

# 3

## Europe, with Feeling: The Eurovision Song Contest as Entertainment

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No other programme in the history of international TV in Europe can match the nearly 60-year-long unbroken tradition of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC). Many factors have contributed to the contest's longevity: the members of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) have been committed to producing a flagship programme for their Eurovision network; the organizers have developed the contest to keep up with changes in media culture; and individual broadcasting companies have been eager to participate, in some cases partly because of the symbolic value that the contest has gained as a sign of European belonging. Another important reason for the ESC's survival is that it has worked as media entertainment, inspiring a wealth of feelings: viewers have been moved by singers' powerful performances and uplifted by energetic choreographies, empathized with winners' emotions, laughed at failed performances, enjoyed an ironic distance from the whole spectacle, celebrated their country's victory and been outraged by 'unfair' results and other controversies. Often these feelings draw strength from national loyalties, but they also construct different kinds of relations to Europe.

This chapter discusses the affective qualities of the contemporary ESC, asking what kind of relations to Europe emerge in the affective intensities generated by the contest. My starting point comes from Sara Ahmed's work on the cultural politics of emotion, which has drawn attention to the role that affect plays in the process where individual and collective bodies take shape. She argues that the boundaries of 'us' as a collective are shaped in contact with others. Naming others as a cause of 'our' emotion forms a boundary between us and them, shaping both as

separate categories (Ahmed, 2004: 1, 10). Ahmed's theorizing provides a basis for considering how boundaries outside and within Europe are formed in affective relations with the ESC. In order to study these relations, I focus on the ESC as entertainment. As film scholar Richard Dyer (1992: 2–3) points out, studies on entertainment have often been concerned with showing that entertainment is actually about something else, such as important historical or social issues. Likewise, ESC research has concentrated on questions of national representation, European belonging and sexual politics, which the contest arguably foregrounds (e.g. Raykoff and Tobin, 2007; Tuhkanen and Vänskä, 2007; Georgiou and Sandvoss, 2008). However, if we focus solely on these issues, we may not learn much about how entertainment works and how it affects us (Dyer, 1992: 3). Following recent work on affects and media, my focus here is on significance more than signification (Skeggs and Wood, 2012: 41; see also e.g. Kavka, 2008; Paasonen, 2011). I hope to contribute to existing research on the ESC's role in the cultural politics of Europe but move the emphasis from representations and discourses to feelings.

Research on the ESC has studied the contest as an occasion for the strategic representation of the nation (Bolin, 2006; Baker, 2008; Mitrović, 2010; Jordan, 2011) and analysed understandings concerning nationality in the audience and media reception of the contest (Pajala, 2006; Christensen and Christensen, 2008; Coleman, 2008; Georgiou, 2008). This has made an important contribution to the study of the cultural politics of contemporary Europe. However, some studies discuss the ESC as if it were a strand of state cultural diplomacy with the result that the contest's specificity as popular media entertainment is in danger of getting lost. For example, Marijana Mitrović's article about the construction of Serbian national identity in the ESC analyses the contest as an event where nation states put themselves on display (2010: 172–173). Yet the ESC is not organized by states but by broadcasting companies. While in rare instances the state may have a say in the choice of the Eurovision entry, in most countries, broadcasters enjoy considerable autonomy from the state. Viewers often interpret Eurovision performances in relation to national stereotypes (see Georgiou, 2008), but nationality does not exhaust their meanings or attractions.

My discussion of the affective intensities of the ESC draws on Dyer's ideas about feelings and entertainment (1992: 17–34). He stresses the sensuous and non-representational qualities of feelings as well as their culturally constructed nature. Feelings may then be difficult to capture in words, but they are not outside culture. Building on Gilles Deleuze and Baruch Spinoza, Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood emphasize the

power of affect to move us and make us do things, defining affect as ‘the feelings that produce an effect’ (2012: 5–6). Like them, I am interested in ‘the resonances and intensities produced between the TV and the viewer that make us do things and do nothing, creating connections as well as refusals’ (Skeggs and Wood, 2012: 135). In this chapter I focus on three kinds of situation where feelings engendered by the ESC result in action: voting, complaining, and singing along. These actions relate to different aspects of the ESC as a TV programme. Voting is a response to a performance, a moment of live TV. Complaining follows the dramatic structure of the ESC, when the results are experienced as unsatisfying. And, finally, singing along is enabled by the repetition of Eurovision songs as recordings that carry with them the memory of their performance on TV. The chapter is based on textual analysis rather than audience research, but the starting point for my discussion comes from observing reactions to the ESC: voting results, public complaints, and Eurovision parties. I will begin by considering how a TV programme like the ESC may contribute to producing a sense of Europeanness.

### Feeling European through transnational TV?

The possibility that transnational TV programmes such as the ESC might contribute to a sense of European belonging has been a point of some debate. Writing about the history of the EBU, Jérôme Bourdon argues that international broadcasts ‘have repeatedly failed to promote, let alone create, a sense of belonging to a common Europe’ (2007: 263). He recounts the history of international broadcasts, news exchange, and attempts to launch European TV channels, suggesting that they have represented a conscious attempt to promote European identity but have failed to create a truly European audience.<sup>1</sup> Bourdon considers the ESC to be an example of this failure, as the programme is domesticated by local commentators for national TV audiences and does not attract viewers equally all over Europe (2007: 266). While it is true that the ESC has been a different show for viewers in different countries, his argument is made problematic by its underlying assumption of a uniformly shared European culture. Bourdon (2007: 263) seems to posit the nation state as a model for European identity, asserting that pro-Europeans have failed ‘where their 19th-century “nationalist” predecessors succeeded’. As a result, he describes Europe as an entity with clear (yet undefined) boundaries between insiders and outsiders.<sup>2</sup> He considers it worrying that enthusiasm for the ESC comes ‘mostly from outside Europe’, arguing that outsider participants, such as Israel and Russia,

share 'an aspiration to be part of "the West"' rather than 'a common European culture' (Bourdon, 2007: 266). In Bourdon's argument, feeling European is tied to a shared European culture and, accordingly, remains an impossibility.

An assumption of a shared European culture is a problematic starting point for an analysis of the ESC. As Gerard Delanty points out in his historical study of the idea of Europe, the region is a kind of constantly redefined 'discursive strategy' (1995: 8). Europe has been constructed through appeals to shared culture and community but also through exclusions and the negative evaluation of difference. While the constitutive outsides of Europe have changed over time, the question of where to draw its eastern boundaries has remained central (Delanty: 1995). In a later study (2005), Delanty and Chris Rumford attempt to offer an alternative vision of Europe that would not be based on an assumption of shared identity or strictly defined boundaries but instead on Europeanization as a process of becoming that is built on encounters rather than shared culture. In Delanty and Rumford's formulation, the essence of Europeanization lies in cosmopolitanism as 'the transformation of cultural and political subjectivities in the context of the encounter of the local or national with the global' (2005: 22). This view of Europeanization is normative, perhaps even utopian. Delanty and Rumford's ideas are valuable in separating the idea of Europe from a demand for an already existing shared culture. However, their idealization of cosmopolitanism does not adequately describe contemporary reality in Europe. (For a critical discussion of cosmopolitanism see Katrin Sieg's contribution [Chapter 11].) Rather than seeing Europe or Europeanization as a value in itself, I am here interested in the different ways in which the contemporary ESC imagines Europe.

Following Jostein Gripsrud's discussion of transnational TV, the ESC could be seen as an occasion for feeling momentarily European. Gripsrud criticizes Bourdon for setting unrealistic expectations for a sense of European belonging by predicting that European identity would become as strong as national identities in a few decades. Rather, people may begin to see themselves as European in addition to their national and other identities (Gripsrud, 2007: 489–490; see also Passerini, 2007: 97–103). He argues that transnational TV – such as Eurovision news exchange and programme activities, international cable and satellite channels, and the habit of watching TV from neighbouring countries – has contributed significantly towards establishing a European public sphere, 'albeit multilingual and seriously limited in many ways' (2007: 491). Gripsrud suggests that 'a sense of belonging somewhere' is created

by habit, 'the experience of the usual and the well-known over time'. He concludes that TV's main contribution to the development of a European public sphere is 'as a source of such feelings of belonging to this continent and not others' (Gripsrud, 2007: 491). While I am not specifically working with the concept of the public sphere here, I find his emphasis on habit useful for describing the ESC's potential for creating a sense of Europeanness. However, the contest often emphasizes boundaries and conflicts in Europe (see e.g. Pajala, 2006: 134–139) and as such does not create a sense of uncomplicated belonging.

The ESC has been organized annually since 1956 and, as such, while it has not been televised in every participating country for this length of time, it is an unusually long-lived European media event. It has been associated with the concept of Europe through its name, Eurovision; and through explicit references, such as the habitual greeting, 'Good evening, Europe'. As conceptualized in the ESC, Europe does not have clear external boundaries, and the contest's image of Europe has grown wider over the years, greatly surpassing the boundaries of the EU, for example. In the contemporary ESC, Europe covers the same area as the Council of Europe (with the addition of Israel), although it may extend further in the future. The regular, annual pattern of the ESC has enabled it to become a habitual part of the European media landscape in the spring. The experience of the ESC varies as a result of differences in nationality, gender, sexuality, generation, histories of migration, musical preferences, and many other factors. Yet watching or hearing about the ESC can become a habit that creates a sense of belonging in Europe or feelings associated with Europe. These feelings can be positive, hurtful, and mixed.

## **Eurovision performance and utopian feeling**

The ESC has traditionally been live TV entertainment for Saturday night, now extended to a short serial format with semifinals during the week. Throughout its history the contest has also been a media event that spreads outside TV, attracting intensive press interest in many countries. The contemporary ESC has a large online presence, which lengthens the duration of the event, as official and unofficial Eurovision websites report from the rehearsals weeks before the final. In the contemporary media environment, live TV entertainment is geared towards the production of moments that will be talked about, remembered, and circulated elsewhere in the media (see Evans, 2011: 117–119). In the ESC, these moments are typically standout performances or spectacular

victories, such as monster metal band Lordi (Finnish winners in 2006), the Russian grandmothers Buranovskiye Babushki (second-place finishers in 2012), and Dima Bilan's performance with the figure skating champion Yevgeni Plushchenko (the 2008 winner for Russia).

Dyer provides a framework for thinking about the role of feeling in entertainment in his classic article 'Entertainment and Utopia' (originally published in 1977). He identifies utopianism as a central feature of entertainment. Entertainment offers a more attractive alternative to everyday life, not by representing an ideal world but by suggesting 'what utopia would feel like' (Dyer, 1992: 18). Utopianism is produced by both representational and non-representational signs, such as colour, rhythm, movement, melody, and camerawork. Dyer stresses that non-representational signs are in no way less structured or historically specific than representational signs. Rather, non-representational signs are part of an affective code that is specific to a particular mode of cultural production. He identifies five categories of utopianism: energy (power, activity, potential), abundance (enjoyment of material plenty), intensity (authentic and unambiguous emotions), transparency (a quality of relationships between fictional characters, and between performers and audience), and community (a sense of togetherness and belonging). These are not universal categories but responses that commercial entertainment offers to real problems in capitalist societies, such as unequal distribution of resources (vs. abundance), exhausting work (vs. energy), and social fragmentation (vs. community) (Dyer, 1002: 18–26). Dyer's discussion of entertainment is based on the analysis of Hollywood musicals where musical numbers are central in the production of utopian feeling. As such, it provides a good model for studying the ESC as entertainment.

The contemporary ESC is very much geared towards producing a feeling of community and abundance. It has always addressed an international audience sharing a live TV event, but the formal audiences of the past did not produce a particularly affective image of community on TV. Since the late 1990s the focus on the fan audience on site has provided a much more tangible vision of community (Singleton et al., 2007: 15, 19; see also the discussion of the 'Share the moment' slogan in Marilena Zaroulia's contribution [Chapter 1]). The feeling of abundance comes from the extravagant staging and TV technology. At the 2000 ESC in Stockholm it became possible to customize the setting for each performance, and the staging has become ever more elaborate since then. Multiple screens, a wealth of camera angles, and huge audiences provide a feeling of plenty. The cost of arranging the ESC has



Figure 3.1 The lavish and electronically sophisticated stage presentation of the 2009 ESC in Moscow

Source: Alain Douit.

soared at the same time as reports of an economic crisis have dominated European news (Figure 3.1). The 2009 contest in Moscow broke previous records, reportedly costing €30 million (Jordan, 2012). Norwegian TV scaled down the production of the following year's contest, but the 2011 show in Düsseldorf was a more extravagant affair again, held in a huge football stadium. At a time when countries such as Ireland, Greece, and Portugal were undergoing severe economic problems, the lavishly staged 2011 contest underlined German economic power. Azerbaijan seems to have broken all previous records with reported government funding of €48 million and a newly built arena for 2012 (ibid.). During an economic downturn, the increasingly lavish ESC productions associate Europe with limitless material abundance, offering a capitalist solution to capitalism's problems. At the same time, the spectacular productions emphasize economic inequalities between European countries, as all participating broadcasters might not be able to take on arranging the ESC in its present form.<sup>3</sup>

Successful Eurovision performances able to attract votes from all over the Eurovision area are often characterized by a utopian sensibility (Figure 3.2). As an example, we can look at Alexander Rybak's 'Fairytale', the winner with the most points in Eurovision history. Of Dyer's categories of utopian sensibility, Rybak's performance embodied energy and intensity in particular. While 'Fairytale' as a title already suggests a



*Figure 3.2* 2009 ESC winner Alexander Rybak performing 'Fairytale'

*Source:* Indrek Galetin.

certain utopianism, the utopian feeling of the performance came mainly from non-representational elements. His performance produced a powerful sense of energy. The rhythm of the song is clear and strong, and the broken hairs of his bow (ripped before the performance, for the effect) drew attention to Rybak's emphatic style of violin playing. Three male dancers contributed to the feeling of energy with their physically demanding and masculine performance. Intensity, on the other hand, came from Rybak's style of singing and playing. 'Fairytale' draws stylistically on folk music, which already carries with it connotations of authenticity. In the chorus in particular, Rybak's voice had a very open quality. His violin playing similarly produced an open sound, owing to the use of open strings, the lack of vibrato, and vigorous use of the bow. The performance style emphasized the meaning of the lyrics: he put his hand to his chest as he sang about liking a girl, touched his head as he sang about hurting, and threw his arms open as he declared: 'I'm in love with a fairytale.' As a result, the performance and the lyrics supported each other, with no sense of ambiguity or contradiction. These qualities produced a sense of unambiguous emotion expressed 'without holding back', which characterizes Dyer's category of intensity (1992: 21).

Runaway victories such as 'Fairytale' can produce a utopian feeling of European community when seemingly everybody agrees to celebrate



a common favourite. Unusually, 'Fairytale' received points from every participating country, ending up with 387 points, almost 100 more than the previous record. If, as Dyer argues, entertainment responds to real problems in society, the ESC could be characterized as a response to the many conflicts and divisions in Europe, such as symbolic divisions between East and West, conflicts between some neighbouring countries, and economic tensions within the EU. While these conflicts are played out in the ESC, there are also utopian moments when they fade to the background. Runaway victories, when viewers in every country appear to be in agreement, produce a utopian image of momentary European unity.

### Dealing with disappointment

Even the most overwhelming victory will never please everybody. Consequently, ESC results always leave many people disappointed. For the avid follower, the Eurovision season offers the potential for a whole string of disappointments: wrong songs are selected for the ESC, the performance of your favourite song fails to live up to its potential, your country does not advance to the final, and your favourite entry ends up at the bottom of the scoreboard whilst some horrid performance wins the whole thing. The voting is an important part of the ESC entertainment, providing suspense, surprises, and an emotional celebration of the winner. The results also offer material for media controversies. Complaints by artists and viewers, for example, in the popular press are a conventional part of Eurovision entertainment in many countries (see Pajala, 2007a: 76–80).

Disappointment occurs when experiences do not live up to prior expectations. Accordingly, if you do not expect anything, you cannot be disappointed. A feeling of disappointment requires that you have affectively invested in an object – in the case of the ESC, a participating song, performer or country. The strength of disappointment as an affective state can be seen in the reactions it engenders, as disappointment is often expressed through conspiracy theories. In the moment of disappointment, it seems to be hard to believe that other people have different tastes than you do; hence the speculation about voting scams that frequently occur not only around the ESC but also programme formats such as *Pop Idol* and *Big Brother*. These kinds of programme invite audience engagement by asking viewers to perform judgements of taste or morality. As such they also encourage outrage at perceived failures of judgement.

The most famous conspiracy theories in the contemporary ESC concern bloc voting and exchanging votes. Following the successes of new participating countries from the former East, accusations of neighbourly voting have been rampant in countries of the former West (see e.g. Björnberg, 2007: 17–18; Coleman, 2008: 135–136; Vidmar-Horvat, 2010: 35–36).<sup>4</sup> The 2007 contest in Helsinki was particularly controversial. Apart from Turkey, the ten countries that qualified from the semifinal were all from the former East.<sup>5</sup> In the final, the top ten was made up of Greece, Turkey, and eight countries from the former East. Many would argue that the highest-scoring entries deserved their place with strong songs and professional performances. However, the absence of former West European countries at the top of the scoreboard led to intense complaints.

The reactions to Eurovision results are particularly strong on site, where people have invested a great deal in the ESC as travelling fans or members of delegations, materially as well as affectually. These reactions also filter through to the wider audience through TV, press reports and internet fan sites. Booing was audible in the 2007 semifinal as the results were announced. Keith Mills of *All Kinds of Everything*, a well-known Irish fan blog that follows Eurovision rehearsals on site, described a sense of shock after the semifinal:

Once I heard the dreadful result I decided to avoid the Winners' Press Conference. I'd seen enough Eastern European back slapping for one day. There's really only one story in town and that's the Eastern European walkover. The majority of them may have deserved to qualify and I think Latvia and Hungary may well have made it on Western rather than Eastern votes, but this result stinks.

No one can tell me that the best ten songs or performances made it. Neighbourly voting... has always been a problem in the contest, but it has now gone beyond a joke.

(Mills, 2007)

Here we can see how emotions construct boundaries between self and other (Ahmed, 2004), as the writer reads others as a cause of his own disappointment. Even though Mills acknowledges that the majority of deserving songs qualified, he describes the results as an 'Eastern European walkover', imagining a coherent Eastern European bloc that is able to dominate Western Europe. Controversies over voting construct an image of Europe as divided into separate blocs with little sympathy for each other.

These kinds of reaction tell us less about actual bloc voting practices than about the workings of affect in watching televised competitions. In their study about audiences' affective reactions to reality TV, Skeggs and Wood note a movement between immediate affective reactions and later judgements based on cognitive rationalization (2012: 154, 209–210). Complaints about neighbourly voting are typically immediate reactions that follow a strong affect. In the moment of affect, a stereotypical notion of Eastern European bloc voting provides a quick explanation for the disappointing results. Following Spinoza's observation about how affect becomes attached to ideas, Skeggs and Wood point out that affect is 'often speedily connected to passing moral judgement' (2012: 150). Similarly, in the ESC the success of 'undeserving' entries quickly surfaces suspicions of corruption, but these accusations are not supported by rational consideration. Analysis of ESC voting patterns has shown that voting blocs where countries favour each other have existed long before the arrival of participants from the former East (Yair and Maman, 1996). Consequently, the arrival of new participants has not made the ESC less fair than it was, but it has undermined the hegemonic position of Western Europe (see Estonian Human Development Report, 2000: 66–69). Succeeding in the ESC is not as easy for countries in the former West as it once was, which can lead to frustrated expectations and intense disappointment.

Following complaints caused by the 2007 contest, the ESC reference group reintroduced 'expert' juries to the contest in 2009 so that half of the result is now made up of audience votes, the other half of jury votes. Among the reasons given for this move was that juries would reduce the role of neighbourly and diaspora voting, making the contest fairer. The juries were also supposed to make the contest more entertaining by guaranteeing less predictable results (Bakker, 2009). These justifications are questionable, as voting blocs existed in the ESC even before the introduction of televoting, when juries alone decided the results (Yair and Maiman, 1996). In her discussion of the politics of happiness, Ahmed draws attention to the unequal access to happiness:

If certain people come first, we might say those who are already in place (such as parents, hosts, or citizens), then their happiness comes first. For those who are positioned as coming after, happiness means following somebody else's goods.

(2010: 578)

In a similar way, the organization of the ESC prioritizes the happiness of the 'old' participants in bringing back juries in response to

complaints from the former West. Culturally, this reflects a hierarchical view of Europe, where Western Europe is prioritized over Eastern Europe (Vidmar-Horvat, 2010: 35–36). The importance given to the concerns of the former West also follows on from economic inequalities in Europe. The large and wealthy broadcasters in Western Europe must be kept happy, as their continuing participation in the contest is important for the EBU.

Complaints about bloc voting are a paranoid way of dealing with disappointment. They posit a grand theory where relations between countries explain Eurovision results, regardless of the actual quality of performances each year (Sedgwick, 1997: 23–24). Following Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's differentiation between paranoid and reparative ways of knowing, it is also possible to find reparative ways of dealing with Eurovision disappointments, especially in fan culture. A reparative position does not look for grand theories or evidence of what it already knows but seeks to turn threatening objects into sources of sustenance and comfort (Sedgwick, 1997). As a reparative reaction to disappointment, Finnish fans offered comforting hugs to people whose favourites had failed to make it to the final at the post-semifinal 'recovery afternoon' during the 2007 ESC. Fan polls and alternative song contests, such as the OGAE Second Chance Contest,<sup>6</sup> offer a chance for fan favourites to come out on top even if they did not succeed in the actual ESC. These kinds of fan practices show that even disappointment can be turned into something productive.

### **Singing along**

The fan experience of the ESC differs from the experience of casual viewers, as the relationship with the contest is cultivated over a long period of time. A popular opinion in Eurovision fan culture is that fan favourites often do not do well in the ESC (see Jordan, 2011; Spence, 2011). This discrepancy between fan favourites and Eurovision successes is partly explained by the longer relationship that fans have with Eurovision entries. Whereas casual ESC viewers hear the entries for the first time while watching the show, fans are already familiar with them and have firm favourites among the entries. A song may keep its position as a fan favourite even if the performance in the ESC does not live up to expectations. Each contest produces some songs that remain in circulation in fan contexts after the contest is over. The following discussion of fandom is based on observations of Finnish Eurovision culture.

The 2011 Finnish Eurovision final was held in my home town, Turku. After the show I went with friends to an after-party where the DJ played a wide selection of Eurovision tunes, ranging from well-known classics to more obscure songs from national finals, especially the Swedish Melodifestivalen. My favourite moment of the evening came when the DJ played the 2010 Serbian entry '*Ovo je Balkan*', with the full dance-floor singing along with '*Beograd, Beograd, ja bezobrazan*' in a language that few of them understood. It reminded me of the last time the Finnish Eurovision final had been in Turku a few years earlier. For me the most memorable moment of the after-party then was when people sang together to '*Neka mi ne svane*', the Croatian ballad from 1998. It seemed like everybody knew the lyrics although, again, few probably knew the language. Certainly it felt like everybody understood the emotion in the song.

In moments like these the ESC provides a basis for a sense of community that is based not on identity categories but on familiarity with a set of songs, built through repetition over the years. In the fan reception of Eurovision songs, language recedes in importance – it is not necessary to understand the lyrics in order to sing along with feeling. The singalong moments seem to be filled with shared emotion, although, as Ahmed reminds us, you cannot actually know what other people feel. She suggests that shared feelings are not actually shared; we do not know if other people are really feeling the same emotion that we are or what their relation to the emotion is. Emotions do not circulate among people; objects of emotion do (Ahmed, 2004: 10–11). Popular Eurovision songs are objects of emotion that circulate in fan culture, providing a basis for a momentary sense of community. On the dancefloor, recognizing these songs, knowing the lyrics, and perhaps borrowing some moves from the original choreography can become the basis for a sense of shared feeling.

Various musical genres can be popular in Eurovision fan culture, but uplifting dance tracks and emotional ballads tend to be favoured, whereas middle-of-the-road, radio-friendly pop songs and ironic comedy acts are generally not as popular (see Vranis, 2011; OGAE, 2012). In Dyer's terms, then, Eurovision fan culture favours performances that offer a sense of energy, intensity, and transparency. A sense of authentic feeling does not require a stripped-down, untheatrical performance as in some versions of rock music culture. Rather, the sense of intensity comes from performing a carefully choreographed show with conviction. '*Neka mi ne svane*' is an example of a classic Eurovision performance, so defined. The song is a ballad that starts quietly and builds to a powerful

crescendo. The singer, Danijela, a small blond woman dressed in a black cape-like dress, began the performance in an introspective manner, holding her hands close to her chest and at times closing her eyes. She stood in the same place for the duration of the song, moving only her hands and arms in graceful movements. At the culmination of the song, Danijela's cape fell off to reveal a figure-hugging white dress. As she belted out the last choruses, her gaze was frank and her gestures had lost their initial tentative quality. The performance formed a narrative of overcoming emotional hardships that was understandable beyond language barriers. The emotional drama of the performance stuck to the song and can be relived on hearing it again (on the 'stickiness' of emotions, see Ahmed, 2004).

Fan parties show that the ESC has created a European popular culture that some people experience as very significant. This culture is not homogenous but has local variations. For example, in the spring of 2010 I attended Eurovision events in the Netherlands and in Norway where the set of popular songs was somewhat different from that in Finland, featuring more Western European material. Factors such as geographical and cultural proximity, language, and access to foreign TV channels contribute to defining which Eurovision songs become popular in a local fan culture. For example, the Swedish Melodifestivalen is familiar to Finnish Eurovision fans because Swedish is taught at school, Swedish TV has been available on the Finnish west coast for decades, and nowadays Melodifestivalen is even shown on a Finnish TV channel. Geographical and cultural proximity do not, of course, completely determine the popularity of Eurovision songs. On the discussion forum of *Viisukuppila*, the main Finnish Eurovision fan site, the entries from some neighbouring countries (Sweden and Estonia in particular) attract more than average attention. The amount of discussion generated by other countries' entries varies annually depending on the song and artist.<sup>7</sup> For fan audiences, songs from all Eurovision countries are potentially equally interesting, which makes the ESC an exceptional event.

The ESC's internationalism has always been one of its attractions for fan audiences. The programme has been a chance to see European countries come together and to hear music from different regions performed in a variety of languages (Moser, 1999: 59–60; Singleton et al., 2007: 18). This aspect was particularly rare before the arrival of cable and satellite TV, and the internet. Brian Singleton, Karen Fricker, and Elena Moreo characterize the ESC of this era as a 'spectacle of otherness' (2007: 15). The expanded Europe of the contemporary ESC means that the variety of languages and musical styles on show has grown, even if many

choose to sing in English. At the same time the internet has made it easier than before for fans to follow other countries' Eurovision finals and to familiarize themselves with the careers of the performers. Instead of a 'spectacle of otherness', the ESC may become a context where the geographically distant can become intimately familiar. Whereas the old ESC was dominated by Western Europe (see Yair and Maman, 1996), this is no longer the case. Many new participating countries, such as Ukraine, Romania, Serbia, and Azerbaijan, have put a great deal of effort into their entries, which makes them more interesting from a fan culture perspective than lacklustre, older participants, such as the Netherlands or Belgium. Thus I would suggest that local Eurovision fan cultures produce changing maps of Europe where different areas emerge as significant: neighbouring countries; some large and formerly dominant Western countries such as the UK; and countries, often from the former East, that seem to take Eurovision seriously and produce interesting entries. In the context of fan cultures, Europe in the ESC does not have one hegemonic region or centre but, rather, many.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has discussed three types of situation where the ESC may engender strong feelings in the audience. These are, of course, not the only possible affective relations to the ESC but they relate to central features of ESC entertainment – winning, losing, and reliving favourite performances. The case studies show that the ESC can engender ambivalent feelings in relation to the expanded vision of Europe that it represents. As a media spectacle, the contemporary ESC presents Europe in terms of material abundance, giving precedence to economically powerful countries. Although the contest provides a context for playing out tensions within Europe, at times it also creates utopian moments of European community. On the other hand, disappointed reactions to ESC results in the former West typically make use of hierarchical divisions between East and West, creating an image of Europe that is separated into two rigidly separated areas. Local Eurovision fan cultures often pay special attention to entries from neighbouring countries, but it is also possible to become intimately familiar with entries and performers across geographical and linguistic distance. In fan cultures, the map of Europe evolves as new areas produce strong Eurovision participants. In conclusion, then, the contemporary ESC both reproduces historical divisions and tensions in Europe and provides opportunities for new connections and affinities.

In this chapter I have foregrounded a reparative instead of a paranoid reading of the ESC, although elements of both are present. In this way I have attempted to make room for a discussion of the ESC that is not wholly structured by the category of nationality. For example, my own previous work on the ESC analysed the construction of nationality in the ESC and its Finnish media reception, outlining the repetition of certain articulations of nationality over the years (Pajala, 2006, 2007a, 2007b, 2011). While this sort of analysis describes an important aspect of the ESC, I have also felt that it misses much of what is significant about the contest. Eurovision performances or fan experiences of the ESC are only very partially explained by an analysis focussing on nationality as the main structuring category. As Dyer notes, contradictions in entertainment forms are also a source of ideological ambivalence. For example, in film musicals, musical numbers often contradict the narrative (Dyer, 1992: 25), and the ESC is equally ambiguous. The structure of the contest is based on the category of nationality: songs are presented as national representatives, and national juries and televoters give points to countries ('Norway, 12 points'), not songs. However, this rigid structure is contradicted at the level of performance. For instance, while Rybak's violin playing draws on Norwegian folk music, the appeal of the performance of 'Fairytale' is not limited to a sense of 'Norwegianness'. A reparative reading of the ESC risks appearing naïve. We can probably find reasons to criticize any Eurovision performance as stereotypical, exoticizing, or sexist if we try. However, the risk of naïveté is at times worth taking as it can draw attention to qualities that a more paranoid critical reading overlooks. In order to grasp the full significance of the ESC, research needs to pay attention both to institutions, structures, and repetition, and to microlevel exceptions and experiences.

## Notes

1. As Jostein Gripsrud (2007: 489) points out, Bourdon seems to exaggerate the hopes that EBU founders and EU politicians had for TV in this regard.
2. Bourdon does not explicitly define the concept of Europe, making no clear distinction between Europe, the EU and the EBU. This conceptual slippage is problematic because the EU is not synonymous with Europe and the EBU's membership has always been wider than that of the EU, or its predecessor, the European Communities.
3. The EBU promised in 2012 to address this problem, suggesting changes that would enable all broadcasters to stage the contest, such as smaller venues and less rehearsal time (see the Introduction and the panel discussion with ESC broadcasters [Chapter 4]). Swedish TV network SVT's decision to host the 2013 ESC at Malmö Arena (capacity 15,000) instead of the newly constructed



Friends Arena (maximum capacity 65,000, although for the ESC it would have been around half this number) near Stockholm may be a step in this direction. Executive producer Martin Österdahl commented in the newspaper *Dagens Nyheter* that he could not understand how Russian and German organizers had been able to inflate their respective budgets on the ESC. Instead of competing with huge arenas and LED walls, SVT declared an interest in spending resources on developing the ESC in other ways. Österdahl argued that the recent emphasis on scale had made the ESC cold, whereas SVT wanted to make the contest 'more engaging' (see Lindström, 2012).

4. As 'Western Europe' and 'Eastern Europe' are contentious terms, I talk about the 'former West' and 'former East' to reference the historical legacy of the era when Europe was divided between communist and non-communist countries.
5. These were Bulgaria, Belarus, Georgia, Hungary, Latvia, Macedonia, Moldova, Serbia, Slovenia, and Turkey. In fact, Serbia, Slovenia, and Macedonia had been participating in the ESC since the early 1960s as part of Yugoslavia, which had distanced itself from the Eastern bloc in the late 1940s. Such differences among the new Eurovision countries are not taken into account in the simplifying division between 'Eastern' and 'Western' Europe.
6. OGAE, the Organisation Générale des Amateurs de l'Eurovision, is the leading Eurovision fan club.
7. Thus in 2012, popular topics included the entries from Albania (an arty ballad that earned the country its best ESC result so far) and Russia (represented by the grandmothers from Buranovo who received extensive media attention before the contest).