Makeover Nation

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MOVING BEYOND the psy-function and young people, this chapter argues that US secular commodity transcendence is undergoing renewal through a major change in the political economy of masculinity, allied to the deregulation of television. Together, these forces have created the conditions for a new address of men as commodity goods, sexual objects, sexual subjects, workers, and viewers, thanks to neoliberal policies that facilitate media businesses targeting specific cultures. Viewers are urged to govern themselves through orderly preparation, style, and pleasure—the transformation of potential drudgery into a special event, and the incorporation of difference into a makeover treat rather than a social threat.

Of course, men have been prone to primp for a very long time. Recent archaeology has unearthed sophisticated male grooming twenty-five hun-
dred years ago. German Romanticism of the 1800s conceived of men as sensuous, emotional creatures, as per Friedrich Schlegel’s “tender manhood.” The Enlightenment era of rationality had its double in Empfindsamkeit, or spiritual sensitivity amongst intellectuals of both sexes. It called for the expression of feelings and for attention to the passional. Men were encouraged to record their emotions in diaries and discuss the results with others. The sybarite/bon vivant is a familiar figure in fashion history, and the New York Public Library’s famous “Rakish History of Men’s Wear” show detailed the way that clothing made the man across time and space (“Metrosexual Man” 2006; Trepp 1994: 13n25; Jauffred 2006; Irizarry 2007). Baudelaire (1972) dates dandyism as far back as Alicibiades, with further links to Lucius Sergius Catilina and Julius Caesar, and locates it as far afield as the wilds of the New World. The early-19th-century dandy was preoccupied with style and pleasure juxtaposed against depth and responsibility. A figure for whom creativity was all and work anathema, he favored art over nature (Elsaesser 1999: 4–5). The severe Calvinist prelate Thomas Carlyle called the dandy “a Clothes-wearing Man, a Man whose trade, office and existence consists in the wearing of Clothes,” sacrificing “the Immortal to the Perishable” in the name of “Self-worship.” In Sartor Resartus, Carlyle typified the 1830s “DANDIACAL HOUSEHOLD” as:

A Dressing-room splendidly furnished; violet-colored curtains, chairs and ottomans of the same hue. Two full-length Mirrors are placed, one on each side of a table, which supports the luxuries of the Toilet. Several Bottles of Perfumes, arranged in a peculiar fashion, stand upon a smaller table of mother-of-pearl; opposite to these are placed the appurtenances of Lavation richly wrought in frosted silver. A Wardrobe of Buhl is on the left; the doors of which, being partly open, discover a profusion of Clothes; Shoes of a singularly small size monopolize the lower shelves. (1999; also see 1837)

Baudelaire classified dandies as men with “no profession other than elegance” who lived under “a rigorous code of laws” despite standing outside formal legal institutions. However “ardent and independent their individual characters” may have been, their search for “a personal form of originality” took place “within the external limits of social conventions.” The dandies’ “cult of the ego” took pleasure in the surprise others showed when they appeared. Nevertheless, Baudelaire saw them disappearing with the rise of democracy, because patrician attitudes and aristocratic wealth would be rhetorically and materially compromised (1972). His prediction was instantiated in subsequent histories that refer to the “Great Mascu-
line Renunciation,” which supposedly saw men shy away from consumption as women’s business. But traces of Bohemian culture are found in the consumption booms of the 1890s, 1920s, and 1960s. The fashion industry broadened its means of production and communication to encompass men with the proliferation of the department store and retail catalogs at the end of the 19th century. Then the interwar period’s revised marketing systems ushered in a new acceptability of men as clothes horses via the notion of their rationality in purchasing, as opposed to the emotion-driven wastefulness of women consumers, and via the association of goods and services with soldiers and sportsmen. This trend countered the link of effeminacy to homosexuality, which had intensified following Oscar Wilde’s 1895 trial for gross indecency (Sedden 2002: 48; Shannon 2004; Honeyman and Godley 2003: 105).

Even so, despite François de Chateaubriand finding rural dandies in North America, the United States has a male tradition that has frequently defined itself in a hypermasculinist and specifically Francophobic way. Early Puritanism stood alongside the frontier as a defining characteristic of the New World, via the careful calibration of conduct through devotion to a higher being who transcended base human desires—a blend of rugged individuality and collective piety. As per the personality/character dialectic noted in the Introduction, men who wrestled with their hungers and drives could attain a life-world of the spiritual through proper behavior, which would compensate for secular privations. They might even feel liberated by establishing and maintaining an alternative universe to the secular. Puritanism’s ethical technology took on a deeply pre- and prescriptive form that ramified and intensified secular law with a duty to obey God’s (heavily interpreted) word. It also became a monetary technology, an index and guide to thrift and self-actualization via utilitarian calculation. Late-18th-century Yankee theater parodied British men, unfavorably contrasting their supposedly effete, foppish display with putatively courageous, rugged nativism. The Old World was associated with a feminizing influence that had to be resisted/infiltrated in order to restore and institutionalize hypermasculinism. Misogyny, xenophobia, machismo, and cultural nation building were bound together. At a time when 80% of men worked in agriculture, John Adams wrote to Thomas Jefferson in 1819 that he feared that economic growth would generate “effeminacy, intoxication, extravagance, vice and folly,” while Washington Irving favored keeping young men as ignorant of the world beyond as possible, lest they “grow luxurious and effeminate in Europe.” There was great anxiety about avoiding not just luxury, but the look of luxury; one had to appear frugal
This decidedly material mode of salvation stressed the male propensity—nay, imperative—to work, save, and invest rather than consume, in accord with the uptake of John Locke’s ideas on private property and the role of the state. It supported the formation of capital and the disciplining of the workforce, even as it rhapsodized about self-sufficiency. In the hands of heralds and apologists for 19th-century capitalism, Puritanism endorsed labor and savings as keys to building an earthly heaven, ordering individuals through the material rule of law and the interpersonal rule of belief. In 1832, Senator Henry Clay coined what became a famous neologism: “self-made men.” These heroic figures attained trust in the business world by contrasting their lack of personal style with demonstrative European aristocrats. Woe betide would-be leaders who did not adopt this look. Despite being described on today’s White House Web site as “trim and erect,” Martin Van Buren was criticized in his 1836 and 1840 presidential campaigns for wearing ruffled shirts and failing to embody frontier masculinity. Davy Crockett accused him of being “laced up in corsets,” which perhaps explains the Bush Minor White House’s admiration for his tumescence. This was also the period when Great-Awakening preachers mocked men without facial hair or who wore glasses, while the Civil War became a moment for the reassertion of the North as a place of manly industry contrasted with the South’s mannered racism. The term “sissy” entered Yankee English at this time to describe men who cowered in the face of peril (Clay and Crockett quoted in Kimmel 1997: 26, 38; http://www.whitehouse.gov/history/presidents/mb8.html; Kimmel 1997: 60, 73; Stearns 2006: 98).

But between 1870 and 1910, a middle class formed comprising folk who were not agricultural, proletarian, or capitalist. In the two decades to 1890, the number of professionals in the US labor force went from below 350,000 to almost 880,000, and subordinate white-collar workers grew from 80,000 to 470,000. Urbanization and Eastern European and Asian immigration accelerated, rural whiteness receded, more and more women entered the labor force, and queer culture emerged. Intellectuals with managerial and scientific knowledge appeared on the scene. Science favored truths that could be tested, rather than magically revealed. The corollary to the intense rationalism of science was an aesthetic notion of human quintessences that would emerge in art: desires were not to be denied or displaced. Puritanism was held responsible for the personal and social alienation experienced by intellectuals. Writers began to wonder about other forms of self-expression.
than those mandated in the narrow corridors of the Puritan mind. H. L. Mencken famously defined Puritanism as “the haunting fear that someone, somewhere, may be happy” (1956: 233). Freudian discourse made desire an inevitable and valuable corrective to the anal retentiveness of prevailing ideology. Aesthetic discourse privileged expressive totality and sensuous response over tightly buttoned shirts. Temperance and censorship were seen to favor certain categories of person over others. The duel between these tendencies has continued, along with the xenophobic nativism that attaches to men who have a sense of style.

Meanwhile, the emergent psy-function began to worry about the impact of modernization on men by the mid-1850s. The 19th century also saw the proliferation of advice manuals to boys on preparation for business success. By the end of the First World War, when so many Yanquis faltered under fire through shell shock, mental illness had begun its process of normalization (Schiller 1996: 17; Susman 1984: 41–48; Kimmel 1997: 82, 85, 87, 98, 132–33; Heller 2006: 3). And the centrality of hypermaleness to the economy had been fatally compromised via a shift away from the foundational mythology of masculinity in agrarian life and then factory life. Even as the economy was undergoing dramatic agricultural and manufacturing growth in the 19th and 20th centuries, the services area, too, expanded. Services were not theorized as such at the time, but we can discern their significance for some time prior to the Depression. The countinghouse was transformed into the modern office, as new technologies, educational investments, and systems of labor emerged, helping the United States to overtake Britain as the key center of world productivity via a shift from customized, low-volume production to standardized, high-volume manufacture. These transformations began in communications and transport, before widening to finance and culture (Broadberry and Ghosal 2002). As George Orwell put it, with reference to belated but similar changes in Britain, the corollary was “a general softening of manners” as industrial technology relied less and less on the “old-style ‘proletarian’—collarless, unshaven and with muscles warped by heavy labour”—and helped to produce a “common culture” of “tastes, habits, manners and outlook” that veered toward the middle class (1982). This sector of the economy was feminized, at both an occupational and a stylistic level, with appearance often an important part of work (Sarah Berry 2000: xiii). The devastation wrought by the Great Depression expressed itself as violent irruptions on domestic landscapes. Herbert I. Schiller recalls his family’s “frequent quarrels, most of which had an economic origin.” His “father’s continuing joblessness was viewed by my mother as weakness and inadequacy” (2000: 17).
12). The return of soldiers from the subsequent World War appeared to reinstate male power along with male employment. Then the rise of feminism and civil rights increased pressure on violently achieved and preserved male antiquities. Through all these changes, a severe Puritanism often revived its cranky self, with culturally libertarian conduct obsessively chronicled and decried. But the political economy has largely militated against this worldview.

All this amounted to what Barbara Ehrenreich views as a “masculinity crisis that gripped middle-class men in the late fifties,” with traditional jobs changing and advertisers focusing more and more on female consumers as key decision makers. By 1960, about 40% of jobs outside farming were in manufacturing. That figure was 14% in 2002, when the service industries accounted for 80% of employment beyond agriculture. By the mid-1980s, 36% of corporate purchases were of high-technology products. Factory machinery had been dropping steadily as a factor since the war. The United States today has 86 million private-sector jobs in services. Well over half of US employment growth between 1988 and 2000 was in the service sector. The corollary of such changes is increased credentialism and internationalism—since the only things people want to buy from the United States are military-related manufactures and cultural, legal, financial, medical, and psy-function texts, technologies, and techniques. The outcome, alongside the deregulatory outcomes explained in the Introduction, has been atrocious for the material underpinnings to working-class masculinity: between 1973 and 2005 the economy grew by 150%, and productivity by 80%, while the hourly wage of the male worker, adjusted for price shifts, went from $15.76 to $15.62. Over the same period, the proportion of women's income to heterosexual household incomes has increased dramatically. In 1970, men brought in all the earnings in 50% of Yanqui homes; by 2000 it was 20%. Men have become less central to the material survival and comfort of those they live with, and women have developed the independence necessary to love them or leave them. Divorce rates correlate with female earnings to reflect that shift in autonomy (Ehrenreich 1990: 33; Hacker 2006: 80, 88, 105; Office of the US Trade Representative 2001: 1, 10, 15; Schiller 2000: 101; Schiller 2007: 12; Goodman and Steadman 2002; Bernstein 2006: 73).

As if to blend these contradictory lineages, the new masculinists of the 1970s and beyond appeared to go forward and build culture anew via an appeal to supposedly ancient verities. The “development and integration of body, mind, and emotions” would result from consulting such pop-psy-function literature as Accessing the King in the Male Psyche and The Warrior
Athlete. Newsweek announced “the first postmodern social movement” in 1991: poet and tree-hugger Robert Bly’s followers looking within for the lost monarch. This tendency was rooted in Carl Jung’s uptake of Greek and Roman mythology as a universal, transhistorical truth about masculine and feminine bases to personality, a “collective unconscious” that animates everyone. Other accounts derived from middle-class reactions against feminist challenges to male authority and privilege. Sometimes these reactions have been misogynistic and antifeminist; at other moments, they have expressed envy at women’s “feelings” discourse, their unity, and their claims to expressive totality. One wing became “Father’s Rights,” the other “Men Against Sexism.” Both sides stressed the difficulties of being a man, the pain of leadership, the confusion of roles “under” feminism, the vacuum of authority and direction, and the need to “share.” Carol Gilligan notes that where the “feminist movement has held men responsible for their violence and privilege,” the “mythopoetic men’s movement has embraced men as wounded” (Moore and Gillette 1992: 25–27; Millman 1979: viii; Ross 1980: 118; Newsweek quoted in Boscagli 1992–93: 71; Gilligan 1997).

There were much more interesting contributions from 1960s and 1970s television and glam rock. The Man from U.N.C.L.E. added a touch of the feminized male to the banality of dyadic male action-adventure TV drama, for example. Whereas its predecessors certainly targeted male viewers keen on action and women keen on bodily display, this series cast men of ordinary physique and soft features as its heroes after the show’s producer met a woman who pointed out that “there were other types of people in the world” than vast hunks (Miller 2003). And in music, androgynous/queer personae of that decade and the next three—Mick Jagger, Jimi Hendrix, David Bowie, Marc Bolan, Elton John, Brian Eno, Peter Gabriel, Lou Reed, Mick Ronson, Todd Rundgren, Alice Cooper, Slade, Sweet, Freddy Mercury, Boy George, Michael Jackson, Robert Smith, Morrissey, Prince, Ricky Martin, and others—led to an androgyny that welcomed queerness, a “cavalier feminizing” that envied girls’ monopoly on “pretty, floaty nonaggressive free spirit[s]” (Doonan 2007). While the blaxploitation film genre of the period may have emphasized violence, it also stressed conspicuous consumption via the superfly figure, who placed great value on stylish, effervescent personal appearance.

As part of a gathering critique across the human sciences and social movements over the last thirty years, we have also seen a burst of scholarly writing and thinking about men from feminist and queer theory (Kimmel 1992; Connell 1992: 735). The critical arm of this research draws much of its inspiration from the idea that we live in an era of “hegemonic mascu-
linity” (HM). The concept’s lineage is in Antonio Gramsci’s theorization of hegemony, as picked up and redisposed by RW/Bob/Raewyn Connell. For Gramsci, an Italian Marxist writing from jail in the mid-1930s, hegemony is a contest of meanings in which a ruling class gains consent to the social order by making its power appear normal and natural. Ordinary people give “spontaneous consent” to the “general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group” as a consequence of education and entertainment. Society contains old cultural meanings and practices, no longer dominant but still influential, and emergent ones, either propagated by an upcoming class or incorporated by the ruling elite. These discourses are carried by intellectuals, who work at “superstructural ‘levels’” to forge the “hegemony which the dominant group exercises throughout society” (Gramsci 1971: 12).

Connell, an Australian Marxist writing from Australian and US research universities in the ’80s, ’90s, and today, applies this notion of consent-through-incorporation to gender relations, especially masculinity. Combining theories of imperialism with feminism, he/she articulates the history of North Atlantic commercial republics expanding into the rest of the world with contemporary anthropological study. The result makes Western European and North American white male sexuality isomorphic with power: men seek global dominion and desire, orchestrated to oppress women. HM encompasses obvious sexism—rape, domestic violence, and obstacles to female occupational advancement—and more subtle domination, such as excluding women from social environments and sports teams, and lopsided media interest in men. Connell calls for critical investigations of masculinity across the state, work, the family, sex, and organizational life (1987, 1995, 1998, 2001).

Of course, HM (straight, strong, domineering) oppresses the many men excluded from it, while even “subscribers” often find its norms unattainable. HM’s articulation against women and queers makes it unpopular with vast numbers of people. While men who feel socially weak (the working class, minorities, and many immigrants) may find the hegemonic model appealing, the real sources of their powerlessness lie in the monetary and racial economy, not struggles against women and gays (Messner 1997: 7–8, 12; Rowe 1997: 124). Connell acknowledges that male identity is complex and polyvalent, with no singular set of qualities consistently marked as masculine; masculinity and men’s bodies (symbolically conceived as unitary) are contested sites, fraught with contradictions (1998). But the work sometimes reads like neat, ideal types overlying messy evidence. Counterexamples to a narrative of Western domination abound in the Third World,
and significant aspects of everyday male conduct are about the desire to share and build, not control and shutter. Francesca M. Cancian argues that what counts as loving conduct has been erroneously feminized in the United States by identifying it with expressing feelings rather than, for example, helping or fucking. She favors equal value being placed on all sides to love (1986: 692). For his part, Wil Coleman (1990) calls for a focus on masculinity in use—not as a term freighted-in from ideal types, as per Connell, but when maleness appears as such in the vocabulary of everyday life.

Those contradictions became manifest and manifold beyond the expectations of HM in the most recent Yanqui makeover. In the 1990s, traditional ways of dividing First World consumers—by age, race, gender, and class—were supplemented by cultural categories, with market researchers proclaiming a decade of the “new man.” Life-style and psychographic research sliced and diced consumers into “moralists,” “trendies,” “the indifferent,” “working-class puritans,” “sociable spenders,” and “pleasure seekers.” Men were further subdivided into “pontificators,” “self-admirers,” “self-exploiters,” “token triers,” “chameleons,” “avant-gardicians,” “sleep-walkers,” and “passive endurers” (Fox 1989). Something was changing in the landscape of Yanqui masculinity, as part of a general turn in employment from manufacturing to culture.

Consider Clinton. The Economist looks back on him as “the first androgynous president,” and he was identified early as a “classic metrosexual” (with ADHD, as we saw earlier) (Lexington 2004; “Real Men” 2003). When lapsed-leftist Christopher Hitchens mocked Clinton with Paula Jones’s implication that “it would have taken two of his phalluses to make one normal one” (1999: 50), he referenced quite precisely the discourse long-used to find fault with women’s bodies. OK, Bill’s is “five inches long when erect, as big around as a quarter, and bent” (Paley 1999: 222). That I could so boast. This information is clearly an objectification of his body. It indicates that the commodity fetish has moved on to men. A similar process problematizing masculinity took place during the 1992 elections, when Bush the Elder accused Clinton of being influenced by “the tassel-loafered lawyer crowd.” Reform Party candidate Ross Perot forbade his staff from wearing the offending shoe, and the Elder’s press secretary, Toni Clarke, compared Clinton to Woody Allen (Kimmel 1997: 297). A big girl, Clinton is described by friends former and current, psychoanalysts, and poly-sci mavens as desperate to please, “seductive,” and eager to hear differing points of view (Wayne 1999: 559–61). He is both the new man of advertising—flawed, sexy, priapic, sensitive—and the publicly humiliated adulterous woman of misogyny. This replays issues close to Augustine,
the Ancient Greeks and Romans, and Burke. Clinton looked back on his impeachment as something akin to a Du Boisian/Aristotelian moment, referring to the split he experienced between public and private selves, between duty and desire, as “parallel lives” that return “with a vengeance” via a duel of “outer life” versus “old demons” (Clinton 2004: 775, 811, 923). This was a combat between “personality” and “character.”

During Clinton’s presidency, the variegated male body was up for grabs as both sexual icon and commodity consumer, in ways that borrowed from but also exceeded earlier commodification of the male form. The most obvious sign was the emergence of the “metrosexual,” a term coined in the mid-1990s by queer critic Mark Simpson after encountering “the real future. . . . [and finding that] it had moisturised.” Key metrosexuals included Spiderman, Brad Pitt, and David Beckham (Miller 2001; Simpson 2002; Simpson 2004; Simpson quoted in Williams 2005).

Historically, male desire for women has been overlegitimized, while female and male desire for men has been underlegitimized. The metrosexual represents a major shift in relations of power, with men subjected to new forms of governance and commodification. Simpson calls his discourse of metrosexuality “snarky sociology, which is no good to anyone.” But it has been taken up and deployed—as a prescription as much as a description—because it promises “highly profitable demography” guaranteed to stimulate any “advertiser’s wet dream” (Simpson 2003; Simpson 2004). The metrosexual has been joyfully embraced by Western European, Australian, South Asian, Latin American, East Asian, and US marketers, who regard it as “about having the strength to be true to oneself,” rather than a sign of being a vain cat. Based on its rapid diffusion, acceptance, and national usage, “metrosexual” was declared word of the year for 2003 by the American Dialect Society, ahead of “weapons of,” “embed,” and “preemptive self-defense.” Euromonitor’s 2006 report on the phenomenon was entitled The Male Shopping Giant Awakes. He even gave his name to a prominent 2006 Thai film (St. John 2003; Casqueiro 2003; Álvarez 2006; Nixon 2003: 6; Euromonitor 2006; Deepti 2005; Chan 2006; Salzman et al. 2005: 55; Barboza 2007; “Bangladesh” 2006; Poblete 2007; American Dialect Society 2004; Diego 2006).

The metrosexual “might be officially gay, straight or bisexual, but this is utterly immaterial because he has clearly taken himself as his own love object and pleasure as his sexual preference” (Simpson 2004). He endorses equal-opportunity vanity, through cosmetics, softness, women, hair-care products, wine bars, gyms, designer fashion, wealth, the culture industries, finance, cities, cosmetic surgery, and deodorants. Happy to be the object
of queer erotics, and committed to exfoliation and Web surfing, this newly feminized male blurs the visual style of straight and gay (St. John 2003) in a restless search “to spend, shop and deep-condition.” He is supposed to be every fifth man in major US cities (Fenley 2004), despite the hysterical right’s claim that metrosexuality “reaches nary an iota of the general populace outside of sushi-sick San Francisco and nightlife-nauseous New York,” and despite American Chronicle’s divining that it falls outside “True masculinity” (Manes 2003; Austria-del Rosario 2006). Single straight men now embark on what the New York Times calls “man dates,” nights out together without the alibis of work and sport or the props of televisions and bar stools—although Yanquis shy away from ordering bottles of wine together. (That would be going too far, other than perhaps in a steak house [Lee 2005].) The last refuge of male-separatist brawn and flailing manbags at two paces (the Canadian ice-hockey changing room) has become a site for swapping recipes and swooning over dining ambience (Brown 2006). And in a triumph of nurture over nature, testosterone “has somehow been supplanted by urban living arrangements” (Williams 2006). Even avowedly antimetrosexual men swarm to Web sites such as basenotes.com in search of comparison tips on fragrances (Petridis 2006).

Summed up by Jet magazine as “aesthetically savvy,” the metrosexual appeared 25,000 times on google.com in mid-2002; three years later, the number was 212,000; by the end of 2005, close to a million; and by mid-2007, almost 1.5 million. He even managed to transform characters on South Park, which devoted an episode to the phenomenon through a conversion narrative of its mildly amusing, banally offensive kind. And in case men aren’t sure they rate, an on-line metrosexual quiz is available. The average grade of the one hundred thousand who took it in its first year was 36.5%. I scored 54%, and qualified. ESPN, the sports cable network, also offered a quiz (Yarborough 2004; Sender 2006: 132; Simpson 2004; Bachelor 2004; Gladden 2005).

In 2003, Californian gubernatorial candidate Arnold Schwarzenegger told Vanity Fair he was “a major shoe queen.” The Metrosexual Guide to Style suggests that such a remark would have been “unthinkable ten years ago” but is now “deeply in touch with the Zeitgeist,” because the “new man” needs to display “style, sophistication and self-awareness” (Flocker 2003). The New York Times’s “Cultural Studies” section discerns a full-fledged “democratization of desire” (Trebay 2003), because men are increasingly key objects of pleasure for female and gay audiences. Male striptease shows, for example, reference not only changes in the gender of power and money but also a public site where “women have come to see exposed
male genitalia . . . to treat male bodies as objects only.” During the 1998 men's World Cup of association football, the French Sexy Boys Band, who had been performing in Paris since 1993 to sellout crowds, offered strip shows for “les filles sans foot” (girls without soccer/girls who couldn't care less). The US Chippendales toured Northern Europe in 1999 to crowds of women—The Full Monty (1997) writ large, even though some female spectators found the reversal of subject positions far from easy, rather like women who find it hard “to date a guy that is prettier and better maintained than me.” For those who could face such things, straight male pole dancers were also available (Barham 1985; Burke 1999; Dyer 1992: 104; Harari 1993; Jenkins 1998: 92; Smith 2002; Rich 2006; Santer 2007).

Such changes are referenced in the commodity form. In the mid-1980s, Calvin Klein caused a sensation with the first scopic ad campaign using the sculpted male form to sell briefs across magazines and billboards, an emergent discourse associated with such photographers as Bruce Weber and Herb Ritts. The International Male catalog from Southern California made postcoital languor and precoital tumescence into market niches. Mesh V Bodywear is underwear modeled on the condom, a form of gentle armature that combines lightweight packaging with intense visibility. And by late 1995, Calvin Klein underwear advertisements featured a sexually aroused model (Crowe 2007; Miller 1998). Underwear for men has recently expanded to incorporate “action bikinis” and “athletic strings,” some complete with condom pockets in the waistband and “sling support” to emphasize genitals. Worldwide sales of men's grooming products reached $7.3 billion in 2002, accounting for 15% of all beauty products sold, and increased by an annual average of 5.7% between 1997 and 2005. In 2002, American Demographics claimed “baby-boomer” men allocated $26,420 a year to “youth-enhancing products and services,” and women just under $3,000 a year more, while both sexes devoted almost an hour a day to grooming (Euromonitor 2006; Weiss 2002; McCasland 2003). In 2004, US men spent $65 billion on fashion and grooming. That year, AC-Nielsen issued What's Hot Around the Globe: Insights on Growth in Personal Care. A study of fifty-six countries predicated on the existence of metrosexuality, it duly discovered that personal care's key sales growth comprised shower gels, deodorants, blades, and moisturizers—to men. Euromonitor predicted a 50% expansion in the male skin-care market between 2001 and 2006, and Datamonitor expected a 3.3% annual increase in sales to men through 2008. In 2005, L'Oréal, with its new Men's Expert line, saw a 49% growth in sales to men over the previous year. For the first time, men's antiperspirants outsell women's in the United States. Body sprays
targeted at boys aged 10 and up form part of “age compression” via the sexualization of men across age groups. Gillette’s TAG Body Spray for Men was promoted via an auction on eBay for teenage boys to buy a date with Carmen Electra, a married celebrity in her thirties, and was soon banned in several high schools because boys used the body spray instead of showering after phys-ed class. Hair-color sales to young males increased by 25% in the five years from 1998. In 2003, men’s hair-care expenditure grew by more than 12% in the United States, to $727 million. “The Micro Touch” was released as the first “unwanted hair” application for men, organized around a metrosexual campaign; and a sample of college students disclosed that over 60% engaged in depilation to remove hair below the neck—an entirely new phenomenon (Treiby 2004; “ACNielsen” 2004; Lindsay 2005; Burbury 2003; Datamonitor 2004; Manning-Schaffel 2006; Beatty 2004; Neff 2005; Farran 2007; Euromonitor 2004; Postrel 2003: 29; Neff 2007; Fenley 2004; Boroughs et al. 2005).

Mid-town Manhattan now offers specialist ear-, hand-, and foot-waxing, with men comprising 40% of the clientele. Such sites provide pedicures and facials to the accompaniment of cable sports and Frank Sinatra, using manly euphemisms to describe procedures—coloring hair becomes “camouflage,” and manicures are “hand detailing.” Both Target and Saks Fifth Avenue opened men’s cosmetics sections for the first time in the new century, aimed principally at straights, while Lancôme announced eight differences between men’s and women’s skins, necessitating new products. Meanwhile, apologists for Bush Minor’s economic record pointed to officially undercounted new jobs in spas, nail salons, and massage parlors as signs of national economic health. Truly a digitally led recovery from recession. And men are now the fastest-growing part of the jewelry market, up to 10% of sales thanks to executive masculinity. In 2004, Garrad, Georg Jensen, and Cartier all launched comprehensive selections of male jewels (Stein 1999; Burstyn 1999: 21; Hall 1999; Lemon 1997; Weiss 2002; Postrel 2004; Flynn 2005).

The metrosexual’s ecumenicism has encouraged white-oriented companies to target Latin@s and blacks for the first time. In Britain, a metrosexual even appears in diaper commercials—not to reflect the division of child-care labor but to appeal to women consumers. The United States sees 80% of grooms actively involved in planning weddings, as never before, and devoting vast sums to their own appearance thanks to advice from such services as groomsonline.com. Banana Republic, a chain dedicated to casual-wear clothing, recently found that its catalog contained items worn as business attire. It proceeded to establish partnerships with Credit Suisse,
Home Box Office, and First Boston, setting up ministores in these enterprises to dispense free drinks and fashion advice. Even Microsoft, seemingly as impregnable to high style as a Roger Moore James Bond film, saw its campus populated by Prada as the century turned. Macho magazines in Britain, such as Loaded, were forced by audience targeting to supplement their hitherto-exclusive appeal to antifeminist, lager-swilling brutes by interpellating “the caring lad in cashmere” as well (“ideavillage’s” 2004; Benady 2004; Caplan 2005; Dube 2007; Florida 2002; Robinson 2005).

The area of plastic, cosmetic, or aesthetic surgery is a particularly notable part of this transformation. Records of Hindu facial surgery date from 600 B.C.; Roman gladiatorial wounds led to reconstructions; and rhinoplasties were undertaken in India from A.D. 1000. All such surgeries became more bearable and common with the appearance of antisepsis and anesthesia during the 19th century. In the United States, cosmetic surgery was associated with modifying immigrant features, which were often articulated to nasal types. Debates over enhancement versus reconstruction saw plastic surgery marginalized within medicine, until the hand of the state made itself known: contemporary reconstructive surgery began as a means of treating male World War I veterans, who were motivated by the desire for economic autonomy. Following a return to disrepute and a debate over the right to self-invention, the cosmetic surgeon reemerged as a miracle worker in World War II, only to experience low esteem again with the peace, amid Papal condemnations of vanity. With the exception of military casualties, from that point to the 1960s, most US surgeons reported treating women and a few gay men, but they privately pathologized and ridiculed their patients. A binary was drawn between function and aesthetics, leading to a series of powerful debates from the 1920s that generally concluded with some level of agreement about a right to self-improvement. Certain men were undergoing procedures at this time to improve their marketability—a study of 50- to 60-year-old salesmen in 1961 disclosed that their incomes increased after face-lifts. And the gendered and sexualized nature of the cosmetic binary began to shift when the New York Times declared “Cosmetic Lib for Men” in 1977 (the year after Clinique introduced its first male skin-care product). Three years later, Business Week encouraged its readers to obtain “a new—and younger—face.” The 1990s and since have seen the shop well and truly set up. Clinics in Plastic Surgery dedicated a special issue to men in 1991, and latter-day meetings of professional associations have been likened by the Annals of Plastic Surgery to “gender-bending,” with more and more male clients seeking what is politely euphemized as “body contouring.” Metrosexuality is welcomed as good business sense, as
men “stream into the salons like lemmings falling over cliffs” to undergo a “wallet biopsy.” The industry’s $12 billion in annual revenue attracts surgeons who lack formal training in the area. Over the past five years, new entrants have departed obstetric wards, dermatological suites, and emergency rooms in search of less risky and more lucrative places to cut, avoiding costly insurance premiums and anticipating huge paydays in the process (Heyes 2007: 18; Crawley 2006: 53–54; Feldman 2004; Burton et al. 1995; Morain 2003; Kathy Davis 2003: 123; Holliday and Sanchez Taylor 2006: 186; Collison 2006; Salzman et al. 2005: 92; Singer 2006).

As noted in the Introduction to this book, Bob Dole parlayed a political career representing Kansas into lucrative endorsements for Visa and Viagra after a face-lift made him telegenic, while John Kerry is rumored to have a Botox habit, and US military recruiters highlight free or cheap elective plastic surgery for uniformed personnel and their families (with the policy alibi that this permits doctors to practice their art). The American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery figures indicate that more than six thousand five hundred men had face-lifts in 1996. In 1997, men accounted for a quarter of all such procedures, and the following year, straight couples were frequently scheduling surgery together (up 15% in a year). Between 1996 and 1998, male cosmetic surgery increased 34%, mostly because of liposuction, and 15% of plastic surgery in 2001 was performed on men (Rosen 2004; “Force” 2004; “Marketplace” 1999; Avni 2002). Data from the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery (2002) disclose a 316% increase in hair transplants from 1999 to 2001. Youthfulness is a key motivation for 50% of women and 40% of men, and dating for 5% of women and 10% of men (Miller 2002).

The top five male surgical areas (breasts, hair, nose, stomach, and eyelids) were not selected two decades ago. In 2002, US men had more than 800,000 cosmetic procedures. Figures from the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery (2003) and the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery (2002) are striking in the popularity of Botox and collagen procedures, chemical peels, and hair surgery to conceal signs of aging, and liposuction to reduce body weight, with similar rates for men and women (such numbers bizarrely tend to exclude circumcision and dental work [Holliday and Cairnie 2007: 58]). Over one million procedures were performed on men in 2003, and the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2005b, 2006) saw a 44% surge in men seeking treatment in the five years to 2005 to 1.2 million, including climbs of 156% for “tummy tucks” and 233% for Botox injections, alongside dramatic expansion to incorporate Latin@s, African Americans, and Asians into the fold. China’s cosmetic surgery numbers
are being swelled by the appearance of the “urban pretty man.” Estimates from Canada suggest that men composed 20% of clients in 2006, up from 5% in 2001, while the British Association of Aesthetic Plastic Surgeons experienced an 80% increase in male clients in 2005. That year brought a study from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2005a) that found that three-quarters of men favored surgery for themselves or others, and the year also saw the launch of the first magazine dedicated to patients, *New Beauty*. Cable television, which the society said had helped the shift to men, was offering the graphic drama *Nip/Tuck* and the reality show *Plastic Surgery: Before and After*, where participants had a chance to release themselves from their bodily biographies. When an independent commission of inquiry into what went wrong on September 11 reported four years after the attacks, evaluating the federal government’s manifold failings before, during, and since, the bourgeois media subordinated coverage of these findings to trends in cosmetic surgery (Jameson 2006; Salzman et al. 2005: 95; Collison 2006; “As Another” 2007; “Bankers” 2006; Goldenberg 2005; Mitchell 2005; Engelberg 2005).

The new man is being governed as well as commodified. What the *New York Times* (Tien 1999) calls “the rising tide of male vanity” has real costs to conventional maleness. The middle-class US labor market now sees wage discrimination by beauty amongst men as well as women, and major corporations frequently require executives to tailor their body shapes to company *ethoi*. There is actually an income differential based on ugliness versus beauty that is more discriminatory for men than women: men who are deemed ugly lose 9% in salary, whereas ugly women lose 6%. Conversely, the beauty premium for men is 5% as opposed to 4% for women (“To Those That Have” 2007: 54). Fourteen percent of female patients versus 30% of male indicate that they wish to undergo cosmetic surgery for reasons connected to the workplace, a clear sign that men perceive age discrimination on the job. The American Society of Plastic Surgeons (2001) advises that male clients seek, *inter alia*, “a professional edge,” and plasticsurgery.org (2007) warns men that “society places a high value on looking young and fit” via “a more balanced nose, a rejuvenated face, a trimmer waistline,” which are worth it despite the lack of insurance to cover costs. Men even favor experimental “abdominal etching,” which promises “a muscular, rippled appearance.” Canadian cosmetic surgeons note a shift away from the desire for youthfulness as part of vanity: it is now more a matter of job protection. “Grooming” was deemed vital to business success by 89% of US men in 2003, and a 2004 ExecuNet (http://www.execunet.com) survey of senior corporate leeches aged between 40 and 50
saw 94% complaining of occupational discrimination by age. One-third of all graying male US workers in 1999 colored their hair to counter the effect of aging on their careers to avoid what is now known as the “silver ceiling.” Studies by the hair-dye company Clairol reveal that men with gray hair are perceived as less successful, intelligent, and athletic than those without. Meanwhile, abetted by a newly deregulated ability to address consumers directly through television commercials, Propecia, a drug countering male hair loss, secured a 79% increase in visits by patients to doctors in search of prescriptions. Hair transplants were said to have grown 61% between 1993 and 1995. Similar trends are evident in the rise of tanning salons. In 1977, there were none; now there are over fifty thousand, with annual revenue in excess of $5 billion and men catching up to women amongst participants. Men’s alibi is that indoor tanning is akin to muscle building. As the delightful authors of US marketing’s major study of metrosexuality cheerfully avow in explaining why men must strive like this, “we’re living in an era of infinite choice” (Hamermesh and Biddle 1994; Wells 1994; Freudenheim 1999; Rosen 2004; Salzman et al. 2005: 36, 60; Weiss 2002; Ahmed 2003; Herman 2006; Holliday and Cairnie 2007: 59; Vannini and McCright 2004: 310–11, 322–23).

While the burden of beauty remains firmly on women, a new trend is unmistakable: the surveillant gaze of sexual evaluation is being turned to men as never before. The gaze is simultaneously internalized, as a set of concerns, and externalized, as a set of interventions. South Korean figures from 2005 indicated that 86% of men aged 25 to 37 saw career advantages from looks, and 56% were dissatisfied with their appearance (Johne 2006). In 1997, 43% of US men up to their late 50s disclosed dissatisfaction with their appearance, compared to 34% in 1985 and 15% in 1972. Playgirl magazine’s male centerfolds have undergone comprehensive transformations over the past quarter-century: the average model has lost 12 pounds of fat and gained 25 pounds of muscle. GI Joe dolls of the 1960s had biceps to a scale of 11.5 inches, an average dimension. In 1999, their biceps were at a scale of 26 inches, beyond that of any recorded bodybuilder. And when Barbie’s boytoy Ken was re-released by Mattel in 2006, his musculature had increased as part of a makeover. Similar changes have happened to other dolls, such as Star Wars figures. These shifts signify a wider cultural shift. The psy-function now refers to “muscle dissatisfaction” among male TV viewers, while dietary supplements have migrated from the gym to the office in search of all-day amino acids. The new century has brought reports of a million men diagnosed with body dysmorphic disorder; psychiatrists have invented the “Adonis Complex” to account for vast increases in male
eating and exercise disorders, with 25% of US eating problems reported by men—as disclosed by pharmacorps-funded research. The National Comorbidity Survey Replication disclosed that anorexia affected 0.9% of women and 0.3% of men, and bulimia 1.5% versus 0.5%, while Euromonitor reported that young men were using steroids in unprecedented numbers, coded as “Metrodrug.” Not surprisingly, hypermasculinist citadels such as the Gold’s Gym franchise were beavering away at their image at just this time to reach out and interpellate men hitherto intimidated by muscularity (Agliata and Tantleff-Dunn 2004; “Madeover Ken” 2006; Pope et al. 2000; Esposito 2006; Gellene 2007; Family & Friends Action Council 2007; Euromonitor 2006; Thomaselli 2007).

Clearly, we should not assume that progressive change is bundled with metrosexuality. Reifying all is not a good substitute for reifying some, while the $8 billion spent each year on cosmetics could put the children of the world through basic education across four generations. Schwarzenegger’s shoes may just register an “upgrade” of service-sector capitalism. Significantly, the Metrosexual Guide ends with a description of “The Metrosexual Mind-Set: The Bottom Line,” which is: “Your life is your own creation.” Metrosexuals are neoliberal subjects governing themselves as new aesthetes generated from shifting relations of power and finance. They are “more responsible for creating their own individuality than ever before,” in the words of Britain’s Cosmetic Toiletry and Perfumery Association Director-General (Snyder 2006; Sardar and Davies 2002: 82; Flocker 2003: xi, xiii–xiv, 169; McRobbie 2002: 100; Flower 2004; McCarthy 2004).

In related developments, the “pink dollar” has become more and more significant. Gay media have long circulated information to businesses about the spending power of their putatively childless, middle-class readership. One magazine’s slogan in advertising circles was “Gay Money, Big Market; Gay Market, Big Money”; another said that its readers “live as well as the Joneses, [but] we live a damn sight better.” Advertising Age published occasional reports on gay marketing from the 1970s, and the Advocate pioneered market research in 1977 which disclosed that erotic/pornographic material needed to be marginalized, and production standards raised, in order to coax heteronormative companies to advertise. The exclusion of sexual material, and new investment in high style, attracted Seagram’s and Simon & Schuster, inter alia, and advertising revenue doubled between 1990 and 1992. By 2006, the gay media received $276 million in advertising revenue, with almost two hundred Fortune 500 companies amongst their customers. The mainstream media eventually took notice as well, and 1997 saw Advertising Age’s front-cover headline emblazoned with “Big Adver-
tisers Join Move to Embrace Gay Market.” The New York Times made no references to queerness in its business pages throughout the 1970s, and male-oriented pieces appeared only occasionally in the 1980s. But news coverage tripled during 1992–93 and has remained significant, if inconsistent. During the 1990s, Hyundai began appointing gay-friendly staff to dealerships; IBM targeted gay-run small businesses; Subaru advertisements on buses and billboards had gay-advocacy bumper stickers and registration plates coded to appeal to queers; Polygram’s classical-music division introduced a gay promotional budget; Miller beer supported Gay Games ‘94; Bud Light was a national sponsor to the 1999 San Francisco Folsom Street Fair, “the world’s largest leather event”; and Dick Cheney’s daughter Mary devised domestic-partner benefits for Coors, supposedly counteracting its antigay image of the past. Advertising expenditure in lesbian publications doubled in the period 1997–2001. On television, we have seen Ikea’s famous US TV commercial showing two men furnishing their apartment together, Toyota’s male car-buying couple, two men driving around in a Volkswagen searching for home furnishings, and a gay-themed Levi Strauss Dockers campaign, while 2003 Super Bowl commercials carried hidden gay themes that advertisers refused to encode openly. (Known as “gay window advertising” or “encrypted ads,” these campaigns are designed to make queers feel special for being “in the know” while not offending simpleton straights.) The spring 1997 US network TV season saw twenty-two queer characters across the prime-time network schedule, and there were thirty in 2000—clear signs of niche targeting. Although gay activists claim that the network share deteriorated to 2% of characters (fifteen people) in 2006–7, cable became a mainstay of gay representation (thirty-five in drama in that year), especially on reality shows; and daytime soaps were also providential, albeit mostly featuring white men. In 2004, Viacom announced that MTV was developing a queer cable network. Investors were animated by $400 billion of consumer power, not cultural politics. Within three years, Logo was in over 27 million homes. In 2007, the Here! Network was on many cable systems and could also be watched via video-on-demand and through Internet TV providers. In the on-line domain, 1999 brought the first gay initial public offering, while gay and lesbian Web sites drew significant private investment. By 2005, the Web sites gay.com and planetout.com had established themselves as the biggest queer-affinity portals. On the one hand, they provided informational services desired by readers. On the other, they provided surveillance services desired by marketers. This combination attracted over 8 million registered visitors and such major advertisers
as United Airlines, Citibank, Procter & Gamble, Chase, Miller Brewing, CBS, and Johnson & Johnson. Repeated market surveys sponsored by gay-friendly groups showed that queers were not more urban than rural and had consumer tastes across the board. Meanwhile, a five-year study of 3,000 professionals working for Fortune 500 companies indicated that employees of gay managers were one-third more satisfied at work than other people (Alsop 1999a; Alsop 1999b; Fejes 2002; Rawlings 1993; Elliott 1998; Mecca 2002; Wilke 2003; Lacher 2007; Sender 2005: 126–28, 111; Ragusa 2005: 658, 655; O’Connor 1997; Bank 1999: B1; Hampp 2007; Mackie 2006; Jensen 2006; Urban 2006; Campbell 2005; "Study Reveals" 2006; Hampp 2007; "Gay/Lesbian Consumer" 2005; Carter and Elliott 2004; Friedman 2006). As Marx said, while a “commodity appears, at first sight, a very trivial thing, and easily understood . . . it is, in reality, a very queer thing” (1987: 76).

Television

EXTREME MAKEOVER APPLICATION
Deadline—Saturday, March 31, 2006
MAKING AN EXTREME VIDEO

Have Fun! If you are not having fun making the video, we are not having fun watching it.

Make sure whoever is filming you is someone you are comfortable with. Do not read from cards or over rehearse what you want to say. Just talk to us like a friend.

Making the video:
– Get creative and grab our attention immediately! Introduce yourself and tell us a bit about you. We get tons of applications, so try to stand out and think outside the box. Why do you deserve the Extreme Makeover? How will it change your life? Do you have any events coming up in the next few months that make this the perfect time?
– Go from head to toe explaining what you would like changed. You do not need to know the exact procedure, just tell us what you don’t like about your current features.
– Get good close ups, about 30 seconds, of your face, profile and body. Also include close ups of any areas of concern that may be hard to see like teeth, complexion, scars etc. For your teeth, please get a good 10 seconds smiling from the front with teeth showing, bite closed. Then another 10 seconds in the same position from the side.
– Please watch the video after to make sure the lighting is good and we can accurately see your problem areas. The light should be shining on your face and not behind you where it may cause shadows. Also check for the sound quality.

—Application to appear on ABC’s Extreme Makeover
They call themselves the Fab Five. They are: An interior designer, a fashion stylist, a chef, a beauty guru and someone we like to call the “concierge of cool”—who is responsible for all things hip, including music and pop culture. All five are talented, they’re gay and they’re determined to clue in the cluttered, clumsy straight men of the world. With help from family and friends, the Fab Five treat each new guy as a head-to-toe project. Soon, the straight man is educated on everything from hair products to Prada and Feng Shui to foreign films. At the end of every fashion-packed, fun-filled life-style makeover, a freshly scrubbed, newly enlightened guy emerges.

—http://www.bravotv.com/Queer_Eye/about

The application to appear on Extreme Makeover excerpted above performs dual tasks. At one level, it is what it says it is—a recruitment device. As such, it is unreliable and rapidly becoming outmoded. In its second, covert, role—surveillance—it is a neatly targeted way of securing data about viewers that can be sold to advertisers, achieved under the demotic sign of outreach and public participation via plastic surgery for the soldier who thinks his career is being held back by ugliness and for the fast-food manager who wants to advance his job prospects (Heyes 2007: 25). Which is where we meet Extreme Makeover’s cousin in surveillance, commodification, and governmentality—Queer Eye for the Straight Guy (QESG). It began in the northern summer of 2003 on the Bravo network and quickly became a crucial metrosexual moment and the station’s highest-ever rated hour, with 3.35 million viewers by the third episode. Parodies followed on Saturday Night Live and MAD TV, while Comedy Central offered Straight Plan for the Gay Man (Nutter 2004; Heller 2006: 3; Westerfelhaus and Lacroix 2006: 429). Simpson (2004) dubbed it Metrosexuality: The Reality TV Show, and the program avowed that it taught “the finer points of being a ‘metrosexual’” (http://www.bravotv.com/Queer_Eye//Episodes/207/). In the winter of its first season, survey research proclaimed that more men went shopping with male friends the day after watching QESG episodes than at any other point in the week (Cohan 2007: 178).

What are its origins, beyond unfurling commodity interest in the queer dollar? QESG is part of the wider reality-television phenomenon, a strange hybrid of cost-cutting devices, game shows taken into the community, cinéma vérité conceits, scripts written in postproduction, and ethoi of Social Darwinism, surveillance, and gossip—bizarre blends of “tabloid journalism, documentary television, and popular entertainment.” Makeover programs such as QESG take economically underprivileged people and offer them a style they cannot afford to sustain. QESG speaks to the responsibility of each person to master their drives and harness their
energies to get better jobs, homes, looks, and families. It is significant that US reality TV has offered queer characters on over a dozen shows and that the entire genre is suffused with deregulatory nostra of individual responsibility, avarice, possessive individualism, hypercompetitiveness, and commodification, played out in the domestic sphere rather than the public world (Ouellette and Murray 2004: 8–9; Hill 2005: 15; Banet-Weiser and Portwood-Spacer 2006; Heller 2006; Bennett 2006: 408; Deery 2006: 161; Fraiman 2006). Bravo paired QESG with Boy Meets Boy, another gay reality show, on Tuesday evenings, thereby branding itself as an alternative to its corporate parent (Cohan 2007: 177). This allowed the network a certain chic quality “as the unofficial gay network” (DeJesus 2008: 46).

The genre derive from transformations in the political economy of TV, specifically deregulation. When veteran newsman Edward R. Murrow addressed the Radio-Television News Directors Association in 1958 (recreated in George Clooney’s 2005 docudrama Goodnight, and Good Luck), he used the metaphor that television must “illuminate” and “inspire,” or it would be “merely wires and light in a box.” In a speech to the National Association of Broadcasters three years later, John F. Kennedy’s Chair of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC), Newton Minow, called US TV a “vast wasteland” (Murrow 1958; Minow 1971). Murrow and Minow were urging broadcasters to show enlightened Cold War leadership, to prove that the United States was not the mindless consumer world that the Soviets claimed. The networks should live up to their legislative responsibilities and act in the public interest by informing and entertaining, going beyond what Minow later called “white suburbia’s Dick-and-Jane world” (Minow 2001). The networks responded by doubling the time devoted to news each evening, and TV quickly became the dominant source of current affairs (Schudson and Tioff 2005: 32). But twenty years later, Reagan’s FCC head, Mark Fowler, celebrated reduction of the “box” to “transistors and tubes.” He argued in an interview with Reason magazine that “television is just another appliance—it’s a toaster with pictures” and hence in no need of regulation apart from ensuring its safety as an electrical appliance.4

Minow’s and Fowler’s expressions gave their vocalists instant and undimmed celebrity (Murrow already had such celebrity as the most-heralded audiovisual journalist in US history). Minow, named “top newsmaker” of 1961 in an Associated Press survey, was on TV and radio more than any other Kennedy official. The phrase “vast wasteland” has even—irony of ironies—provided raw material for the wasteland’s parthenogenesis, as the answer to questions posed on numerous game shows, from
Jeopardy! to Who Wants to Be a Millionaire? The “toaster with pictures” is less celebrated but has been efficacious as a slogan for deregulation across successive administrations, and it remains in Reason’s pantheon of libertarian quotations, alongside Reagan and others of his ilk. Where Minow stands for public culture’s restraining (and ultimately conserving) function for capitalism, Fowler represents capitalism’s brooding arrogance, its neoliberal lust to redefine use value via exchange value. Minow decries Fowler’s vision, arguing that television “is not an ordinary business” because it has “public responsibilities” (Minow and Cate 2003: 408, 415). But Fowler’s phrase has won the day, at least to this point. Minow’s lives on as a recalcitrant moral irritant, not a policy slogan.

Fowler has had many fellow-travelers. Both the free-cable, free-video social movements of the 1960s and ’70s, and the neoclassical, deregulatory intellectual movements of the 1970s and ’80s, imagined a people’s technology emerging from the wasteland of broadcast television, as portapak equipment, localism, and unrestrained markets provided alternatives to the numbing nationwide commercialism of the networks. The social-movement vision imagined a change occurring overnight; the technocratic vision imagined it in the “long run.” One began with folksy culturalism, the other with technophilic futurism. Each claimed it in the name of diversity, and they even merged in the depoliticized “California ideology” of community media, much of which quickly embraced market forms. Neither formation engaged economic reality. But together they established the preconditions for unsettling a cozy, patriarchal, and quite competent television system that had combined, as TV should, what was good for you and what made you feel good, all on the one set of stations—that is, a comprehensive service. Such a service was promised by the enabling legislation that birthed and still governs the FCC, supposedly guaranteeing citizens that broadcasters serve “the public interest, convenience and necessity,” a tradition that began when CBS set up a radio network in the 1920s founded on news rather than its rival NBC’s predilection for entertainment (Mullen 2002; Barbrook and Cameron 1996; Scardino 2005).

In place of the universalism of the old networks, where sports, weather, news, life style, and drama programming had a comfortable and appropriate frottage, highly centralized but profoundly targeted consumer networks emerged in the 1990s that fetishized life style and consumption tout court over a blend of purchase and politics, of fun and foreign policy. Reality television, fixed upon by cultural critics who either mourn it as representative of a decline in journalistic standards or celebrate it as the sign of a newly feminized public sphere, should frankly be understood
as a cost-cutting measure and an instance of niche marketing. The make-over varietal has a special focus on dramatic aesthetic transformations (Heyes 2007). The Kaiser Foundation’s 2006 study of US reality TV (Christenson and Ivancin 2006) drew on encounters with television producers and health-care critics and professionals to get at the dynamics of how medicine and related topics are represented in the genre. It found that US reality TV, for all its populist alibis, constructs professional medical expertise as a kind of magic that is beyond the ken of ordinary people—and certainly beyond their engaged critique. Again and again, whether it’s plastic surgeons or pediatricians, miraculous feats are achieved by heroic professionals who deliver ignorant and ugly people from the dross of the everyday, transcending what off-screen primary-care physicians have been able to do for them. For all the world reincarnated Ben Caseys, time after time these daring young doctors provide astonishing breakthroughs. The foundation’s study could find nothing in US reality TV even remotely critical of this model of what “they can do.” The representation of expertise deemed it ungovernable other than by its own caste. Such a landscape is not about powerful citizen-viewers; it’s about deities in scrubs. The use of the commodity form to promise transcendence through the national health-care system, as embodied in patriarchal medicine, is sickening. And as with makeovers of houses and personal style, it offers a transcendence of the grubby working and lower-middle classes that viewers cannot afford to emulate. Helpless and ugly, patient bodies testify to the surgeons’ skill (Heyes 2007: 19) as per fashion consultants confronting a lack of savoir-faire. Enter Queer Eye.

With excellent ratings, a soundtrack album that topped electronic-music sales charts, and revenue from many parts of the world via both export and format sales, QESG won an award from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation (GLAAD) and an Emmy for Outstanding Reality Program in 2004, and was variously heralded as a mainstream breakthrough text for queers, an exemplification of male vulnerability, the virtue of popular culture in an era of conservatism, and the epitome of Yanqui imperialism—the encapsulation of the “ambivalent text” in its allegedly carnivalesque instantiation of “commodity and difference” (Rogers 2003; Hart 2004; Fraiman 2006; Di Mattia 2007; Allatson 2006; Pullen 2007: 194, 207, 210). Metrosource places QESG in the pantheon of greatest moments of gay television: “it catapulted gay culture into the mainstream” (DeJesus 2008: 46). The American Film Institute nominated Queer Eye as its major cultural development for 2003, alongside copyright (Cohan 2007: 178). Some inevitably criticized it for stereotyping, including out Congressman
Barney Frank, while from the other side of politics, the Family Television Council thundered that it appealed to an “element in our culture already earning an advanced degree in Sin Acceptance.” Media Research Center maven L. Brent Bozell III (as improbable as his name) called it “The Gay Supremacy Hour” and said, “I want to vomit.” NBC, Bravo’s network parent, first screened the show in 2003, drawing 6.7 million watchers despite some affiliates declining to screen the show until the middle of the night because of its queerness, leading to a write-in campaign orchestrated by GLAAD. Meanwhile, adherents of straightacting.com opposed the show because it didn’t suit their preference for sport-loving, macho gay men, while neoconservatives were sly in their mix of endorsement and critique. Boston Red Sox baseballers who participated insisted they did so only to aid charity, even as they subjected themselves to floral footbaths, waxing, and other procedures. Taboos were under erasure, as per unwanted hair (Berila and Choudhuri 2005; Council quoted in Sender 2006: 132; Dossi 2005; Bozell 2003; “Tell” 2003; Rocchio and Rogers 2007; Clarkson 2005; Skinner 2003; Cometta 2005; Westerfelhaus and Lacroix 2006: 427; Allen 2006).

_QESG_ embodied the ethos of reality TV: originating on cable, an underunionized sector of the industry, with small numbers of workers required for short periods, and production funds derived in part from the producer’s credit-card award points (later turned into a marketing point by the card company). These flexible arrangements quickly led to a lawsuit on behalf of a queer star who was dispensed with after two episodes, while those left recognized that “we could be fired at any moment” (“David Collins” 2004; participants quoted in Giltz 2003). There was a furor when the Web site thesmokinggun.com disclosed that the Fab Five were receiving just $3,000 each per episode, with tiny raises and none of the typical perks of celebrity—they got mere fractions of the tens of thousands of dollars available to minor but unionized characters in broadcast drama. This contingent, flexible labor is textualized in the service-industry world of the genre, which creates “a parallel universe” for viewers (Lewis et al. 2005: 17).

_QESG_ looked for its loser-male makeover targets in the suburban reaches of the tri-state area (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut), men who needed to be transformed from ordinary guys into hipsters. Cosmopolitan queers descended on these hapless bridge-and-tunnel people, charged with increasing their marketability as husbands, fathers, and (more silently and saliently) employees. The program seemed to compromise its claims of “ideological edginess” in favor of turning “straight men into straight men with better shoes.” Change was predicated on affluence (Allen 2006). The program’s success can be understood in four ways. First, it represents the
culmination of a surge of US television that offers a sanitary, light-skinned, middle-class queer urban world of fun, where gays and lesbians are to be laughed with, not at. Their difference is a new commodity of pleasure—safely different from, but compatible with, heteronormativity. Second, it is a sign that queerness is, indeed, a life style of practices that can be adopted, discarded, and redisposed promiscuously—in this case, disarticulated from its referent into metrosexuality. Third, it signifies the professionalization of queerness as a form of management consultancy for conventional masculinity, brought in to improve efficiency and effectiveness, like time-and-motion expertise, total quality management, or just-in-time techniques. And, finally, it indicates the spread of self-fashioning as a requirement of personal and professional achievement through the US middle-class labor force. Even the queer-language games of the show became systems of translation across cultures, while their camp ways showed the power of mainstream containment and a bias toward urban living that offended the self-regard of those who repeatedly laid noisy claim to being “the Heartland” (Weiss 2005; Lacroix and Westerfelhaus 2005; Rasmussen 2006: 812).

In Alexander Kluge’s words, capitalism seeks “to designate the spectators themselves as entrepreneurs. The spectator must sit in the movie house or in front of the TV set like a commodity owner: like a miser grasping every detail and collecting surplus on everything” (1981–82: 210–11). And commodities were central to the secular transcendence of QESG. Viewers were gently led toward a makeover that would meld suburban heteronormativity with urban hipness. A virtual gay parachute corps solved a dilemma for capital: namely, that “white, heterosexual men have been hard to train as consumers” (Sender 2006: 133). QESG undertook “a full-scale humanitarian relief mission: Queers Without Borders” that reached “a virgin makeover-market niche in basic cable” (Chocano 2003). They did so in accord with US self-help literature for men, which focuses on augmenting capital, rather than the women’s version, which seeks emotional resolutions to private-public dilemmas (McGee 2005). The QESG Web site offered the following: “FIND IT, GET IT, LOVE IT, USE IT. You’ve seen us work wonders for straight guys in need of some serious help. Get the same results at home with the same great products, services and suppliers that put the fairy dust in our Fab Five magic wands at ‘QUEER EYE’S DESIGN FOR LIFE PRODUCT GUIDE’ via www.bravotv.com/Queer_Eye_for_the_Straight_Guy/Shopping_Guide/.” Sales were immense (Redden 2007: 150). No wonder Terry Sawyer worries that this implies the status of minstrelsy for queers, via their incarnation as “materialistic vamps” (2003). “Q[ueer]E[ye] isn’t really about mutual understanding between homos and
heteros. It’s about mutual understanding between Bravo/NBC and Diesel . . . and Roberto Cavallia and Ralph Lauren and Via Spiga and Persol and Baskit Underwear,” said New York magazine, while the Village Voice thundered that the “agenda is about tempting guys who have managed to get by without facials and instant tans to become consumers of same,” distilling yet concealing “the essence of the infomercial: It meets a need you didn’t know you had” (Dumenco 2003; Goldstein 2003). In that sense, a reactionary like Bozell is correct to call the program “almost a parody of product placement, a veritable plug-a-minute infomercial.” The problem is that he also derides it for being “drenched in references to raw, perverted homosexual sex” (2003) (anxieties about commercialism encourage the oddest frottage).

The wholesale commodification of male subjectivity witnessed in QESG is actually about reasserting and resolidifying very conventional masculinity. The latter has long relied on women’s work and queer work, or gay work at least, for its style: women and gay men have always contributed to straight men’s looks and professionalism. The question is, has their contribution ever led to a feminization of the public sphere or to recognition of the legitimacy and centrality of queerness? QESG was the ultimate in the commodification and governmentalization of queerness as a set of techniques that could be applied and then cast aside. When that is done in the service of retaining conventional straight masculinity, one has to ask how progressive it actually is. And, of course, the program did not last forever, with a huge 2004 ratings slump prior to the inevitable detour of a failing program by focusing on weight issues as well as personal style in an attempt to reinvigorate itself in the fall of 2006, before being cashiered the following year, with Bravo asserting it had “really helped open the closet doors on gays and their presence on television and in popular culture” and claiming credit for featuring queer leads (“Bravo’s ‘Queer Eye’” 2006; Dossi 2005; Bravo quoted in Rocchio and Rogers 2007; Pullen 2007: 207).

Conclusion

There is a . . . long history of gays and lesbians serving as priestesses, holy fools, minstrels, and other religious-cultural functionaries in pagan, medieval Christian, African, Native American, and Asian cultures. Now their role has been translated: for the worshippers in the church of capitalism, they’re the priests of good taste.

—Dan Friedman (2006)
[The metrosexual] was really more a creation of Madison Avenue than a real demographic.
—Mediaweek (Tony Case 2006)

In addition to this intrication with commodity fetishism, the trends I have outlined also produced a backlash. Attempts by queer marketers to emphasize the affluence of upper-class, white, male consumers distort average queer wealth and lead to arguments by the American Family Association and Supreme Court Justice Antonin Scalia that there is no need for public subvention of AIDS research and prevention or antidiscrimination protections for queers, despite evidence from the Census and the General Social Survey that same-sex, unmarried people have less income than their straight counterparts (Lenskyj 2005: 287; Ragusa 2005: 656; Guidotto 2006; Fejes 2002: 203–4).

And has there really been a grand change in the prevailing forms of masculinity? Richard Goldstein (2003a) suggests that various testosterone tendencies in popular culture, such as masculinist hip-hop and talk radio, were preconditions for the rapturous turn to the right since September 11, when hostile reactions to women have, in Molly Faulkner-Bond’s words, “the cultural upper hand” (2006). American Enterprise magazine headlined its post–September 11 cover “Real Men, They’re Back,” and it has been argued that hypermasculinity became not just patriotic but “a G[rand]O[ld]P[arty] virtue.” The Boston Globe hails a “menaissance” of “everyday men who wear work boots, change their own oil, get their hair cut at barbershops, and wouldn’t have the faintest idea where to get a pedicure or mud mask” (Diaz 2006). When Harold Ford Jr’s much-trumpeted 2006 campaign for a Senate seat in Tennessee failed, his loss was partly attributed to the winner’s critique of him as “an attractive young man,” while the New York Observer worried that “Obama has more feminine allure than Hillary” (quoted in “Fit to Serve” 2007; Doonan 2007). JWT (previously J. Walter Thompson) announced the 2005 invention of the “ubersexual,” who smoked cigars and was tough at the same time as he was sophisticated. This was marked by some, such as Rush Limbaugh, as the defeat of feminism and the triumph of traditional masculinity. ABC News decreed the end of metrosexuality and the need for marketers to reassure men about their masculinity (“Metrosexual Is Out” 2006). So it comes as no surprise that the bourgeois media and the right fixated on John Edwards’s haircut during the 2008 election campaign. They did so to illustrate “the effete mannerisms of those who claim to speak for the common man and woman” (Younge 2007).
Doubts were expressed about the “gender-wide” appeal of metrosexuality. *Campaign*, a British magazine covering advertising, accused the industry of focusing on “castrated dweebs.” And new forms of dividing up male consumers adopted four categories: “patriarchs” (supposedly 37% of men), “power seekers” (23%), “metrosexuals” (24%), and “retrosexuals” (16%) (Jargon 2006). Much was made of Miller Brewing’s 2006 “Men of the Square Table” advertising campaign. It featured “actor” Burt Reynolds, “wrestler” Triple H, and “footballer” Jerome Bettis forming a masculinist countercultural sphere and an associated “Manlawpedia.” Right-wing cultural critics gloried in this riposte to metrosexuality (Mullman 2007). Then there was the 2006 appearance of “fratire . . . a spate of testosterone-fuelled books about belligerence and debauchery, leglessness and legovers, which publishers hope will spawn the male equivalent of chick-lit” (Turner 2006) with such titles as *I Hope They Serve Beer in Hell* (a *New York Times*–certified bestseller), *The Alphabet of Manliness*, and *Real Men Don’t Apologise*. Young men rarely buy books in the United States or Britain, so this development promised the prize of new markets (Harkin 2006). The *Scotsman*, which had earlier ranted at the narcissism of the metrosexual because he “likes what he sees reflected in the smoked glass of whatever fashionable bar he is in,” decreed 2007 “The Year of the Retrosexual,” a direct reaction to QESG’s presumption that straight men were flawed, and the *Los Angeles Times* brayed that “Deadwood chic” was kicking “the metrosexual look out the saloon doors.” The very marketers who had promoted metrosexuality in 2003 predicted its demise (Trew 2002; *Scotsman* 2006; Keeps 2007; Turner 2007). Terence Blacker, a columnist for the *Independent on Sunday*, derided metrosexuality not only as a marketing ploy but also as an ideological alibi for “vanity, self-obsession, stupidity, and a pointless, masturbatory, inward-looking obsession with sex” (2004).

The London *Times*’s Andrew Billen (2006) confronted an unexpected dilemma:

*What is the precise ratio between machismo and moisturiser that will get me laid?*

Tomorrow, I unwisely wrote in these pages two and a bit years ago, belongs to us. The us I referenced were metrosexuals, sophisticated males who took trouble with their appearance, listened to women and suavely followed them to the table in the restaurant. We knew as much about arts, literature and cuisine as football and beer. We were, you know, just gay enough.

As for tomorrow, that, I suppose, must be now. But last week I feared I
was wrong. Alarming publishing news from America made me wonder if metrosexuals had lost control of masculinity even before they had properly taken ownership. Condé Nast announced that it was closing Cargo, a male shopping magazine that, in the two years since its launch, had become the metrosexual source book. Its death followed those of Sync, which spoke to metrosexual man’s inner gadget-nerd, and Vitals, which sought to bring “the concierge” experience to readers’ lives.

His counterpart over at the Observer Magazine, Barbara Ellen (2007), argued:

Just as men have evolved—to suit women, it seems—females have also evolved, to suit women, too. And this new breed of women are not going to take kindly to Metrosexual Man . . . gently insisting that they put down their whiskey tumbler, stop vomiting on the coffee table and get a good night’s sleep. It may even come to pass that men begin daydreaming wistfully of a new breed of woman, who is sexy but house-trained, sensitive, and not forever ogling man-bits and so on.

In 2007, Rolling Stone magazine, primarily aimed at a youthful male audience, ran advertisements for Canadian Club that picture “YOUR DAD” as he was when young—going fishing, wearing Bee-Gees clothing, and sporting a perm—under the banner “YOUR DAD WAS NOT A METROSEXUAL.” For Simpson, though, these trends confirmed the onward march of metrosex:

The “menaisance” is mendacious. This isn’t retrosexual at all, but hummersexual—a noisy, overblown, studied and frankly rather camp form of fake masculinity that likes to draw attention to itself and its allegedly old-fashioned “manliness,” but tends—like driving an outsized military vehicle in the suburbs—to be a tad counterproductive . . . fetishized, “strapped-on,” unsustainable, gas-guzzling masculinity. (2006c)

And the Miller Lite commercial? Sales plummeted by contrast to those of its rivals, and the campaign was ditched. After all, even NASCAR marketers were now promoting their “sport” metrosexually. Noted driver Jeff Gordon told KTLA Morning News that “you need to smell good” in an environment of “burning rubber and gasoline.” He endorsed wine, watches, and body spray, and colleague Brian Vickers outed himself as metrosexual. Meanwhile, Mark Gauvreau Judge identified as “a conservative Metrosexual.” Euromonitor continued to welcome the phenomenon, announcing that
“the male shopping giant awakes.” *Foreign Policy* magazine nominated the European Union “the world’s first metrosexual superpower” because it “struts past the bumbling United States on the catwalk of global diplomacy.” And epidemiologists proposed that men with “higher ‘femininity’ scores” lived longer and healthier lives (Harkin 2006; Ellison 2006; Donahue 2005; Kovacs 2005; Williams 2005; Jennine Lee 2005; Gladden 2005; Judge 2006; Khanna 2004; Euromonitor 2006; Globescan 2005; Hunt et al. 2007). Some of the hype surrounding metrosexuality may be overdrawn, but the numbers signal that the objectification and subjectification of men are on the move. Thanks to commodification and governmentalization, the male subject has been brought out into the bright light of narcissism and purchase in an epochal reordering of desire: “The Metrosexual isn’t dead, he’s just dead common” (Simpson 2006a).

Of course, national identity comes into play with masculinity in the United States. The period since 2001 in particular has staged this drama via regressive attitudes toward war, toward militarism, toward seeking an “other” who can be blamed for a whole mixture of things involving national security and the state of the economy. We are frequently told that, however unsubtle, there is a justifiable and beneficially unswerving nature to conservative and neoconservative masculinity that has given a certainty and purpose to the country that Clintonian metrosexuality did not, because it was more open, looser, less disciplined. At the same time, it is argued that the world economy would collapse if there were not a continued obsession with consumerism on the part of the citizens and residents of this country, so there’s no doubt that the pro- and antimetrosexual forces within marketing and the bourgeois media confront contradictory complexities. Often the most important of these occurs not at the level of geopolitical rhetoric—“we’ve got to show that we’re macho men”—but at the occupational level of advertising rhetoric: “we’ve got to invent a neediness, a new nerdiness, a new style.” Marketing cannot rest. It never just sits down and says, “Let’s look at how old these people are, where they live, what their religion is and their race and gender.” It can never be satisfied with empirical research. It has to invent (or uncover) new forms of subjectivity on a regular basis—faster than it would be possible for men to change. It has to make itself over.

Like most commodification and governmentalization, metrosexuality has numerous unintended consequences, coalescing with the new neoliberal world of TV to produce the phenomenon of QESG. In the words of the *New York Times*, QESG was a “postmodern television fairy tale” (Finn 2003). *Entertainment Weekly* dubbed it “a full-scale humanitarian relief
mission: Queers Without Borders” (Chocano 2003). But its mission began with “that most suburban (and supremely straight) of vehicles, the family-sized SUV” (Lewis 2008: 67). And that grotesque mobile monument to marketing, a hideous scar of consumption, is as environmentally violent as any equivalent vehicle of capitalism. The show and its kind may not be training the populace at large to legitimize queerness (Friedman 2006). But nor are they responsible for the shambolic nature of US TV. For that we must examine three decades of ill-advised deregulation and the subsequent turn away from the idea of the media as a public trust and toward Wall Street share valuations as the one true measure of their success. At the same time, a country of ghost-fearing, god-bothering Yanquis and alien visitors has embraced a new form of superstition: neoliberal queerness, with a hypercommercial, tolerant worldview.

And the metrosexual’s sculpted features, chiseled waistlines, well-appointed curves, dreamy eyes, administered hair, and casual threat that do not need traditional machismo to electrify? Like beauty and fitness of all kinds, the years will attenuate them. Age will weary them. But marketers will identify new names, new bodies, new Eros, new Euros. The makeover nation is always up for finding ways to remake itself anew.