

Introduction. Queer Eurovision, post-closet

Mikko Tuhkanen

First staged in 1956, the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) was originally established to allow European countries to showcase their particular national cultures. Each country was to choose a contestant that best reflected the national constituent. While the entries from different countries would meet on the stage in a playful competition, the event's real aim was to enhance transnational understanding by familiarising European peoples with each other's cultures.

Yet, the idea behind the contest—a benevolent encounter of nationalities, beamed to domestic spaces across the continent—quickly disintegrated into a mass-culture spectacle that held scant allegiance to its original intentions. Rather than celebrate their particular cultures, countries increasingly chose to churn out vapid examples of popular culture designed to appeal to as wide an audience as possible. Consequently, after the brief golden years of classic Eurovision entertainment, by the mid-1970s the event had become a market-driven extravaganza with integrity and good taste sacrificed for the immediate translatability of the crassest mass culture.

So goes one of the popular narratives of the ESC's history, one that the Eurovision scholar Mari Pajala (2006, 64–68)

calls “the narrative of decline.” The proponents of this narrative critique what they consider the commercialisation of a space where the coming together of neighbours was to be enacted. Yet, like so many other stories we tell of our pasts, this legend mourns something that may never have existed. As Pajala points out, only in 2002 was the wish that the songs reflect national cultures inscribed in the Eurovision Broadcasting Union (EBU) rules (ibid., 377n43). Moreover, one need not underline the paradox in the lament over the presumed loss of Eurovision's innocence: the fact that a “mass event” cannot but produce “mass entertainment.” It is not surprising that the ESC became the phenomenon it was in the 1970s (if not earlier) only by owning the most easily assimilable idiom and strategies of popular culture.

Alongside the narrative of decline, another reading of the ESC, one that concerns the contributors in this issue, has gained currency since the 1990s. The advocates of this narrative point out that gay audiences, particularly gay men, have for a long time comprised some of the most devoted of Eurovision spectators. According to this account, the song contest, at least since the 1970s, has implicitly but undeniably constituted an annual gay event unchallenged in its scope and significance. Unbeknownst to the presumptively

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heteronormative gatekeepers of transnational mass media, many a queer kid of the 1970s and 1980s experienced heady moments of recognition in front of the TV screen every spring. The family event allowed the explication and proliferation of an idiom that was to assist in the queer adolescent's orientation toward his (and, sometimes, her) alternative future families.

A further twist to these competing histories comes from the fact that, by now, some members of ESC's gay audiences have developed their own narratives of decline. For them, something of the original significance of the event was lost when ESC's queerness ceased to operate according to the logic of what D.A. Miller (1988) calls an "open secret" and, instead, was stylised for self-conscious mass circulation among and consumption by mainstream audiences. As much as the 1998 victory of Israel's transgender diva Dana International functioned as a welcome legitimisation of the event's queer specificity, it has also come to stand as the most obvious moment of the kind of challenge to closeted pleasures that the happiest of outings can paradoxically produce. According to this recent narrative of decline of ESC's queerness, the contest was at its best when it was impelled to speak in a forked tongue or double-voice to reach its gay viewers while appeasing its hetero family audience. With Dana International, the disclosure was complete: everyone knew that gays loved Eurovision and Eurovision was gay; the proto-gay kid, glued to the TV screen and lapping up the ESC glamour – inventively producing a private world of meaning because of the absence of more transparent points of queer identification – was

now threatened with extinction.

The essays in this special issue of *SQS: Journal of Queer Studies in Finland* take up the post-outing Eurovision Song Contest as an opportunity to think through such issues as the cohesion and generation of gay fandom; the constitution and disruption of heteronormative address and audiences; the oxymoronic status of the idea of "queer nationality"; the national temporalities that are performed and critiqued on the Eurovision stage; camp as the primary critical tool for the analysis of ESC's queerness; and the possibility of camp's lesbian specificity.

As we are beginning to witness, the Eurovision Song Contest provides a wealth of material for cultural studies scholars interested in analysing formations of nationality, popular culture, gender, affect (including the queer specificity of shame), performance/performativity, mass media and globalisation (see Raykoff & Tobin 2007; Pajala 2006; Feddersen 2002). We present the essays under the rubric of "Queer Eurovision" while recognising the work that still remains to be done in this area of cultural and media studies. That is, the gay and queer approaches – and may my untheorised conflation of these two contested terms in this introduction function as a self-conscious gesture toward further thinking – are as varied as cultural attitudes toward the Eurovision Song Contest itself.

The first section of our issue, "QueerScope," includes three articles. "Performing the queer network. Fans and families at the Eurovision Song Contest" offers a sociological

inquiry into Eurovision fandom. Based on interviews with fans, Brian Singleton, Karen Fricker and Elena Moreo demonstrate the practices with which gay viewers have approached the contest, reading its apparently heteronormative presentations “against the grain.” They also suggest that, with the recent outing of Eurovision as a queer phenomenon, some of the comforts the contest has traditionally held for gay viewers may have to be reconfigured—or, as they put it, “queered”.

Mari Pajala’s essay, “Closeting Eurovision. Heteronormativity in the Finnish national television,” takes a close look at the ways in which the Finnish media has dealt with Eurovision over the years. Pajala traces the practices of heteronormativity—the most flagrant examples of which she isolates in the media coverage of Dana International’s victory in 1998—through which the media have not only packaged the event for the consumption of the mainstream heterosexual audience, but also have *constructed* this very audience. She also draws our attention to the moments of slippage or rupture where the media’s heteronormative assumptions have failed to produce the desired effect and their addressees have been revealed as an unexpectedly varied body of viewers.

In “Danzing time. Dissociative camp and European synchrony,” Peter Rehberg and Mikko Tuhkanen suggest a re-reading of the category of camp, which has arguably been the primary critical lens for queer readings of the ESC. Developing the concept of “dissociative camp” through Nietzsche and Foucault, they provide a close reading of the performance of the 2007 contest’s runner-up, the

Ukrainian Verka Serduchka. Serduchka’s unconventional drag performance requires a rethinking of camp as an epistemological frame for queer-theoretical commentary on the ESC; her (if we may) entry, “Danzig Lasha Tumbai,” also functions both as a critique and an affirmation of contemporary demands for the synchrony within the disparate cultures of the European Union.

The section “Queer Mirror” includes two commentaries on the queerness of Eurovision. In his second contribution to our issue, Peter Rehberg analyses the odd coupling of terms in the phrase “queer nationality”—odd because of the more conventional queer-theoretical assumption that “the tenor of queerness is intrinsically antinationalist” (Puar 2005, 131). Without taking for granted either of the terms, Rehberg asks what the Eurovision phenomenon may tell us about both queerness and nationality. He proposes that Eurovision may be one of the few arenas where queers get to experience nationality *affectively*. In the carnivalesque format of Eurovision, we witness the hyperbolisation of the processes through which nationality is reproduced through affects.

Annamari Vänskä, on the other hand, seeks out what often seems the rarest of phenomena on the Eurovision stage: lesbian camp. Numerous commentators—including Germaine Greer—lauded the 2007 winner, Serbia’s Marija Šerifović, for having successfully challenged the Eurovision format with what they considered her distinctly *uncampy* performance. For Vänskä, however, such assessments, in their misreading of the butch-femme aesthetics of “Molitva’s” staging, reveal the easily missed dynamics of lesbian camp.

Arguing that we read Šerifović's performance as commentary on the protocols of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class, Vänskä tracks a genealogy of lesbian camp by turning to "minor" ESC history, more precisely the 1992 Finnish national finals, where Kikka—the undisputed, if sadly dismissed, queen of Finnish trash disco of the 1980s and early 1990s—offered the spectators a camped-up spectacle of white, middle-class femininity.

In the section "Queer Lens: Art Gallery", Harri Kalha introduces us to the Finnish media artist Anneli Nygren, the winner of the media art contest organised by *SQS Journal* and AV-Arkki (The Distribution Centre for Finnish Media Art) to coincide with the Queer Eurovision conference. Continuing Nygren's previous works' tongue-in-cheek commentary on popular culture aesthetics, her award-winning video art piece, *When Noise and Death Meet*, tackles the Eurovision phenomenon. In his analysis of Nygren's art practice as "a queer citational masquerade", Kalha argues that her productions are queer in the etymological sense of the term—he finds her works "queer by bent". As such, Nygren's work also facilitates a rethinking of what we mean by the adjectival or adverbial *queer* in the first place—a point that we'd suggest the phenomenon of the Eurovision Song Contest demands, too.

The texts in this issue emerged from the presentations, and the dialogue elicited by them, during Queer Eurovision!, a conference held in Helsinki in May, 2007, in conjunction with the 52nd Eurovision Song Contest. As the organizers of the event and the editors of this issue, I and Annamari Vänskä want to thank Kirsi Saarikangas, Pirkko Koski, the

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