

1

‘Sharing the Moment’: Europe, Affect, and Utopian Performatives in the Eurovision Song Contest

Marilena Zaroulia

Zagreb, 1990: ‘Unite, Unite, Europe!’

One of my earliest memories of the Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) is from the 1990 contest in Zagreb, when I first heard Italy’s winning song, ‘*Insieme: 1992*’ (‘Together: 1992’). The first line was delivered *a capella*: ‘Insieme, unite, unite Europe!’ Then the first piano notes were heard and Toto Cutugno with eyes closed, tightly holding his hands, sang a ballad pleading for togetherness in a united Europe. As the melody kept building and the backing vocals joined the lead singer, I felt a sudden rush in my body, an incomprehensible and growing feeling of elation, and by the time I heard the chorus lines I was so excited that I found myself singing with tears in my eyes. Listening to the Italian song had deeply affected me: it had caused a bodily, subjective reaction (the rush) that was subsequently transformed into an emotional, socially readable one (the tears).

What might appear as a naïve and embarrassing recollection from my childhood provides an appropriate starting point for this article, which aims to investigate the affective reactions that Eurovision provokes, while probing the politics that underpin such responses. In an attempt to understand the complex interrelation between Europeanness, affect, and politics as manifested in the contest, this chapter sets out to study three Eurovision moments, which coincide with shifts in the politics of the European Union (EU) and experiences of European consciousness since 1989, studying a period that started with the celebration of a united Europe coming into being in the years leading to the 1992 Maastricht Treaty and finishing with the post-2008 socio-political, economic, and institutional crises in the EU. By analysing these

moments – Zagreb, 1990; Oslo, 2010; Düsseldorf, 2011 – I also map my different experiences as a spectator of the ESC, tracing how each moment adds layers to my process of European identification.

The chapter builds on the important work of Italian historian Luisa Passerini, who has historicized representations of Europe and interrogated various aspects of European consciousness and belonging beyond Eurocentric essentialism. She has argued for a critical position towards European heritage, while emphasizing the need for a new approach to the question of Europe, beyond symbols and myths that have historically shaped definitions of Europeaness. I follow her argument that ‘one cannot define oneself as European without questioning not only one’s cultural heritage, ... but also one’s intimate feelings and attitudes’ (2002: 27). Hence, a comprehensive analysis of Europe and European identities requires a new conceptualization of the relation between the individual and collectivity: the term ‘identity’ is replaced with ‘identification’, and an engagement with subjectivity, intersubjectivity, and their affective dimensions offers further insight into the complex experience of Europeaness.

Passerini’s proposition (2007: 98) that processes of identification ‘are part of a broader process of subjectivation, by which one becomes the subject of one’s life in a given time and place’ frames the present analysis. That brief moment of listening to *‘Insieme’* added to the shaping of my subjectivity, as I experienced through feeling – possibly for the first time – a sense of belonging to a community larger than the Greek nation, thus making a first step towards identifying myself not only as a Greek but also as a European subject. Thus on that evening of 5 May 1990 in my family’s house in Athens, a significant aspect of my subjectivity was coined through an affective interconnection between national and European identification. The present chapter, written between January 2011 and September 2012, a period of tension in Greece–EU relations, questions how this layering of national and European identification has informed ways of watching the contest across the three Eurovision moments as well as critical analysis of such affective reactions.

The chapter does not study in detail specific Greek acts but, particularly in its final part, questions how the socio-political and institutional crises following International Monetary Fund (IMF) and EU interventions and austerity measures introduced by Greek governments since May 2010 have had an impact on my Greek-European identification and subsequent analyses of the ESC. Having grown up in Greece during the 1990s – when the calls for the country’s modernization

and Europeanization were widely accepted as necessary steps for its prosperity – but living and working in the UK since the early 2000s, my process of subjectivation has shifted and is defined by an inside/outside sense of belonging. Apart from shaping a different set of ‘strategies, alliances and loyalties’, this inside/outside notion of belonging further complicates processes of ‘affective investment’ (Passerini, 2007: 98), which cannot be read as a static condition of nationhood but instead emerges as an intersubjective relation with the national and other communities beyond it. In short, an inside/outside perspective, often precipitated by geographic displacement and shaped by encounters with various identity groups, corresponds to the complex layering of subjectivity, whereby national or European identification is only one of the experiences shaping a subject.

Emotionally rich moments, such as the one that I had at the age of ten, certainly appear in the personal narratives of a number of people who grew up watching the ESC. The feelings that might emerge among audiences – either inside the arena or among the TV viewers – can be easily deconstructed, for they are often permeated by problematic ideological positions about nationhood and might manifest what Michael Billig has defined as ‘banal nationalism’ (1995). Without dismissing such criticisms of the ideological premises of audiences’ feelings, this chapter follows Erin Hurley’s argument that affect operates as ‘a supplement to meaning that also undoes meaning’ (2011: 149) and thus proposes that what might emotionally move us in the context of the Eurovision cannot and should not be ignored. As emotion constitutes ‘a form of cultural politics and world making’ (Ahmed, 2004: 12), the ESC’s affective and ideological dimensions should not be perceived as polar terms of a binary opposition but as complementing perspectives for a comprehensive reading of the contest and its audiences.

Such a methodology is imperative for reading moments when the experience of national belonging, which lies at the heart of the competition, overlaps with or is followed – even momentarily – by an affiliation to a concept broader than the nation, a feeling European sensibility. In those moments of ‘emotional labour’ (Hurley, 2011: 28), a subject does not ‘possess something defined as an identity, but rather it is the subject who is possessed’ (Passerini, 2007: 98). Can such moments when one is ‘possessed’ by strong feelings of belonging to a collectivity capture the possibility of a meaningful European public sphere? If ‘our very identification with Europe’, as Passerini argues, ‘remains to be defined’ (2007: 101), since it is constantly reinvented, could an examination of structures of feeling as produced, capitalized, and reflected on the

Eurovision stage provide new insights into what Europe can be in the 21st century, while indicating other forms of European identification beyond institutional bodies such as the EU?

Before I turn to the second historical moment that this chapter studies, I would like to attempt a provisional reading of my childhood memory, acknowledging certain ideological and political factors that might have influenced my reaction in 1990. In doing so I aim to provide a framework for that intense, personal moment: a framework that was shaped by both national and international reasons, which have defined Greece's European identity since 1990 and which are pertinent for an understanding of the emotions that have surfaced in Greece as a consequence of the 2010–2012 crises, which I will discuss in the chapter's third part.

During the 1990 ESC, hosted for the first and last time by Yugoslavia, a number of songs contained overt references to Europe and the European future in the aftermath of the watershed 1989. The Austrian and Norwegian songs were direct responses to the fall of the Iron Curtain, while the Irish song, 'Somewhere in Europe', although ostensibly narrating a love story, presented a journey through a number of landmark places across Europe. Ireland's entry, which finished second, could be read as a celebration of a borderless Europe, an emerging reality or at least an aspiration after 1989. 'Insieme', a ballad overtly celebrating the post-Cold War united Europe vision, articulated the period's zeitgeist of Europhilia, while 12 European countries were preparing for the Maastricht Treaty.

Hence the 1990 ESC captured a turning point in European history where international relations appeared no longer determined by the intense divisions of the Cold War. As Vuletic explains, this historical moment was broadcast live to Western and Eastern European audiences:

It was a pleasant coincidence that the only East European country in Eurovision won the Contest in the year that saw the fall of state socialism in eastern Europe, and the Zagreb contest was the first Eurovision that was broadcast directly to the other countries of eastern Europe and the Soviet Union.

(2007: 94)

The shifting international order was bringing about new questions regarding the position of nation states and the reconfiguration of national identities. Eric Hobsbawm, in *Age of Extremes*, provides the

terms for a fuller comprehension of the key elements that defined this landmark period:

The end of the Cold War proved to be not the end of an international conflict but the end of an era: not only for the East, but for the entire world. There are historic moments, which may be recognized even by contemporaries, as marking the end of an age. The years around 1990 clearly were such a secular turning point. But, while everyone could see that the old had ended, there was utter uncertainty about the nature and prospects of the new.

(1995: 256)

Indeed, what Hobsbawm describes as a volatile background of anticipation defined a number of aspects of the socio-political and cultural milieu in Greece at the turn of the 1990s. The first years following the country's accession as the tenth member of the European Economic Community (EEC) in 1981 were marked by scepticism or hostility towards the EEC, partly because of the country's vexed relations with countries of the European centre since the Second World War. However, by the end of the 1980s and largely due to the EEC's growing economic support of the country, Greek public and political attitudes to European integration changed significantly. Susannah Verney has summarized this radical shift from Euroscepticism to the vision of European integration by juxtaposing two posters of the governing, socialist party for the European elections in 1984 and 1989. While in 1984 the poster depicted two arms – the Greek and the European – wrestling, in 1989 this struggle was replaced by a friendly, welcoming gesture:

The arm was being held out for a handshake and being used as a bridge for a representative sample of the Greek population to march towards united Europe and 1992 with their heads held high.

(Verney, 1993: 147)

The shifts in the international status quo as well as the positive reactions to these changes in Greece framed my reception of *'Insieme'* and contributed to what I recall as an emotionally intense moment. Since the last months of 1989, I had been fascinated by the media's representation of the fall of the Berlin Wall and its aftermath. Furthermore, the proliferating narratives about Europe as a promise of growth for Greece and the rising public discourses framing 1992 as a magic year had captured my imagination.¹ Such representations and discourses shaped my process of

identification as a Greek subject as bound up with the European vision. This bond between national and European identification was solidified in a spectacular and affective manner on the night I heard '*Insieme*'.

Nonetheless, the Europe that I identified with was incomplete. In problematic ways, official Greek discourses in the early 1990s used the terms 'Europe' and 'EU' as synonymous, although the Maastricht mission of European integration excluded nation states within the borders of the continent which did not participate in the EU mode of governance. At the age of ten I could not realize that the primary focus of the hegemonic EU project was the monetary union or how volatile the transition to the new international order would be for certain European countries, including Greece's neighbours in the Balkans. Instead, the vague notion of an emerging European consciousness had an impact on my imagination, which produced an idealistic version of Europe: a community that inhabited an imagined space of togetherness, beyond geographical borders. My imagination of Europe was similar to that of scholars during the interwar period: like their Europe that became an object of love, a sign 'of identification which go[es] beyond the affective investment for the places where we are born or live' (Passerini, 2007: 109–110), my Europe, the Europe of '*Insieme*', was a utopia, produced through representation and perpetuated through feeling.

Borrowing Sara Ahmed's terms from her important study on what emotions do to the individual and collective body, psyche, and ideology, the feelings of excitement and joy generated by '*Insieme*' did not 'reside positively in the sign'; instead, the emotions associated with the Italian song operated 'as a form of capital' (2004: 45), reproduced through my reception of the performance while feeding back into my fascination for the European utopia, my version of the socioeconomic and political project for a united Europe. In Ahmed's theory, emotions do not reside on a particular object but operate through an 'affective economy' (44); thus, at the turn of the 1990s, the value of a 'European belonging' sentiment grew through the circulation of cultural products, such as the ESC. My European utopia – limited and problematic though it was – was an outcome of this affective economy and exemplifies what Ahmed describes as a process of emotion-working that binds people together, and which is comparable to experiences of temporary community that emerge among audiences during the theatre or performance event.

In *Theatre & Feeling*, Hurley suggests that both affect, as the sensory, subjective reaction, and emotion, as the social manifestation of affect, are relational. In the context of theatre, feeling works by means of the intersubjective relation between performer and audience. This same principle applies to performances on the Eurovision stage. In the

example of *'Insieme'*, the chorus lyrics *'L'Europa non è lontana/C' è una canzone Italiana per voi'* ('Europe is not far away/This is an Italian song for you') not only emphasized the intersubjective relation between performer and audience or TV viewer but, more importantly, moved beyond the competition's national aspect, stressing its Europeaness through this direct address to the imagined, European community to which viewers – including me – could have felt that they belonged.

This ideal, European, imagined community appeared to exist beyond the us/them conundrum of national identity, even if this experience could only last for the three minutes of the song. The simultaneous reception of the Italian song by viewers across the continent was bound to instigate a sense of communion among them, an experience through simultaneity that is similar to Benedict Anderson's theorization of the *'kind of imagined community that is the nation'* (1991: 25). Imagining other people across Europe listening to the song at the same time with me had an impact on my reception of *'Insieme'* and my sense of European belonging. However, this imagining not only indicates that Greece had managed itself to be included in the European integration mission but also suggests the contradictions that defined the unification process. While certain viewers, like me, may have felt part of the community that Cutugno was singing for, other viewers across Europe – in countries that were not yet EU members – may have felt excluded from this future of togetherness, thus being reminded of their status as *'others'* in the emerging *'new'* Europe of unity despite their desire to be recognized as Europeans. The contrast between my identification through song with other Europeans' exclusion demonstrates the tensions that had marked European history since 1989 and *'the possibility or impossibility of European unification'* (Balibar, 2004: 3). The question of who wishes and significantly can identify oneself as European and whether this necessarily implies EU membership has returned to prominence since the eruption of the Eurozone crisis in 2010, challenging hitherto comfortable intersections of national and European – as synonymous with the EU – identifications.

Some 20 years after *'Insieme'* and in a context of emerging crisis, the European imagined community was again articulated through a performance designed to produce a shared, simultaneous, and emotionally intense experience in reception, this time during the non-competitive part of the ESC: in the flash mob dance *'Glow'*, the interval act of the 2010 Oslo contest, performed by Madcon, a Norwegian hip hop band, made up of Tshawe Baqwa and Yosef Wolde-Mariam. Both *'Insieme'* and *'Glow'* attempted to represent a united Europe, particularly through the songs' lyrics. In performance, though, the 1990 song represented

the European community as absent, imagined, listening to the song in 'homogeneous time' (Benjamin qtd. in Anderson, 1991: 24), while the singers portrayed a hegemonic image of an all-white, European, 'authentic' identity. In contrast, Madcon's immigrant identities challenged that dominant representation, allowing for a pluralistic image of Europe. This celebration of difference in Europe through the performers' mixed backgrounds captures aspects of everyday life in contemporary, globalized Europe and a desire for a European consciousness beyond any discrimination. This emphasis on diversity also resonates with principles that permeated the 1997 Amsterdam and 2001 Nice EU treaties and the 'united in diversity' motto, launched in 2000, indicating how often the ESC articulates EU priorities. It is impossible to determine whether the ESC aims to stage the realities, aspirations or institutional directives in contemporary Europe, or indeed who would make such decisions, but, when attempting to read the contest's reception, it is crucial to remember this complex interplay between performance and institutional contexts and how it might have an impact on the audience's feelings.

This chapter's second section discusses the affective and ideological dimensions of 'Glow', focusing particularly on how the flash mob might have contributed to the negotiation of Europe as utopia and the key role of a dramaturgy of feeling, particularly what Jill Dolan (2005) terms the 'utopian performative' – emotionally efficacious moments that invite us to reconsider performance's social potential – in a new stage of the European utopia, in the expanded EU of 27 member states. The chapter further examines the representation of European imagined and existing communities through the flash mob and the potentiality of multiple European public spheres. I ask how the performance worked at an emotional level, proposing that an analysis of the affective dimensions of 'Glow' might allow for a more comprehensive understanding of Europe not as a geographical entity but as an elusive notion, a utopia or, to quote Jacques Derrida, an 'other heading' (1992) with a political impetus. In doing so, I wish to consider the problematics of European belonging and propose that the ESC briefly and in negative terms provides us with insight into how European identification could be experienced through fleeting encounters in the public sphere.

Oslo, 2010: 'Sharing the Moment'

The ESC's promotion is bound up with a discursive triangle of music, sharing, and emotion, which is part of the wider 'affective economy'

that solidifies the contest and the representation of a united Europe through it. As this chapter focuses more on the European unity utopia rather than the construction of national sentiments, it is necessary to examine the interval act as a moment in the contest where pan-European feelings emerge. Furthermore, in recent years, the postcards – short clips that introduce each act – as well as slogans, such as ‘Under the Same Sky’ (Istanbul, 2004), ‘Confluence of Sound’ (Belgrade, 2008), ‘Share the Moment’ (Oslo, 2010) and ‘Feel Your Heart Beat’ (Düsseldorf, 2011), encapsulate the affective strategies employed to produce a feeling European sensibility.

Interval acts since 1990 can be classified into two groups. The first are those that celebrate the host nation’s identity while promoting a version of ‘authentic’ national culture that can appeal to both national and international audiences. Examples include ‘Riverdance’ in Dublin (1994), which subsequently became a global sensation, and the appearance of Goran Bregović (Belgrade, 2008), who is famous for his collaborations with other musicians in the Balkans. Furthermore, the interval act in Athens (2006) narrated the history of 5000 years of Greek song, employing dramaturgical strategies reminiscent of the 2004 Athens Olympic Games’ opening ceremony, particularly with regard to the spectacular representation of a linear historical narrative of the Greek nation and its music.

The second kind of interval act celebrates a common European identity and a culture of sharing through music. A good example is the ‘Musical Journey through Europe’ in the 2000 Stockholm contest. The Swedish act, which in some ways is similar to the Norwegian flash mob, attempted to present Europe as a shared space of togetherness by merging live, Swedish music and dance performances in the arena, and recordings of music, dance, and everyday life in various countries across Europe. In other words, the Stockholm act crafted an impression of the local, Swedish culture as part of a larger European community portrayed as a lived, everyday experience.

In this way the interval acts of the ESC share some commonalities with a global spectacle like the Olympic Games. As Helen Gilbert and Jacqueline Lo have observed in their discussion of the 2000 Sydney Olympic Games, the opening ceremony is ‘designed not only to capture the imagination of a vast media audience but also to present the nation to itself through popular and allusive iconographies’ (2007: 1). By means of sophisticated and carefully orchestrated representations of national narratives and images alongside reflections of cosmopolitanism, the Games’ ceremonies advocate a universalist principle of

togetherness, which neglects the existing, material conditions that frequently cause divisions in the contemporary world. The ESC interval act – as the moment in the contest where the national is portrayed as part of the European – can be subject to a similar critique for offering incomplete and romanticized versions of the enlarged, all-inclusive ‘new’ Europe, ignoring tensions and conflicts in the Continent and, sometimes, reproducing a hegemonic and totalizing narrative of a united Europe that can be consumed by viewers but does not actually exist.

Notwithstanding this valid critique of interval acts as partial representations of contemporary Europe, I would like to investigate the flash mob’s affective power, questioning how it staged the European utopia. ‘Glow’ is significantly different from other interval acts that have attempted to capture Europeanness, for it was not a mere representation of contemporary Europe; as a flash mob, it aspired to present the Eurovision audiences with a possibility of participation in the contest and, metaphorically, Europe.

Flash mobs appeared during the summer of 2003 in the US and soon became a global phenomenon. Balancing between playful attitudes of intervention in public spaces, particularly in urban areas, and ‘surfing the line between legality and guerilla-like transgression as a means of calling into question the validity of the former’ (Whybrow, 2010: 198–199), flash mobbing has become ubiquitous in performance as well as advertising campaigns. Despite claims to spontaneity, flash mobs are always meticulously planned, as flash mobsters use cyberspace to coordinate their performances. Crucially for this argument, though, flash mobs articulate a new version of the Habermasian public sphere, where the boundaries between performer and spectator become porous. This form of ‘surprise theatre’ ‘both responds to and encourages a culture of perpetual spectatorship’ (Muse, 2010: 12) in the digitized age. Flash mobs can be viewed as a celebration of mobilizing people, creating temporary electronic communities as well as different kinds of ‘diffused audiences’ (Abercrombie and Longhurst, 1998), both of the live and the framed, online performance:

they use the very technologies that mitigate against the need for live crowds in order to generate, first, temporary live communities, and then long-term virtual ones. They stage a digitally enabled in-your-face revolt against the erosion of face-to-face interaction in a digital nation.

(Muse, 2010: 12)

As in Stockholm, the Oslo act was a composition of live and recorded dance sequences in the arena and other places across Europe. The novelty lay in the inclusion of Eurovision audiences/fans as performers in the act: the 'imagined European community' that Cutugno addressed in 1990 was now actually dancing in various European cities, 'sharing the moment'. Peter Svaar, head of press for the 2010 ESC, suggested that the hosts wanted

to share the Eurovision Song Contest, rather than just broadcast it. With 18,000 people live on location in Oslo dancing, plus video footage of large flash mob groups from ten major cities, the song, the movements, the arena, and all the cities will share a common musical experience together.

(qtd. in Bakker, 2010)

The Eurovision flash mob, which is reminiscent of widespread volunteering during the Olympic Games, added to the contest's 'affective economies'. Via new technologies, the contest's numerous fans were called to volunteer and perform in an expanded Eurovision stage, in their local contexts (Figure 1.1). 'Glow' enforced the participants' sense of ownership of the contest while, following Ahmed, the more widely



Figure 1.1 Flash mobbers perform 'Glow' as part of the 2010 ESC interval act
Source: EBU.

the dance circulated, the more affective it became and consequently a stronger feeling European sentiment emerged. Participation triggered the emotion-work that binds people together and produced a temporary community. Further, like all performances that 'flash into being for a few short minutes in a particular place [then] often continue to flash on screens around the world for months or years to follow' (Muse, 2010: 9–10), 'Glow' produced a more permanent spectating community potentially beyond European borders, as since the night of the Oslo final the act has been viewed online more than 3 million times.

On the night of the grand final, as the first notes of 'Glow' were heard, the two performers walked across the arena approaching the stage. Madcon's appearance gave a sense of togetherness between performers and the 18,000 spectators, which resonated with the song's lyrics and the promise of 'a world connected'. As the two reached the front rows of the audiences, the wave of 'bow-arrow' moves of the choreography spread across the arena: the first row of audiences started dancing and then gradually the dance rippled across the arena. For eight minutes, footage of Madcon and audiences dancing in the arena were rapidly succeeded by recordings of groups of – predominantly young – dancers in European cities. The recordings from the European cities were cut into performances in the arena as Madcon were asking the audiences to 'put their hands up', not only to celebrate but presumably to participate in the pan-European dance. Five minutes into the act a *coup de théâtre* was staged, as images of Eurovision parties in each of the 39 participant countries appeared on screen: families, couples, and pets were all dancing to 'Glow'.

Two decades after Zagreb, I was watching the ESC at my home in the UK, not on TV but through Eurovision live broadcasting via the internet. This time I was conscious that I was 'sharing the moment', the European utopia of togetherness that I had first encountered in my childhood, not only with other Europeans but also with viewers across the world. This was not simply a carefully crafted image of a united Europe, where the borders between the private, the public, and the spectacular had collapsed; 'Glow' appeared to articulate a cosmopolitan disposition, which was also evident in the song's lyrics, and gestured to a global community of viewers. The ESC was speaking to another layer of my subjectivity, not only as a Greek or a European but also as a 'citizen of the world'. Nonetheless, the Norwegian act's promise of a cosmopolitan Europe vis-à-vis the impact of neoliberal ideologies in shaping (banal) cosmopolitanism as well as models of European governance that limit the space for citizens' participation could only be met with scepticism. For

me, the performance's affective call could not overcome the ideological limitations of a 'cosmopolitan' act on the Eurovision stage.

'Glow' aspired to instigate emotion through the intersubjective moments produced between performers and audiences in the arena, audiences in the various cities and future audiences of the recorded flash mob dance. Hence 'Glow' was produced by a specific European community – Eurovision fans – but was constructed in a way that attempted to reach wider European and global publics. To borrow a term from Dolan's fascinating study of *Utopia in Performance*, 'Glow' could 'ripple out': the dance seemed to literally spread across European cities and households, provoking emotion to the viewers while the dance's affective dimensions could permeate 'other forms of social relations' (Dolan, 2005: 34). Furthermore, the community shaped among the various kinds of performers and audiences of 'Glow' bear the potentiality of 'rippling out', extending into the future.

The concept of potentiality is important for a discussion of the links between Europe as utopia, emotion, and Eurovision dramaturgies. According to José Estaban Muñoz's reading of utopia in queer performance,

Potentialities have a temporality that is not in the present but, more nearly, in the horizon, which we can understand as futurity. Potentiality is and is not presence, and its ontology cannot be reduced to presentness... It is something like a trace or potential that exists or lingers after a performance.

(Muñoz, 2009: 99)

Potentiality as a critical framework complicates the definition of temporality in Norway's interval act. The flash mob dance and the moment that was shared by performers and audiences transcended clear temporal distinctions of past and present while gesturing towards a future. Thus the 2010 ESC could be approached as an engagement with the notion of Europe not only in the present tense but also in terms of what might happen after the contest, in terms of the acts' potentiality, of what is here but not entirely there until we move to the future. A principle of presence and not presence permeated the flash mob's dramaturgy as it travelled across European cities, living only a trace while progressing to the next location.

A link between the flash mob, potentiality, and the Derridean approach to Europe can be made here. This link, although ostensibly working on philosophical grounds, can offer a valuable position about actual crises in Europe, which are reflective of divisions in the Eurozone,

since certain countries are established as key players in the EU's financial policies while others are perceived as potential contaminators of Europe. These tensions, though, expose a more fundamental rupture in the EU edifice: the failure of plans for a common European constitution during the 2000s and the absence of a European civil society. In short, a united Europe 'sharing the moment' does not exist through EU institutions, which have failed to create an appropriate framework for a meaningful European public sphere.

However, a performance like the flash mob and the feelings it instigated bear the potentiality of indicating another way towards this European unity utopia, which is closer to the Derridean reading of Europe as 'im-possibility'. This 'im-possible' does not signify resignation; instead, it is what gives 'the very movement to desire, action and decision: it is the very figure of the real. It has its hardness, closeness and urgency' (Derrida, 2005: 131). In *The Other Heading* and other writings about Europe since the 1990s, Derrida read Europe as a manifestation of the *à-venir* – as the future and what is yet to come – and an event, which is based on 'a condition of impossibility' (Derrida, 2005: 90). Proposing a radical redefinition of the European beyond Eurocentrism and allowing a true engagement with the 'other', 'which is not, never was, and never will be Europe' (1992: 77), Derrida responded to the European unity promise – that marked my childhood – in deconstructive terms. Although he did not oppose the European utopia *per se*, he radically challenged the homogeneity that the EU integration vision implied and emphasized the distinction between 'the im-possible' and utopia as a term that he was 'wary of', although it 'has critical powers that we should probably never give up on' (2005: 131).

Significant for the purposes of my argument here is that Europe is constantly deferred, at a temporal and geographical distance; it bears the potentiality of a future, which might never emerge, but within this deferral lies its utopian quality. The Derridean Europe, as approached in his talk 'A Europe of Hope' in 2004, shortly before his death, is a 'call' (Naas, 2008: 93) that can shape a direction to the future. Although the flash mob was rehearsed and edited, and 'arrived' on the screens of European audiences on the night of the contest, the experience of European togetherness and participation that it sought to capture can be read in a Derridean fashion, as an experience that is yet to arrive and at the same time incomplete and impossible to arrive. In other words, the flash mob was an appropriate strategy to briefly articulate Europeanness as an im-possible principle while indicating how multiple communities can shape public spheres through shared, embodied

experiences of participation and affective moments of identification, thus paving the way towards that European im-possibility. In this way, the Derridean approach to impossibility offers a framework for analysing the flash mob's performance efficacy while responding to sociological debates (Delanty and Rumford, 2005: 168–183) about the form that a European civil society, beyond the EU, can or might take. Unlike the romanticized European utopia I had imagined in 1990, the 2010 act rejected a static vision of unity misrepresented by institutional bodies, offering instead a passing image of what Europe could be like if more spaces were available for subjects to come together as public in diverse and creative ways.

'Glow' negotiated the relation between present and future, the utopian and the impossible, through emotion, generating 'utopian performatives', which are imbued by a transformative quality for audiences. According to Dolan, utopian performatives are

small but profound moments in which performance calls the attention of the audience in a way that lifts everyone slightly above the present, into a hopeful feeling of what the world might be like if every moment of our lives were as emotionally voluminous, generous, aesthetically striking and intersubjectively intense.

(2005: 5)

Following Dolan's argument, these intense, emotional experiences of community and intersubjectivity during performance might transform into principles of action in the public sphere. Utopian performatives articulate 'affective and ideological doings... [which] also critically rehearse civic engagement that could be effective in the wider public and political realm' (2005: 7); in this way, the utopian performative momentarily bridges present and future. Certain moments in the performance clearly expressed a desire for an elsewhere: audiences/dancers' hands reached for the sky, while in the London part of the act, three dancers were lifted above the group and reached for the camera, potentially calling viewers across Europe to join them. The heterogeneous groups of people dancing could provoke an emotional reaction, as these embodied communities in the material space that was the Oslo arena and the imaginary (TV) space of Europe gave an image of 'a lived connection', particularly among younger generations in Europe, thus indicating one of the many, existing European communities. The utopian performatives that emerged between audiences and various bodies performing 'Glow' were momentary, grasped only partially. In the same

way that 'utopian performatives spring from a complex alchemy of form and content, context and location, which take shape in moments of utopia as doings, as process, as never finished gestures towards a potentially better future' (Dolan, 2005: 8), the dance and song kept on moving across Europe, challenging any understanding of a European community as transhistorical or essentialist.

However, 'Glow' did not manage to capture the complex image of European communities in their plurality, as only one community that crosses national borders emerged: the community of the Eurovision fans who were recruited to perform. Furthermore, if 'flash mobs envision themselves as a slap in the fact of convention' (Muse, 2010: 20), 'Glow' did not cause – at least visibly – interruption or disruption in the European public spaces or did not conclude with the dispersal of the different groups, thus acknowledging the flash mob's fleeting nature.² Although performers' recruitment and planning happened through viral communication, 'Glow' did not appear to react to the realities of contemporary European urban life but instead exemplified how what first appeared as an experimental form of public performance has now largely become mainstream and commodified. All of the recorded footage focused on the dancers, while no audiences in the actual location of the dance appear and their reaction was not visible. In other words, the carefully edited and rehearsed image of Europe 'sharing the moment' did not include anyone who was not officially prepared for the act. This absence of audiences on the location of the flash mob presents 'Glow' more as a spectacle than as a performance of long-lasting 'cracks [that] they [i.e. mobsters] hope to make in people's sense of the stability of everyday life' (Muse, 2010: 14). These cracks can make a flash mob a subversive practice and their lack in the Eurovision example raises questions about the politics of the act.

The synchronized dance produced a naïve understanding of a shared identity and celebrated what can otherwise be perceived as a rather dystopian uniformity that neglects what Gerard Delanty and Chris Rumford (2005: 30) describe as a 'plural conception of Europe' through a 'constellation of civilisations'. The footage from various European households, where families or groups of friends in almost identical living rooms watched the contest, can be read as a representation of a pan-European social class that comprises ESC audiences. The celebratory image of Europe dancing was incomplete: the flash mob articulated a rather totalizing and heteronormative representation of contemporary Europe without clearly contesting it or at least allowing space for difference.

In short, 'Glow' indicated the limits of utopian performatives on the Eurovision stage and raised questions about the ways in which European identities might exist together in the same geographical and imagined space that is Europe, as well as the potentiality of a European public sphere, a space of participation for European citizens. Peter Rehberg has proposed that understanding the paradox of nationality on the Eurovision stage involves an engagement with camp strategies as 'the inevitable articulation of one's endeavor to represent nationality' (2007: 65). Considering how the act could emotionally affect an audience as well as its limitations or failures, 'Glow' is another example of the complex ideologies and dramaturgies that underpin the ESC. It presents a queer strategy of staging Europe by responding to the calls for a European public sphere or civil society question. On the one hand, the flash mob aimed to produce a utopian version of a Europe that is 'not-yet-set' and perhaps will never be, but instead illustrated a rather fixed representation of European identities and communities through the chosen choreography. On the other hand, the impression that 'Glow' through its fleeting dramaturgy of feeling left on certain viewing publics might 'serve the negative purpose of making us more aware of our mental and ideological imprisonment' (Jameson, 2005: xiii) and thus invite us to consider other possibilities of European communities. For Fredric Jameson, 'the best utopias are the ones that fail the most comprehensively' (2005: xiii) and perhaps the utopian quality of the ESC lies precisely in its failing attempts to represent European identities or public spheres, in its 'celebration of Europe *only negatively*' (Rehberg, 2007: 65), thus reminding us that Europe is this impossible task that is yet to arrive but must be pursued, beyond EU politics.

Düsseldorf, 2011: 'Head Up High'

In 1990 my identifications as Greek and European were interconnected because of narratives and images – including '*Insieme*' – that established Greece as a proud member of the vision of European unity; in 2010, the Oslo ESC provoked consideration of the possibility of being a 'citizen of the world' alongside European identification. In May 2011, when I travelled to Düsseldorf alongside other members of the Eurovision and the 'New' Europe Research Network to attend the contest for the first time live, new questions about my Greek/European/cosmopolitan subjectivity were raised. Against a backdrop of failures across the Eurozone that reflected on, or as failures of, Greece, I had to reassess how I identified with Greek and European collectivities, which no longer seemed to

complement each other but instead were in clear opposition.³ On the day of the second semi-final, news of violent clashes that had erupted following a general strike in my home town reached me. The contrast between images of struggle in Athens and the celebratory atmosphere of a Europe united through music in the ESC host city was striking. Inevitably, I remembered *'Insieme'* and the excitement of what now appeared as a void promise of European unity. I reassessed *'Glow'* as a naïve articulation of EU hegemony where citizens have access to a controlled public sphere of uniformity, and where illusionary participation in a system governed by the logic of global capitalism is cloaked as liberal democracy.

My experience of the 2011 ESC and particularly my emotional reactions manifested a fundamental shift in my identification as a European subject, whereby my 'I' was attached to a European 'we' which was different from the ideal vision of Cutugno's song, the flash mob's rippling effect and the celebratory communities gathering outside the Düsseldorf arena. Although this was the first time I could experience the contest live, I did not feel that I was 'sharing a moment' alongside the rest of Europe or, rather, I questioned what the Europe was I now belonged to.

A possible reading of the strong alienation that I experienced while in Germany would suggest that my Greekness limited any possibility for a European identification, particularly when considering that since 2010, Greece had offered a spectacle of threat and punishment across Europe. According to such a reading, feelings of anger and shame, and Eurosceptic positions, would limit any possibility of engaging with the contest as a performance of Europeanness. That year was significantly different from the European elections two decades earlier, when Greeks could proudly and 'with their heads held high' – to use the popular expression to which Verney also alludes – be in Europe; like the countries of the Eastern bloc at the turn of the 1990s, Greece is 'othered' in contemporary Europe.

Despite the call for pride in the song's lyrics by means of the same expression, *'το κεφάλι ψηλά και τα χέρια ανοιχτά'* ('head held up high and arms open'), I experienced strong alienation towards the Greek act (Figure 1.2). *'Watch my Dance'* was a hybrid of hip-hop dance and traditional *zeibekiko* music, ostensibly attempting to respond to the challenges of post-bailouts Greece. The song narrated a story of betrayal and survival, culminating in a heroic dance performed against a background of ancient ruins; blending allusions to antiquity, reference via *zeibekiko* dance to centuries of Ottoman rule and contemporary rapping, *'Watch my Dance'* aptly illustrated contemporary Greek identity as an



Figure 1.2 Loukas Yiorkas and backup dancers perform ‘Watch My Dance’, Greece’s 2011 ESC entry
Source: Alain Douit.

amalgam of often contradictory cultural references, which indicate the Western/Eastern influences on the country. The act provoked passionate dancing among Greeks in the arena, thus capitalizing on nationalist sentiments which had surfaced in discourses since May 2010 and were reminiscent of attitudes that defined Greek foreign policy and populist antagonism in the 1980s.

Although the song could be read as my generation’s allegoric response to the crises, since both performers (Loukas Yiorkas and Stereo Mike) grew up in the same period as me, I felt anger, shame, and frustration, unable to identify with this representation of Greekness and thus relate to other Greeks around me in the arena. ‘Watch my Dance’ perpetuated the myth of a nation of proud survivors that ‘hold heads high’, thus transferring the financial and institutional opposition between EU and Greece to the ESC stage, while satisfying an imaginary of national superiority, as it was performed in a German city. In fact, the 2011 Greek entry demonstrated the modernized and Europeanized face of contemporary, Greek popular music – a product of the processes of globalization and late capitalism, elements that led to the crisis that the song’s content aspired to critique. In other terms, the Greek song could be read as resisting and responding to the crises, but its spectacular staging and eclectic

borrowings from musical and other cultural influences undermined its efficacy at a political level but strengthened it at an affective one, in either positive or negative terms.⁴

Even in these negative terms, the contest's affective dimensions present an effective way to map moments of national and European identifications, particularly in critical moments of European history. If affect shapes individual and collective bodies, the shared or solitary experience of affect while watching the ESC can shape an experience of Europe as a protean term that exists in the present but gestures to a future. According to Muñoz, utopia is a temporal and spatial stage which moves us beyond the present and expresses 'a politics of emotion' (2009: 97). Examples like the 1990 Italian song, the 2010 Norwegian interval act, and the 2011 Greek representation of Greek-European tension are utopian in the ways that they generated intense feelings while producing views on what is possible or not in Europe, what kinds of communities are visible or not, and how particular forms of identification emerge and are consolidated. These utopian performatives – affective responses that negotiate a sense of what is yet to come – indicate the failure that is inherent in any utopian project, and in negative terms expose what is a disappointing and limiting present; they may not show us what the way to Europe is but they indicate which one is not.

In 2003, in the wake of massive public protests against the Iraq War, Jürgen Habermas and Derrida identified the possibility of a European public sphere, suggesting that 'the power of emotion has brought European citizens jointly to their feet' (2003: 292). Ten years later, in the 2012 context of failure of the official mode of European governance, what emerges is '*a European populism*, a simultaneous movement or a peaceful insurrection of popular masses who will be voicing their anger as victims of the crisis' (Balibar, 2010). This power of emotion might pave the way for a European public sphere, both as a utopian project and as a necessity. In a context where neoliberal rationality is advocated as the only way out of the crisis, a return to emotion as what binds people together can indicate a politics of resistance, beyond national identification, and shape a European civil society where the political is driven by 'passion . . . fantasies, desire, and those things that a rationalist approach is unable to understand in the very construction of human subjectivity and identity' (Mouffe, 2001: 40–41).

Janelle Reinelt has offered a critique of Habermas' theory as excluding particular subjects and questioned the role of the public sphere as a space of consensus in a global age. Her proposition is that such forms of expression as affect and emotion should be included in the formation of a public sphere:

the governing geometry of this sphere needs to be envisioned not as a unified field but rather as a network or a rhizome with a plurality of entry points and, indeed, of publics. There is no monolithic sphere.

(Reinelt, 2011: 18)

Reinelt's views are significant for an understanding of the European public sphere, and of the role of the ESC – both in production and reception – in that rhizome of consensus and dissent. In a growing context of anger at the EU's politics as well as hope for rising public movements of resistance, an understanding of affect and emotion as crucial components of ideology and belonging can shed light both into how European politics and identities happen outside Eurovision and into how a new version of the European public sphere might emerge.

The relation between the ESC and European audiences can generate utopian performatives that in their affective potency propose, either positively or negatively, ways of moving beyond the present. Derrida suggests that one can 'feel European *among other things*' (1992: 83). Hence the feeling European sensibility might be an intense, affect-based reaction, the last identification (Passerini, 2007) that emerges only momentarily and is bound to disappear; it is a utopian performative *per se*, which leaves a trace on the history of European identities at large and on the micronarratives of a subject's European identification in specific contexts. In 1999, Étienne Balibar emphasized that it is necessary that 'the project of democratisation and economic construction common to the East and West, the North and South... will be elaborated and will gain support of its peoples – a project that depends first on them' (2004: 10). In what appears to be a crucial historical juncture which could be 'the end of the EU' (Balibar, 2010), Europeans face the challenge to experience feeling as it is emerging in the actually existing, multiple, and often contradictory European public spheres. This feeling can allow democratic participation across countries, shape new modes of European identification beyond a defined notion of Europe and thus, returning to Balibar, render 'Europe impossible: Europe possible' (2004: 10).

Notes

1. In 1989–1990 the first major scandal in post-dictatorship Greece was revealed: a network of corruption that involved the banking system, press, and leading figures of the governing socialist party, including the prime minister, was exposed. This caused nine months of political instability and three consecutive national elections. The argument about the imperative of the country's modernization and Europeanization that would guarantee the 'cleansing' of

the political system from clientelism and corruption gained momentum during the pre-election period and paved the way for discourses, which claimed that Greece's political future and financial growth could only be guaranteed if European standards were, or at least appeared to be, met.

2. In the spring of 2010 and prior to the night of the live final, recordings of the flash mob dance had taken place in various countries across the continent: Spain, Iceland, Slovenia, Sweden, Lithuania, the UK, Germany, and Ireland. The call for participation was advertised through the official website of the ESC, as well as through fans' websites, pages on *Facebook* and other social media. People who were interested in participating in the flash mob could learn the choreography, using online videos that explained the score in four parts. Although it is possible that a small number of people who had not gone through the process of rehearsal might have joined on the day of recording, the majority of participants were Eurovision fans or at least friends of Eurovision fans who had actively chosen to prepare for and participate in the flash mob. In the case of London, a short advert in the *Evening Standard* (5 May 2010) clearly states that participants 'need to learn the dance before turning up' for the recording.
3. It is impossible and beyond the chapter's scope to engage in detail with the Greek crisis of public debt and its implications for the country and the EU. Since April 2010, Greece has gone through its worst period of recession since 1945, as in order to secure bailout packages from the IMF and the European Central Bank, governments have implemented severe austerity measures, leading to a rise in unemployment and poverty rates as well as extreme ideological positions and practices, primarily from the Far Right party. In Balibar's terms, 'Europe ... imposed on it [i.e. Greece] the coercive rules of the IMF, which protect not the nations, but the banks, and promise deep and endless recession' (2010). Greece, alongside other countries of the European periphery (Portugal, Italy, Ireland, and Spain), seemed to be in a state of emergency, while the possibility of the country's default on its debt was often used – particularly by German government officials – to induce panic among Greek citizens.
4. Providing a reading of the act's relative ESC success – it finished seventh – is complex, for it might have been largely due to diasporic Greeks voting for an act that flattered the nation's ego; on the other hand, it could also have been due to the song's musical references and the growing appeal of hip hop music among the younger generation across Europe.