

## **The Author on Stage: Björn Ranelid as Performance Artist**

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### **Abstract**

Media development has profoundly affected the literary public sphere. Authors as well as politicians may feel obliged to follow “the law of compulsory visibility” (John B. Thompson). All contemporary writers, be it bestselling authors or exclusive, high brow poets, must in one way or another reflect on their marketing and media strategies. Meeting and communicating with the audience, the potential readers, is of critical importance. In the article “The Author on Stage”, the authors consider how different literary performances by Swedish novelist Björn Ranelid (b. 1949) help establish his “brand name” on the literary market place.

**Keywords:** Björn Ranelid, performance studies, literary performance, author readings, Richard Schechner, Erika Fischer-Lichte.

## Introduction

“Writing at its best, is a lonely life” – Ernest Hemingway’s well-known words about the author’s existential predicament are still valid to this day. The pen and typewriter may perhaps have been exchanged for the word processor – yet the state of loneliness at the writing desk is still a prerequisite of the creative process. Nonetheless, it is evident that today there is a diametrically opposite tendency in the field of literature. Nowadays, authors must, in a whole new way compared to before, step out of their writing chambers in order to market or make manifest their message to the public. Meeting and communicating with one’s audience, the potential readers, in different ways is of critical importance. These reading meetings may actually take place physically in conjunction with writers’ talks in bookshops, at libraries and at book fairs. But, they may also be in the form of interviews and talks that are mediated via radio and television. Apart from serving to market one’s authorship, these performances have a very tangible economical dimension. Just as rock stars of today often earn more from their concerts than from their record sales these performances function as a not so insignificant source of income for the writers. The Swedish Writers’ Union therefore recommends that their members ask for a remuneration of at least SEK 5 500 per “small prose performance” and at least 15 000 for a “larger event” (Författarförbundet 2010).

Such appearances made by writers are naturally no new phenomenon. In earlier times too, writers have made use of this opportunity to create an image of themselves and their authorship among their audience and, in so doing, strengthening their own trademark. For Charles Dickens, who toured the United States between 1867 and 1870 reading aloud from his books, it was precisely the economy that was an important factor: appearing in front of an audience and reading from his own novels gave him an income that compensated for the revenue loss that arose due to there not being any copyright law in “the new world” (Andrews 2006). In a similar way Selma Lagerlöf made herself a name as a skilful and captivating reader of her own texts (Vinge 2005).

Björn Ranelid, born in 1949, is today, without a doubt, one of Sweden’s authors who has attracted the most attention and is most acknowledged. This is largely due to his comprehensive activity as a performance artist. On his website, Ranelid presents himself, not only as a “writer and columnist” but also as an “entertainer”. In other words, not only does he devote himself to writing novels and articles, but he also appears – usually on his own – on various stages and platforms. The appearances of the last few years can be found listed on the author’s website. It is a touring plan worthy of a rock star. According to Ranelid himself, he has given more than 3 000 such stage appearances since his debut in 1983. Considering that

Ranelid appears on stage approximately 100 times a year (and often more than that) this means an annual salary that is above the average in Sweden.

Ranelid holds a position in contemporary Swedish literary public life that in many ways is unique. He moves between different, normally incompatible positions. On the one hand, the lofty and highbrow poet, who preaches goodness, love and the holiness of the word, and whose poetic and metaphor-charged language has even been given its own name: “Ranelidish”. On the other hand, the commercially conscious writer, who builds his author’s trademark by driving around in a shining Jaguar with “RANELID” on his number plates and by participating in advertising campaigns of various kinds (Forsslid & Ohlsson 2009). “Referring to him as being ‘known from the radio and television’ would be to make an understatement”, a paper wrote towards the end of the 1990s (Carlsson 1997). This utterance is no less true today. Not only does Ranelid participate in traditional literature and culture programmes on television, he is also a frequently appearing guest in entertainment programmes showing on prime time. Thus Ranelid is the prototype of a modern medialisated author.

A pivotal aspect of this medialisated author’s role is that of Ranelid’s fighting- and provocative spirit. He knows how to use his strong public position, from where he constantly, with his fighting spirit and desire to debate, time and time again calls attention to himself and his authorship. This emphasis on struggle and debate can certainly be regarded as fundamental to Ranelid’s entire production and his role as a writer. Jonas Frykman, Professor of Ethnology, has aptly called him “the Mohammed Ali of literature” on a TV show (SvT 2002). The struggle and fighting therefore function as a successful strategy for getting attention from the media. But it is also an effective way of charging his authorship with energy and power.

However, Ranelid distinguishes himself from most other authors who are highly exposed to the media, by way of his classical romantic-modernistic artist’s role and his high-brow literary claims. His debut novel, *Den överlevande trädgårdsmästaren* (1983; “The Surviving Gardener”) consequently follows a traditional modernistic aesthetic, with an experimental imagery that might be hard to fathom. With his subsequent novels Ranelid developed into somewhat of a favourite among critics. In the middle of the 90s he was placed within the circle of highly acknowledged contemporary authors such as Per Olov Enquist and Kerstin Ekman (Franzén 1996). Ranelid also came to be associated at an early stage with Lars Ahlin, one of Sweden’s leading modernist writers of prose (Eriksson 1990: 125).

Already a few years after his debut the term Ranelidish began to be used about the author’s distinctive and personal style of prose with its meandering metaphorical formulations. In order to exemplify this Ranelidish virtually any opening line in the author’s novels could be used, such as this one from *Mitt namn ska vara Stig Dagerman* (1993; “My Name shall be Stig Dagerman”): “My soul weighs

less than a dream in a butterfly, but it holds so much that God needs to use his biggest compass to close the circle”.

A consequence of this variety of pursuits with its role changing is that it is hard to place Ranelid the writer into any given category. He moves between different positions. One moment the aristocratic modernist who preaches the holiness of the word. Next moment the ex football player who chooses sides in politically controversial matters. Thus the public opinion of Ranelid is also divided. Depending on which aspect is being discussed he may be both praised and blamed. “No-one has written about the handicapped as well as he has”, someone might say. “An arrogant son-of-a-bitch”, says another.

The fact that the first of these utterances – that are authentic ones, uttered in our proximity – refers to Ranelid’s text and the second to his person is quite typical. Far from all Swedes have read a novel by Björn Ranelid. But almost all adults know who he is and have an opinion of him. In literary studies the discussion on the relationship between life and work was long regarded as problematic. In Ranelid’s case this is virtually inevitable, at least with regard to the connection between public person and works. Ranelid appears continuously in the media, where he states his opinions and views on various matters. How then, could you disregard this when reading his books? You can see his face in front of you. You can hear his voice with its particular phrasing and Scanian accent.

For better or for worse the writer is once again a part of his/her text before the literary public of today – and this applies to a particularly great extent to Ranelid.

Even if Ranelid has been both criticised and praised through the years there is an obvious dimension of time. At this point in time he is certainly one of the most known and read authors in the country. Yet, at the same time as Ranelid has become an acknowledged author and is loved by many, his status within the cultural Establishment has, to a certain extent, declined. The lofty prose and the religiously tinted message of love which at the beginning of his career as a writer secured him a unique position, is seen today by many people as being provocative and challenging. Others see him as somewhat of a medial buffoon (compare “the Mohammed Ali of literature”). But Ranelid’s massive exposure to the media has also implied that he has reached new groups of readers and fans, not least among the younger generation where he at times has been assigned cult status.

In this article we will illustrate an essential aspect of Ranelid’s medial role as an author – his activity as a performance artist. This meeting between author and reader is an important but often overlooked aspect of literary public life of today. Our point of departure is that it is impossible to understand Ranelid’s position in literary public life, and in the Swedish social debate as a whole, by merely reading his books. The perspective must necessarily be broadened to include more than textual analysis. Theoretically we have our point of departure in “performance studies” in Richard Schechner’s (2006) and Erika Fischer-Lichte’s (2008) versions. This is also where we find the methodological devices that we present con-

tinuously. Even though Fischer-Lichte focuses on avant-garde performances and theatre, the concepts and methodology she has developed may in our opinion also be applied to Ranelid's performances. A performance, in the same way as a theatrical event, is of course impossible to preserve for posterity or to recreate. Video documentations – that are of necessity imperfect – of Ranelid's appearances are all that is left of this momentary art form.

We will analyse three of Ranelid's many appearances in recent years. Two of them in small places in Southern Sweden, in Vinslöv (27/11, 2007 and Ystad (6/2, 2009). The third was recorded in a TV studio and broadcasted in the programme "Go' kväll" ("Good Evening") on Sveriges Television (19/10 2007; Sweden's Television, national public service broadcaster).

Every such appearance – or performance – is of course unique. Their character changes as we will see, depending whether, for example, the meeting with the audience takes place face to face or is mediated via TV cameras. Naturally, the context and the audience in front of which Ranelid performs are also significant. We will shed some light on how he goes about staging himself and his authorship under the rather varying conditions prevalent on these three occasions. The differences are obvious. The meeting with the anonymous and rather heterogeneous TV audience is strictly structured (by the producer and the presenter). In Vinslöv the author had the possibility of arranging his appearance according to his own wishes. Finally, in Ystad Ranelid was interacting with a music group. Moreover, the differences between the events in Vinslöv and Ystad were quite substantial as regards the composition of the audience and the institutional framework. The result is three performance appearances with varying character. Ranelid takes on, and is given, different roles. We see him as a literary stand-up artist, as a "prophet" and as an artist.

## **Ranelid – The Literary Stand-up Comedian and the Entertainer**

An essential part of Ranelid's appearance – his performance – in Vinslöv and in other places, is the actual framing. First of all Ranelid enters onto a simply built up stage with colourful advertising signs in the background. Art and commercialism go hand in hand. The author is dressed in a black blazer and a white unbuttoned shirt. The shirt collars are spread over the lapels of the blazer like a classical Schiller collar. After some playful small talk with the audience and some tens of seconds of silence comes the introductory line:

Paradise has thin pages and you have to turn them with a needle in your hand. Show me anything else on Earth that has that density, that weight, that mass which words have. It is all that rises from the dead. Now black letters lay on white pastures that from time to time are called the pages of a book, and so I sharpen my pencil so that it becomes like a shepherd's staff and thus the words will follow me, one by one, over the face of the Earth.

Ranelid's voice is loud and clear, finely tuned and poetic as is befit an author who dresses in a way that leads one's thoughts to a romantic character such as Lord Byron. His Scanian dialect bears a tinge of a Central Swedish accent with its lighter diphthongs and more complex intonation. The opening line is a typically Ranelidish one, a well-formulated phrase which, like a refrain in a popular song or a rock tune, is easy to recognise. It is taken from *Min son fäktas mot världen* (Ranelid 2000; "My Son Crosses Swords with the World") but recurs and is re-used in various performances, books and articles. The idea is that the faithful audience of readers and listeners will recognise the opening line and nod in assent – this gives a feeling of belonging, both with the author and within the audience. On this evening the latter is comprised which is very unusual when it comes to Ranelid, of only men plus one woman journalist.

Although the theme of Ranelid's appearance in Vinslöv is *the word*, it soon becomes obvious that it is not only the spoken word – no matter how equilibristic and well-formulated Ranelid is this evening – that brings the, initially clearly reserved, audience to line up after the performance in order to buy his novels. If one wishes to better understand the audience's experience and the effects of a performance such as that of Ranelid, one must take a number of different factors into consideration. As early as around the turn of the last century research showed that if one were to understand communal phenomena such as theatre performances or rituals in non-western cultures, one could not merely make do with the actual spoken language; one must, for example, also take into consideration the institutional framing or the actors' ways of using their bodies. Thus it is advantageous for anyone trying to describe and understand various types of performances to refer to the comprehensive research that has been conducted about theatre and other ritual events. The German theatre researcher Erika Fischer-Lichte writes about this shift of perspective in *The Transformative Power of Performance*:

...both ritual and theatre studies repudiated the privileged status of texts in favour of performances. It could thus be said that the first performative turn in twentieth-century European culture [...] occurred much earlier with the establishment of ritual and theatre studies at the turn of the last century. (2008: 31)

Essential for a performance, Fischer-Lichte points out, is the *concurrent* physical presence of the actor or actors and the audience. In this way the prerequisites for the audience's more or less active participation in a performance are created and this can thus be described as a happening that occurs *between* actors and spectators (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 32).

Ranelid also comes back to and continuously reminds us, in his various appearances, of the relationship and sense of belonging between himself and the audience: "As you know, I have said that one swims from the shore I, to the shore you, in the ocean we. This ocean we all have within us". With a slight gesture – he quickly bows his head to the right – Ranelid accentuates the rhythmical direction away

from the self to the other. Ranelid also emphasises that it is the support of the audience that has helped him to avoid getting stuck during the performance.

Richard Schechner, one of the main names in the American tradition of Performance Studies, traces features of performance in a large number of human activities, in everything from play, sports and rock galas to theatre performances and rituals (Schechner 2006: 31). The key categories here are ritual and play, which are present in all performances to varying degrees. Rituals provide people with a sense of belonging and a communal experience. Furthermore, rituals help the participants to relate to difficult upheavals and transitions in society or private life, to relate to hierarchies of various kinds as well as taboo-like or risky events that cannot be given expression in daily life. In rituals the experience of border phenomena and the crossing of borders are of critical importance. Both ritual and play create a “second reality”, that distinguishes itself from daily life, writes Schechner. With various, more or less conventional means a stage is created where ritual and play take place (2006: 52).

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv gets its dimension of ritual both from the introductory meal that is eaten together and served before his appearance, and from listening to Ranelid’s elaborate and dedicated use of language. Even the actual performance is of a ritual character and leads one’s thoughts to situations like the presentation of an authorship or authors reading aloud. By comparing his pencil to a “shepherd’s staff”, Ranelid places himself in a sort of Christ-like or preacher’s position.

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv, which lasts slightly longer than an hour, is built on his own authorship. His point of departure is taken from some of his novels that are lined up on a small table on the stage, blatantly visible just as in the case of “talking about books” in a library. But before coming to his authorship, Ranelid sets the tone of the evening in a prologue-like section by evoking the presence of three persons. Onto the stage he invites, one after the other, Swedish poet Tomas Tranströmer, Nelson Mandela and, the Cambridge professor Stephen Hawking.

The presentation of Tranströmer turns out to pay homage to Art with a capital A. The poet is said to come sailing in on a “gondola of grief” – which, by the way, is the title of one of Tranströmer’s poem anthologies – navigated by his wife. Here, Ranelid alludes to Tranströmer’s poem “Storm” from the collection *17 dikter* (1954). According to Ranelid, this is one of “the world’s most skilful, generous, equilibristic poets” and time and time again he proves his mastery in spite of his suffering from aphasia after a stroke. Great artists have power over the word which, according to Ranelid, allows them to compare favourably with all the worldly power magnates.

When presenting both of the other guests of honour – Mandela and Hawking – Ranelid introduces the ethical stance that runs all through his performance. Mandela who chose to turn away from “hatred, revenge and vendetta” despite having

been imprisoned for 27 years on Robben Island. Hawking, the much acknowledged physicist and mathematician, who is gravely handicapped by the disease of ALS, but if “Adolf Hitler had been allowed to decide and had been a contemporary of his he would not have been deemed worthy of living”, despite the fact that his brain functions better than most people’s. Ranelid summarises his ethical stance – his conviction of man’s inviolable value – with one sentence that he self-consciously nominates as “Vinslöv’s and Sweden’s and the world’s most beautiful sentence”. It runs: “Every single person on Earth exists in one unique sample and when she is gone she can never be replaced by anyone else”. In a way that is typical of the performance arts: aesthetical, social and political aspects are interwoven already in the prelude. Art is brought into contact with the world (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 44).

Thus the theme of the prologue-like introduction in Vinslöv is the power of the word and the inviolability of human life. But Ranelid does not only merely rely on his own spoken words to reach out with this message. As all performance artists do (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 40), he also uses the language of his own *body*. During the performance Ranelid is in constant movement in the room. He steps down from the simple stage, where he starts his appearance, and interacts with the listeners. In addition to this he uses the premises in a spontaneous fashion, for example by sometimes hiding behind a column. At this moment in time it is possible to identify two superior and interacting strategies of Ranelid’s which can be found to occur amongst most performance artists. On the one hand a striving to achieve a (temporary) feeling of belonging between himself and his audience. On the other hand the ambition to achieve a mutual, physical contact with the listeners.

When Ranelid leaves the stage and moves around in the room he shows quite clearly how he attempts to bridge the gap between the stage and the auditorium and how he tries to avoid addressing his audience from a top-down perspective. Otherwise the whole situation is designed for precisely that: on the stage we have a literary celebrity with his familiarity with the media and other authorities who is inevitably in a superior position in relation to his listeners. In a way that is typical of performance artists he thus observes his audience and interacts spontaneously with it instead of directing his words *to* an anonymous mass. The spectators, who normally watch, now find themselves being watched by the actor. On one occasion Ranelid jokes, to the delight of the audience, about a man sitting in the first row who obviously has not reacted quickly or strongly enough to an anecdote: “You’re not keeping up. Have you brought your pillow? It’s time to sleep now. Have you got an alarm clock also?” Here we have a situation where the tables are turned: an observer who himself is being observed by someone whose primary task is to act, something which, according to Fischer-Lichte (2008: 40), is another common strategy used within the performance arts.

Ranelid also makes use of the opportunity on one occasion to touch one of the spectators lightly. This touch is no doubt a surprise for the man in question.

Whoever seats himself in a theatre hall naturally expects to take part in the performance by *seeing*, in the capacity of spectator, what takes place; compare with the Greek word “theatron” from “theastai” that means precisely “to see”. When an actor thus breaks with this convention this can contribute indirectly to the achievement of the main goal of a performance, namely that of creating a sense of belonging. The reason for this, as Fischer-Lichte maintains (2008: 60–62), is that various forms of physical contact temporarily upset the opposition between seeing and feeling, between public and private, between distance and closeness, which in turn leads to emotional responses. Something similar also happens on the occasions when Ranelid moves around in the room and approaches individual spectators – without actually physically touching anyone – bends forwards towards them and addresses them with the Swedish informal form of you or their personal name and looks into their eyes. Fischer-Lichte writes: “A glance exchanged between two people can constitute closeness and intimacy similar to physical contact. Seeing stimulates the desire to touch” (2008: 62). The sense of belonging between the entertainer Ranelid and his audience is also strengthened by laughter and satire against power and authority. The parties are united on such occasions in a bottom-up perspective where Ranelid becomes just like anyone else – in a collective we – that is directing criticism towards all of those “up there”.

Another strategy from Ranelid’s side for melting in with the crowd, for showing the spectators that he is one of them, is the ideal of conscientiousness he continually assigns himself. He is no non-committed sort of person who takes liberties. One aspect of this is to always do one’s very best in every situation, to make an effort. Ranelid declares sharply: “Don’t come and say that I didn’t do my best. You can say that I was bad, that I was worthless, but *don’t say* that I didn’t do my best. *Don’t say* that I didn’t do my very best. Don’t say that I didn’t strain every nerve to the utmost”. Ranelid refers to his “ethos”, that is, to his personal traits and his character, as a guarantee of the credibility of his message (Johannesson 2003).

Ranelid’s striving to establish a common ground and feeling of belonging with the listeners in Vinslöv around his ethical message has a good chance of succeeding, since it is the local Lions Club that has invited him to talk. Lions, founded in 1917 in the U.S., are an international network with 1.3 million members – both women and men – in 205 countries. One works to “create and foster a spirit of understanding among all people for humanitarian needs by providing voluntary services in conjunction with social commitment and international collaboration” (Lions 2010). The spirit of community and the ideological affiliation among the audience is, so to speak, already in place. Apart from the fact that they are all in some way associated with Lions, it is likely that many of them already know each other; the village of Vinslöv is no bigger than that. The bond between the listeners is stronger in such a relatively closed company than in a more official Ranelid event. It is “just” for Ranelid to step into the fellowship, which is thus facilitated

by the sympathy for and understanding of the ethical message presumably harboured by the Vinslöv audience. The bonds of fellowship that are established during each performance – in Vinslöv it is both about the bond between Ranelid and the listeners and *between the individuals* in the audience – facilitates for the individual to connect to the values that form the foundation for the work of both Lions and Ranelid. A performance, Fischer-Lichte emphasises, normally creates rather temporary fellowships (2008: 55).

Ranelid's appearance in Vinslöv, just like the performance arts in general, is thus characterised by a tangible *bodily presence*. Ranelid regularly dresses in generously open – preferably short-sleeved – shirts, allows himself to be photographed with a bare torso or discusses the meaning of being well-trained and of leading a healthy life. Therefore it comes as no surprise that he also during the Vinslöv appearance uses his body in different ways. For example, he shows how, being a former elite player himself, his parents used to dream when he was growing up about how their sons would become football players just as famous as the Swedish Italian pros Gunnar Green, Nisse Liedholm and Gunnar Nordahl by, for every name, make-believe heel-kicking a football or slap kicking a side-foot.

If therefore, Ranelid on stage – not without pride – shows up a body that can breed jealousy among certain spectators, the story about his earlier and present bodily exposure and failings are a regularly returning feature during his performances. As Fischer-Lichte claims, this is also applicable to the performance arts in general (2008: 82). The stories about his childhood skull fracture and growing upper lip that continuously surface in Ranelid's appearances further strengthen the character of ritual. These elements are constantly present. The sympathy of the audience may be an advantage for the ethically demanding sermon. As an advocate of truth Ranelid has had a high price to pay: "No one has been so slandered, no one has been so derided, and no one has been so lied about as I have been". In Vinslöv Ranelid refers to his autobiographical book *Till alla människor på jorden och i himlen* (1997; "To all people on Earth and in Heaven"), in which the accident when he, at five years of age, falls down the cellar stairs and fractures his skull, is a pivotal event. But, according to Ranelid, this is also the explanation for how he can perform as he does – without a manuscript – without losing his thread: the high-pitched tone ringing in "... (my) head is a part of the explanation for me being able to be so concentrated when I talk. I am namely always in the present. I'm sentenced to being in the moment. [– – –] I have a radio in my head that I turn on and off". In Ranelid's understanding of himself this means that he has turned a threat of catastrophe into something productive and successful. Paradoxically, his whole success story as a writer and entertainer probably derive from this fracture.

Ranelid's other bodily trauma as a child – his upper lip that, without any explanation, starts to grow when he is in his teens – is also a part of the Vinslöv appearance. He recounts how the event still stalks him. But Ranelid knows how to take revenge on those who called him "nigger lip" when he was growing up and

even later. “You take revenge”, Ranelid goes on cheerfully and to the audience’s great delight, not by force but “by being elected one of Sweden’s ten sexiest men. How about that? Good Lord!”

Ranelid’s performance in Vinslöv is based on the author’s humanistic sermon on the inviolable value of man and the importance of taking an individual responsibility in an existence in which everyone is fundamentally dependent on one another. However, this does not stop Ranelid from sailing close to the wind, from making jokes about and making fun of other actors in public life. In this circle of (ethically) like-minded people, male Lions supporters and people living in Vinslöv, Ranelid lets go in a way that he does not do when performing in front of an anonymous TV audience. Towards the end of his performance he declares: “...you know, I can say what I want to now; it’s so wonderful”.

### **Ranelid – The Prophet**

The TV programme “Go ‘kväll” (Good Evening) is broadcasted every evening Monday to Friday between 6.15 and 7.00 pm on Sweden's National Television and has the character of a lifestyle programme aimed to serve an audience comprised of people who are upper middle aged and older. The features included concern fashion, food, culture and existential questions. A standing point in the programme on Friday evening broadcasts is that of a medially well-known person pretending to be the host of an imaginary dinner party – a feature that normally takes about ten minutes. The host of the dinner and the presenter of the programme take a seat at a neatly set table where four seats are empty. They chat about the menu and the setting of the table as well as about the four absent – yet present in the imagination – guests. This talk about the food that is served, where the dinner takes place and, not least, the choice of dinner guests, functions as a performance, in which the host stages his own person and role in the public eye.

Ranelid chose to invite two men and two women to his dinner party. These were then seated as two couples at the long ends of the table, while Ranelid and the programme presenter sat opposite one another on the short sides. The men who were invited were world-famous: the South African bishop Desmond Tutu as well as the then American President George W. Bush. The two women on the other hand were unknown to the general public. Elisabeth B. Lindgren, Chairman of the Board of the Temperance Society in Örebro as well as Inga Pagnéus.

One might ask oneself whether Ranelid’s dinner party on “Go ‘kväll” really is a performance fully comparable with the one in Vinslöv? Several of the characteristics of performance art are missing, especially the live character and the concurrent presence of actor and audience. Fischer-Lichte also draws a sharp line between live performances and medialised performances: “Live performance seems to carry remnants of an ‘authentic’ culture that fortifies the opposition to media-

lised performance as a product of commercialism created by market interests” (2008: 69).

However, the opposition between a live and a medialised performance is not, at least as far as we can see, quite as absolute as Fischer-Lichte would have it. Firstly, performance artists who appear live today are often completely dependent on mediating electronic or digital techniques, in the form of microphones and speaker systems or various kinds of image or sound reproductions. Secondly, a performance artist can interact with the audience that is present in, say, the TV studio (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 69). Furthermore, Ranelid’s contribution to “Go ‘kväll” can hardly be described as a straightforward TV interview. The programme presenter takes on a very subordinate role. His contribution is confined to just a few random lines, while Ranelid totally dominates the stage.

The description and analysis of Ranelid’s participation in “Go ‘kväll” as a performance, is also supported by the fact that this feature of the programme is framed in and divided from the rest of the programme in a very clear way, which according to Schechner (2006: 2) is one of the defining characteristics of a performance. After having conversed with two other participants the programme presenter stands up and says: “Now I can smell food”. A dimension of play, also a prominent feature in the performance arts, is thus made apparent. We are all meant to imagine delightful aromas of dinner, in spite of the fact that food and drink are so clearly absent during the feature. The line fills the same function as when children who are eager to play open with “do you want to play with me?” Ranelid’s answer to the question about where the dinner party is to take place – “next to the apple grove in Kivik” (Kivik is famous for its apples) – shows that yes, he would like to play.

The subdued dinner table where Ranelid and the programme presenter sit down is set for a traditional middle class party with tall wine glasses and broken serviettes. The dinner table creates its own stage within the TV studio, which differentiates itself from the bar counter where the other interviews took place. This dinner party feature is thus made up as a stage setting of its own within the framework of the staging of the whole TV programme.

The actual physically present audience during Ranelid’s TV performance is, as mentioned, small. However, the stage-setting in itself reveals a striving for involving the anonymous TV audience in the feature, thus creating prerequisites for the kind of togetherness that a performance aims to achieve. Various means are used to create closeness between Ranelid and the TV audience. The viewers are invited to join in the game and in their imaginations take a seat at the ceremoniously set table in the Ranelidian summer home in Kivik, Österlen. This is emphasised by the chairs that, in keeping with the logic of the game, remain empty during the feature. Here there are seats that are literally empty to allow for the viewers’ own identifications.

There is also a clearly ritual dimension in Ranelid's TV appearances just as in a traditional live performance. The whole concept of the programme is built on one of the holiest rituals of secular private life: the middle class dinner party with all of its tacitly implied codes and rules. Moreover, the imaginary dinner party comprises an important and recurring ritual in the actual programme. It is one of the cornerstones in the Friday broadcasts. It is also logical that the dinner party takes place on the last day of the working week. A large number of viewers find themselves in the borderland between work and leisure. The much longed for weekend has just been initiated with opportunities for, and features of, playing and games.

Ranelid's TV performance was directly linked to his book of current interest in the autumn of 2007, *Öppet brev till George W Bush* ("Open letter to George W Bush"). It follows that three of the guests at the fictive dinner party are also in the book which is not a novel but a personal reflection on the state of the world and the suffering of mankind, something which, all in all, has led Ranelid to the edge of despair. In *Öppet brev* he addresses the American President with an informal "you" – compare the letter form – and accuses him of a lack of righteousness in his war on terrorism, but also in relation to the poor and destitute in his own country.

As one can see, the production and institutional framing of this TV performance differs from that of the Vinslöv performance. The format is both shorter – just more than a quarter of an hour instead of an hour – and stricter. Ranelid remains seated at the short end of the table and can thus not use his body in the same way as in Vinslöv, where he could, by using gestures and movements, support his message and create a feeling of closeness with his audience. He is thus forced to a greater extent to trust in the spoken word, even though the TV audience is naturally exposed to his well-trained body and styled image. Moreover, he appears more austere and has a more serious profile during the dinner party on TV. He does not allow himself to take liberties like he did in Vinslöv, for example he avoids, in so far as possible, joking about and criticising well-known people.

This means that Ranelid in his TV performance remains in the authoritative position where he, as a medial celebrity, is naturally at home. His possibility of creating closeness to the audience is limited in an entirely different way than during a performance. Now he is forced to be in a *high position*, from which he talks to his listeners with a top-down perspective. In Vinslöv he strove to be in a *low position*, which meant that he instead talked *with* the audience from a more equal we-perspective or, alternatively, from a bottom-up or victim's position. In the TV studio Ranelid rather chooses a number of different strategies in order to mark his high, superior position. One is the use of long, expansive lines that aim to create authority, to give the impression that he knows what he is talking about.

Another and more important circumstance that places Ranelid in a high position in relation to the viewers – as well as to the American President – is that he takes on a sort of prophet-like role. On the whole there is a dimension of the Old Tes-

tament and Christianity in Ranelid's TV performance. At least three of the guests are believers, both the "good" guests like Desmond Tutu and Inga Pagréus and the "bad" guest, Bush. Ranelid himself bears witness to his own strong faith ever since he "...accompanied Mom and Dad to the Elim Church in Malmö. And, what's more, I've found, that all the mysteries that exist in the world today, all the miracles that exist in the world today, they are immune to all scientific and technological explanations. There isn't one single Nobel Prize winner in Physics or in Chemistry who can explain laughter, sensuality and eroticism and beauty on Earth, there isn't anyone who can explain that".

Ranelid's language thus often borrows expressions and figures of speech from the religious sphere: "I have sentenced myself to never deride or violate another human being".

Another circumstance that shows that Ranelid takes on some sort of a prophet-role is that he does not behave at all like a conciliating, middle class dinner party host who will do everything in his power to ensure that the guests will enjoy themselves. Instead he confronts the American President and makes him accountable for his war on terrorism. In this confrontation the dinner host also accepts assistance from the other guests:

And now I think that Desmond gets up and says a few words to George Bush and the words will burn like laser beams right through the man, and then I'll say to George Bush that you should now pick up your shining knife, and then you shall look at the reflection of your own face there since it fits into that narrow blade of the knife, and when you have observed your face for long enough you'll see that you, yourself, are your worst enemy.

When Ranelid in this way condemns the American President he also resembles an Old Testament prophet. In *Öppet brev till George W Bush* this connection between Ranelid's words to the president and the prophets of the Bible is even more direct: "I write these words to you, since they say more about humanity than all of your advisers' opinions. Many people in history have claimed to be prophets, but only very few have been true prophets. A prophet who says that he/she has received a revelation from God must be a loving person and be more good than evil" (Ranelid 2007: 46).

Thus Ranelid acts as a judging prophet, who surrounded by his good and loyal disciples exhorts and admonishes the sinful disciple – George W bush – who has not understood how best to serve the will of God. From his elevated position the dinner host talks to "the world's most powerful man", the presiding American president. The judgemental dimensions of the prophet role – the dinner party's features of debate and struggle – blend together well with the dramaturgy that governs talk and discussion programmes on TV. This, in turn, can be seen in the light of the tendency towards struggle that characterises the spoken word in general, not least in the so-called "primary oral culture" (Ong 2002: 32)

Ranelid's description of people's exposure and vulnerability is striking. In this case it also becomes clear that his prophetic speech not only addresses itself to the

most powerful men in the world, but to each and every one of us. He makes an impression by talking in terms of “we”, that it is about all of our responsibility. In answer to the question of how important it is to hand out food to the homeless in Stockholm he says:

It’s extremely important. Because this has nothing to do with glamour, nothing to do with honour or with money. This comes straight from the heart. This is where the little and the big person meet. The whole future of the human race begins in your heart as a human. [– –] And there is no such thing as war inscribed in human genes. Not one single person on this Earth exists who has been born with evil, hatred, revenge and vendetta inscribed in their genes.

Thus in his TV performance Ranelid is forced, to a greater degree than during the Vinslöv appearance, to put his trust in the spoken *word*. The position of stiff dinner party host in a TV studio allows for less freedom of bodily exposure and use of gesture. On the other hand, Ranelid has in general – both in his role as performance artist and author – a strong confidence in the intrinsic power of words. This applies both to the word in writing and in speech. This is made obvious in *Öppet brev*:

Words fly faster than the hawk and the falcon and they live longer than the elephant and the oldest tree on Earth. [– –]

The word is alone on Earth in its ability to rise from the dead. Man closes the book. Then the black letters lay as lambs on the white page. The pencil is a shepherd’s staff. When you move it over the paper, then all the letters of the alphabet play, dance or behave according to the gravity of the moment. Seat yourself in your reading corner in the evening. Turn on the light and once more start again.

In the beginning was the Word.

The power of the word is strongly emphasised here; as Christ it can rise from the dead. On the whole the Biblical connection is tangible – the lamb, the staff of the shepherd – just as the closing sentence, that directly cites the so-called Johannes Prologue in the Bible translation of 1917.

And so, the “prophet” Ranelid, equipped with the strong and powerful word, pronounces his sentence over President Bush and anyone else who has not understood that he/she needs to follow the message of God in the right way. However, this is only the one part of the author’s sermon which, in its entirety, does not only consist of condemnation. He also points to the opportunities for ethical actions that are open to every person. He does this by bringing to the fore his three “good” guests as worthy examples. Desmond Tutu, the South African bishop; Elisabeth B Lindgren who after 22 years as a drug addict now runs a cooperative rehabilitation centre – she stands, together with her husband, “for some sort of hope for mankind”. And finally, Inga Pagnéus, the deacon, who together with a group of volunteers – Ranelid is one of them – hands out food to alcoholics, drug addicts, prostitutes and the homeless in Stockholm City: “And then I make Sergel’s torg [a town square] the hand of God. And where we should be pumping in oxygenated blood, we see to it that we pump in hepatitis, HIV and AIDS. And on

Sergels torg that is the Aorta of Sweden, we let people die with their tongues in a pool of urin”.

In sum we can maintain that Ranelid’s TV performance combines the religious and the secular, ritual and play. In a similar way it finds itself in the field of tension between seriously directed messages and entertainment (Schechner 2006: xx). This is the actual idea of the programme “Go ‘kväll”’: a pleasant and entertaining start to the weekend that can nevertheless contain existentially thought provoking and serious features. And Ranelid’s sermon is to a great extent serious. It is the Christian ideal of love he preaches from his secular pulpit. And it is hard not to be moved, even if one’s first reaction might be to smile a faint, amused smile. Both Ranelid’s appearance, his clothes and his language are exaggerated and blown-up. But after a couple of minutes, when the initial surprise has settled, one becomes captivated by the power in the message and the words. One feels powerless when the author speaks of the exposed and vulnerable people on Sergels torg, a place he metaphorically sees as Sweden’s aorta. The image-packed turns of speech, whose significance might not be immediately clear to the listeners, and that can be difficult to digest when seen in print, seem none the less seductive in the actual moment of delivery. However, the situation and the framing involve a number of limitations compared to Ranelid’s live performance in Vinslöv. The result is a less laid back and more strict performance. It is the prophet Ranelid who sits at the table in the TV studio.

### **Ranelid – The Jazz & Poetry Artist**

The third and last Ranelid performance we analyse in this article thus took place in a well-respected Cinema Theatre in Ystad in February 2009. Here films have been shown since 1910. However, during the period of the last ten years the premises have been totally renovated. Today the company is run by a non-profit association and its programme includes over and above the showing of quality films also music and song, theatre and lectures, meetings and information evenings.

Shortly after nine in the evening Ranelid stepped down from the stage. Already then it became clear to us that what we had just witnessed diverged from both the other appearances in Vinslöv and the TV studio respectively. This was a different experience. We were not surprised and slightly embarrassed – as when we saw “the prophet” Ranelid on TV the first time – but rather moved. Neither were we alone with our reaction: An enthusiastic audience managed to get an extra number after the standard performance. The local newspapers stated the next day that “Ranelid spellbound the Scala” and transformed the old cinema into a “church building” where there soon arose an “intimate and spiritual atmosphere” (Nilsson 2009). What then, was the difference between the performance in Ystad and the ones on TV and in Vinslöv respectively?

Already the institutional framing was different. Here it was an intimate room where also on other occasions an ambitious cultural and artistic activity is pursued. The mixed audience that fills the room till the last seat has left the duties of everyday life behind them; the performance was on a Friday. People have seated themselves in premises where artistic – aesthetic- experiences are usually served. This creates certain expectations, which are fulfilled. The audience is given from the first moment the impression of being a part of an artistic performance. Ranelid performs now as an *artist*, not only as a preacher and prophet – or entertainer. In Vinslöv the show was framed by large, conspicuous advertising boards. In Ystad the commercial side of the appearance is toned down, actually almost absent.

Perhaps the most important explanation for why the Ystad performance has such a clear aura of art is that Ranelid appears here together with the band “Tales”. The group that was founded in 1996 fetches inspiration from Nordic ballads, meditative jazz and folklore. Improvisation also plays an important part in their music. The band released its first CD in 2000 and started working together with Ranelid two years later (Tales 2010). Together, Tales and Ranelid have given a great number of concerts around the country, often in Southern Sweden. In January 2009 they released a CD they had made together.

As we shall see Ranelid functions as some kind of an extra “singer” in the band, when he recites his one-liners – his recitations – to music. His basic position during this performance or concert is also among the musicians on stage, where he either stands up or sits on a chair. In the background a suggestive photograph of the group; no advertising boards.

During his recitals Ranelid moves around in the room, so as to create a closeness to and contact with the audience. The whole performance gives a stronger impression of planning, of being staged: Ranelid often looks at his playlist to remind himself of the order of the songs and his own contributions – and he chats to the leader of the band before performing his own numbers. In total Ranelid stands for twelve such interpositions or numbers during the evening. In sum the institutional framing – from the premises to the stage that has been clearly arranged for the concert – makes this performance seem like an artistic happening or concert performance (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 201).

Already in the prelude to the performance, which including the interval is almost two hours long, it is quite clear that Ranelid not only talks or preaches but also takes on the role of singer. Ranelid does not begin, as he has done in other performances, with anecdotes or short jokes. Instead he recites something that is much more like the lyrics of a song – or a prose poem. His speech is organised in a more lyrically unpredictable way than as a narrative at the Scala in Ystad. For example in the fifth number of the evening he cites from the introduction page in a novel by Stig Dagerman with the support of the saxophone-dominated music. First in Swedish – just like in Vinslöv – later also in English. Ranelid makes here a definite entry into the Jazz & Poetry tradition (Baumgartner 2001).

In Ranelid's first number one can differentiate two themes that are well-known to anyone who knows their Ranelid. First of all it is about the power of the word. Secondly it is about the unique and inviolable dignity of man.

The part about the power of the word in the first number is introduced with the sentence: "Show me anything on Earth that has the density and the weight and the mass that the word has". During the time – approximately one minute – that it takes for Ranelid to perform this first part about the possibilities of words, this sentence is repeated at least twice. In this way it gets the character of a refrain or chorus that frames in the other sentences that vary the theme.

In a similar way Ranelid uses one and the same sentence in the second thematic section – "Every person on this Earth exists in one single sample and when she is gone she can never be replaced by anyone" – three times and lets it frame lines such as "You are tall, you are short, you are feeble-minded, you are mentally retarded, you are even equilibristic in the expression of language".

Thus Ranelid works throughout with repetitions of single words, groups of words and full clauses. When it comes to singing – a genre he approaches in Ystad – this is nothing strange. But anyone who has read or listened to Ranelid will know that these repetitions and reuses apply to all of his oral appearances. Neither is this surprising bearing in mind that Ranelid, as he himself emphasises, does not use a written down script in the role of entertainer. This naturally requires that the speaker has a memory bank that is quite comprehensive with ready-made formulas and expressions to lean on and make use of. This practice is, to a certain extent, in conflict with the originality requirement that is a fundamental prerequisite in the romantic and modernistic tradition that Ranelid, at least in the beginning of his writing career, had as his point of departure. At the same time these formulas and expressions are Ranelid's own expressions. They are not anyone else's words that he imitates or repeats. Ranelid of today finds support in Ranelid of yesterday.

Ranelid's appearances thus show all the typical signs of oral narration. As a performance artist without a script Ranelid can be compared with the rhapsodes who during the pre-classicistic era – before the art of writing – with the help of special *formulae* could recreate long stories off by heart. Traces of this can for example be found in the *Iliad* and the *Odyssey*. These works were probably written down on a particular occasion with a specific oral appearance in mind. Thus they display a number of characteristics – writes Walter J. Ong in his classical study *Orality and Literacy: the Technologizing of the Word* that are typical of speech in the early oral societies, in so-called "primary oral cultures" It is a matter of "heavily rhythmic, balanced patterns, in repetition and antitheses, in alliterations and assonances, in epithetic or other and other formulary expressions, in standard thematic settings" (2002: 34). Such formulae are to be found on different levels. It can be anything from the use of standard words and expressions, such as, for example, Ranelid's continually appearing phrase "it's as simple and as great as that". To the reuse of entire episodes, such as when Ranelid in all of these ana-

lysed appearances tells the audience about the skull injury of his childhood and the subsequent tinnitus problems which he sees as a fundamental part of his artistry.

As an entertainer Ranelid works today in what has been called “the secondary spoken language culture”, in other words, in a written-language dominated society like our own, which is nonetheless experiencing a renaissance for the spoken word. This rebirth includes the use of new electronic and digital techniques: from the telephone and radio to the television and mp3-players. And naturally there is a great difference between our day’s spoken language culture and the conditions for words and communication, thought and knowledge that prevailed in primarily oral cultures. Secondary spoken language is “more deliberate and self-conscious” (Ong 2002: 133). Yet still, in Ranelid’s use of language as a performance artist, one can see traces of classical oral story-telling (Ong 2002: 32–76). This kind of speech is often bound to a specific situation; since concepts in oral cultures tend to be used in specific situations, close to the experiences of human life. Thus the situations that form the starting point of Ranelid’s ethical sermons are consistently concrete situations – often self-experienced.

Furthermore, Ranelid’s oral appearances are characterised by a wealth of words and a surplus of information – so-called redundancy. This is because one’s thinking cannot proceed as quickly in speech as in writing. By using different oral expressions for one and the same thought the speaker can carry on thinking without having to be quiet.

Moreover oral speech tends to be aimed at struggle. This is because in societies without a written language it was difficult to store knowledge and know-how. The only way of communicating it was to repeat it to each other, to speak to each other face to face. This could easily lead to strife and physical behaviour. We have already seen how Ranelid during his dinner performance verbally attacked Bush’s war on terrorism. In Ystad Swedish football player Fredrik Ljungberg and Simone de Beauvoir are among those who land up in the line of fire. Alongside struggle and confrontation in spoken language situations, one can also find examples of the opposite: empathy and participation. Just as Ranelid contrasts George W Bush with Desmond Tutu at his dinner party, in his sixth number in Ystad he contrasts Fredrik Ljungberg with Zlatan Ibrahimovic. And there is no doubt as to who is the “good guy” of the two. The empathy and admiration are both completely on Zlatan’s side. This is made clear in the quotation below both with the description of Zlatan’s artistry on the football field and with Zlatan himself being seen as connecting with Ranelid’s humanistic message:

Now Zlatan comes in here. Now he writes a Z with white chalk over Ystad’s and Malmö’s dark skies. Now white flakes from the chalk fall down and settle next to the black sheep. Now he does a roll & scissor. Now he does sixteen of them. Now he flies. Now he makes sure to keep the ball close to his feet. Now he stretches Sweden’s broadest grin between Smygehuk in the far south and Jukkasjärvi in the far north. Now he dribbles, now he jinks, now the back starts running in the wrong di-

rection. Now he's a sibling of Nacka, now he's a sibling of Romario, of Ronaldinho. Now he's a sibling of all the great players. Now he comes from the town of Rosengård. This is how one describes the world's longest and best and most beautiful class travel.

This part of the Ystad performance has a very special character. The son of Malmö and the former player in the town's best football club – Malmö FF – praises here another son of Malmö and MFF-player. The tone is humorous but still warm when he imitates Zlatan's special Malmö dialect – and comments: “Zlatan – he must always maximise” – about the luxuriously renovated house at the finest address in Malmö. Ranelid comments on Zlatan's broad smile – one of the Zlatan brand's most obvious “product attributes”. As time goes on Ranelid becomes more and more involved, the intensity is raised: the words clatter on. The accompaniment of the band gets the pulse rising even more. The repeated word “now” also contributes. During the number Ranelid moves smoothly around in the room as though to bring forward the image of a dribbling football player and thus illustrate the opening line: “Now Zlatan comes in here.” The audience, who is thrilled, gets a feeling of how Zlatan “flies” forwards over the green grass with the ball close next to his feet. Ranelid evokes a warm-hearted image of Zlatan with the big smile, the equilibristic technique on the field and the generous attitude to his old home-town. Some of this energy and empathy most likely stems from the fact that Ranelid himself has travelled on a similar class journey – from the working class quarters of the eastern parts of Malmö to the centre of the Swedish media scene – even if at a lower level as far as money is concerned.

The tendencies we have looked at in Ranelid's Ystad appearance – the use of formula-like repetitions, its constraints of the here and now, the wealth of vocabulary, the element of struggle but also the empathy and striving to accomplish a feeling of togetherness – are naturally also a part of the author's other appearances on stage.

At the end of the day the question remains: what was it that triggered the concentrated, almost sacred atmosphere during the appearance in Ystad – an atmosphere we could all feel and that was also lifted forward in the review done by the local newspaper? So far we have shown with different examples that this performance bears a stronger stamp of artistic staging – of being aestheticised – than both the others we have analysed. Yet it is nonetheless obvious that it is not enough to point to the degree of aestheticisation to explain the stronger experience. This aestheticisation collaborates namely with other pivotal aspects, and then, not least the religious element.

As Fischer-Lichte points out rituals often have a recurrent, trisected structure (2008: 175). In the first phase the participants leave their daily lives behind them. Translated to Ranelid's Ystad performance this implies that we and the other spectators took ourselves to the cinema theatre Scala at the end of the work day, where we seated ourselves in front of the stage. The second phase – the actual “transforming phase” – implies that the people who have been separated from

their daily contexts take part in a strong, “transforming” experience that ideally gives them a new identity. For example in initiation rites of manhood young men are exposed to diverse physical ordeals and hardships. By managing these they prove themselves worthy of being taken up into the circle of real men. This second phase thus takes place between two “thresholds”: the participant has taken the step over the threshold that separates daily life from the place of the actual ritual, which in turn is one threshold away from the daily life context that the participant of the ritual finally re-enters into. This step back into daily life is namely the third phase: the, by ritual transformed, participants re-enter into their original contexts, but now with another identity and status.

As mentioned previously: one should take care when drawing parallels between various types of rituals. When we say that we to a certain extent were “struck” by Ranelid’s Ystad performance, we perhaps do not mean that it was an experience that changed our lives and forever left us with a change of character once we crossed the “threshold” between the Scala and the reality of daily life – this however, does not mean that such an experience would be impossible. On the other hand we do mean that the performance/ritual in its “second phase” gave us strong, maybe even “revolutionising” experiences that had the effect of bowling us over as least as long as we found ourselves within the threshold. The transformation may be described as temporary rather than constant; the latter is the pronounced goal in more traditional rituals. The journey that is the actual performance – not the destination – seemed for us in Ystad to be the strong experience. But this can of course vary between individuals in the audience (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 199–200).

Fundamental for a “threshold experience” is such a feeling of community – with an audience that is spoken to and that participates in different ways – as we have pointed out during Ranelid’s various performance appearances. As Fischer-Lichte points out, such an artistic performance therefore implies a transgressing and crossing of different kinds of borders:

Among these supposedly natural borders are the borders between art and life, high culture and popular culture, and Western art and non-Western-art. [– – –] its aim is to transcend rigid oppositions and to convert them into dynamic gradations. The project of the aesthetics of the performative lies in collapsing binary oppositions and replacing the notion of “either/or” with one of “as well as”. (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 203–204)

One obvious such opposition, which Ranelid negotiates during his Ystad appearance, is the one between ethics and aesthetics, between the right way of acting in life and art. Towards the end of the evening this becomes particularly clear. The band Tales have just performed Joni Mitchell’s well-known “Both Sides Now”, which has made a strong impression on the audience and results in the longest applause of the evening. The leader of the band happily hugs the other band members. The Ranelid number that follows after this evening’s aesthetical peak illustrates the striving to build bridges between aesthetics and ethics. Still moved

after “Both Sides Now” the individuals in the audience have their senses wide open for the “preacher” and ethicist Ranelid. This goes back to the feministic discussion or “provocation” in the novel *Kvinnan är första könet* (2003; “The Woman is the First Sex”). It concerns an existential view of woman – and not least an honouring of her as a mother: “There is nothing more beautiful on this Earth than a mother breastfeeding her child”. Thus, Ranelid says, a woman can never be the “second sex”, which is the title of Simone de Beauvoir’s classic from 1949. The provoker Ranelid, who is critical of de Beauvoir, is careful to express his dissociation in an original and aesthetically effective language. He criticises de Beauvoir for passivity in the face of the burning issues of the time and claims that she merely “sat amongst the upper class and hid her face in the wreaths of smoke from Jean-Paul Sartre”. In immediate connection to this he turns to a listener and reminds us of his inventiveness in language: “Where do I get it all from?” – The audience cheers. Ethical preaching and aesthetical ambition go hand in hand.

Ranelid’s attempts at, especially in the Ystad performance, in different ways transgressing the opposition between art and life, between global and local etc, can be seen from a wider perspective. To think about and understand the world in terms of such binary oppositions is an inheritance from the rational philosophy of Enlightenment of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The Age of Enlightenment sought to “demystify” the world. By referring to the laws of nature and reason one wished to explain everything that had previously been seen as mystical, magical or difficult to comprehend. This was attained by dividing existence into oppositions: heaven against earth, soul against body and, towards the end of the 1700s, also art against life (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 206).

Therefore one could perhaps claim that this ambition to transgress borders becomes a way of “re-mystifying” the world. Today we also know – not least thanks to the natural sciences – that there are powers and aspects of the world that cannot be explained rationally with the help of enlightenment-inspired reason. “Today, chaos theory, or microbiology in particular, bring home the fact that the world is ‘enchanted’ and that it forever eludes the grasp of science and technology” (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 206). The border-crossing and abolition of borders that is staged during a performance can therefore be experienced – if only temporarily – as the re-creation of the magical dimensions of existence. An audience that has left the chores of everyday life on the other side of the threshold can be receptive for such a performance, experience it as revitalising, as challenging and jolting (Fischer-Lichte 2008: 207). This was the case when Björn Ranelid and Tales stood on stage in Ystad’s renowned cinema theatre. Ethics and aesthetics are twined together. Music and song and speech are united. For a while the world seemed once more to be “enchanted” to the spectators of the performance.

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