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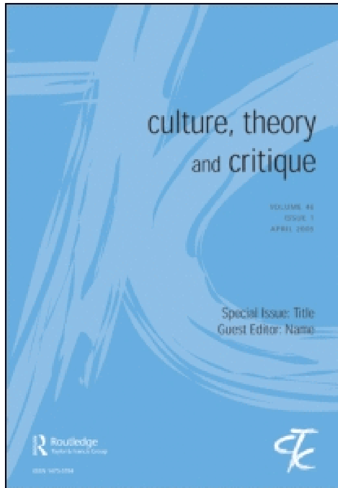

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'Antes cursi que sencilla': Eurovision Song Contests and the Kitsch-Drive to Euro-Unity

Paul Allatson

Abstract *This essay proposes that kitsch, in this instance the kitsch exemplified by the musical and sartorial look, sound and feel of Eurovision Song Contests (ESC), may not only influence the popular appeal of the current European-unity project, but provide that project with its governing aesthetic and imaginary. Indeed, noting that the ESC has been more inclusive than, and arguably ahead of, the parallel economic and political movement to European union in the post-World War II era, the essay proposes an aesthetic reclamation of kitsch as a socio-political and intercultural avant garde that avoids ethno-national conflict. The essay argues that unlike the historical-material spaces in which creolisation emerges, the Euro kitsch-drive enables disparate peoples to enter a mass-mediated kinship group in a networked zone of peace and superficial familiarity.*

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Hailing from the little Spanish pueblo of Ayamonte, near the Portuguese frontier with the Andalusian province of Huelva, nine-year-old María Isabel López became an instant Euro-superstar when she won the Junior Eurovision Song Contest (JESC) in 2004. Her winning entry was an infectious rap-flamenco-pop fusion called 'Antes muerta que sencilla' (I'd rather be dead than plain). The song's lyrics amount to a celebration of clothes shopping, perfume, hairdresser visits and make-up application, and are marked by a desire to look and be beautiful without censure in a pan-European context, as attested by the song's geographical references: London, Paris, Milan (and, inexplicably, San Francisco). Given its origins in a televisual event that does not normally generate commercial or artistic triumphs, 'Antes muerta que sencilla' surprised many observers by selling in the millions. That success was due, in part, to the canny dance remixes, and a marketing campaign involving a glossy video clip and merchandising, that ensured the song became a fixture in nightclubs, and on radio station playlists and pop charts, throughout Spain, the continent as a whole, and even in the Latin American pop market. Following the Spanish tradition of rewarding children who can hold a tune in a quasi-*gitano* (gypsy) way while performing a convincing simulation of adulthood, María Isabel is now a constant presence on Spanish television and in the Spanish tabloids. In 2005 she released her second CD-album, its national and international success cementing her precocious post-JESC career.

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While not wishing to sidestep the compelling point made by Spanish web-scribe CValda, who argues that both the song and its singer should be jettisoned from the planet for misrepresenting 'la humillación a la mujer' (the humiliation of women) as a form of celebratory 'girl power, tipo superhéroe' (superhero type) (Cvalda 2005), my interest here lies in the song's other celebratory function. That is, in the continent served by the JESC and its Eurovision Song Contest (ESC) parent, 'Antes muerta' is emblematic of a pan-European desire for the signs and trappings of ethno-national kitsch. As implied by my title's rewording of María Isabel's lyrics – 'I'd rather be *cursi* [kitsch] than plain'[1] – my proposal is that kitsch, in this instance the kitsch exemplified by the musical and sartorial look, sound and feel of Eurovision Song Contests, may not only influence the popular appeal of the current European-unity project, but provide that project with its governing aesthetic and imaginary, its fundamental *razón de ser*. Moreover, the ESC manifestation and celebration of the kitsch-drive has broader socio-cultural implications. The kitsch-drive suggests that disparate peoples may manage cultural and ethnic contact in ways that extend contemporary theoretical explanations of hybridity or creolisation into an aesthetics of conflict avoidance.

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Redefining the kitsch-drive

Since its invention in the nineteenth century as a bona fide but contentious aesthetic category, kitsch has attracted the ire of numerous critics.[2] In a 1950 lecture delivered at Yale University, for example, Hermann Broch crankily defined kitsch as a systematic falsehood, a thing or style or form of bad-taste used by 'kitsch-man' in order to recognise and reinforce his [sic] own 'counterfeit' nature (Broch [1950] 1968: 49). Kitsch functioned for Broch as 'the element of evil in the value system of art' (63), its relationship to art in fact analogous to that between 'the system of the Anti-Christ and the system of Christ', hence the Fascist and totalitarian predilection for the purportedly kitsch mass spectacle (62). These utterances reprised Broch's earlier 1933 essay, 'Evil in the Value-System of Art', in which he characterised the maker of kitsch as 'ethically depraved, a criminal willing radical evil' (Broch [1933] 2002: 37). The modernist critic Clement Greenberg made a differently judgemental point in 1939 when he argued that the kitsch object, a product and symptom of the massification of culture inaugurated by the industrial revolution, is produced for and consumed by the ignorant masses, as opposed to the powerful and 'cultivated' avant-garde (Greenberg 1961: 9). Kitsch thus became the 'rearguard' to the 'avant-garde', functioning as an 'ersatz culture … destined for

[1] The Spanish word *cursi* is normally regarded as a synonym for kitsch, but has additional signifying capacities: the rococo; bad taste; camp (effete, something queer); anything that is derivative; someone, or a class, that is dependent on foreign things and styles (Valis 2002; Polimeni 2004). Lidia Santos (2006) argues that *cursi* is a key cultural aesthetic in much Latin American literary, film and musical production, one that permits local mass culture to mediate the transition from tradition to modernity.

[2] See Matei Calinescu (1987) and Lidia Santos (2006) for two excellent accounts of kitsch and its historical and critical evolution in the modernist and postmodernist eras.

those who, insensible to the values of genuine culture, are hungry nevertheless for the diversion that only culture of some sort can provide' (Greenberg 1961: 10). For Broch and Greenberg, kitsch was a dangerous and pernicious aesthetic, antithetical (the low) to great human artistic endeavour (the high), and intimately allied to oppressive political ideologies and state systems (Nazism, Fascism, Stalinism). As Greenberg argues, 'If kitsch is the official tendency of culture in Germany, Italy and Russia, it is not because their respective governments are controlled by philistines, but because kitsch is the culture of the masses in these countries, as it is everywhere else' (Greenberg 1961: 19). He adds, 'Kitsch keeps a dictator in closer contact with the "soul"'. Saul Friedländer took these claims further in his argument that kitsch was inherently an anti-modern aesthetic of spectacular power and evil, as typified by the death-drive and excessive symbolism of Nazism (Friedländer 1984). For his part, Harold Rosenberg decried the 'intellectualization of kitsch', by which he meant the increasing academic and critical interest in mass and popular culture at the expense of art and the individual artist, writer, or composer (Rosenberg 1962: 260–61). Rosenberg thus regarded kitsch as the aesthetic ally not of totalitarian political systems, but of an equally totalitarian capitalism, one responsible for the mind-numbing mass-mediation of contemporary life and the emasculation of vibrant intellectual discourse.

Despite their different targets, modernist critics were united in making of kitsch a convenient aesthetic scapegoat, attributing to it an historical-material agency or physicality, and an ideological capacity for profound social and personal harm. All agreed, too, that kitsch was not simply symptomatic of industrial capitalism, but one of modernity's defining aesthetic characteristics. As Matei Calinescu notes,

> Kitsch … is a recent phenomenon. It appears at the moment in history when beauty in its various forms is socially distributed like any other commodity subject to the essential market law of supply and demand. Once it has lost its elitist claims to uniqueness and once its diffusion is regulated by pecuniary standards (or by political standards in totalitarian countries), 'beauty' turns out to be rather easy to fabricate. (Calinescu 1987: 229)

And yet, as Calinescu also emphasises, the claims made of kitsch have been formulated in defiance of kitsch's historical appearances as 'one of the most bewildering and elusive categories of modern aesthetics' (1987: 232).

> … Like art itself, of which it is both an imitation and a negation, kitsch cannot be defined from a single vantage point. And again like art – or for that matter anti art – kitsch refuses to lend itself even to a negative definition, because it simply has no single compelling, distinct counterconcept. (Calinescu 1987: 232)

Despite recognising the impossibility of ever adequately defining kitsch, Calinescu identifies at least two general categories of kitsch, the first tied to propaganda (political kitsch, religious kitsch), the second produced as entertainment (tourist souvenirs, sentimental novels, and so on) (235–36), and

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further postulates that there can be innumerable other categories. This proliferation of kitsch possibilities befits an aesthetic that produces the '"normal" art of our time' and that thus provides all residents of modernity not simply with 'the starting point of any aesthetic experience' (258), but with the 'necessary step on the path toward an ever elusive goal of fully authentic aesthetic experience' (262). Kitsch, for Calinescu, thus carries the seeds of its own failure, for by exposing consumers to a ceaseless supply of duplicates and fakes (for example, reproductions of a Rembrandt painting), kitsch may predispose such consumers to seek out the 'aesthetic truth' of the artistic original (262).

Yet, as Calinescu's ultimate valuing of the 'artistic original' over kitsch confirms, so burdened is kitsch by a reputation for totalitarianism and (mass) deception that contemporary critics often cannot escape replicating or reinforcing the idea that kitsch invariably signifies oppressiveness and falsity. Those significations shadow postmodernist reclamations of kitsch and the concomitant shift in critical attention from the kitsch object to the mechanisms of reception, traditionally overlooked in modernist criticism. As Lidia Santos notes, critical approaches to kitsch in the second half of the twentieth century moved 'from unrestricted condemnation, provoked by the identification with political kitsch fabricated by Nazism and Stalinism, to a relative absolution', by which kitsch's productive capacities are not foreclosed by, or overdetermined by, the art/kitsch dyad (Santos 2006: 88–89). The shift away from the kitsch = totalitarianism and kitsch = falsehood equations is articulated perhaps most productively in the work of Ludwig Giesz. Disputing modernist dismissals of kitsch, Giesz argues that the debate over kitsch must move away from the obsession with dichotomies (art/not-art; art/anti-art; high/low; authentic/inauthentic; meaningful/meaningless; elite/popular; rich/poor; enduring/transient; serious/laughable; beautiful/ugly; valuable/worthless; unique/mass produced; good/evil; totalitarian/democratic) in order to explain why kitsch can be produced out of virtually anything, including 'high' art. Giesz proposes, therefore, that the precondition for kitsch is a 'kitsch-consciousness', a psychological state (such as that induced by modern tourism) that 'collectivises' people in ways that preclude escape from 'kitsch impressions' (Giesz 1968: 159–61). According to Giesz, no aspect of human material and social existence is immune to the kitsch-consciousness. Thus kitsch is at once definitionally elusive, temporally mutable, and materially legion, as befits an epoch in which 'the mass-production of kitsch articles involves limitless possibilities' (156–57). The modern tourist, for example, has a predisposition 'to kitsch experience in so far as he [sic] would like to treat "abroad" as he does his personal memories: his expectations are modelled on more or less precise stereotypes, since he is certainly not in search of the "utterly unknown"' (170). At work in the tourist's kitsch-consciousness is what Giesz calls a yearning to familiarise the exotic and to exoticise the familiar (171). These are the imaginative tools by which kitsch-man willingly 'adapt[s] himself to playing a little aesthetic joke on the real and fleeting condition of man, with which he is perfectly familiar in everyday life' (174).

Taking Giesz's position a little further, the desires of the tourist as kitsch-man indicate that kitsch may be understood as a familiarising response in a system of exchange triggered by experiences that place kitsch-man in close proximity to the realm of the Other. The kitsch-drive does not simply evince

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what Giesz would call 'a lack of enthusiasm for the utterly known', but recognises tacitly that there are limits to what we can know of the Other. This understanding of kitsch – a mode that mediates the superficial relations between self and other – thus runs counter to that proposed by David Lloyd, who, surveying the global proliferation of Irish kitsch, regards such kitsch as emblematic of a subaltern Irish culture 'cast from futurity by the state' and thus containing in itself 'the elements of another living' (Lloyd 1999: 100). Colin Graham disputes that argument, noting that it imposes on kitsch 'the expectation of a germination of political meaning which kitsch cannot sustain, since it is reliant on production, overproduction and a plethora of meanings which verge on overwhelming the capacity to mean' (Graham 2001: 170). There is no 'real' to be uncovered by the kitsch-drive, and nor can any inherent or essential meaning be imposed on kitsch. Rather, as Santos recognises in her gloss on Giesz, the pleasure offered by kitsch lies in its capacity to transform 'the extreme situations of human existence "into moving romances, [thereby] substituting numinous dramas (fear, veneration, oration, desperation, etc.) with an agreeable emotivity"' (Santos 2006: 88). Cast this way, kitsch may be best understood as an aesthetic mechanism for domesticating radical difference and avoiding transcultural and ethno-national conflict, or worse: I'd rather be kitsch (agreeably emotive) than ethnically cleansed.

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The ESC as an avant-garde

Kitsch's double safety act of exoticising the familiar and familiarising the exotic suggests that a kitsch-consciousness has been at work in the post-World War II European quest for unity. And in that quest the ESC has been quite literally an avant-garde, a claim that accords with Calinescu's observation that kitsch 'can mimic with profit the appearance of avant-gardism', and utilise 'avant-garde procedures for purposes of what we may call "aesthetic advertising"' (Calinescu 1987: 231). The first ESC was held in 1956 as an initiative of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU) that was formed in 1953 and headquartered in Geneva. The EBU's brief was to provide better access to television programmes for member broadcasters in two dozen countries, many of which lacked the means and resources to cover big events, such as international sporting contests and events of historical 'interest' like the Coronation of Queen Elizabeth II in 1953, the latter the first pan-European media event covered by the EBU. The ESC was conceived as a promotional exercise for the EBU's pan-European modus operandi. The 1956 competition involved seven countries and, despite accusations that the host country Switzerland had rigged the voting in its favour, was successful enough in audience-capture terms to justify an annual event. Since 1956, the ESC has grown to the extent that each May it now takes place over two nights with a semi-final and final, involves 36 countries (24 make the final), and attracts over 100 million viewers in Europe alone,[3] with many more millions across the globe via

[3] This figure is conservative. Some commentators estimate that the ESC is watched in 255 European million households, with a possible audience of 400 million (Le Guern 2000).

satellite television, delayed local TV broadcast, or live webcast (since 2000), thus making the ESC one of the most successful popular-musical phenomena in the world.[4] That success is augmented by the fact that each participant country conducts highly publicised competitions and/or selection processes for the official national entrant months before the ESC finals. The Junior Eurovision franchise was inaugurated in 2003, and takes place in early December each year.[5]

The ESC has been more inclusive than, and arguably ahead of, the parallel economic and political movement to continental union in the post-World War II era. That inclusiveness is in part indebted to the ever-expanding ambit of the EBU itself, which in 2006 had 74 Active Members (TV broadcasters) in 54 countries in Europe, the Middle East and North Africa, and another 44 Associate Members in 28 other countries across the globe (including, for example, Australia, Cuba, India, Iran, South Africa, Zimbabwe, and the USA).[6] Theoretically, any country with EBU Active Members may participate in the ESC. In practice, the sole non-European state to date granted honorary 'European' song-contest status has been Israel. Only four countries – the UK, Germany, Spain, and France – are guaranteed ESC participants.[7]

Shortly after its debut, the ESC began its inexorable expansion, notable admissions including Spain (1961) and Portugal (1964), two dictatorships eager to be involved in any event that might help to normalise relations with the states of Western Europe. In the 1970s the ESC also embraced Israel (1973) and Turkey (1975), both of which have gone on to win the ESC. Yet, while Eurovision organisers have striven to avoid political controversy, national and regional political interests, disputes and rivalries have always characterised ESC proceedings. That characteristic is evident in the Eurovision tradition of country voting patterns, by which regional and ethnic blocs consistently give high points to neighbouring country entries (the Balkan states always vote for each other, as do the Scandinavian and Baltic states, Greece and Cyprus regularly trade top votes while resolutely ignoring Turkey, and so on).[8] At times, political protest has erupted into televisual view, as occurred in 1964 in Copenhagen, when demonstrators jumped on the stage bearing placards saying 'Boycott Franco and Salazar', the Spanish and

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[4] A case in point is Australia, where a delayed replay of the UK's ESC coverage has been screened since 1986 on SBS, the national 'multicultural' TV station. The ESC broadcast attracts about 8% of the national TV audience each year, and is accompanied by hundreds of ESC-theme parties in homes across the country. At times, viewer outrage has erupted, as occurred in the early 2000s when SBS changed the UK broadcast format in an attempt to 'localise' it with Australian commentators and sensibilities (Douglas 2001; 2002; Mangan 2004).

[5] See the ESC (http://www.eurovision.tv) and JESC (http://www.junioreurovision.tv) official websites for more detailed historical overviews.

[6] See the EBU official website (http://www.ebu.ch/en/) for the full list of Active and Associate Members.

[7] The four countries pay the EBU more than other participating ESC states for the privilege of avoiding the semi-final.

[8] See Philippe Le Guern (2000) for more detailed analysis of ESC voting patterns, or what he calls the ESC 'structuring system'.

Portuguese dictators. A decade later, in the famous 1974 contest won by the then little known Swedish group Abba with 'Waterloo', coup plotters in Portugal initiated their successful overthrow of the Salazar regime by cuing the uprising to the opening bars of the Portuguese entry 'E depois do adeus' (And after the Goodbyes) on the state radio's Eurovision broadcast.

The avant-garde function of the ESC has also been evident in the post-1990 incorporation of ex-Communist states, and more generally in what Göran Bolin calls the ESC's cultural and demographic expansion to the 'East' (Bolin 2006: 191). This process began in 1993 when the International Radio and Television Organisation of central and eastern European broadcasters merged with the EBU, thereby adding nine new member states to the EBU roster, and replacing Yugoslavia with three newly constituted states (Bolin 2006: 194). The rapid and painless incorporation of former-Soviet bloc states as participants again demonstrates the ESC's capacities to manage the task of cultural unification without the drama, duress and delays that have accompanied political and economic entry into the EU.

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The ESC and kitsch-consciousness

At once democratising, incorporative and expansionist, the ESC's historical success would have been impossible had the event not been marked by, and defined explicitly in terms of, an unselfconscious celebration of unity in, and despite, ethno-national diversity. As Gunhild Agger describes it, the ESC's explicit brief to foster 'a pan-European sense of identity and … dialogue sans frontières' is evident in the modus operandi of participants: 'The point of this contest is, explicitly, for songwriters and singers of the participating countries to express national idiosyncrasies in ways that are calculated to appeal to as much of Europe as possible' (Agger 2001: 43). That governing urge is evident in a random selection of song titles from the last three decades: 'If We All Give a Little' (Six4one, Switzerland, 2006), 'Europe's Living a Celebration' (Rosa, Spain, 2002), 'Believe in Peace' (Times Three, Malta, 1999), 'Sole d'Europa' (European Sun) (Enrico Ruggeri, Italy, 1993), 'Somewhere in Europe' (Liam Reilly, Ireland, 1990), 'Insieme: 1992' (All Together: 1992) (Toto Cutugnio, Italy, 1990), 'Europiennes' (Cocktail Chic, France, 1986), 'Eurovision' (Telex, Belgium, 1980), 'En un mundo nuevo' (In a New World) (Karina, Spain, 1971). To rework Giesz's words, for fifty years the ESC has nurtured its own specific kitsch-consciousness, by which the expectations of organisers, participants and audiences alike have been 'modelled on more or less precise stereotypes' that, in turn, confirm a decided lack of enthusiasm for the 'utterly unknown' (Giesz 1968: 170). Each year participants from across the continent appeal to the familiarised-exotic taste of the audience, while simultaneously aiming to stand out exotically from the familiarised competition.

Given the time restrictions on ESC entries,[9] as well as the language barriers generated by so many participant countries, ESC entries conform

[9] A three-minute rule was introduced in 1958 after the 1957 Italian entry, 'Corde della mis chitarra' (My guitar strings) lasted for 5 minutes and 9 seconds (Mangan 2004: 20).

routinely to one of three possible kitsch-consciousness options. The first includes entrants who transcend linguistic and cultural limits by eliminating verbal complexity from song lyrics, as typified by such titles as 'Boum Badaboum' (Monaco 1967), 'La, La, La' (Spain 1968), 'Tom Tom Tom' (Finland 1973),[10] 'Boom Boom' (Denmark 1978), 'Bem Bom' (Portugal 1982), and 'Diggi-loo, Diggi-ley' (Sweden 1984).[11] Taking this kitsch option to perhaps its inevitable endpoint, the Dutch entrant in ESC 2006, Treble, presented 'Amambanda', whose title and lyrics derived from a made-up language devised by the group. A second approach is exemplified by participants who perform as ethno-national stereotypes, either by singing traditional folk styles or genres and/or dressing in 'national' costume. A third ESC kitsch-consciousness involves the neoculturation of tradition and the pop-music modern, an approach that teases the televisual audience with a glimpse into an 'utterly unknown' made familiar, its radical alterity accordingly disarmed for continent-wide consumption. María Isabel's JESC winner, 'Antes muerta que sencilla', exemplifies the latter option. The rap-flamenco music fusion is overlaid by lyrics, and a specific singing style, that signify southern Spain – since the late 1950s, the pet destination for millions upon millions of northern European kitsch-people tourists – and the hot-blooded Spanish women, gypsy or otherwise, that kitsch expectations say are to be found there. In this instance, María Isabel's young age presents no hindrance to the play of ethno-national, adult and gender significations in the service of continental unity. The kitsch-consciousness enabling spectators to read an ideal Spanishness onto María Isabel's performing body also permits them to assimilate that ideal into the Greater Europe served by contest and song alike.

Current EBU discussions with various ex-Soviet republics over their possible membership suggest that the Euro kitsch-drive is untroubled by debates over where precisely Europe's furthest frontiers might lie. A logical consequence of the kitsch-drive eastwards could be the eventual participation of Turkmenistan, currently ruled by 'Leader of all Turkmeni', Saparmurat Niyazov Turkmenbashi.[12] With a vigour unmatched anywhere in our epoch he has remodelled his republic on kitsch lines, from planning the world's first ice palace to renaming the months of the year after himself, his mother, and other national heroes, proclaiming that Turkmeni women are beautiful enough to appear on television without makeup as long as their hair plaits and clothing conform to Turkmeni tradition, changing official national age categories,[13] and constructing hundreds of visually idiosyncratic monuments in his own honour, including the Arch of Neutrality, replete with a rotating statue of the president himself in pure gold, in the Turkmeni capital

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[10] This particular number is most probably not an intended intertextual reference to Tom of Finland (Touko Laaksonen), the Finish cartoonist of gay erotica whose international popularity was on the rise in the early 1970s.

[11] See John Kennedy O'Connor (2005) for full information on the ESC history.

[12] This essay was written before Turkmenbashi's death on December 21, 2006.

[13] The new Turkmenistan age categories are: childhood, from 1–12; adolescence 13–26; youth 26–37; maturity 37–49; prophetic 49–61; inspirational 61–73, Turkmenbashi's own age group; wisdom 74–84; old age 85–96; and finally Oguzkhan, 97–109, named after the founder of the Turkmeni 'nation'.

Ashgabat. Despite the Turkmeni President's apparent antipathy to the makeup celebrated by María Isabel, he would concur with her words: 'Que más nos da que digas tu de mí, de Londres, de Milán, de San Francisco o de París' (We don't care what you say about me, in London, Milan, San Francisco, or Paris).

It is not idle speculation to suggest that the Euro kitsch-drive could easily incorporate Turkmenistan. However, the kitsch-drive already at work in that state would need to adapt itself out of its totalitarian and nationally bound kitsch framework in order to promise no authentic ethnic, national or ideological 'truth'. Rather, Turkmenistan's incorporation into the Euro-kitsch drive would require that state to undergo what J. Hoberman calls kitschification 'in reverse', as occurred in the Soviet bloc in the early 1990s (Hoberman 1998). That is, after the political collapse of Communism – for Hoberman '*the* aesthetic project of the twentieth century' – the post-Soviet era became inevitably a new aesthetic era, the pain and oppression of the past safely refamiliarised into and as kitsch. As Hoberman describes it, the kitschification of the ex-Soviet states confirmed that the kitsch = totalitarian equation was, at best, a naïve thesis. With the discrediting and rapid disintegration of the Communist master narrative, and 'of the idea that the world was ultimately knowable and that such knowledge could be generalized', kitsch triumphed, as evident in Hoberman's description of Prague in 1992:

> stores were selling a record mixing Communist hymns, among them a disco version of the 'Internationale', with the chants of Romania's anti-Ceaușecu demonstrations, the soundtracks of Social Realist movies, the theme from *The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly*, and phrases looped from the radio speeches of Stalin-era party hacks. (Hoberman 1998: 42)[14]

Familiarisation without conflict

In 2006 the ESC was won by Lordi, a Finnish heavy-metal outfit whose members wore trademark dinosaur/monster costumes. Lordi's participation as the official Finnish entrant caused high-level controversy at home, the Prime Minister even declaring that the group was an unworthy representative of the nation. Many media commentators regarded Lordi's resounding win with 'Hard Rock Hallelujah' as the sign of a new ESC era not beholden on an aesthetic level to the previous five decades of manufactured and disposable Euro-pop. Such commentators, however, missed a crucial feature of the ESC and its governing kitsch-drive, and that is the contest's capacity to kitchify even those groups and songs that appear to purvey an anti-ESC sensibility, in Lordi's case, purportedly serious and meaningful 'rock' in direct opposition to unserious and meaningless pop-kitsch. Traditionally antithetical to the ESC repertoire, the 'rock' purveyed by Lordi now joins that

[14] Marcelo Abreu's (2001) account of his travels through the post-Communist kitsch world suggests that even putatively Communist states such as China and Vietnam are currently undergoing a kitsch-in-reverse aestheticisation.

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repertoire as another exotically familiarised kitsch option, in an incorporative parallel to the ESC's relentless familiarisation of states and peoples since the event's inauguration in 1956.

The future-perfect dream of unity that the ESC's record of ethno-national accord and good neighbourliness has championed confirms that the Euro kitsch-drive is a making-do enterprise, a process of consciousness raising and conflict avoidance by which disparate peoples sing and watch themselves into a broader kinship group in a networked zone of peace and limited familiarity. Neither cultural hybridisation nor creolisation can adequately explain the Euro kitsch-drive's triumph as the dominant aesthetic and mode of European ethno-national coexistence since the 1950s. As Andrea Schweiger Hiepko argues, creolisation designates 'situations dominated by the facts of lingual, social, and cultural fusion without referring to an initial purity or essentiality' (Hiepko 2001: 116). These 'situations' are the hallmark of a post-colonial world, 'a global space with cultural interconnections … created by colonial expansion' and now configured by the structures of multinational capitalism (Hiepko 2001: 122). The Euro kitsch-drive, too, is dominated by transnational capital, and arises in the very continent that generated an array of global empires and thus the preconditions for linguistic and cultural creolisation in the Caribbean and elsewhere. Despite those shared historical-material conditions, the Euro kitsch-drive is nonetheless indicative of a differently conceived and ordered space of cultural interconnections. This space recognises only the peaceful interplay of ethno-national superficialities, the signs 'of a never-to-be-realised and thus never-to-be-broken promise' (Graham 2001: 172). Indeed, to reword Graham's reading of kitsch 'Ireland', the kitsch-drive underwriting the ESC scatters the 'remnants' of European authenticity around the continent, and beyond it, 'allowing forms of ownership' to participants and viewers alike (Graham 2001: 172). For disparate peoples across the continent, the kitsch-drive, and the media through which it is presented, thus enable a functionally superficial imaginary of unity. This befits our current epoch in which 'the *hypostatization* of the techniques/products of media culture (the technological conduit for contemporary variegations of kitsch) has been yoked together with strategies of aesthetic expertise, connoisseurship, and empowerment' (Decter 1989: 59).

Exemplifying that imaginary of empowerment, on Poland's entry into the European Union in 2004, Polish households received a free CD, *Sounds Like Europe: A Compilation of European Border-Breakers* (European Music Office of the European Union 2004), courtesy of the Directorate-General for Education and Culture of the European Union. Based on the ESC model, the CD was the result of a European competition in 2001 for songs that celebrated Euro diversity. As the CD sleeve notes say, the 15 'European border-breakers are the top European records travelling best outside their country of signing [sic]'. And as those notes reveal, in the ever Greater Europe of singing, flag-waving and familiarly ethnicised and nationalised peoples, communication is conducted in the new Europanto, the kitsch idiom – a new Euro-creole – that results when English is one's third or seventh tongue and that is characterised by a carefree, smiling disregard for the niceties of clear delivery: 'We won't stand this. No!' (Ukraine's Green Jolly, 2005). And in the Euro kitsch-zone, political dissent and conflict are also managed by the kitsch drive. In

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the 2004 ESC, for example, the UK entry by the duo Jeremy received 'nul points', a result that had as much to do with a devastatingly poor vocal delivery as it did with a continental desire to rebuke – cheerfully and politely – the UK for its leading role in the Iraq War. Ultimately, the incorporative kitsch-drive ensures that the quest for Euro-unity confronts and recognises few substantive geographical or political obstacles, the only exclusions being those zones and peoples yet to develop a kitsch-consciousness.

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