

by Steve Hanson

IN ONE sense Eurovision is a strange thing, a glimpse into the exotic cornucopia of European pop. But in another sense, Eurovision actually just highlights the bits of ubiquitous, daily mainstream culture that I usually ignore.

It struck me yesterday evening, when watching Eurovision, that the functions of those climactic, vocoder-driven stadium house tracks, are both obvious and complex. Their videos especially are fascinating, glimpsed in working class pubs with television scenes of audience climax, at a faked live performance or festival, a mass celebration, in front of an often blonde, female, western, half porn star, half fitness workout instructor figure. This says everything we need to know about the assemblages of labour and leisure most of us now tolerate, historically, in the western first world, as well as their dominant, nauseating assumptions.

But this music's aesthetic is also highly classed. These mass celebration climaxes function to symbolically re-include the excluded, those who inevitably consume the videos in the first place. By doing so, they are placed, as vicarious members of the audience, at two stages removed, into the mass and

therefore global story they are inevitably marginalised by. The tracks are always about overcoming obstacles to get somewhere (baby), but the consumer of them is inevitably stranded in a declining and very local present, both geographically and temporally, smoking outside a bad pub where the bus service has been cut.

But, when this musical and visual aesthetic becomes the form and function of Israel's Eurovision entry, which last night included Moorish floor projections, the Israeli flag, and a lyric about everyone having "one heart" (I edited my bloodier metaphors from this draft) it is the concealment of ideology we are concerned with. As with the stadium house track genre, the intended unitary sentiments cover a much larger and more complex story.

In some ways then, the moment when Austria won last night, with an undoubtedly cheerful, beyond heteronormative performer, it felt wrong to snipe. The performance cut right through the dominant gendering of the standard Euro-pop or stadium house

cultural mainstream.

Music and the landscapes of Europe have so often been bleak combinations, with good reason. If we think back to Barok, and much of the eastern European folk music his pieces often borrow from, then we only have to think forward again to the Serbian and Bosnian conflicts, or Israel and Palestine, to understand what Eurovision conceals.

But it would also be naively worthy to suggest that the symbolic landscapes of Eurovision, temporarily rushing into the minds of millions like a mass hallucination, should now evaporate its hyper-real form into some misguided idea of "authenticity", replacing these strange hybrids of aesthetics and athletics with, say, folk music, or an indie band. Although I wouldn't mind seeing some UK hip hop performing for Britain, Mystro and Britain-tax perhaps.

No, the mythical and almost mystical nature of Eurovision is both useful and crucial. These symbolic magic lantern shows, performed in the interior of a busy and perhaps politically agnostic mind, need to be recalibrated to better reflect the daily struggles and experiences of those who consume them, instead of masking and anaesthetising them. There is a very different way that culture like this could connect the local to the global. But that, as we saw last night, is a very big job.

Adventures in European hyper-landscapes



• Austria's winner Cinchita Wurst.

is at that moment so easily re-incorporated into the new normal of wars, shopping, wars and shopping.

The expanded spectrum of sexuality and gender risks becoming just another part of the flattened smorgasbord of cultural values, and even this is an illusion: as we can see, both Eurovision songs and stadium house present highly identifiable genres. By which I mean that they are very far from limitless in what they can say or

present, even when they "go further", re-including what was excluded before, symbolically speaking. What was Marx saying about both the culture and economics of liberalism?

But I don't want to sound intolerant or unaccepting here. What we need is more radical and opened-out cultural forms and avant-gardes, not the smooth assimilation of them into an amnesiac, eternally-recurring, politically and ethically dubious

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It struck me yesterday evening, when watching Eurovision, that the functions of those climactic, vocoder-driven stadium house tracks, are both obvious and complex. Their videos especially are fascinating, glimpsed in working class pubs with televisions. They often contain scenes of audience climax, at a faked live performance or festival, a mass celebration, in front of an often blonde, female, western, half porn star, half fitness workout instructor figure. This says everything we need to know about the assemblages of leisure and labour most of us now tolerate, historically, in the western first world, as well as its dominant, nauseating assumptions.

However, this music's aesthetic is also highly classed. These mass celebration climaxes function to symbolically re-include the excluded, those who inevitably consume the videos in the first place. Via doing so, they are placed, as vicarious members of the audience, at two stages removed, into the mass and therefore global story they are inevitably marginalised by. The tracks are always about overcoming obstacles to get somewhere (baby), but the consumer of them is inevitably stranded in a declining and very local present, both geographically and temporally, smoking outside a bad pub where the bus service has been cut.

However, when this musical and visual aesthetic becomes the form and function of Israel's Eurovision entry, which last night included moorish floor projections, the Israeli flag, and a lyric about everyone having 'one heart' (I edited my bloodier metaphors from this draft) it is the concealment of ideology we are concerned with too. As with the stadium house track genre, the intended unitary sentiments cover a much larger and more complex story.

In some ways then, the moment when Austria won last night, with an undoubtedly cheerful, beyond heteronormative performer, it felt wrong to snipe. The performance cut right through the dominant gendering of the standard Euro-pop or stadium house number, which I outlined at the start of this piece. But the bearded lady (or ladies beard) is also a mask, as much as it is a revelation. Queen Conchita dripped with all the tacky baubles of a culture presenting the conspicuous consumption of luxury goods as a default set of values.

Austria's win was world-historical, and genuinely progressive, at one very fundamental level, but the supposed 'transgression' of transgender, is at that moment so easily re-incorporated into the new normal of wars, shopping, wars and shopping. The expanded spectrum of sexuality and gender risks becoming just another part of the flattened smorgasbord of cultural values, and even this is an illusion: As we can see, both Eurovision songs and stadium house present highly identifiable genres. By which I mean that they are very far from limitless in what they can say or present, even when they 'go further', re-including what

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