



Visions of Europe

Cultural technologies of nation-states

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ABSTRACT ● With the expansion of the European Union eastwards, nations have adopted various strategies for being included in the European community. This article discusses examples of cultural technologies used by post-communist countries in aligning with Western Europe. It is argued that the phenomenon is in fact not new, as the marketing of nations has occurred since at least the World's Fairs of the 19th century. However, while the World's Fairs addressed the nation-states of high industrialism, cultural technologies are the features used in a post-industrialized context, where it is more important to impress with abilities of symbolic production rather than with traditional industrial production. In terms of modernization processes, it can be argued that the increased emphasis on symbolic production indicates a shift from techno-industrial modernization to techno-cultural modernization. ●

KEYWORDS ● culture ● Eurovision Song Contest ● ideologies ● media technologies ● modernization ● nationalism ● World's Fairs

Introduction

An important feature connected to the rise of the modern nation states and nationalism in the 19th century was the rise of the World's Fairs, beginning in 1851 with the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace in London. The World's Fairs were events that functioned as promotional institutions for the new nation-states, where nations could impress with the most advanced

technological inventions, and the most refined cultural and artistic expressions, of their time.

It is reasonable to claim that since the Second World War, the World's Fairs have decreased in importance as promotional events for the industrialized nation-states, at least given the fact that they attract fewer and fewer visitors. The 1900 exhibition in Paris attracted 50 million visitors, while a century later, the exhibition in Hannover 2000 'only' attracted 18 million visitors.¹ Information and media technologies, once technological attractions in their own right at the World's Fairs, before and shortly after the turn of the 20th century have evolved into the very means for national display and promotion. With the deeper embedding of the (mass) media in modern societies, it followed that the media gradually came to *dictate* the events themselves. This eventually resulted in 'media events' such as the Olympic Games, royal coronations, the soccer World Cup and other large-scale events relayed by the media (Dayan and Katz, 1992). One such 'media event' is the Eurovision Song Contest. And however much the World's Fairs could be claimed to be mass events (or mega-events, as Maurice Roche [2000] would phrase it), the numbers of visitors to them seem quite small compared to the estimated 166 million viewers who watched the Eurovision Song Contest from Tallinn in 2002, to take a fairly recent example (which is also the one I will draw most heavily upon in this article).²

The Eurovision Song Contest naturally shares many characteristics with other large-scale, international media events such as the Olympic Games and the soccer World Cup, but there are also annual entertainment events that are broadcast internationally, for example the Academy Awards or MTV Awards. In addition to these there are charity events such as Band Aid and Live 8. The Eurovision Song Contest is similar to sports events, however, as the contest is between nations, rather than between actors as at the Academy Awards. And although charity events are politicized to a certain degree, they represent the politics of humanitarianism rather than the politics of nations. This makes the Eurovision Song Contest unique in its genre.

It is the argument of this article that the Eurovision Song Contest along with media events such as the Olympic games, World Championships and the like, have developed to be post-industrial equivalents to the World's Fairs of high industrial modernity. It is further argued, focusing on the example of the Eurovision Song Contest, that this has become increasingly obvious since nations in Eastern and Central Europe began to enter successful competitors in the early 2000s. Political dimensions have always been present in sports events, for example when nations have protested by not taking part in the competitions (for example, the Olympic Games in Berlin 1936, Moscow 1980 and Los Angeles 1984), but this has previously not been as obvious in mass popular culture events. However, the Eurovision Song Contest has become increasingly politicized as it has expanded to the East. This tendency emerged in Denmark in 2001 with the success of

Estonia, which was the first Eastern European nation to win the competition (thereby bringing the event to Tallinn in May 2002). Since then it has been hosted by Latvia in Riga 2003, Turkey in Istanbul 2004, and in May 2005 by Ukraine in Kiev. Along the way the Eurovision Song Contest has become a discursive tool in the definitions of Europeanness and political strategies of Europeanization.

I will start my discussion with an historical account of the rise of the World's Fairs in the mid-19th century and their relation to the evolving nation-states. I will then give an account of the history of the Eurovision Song Contest (and the Eurovision phenomenon in general). Against this background I will then discuss the extent to which it is possible to see the Eurovision Song Contest – and other mediated events – as continuing some of the processes laid out in the World's Fairs (and, naturally, also point out the main differences between the phenomena).

From London to Aichi: The World's Fairs and the nation-states

The fact that the first World's Fair took place in England is, naturally, no coincidence, since England was also the most industrially advanced nation in the world in the mid-19th century. The World's Fairs, then, became the prime manifestation of the evolving industrial society. Industrialism is, of course, hard to analytically distinguish from capitalism as a system. Walter Benjamin has, in his comments on the World's Fair of 1867 in Paris, described the event as a 'phantasmagoria of capitalist culture'; the exhibitions were in his words 'places of pilgrimages to the fetish Commodity [that] glorified the exchange-value of commodities' (Benjamin, cited in Friedberg, 1993: 81).³ The World's Fairs had their predecessors, as Benjamin (1955/1991: 103) acknowledges, in the industrial exhibition, the first of which was held in Paris 1798, just before the turn of the 19th century. These were obviously more concentrated around the display and demonstrations of technical advances within the then slowly emerging industries of the gradually modernizing nation-states. And this focus on the technological developments within the industries followed as a theme in the Great Exhibition at the Crystal Palace, as revealed in the catalogue:

Other nations have devised means for the display and encouragement of their own arts and manufactures; but it has been reserved for England to provide an arena for the exhibition of the industrial triumphs of the whole world. She has offered an hospitable invitation to surrounding nations to bring the choicest products of their industry to her capital, and there to enter into an amicable competition with each other and with herself. (quoted in Friedberg, 1993: 82)

The exhibitions, thus, first and foremost addressed the 'Industry of All Nations', as also stated in the catalogue (Friedberg, 1993: 82). And, as noted by, among others, Carolyn Marvin (1988), a phenomenon such as electric light could contribute to making the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893 a tremendous public success, if counted by number of visitors – 27.5 million fairgoers paid visits to the exposition to watch, among other spectacles, the Edison Tower of Light (1988: 171f). However, the World's Fairs were, at the same time as they were providing technological development, also hailing entertainment. In fact, the two features were quite hard to separate from one another. Beginning with the exhibition of 1855, where the technology of photography had a special section of its own, amusement technologies and inventions within the realm of media and entertainment became a standard feature: mechanical type-setting in London 1862, the telephone in Philadelphia 1876, the phonograph in Paris 1878, wireless in Buffalo 1901, television in Chicago in 1933, and so on (Roche, 2000: 160).

The fact that media and other electrical technologies were demonstrated side by side is by no means strange. At the end of the 19th century it was not entirely evident what specific use the various technological inventions would have. Photography as a technology, for example, had both scientific and other uses. This was even more evident when it comes to film as a medium: the photographic experiments to study movement carried out in the 1880s by Eadweard Muybridge are a case in point, and film was, for example, an important novelty on display at the Stockholm Fair in 1897. The inventions of radiology, as Solveig Jülich (2002) has eloquently shown, used x-ray images both for scientific endeavours and for amusement (and sometimes for other, more casual, everyday uses).⁴ In the same way as the medium of film was used as part of the entertainment programme at vaudeville shows, so too were x-ray images (Dahlén, 1995; Jülich, 2002: 157).

However, although the fairs were said to address the industry of all nations rather than individual nation-states, they were quite obviously intimately connected to the ideology of nation building. There are, naturally, several explanations for the rise of nation-states. Most of these explanations focus on the need to standardize education, language, etc. in relation to the rise of industrial capitalism. Ernst Gellner (1983) points to the need for the centrally controlled system of education that industrialization brought with it, while Benedict Anderson (1991) holds forth the effects of printing. These accounts exemplify two different explanations: on the one hand those who see the rise of nation-states as an effect of other developments (the printing press in Anderson's case), and on the other those who point to industrialization as the motor of the development of nations (Gellner). A variant on the second explanation is that capitalist economy needs to invent the nation to create the regulatory frameworks for its economic growth (Billig, 1995: 21ff).

Irrespective of which explanation one prefers, the rise of the nation-states also brought with it the rise of national identities, including ideologies of the essential character of the national people and the historical roots of the nation itself. These constructions became very prominent features in the World's Fairs towards the end of the 19th century, where it was common to exhibit national minorities, such as American Indians, Javanese indigenous dancers and Swedish Sami groups (Ekström, 1994: 48f).

From the very start it was evident that the symbolic nationalist value of the World's Fairs was very great. It was important for the contributing nations to make a good impression at the exhibitions, to prove the nation's advances in the spheres of technology, arts and architecture, as well as in entertainment. Failure in this respect led to feelings of inferiority and unworthiness, as is exemplified by the report from the 1851 exhibition in London by Swedish feminist author Fredrika Bremer. Sweden was represented at the exhibition together with Norway, with whom they shared a pavilion. In Bremer's account, visiting Swedes complained about the air of 'backwardness' connected to the Swedish–Norwegian pavilion, and she reported that Swedish visitors kept their distance in order to dissociate themselves from the poor exhibition (Ekström, 1998: 13). Evidently, Bremer did not consider Sweden and Norway up to par with the industrial level of the more 'advanced' and modernized nations.

From Lugano to Kiev: The Eurovision Song Contest and the expansion of Europe

A little bit over a century after the first exhibition in the Crystal Palace, the Eurovision Song Contest was launched in 1956 on the initiative of the European Broadcasting Union (EBU). EBU was founded by the national European Public Service companies in 1950, with the aim of co-operatively producing pan-European broadcasts. The first such pan-European media event to be broadcast was the coronation of Queen Elizabeth in Britain in 1953 (Dayan and Katz, 1992). A prominent feature in the Eurovision broadcasts since has been the covering of sports events (such as athletics, ice hockey and soccer). At the time when EBU started there were 23 broadcasting members. In 2004 EBU had 70 members in 52 states (and 29 additional associate members). In Sweden, for example, both public service enterprise Sveriges Television (SVT) and hybrid channel TV4 are members.⁵ Geographically the member states have spread, so that several countries outside of Europe are members, including broadcasters from the North African countries Algeria, Tunisia, Egypt and Morocco, but also Israel, Jordan and Lebanon, as well as Japan and Canada. This does not mean, however, that they have entered the Eurovision Song Contest. The only entirely non-European nation to take part in the contest is, and always has been, Israel.

When the Eurovision Song Contest started in Lugano, Switzerland, in 1956, there were only seven Western European countries that competed for the title of having produced and performed the best European song. The winning contribution came from Switzerland. The next year, another three countries joined the contest. Since then, the number of participating countries has continuously increased. In 1993, the International Radio and Television Organisation (OIRT), an equivalent organization of broadcasters from Central and Eastern Europe, was merged with the EBU. Consequently, in 1993 Yugoslavia was replaced by three of its former constituent states, and nine new countries previously under Soviet rule also had their debut. The entering of the Eastern European countries meant a shift in the meaning of the popular song traditions in these countries, at least in the ideological direction of the popular songs produced, primarily indicated by the shift in the lyrics from celebrating the socialist enterprise to the glorification of love and consumption (Graf, 2002).

Naturally, the competition has changed somewhat over the years. Since 2004, due to the expansion of the number of competing countries, the show now stretches out over two days (not counting all the national competitions where national audiences vote for who they want to represent their country). The first evening is the semi-final where up-coming contestants (i.e. those who were unsuccessful the previous year) compete for 10 of the 24 places in the final. Four countries – the UK, Germany, France and Spain (incidentally four large national television audiences) – are automatically qualified for the final. The previous year's winner, and accordingly the organizer of the event, is also automatically qualified for the final.

Over the years there has developed an ironic stance among certain audiences, which is revealed in some of the national commentators' comments and here exemplified by the BBC's legendary commentator Terry Wogan (quoted in Ericson [2002] where more similar examples can be found):

Hope you enjoyed it as much as I have. . . Congratulations to everybody involved here – a very polished show, a very entertaining show, in some ways, as always [laughter] . . . a very foolish show. But that's the charm. That's what the Eurovision Song Contest is all about. Not really a song contest, as such, a piece of . . . extraordinary entertainment. Just some fun. Grandiose fun. Nothing like it in the world. Hope you in Australia enjoyed it. And all over Europe. And all over the world!!!

Not all involved share the ironic stance that Wogan and others entertain. After the victory of Latvia, and the success of other Eastern European countries in Tallinn 2002, some were quite upset and argued that there should be separate competitions for Eastern and Western Europe. Among those with that opinion was Christer Björkman, one of the two Swedish commentators (also responsible for the Swedish national contests arranged by public service broadcaster SVT), and legendary Swedish record company

owner Bert Karlsson, who aired this opinion in television interviews as well as in the press. The argument against the winning Latvian contribution was paradoxically that it was *not commercial enough* and would have little chance in making it in Western Europe. It was, however, easy to see that the statements revealed a contempt for Eastern European culture, and an irritation over the fact that the audiences of Europe did not realize the presumed cultural backwardness of Eastern Europe generally.

Another thing that has changed is that the performing artists no longer need sing in their national language, which means that most contributions are sung in English, with occasional national linguistic flavours added in the choruses. In the last couple of years the studio orchestra has also disappeared, as most artists have pre-recorded music to perform to. The main formula of the show has, however, not changed: we get the performances of the songs, then a short interlude where some national artists perform, and then the voting procedure starts, where each contributing nation gives its votes. Nowadays most countries have adopted the system of tele-voting, whereas earlier (before the necessary technology was available), there was a jury in each country that decided on the national votes.

If the organizational form has changed slightly, there has been a more significant shift in the cultural–political sphere dominating the contest. Not only could there be said to have occurred a shift in the evaluation of Eastern Europe’s potential at winning, there could also be said to have evolved two attitudes towards the event. The Western, more ironic stance towards the competition, with its camp ideology, its connections to gay culture, etc. can be seen as opposed to the more sincere and strategic attitude of the participating nations from Eastern Europe. It is telling that the final in Kiev, taking place shortly after the political turmoil surrounding the national elections in Ukraine, ended with the entering of the stage by the new President of Ukraine, Viktor Yushchenko, taking the opportunity to present the winner Helena Papparizou from Greece with a ‘special prize’ from the host country: ‘a special pictorial to the song that unites the whole Europe’.

From the Crystal Palace to Saku Suurhall: Eurovision Song Contest as a modern World’s Fair

In what way, then, is it possible to regard the Eurovision Song Contest as a post-industrial equivalent to the World’s Fairs of high industrialism? I will suggest that there are at least two similarities that lead to such a conclusion: one having to do with performance in organization and in mode of production, and one connected to similarities in the content, or perhaps, in the ideology of the two events.

Performance: promoting the national industries

One of the main features of the World's Fairs was the struggle to exhibit the very best and most advanced in modern technology, for example the ability to produce electric light on a scale previously not shown in the Chicago exhibition of 1893 (Marvin, 1988). In a similar way, and parallel to the technical (and cultural) development, the prestige connected to the ability to produce mass entertainment events such as the Eurovision Song Contest has increased dramatically. These events, and sports events such as the Olympic Games and the World Cup as well, have become increasingly complicated both organizationally and technically, and the task of producing them has grown beyond the scope of most national public (and commercial) broadcasters. Most of the events are thus produced as co-operative efforts between several broadcasters. Thus it is said that when, after having won in Denmark, the Estonian public broadcaster ETV discussed the possibilities of arranging the event, Malta offered to arrange it instead. It was said that this was what convinced the chief of entertainment at ETV, Juhani Padaam, that ETV had to prove for the rest of the European broadcasters that they were able to produce the show. The alternative would have been to be considered the poor Eastern relative within the EBU family.

The minute descriptions of the technological details of the production in the press material indicate the importance of the technological advancement of the European Song Contest. For example, a technical detail to be impressed by, and one that most people in the audience probably never reflect upon, is the lighting:

The lighting design for the Eurovision Song Contest 2002 is an integral part of the show's visual expression. Graphical video imaging will be integrated into the lighting system and combined with conventional rock and roll lighting and moving show lighting. The greatest challenge of the design is to create light which provides each song with an individual identity and atmosphere, while at the same time contributing to the show's dramatic development. (*Technical handbook for the Eurovision Song Contest*, 2002: 12)

In the technical handbook that is handed out to accredited journalists at the event in Tallinn, we also learn that there were 27 persons involved in the lighting arrangements and that 3,000 metres of cable had been used. For the camera work there were 18 cameras, three satellites were mastered from Tallinn for the transmission and the tele-voting was organized through a special transmission centre in Tallinn (Forsman, 2002: 73ff). Many of these facts around the production were reproduced in the printed press during and around the event, both in the Estonian and the Swedish press, as in international press generally.

The organizers in Ukraine 2005 were equally keen on publicizing the work and preparations with lighting before the final in Kiev, and were

proud of having made the lighting even more sophisticated than earlier shows:

Light was used to increase the depth of the stage. The visual effects were based on 300 moving lights and 500 conventional light sources.

A team of 30 people spent more than 40 days programming and adjusting the lighting desk to give each participant their own unique stage and light design that harmonised with the mood of the music. (www.eurovision.tv/english/1786.htm, accessed 24 July 2005)

To perform better, and be technologically advanced and extraordinary in scale is then an important ingredient in the arrangements. At the level of the televisual text, this is also revealed in the now-common 'behind the scenes' clips, such as the two full minutes of a visual montage of the construction of the studio set, while the television viewers waited for the results of the tele-voting in Kiev 2005.⁶ The only reason for showing this is to make sure that the European audiences fully understand the technical and organizational complexity of the event, and to further emphasize the mega-event character of the production – that is, to show the ability to perform organizationally and technically as a major national broadcaster.

We can conclude that there are at least two levels to the Eurovision Song Contest. On the one hand there is the production of the contest as a television programme, and on the other, the production as a media event. Everything described above was, besides being part of the production of the programme script itself, also part of the production of the more general media event. The reverse, however, is not true: in the media event are also included articles and features in the (popular) press; other television programmes (such as national contests), television news reporting, advertising and commercials, record compilations, etc. Media events are thus not played out in any single medium, but within the links between many media forms and genres.

One important component in the overall production of the media event as it was staged in Estonia 2002 was the project Brand Estonia. Brand Estonia is the name given to the project initiated by the Estonian government that was to lay out the plans for promoting Estonia as a nation before the broadcasting of the show in Tallinn in May 2002. The British public relations firm Interbrand was hired to execute this. Interbrand had previously worked with 'national re-branding' for the campaign Cool Britannia, initiated by the Blair administration. This time they were hired to promote Estonia by fulfilling three objectives, as declared in the final report:

Brand Estonia

This project was undertaken in 2001–2002 to promote the Republic of Estonia abroad.

Its objectives were to enable Estonia to achieve greater success in attracting foreign-direct investment, to expand the tourist base and to broaden European markets for Estonian exports. This would be achieved through the deployment of targeted, strategic messages communicated using visual and verbal components – in effect, branding the country.

The following report describes the strategy for achieving the project's objectives, the messages to be communicated and the specifications for implementing a clear visual identity for Estonia to promote and deepen those messages. (Enterprise Estonia, 2002)

The research for the report included surveys in Estonia, Finland, Russia, Germany, Sweden and the UK. In addition to these surveys, interviews with investors, politicians, journalists and culture workers were conducted. The research efforts resulted in the Brand Estonia campaign, which included picture and text material, a slogan – 'positively transforming' – that would mark the whole campaign, a colour palette that would indicate Estonian-ness, and a logo that read 'Welcome to Estonia' in a 1970s-style typeface that is still widely used, including on the Estonian airlines' aeroplanes.

The potential of the Eurovision Song Contest to focus the eyes of the world on Estonia did not, however, simply fall from the sky after the success for Estonia in the Eurovision Song Contest 2001 in Denmark. Already more than a year previously, in November 2000, the Estonian Prime Minister Mart Laar signed the Estonian Human Development Report and submitted it to the United Nations Development Program. Among such chapters as 'The Estonian Labour Market', 'The Changing Family in Estonia and Europe', 'Democracy and the European Union', were, in a section on Society and Culture, the chapters 'Estonian Folk Culture Entering the EU Cultural Landscape' and 'Estonia on the Eurovision Landscape' (*Estonian Human Development Report*, 2000). The chapter on the Eurovision Song Contest contained, along with a history of the competition, a hierarchical cluster analysis of voting patterns in order to assess the taste patterns of the participating nations. In the analysis it was stated that Estonia had been 'relatively successful', and the reason for this was seen to depend on either 'generous scores from [...] geographical-cultural neighbours', or in the country's 'natural affiliation with Europe'. This leads the author of the report to pose the more fundamental question: 'Is it that Estonia is part and parcel of modern cultural Europe and possesses the skill to stand up and be noticed even before economic and political integration?' (2000: 68). The conclusion of the analysis is worth quoting at length:

Thus the best tactical choice for success in the Eurovision song contest is not a simple orientation to the authentic West, but rather making oneself favourable to other regions. This means we are to offer western style songs to those who can not vote for the West due to historical or cultural considerations.

This has worked well for Estonia to date, however the last song contest indicated that similar actors are emerging elsewhere (Latvia, Russia). This will open unexpected vistas for the newcomers of the 90's which may result in surprising victories. This is likely to accentuate, not mitigate, Europe's polarisation on this relatively neutral field, the Eurovision song contest. (*Estonian Human Development Report*, 2000: 69)

The 'surprises' provoked by the last few years' winners have, if not in Estonia, been highly visible everywhere else among the 'old' Eurovision countries. This is revealed in journalistic writing within the music business and among the commentators (see Ericson's [2002] analysis of the commentaries from five countries). As predicted in the report, Latvia won in Tallinn 2002, and Russian female duo Tatu – performing their song 'Ne ver, ne bojsia' in Russian, but also heavily associated with western record producers for their previous songs and videos – ended up as number two, beaten by Turkey's vocalist Sertab in Riga 2003.

The World's Fairs have always been organized and arranged in order to impress the world at large through claims of being bigger, greater, more advanced, more costly, etc. It seems as if the quality of a nation stands and falls with its ability to produce mega-events of certain kinds, be it in the form of the Olympic Games, world exhibitions, or cultural extravaganzas such as Eurovision. At the New York exhibition of 1939, which was organized around the theme 'The World of Tomorrow' – and in hindsight extremely confident in the ability to secure world peace through international exhibitions (although we can note that Germany did not partake in the event) – it was claimed that:

The New York World's Fair is far larger than any international exposition in history. In terms of physical area and total investment it is approximately three times greater than the Chicago Century of Progress Exposition of 1933; the Amusement area of the New York World's Fair is alone larger than the entire Paris Exposition of 1937. (*Official Guide Book of the New York World's Fair 1939*, 1939: 7)

In the guide books published in connection with the World's Fairs, there is an obvious stress on the constructedness of, and the endeavour to architectonically construct, the event. For the New York fair of 1939 there was an entire chapter devoted to 'building the fair' (*Official Guide Book of the New York World's Fair 1939*, 1939: 24ff). As indicated above, there have been, especially during the last couple of years, similar efforts to display the complex nature of the production of the Eurovision Song Contests, with large amounts of information about the technical equipment (e.g. lighting and computer capacity), and with explicit footage from the construction of stages, lighting, rehearsals, etc. This has led to the problem that few national broadcasters can take on such a huge production, and thus with the Tallinn

contest had to be co-organized. At the textual level, this leads to a structural similarity in the productions, since many of the technical and creative workers (producers, directors, etc.) are the same year after year. The camera work tends to become standardized, as do the constructions of stages, the use of the audience as props in the production, and so on.

Ideology: promoting the national cultures and identities

Another important feature that made its mark on the World's Fairs has been the efforts to exhibit the most refined cultural artefacts within the realms of architecture, arts and folk culture, both historical and contemporary. Thus, every country has engaged cutting-edge architects, designers or composers. At the exhibition in New York in 1939, for example, composer Jean Sibelius contributed to the 'score' of the Finnish exhibit.⁷

As the expositions have come closer to the present day, the composers considered to be cutting edge have shifted. For the Expo 2000 in Hannover, Germany, avant-garde 'techno-pop' musicians from Kraftwerk were engaged to compose the main anthem for the exposition, where they, in typically repetitive Kraftwerk style, hailed 'Mensch, Natur, Technics / Man, Nature, Technology', in their modernistic lyrics.

As indicated, Kraftwerk belongs on the one hand to the musical avant-garde, but they are, on the other hand, also firmly rooted in popular (music) culture. This is of course also the musical realm of Eurovision (although it could be argued that there is a spectrum of values surrounding popular music, ranging from trash to popular avant-garde, as there is around consecrated, legitimate fine arts music). Popular music has often been accused of ideologically supporting the capitalist economic system, either promoting consumerist ideologies or contributing to false consciousness, or, as Theodor Adorno and the Frankfurt School would have it, that the one is leading to the other. Popular music, then, helped shape conformist behaviour through pseudo-individualization and standardization, due to the fact that the production of popular music is subsumed by the profit-driven capitalist production mode (Adorno, 1941/1990). However, the ideological use of popular music has not been restricted to the western democracies and their capitalist consumer markets. The commercial *schlager* songs had their socialist counterpart in what Heike Graf (2002) has called 'the communist schlager'. In former East Germany, for example, popular music was actively used for educational purposes in the task of developing 'die Sozialistische Persönlichkeit' (Graf, 2002: 27).

Whatever the political system, popular music has always served national and ideological interests – although not always in the same way. However, the fact that popular music in its musical structure does not seem to be ideological does not prevent it from being ideologically anchored *textually* (as was the case in the GDR, where western *schlager* music easily became

transformed into a strategic device to foster the socialist personality). A common critique of the songs presented in the Eurovision Song Contest has long been that they are constructed according to the same formula (a critique that has much in common with Adorno's). This has been the case since it became possible for all competing nations to sing in whichever language they chose (which has meant that most sing in English). The promotion of national identities has thus become transferred to other levels: in the commentaries and in the visual effects.

As Staffan Ericson (2002) has shown, the commentaries function as a national anchorage for the musical and visual text. Commentators of all nations usually support their own nation's contribution and ridicule other nations. BBC commentator Terry Wogan is perhaps the most infamous in this respect. This is the anchorage at the individual national level. However, for each hosting country there is an opportunity to do more by constructing master narratives as frameworks for the performances. In Estonia in 2002 this was made in the form of 'postcards' with variants of famous fairy tales (mostly represented in the Grimm brothers' collections), which all had as the conclusion a (positive) fact about Estonia (Bengtsson, 2002). The stories end with slogans such as 'countless internet connections!', 'forests – Estonian treasure', 'no parking places – theatres everywhere' and 'endless Estonian hospitality'. These slogans had all been worked out within the project of Brand Estonia.

Especially interesting, and revealing in terms of national identity, is the commentary from those European countries that broadcast the show but did not reach the final, and thus could do nothing but comment on other countries. In the Eurovision 2002 in Tallinn, Norway was not qualified to take part in the final. Hence, the Norwegian commentator focused on other national, Norwegian qualities of the show: one of the producers who was of Norwegian ancestry and the graphics made by a person from Bergen (Ericson, 2002: 60).

At the World's Fairs there were separate pavilions for each nation; in the same way the Eurovision Song Contest is a competition between countries (although it tends to be more and more common for artists to represent nations other than their own – which has, for example, meant that the Swedish singer Sahléne performed the Estonian contribution 'Runaway' in Tallinn, where the girls in the choir were also 'imported' from Sweden). And although most countries perform their songs in English, there is almost always some national marker in the lyrics, such as the title of the Greek contribution in 2002, where the chorus sang '*sagapo*' (which translates as 'I love you'), although the rest of the lyrics were in English.

The theme of cultural identity is also highlighted in the voting procedure, where national representatives deliver the votes from each participating nation. As was shown in the Estonian development report, there are three dominant voting patterns where countries often exchange votes: one Nordic

voting pattern, one Mediterranean, and one Western European (Yair, 1995). Thus, there is statistical support for the suspicion among several commentators that countries vote for their geographical/cultural neighbours. How the expansion of the contest eastwards will affect cultural affinities and thereby voting patterns will be an interesting question for the future. It is unlikely that the contest and the types of songs performed will be unaffected.

From techno-industrial to culture-industrial modernization

In the above I have tried to point to similarities between the World's Fairs and the Eurovision Song Contest, similarities that suggest that the song contest is the post-industrial equivalent to the World's Fairs of high industrialism. I have done so by pointing to two main similarities: one related to performance and organizational skills, and one relating to the ideology of the nation, national culture and identity.

There are, almost needless to say, also striking differences. The World's Fairs were reported on in the media (foremost the press for the early fairs) while the expositions were in progress, or after they had closed (e.g. Fredrika Bremer's report from the Crystal Palace, as referred to above). The Eurovision Song Contest is constructed as an event most intensively before the actual contest and the live television broadcast. The contest is in fact the end-point to the event, rather than the event itself. It is, for example, indicative that the farewell party that was ending the project Brand Estonia, which was responsible for the majority of the promotion around the contest in Tallinn 2002, took place on the evening before the final in Saku Suurhall.

The nature of the two types of events is also strikingly dissimilar. The World's Fairs were and still are firmly rooted in a physical and geographical place, and those taking part in the event have to literally go there as visitors. This is opposite to the Eurovision Song Contest, which takes place in people's homes, on television screens in front of the viewers. Naturally, there are people present in the auditoriums where the artists are performing, but it can be argued that this is not the audience for whom the event is constructed, but rather the props used for creating the 'live' quality of the event. This makes the Eurovision Song Contest simultaneously de-centred and centred. It is de-centred as it is taking place in millions of places at the same time, but through this it also creates a symbolic centre, which is the represented place of the event (Tallinn, Kiev, Athens). This 'place' should not be confused with the physical, geographical space of Tallinn, Kiev or Athens, as this symbolic place is constructed for and by the audience, and its meanings are mediated through its perception by the audience. This is indicative of the shift from place-bound techno-industrial production of material objects, to the multi-placed character of late modern production of symbolic goods, commodities and spaces (Bolin, 2005).

The World's Fairs first and foremost addressed the industrial nations and hailed modern values like progress, development and achievements of humankind over nature. They were thus emphasizing technology over culture. The reverse could be said to be the case when it comes to the Eurovision Song Contest, where technology and technological performance is the backdrop or the means to completion of the cultural performances and the display of national identities. We could also say that there are in fact two kinds of industries that are promoted by the two events: the first concerns technological industry, the other the culture industry. Or, in other words, the focus of industrial production has shifted from the production of material objects and commodities to the production of immaterial or symbolic commodities and sign value. One could see it as a shift in the modernizing process, represented by this move from techno-industrial to techno-cultural modernization.

To summarize, it has been the argument of this article that the Eurovision Song Contests, as media events, along with other media events such as the Olympic Games, the World Cup, and other large-scale media productions reaching trans-national audiences, are the post-industrial equivalents to the World's Fairs of high industrialism. The World's Fairs were promoting the then new nation-states in the same way as new nation-states today use the Eurovision Song Contest as a vehicle in constructing themselves. This is especially evident if one looks at the newly founded sovereign states recently freed from Soviet rule. And it is quite clear that these popular culture events have the power and ability to reshape the geopolitical map of Europe and are also, as I have tried to show, used in this way by the new member states of the European Union. The ability presented by these countries is not the ability to echo the formulas of Western popular music, or at least this is not enough. New nations also need to prove to the rest of the world their ability to produce large-scale events. The production of the Eurovision Song Contest, the Olympic Games and other similar events is the final test that the nation has the capability to join in the symbolic commodity production of late, post-industrial modernity. The stakes for the new countries are high, and the results are presented in the news media immediately after each production. In the same way the identities displayed by the former Soviet republics in the shows are also a mixture of Western popular cultural signs, with traditional markers of Eastern culture shown in the music as well as stylistically in clothing. This is a fine line to tread, and the risk of being ridiculed is high (and there are plenty of examples where artists become the laughing stock of the commentators). If successful, however, it becomes really successful, a thing proven by above-mentioned Russian duo Tatu, who combined Western influences with singing in Russian – a thing that artists from other non-English speaking nations did not dare attempt. (They were also obviously helped in their success by a successful PR strategy against journalists, who loved to hate their flirtation with lesbianism.)

In the same way as the World's Fairs promoted the modern nation-states by displaying technical mastery and inventiveness, so too does the Eurovision Song Contest display a nation's mastery and refinement of its culture industry. That the exhibiting of industrial-technical advancement would eventually leave room for production of symbolic goods and commodities seems like a natural development of (late) modernity, and it has obviously spread to other areas than commodity production, in this case, the production of nation-states. In this transformation, from industrial production of material goods, to the industrial production of symbolic commodities and symbolic values, the Eurovision Song Contest is one example of how this works within the popular cultural industry.

Notes

- 1 Figures from *Dagens Nyheter* 9 August 2002. The exposition in Aichi, Japan (25 March to 25 September 2005) attracted 22 million visitors (www.japan-guide.com/expo, accessed 29 October 2005).
- 2 Figures from press release by Estonian market research agency Emor, 29 May 2002.
- 3 Friedberg has taken this quote from Benjamin's essay 'Paris – Capital of the Nineteenth Century' from the *Reflections* (1979). I have relied on the Swedish edition in the collection *Bild och dialektik* (Benjamin, 1955/1991). Another version can be found in the Swedish translation of the *Passagenwerk*, based on Rolf Tiedermann's edition (Benjamin, 1982/1990).
- 4 Of the more amusing everyday uses could be mentioned the use of 'pedoscopes' in shoe stores, where the x-ray technology was used to try out the fitness of shoes (Jülich, 2002: 174).
- 5 A hybrid channel is commercially financed, but has obligations similar to public service companies through concessions agreements with the state authorities. They thus stand in an in-between position between public service and commercial broadcasting (Syvertsen, 1996).
- 6 The example is from the semi-final 19 May 2005.
- 7 See the *Official Guide Book of the New York World's Fair 1939*: 134.

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