



U(n)we/aving Lena: Popular Inter-Culture

Brian Singleton, 02 July 2010

The success of the German entry to the 2010 Eurovision Song Contest in Oslo was matched by stunning sales and chart positions in many countries throughout Europe. Having more Google hits than any of the contestants before the contest itself was a sure sign that the appeal of a German contest song was to a much broader European youth culture than a national boundary could contain. The song was produced by Stefan Raab, himself a former contest entrant as a writer, and now the producer of the German national contest. In a wrap-up event two days after Lena triumphed in Oslo, she guested on Raab's night-time talk show which was frequently interrupted by the host (Raab) and guest (Lena) breaking into a football chant of 'Deutsch-e-land' to celebrate only the second win for Germany in the 55 year history of the contest, a Cold War-era televisual phenomenon purporting to be apolitical and aiming for the promotion of a collective European identity. Also, in a succession of post-contest interviews it was strongly suggested by Raab that Lena should defend (*verteidigen*) her title, and thereby undeniably linking a song contest to a sporting contest, and in particular to the imminent World Cup soccer tournament in South Africa. In terms of the impact of popular culture, the World cup soccer tournament and the Eurovision Song Contest are the two biggest televisions shows in the world, both televisual spectacle for competitive and competing nationalisms.

The winning 'German' song *Satellite* is an interweaving of several musical sources. The composers themselves are American and the song is sung by a young 19 year old German from Hanover but sung with a pretend Cockney (east-end London) accent. Positioning herself tonally as English and sounding similar to successful singer-songwriter Lily Allen, was Lena's triumph less German? The soccer chanting after the win as well as the flag-waving, though, could be read as an attempt to re-nationalise a song that sounded more English than English itself.

And then came Uwu Lena's *Schland O Schland*, a viral video upload to Youtube by a band of male students from Münster, who used the sound track of the original song *Satellite* but rewrote the lyrics. Replacing the recurrent chorus line of "Love, O Love" of the original with "Schland O Schland", their lyrics brought the song back to a German-language base. Love for another in Lena's song became rewritten as love for one's country in Uwu Lena's rendition. But it wasn't the full country but the colloquial

abbreviation removing the German part of the word (Deut/sch) from country (Land). The song continued: "wir sind von dir begeistert"/"we're crazy for you", a profession of love for a country not fully formed in the mouth, unlike the complete articulation of the country's name by Raab and Lena (Deutsch-e-land). In the video the male singers were dressed in football shirts and flags, while one was dressed up in Lena's trademark little black dress and sported a long black Lena-like wig. One of the most gloriously ironic twists of the video comes in the middle when the lead singer inserts a verse in English, noting how Lena showed the way for German success and how the national football team would replicate that success, "We're going to show you either way", he sings, speaking the last word in a cockney accent, as a tribute to the original. At the end, the not fully formed name for the country is finally articulated as if it took Lena and her success, and the length of her song for the singers to sing proudly the full name of their country.

Rarely have Eurovision Song Contest winners reflected their national musical traditions, and Germany's song this year was no exception. The reverse queering of the song by Uwu Lena (including the male singer dressing as Lena) is a struggle for the assertion of a national identity from within. Played and replayed during the spectacle of international togetherness through competitive nationalisms that is the discourse of World Cup soccer, Uwu Lena's rendition of an already winning international song, as voted by 39 nations of Europe, reconfigures it as conspicuously German. Weaving national ambition into a song deliberately chosen for its ability to appeal beyond the national are just two complementary performative strategies within popular culture to respond to and succeed in international competition in which the idea of the 'national' is re-invoked to structure the competition, despite the fact that the vast majority of the world's major soccer players live and play in transnational contexts. And so, too, is Lena, winning for Germany with a song that has nothing conspicuously German about it, save for the passport, like that of a transnational soccer star, of the competitor.