

A PERFORMATIVITY OF NORDIC SPACE

The Tension between Ritual and Sincerity Re-Embodied through Each Performance of Sweden's *Allsång på Skansen*

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Drawing on Richard Schechner's ideas of performance, modern ritual theory (especially the work of Seligman, Weller, Puett and Simon), and Butler's considerations of performativity, this article considers that the performativity of Nordic Space is located in the tension between ritual and sincerity. Using examples from the 150th televised installment of *Allsång på Skansen* (a Swedish community sing-along event) I examine how repetition affords us the opportunity to create and re-create a sense of what Nordic could mean in a variety of arenas. Repeating Nordic Space as a blend of memory and re-creation continually reestablishes the refreshing tension between ritual and sincerity.

Keywords: performativity, ritual, sincerity, sing-along, Sweden

There will be more “in-between” performative genres. In-between is becoming the norm: between literature and recitation; between religion and entertainment; between ritual and theatre. Also, the in-between of cultures: events that can't easily be said to originate in, or belong to, this or that culture but that extend into several cultures. (Schechner 1985: 322)

I wonder: What would a performativity of Nordic Space look like? Sound like? Feel like? Smell like? Taste like? These questions begin a discussion of action and doing that is central to the project of Nordic Spaces. These are not passive places, pieces of real estate to be possessed, owned or reflected in a state of being. On the contrary, Nordic Space evokes an active exchange of *doing* and calls forth a space relocated and re-imagined. To do this imaginative

thinking, I want to explore these concepts of performativity and Nordic Space as an “in-between” genre that might offer insight into events that “extend into several cultures.” I will then look at the Nordic Space of *Allsång på Skansen* (a Swedish community sing-along event) in particular through the lens and speaker of sight and sound.

Richard Schechner, groundbreaking theatre and performance scholar, opened up the discursive vista, or a fan in his case, of what is possible to examine under the rubric of performance and as a result created an interconnected web of possibilities for understanding the way we experience the world. Undergirded by collaborations with and writings of anthropologists Victor Turner, Erving Goffman and Clifford Geertz, Schechner explained that the basic performance structure of gathering/performing/dispersing underlies – and literally con-

tains – the dramatic structure of Turner’s *Breach, Crisis, Redressive action and Reintegration* (1974). But in contrast to theatre’s bottom line of conflict, performance looks to solidarity as the foundation (Schechner 2003: 189). In breaking from the Aristotelian poetics of conflict/resolution, Schechner casts a wide net in describing the magnitude of performance. In an extensive table he lists a range of possibilities from clear examples of theatre, dance, and music to “what Clifford Geertz might lift his eyebrows at as the blurriest of genres: the Iranian hostage crisis of 1979–80, a bar mitzvah, famous murder trials (like those of Klaus von Bulow or Jean Harris), Hindu temple services, title boxing matches, TV soap operas, the Yaqui Easter Passion play, orthodox Euro-American theater and dance, noh drama, ram-lila, etc.” (ibid.: 295). The very nature of the term Nordic Space invites community. The word *Nordic* is inclusive, encompassing a region, and the word *Space* offers a location of gathering and solidarity where doing can happen. Is it so far to suggest, then, that a dining experience at the restaurant *noma* in Copenhagen (see Larsen, this volume), the ritual of gift giving between museums in Sweden and North America (see Gradén, this volume), or an outdoor community sing-along in Stockholm find a home on Schechner’s taxonomy of performance? Not at all – yet taken to a reduced conclusion it could be interpreted that everything is performance, and in some regard, this is true. What Schechner sets out to explain in a thick description, however, is what he posits as a triune thesis: “1) there is a unifiable realm of performance that includes ritual, theater, dance, music, sports, play, social drama, and various popular entertainments; 2) certain patterns can be detected among these examples; 3) from these patterns theorists can develop consistent broad-based models that respect the immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity, and ever-changingness of individual performances, runs and genres” (ibid.: 296). Taking this task into consideration, what consistent patterns or models can be explored when examining a notion such as Nordic Space with its immediacy, ephemerality, peculiarity and every-changingness? And what is essentially performative about it? Can we see in

Nordic Space what Schechner described above as a more “in-between” performative genre?

Performativity

Before attaching the concept of performativity to Nordic Space, we need to understand clearly why this term is salient to our discussion. In their introduction to the collection of essays in *Performativity and Performance*, Andrew Parker and Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick (1995) clarify how J.L. Austin’s term of performativity (speech-act) is expanded in the works of Jacques Derrida (1982) and Judith Butler (1988). Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick argue that “performativity enabled a powerful appreciation of the ways that identities are constructed iteratively through complex citational processes” (1995: 2). Simplified, the iteration gives meaning – action gives insight. Through this collection of essays we begin to tease out a definition of performativity, one that is defined differently from performance or theatricality. While performance and performativity share a similar root, what Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick want us to think about is that a “certain stress has been lifted momentarily from the issues that surround *being something*, an exciting charged and spacious stage seems to open up for explorations of that even older, even newer question, of how saying something can be doing something” (1995: 16). Indeed, through examining performance, Schechner opens a window into understanding the world. Parker and Kosofsky Sedgwick focus that view by suggesting that performativity is the repeated act of performance, and from that repeatable act meaningful identity emerges. Taken together, they articulate that identities are performative: made and re-made by doing.

Such a question is taken up by Judith Butler where she makes the strong argument that gender is performative. She contends that what defines gender is established through repeatable speech-acts over time (Butler 1988). For example, a daughter learns to be a gendered “women” by observing over time the repeated performance of her mother. In developing this idea of performative gender, Butler opens up the discussion for other theoretical possibilities.

Can repeatable performances over time confirm other aspects of human identity? Can a performance confirm and reaffirm the notion of Nordicness? Can Nordic Space be defined by repeatable performative acts? Performance-studies scholar Joseph Roach considers the way that communities attempt to define their own culture by actively selecting what they will transmit through performance. Different than analyzing history and what written records demonstrate, he contends that performance highlights social memory as a form of cultural transmission across time. Events such as theatrical performances, shamanistic rituals, or Olympic opening ceremonies function for cultures as ways to select what they transmit through memory (Roach 1995: 47). Richard Schechner sees this as a “restoration of behavior” in the ritual performance where the behavior is symbolic and reflexive – “its meaning need to be decoded by those in the know” (2002: 28).

Considering these ideas together, they develop an idea that certain aspects of community and its collective knowledge is in part tested, confirmed and modeled through the repeatable act of doing: that is, performativity. The larger question for the Nordic Spaces project, then, is where are such repeatable actions located; what places make space for these performances? For Butler, gender became that performative space. In the case of the greater topic of Nordic Spaces, what types of places are created when a sense of Nordicness is embodied and (re)performed over time? And how, according to Schechner, can these spaces be immediate, ephemeral and ever-changing? In the assessment of Nordic gastronomy, Hanne Pico Larsen examines the Nordic Space of restaurant *noma* and how the vast expanse of the Nordic region (and its *terroir*) is embodied in the tactile, taste, smell and look on each plate served (see Larsen, this volume). Through performative acts over time, the restaurant is redefining what Nordic Cuisine means to the public, the gastro-audience. The audience is a willing participant in the performance equation. This act of engagement underscores the concept that Nordic Spaces are fluid in their very notion of identity however bound in/to nature, but somewhat simultaneously sacrosanct. At the same

time that we (a collective we) have a sense of what “Nordic” means, we are also challenging that definition: in the case of *noma* engaging both playfulness in form of innovation, as well as nostalgia (cf. Larsen this issue). In the same way as Butler demonstrates how concepts of gender can and will change over time, so too, can the concept of heritage and ones identity within it (see Gradén, this volume). These performative “spaces” of fluid memory exist all through the Nordic region and can be explored to illuminate different approaches of how performance matters in construction of Nordicness. By saying Nordic Space, we are not eliminating, but gathering and re-gathering, articulating that collective or solidarity suggested by Schechner (2003).

The Ritual Process is Performance – According to Schechner

As implied above, Nordic Space is about doing and redoing memory. It is this performative act of iteration, of doing and re-doing that I want to explore in the rest of this article. To do this, I want to bring ritual into the discussion where the acts of doing and re-doing are essential. The current discourse in ritual studies is helpful to understand the performative tension at the core of Nordic Space. While ritual studies in the past have focused more on the exchange between traditional and modern, current scholars are re-examining this dichotomy. Instead of seeing ritual as meaning something, scholars are now thinking that ritual is about *doing* more than about being or saying something. Catherine Bell, for example, sees one of the core characteristics of ritualization as “the simple imperative to *do* something in such a way that the doing itself gives the acts a special or privileged status” (1997: 168). There is a tension, however, that emerges in the act of doing – a tension between repetition and originality, between a perceived ritualization and individual sincerity. The “doing” of Nordic Space relies on a heritage cycle to keep its identity reified, but needs to be located/named in order to be authentic. For example, somehow we agree collectively that a type of cuisine is Nordic, or a dance step is authentic. The moment that the authentic becomes established, however, the

location of the Nordic seems to shift. We have the urge to explore the parameters that constitute the cuisine or dance step. In the words of Henry Glassie, “all tradition is change” (1995).

This paradox is the tension articulated in *Ritual and its Consequences: An Essay on the Limits of Sincerity* (2008). Here, authors Adam B. Seligman, Robert P. Weller, Michael J. Puett and Bennett Simon make the convincing argument that ritual creates *as if* worlds, drawing upon the imaginative capacity of the human mind to create a subjunctive universe. Instead of looking at ritual as a fixed structure indicating stasis in order to understand meaning, they contend that ritual works best when it is not seen as a convention, but rather looking at what *could be*. They suggest that we do not teach our children to say “please” and “thank you” because convention dictates so, we do it because the very nature of kindness emerges in the repetition of the act. We say “please” and “thank you” because we want to live in such a world that is filled with gratitude, even if it is done by rote without feeling. We can never know if the “please” and “thank you” is sincere and often it is not. In doing a ritual, however, the whole issue of our internal being is often neither here nor there because “[w]hat you *are* is what you *are in the doing*, which is of course an external act” (Seligman et al. 2008: 24). The degree to which the “please” is sincere is personal and can only truly be known by the individual, but with ritual, the repetitive act indicates a social orientation. With the repetition of the action, we are embodying a view that the currency in the world *could be* kindness. This is what Seligman et al. describe as the subjunctive and by using the grammatical term, they introduce a helpful idea in explaining why we go through the act of ritual repetition.

To further understand this tension between ritual and sincerity found in the social world, Seligman et al. underscore a “continuum of orientations”. They write that ritual orientations stress the “performative, repetitive, subjunctive, antiscursive, and social,” while sincere orientations stress the “indicative, unique, discursive, and private.” These orientations are not necessarily binaries, but rather “structural alternatives to action” with two modes of

response having their “internal tensions and inter-actions” present at all times (ibid.: 115). Our modern world seems to emphasize sincerity and by means of the indicative and private it has inappropriately been linked to truth and purity. Ritual offers hope to a fragmented world as it “continues to provide an ongoing arena of creativity and tradition, acceptance and obligation. Ritual practice becomes the arena where the dynamic of that third space, the potential space within which cultural creativity takes place, is worked out” (ibid.: 37). Similar to Schechner’s in-between performative genre, this third space makes room for engaging a Nordic presence of cultural creativity, whether the space is actively found on the performance stage, culinary arena or urban landscape. I think the space of Nordic performativity can be found at the balance of the tension between ritual and sincerity. To examine this notion more fully, I want to locate this potential third space at a particular event, a potential in-between, according to Schechner: the community sing-along of *Allsång på Skansen*.

A Performative Nordic Space: *Allsång på Skansen*

The immediacy of our senses (sights, sounds, smells and tastes experienced in the moment) and what we recall (memory) are in constant tension. Uniquely private, I remember the smell of a special cuisine as it evokes a feeling in me, while at the same time I am removed from the ephemeral moment. This same experience works collectively as we listen to a certain song and it moves us emotionally because for the group it brings to mind a nostalgic ephemeral moment. This desire to recreate is one reason why we return to familiar behaviors and yet we can never step in the same river twice. These experiences are momentary, so we establish structures that help us remember. Tastes, sounds and sights work on an emotional level – a known song or a familiar taste can stir the core tension between sincerity and ritual. We hear, we are moved, we are called to respond – together, it is an individual experience and a community event based on prior knowledge. One such place to examine that offers understanding in the

performativity of Nordic Space is Sweden's summer community sing-along event, *Allsång på Skansen*. To offer context, *Allsång på Skansen* began in 1935 as an outdoor summer event at Stockholm's open-air museum Skansen, gradually evolving to also include a live national radio broadcast in 1956, and finally live national television broadcasts beginning in 1979. Initially, people gathered to sing popular songs and as a tradition with humble origins the program has grown in size and scope (Bæhrendtz 1980; svt.se/2.110066/1.406787/all_historiafakta?lid=puff_1635683&lpos=lasMer, accessed August 11, 2010). In its current configuration of an hour long performance on the seven (eight in 2010) Tuesdays following summer solstice, people can attend the event at Skansen, they can watch the program live on television, they can stream it live via the web and they can see the archived version of the performance for a limited time after the event. Given the numerous opportunities for viewing it (in different formats), some form of *Allsång* reaches nearly a quarter of the Swedish population each week during summer (svt.se/2.134076/1.2043610/allsang_pa_skansens_rekordlista?lid=puff_2043939&lpos=lasMer, accessed August 11, 2010).

The viewing experience, however, involves (at least) two distinct events wrapped up in one. There is a live event for those in attendance and a mediated event for those who watch from a distance. The live event has the sensation of being at a large open-air revival meeting. There is a significant notion of eventness (Sauter 2000) where the overall experience engages the sights, sounds and smells of a summer night in Stockholm and seeks to evoke a heightened state of *communitas* (Turner 1998).¹ Those in attendance participate with their full bodies; they chant, they sing, they respond in motion to emotions throughout the event. Rain or shine, the crowd embraces the moment of the outdoors. While the physical stage operates as a focal point to the action, the shared space of all who attend the event sense the importance of *being* there. They appear as the physical embodiment of a collected Sweden. But more importantly, there is a keen sense of *doing* there. The crowd assembles at *Allsång* to actively participate in

the event, most notably to sing. However, this singing reaches into households as well, as people sing along with their televisions aided by the text of the song scrolling on the screen. In addition, the event clearly also reaches beyond the borders of Sweden as was demonstrated by the multinational flags in the audience and the fact that its form has been replicated in both Norway and Finland (tv2underholding.no/allsang; yle.fi/uutiset/kulttuuri/2009/05/yhteislaulu_kasvattaa_suosiotaan_738033.html, accessed August 11, 2010).

Allsång is a good example of exploring a performativity of Nordic Space because the reach of the program extends beyond the borders of Sweden. While it is indeed a focal point of Sweden,² other Nordic countries are represented in its influence, guests and participants (as noted above). As a significant act of doing, it also involves performativity that is repeated and (re)performed each week. Given our topic of the tension that can exist between ritual and sincerity, it is important to examine how *Allsång* entails a cyclical struggle between the two, as mentioned earlier.

Much of early ritual theory was based on the observations of the action and reaction entangled in Protestant/Catholic reform. For instance, the Protestant movement emerged as a reaction to the rigidity of form and the perceived meaninglessness of the formalism within the Catholic Church. Perceived as missing was the sense of sincerity, the emotional connection and a desire to have an "authentic" faith. In later times, this same perception of emptiness combined with the legal ramifications associated with the Swedish State Church (the payment of fees to get married, for example), led many people to move from the formalism of the church to discover new "authenticity" in more charismatic movements. These movements once again tapped in to the sincerity individuals apparently craved from religion and while these new movements included several religious Fundamental, Evangelical and Pentecostal groups, the form of authentic worship that emerged echoes the same loose, sincerity-based form that has developed in the presentation of the *Allsång*. The structure makes sense when one sees *Allsång* as a reaction to the ritualized performance in the Swed-

ish State Church and as a reflection of the aforementioned contemporary congregations. While Svenska Kyrkan (The Church of Sweden) is the largest church in Sweden with about 75 percent of Swedes as members, only 2 percent of its members regularly attend a Sunday service – about 150,000 people (svenskakyrkan.se/SVK/eng/liturgy.htm, accessed August 11, 2010). Another religious organization a little closer to the structure of *Allsång* is the Pingst, or Pentecostal Church in Sweden with about 83,000 members (pingst.se/viewNavMenu.do?menuID=71, accessed August 11, 2010). *Allsång*, with its seven Tuesday installments following the Swedish national holiday of *Midsommar*, generates a television audience of over two million people per episode in addition to those who are in attendance at Skansen. If I wanted to reach a sizable portion of Sweden, I would choose *Allsång* as the platform rather than the church. Unlike the religious movements, however, *Allsång* eliminates the spiritual without doing away with the sincere and still manages to have developed a distinct ritual component.

What *Allsång* has done to facilitate social memory is to script the event in the same way that some contemporary Protestant churches have scripted the Sunday worship service; both emphasize an authentic sincere feel and both rely on pop-culture influences to motivate the audience. While the live event has more of a tent-rival feeling to it, the televised version is more tightly structured, but both have an order of the “service” that is essentially the same each episode – the crowd assembles in Skansen with the “Pastor” leading his flock in an opening song. Then a series of special guests are integrated in the “service” to sing, dance, perform or lead the group in a rousing rendition of a song from the yearly printed song book, or “hymnal”. Even though the songs in this book change each year, the book represents a cultural repository of songs Swedes *should* know. Interspersed among the solo performances and public sing-alongs are interviews with the special guests that serve as human-interest testimonies to help the audience feel connected to the guest. There is a similar feel to the “testimonies” of those who have turned away from sin and returned to the church.

Testimonies are very important in the Evangelical Protestant movement as one’s individual experience offers a sincere and honest witness to the authenticity of the event. There are even public service announcements because the producers know that they have a significant audience to get a new message across. For example, in the 150th televised episode the cast and crew of *Bolibompa*, a popular children’s program, walked through the crowd to simulate the program’s programmatic move to the new television channel for children. Each event concludes with the assembled participants receiving flowers from young children often dressed in traditional folk costumes, suggesting an emotional anchor to a collective past.

Very important to the concept of sincerity is the powerful conviction that individual belief holds. There is very little ambiguity, and thus play, in search for a true self or a pure self (Seligman et al. 2008: 107). Within the Protestant notion of salvation, people personally ask Jesus to come into their hearts and thus wash all sins away creating a clean and whole person. In a similar fashion we see this invocation each week in the very words of the opening song written by the previous host of *Allsång*, Lasse Berghagen. Much like an evangelist, the song’s refrain engages all people to place Stockholm in their hearts:

Stockholm in my heart,
let me sing of you now,
aged in youthful greenery,
island city, it’s you!
Of the cities I know in the world
you are the city that has received everything.
Through Mälaren’s love towards the sea
you are a mixture of sweet (fresh) and salt.³

For Protestants (Evangelical and Fundamental, in particular), the act of asking Jesus into their hearts is the most important choice and significant act an individual can make or do. As an act of sincerity, then, placing Stockholm in people’s hearts is as equally transformative.

The current “Pastor” figure in *Allsång*, Anders Lundin, energizes the live crowd, but also – similar

to a television-evangelist – talks and sings directly to the television camera as if he is speaking explicitly to the people watching at home, thereby involving them in the event in a much more immediate way than those on site. Lundin is a Swedish “everyman” who, with his broad and welcoming smile exudes sincerity urging the flock to follow him through the hour spectacle/service. Looking at the website of the Swedish Television (svt.se/2.109533/start, accessed August 11, 2010), he is the face of *Allsång* and by extension is the authentic face of Swedish summer – light, carefree and buoyant. He is the right mixture of “sweet and salt”, as the song above evokes, walking the fine line between ritual and sincerity, age and youth, tradition and trend.

Popular and traditional songs in particular carry important cultural significance and act as a common vocabulary in society. This is especially true for the charismatic movements. Music moves people to have an emotional and spiritual experience. People seek it out, they crave the sincere feeling it generates and try to duplicate it. The choice of many of the songs and those who sing them is built on a collective memory, or a “generational memory” (Hyltén-Cavallius 2002) and while difficult to identify what that shared knowledge is, there is a symbolic construction of community here (Cohen 1985). Using

Michel de Certeau’s theories about the practice of everyday life (1984), Roach illustrates how spectators become actors in rituals (1995: 46). This blurred line of performer/audience is evident throughout the performance of *Allsång*, especially on television. During the sing-along, the scripted line is also blurred as improvisation brings new life to songs that in many cases have long been considered obsolete. Furthermore, the nation, via television and web-casts, observes ordinary people as performers in a larger apparatus happily singing these old classics. The authentic voices (participants in the crowd) sing as professionals lead the song. Throughout each song, several “authentic voices” get the chance to sing into the microphone (but not too much). What is important to note is that people sing along regardless if a microphone is placed in front of them. This is communal song and in a sense communal worship.

In the 150th episode, such a song was the traditional “Flickorna i Småland” (Girls from Småland, a Swedish province). In a clever move by producers, this community sing-along was led by the blue grass/folk group Abalone Dots. This was particularly relevant in terms of building sincerity and authenticity because Abalone Dots are four women who come from Västervik in Småland and thereby



Ill. 1: Anders Lundin is the charismatic leader of Sweden’s sing-along, *Allsång på Skansen*. (Photo: Carl-Johan Söder/SVT)

they were helping to legitimize the song for the Swedish audience. This intentional arrangement of performers (both the local folk group and the audience) brought life back to the song and re-confirmed it as a Swedish standard.

Music is an important part of church services and essential to the very fabric of *Allsång*, and the musicians at *Allsång* hold a significant place in the production hierarchy. Every great evangelist has had a musical genius at his side. The renowned Billy Graham had Cliff Barrows as his song leader – Anders Lundin has Kjell Öhman, who is well known in Sweden.⁴ Working as another anchor for the older generation who view *Allsång* as a link to their heritage, seeing the legendary jazz musician on stage each week further assuages their anxieties of *too* much change taking place. In a time of pop, hip-hop and electronica, Öhman reminds the older faithful that tradition still matters. The structure of the program and the cultural reminders of traditional songs and familiar faces serve to sustain a Swedish identity in an over-mediated world.

Allsång has become a relevant place of communal gathering because of how it engages sincerity in the same way that the charismatic movement embraces pop-culture to celebrate the individual experience of worship. Feeling connected to something greater and living those emotions transform a simple gathering into a conversion experience. If we rely solely on the individual feelings to always evoke the same emotions, however, we are only engaging half of what makes the experience performative. I think a key in understanding how *Allsång* becomes a “third space”, an “in-between” in which Nordic Spaces becomes performative, is exemplified in the chorus of the opening song of the program, “Genom Mälarens kärlek till havet är du en blandning av sött och salt” (see above). The tension is held in this last phrase, a mixture of sweet (or fresh water) and salt. Lake Mälaren is the confluence in Stockholm where the freshwater from inland meets the salt water from the sea. For if something becomes too sincere, it often individually becomes too sweet. Paradoxically, it actually loses its authenticity. In order to preserve something, meat or in this case tradition, one uses

salt. But too much salt takes all the moisture and life out of it and paradoxically, loses all sense of meaning. It might be argued that Nordic Spaces is constantly renewed within the tension involved in keeping tradition fresh. As a Nordic Space, the audience of *Allsång* participates in the performative act in three ways: they embrace the communal *as if*, they willingly do so and they do so repeatedly.

Performativity and Ritual: The Subjunctive, *as if*

Held in this idea of the subjunctive, *Allsång* looks at the *could be* aspect within a divided and fractured community. The structure of the event allows for the creative flexibility for Nordicness to be formed and reformed through performativity. Most present in the performative repeating is the collective acknowledgement of songs that everyone sings. As the example above with the group of women from Småland confirming the traditional aspects of an acknowledged standard folk song, they are affirming an aspect of their Swedishness in the very act of doing. Yet the form and the potential of the *as if* are in constant movement, an inherent flexibility in the iteration.

This is the very point that Seligman et al. are trying to make. That there is room for the creative expanse of possibility within helping the world navigate the changes and fragmentations. In effect, ritual is fluid and how *Allsång* responds to these new influences is found in the performative act. Nordic Space is at once an imaginary and imagined space – one that is defined and redefined in the hope of a *could be*.

Schechner offers us a glimpse in how the *could be* is a paradox that keeps the performative tension alive. When one thinks subjunctively, one can imagine how terms associated with progress, vanguard, the cutting edge, or the avant-garde can be employed within the traditional. Schechner, while offering five different approaches to the avant-garde (historical, “current”, forward-looking, tradition-seeking, and intercultural), ultimately wonders if there is actually no avant-garde at all or perhaps only a blended combination (1993: 5–18). Instead of looking at progress through the lens of a historic avant-garde, with its connotation of trying to shock people, Schechner

notes that the “current avant-garde includes work that is forward-looking, tradition-seeking, and intercultural” (ibid.: 18). Recognizing how complex the avant-garde has become, this description is apt for how a “forward-looking, tradition-seeking, and intercultural” Nordic Space can exist. At least this tension is evident throughout the performances of *Allsång*.

Seeing the world as it *could be*, something central to the theme of the 150th episode, *Allsång* highlighted Stockholm as the 2008 EuroPride festival city with a significant portion of this particular show being dedicated to LGBT (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender) songs and sketches.⁵ In this episode the complex perspective was illustrated by an ecumenical call of cultural inclusion. This is a particular Nordic trait given how the Nordic countries have had leading positions in adopting universal suffrage. *Allsång* demonstrated this currency with Swedish electro/pop/dance/synth group BWO (originally Bodies Without Organs) premiering the 2008 EuroPride-song “The Bells of Freedom”. The band’s performance was a full-on, get the party rocking, feel good number done in English with a focus on how the world could be with “love for all”.

The Bells of Freedom,
there gonna be ringing
the Love that I’m bringing
is Love for all.

While the crowd got caught up in the snappy pop and the feel-good lyrics, for the television audience there was a telling juxtaposition that the television and web audience experienced between this song and the one lead by Abalone Dots. The televised frame followed the lead singer through the crowd in this song creating a different narrative to the crowd shots shown during “Flickorna i Småland”. In “The Bells of Freedom” it seemed important for *Allsång* to cover as many youthful female fans as possible and nearly everyone in the camera shot was what would be considered by some to be a “traditional” Swedish girl – blond and fair. Perhaps this was a conscious choice to show the traditional screaming fan’s sup-

port of the EuroPride song, and by extension LGBT rights. During the traditional folk song “Flickorna i Småland”, however, the visual picture was different. After establishing the shot with the members of Abalone Dots, the camera cut to a person of African origins (a Swedish celebrity), then to a family of four, then to a single Asian (possibly Korean) girl, then to another person of African origin, then to an elderly “traditional Swedish” couple, back to a person of African origin, then to a young girl, and concluded with a shot of two men in pink outfits with yellow Band-Aids over their nipples donning silver crash helmets. This seemed to suggest that while “Flickorna i Småland” is a traditional song, it has the potential to be inclusive. In fact, the camera routinely tries to capture as many diverse faces as possible in crowd shots, but one cannot help but acknowledge the sea of blond that is in the audience. Understanding the power of the visual image and the story it sends, Schechner speaks of TV working to knit “together many voices into a unitary broadcast fabric” (1993: 90). Here, in *Allsång*, this projects the hopes of how a Nordic world *could be*.

For all its hoopla, both in person and via the media, the subjunctive mode of *Allsång* constitutes a dream of a shared reality and a shared future through the stories of a common past (Seligman et al. 2008: 105). Without this shared subjunctive space, or Nordic Space, individuals would need to be bound by the depths of their own sincerity. Sincerity of feeling comes to replace the subjunctive world of shared “illusion” as the new ground of personal commitment and interpersonal bonding. According to Seligman et al., the establishment of a stable and unquestionable *as is*, rather than a common *as if*, becomes the projected basis for the intersubjective world (ibid.). If the orientation of sincerity overtakes the subjunctive of Nordic Space and thus creates an imbalance, the result moves it out of the “third space” to become a platform for the individual.

Performativity and Sincerity: The *as is*

We have already looked at how sincerity relates to ritual to help create the tension we observe in Nordic Space. What is interesting to explore are exam-

ples when the application of *as is* interferes with the subjunctive performative space. Seligman et al. state that “unlike ritual, the sincere form is characterized by a search for motives and for the purity of motives” (ibid.: 105). A significant example from history where such a search for purity or a “true” self was overplayed, was during the nineteenth century campaign for nation states and nationalisms. In this search to renew the “authentic” sources of sincerity, ambiguity was avoided. In fact, ambiguity and ambivalence threaten the attempt to arrive at the “true” self (ibid.: 107). In the work of the nineteenth-century national romantics, we can see how defined the constructed identities were as the romantics tried to present the true Swede (paintings by Carl Larsson), the true Dane (the Skagen movement), the true Finn (*Kalevala*), the true Norwegian (music by Edvard Grieg).

Nordic Spaces also potentially can fall into the trap of “authenticity” or true self – especially in terms of what *is* unambiguously heritage. We see this in the intense arguments over the most authentic meatball or the exact movement of a dance step. These same questions of “true” self are at play in the episode of *Allsång* under discussion and the attempt to eliminate ambiguity only exposed an inauthentic approach to performativity, but in a distinctly different way. In effect, individual motivations of “authenticity” actually get in the way of the established subjunctive world that had been building momentum through multiple years of *Allsång*. Two examples from the 150th episode offer insight into how the very nature of trying to establish a “true” self or the “ironic true” self actually comes across as insincere to the collectivistic universe that is *Allsång*. These examples demonstrate an attempt at creating something *as is* from an individual point of view instead of what *could be*.

The first example illustrates how the identity and voice of one person, while important in and of itself, can serve to break the subjunctive agreement and disrupts the balanced tension involved in establishing *Allsång* as a performative subjunctive Nordic Space. During the summer of 2008, the drag artist Babsan, embodied by the performer Lars-Åke Wil-

helmsson, offered color commentary to Anders’ “straight”-man schtick. While drag is not progressive in and of itself, the repeated act of inclusion implied by Babsan seemed to prepare the audience for this particular episode to embrace the Pride festival fully and unconditionally. During each previous episode, Babsan would interview guests and prepare to go on with her big number, only to have Anders tell her that the program was running late and there wasn’t any time. The recurring comic gag was that there would be time “nästa tisdag” – next Tuesday. With the opening song of this episode, Anders turned to the doorway where Babsan usually enters and the door was empty. Motioning from the crowd, Lars-Åke drew Anders’ attention and the audience saw Babsan, now in the form of an actor in male street clothes. After five failed attempts, Wilhelmsson seemed to have “decided” to not participate as a performer, and yet was still shown as part of the collective community. Anders implored him to bring on Babsan and the crowd willingly approved. This comic play was, of course, a set up for the finale of the program when Babsan entered the stage full-clad in a bright pink coiffed wig, a lemon-yellow dress with dangling sleeves and high heeled shoes ready to perform her big number. As expected, Anders once again informed Babsan that there was not time for her musical number suggesting that perhaps, once again, there will be time next Tuesday. Now, however, Babsan took control to go on to sing “GALA (Jet-Set Babsan)”, a song that celebrated the celebrity life of Babsan, the character.

On the surface, it appears that Babsan had finally gotten to voice her identity, to be a part of the subjunctive *could be* expressed by *Allsång*. If she had not been “invited” to say the “I”, as Judith Butler (2000: 571) puts it, Babsan’s speech act certainly claimed the central stage of Sweden and Swedishness. Butler suggests that performative acts are forms of authoritative speech and confer a binding power on the action performed (ibid.). In declaring herself as Babsan, in a similar way to other declarations of ownership or statements of baptism, Sweden, therefore, acknowledges the power of Babsan’s performed action – an action of individual authority. Babsan’s performa-

tive statement at the end of the episode seemed to be the culmination of inclusiveness charted by earlier musical numbers and sketches.

A closer look at these earlier examples demonstrates a more complicated view of how her action was perceived, however. While *Allsång* may have wished to demonstrate how “forward-looking, tradition-seeking” Sweden is with this episode, the actual trajectory of this performance, nonetheless, missed the mark. Unambiguous as it was, the performance was solely an individual’s experience rather than that of the group, and as mentioned earlier, “sincere orientations stress the indicative, unique, discursive, and private” (Seligman et al. 2008: 115). Babsan’s performative act placed in a different subjunctive universe, say a pride parade, would have been appropriate. At *Allsång*, however, it seemed forced and indicative.

The second example comes in the form of an ironic attempt that seemed to be trying to understand, or rather, appropriate a unique and individualistic perspective. As successful as the “Bells of Freedom” was in getting the crowd communally excited about a subjunctive universe, a more muted and ambiguous crowd response was given to Andreas Nilsson’s lack of ambiguous performance of “Om jag var en homo” (If I were gay).⁶ In this performance, *Allsång* hedged its bet in Nilsson’s song on a comically ironic number that tried to extract humor from an imaginary *as is*. Possibly the mistake is in the reduction of performativity to performance (Reinelt 2002). Butler suggests that “performativity consists as a reiteration of norms which precede, constrain, and exceed the performer and in that sense cannot be taken as the fabrication of the performer’s ‘will’ or ‘choice’” (2000: 579). Since gender is a performative “act”, the performance of gender cannot always be assumed to be true. Nilsson’s attempt at performing the “truth” of “en homo” disavowed the performativity of a subculture. In other words, in an attempt to be inclusive, he was completely unaware of how his performance played to the audience he was trying to include. Playing on the expectation of the audience, Nilsson lead up to the song with a plea to heaven in the style of Tevye from *Fiddler on the Roof*, asking “why have you

made me the way I am?” Nilsson then launched into song with the tune of “If I Were a Rich Man” claiming “Om jag var en homo” how much better his life would be. There was a complicated assumption that was happening at this moment in Nilsson’s performance – an assumption of progressive confidence. As if to say, look at how far we (Swedes) have progressed beyond worrying whether or not we are accepting. By using self-irony, there was an attempt to point out that there is no longer a sub-altern group and in effect removing any ambiguity in understanding a “true” self. What is the difference between saying this is *exactly* how a Danish table should be set and this is *exactly* how the gay community acts? Both reduce the *as if* to an *as is*. During the comic song, the camera scanned the audience to reveal equal parts laughing and not laughing.⁷

As progressive as *Allsång* wanted to appear, the complexity of this performance illustrated the difference between drawing attention to how progressive one is versus the natural fluctuation of a society based on fluid practices and beliefs. Bell contends that as with ritual action, “people tend not to see how they construct tradition and meaning but rather, in ritualization, people tend to see themselves as responding or transmitting – not creating” (1997: 167). It seemed that the error for *Allsång* here was in the action and attempt of creating a definitive self rather than the responding to the adaptable changes within Nordic Spaces. Yet in this tension between tradition and progress is a space where Swedish identity is renewed and made new. Returning to Schechner’s idea that the “current avant-garde includes work that is forward-looking, tradition-seeking, and intercultural” (1993: 18), it might be said that the strength of *Allsång* is in its intercultural ambiguity, the in-between. Rather than living in a subjunctive world that has room for creative changes, the fault in these examples lay in trying to create authentic individuality motivated by articulating the way things *are*. As Seligman et al. suggest:

Getting it *right* is not a matter of making outer acts conform to inner beliefs. Getting it right is doing it again and again and again – it is an act of

world construction. This suggests the counterintuitive insight that in this world of ritual acts the self is left more “room to wander” (perhaps also to wonder) than in one where the self has to be firmly identified with its role – where the matrix of social order is in sincerity (for which there is never enough evidence, cannot be, anywhere, at any time). As ideal types the self *who does ritual* is very different from the self *who is sincere* (2008: 24).

The Repeatable Balanced Tension: A Performativity of Nordic Space

I'd like to bring the discussion back to my first moment of wonder – what does a performativity of Nordic Space look like? In considering contemporary Nordic Spaces, they are not places where individual entities dissolve into a collective oneness. Rather, as a ritual it is a subjunctively shared arena, a space in between (Seligman et al. 2008: 26). Using *Allsång* as the example, I suggest that performativity of contemporary Nordic Space is seen in the repeatable subjunctive mode of *as if* or *could be*. Together we sing, together we break bread, together we experience the city, together we give gifts – all again and again in a mode of a world based on what *could be*.

Repetition affords us the opportunity to create and re-create a sense of Nordicness in a variety of arenas. Repeating Nordic Spaces as a blend of memory and re-creation continually reestablishes the refreshing tension between ritual and sincerity. The act of repetition itself, through infinite iterations, erases what was established in the perpetuity of repetition itself. Seligman et al. articulate repetition this way:

Repetition circumscribes the future in and by the past. It limits an otherwise infinite and uncontrolled set of all possible future events within the frame of a known, specific, particular, and felt (past) experience. Repetition creates by constraining. It creates community and union by replicating precisely delineated actions, words, and gestures. By doing so, it also re-creates. The act of re-creation opens repetition to the future, to what

is not so circumscribed – to what is beyond the ritualized and formalized modes of apperception. It opens repetition to change. Repetition embraces both past and future, ritual and sincerity, the mediated and the unmediated (2008: 120).

Allsång på Skansen thus illustrates a location where a performativity of Nordic Space lives in the tension between ritual and sincerity. This Nordic Space is renewed because a significant portion of the program is based on acknowledging the group's desire to see the action as a potential – *as if* – universe. It could be said that Nordic Spaces today are dynamic spaces for this very reason; we see them, taste them, feel them and hear them sustained through flexible acts of doing and redoing over time. Glacial as change might seem, the performativity of Nordic Spaces are in constant flux, yet identifiable nonetheless.

Notes

- 1 The sense of *communitas* is not universal at *Allsång* and there are distinct moments when there is not a heightened sense of community present. Furthermore, there appears to be a currency of patience as different generations find their experience celebrated at different times during each show. *Allsång* therefore creates this multilayered community phenomenon whereby audience members wait, without judgment, their turn to feel the togetherness. Regardless, people return each week with excitement.
- 2 Often cited as the first open-air museum, Skansen was created by Artur Hazelius during the National Romantic movement of the late nineteenth century. He assembled representative buildings from around Sweden in one location to emphasize the historical depth of Sweden. For a complete description, consult the Skansen website: www.skansen.se.
- 3 ”Stockholm i mitt hjärta, låt mig besjunga dig nu, åldrad i ungdomlig grönska, öarnas stad, det är du! Av städer jag känner i världen är du den stad som fått allt. Genom Mälarens kärlek till havet är du en blandning av sött och salt” (translation by the author).
- 4 Kjell Öhman has led the house band at *Allsång* for over 15 years. He is especially renowned for his Hammond-organ skills.
- 5 According to their website, “The European Pride Organisers Association is a network of European Gay, Lesbian, Bisexual, Transgender Pride Organisations. epoa was founded in London and incorporated in 2002

in Berlin as a non-profit association. epoa holds the rights to the title EuroPride. The purpose of epoa is to promote lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Pride on a pan-European level and to empower and support local and national pride organisations in their efforts of planning and promoting pride celebrations”(www.europride.info, accessed August 11, 2010).

- 6 Andreas Nilsson is most known in Sweden as the voice of Kalle Anka – Sweden’s Donald Duck. The choice of Nilsson to sing a song reflecting a cultural “other” was an interesting choice given the fact that he voices a classic “other” character in the early catalogue of Disney characters.
- 7 The discussion of appropriateness was also found on the popular Youtube comment section where the argument vacillated between “Fördomar är ju drivkraften i den här sortens humor” (Prejudice is the driving force behind this kind of humor) and “Jag tycker inte det är fördomar, han talar ju gott om att vara homosexuell. Jag kan faktiskt hålla med honom i det han sjunger, på ett positivt sätt. Så tro inte att jag har fördomar, se det som en komplimang!” (I do not think it’s prejudice, he is talking good about being gay. I can actually agree with him in what he sings, in a positive way. So, do not think that I have prejudices, see it as a compliment!) (youtube.com/watch?v=Q9N5yOITS8g, accessed August 27, 2009). Although not necessarily a reliable source for cultural criticism, the comments do shed light on the continued discussion of gender and gendered politics in Sweden.

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