

Bespectacular and over the top. On the genealogy of lesbian camp

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In May 2007, the foundations of the queer Eurovision world seemed to shake once again as Serbia's representative, Marija Šerifović inspired people all over Europe vote for her and her song "[Molitva](#)," "[Prayer](#)." The song was praised, the singer, daughter of a famous Serbian singer, was hailed, and the whole song contest was by many seen in a new light: removed from its flamboyantly campy gay aesthetics which seems to have become one of the main signifiers of the whole contest in recent decades. As the contest had already lost the Danish drag performer DQ in the semi finals, the victory of Serbia's subtle hymn-like invocation placed the whole contest in a much more serious ballpark. With "Molitva" the contest seemed to shrug off its prominent gay appeal restoring the contest to its roots, to the idea of a Grand Prix of European Song, where the aim has been to find the best European pop song in a contest between different European nations.

The serious singer posed in masculine attire: tuxedo, white shirt, loosely hanging bow tie and white sneakers, and was surrounded by a chorus of five femininely coded women. The gay audience immediately read the arrangement as butch-femme and the rumour spread: "Is she a lesbian?"; "She *must* be a lesbian." The discussion about Šerifović's sexuality sparked in tabloids and at last the audience's cu-



Marija Šerifović's performance was said to lack camp and restore the contest to its roots, to the idea of a Grand Prix of European Song.

riosity was appeased: not only was Šerifović identified as a lesbian but also as a Romany person.¹ Šerifović seemed

¹ Karen Fricker has recently pointed out that Šerifović was at first most keen to claim her victory for Serbia and not for lesbians. Šerifović said that she was "proud to be Serbian" and that this was a victory for "all Serbia." Fricker's analysis is that governments, national broadcasters, and national publics are more willing to accept these

to embody a paradox: a serious song drawing from the age-old traditions of European folk music; sung with all seriousness and professionalism—yet by an openly lesbian Romany young woman posing in a starkly tailored suit instead of trying to fish for votes with the usual apparel. It was apparent that that this was not just the victory of Serbia, but it was the victory of the Roma and lesbians—and thereby of the utopia of tolerance.

Šerifović was saluted in the press all over the world. While BBC's reporter Mark Savage (2007) lamented that the "unassuming, bespectacled singer" had triumphed over the flamboyant Ukrainian drag act Verka Serduchka, the celebrated feminist writer Germaine Greer (2007) praised this milepost in *The Guardian* as follows:

Usually I don't care who wins Eurovision; this time I cheered every time Serbia increased its lead. For once winning was important. When 23-year-old Serifović walked on to the glittering stage in her white plimsolls and unbuttoned black Dolce & Gabbana suit, the ends of her bow-tie hanging loose, kitsch was suddenly extinguished. When she stood four-square, lifted her head and sang, shrieking camp was silenced. (Bolding mine)

Both Savage and Greer commented on Šerifović's performance, Savage musing somewhat dolefully on her unassuming "bespectacularity"; Greer celebrating the piece's power as the antidote for shrieking camp. Greer seems to suggest that, thanks to Šerifović, the whole contest became somehow more profound and more grounded, more "four-

kinds of statements which give, in turn, more subversive power to the gender play. Fricker 2008.

square"—in a word, more *real*, because the performance was everything *but* camp. This performance was serious, deep and earnest, quite unlike our expectations of camp. For Greer and Savage the performance works against camp—and in so doing exposes the superficiality and shallowness of camp. As Savage writes, the performance seemed at times to be a sort of "liturgical dancing" and the song a "heartfelt plea to an estranged lover with religious overtones". Šerifović's performance is, in other words, praised for the lack of camp. One might ask: Who defines camp, on what grounds? And who is camp for? Who can camp? Can women camp? What about lesbians? Does lesbian camp even exist or is it merely a gay male priority?

Camp as gay male prerogative

Ostentatious, exaggerated, affected, theatrical; effeminate or homosexual; pertaining to or characteristic of homosexuals. So as n., 'camp' behaviour, mannerisms, etc.; A man exhibiting such behaviour.

Oxford English Dictionary, "camp"

a. To make (something) 'camp' –; esp. in phr. to camp it up, to use exaggerated movements, gestures, etc., to over-act. b. To be 'camp'; to be or behave like a homosexual.

Oxford English Dictionary, "to camp"

Even though the etymology of camp is obscure, the use of the word as an adjective dates back at least to 1909, when

it was defined as actions and gestures of exaggerated emphasis (White 1966, 70). Early on, the word was also linked to overtly excessive acts and gestures of homosexuals—or someone who *behaved* like them. The etymological history of camp as a word referring to exaggerated gestures of homosexuals was further stressed in a famous, oft-cited passage from Christopher Isherwood's novel *The World in the Evening* from 1954. In it, Isherwood (ibid., 110) identifies the relationship between gay male homosexuality and camp and goes even on to define camp as either “high” or “low”:

*You thought it meant a swishy little boy with a peroxide hair, dressed in a picture hat and a feather boa, pretending to be Marlene Dietrich? Yes, in queer circles, they call **that** camp. It's all very well in its place, but it's an utterly debased form. -- What I mean by camp is something much more fundamental. You can tell the other Low Camp, if you like; then what I'm talking about is High Camp. High Camp is the whole emotional basis of the ballet, for example, and of course of baroque art. You see, true High Camp always has an underlying seriousness. You can't camp about something you don't take seriously. You're not making fun of it; you're making fun out of it. You're expressing what's basically serious to you in terms of fun and artifice and elegance. Baroque art is largely camp about religion. The ballet is camp about love.*

Isherwood continues to categorise: Mozart is camp, Beethoven is not; Rembrandt is not camp but El Greco and Dostoyevsky are. The difference between high and low camp lies in the affective relationship one has to it: at the core of true high camp lies seriousness, which is dealt with artifice and elegance. Contrary to this low camp is

bogus; it is superficial, mere pretending without any deeper seriousness.

This notion of camp was popularised by Susan Sontag (1964/1999, 53–65), who went on to define camp as a “sensitivity”. She claimed that camp sensitivity loves everything that is unnatural, artificial and exaggerated—ultimately the idea of camp is mere artifice. Sontag's (ibid., 56–57) suggestion that camp converts the serious into the frivolous, sees the world as an aesthetic phenomenon, places everything in quotation marks, and defines being as playing a role through the employment of bombastic mannerisms in order to produce ambiguous interpretations and gestures full of duplicity, has become widely accepted. However, many critics have argued before me that Sontag's claim (“it goes without saying”, her exact words) that camp sensitivity should merely be disengaged and depoliticized is not entirely arguable. Sontag's understanding of camp as style at the expense of content suggests that camp is camp because it has no content behind the gorgeous façade. To quote from Sontag's reading: “It is art that *proposes* itself seriously, but *cannot be taken* altogether seriously because it is ‘too much.’” (ibid., 58, italics added). Sontag's account seems somehow incredibly misunderstood, but her legacy still lives on in the popularised conceptions of camp—for example in Germaine Greer's account. More importantly, Sontag's notion also confines the ways in which lesbian camp can be conceptualised. Is “Molitva” a song that will be taken too seriously, because it is not too much?

Is “Molitva” too little? Or, on the invisibility of lesbian camp

If we understand camp as a phenomenon which belongs, by and large, to gay male culture and which mostly draws from excess of femininity, why wouldn't it also be logical to assume that the most conventional form of lesbian camp would draw from masculinity and cross-dressing? Even though literature on lesbian camp is rather scarce, there is enough to go from for the pertinent reader. For one, one of the earliest mentions of lesbian camp is from William White's (1966, 70–72) entry on camp. He writes, in passing, that “camp meant ‘homosexual, Lesbian’ in theatrical argot about 1920” and that this meaning of camp was in general use by 1945. Despite this lesbians have not been the core agents of camp culture as we know it—even though they have been historically even more invisible than gay men within image and literature production (Grover 1989, 166). Also, the way in which we take it for granted that female stars—Greta Garbo, Marlene Dietrich, Judy Garland, Marilyn Monroe, Joan Collins, Barbara Streisand or Madonna, to name just a few—as well as women's clothing, accessories, make-up, and styles are material to be freely appropriated by gay men indicates, how heavily the concept of camp is gendered, even masculinised. As Pamela Robertson (1996, 5) puts it:

Most people who have written about camp assume that the exchange between gay men's and women's cultures has been wholly one-sided; in other words, that gay men appropriate a feminine aesthetic and certain female stars but that women, lesbian or heterosexual, do not similarly appropriate the aspects of gay male

culture. This suggests that women are camp but do not knowingly produce themselves as camp and, furthermore, do not even have access to a camp sensibility. Women, by this logic, are objects of camp and subject to it but are not camp subjects.

Robertson has written about heterosexual and lesbian camp—and stressed its potential as a political tool in rearticulating gender within feminism. Another, even more classical take is Sue-Ellen Case's (1988/1999, 185–199) article, where she introduces the lesbian convention of the butch-femme couple as an example of lesbian camp. But instead of aiming her criticism of the negligence of lesbian camp at gay male culture, she criticizes the way in which heterosexual feminists have used butch-femme as a thin, unhistorical metaphor and failed to see its genealogy in camp. Case (ibid., 191) condemns this tendency and compares it to the ways Native Americans have been metaphorised and turned into decorative advertising gadgets:

Heterosexual feminist critics who metaphorize butch-femme roles, transvestites and campy dressers into a “subject who masquerades” as they put it, or is “carnavalesque” or even, as some are bold to say, who “cross-dresses” – evacuate the historical butch-femme couples' sense of masquerade and cross-dressing the way a cigar-store Indian evacuates the historical dress and behaviour of the Native American. As is often the case, illustrated by the cigar-store Indian, these symbols may only proliferate when the social reality has been successfully obliterated and the identity has become the private property of the dominant class.

Case's point is that heterosexual feminists, who have detached butch-femme from its historical roots i.e., ignored its lesbian context, have also failed to see that that context

made the whole culture of cross-dressing and masquerade visible for feminists in the first place. In overlooking the historical context of this dynamic duo, heterosexual feminists have not been able to see that butch-femme is no more repetition but a parody or camping up of the assumed naturalness of heterosexuality. Case calls for the recognition of the performative aspect of butch-femme masquerade in relation to camp. Instead of seeing butch-femme as an empty symbol reproducing heterosexuality, Case sees it as an opportunity that offers lesbians and heterosexual women the kind of agency necessary to resist the dominant constructions of gender. This agency is made possible because the “butch-femme couple inhabit the subject position together”, and are thus in a position to critique the ideology of sexual difference (ibid., 186).

In other words butch-femme roles constantly seduce the sign system of heteronormativity when they insist the role-playing to be artificial. This means, quite simply, that butch-femme are perceived as roles, as masquerade. Case (1988/1999, 194) explains: “Within the butch-femme economy, the femme actively performs her masquerade as a subject of representation. She delivers a performance of the feminine masquerade.” The same applies to the butch, who in turn delivers her masculinity performance to the femme. In their excess of “genderedness”, they both highlight the performative nature of these roles. Case (ibid., 197) argues:

The point is not to conflict reality with another reality, but to abandon the notion of reality through roles and their seductive atmos-

*phere and lightly manipulate appearances. Surely, this is the atmosphere of camp, permeating the **mise en scène** with ‘pure’ artifice. In other words, a strategy of appearances replaces a claim to truth. Thus, butch-femme roles evade the notion of “the female body” as it predominates a feminist theory, dragging along its Freudian baggage and scopophilic transubstantiation. These roles are played in signs themselves and not in ontologies. Seduction, as a dramatic action, transforms all of these seeming realities into semiotic play. To use Baudrillard with Riviere, butch-femme roles offer a hypersimulation of woman as she is defined by the Freudian system and the phallocracy that institutes its social role.*

Case thus understands camp as a discourse that can trouble the heteronormative gender system through ambiguity and irony. Her bold way of describing the structures of realism as “only sex toys” for the butch-femme couple is aimed at creating an antidote to realism, which always promulgates one political truth.

If the idea of butch-femme role-playing as spectacularization of heterosexual eroticism is applied to Marija Šerifović’s performance, it becomes rather obvious that the performance is a parody of heterosexual male virility, not only within the Eastern Central-European culture where Šerifović comes from, but also within the Eurovision Song Contest itself. At the beginning of “Molitva” Marija Šerifović enters the red-lit – read: sexually charged – stage. She is dressed in a tuxedo, walking casually but firmly, with her hand in her pocket – read: manly – across the stage, with her white-collar shirt hanging loosely over the trousers, and the bow tie dangling loose-ended around her neck. As she starts singing, in her deep voice, “I’m

wide awake; an empty bed drives my dreams away. -- I'm losing my mind -- Our lips are touching softly, you're the one I believe blindly"; the spectator—at least this particular one—is quite ready to buy the idea that this is a song camping up all those thousands of performances, where the male protagonist cries after his lost love after an already-fading after-glow.

This parodic setting is stressed further when five spectacularly feminine women come in on the stage, gathering around the singer, eying her intensely and touching her ever so lightly. Are these ladies her lovers, perhaps? The arrangement camps up the signifiers of heterosexual femininity and masculinity. Adhering to the conventional standards of butchness, Šerifović wears a business suit, which hides her body and makes her gender ambivalent. On the other hand, the back-up singers are coded as femmes: they wear their hair long, sport make-up and heels and are dressed in women's sassy business suits. The whole constellation, the excessively ritualistic and slow movements of the performers, as well as the religious-spirited lyrics, which Šerifović moans with the assistance of her femmes, plays on the heterosexual assumptions about the contest's syrupy love songs:

*Prayer – It burns my sore lips like a fire
Prayer – Thy name is something I admire
Heaven knows just as well as I do, so many times I have cried
over you
Heaven knows just as well as I do, I pray and live only for you
I can't lie to God as I kneel down and pray
You're the love of my life, that's the only thing I can say*

Heaven knows s/he's miserable now. The seduction climaxes as the five femmes gather around the butch, grasp each other by the hand, and expose that the red stains they have on their backs of their hands are actually halves of hearts, now forming full hearts (yes: they are or have all been each other's lovers). All this, and more. Yet the supposedly knowledgeable feminist Germaine Greer missed the camp.

On the other hand, no better did the cognoscenti present at the Queer Eurovision seminar in 2007, which Leena-Maija Rossi (2008, 32) has recently pointed out. Rossi argues that the audience at the seminar was "disappointed" in the performance and didn't see it as lesbian, heterosexual or bisexual camp, because it—we, for I was among the audience, too—was too fixated on Šerifović's statement, which she had delivered at a press conference just days before the performance. She had blurted out the words: "*I just dream about a husband and children*" (Huotari 2007, quoted in Rossi 2008, 32).

If Greer can be said to have revealed her uncampy sensibility, the Queer Eurovision seminar audience, according to Rossi, revealed its failure to embrace the queer. Rossi, who saw the performance as camp, wonders why the queer seminar audience failed to see this and answers: it was in quest of identity. "The audience -- would have wanted to hear a confession about the performer's 'real sexual orientation'", she remarks (ibid.). Rossi also suggests, in reference to Mari Pajala (2006, 296–317) that this is understandable, because the tradition of Eurovision Song

Contest is strangely two-fold: it has its roots both in the heteronormative nationalistic ideology and in the extensive gay male fan base.

Rossi's reading of the audience's disappointment is arguable. However, I also want to suggest, that the audience of the Queer Eurovision symposium, like Greer and others, failed to see "Molitva" as camp, because it did not meet the audience's expectations about camp. Šerifović's performance was not perceived as camp, because it didn't draw from the cultural repertoire of those conventions (or the Lacanian *screen*, as Kaja Silverman² would have it) i.e. from those poses, styles, and gestures that the Eurovision Song Contest fans are accustomed to associate with camp performances. Maybe the presence of the historical context of camp, which connects camp especially to gay male identity politics, just made it hard to see "Molitva" as camp. For Eurovision fans, the identity or sexual orientation of the performer is in fact still important both politically and personally. Also, the Queer Eurovision audience didn't only consist of Western queer scholars, but of non-academics, press journalists, fans, and other interested people from all parts of Europe, who all had different ideas of what constitutes camp.

Be as it may, it is crucial to remember that camp has its roots in a specific historical context, in which camp used to express repressed emotions and feelings of shame, guilt

² Kaja Silverman (1996, 19) has an interesting interpretation of the Lacanian screen: "[It is] the repertoire of representations by means of which our culture figures all of those many varieties of 'difference' through which social identity is inscribed."

and rejection that certain groups of people have had to endure on a daily basis due to the traumatic "fact" that their sexualities were criminalised and pathologised. This is important to remember especially now, in year 2008, after the Eurovision Song Contest has been held in Šerifović's home country, Serbia. In Belgrade, the press journalists had been given a sheet of information, signed by EBU's Executive Supervisor Svante Stockselius and the Executive Producer of the Serbian TV Sandra Susa, basically asking the press to "avoid political discussions, public same gender sexual expressions and jaywalking".³ The official explanation is that information sheet was given to the press in order to prevent violence against lesbians and gay men during the Eurovision Song Contest week. It will be interesting to see whether these kinds of statements will have continuation in next year's contest—it is a well-known fact that the sexual rights are not in the same level in former Soviet countries like they are in Western European countries.

Part of the audience of the Queer Eurovision seminar formed its interpretation of Šerifović's performance as lesbian camp; at the same time the dreaded press statement just made this interpretation impossible for the other part of the audience. My reading of the disappointment—rather, *disagreement*—at the symposium is that the audience could see it as camp, but mostly in the Sontagian way: more as artifice, less as political. The audience—or I, at least—was bound to ask: *whose* camp was the per-

³ Eurovision Song Contest Belgrade 2008 press release. I am grateful to Dr. Karen Fricker, from whom I received this press release.

formance, if not Šerifović's? Was it the stylist's, or perhaps the choreographer's camp? Perhaps it was designed as a stylish, queer but safe commodity camp? Maybe the singer, dressed in an expensive Dolce & Gabbana suit embraces the violent stereotype, which imagines the Romany people as those who have the gift of singing (like Africans are stereotypically perceived as those who have the rhythm in their veins), but who never have real jobs and therefore dress in expensive designer suits which they have bought either with social benefit or with drug-money. Maybe it points out the ways in which lesbianism and non-heterosexuality are still taboos within Romany culture all over Europe. Perhaps the performance can be read as the latest chic product, produced by the colonisation and by the commodification of this particular Romany lesbian body, wrapped in a fancy Dolce & Gabbana suit, to be consumed by the mostly white, middle-class audience, which wants to be at the fore-front of everything new and exciting.

The other half of the dynamic duo: Femme camp

Šerifović's performance can be read to trouble the ideas of gender, sexuality, ethnicity and class from butch point of view. But as we know, butch without a femme by her/his side is an impossibility. So, I give you the ultimate femme, and especially the ultimate queen of Finnish trash disco: Kikka aka Kirsi Viilonen (1964–2005). Her performance in the 1992 Eurovision Song Contest Finnish semi-finals is just unforgettable. This performance, "[Parhaat puoleni](#)" never even made it to the finals, because it didn't receive

enough votes from the Finnish Eurovision audience. This situates Kikka and her femme camp already at the margins.



Kikka aka Kirsi Viilonen (1964-2005) caused a Kikka-fever in Finland at the beginning of the 1990s.

At the beginning of the 1990s Finland had Kikka-fever. Kikka, a woman then in her thirties, had started her career in the mid-1980s, at the time, when bosomy bombshells like Madonna, Samantha Fox and Sabrina gained huge international coverage and fame within pop music.⁴ Kikka was the embodiment of a stereotypical peroxide blonde: ethnically white young woman, from an ordinary background from an ordinary working-class city of Tampere. She was ordinary but at the same time so much more. Her body, curvy but slim, her pretty face with reasonably full lips and childish look combined to trashy, blatantly revealing clothes and high heels; flashy make-up with fake tan and a fake beauty spot; fake jewellery combined with heavy gold chains and rings in every finger were tailor-made to make her seem like the perfect Finnish pin-up.⁵

What is interesting in Kikka's performance is that it is constituted by a matrix of intersecting performative categories of gender, race, class and sexuality. In her case, the importance lies not only in her gender performance but especially in the performance of working-class white femininity—performed by a white woman. Kikka camps up the stereotype of the peroxide-blondeness, denaturalising the ways in which white is naturalised. Kikka's blonde ambition exposes how gendered whiteness can be and is performed by white people. In this sense her performance troubles the idea of the power of whiteness as a natural condition of white bodies. Or, as Richard Dyer

4 On Kikka's autobiography, see <http://groups.msn.com/KikkaFanClub>.

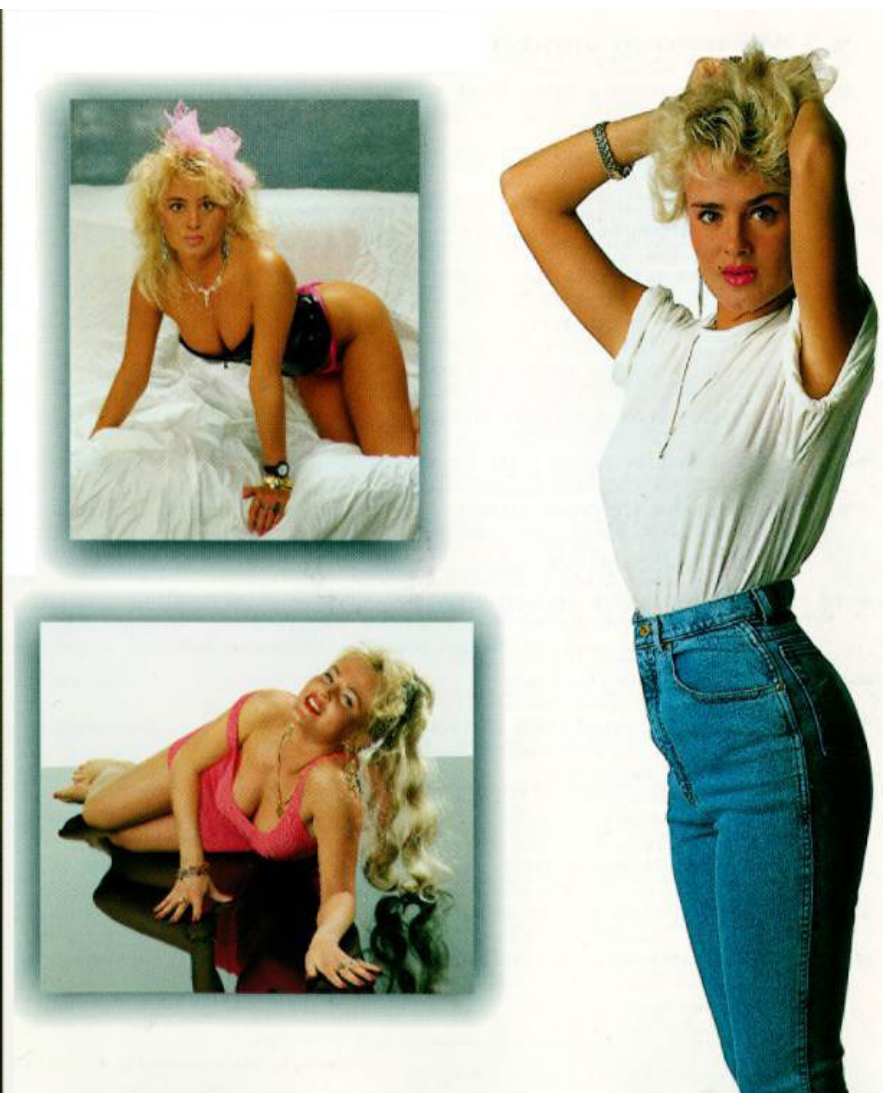
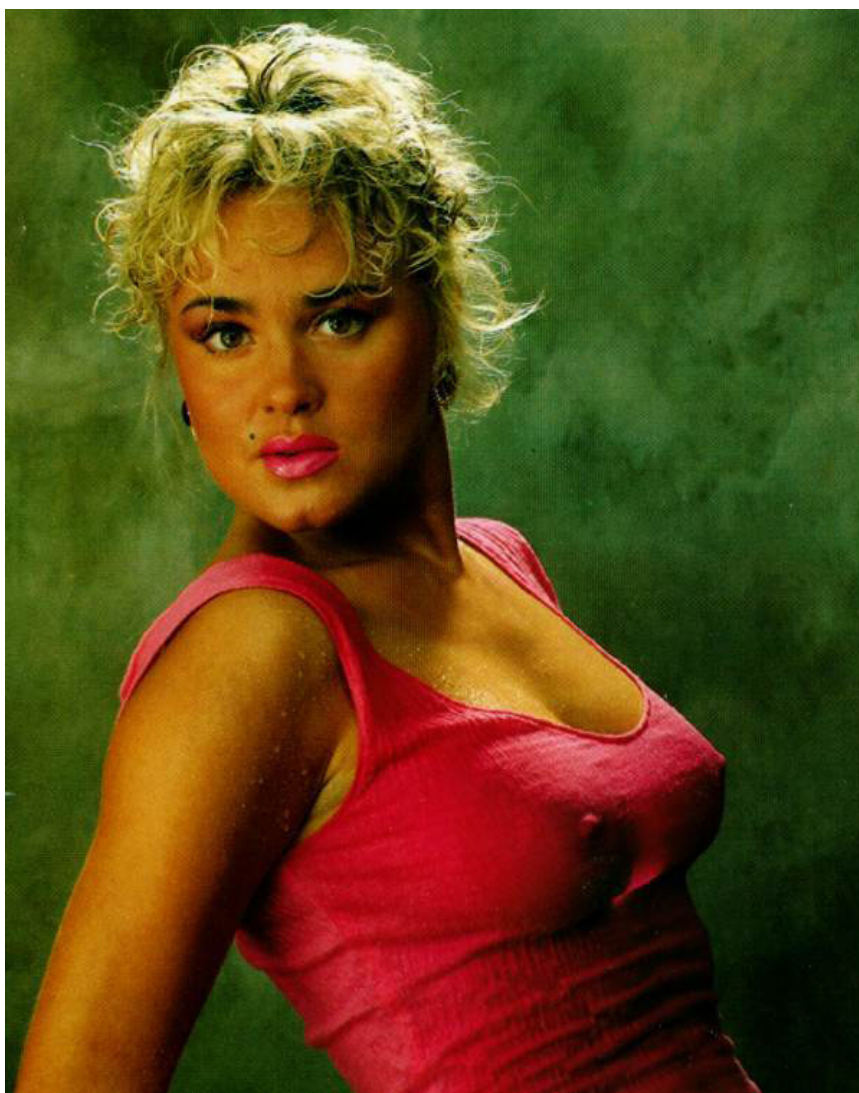
5 On the history of the pin-up, see Buszek 2006.

(1997, 3) explains:

Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves as whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled. Bilding in original.

Kikka's popular, even populist variation of the white pin-up made her a celebrity in Finland in the early 1990s. She had a huge fan following among both heterosexual and gay men and young girls, and she won gold, platinum and double-platinum for her albums. Kikka's success was more or less in her self-conscious camp—she embodied, what Angela McRobbie (1999, 46–61) has named “ironic femininity”. Kikka didn't make a difference between her stage-self and her self. In her interviews, where journalists asked about her style, labelled as “kikkailu” (“gimmickry”), a play on her name, she declared, with laughter, for example: “To summarise: I am what I am.” (Kikka 1993) or “I am always like this: Gay, rakish, good-humored Kikka.” (Kikka 1995)

Kikka's style drew especially from Marilyn Monroe and Madonna, as she always pointed out, and this similarity or the mimicry of her idols also made her somehow more down-to-earth as well as her pin-up camp more visible than perhaps her idol's appearances and performances. In Kikka's case, everything was a little bit out of tune, which makes it easier to see the space of discontinuity between her white body and the whiteness she performs: the viewer can easily see the heavily applied make-up, the hair extensions mixed with Kikka's own hair, and her inexpensive



During her career, Kikka embodied several stereotypes of the sexy peroxide blonde.

corsets and super-market high-heel shoes, which for example in Kikka's 1992 Eurovision Song Contest semi-finals mimicked the outfit designed by Jean-Paul Gaultier for Madonna for her Blonde Ambition World Tour in 1990. Kikka's camp can be seen as a mode of class performance, which subverts naturalised whiteness and renders it marked and visible. Kikka's look deconstructs the myth of "natural" white girl beauty by exposing the extent to which it is artificially constructed and maintained. Her performance camps up the conventions of racist beauty ideals—even though Kikka strived to embody them, too.

The dimension of class is especially visible in Kikka's clothing. In the 1992 Eurovision Song Contest semi-final performance, She turned, like Madonna, underwear to outerwear. However, whereas Madonna was dressed in flamboyant corsets with huge cone breasts, Kikka wore a regular black corset with sequins sewn on the brassiere. In a way Kikka camped the class-system of fashion. Namely, throughout the history of fashion, until the early 20th century, different class members had strict orders how to dress. The poorest classes wore the cheapest cloth: "Bluett, blue as its name suggests; russet, which was brown of black; or the undyed blanketcloth." (Wilson 1985/2007, 22). In other words, Kikka's outfit, constructed out of Gaultier-imitation and fake jewellery, exposes the way in which individuals belonging to different classes have been and still are separated through clothing.

And the third aspect of white feminine camp relates to

Kikka's music, folksy and trashy disco pieces, lyrics full of double entendres. The lyrics are the salt of the whole performance: they provide the final twist to Kikka's camp, in which she camouflages sexist lyrics with references to for example current political situation. Her first hit was "Mä haluan viihdyttää" ("I want to entertain") from 1989, causing a Kikka-heat all over Finland. In 1990, she released a single "Sukkula Venukseen" ("Shuttle to Venus"), the lyrics of which left little to the imagination. In 1991, she advised her listeners how a woman should be satisfied in "Onnen nainenkin silloin vasta saa" ("Even she is happy only then"), which was the first rap-song by a female artist in Finland. When the economic depression hit Finland, Kikka released songs which were about recycling "Kierrätä pyöritä mua" ("Spin me around") in 1991 and in 1993, "Käyrä nousemaan" ("Raising the curve"). Her Eurovision Song Contest in 1992 was "Parhaat puoleni" ("The best sides of me"). Kikka's lyrics trouble ideal of middle-class femininity—understood as virginal and submissive, designed to hold heterosexuality in check—with the help of working-class femininity and its feisty vulgarity. Kikka's performance of imperfect femininity and imperfect class suggests an imperfect whiteness in the way Gaylyn Studlar (1989, 4) has explained the difference between high and low-class femininity:

High-born women could be idealized as pure angels, asexual and nurturing, but lower-class women become the signifier of a dark and degenerate femininity.

Kikka's burlesque⁶ performance is far from angelic, asexual or virginal. Rather, it embraces everything that is disturbing in femininity: sexuality. In the semi-finals of the Eurovision Song Contest in 1992 Kikka's performance resonated to what Carole-Anne Tyler (1991, 57) has written about "real women" in relation to the drag-queen Divine:

A real woman is a real lady; otherwise, she is a female impersonator, a camp or mimic whose "unnaturally" bad taste—like that of the working-class, ethnic, or racially "other" woman—marks the impersonation as such –.

Class therefore becomes the very excess that characterises Kikka's camp: codes of working-class white femininity constitute the markers of incongruity. As I see it, Kikka's performance suggests that femininity is sexualised not only through the codes of femininity—long hair, make-up, heels—but through the codes of class and race attached to femininity.

From camp to KAMP? Some afterthoughts

If I think about Kikka's performance through the image of the pin-up, her figure comes close to how Mark Booth (1983/1999, 66–79) has defined camp. According to Booth the established writers of camp from Isherwood to Son-

⁶ According to the OED "burlesque" refers to "the nature of derisive imitation; ironically bombastic, mock-heroic or mock-pathetic; now chiefly said of literary or oratorical compositions and dramatic representations; formerly (quot. 1712) also of pictorial caricatures." <http://dictionary.oed.com/>.

tag have seen camp's origins as far more noble than what they really are. According to Booth, camp was located "in the files of New York City police under the abbreviation KAMP", KAMP meaning "Known As Male Prostitute" (ibid., 74). This abbreviation referred to the male homosexual brothels in the 19th century as well as to a slang word used by dandies to describe their assignations with soldiers at war camps. Booth's idea is that camp is something underground, illegitimate, and indecent and this detaches camp from the idea of homosexual identity. Booth remarks that camp cannot be an identity, since identity is always something noble or civilized—which camp, by definition, cannot be. Rather, Booth argues, camp is something that is found not only in the margins of society but "in the margins of the margins" of society. These margins of the margins are not only populated by homosexuals but also by effeminates, prostitutes, sodomites, transvestites, people with underworld connections and "other things too disgusting" (ibid., 76).⁷ Even though Kikka was never a prostitute, the subtext of her burlesque performance—the lyrics, her singing-voice, and the clothes—clearly refers to the stereotypical image of the slut and the prostitute.

Booth's definition, which departs from both Isherwood and Sontag's serious, ultimately safe high camp, defines camp as a specifically sexual political concept, which ul-

⁷ Booth even goes on to argue, quite homophobically I think, that rather than representing an effeminate homosexual identity, "camp people tend to be asexual rather than homosexual." Booth also claims that camp people might be homosexuals "in spirit rather than in practice" (Booth 1983/1999, 70). He does not continue to tell, however, how he knows this "fact".

timately belongs to a culture, which is not (yet) legitimate and decent. As I see it, Booth's concept, which emphasises the politicised meanings of camp, is fruitful for my discussion on the femme camp of Kikka – who is also the adored idol of gay men. In fact, Kikka's camp is rebellious against the pressure of women and lesbians to be quiet about their sexuality. Kikka's camp is an in-your-face rejection of the proper response to middle-class, decent femininity.

Booth's account succinctly summarises camp's specifically queer-theoretical potential in thinking about queer feminist camp within the confines of the European Song Contest, where camp has lost its taboo-breaker quality and become mainstreamed and safe. Through Kikka's performance indicates that camp can be queered if one looks for example into the histories of the pin-up and the prostitute. Through them it's possible to see how these objectionable forms of femininity can be used in camping up for example white, middle-class, asexual, and decent forms of femininity.

Compliments

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