comes through loud and clear on the recording. But Friedrich is as puzzled as he is delighted over the results. The song of the chaffinch is to his surprise not the only sound captured on the tape. A deep male voice cuts through the sound of the bird's song. The voice is speaking in Norwegian. Surrounded by a cacophony of noise the voice that he did not hear while making the recording speaks of «nightly bird song». In the background is the sound of a singing sparrow. All of the sudden the sound of the sparrow disappears along with the voice.

The only sound left is the song from a distant titmouse and that of the chaffinch outside the window.

Friedrich assumes that the recorder somehow has taped a Norwegian radio broadcast. But he has a hard time settling with this theory. The only radio receiver nearby is situated in the house across the garden and upon further inspection it turns out that the apparatus was switched off while he was making the recording.

– Of course there is the possibility that under certain circumstances a tape recorder can act as a radio receiver. But – was it not remarkable, that I of all people who was searching for bird sounds should receive sounds of Norwegian night birds exactly in that moment when I turned on the tape recorder? Was there

an invisible intelligence that with such a remarkable way was trying to get my attention? Very puzzling!

As night falls on the estate by the lake, Friedrich returns to the tape recorder in the loft. He is excited and filled with expectations of making further recordings of the unknown voice.

But nothing out of the ordinary finds its way to the tape, only the peaceful sound of the summer night closing in on the garden by the lake.

It is still going to be a couple of weeks before Friedrich makes the discovery that will make him certain that the someone is trying to contact him.

A month later Friedrich is back in the attic with his tape recorder.

It is a quiet night in Mölnbo. The crescent moon draws up the silhouette of the linden trees. Through the window the clear bright moonlight shines onto the tape recorder. It is quiet and the light in the room is dim. Friedrich struggles to stay awake. All of the sudden the red light on the recorder starts to blink, indicating that sound signals are being registered on tape. As soon as the lamp stops blinking he rewinds the tape. He listens to the tape with great enthusiasm and hope. But Friedrich does not find what he is hoping to find. Not until he makes a closer examination of the tape.

The following morning Friedrich listens closely to the tapes. He is certain that he must have missed out on something. But all he hears is a vibrating noise and disturbing interference. After hours of listening he

manages to discern sounds beyond the noise. Out of the chaos a voice speaking in German emerges:

– Friedrich, you are being observed ...

Friedrich is convinced, beyond the shadow of a doubt, that someone or something is trying to contact him:

– Though it left me puzzled, it became clear to me that the transmission was meant for me personally.

A seed is planted in quiet Mölnbo. In a few years enthusiasts and scientists across the world claim to be making contact with the unexplainable voices. Meanwhile Friedrich's own theories on the origin of the voices are about to make him a persona non grata in established scientific circles.

Friedrich Jürgenson was born in 1903 on the shore of the Black Sea, in the Ukrainian city of Odessa. His mother is of Swedish origin, and his father, who works as a doctor in Odessa, is of Danish decent. Friedrich describes his childhood as harmonic up until the outbreak World War 1.

But if life for the family was harsh during the war, the situation was about to go from bad to worse under the country's unstable political situation in the years following the Russian Revolution of 1917. Hunger, bloody street fights, utter poverty and illness were a part of everyday life during Friedrich's teenage years.

Friedrich is a gifted and creative child and his parents make sure that he gets a good education. He studies music at the Odessa Conservatoire and painting at the art academy.

In his painting he works in a classical and realistic

tradition, focusing on portraits, landscape and still life. During his vocal studies at the conservatory he is predicted a bright career in opera. For several years he makes a living as a singer and a painter. But due to chronic colds he is forced to resign from professional singing.

The mysterious voices are about to play a significant part in Friedrich's life for the rest of his years. He is confident that someone is trying to get in touch with him, and he decides to give his painting a rest to devote his full attention to the voice phenomenon. He spends the following years developing the recording technique and the voice recordings become both clearer and more frequent.

One day while recording Friedrich makes a major breakthrough that is going to fundamentally alter his view on the voices. When he plays back the recording he hears the voice of his dead mother speaking directly to him:

– You love, you live in love ... In me lives Elly ... Friedel lives ... You live ... Alas ... We live ... Elly, Friedel papa lives ... many live ... Alas, alas ... You love Helene ...

He plays the distorted recording to his wife and his sister Elly. They recognize the voice and agree that the content on the magnetic tape must be a message from beyond the grave.

In his book *Voice Transmission with the Deceased* Friedrich writes about voices that describe a life after death.

– How often have I not on my tapes gotten the following confirmed, and with what intensity the dead has been saying, shouting, singing and reciting: «We live! We live!» and «Friedel! The dead live since they are not dead!» or «We are humans! The dead are humans ...!»

Autumn 1962 marks the beginning of a highly active period for Friedrich and the voices he by now refers to as his «invisible friends». During the fall and the following winter Friedrich claims to make recordings of no less than 140 relatives, close friends and others.

The summer of 1963 Friedrich decides upon making his private research public. He invites the press to what is going to be the first of several international press conferences in Mölnbo.

Prior to the conference chief engineer Kjell Stenson at Swedish Radio, the Swedish national public broadcaster, inspects the recording equipment and assures the audience that the equipment has not been manipulated, tampered with or modified in any way.

The 14th of June Friedrich initiates the conference by stressing the necessity of judging the phenomenon with an open yet critical mind.

– To eliminate any possible deception, including self deception, from the start, it would be desirable to form small research groups to make recordings jointly with the cooperation and, or, in the presence of acoustic experts, radio engineers, experts in electronics, parapsychologists and other reliable witnesses.

During the press conference a journalist from the newspaper Aftonbladet confronts Friedrich. He raises the question that acknowledging that there are voices of unknown origin on tape is one thing, but to conclude that the voices are from beyond the grave is something quite different. Friedrich's answer is brief:

– Maybe not until you yourself hear a voice that is clearly identifiable as a friend or a close relative. Maybe then ...

The press conference alters Friedrich's quiet life overnight. The peaceful atmosphere in Mölnbo is replaced by journalists, acoustic experts and researchers who want to hear of Friedrich's remarkable discoveries. But the interest he wants the most is lacking.

Friedrich was hoping that the press conference would be the catalyst for a systematic and thorough scientific research on the voice phenomenon. But no one is interested in doing critical investigation on his «invisible friends».

– Despite all the publicity and the positive testimony of widely known experts, there were no efforts made from the scientific side to get to the bottom of the phenomenon using technical methods. To reduce the cost of such research to a minimum at the outset, my wife and I had put our cottage in the forest, four rooms, kitchen and bath at the disposition of researchers as an experimental and residential facility. We could not afford to do more. However nothing at all happened.

Serious scientists found Friedrich's alleged findings hard to believe. And Friedrich did by no means sweeten the pill.

Maybe it was Friedrich's absolute conviction that the voices were an undisputable objective proof of life after death that kept researchers at a distance? Friedrich and his voices were probably a bit too extravagant for some.

One of several recurring «invisible friends» on tape was Adolf Hitler, at one time in a heated discussion with Josef Stalin. Einstein, Lenin and Van Gogh were also amongst the voices Friedrich claimed to have obtained contact with. This led to extravagant articles in the tabloid press. Friedrich's initial theory on the voices being UFO related may also have contributed to making it hard for scientists to take him seriously.

Through science fiction literature and movies UFOs were playing an increasingly prominent part in popular culture during the 1950s. Back when Friedrich made his first assumptions on the origin of the voices it was while gazing at the dark night sky.

– Back then the number of sightings of these mysterious flying objects had surpassed 100 000, and there practically was not a country in this world of which these mysterious flying objects had not been observed. The thought that there was a connection between the male and female voice on the tape and a crew of a UFO was really not that far-fetched.

The peculiar language spoken by the voices in the recordings may also have made it hard for people to take the phenomenon seriously. The voices communicated

in a mix of Swedish, German, English, Italian and Russian, often combining several different languages in the same sentence. The fact that Friedrich mastered all of these languages must have seemed like a striking coincidence to good to be true.

Friedrich's own writings on voice entities who are trying to establish contact with his poodle and voices who prefer full moon in order to make an appearance probably seemed odd to empirically oriented scientists stressing testability and objective results.

This led Friedrich to conclude that the greatest challenge in understanding the voice phenomenon lies in our own minds.

– I discovered the simple truth that the biggest difficulties and obstacles are to be found within ourselves, and that without their removal, the attempted approaches by the invisible dimension of life could not be realized and would instead inevitably lead to new misunderstandings.

Friedrich has a hard time convincing people that the voices are indeed from beyond the grave. But the idea of contact with the deceased by means of modern technology was far from new.

Fueled with great optimism and confidence in the new technological breakthroughs of the era, the thought of communication with the dead through technology was not uncommon in the 19th century. Even Thomas Alva Edison, the legendary inventor of the light bulb, the phonograph and the motion picture camera, was quoted in an interview with Scientific

American in 1920 that contact with the dead would be obtainable with the right apparatus:

– I have been thinking for some time of a machine or apparatus which could be operated by personalities which have passed on to another existence or sphere [...] I do claim that it is possible to construct an apparatus which will be so delicate that if there are personalities in another existence or sphere who wish to get in touch with us in this existence or sphere, this apparatus will at least give them a better opportunity to express themselves than the tilting tables and raps and Ouija boards and mediums and the other crude methods now purported to be the only means of communication.

Even though the ideas behind the phenomenon were more than half a century old, it was not until Konstantin Raudive PhD at Uppsala University in Sweden initiated his research during the 1960s that the voice phenomenon would reach a broader audience.

Raudive, who was of Latvian origin, was a former student of the psychiatrist and psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung. In a bookshop in Stockholm Raudive stumbled upon Friedrich's book *Voices from Space*. Raudive's initial reaction was with a certain amount of skepticism:

– Many of his ideas seemed to me to have been formed by a vivid imagination; the kind that could conjure up pictures in an empty room or voices out of the stillness.

Raudive has a great interest in parapsychological issues and a particular fascination with the possibility

of life after death. He sets up a meeting with Friedrich in order to get a demonstration of the recording technique. He then goes on to make his own recordings:

– I resolved to investigate the phenomenon by myself; to isolate it, if possible, from Jürgenson's personality as a medium and to make it «independent». Was the phenomenon really universal and free from all subjective influence? In that case it should be able to manifest itself on tape quite independently, regardless of persons, time, or space. Should this prove to be so, one would have to reckon with an objective existence of the phenomenon.

During the following three years Raudive claims to have made recordings of no less than 72 000 voices under what he describes as «strict laboratory conditions». He makes recordings in rooms isolated from incoming radio waves and arranges tests where several individuals who were not present while making the recording are asked to listen to the tape and individually transcribe what they might perceive as human language in the recording. Dr. Raudive concludes that the voices are indeed present on the magnetic tapes:

– Out of 72 000 recorded voices, 25 000 have been established and indisputably proved to exist; and these have been deciphered and verified by various participants in experimental listening-in tests.

In 1968 Raudive publishes his results in the book *Unhörbares wird Hörbar*. The trained psychologists methodical approach brought the phenomenon to a much larger audience than before. He rejects the

common criticism that the voices are a projection of wishful thinking from people desperately wanting to get in touch with departed loved ones:

– The voices make their objectively valid statements independently of our attempts at interpretation; they are an acoustic fact and need no special theories to confirm them.

Amongst the thousands of voices Raudive claims to have recorded several belong to departed friends and family members. It does not take long into his investigations before he reaches the same conclusion as Jürgenson, that the voices are indeed a confirmation of an afterlife.

The voices often address the doctor and his assistants by name and refer to events that took place while they were still alive.

The voices still speak in a «polyglot» tongue, often mixing several different languages in the same sentence. But in the Latvian doctors recordings the voices primarily speak his mother tongue.

Three years after the publication of Dr. Raudive's book the English translation *Breakthrough: An Amazing Experiment in Electronic Communication with the Dead* is to be found in stores.

The electronic voice research is establishing itself as a cult phenomenon with local organizations in Germany, Austria, France, Canada, Brazil, Italy, USA and Russia.

Amongst the growing number of readers of Dr. Raudive's research is none other than celebrated

American novelist, poet and essayist William S. Burroughs. It is with great interest he embarks upon Raudive's book, but he is not convinced.

Burroughs states that the recording technique used by Raudive, to record in normal speed and then play back the results in half speed, inevitably distorts the recording to such an extent that it may very well sound like human voices:

– As soon as you start experimenting with slow-downs, speedups, overlays etc., you will get new words that were not on the original recordings. There are then many ways of producing words and voices on tape that did not get there by the usual recording procedure, words and voices that are quite definitely and clearly recognizable by a consensus of listeners. I have gotten words and voices from barking dogs. No doubt one could do much better with dolphins. And words will emerge from recording of dripping faucets. In fact, almost any sound that is not too uniform may produce words. «Every little breeze seems to whisper Louise ... The very tree branches brushing against her window seemed to mutter murder murder murder.» Well, the branches may have muttered just that, and you could hear it back with a recorder. Everything you hear and see is there for you to hear and see it.

In 1974, six years after the publication of *Unhörbares wird Hörbar*, Dr. Konstantin Raudive dies in Bad Krozingen in southern Germany, 64 years old. His tombstone bears the inscription «Der Tot - Übergang in ein neues Werden», or «Death - The transition to another state of being».

Raudive left behind an archive he claimed to contain the recordings of more than 100 000 voices.

During the 1970s Friedrich Jürgenson moves to the small town of Höör in the south of Sweden. He continues to make his recordings, and he has resumed his painting, primarily landscapes from the ruins of the antique roman city of Pompeii.

During his third international press conference in 1978 he talks with great enthusiasm on the subject of the possibility of getting in touch with the dead through the TV sets.

In 1985 he holds his last press conference and 15th of October 1987 he dies at the age of 84.

While the funeral is taking place in the village church in Höör six days later, Friedrich's dear friend and collaborator Claude Thorlin sits in his home in Eskilstuna 500 km away.

During breakfast that same morning Claude's wife Ellen speaks of hearing a loud and clear inner voice repeating the words «channel four». Ellen has a distinct feeling this may have something to do with Friedrich's funeral the same day. Claude immediately starts thinking of the radio and the TV. But there are only three channels broadcasting on their radio and two on the TV.

When the funeral starts at one o'clock Claude turns on the TV-set and puts on channel four. But the only thing on the screen is the snowy electrical noise.

22 minutes into the ceremony a small glimmer of

light starts to expand on the buzzing dark screen. Claude takes out his Polaroid camera and photographs the monitor.

As the picture is developing before their eyes a white figure reveals itself against the black monitor.

As the contour of the ghostly white figure gets clearer Ellen utters with a trembling voice, «Oh my God! It is Friedel».

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