

CHAPTER 7

# METROSEXUALITY: SEE THE BRIGHT LIGHT OF COMMODIFICATION SHINE! WATCH YANQUI MASCULINITY MADE OVER!<sup>1,2</sup>

TOBY MILLER

[A] metrosexual is a man who wants to be looked at [. . .] a collector of fantasies about the male, sold to him by advertising

Mark Simpson<sup>3</sup>

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 lifestyle makeover, a freshly scrubbed, newly enlightened guy emerges

[bravotv.com/Queer\\_Eye\\_for\\_the\\_Straight\\_Guy/About\\_Us/](http://bravotv.com/Queer_Eye_for_the_Straight_Guy/About_Us/)

ONE MUST PONDER HARD that in an avowedly pragmatic and instrumentalist nation where the vast majority attests to the existence of a devil and individuated angels, 45 percent of people think aliens have visited Earth, 64 percent of adult Internet users (i.e., 82 million Yanquis) go online in search of

spiritual information, three times more people believe in ghosts than was the case a quarter of a century ago, and 84 percent credit the posthumous survival of the soul, up 24 percent since 1972.<sup>4</sup> Yet a major part of the bill of goods offered to U.S. residents is *secular* transcendence, the sense that one can become something or someone other than the hand dealt by the bonds of birth: one alternately loving and severe world of superstition (a.k.a. religion) is matched by a second alternately loving and severe world of superstition (a.k.a. consumption).

This chapter argues that U.S. secular commodity transcendence is undergoing renewal through a major change in the political economy of masculinity, allied to the deregulation of television. Together they 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 treat rather than a threat.

#### METROSEXUALITY

In the 1990s, traditional divisions of First-World consumers—by age, race, gender, and class—were supplemented by cultural categories, with market researchers proclaiming the 1990s a decade of the “new man.” Lifestyle and psychographic research sliced and diced consumers into “moralists,” “trendies,” “the indifferent,” “working-class puritans,” “sociable spenders,” and “pleasure seekers.” Men were subdivided between “pontificators,” “self-admirers,” “self-exploiters,” “token triers,” “chameleons,” “avant-gardicians,” “sleepwalkers,” and “passive endurers.”<sup>5</sup> Something was changing in the landscape of Yanqui masculinity. The variegated male body was up for grabs as both sexual icon and commodity consumer, in ways that borrowed from but also exceeded the longstanding commodification of the male form. The most obvious sign of this 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.”<sup>6</sup>

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 since 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.”<sup>7</sup> The metrosexual has been joyfully embraced by

Western European, Australian, South Asian, Latin American, and U.S. marketers. It was declared word of the year for 2003 by the American Dialect Society, ahead of “weapons of [mass destruction],” “embedded [journalist],” and “pre-emptive self-defense.”<sup>8</sup>

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.”<sup>9</sup> He is said to endorse 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, the metrosexual is a newly feminized male who blurs the distinction between straight and gay visual styles<sup>10</sup> in a restless search “to spend, shop and deep-condition”—and he is supposed to be every fifth man in major U.S. cities.<sup>11</sup> Single straight men now embark on what the *New York Times* calls “man dates,” nights out together with other men 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 a bit too far, other than perhaps in a steak house!<sup>12</sup> 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; and by the end of 2005, close to a million. He even managed to transform characters on *South Park*, which devoted an episode to criticizing the phenomenon in its mildly amusing, banally offensive way. In case men are not sure they qualify, an online metrosexual quiz is available. The average grade of the 100,000 who took it in its first year was 36.5 percent. I scored 54 percent and qualified!<sup>13</sup>

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 it is now “deeply in touch with the Zeitgeist,” because the “new man” needs to display “style, sophistication and self-awareness.”<sup>14</sup> The “Cultural Studies” section of the *New York Times* discerns a fully fledged “democratization of desire,”<sup>15</sup> 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 “[w]omen have come to see exposed male genitalia [. . .] to treat male bodies as objects only.” During the 1998 men’s soccer World Cup, the French Sexy Boys Band, who had been performing in Paris since 1993 to sell-outs, offered strip shows for “les filles sans foot” (girls without soccer/girls who could not care less). The U.S. Chippendales toured across Northern Europe through the spring and summer of 1999 to crowds of women—*The Full Monty* (Peter Cattaneo 1997) writ large, even though some female spectators found the reversal of subject positions far from easy.<sup>16</sup>

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 the male genitals. Worldwide sales of men’s grooming products reached US\$7.3 billion in 2002, accounting for 15 percent of all beauty products sold. *American Demographics* states that “baby-boomer” men allocate US\$26,420 a year on “youth-enhancing products and services,” and women just under US\$3,000 a year more.<sup>17</sup> In 2004, U.S. men spent US\$65 billion on fashion and grooming. ACNielsen issued *What’s Hot Around the Globe: Insights on Growth in Personal Care* that year. A study of 56 countries, it was predicated on the existence of metrosexuality, and it duly discovered that the sector’s key area of growth was shower gels, deodorants, blades, and moisturizers—for men. Euromonitor predicts that the male skin-care market will increase by 50 percent between 2001 and 2006, and Datamonitor expects a 3.3 percent annual increase in skin-care sales to men up to 2008. Men’s antiperspirants outsell women’s in the United States today, for the first time. Body sprays targeted at boys aged ten and up form part of “age compression,” increasing both the sexualization of men and its impact across age groups. Gillette’s Tag was promoted via an auction on eBay for teenage boys to buy a date with Carmen Electra, a married celebrity in her 30s. Hair-color sales to young males increased by 25 percent in the five years from 1998. In 2003, men’s hair-care sales grew by more than 12 percent in the United States, to US\$727 million. Teen boys in the United States spend 5 percent of their income on such products.<sup>18</sup>

Mid-town Manhattan now offers specialist ear-, hand-, and foot-waxing, with men comprising 40 percent of the clientele. Such sites provide pedicures and facials, to the accompaniment of cable sports and Frank Sinatra, and manly euphemisms to describe the various 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, sections that were aimed principally at straights, while Lancôme announced that it had discovered eight differences between men’s and women’s skins, necessitating new products. “The Micro Touch” was released in 2003 as the first “unwanted hair” application for men, organized around a metrosexual campaign. Meanwhile, apologists for George Bush’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 segment of the jewellery market: up to 10 percent of sales as part of executive masculinity. In 2004, Garrad, Georg Jensen, and Cartier all launched comprehensive selections of male jewels.<sup>19</sup>

The metrosexual’s ecumenicism has encouraged white-oriented companies to target Latinos and blacks for the first time. In Britain, he even appeared in diaper commercials—not to reflect the division of child-care labor, but to

appeal to women consumers. The United States now sees 80 percent of grooms actively involved in planning weddings, as never before, and they dedicate vast sums to their own appearance. Banana Republic, a chain dedicated to casual-wear clothing, suddenly found that its catalog contained items worn as business attire and proceeded to establish partnerships with Credit Suisse, Home Box Office, and First Boston, setting up mini-stores that dispensed 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 abandon their appeal to antifeminist, lager-swilling brutes in favor of "the caring lad in cashmere."<sup>20</sup>

The area of plastic, cosmetic, or aesthetic surgery is a particularly notable part of this transformation. Reconstructive surgery was pioneered on male veterans of World War I, most of whom reported the desire for economic autonomy as a key motivation. With the exception of wartime casualties, from the 1940s through to the 1960s, most U.S. surgeons reported treating women, and a few gay men, and pathologized their patients. But the *New York Times* declared "Cosmetic Lib for Men" in 1977, and three years later, *Business Week* encouraged its readers to obtain "a new—and younger—face." This tendency developed to the point where the major U.S. medical journal *Clinics in Plastic Surgery* dedicated a special issue to men in 1991.<sup>21</sup>

The 1990s and the years since have seen the shop well and truly set up. Bob Dole parlayed a political career representing Kansas into lucrative endorsements for Visa and Viagra after a facelift made him telegenic, John Kerry was rumored to have a Botox habit, and U.S. military recruiters began to highlight free or cheap elective plastic surgery for uniformed personnel and their families (with the policy alibi that this permitted doctors to practice their art). American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery figures indicate that more than 6,500 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 percent in a year). Between 1996 and 1998, male cosmetic surgery increased 34 percent, mostly because of liposuction, and 15 percent of plastic surgery in 2001 was performed on men.<sup>22</sup> These 2001 figures from the American Society of Plastic Surgeons specify the distribution across gender of the procedures they performed (table 7.1).

Turning to the American Academy of Facial Plastic and Reconstructive Surgery,<sup>23</sup> we see a 316 percent increase in hair transplants from 1999 to 2001. Fourteen percent of female patients versus 30 percent of male indicate that they wish to undergo surgery for reasons connected to the workplace, a clear sign that men perceive age discrimination on the job. Youthfulness is a key motivation for 50 percent of women and 40 percent of men, dating for 5 percent of women and 10 percent of men. The top five male surgical

Table 7.1 American Society of Plastic Surgeons—2001 Procedures

Procedure	Patients	Male (%)	Female (%)
Breast augmentation	219,883	N/A	100
Breast implant removal	43,589	N/A	100
Breast lift	55,176	N/A	100
Breast reduction	18,548	100	N/A
Buttock lift	1,339	3	97
Cheek implant	8,494	26	74
Chin augmentation	28,736	33	67
Ear surgery	33,107	53	47
Eyelid surgery	238,213	19	81
Facelift	124,531	10	90
Forehead lift	74,987	12	88
Hair transplantation	31,012	90	10
Lip augmentation	23,044	9	91
Liposuction	275,463	18	82
Lower body lift	4,720	N/A	100
Nose reshaping	370,968	37	63
Thigh lift	3,495	3	97
Tummy tuck	58,567	3	97
Upper arm lift	3,241	N/A	100
Total	1,617,113	20	80

procedures (breast, hair, nose, stomach, and eyelid work) were not selected by men two decades ago.<sup>24</sup>

In 2002, U.S. men had more than 800,000 cosmetic procedures.<sup>25</sup> Data from both the American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery and the American Society for Aesthetic Plastic Surgery present popularity rates that are striking, these rates are for botox and collagen procedures, chemical peels, and hair surgery to conceal signs of ageing, and liposuction to reduce body weight, with similar rates of uptake by men and women.<sup>26</sup> Consider the figures in table 7.2. In 2003, cosmetic procedures were up by 33 percent, and 2005 brought the launch of the first magazine dedicated to patients, *New Beauty*.<sup>27</sup>

The new man is being governed as well as commodified. What the *New York Times*<sup>28</sup> calls “the rising tide of male vanity” has real costs to conventional maleness. The middle-class U.S. labor market now sees wage discrimination by beauty amongst men as well, and major corporations frequently require executives to tailor their body shapes to company *ethoi*, or at least encourage workers to reduce weight in order to reduce health-care costs to the employer. In 1998, 93 percent of U.S. companies featured fitness programs, compared to 76 percent in 1992. A 2004 ExecuNet survey of senior corporate leeches aged between 40 and 50 saw 94 percent complaining of occupational discrimination by age. A third of all graying, male U.S. workers in 1999 colored

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Table 7.2 Estimated Number of Patients Treated by U.S.-based American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery Members 2002\*

Procedure	Men Undergoing Procedure		Women Undergoing Procedure		Total Patients	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Abdominoplasty	414	0.3	8,065	1.15	8,479	0.99
Blepharoplasty	5,909	3.68	21,594	3.09	27,503	3.20
Upper lids	5,129	3.19	19,894	2.85	25,023	2.91
Lower lids	3,442	2.14	13,322	1.91	16,764	1.95
Botox	34,410	21.41	205,017	29.32	239,427	27.84
Breast Augmentation	122	0.08	31,096	4.45	31,218	3.63
Breast Lift	—	—	4,843	0.69	4,843	0.56
Breast Reduction	152	0.09	3,472	0.50	3,624	0.42
Buttock Lift	6	0.00	225	0.03	231	0.03
Calf Implants	38	0.02	41	0.01	79	0.01
Collagen injections	10,203	6.35	50,229	7.18	60,432	7.03
<i>Chemical Peels</i>						
Glycolic	13,669	8.51	52,904	7.57	66,573	7.74
Phenol	268	0.17	749	0.11	1,017	0.12
TCA	5,903	3.67	25,687	3.67	31,590	3.67
<i>Total Chemical Peels</i>	19,840	12.35	79,340	11.35	99,180	11.53
Facelift	1,961	1.22	13,517	1.93	15,478	1.80
Fat Injections	3,813	2.37	22,325	3.19	26,138	3.04
Forehead Lift	1,139	0.71	6,743	0.96	7,882	0.92
Genioplasty	1,748	1.09	3,704	0.53	5,452	0.63
Gynecomastia	2,376	1.48	305	0.04	2,681	0.31
Hair Transplant/Restoration	28,715	17.87	3,436	0.49	32,151	3.74
Laser Resurfacing	2,936	1.83	12,457	1.78	15,393	1.79
Liposuction	14,089	8.77	55,901	8.00	69,990	8.14
Malar Augmentation	573	0.36	1,498	0.21	2,071	0.24
Microdermabrasion	14,296	8.90	96,573	13.81	110,869	12.89
Otoplasty	804	0.50	1,072	0.15	1,876	0.22
Pectoral Implants	183	0.11	9	0.00	192	0.02
Rhinoplasty	3,417	2.13	7,206	1.03	10,623	1.24
Sclerotherapy	3,009	1.87	36,859	5.27	39,868	4.64
Thigh Lift	40	0.02	432	0.06	472	0.05
Penile Enlargement	1,919	1.19	—	—	1,919	0.22
Total	160,683	100.00	699,175	100.00	859,858	100.00

\* American Academy of Cosmetic Surgery, 2003.

their hair to counter the effect of ageing on their careers, avoiding 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 percent increase in visits to doctors by patients in search of prescriptions.<sup>29</sup>

Whilst the burden of beauty remains firmly on women, a new trend is unmistakable: the surveillant gaze of sexual evaluation is being turned onto men as never before. It is simultaneously *internalized*, as a set of concerns, and *externalized*, as a set of interventions. *Playgirl* magazine's male centerfolds have undergone comprehensive transformations over the past quarter century: the average model has lost twelve pounds of fat and gained twenty-five 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 any recorded bodybuilder. Similar changes have happened to other dolls, such as *Star Wars* figures. Not surprisingly, in 1997, 43 percent of U.S. men up to their late fifties disclosed dissatisfaction with their appearance, compared to 34 percent in 1985 and 15 percent in 1972. The new century brought reports of a million men diagnosed with body dimorphism and the invention of the "Adonis Complex" by psychiatrists to account for vast increases in male eating and exercise disorders. The psy-complexes refer to "muscle dissatisfaction" among male TV viewers, and 40 percent of U.S. eating disorders are now reported by men.<sup>30</sup>

Clearly we should not assume that progressive change is bundled with metrosexuality. Reifying all is no good substitute for reifying some, while the US\$8 billion spent each year on cosmetics could put the children of the entire world through basic education across four generations. Schwarzenegger's shoes may just register an "upgrade" of service-sector capitalism. And the *Metrosexual Guide* ends with a description of "The Metrosexual Mind-Set: The Bottom Line," which is that "Your life is your own creation." The metrosexual is a neoliberal subject who must govern himself as a new aesthete, generated from shifting relations of power and finance. Such cultural citizens are "more responsible for creating their own individuality than ever before," in the words of Britain's Cosmetic Toiletry and Perfumery Association Director-General.<sup>31</sup>

### TELEVISION

In related developments, since the 1990s, the "pink dollar" has become more and more significant, as the gay media circulated information to businesses about the spending-power of their putatively childless, middle-class readership—*Campaign* magazine's slogan in advertising circles was "Gay Money Big Market Gay Market Big Money"—the mainstream media took notice. The *New York Times* made no references to queerness in its business pages throughout the 1970s, and only occasional—and male-oriented—pieces appeared in the 1980s. But news coverage tripled from 1992 to 1993

and has remained significant, if inconsistent. 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 were coded to appeal to queers, Polygram's classical-music division introduced a gay promotional budget, Miller beer supported Gay Games '94, Bud Light was national sponsor to the 1999 San Francisco Folsom Street Fair, "the world's largest leather event," and Coors devised domestic-partner benefits through the work of Dick Cheney's daughter Mary, supposedly counteracting its antigay image of the past. Advertising expenditure in lesbian publications doubled from 1997 to 2001. On television, we have seen Ikea's famous U.S. 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 "encrypted ads," these campaigns are designed to make queers feel special for being "in the know," whilst not offending simpleton straights). The spring 1997 U.S. network TV season saw 22 queer characters across the prime-time network schedule, and there were 30 in 2000—clear signs of niche targeting. Nineteen ninety-nine brought the first gay initial public offering, while gay and lesbian Web sites drew significant private investment. By 2005, Gay.com and PlanetOut.com had established themselves as the biggest queer affinity portals. They operated via a double appeal. 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 eight million registered visitors and such major advertisers as United Airlines, Citibank, Procter & Gamble, Chase, Miller Brewing, CBS, and Johnson & Johnson. In 2004, Viacom announced that MTV was developing a queer cable network. Investors were animated by the US\$400 billion consumer power, not cultural politics.<sup>32</sup>

Which is where we meet *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* (*QESG*), a successful program that began in the northern summer of 2003 on the Bravo network. Regarded by many as a crucial metrosexual moment,<sup>33</sup> it teaches "the finer points of being a 'metrosexual'" ([bravotv.com/Queer\\_Eye\\_for\\_the\\_Straight\\_Guy/Episodes/207/](http://bravotv.com/Queer_Eye_for_the_Straight_Guy/Episodes/207/)). 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 that are written in post-production, and *ethoi* of Social Darwinism, surveillance, and gossip—bizarre blends of "tabloid journalism, documentary television, and popular entertainment."<sup>34</sup>

The genre derives from transformations in the political economy of television, specifically those that came about as a result of deregulation. When

veteran newsman Edward R. Murrow addressed the Radio-Television News Directors Association in 1958 (recreated in the 2005 docu-drama *Goodnight and Good Luck*), he used the description/metaphor that television needed to “illuminate” and “inspire,” or otherwise it would be “merely wires and light in a box.” In a famous speech to the National Association of Broadcasters three years later, John F. Kennedy’s chair of the Federal Communication Commission (FCC), Newton Minow, called U.S. TV a “vast wasteland.”<sup>35</sup> He was urging broadcasters to embark on 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 to act in the public interest by informing and entertaining, and go beyond what he later recognized as “white suburbia’s Dick-and-Jane world.”<sup>36</sup> They responded by doubling the time devoted to news each evening and quickly became the dominant source of current affairs.<sup>37</sup> But 20 years later, Ronald Reagan’s FCC head, Mark Fowler, celebrated the 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, beyond ensuring its safety as an electrical appliance.<sup>38</sup>

Minow’s and Fowler’s expressions gave their vocalists instant and undimmed celebrity (Murrow already had it as the most heralded audiovisual journalist in U.S. history). Minow was named “top newsmaker” of 1961 in an Associated Press survey, and he 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 it has been efficacious as a slogan for deregulation across successive administrations, and it remains in *Reason*’s pantheon of famous libertarian quotations, alongside those of 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 of its “public responsibilities.”<sup>39</sup> Fowler’s phrase has won the day, at least to this point. Minow’s lives on as a recalcitrant moral irritant, rather than a central policy technology.

Fowler has had many fellow-travelers. Both the free-cable, free-video social movements of the 1960s and 1970s and the neoclassical, deregulatory intellectual movements of the 1970s and 1980s saw a people’s technology allegedly emerging from the wasteland of broadcast television. Porta-pak equipment, localism, and unrestrained markets would supposedly provide an alternative to the numbing nationwide commercialism of the networks.

The social-movement vision saw this 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 “Californian ideology” of community media, much of which quickly embraced market forms. Neither formation started with economic reality. 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 just one set of stations, that is, a comprehensive service. This 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,” part of a tradition that began when in the 1920s CBS set up a radio network founded on news rather than its rival NBC’s predilection for entertainment.<sup>40</sup>

In place of the universalism of the old networks, where sport, weather, news, lifestyle, and drama programming had a comfortable and appropriate *frottage*, highly centralized but profoundly targeted consumer networks emerged in the 1990s that fetishized lifestyle 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 feminised public sphere, should frankly be understood as a cost-cutting measure and an instance of niche marketing. Enter *Queer Eye*.

*QESG* won an award from the Gay & Lesbian Alliance Against Defamation and the Emmy for Outstanding Reality Program in 2004, it has also been heralded as a mainstream breakthrough text for queers.<sup>41</sup> But it embodies the advent of reality TV: originating on cable, an under-unionised sector of the industry, with small numbers of workers required for short periods. This contingent, flexible labor is textualized in the service-industry *ethos* of the genre, this creates “a parallel universe” for viewers.<sup>42</sup> *QESG* looks for male losers in the suburban reaches of the tristate area (New York, New Jersey, and Connecticut) who are awaiting a transformation from ordinary men into hipsters. Cosmopolitan queers descend on these hapless bridge-and-tunnel people, increase in whose marketability as husbands, fathers, and (more silently) employees they are charged with. The program’s success can be understood in four ways. First, it represents the culmination of a surge of U.S. television that presents a sanitary, white, middle-class queer urban world in which queerness is fun, and gays and lesbians are to be laughed with, not laughed 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 lifestyle of practices that can be adopted, discarded, and redispersed 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 U.S. middle-class labor force.

Commodities are central to the secular transcendence that is *QESG*. They elicit desire by wooing consumers, glancing at them sexually, and smelling and looking nice in ways that are borrowed from romantic love, but they reverse that relationship: people learn about correct forms of romantic love from commodities. Wolfgang Haug's term "commodity aesthetics" captures this division between what commodities *promise*, by way of seduction, and what they are *actually about*, as signs of production.<sup>43</sup> For the public, this is "the *promesse du bonheur* that advanced capitalism always holds before them, but never quite delivers."<sup>44</sup> In media terms, the price paid for subscribing to cable or satellite (exchange-value) takes over from the program being watched (use-value).

Jean Baudrillard maintains that all products purchased within capitalist societies involve the consumption of advertising, rather than objects themselves. Such is the contest for newness. The culture industries are central to the compulsion to buy, through the double-sided nature of advertising and "the good life" of luxury: they encourage competition between consumers at the same time as they standardize processes to manufacture unity in the face of diversity. For all the pleasurable affluence suggested by material goods, the idea of transcendence has been articulated to objects. Commodities dominate the human and natural landscape. The corollary is the simultaneous triumph and emptiness of the sign as a source and measure of value. Baudrillard discerns four "successive phases of the image." It begins as a reflection of reality that is transformed when a representation of the truth is displaced by false information. Then these two delineable phases of truth and lies become indistinct. The sign comes to refer to itself, with no residual need of correspondence with the real. It simulates itself,<sup>45</sup> as "human needs, relationships and fears, the deepest recesses of the human psyche become mere means for the expansion of the commodity universe."<sup>46</sup> Commodities hide not only the work of their own creation, but their post-purchase existence as well. Designated with human characteristics (beauty, taste, serenity, and so on), they compensate for the absence of these qualities in everyday capitalism via a "permanent opium war."<sup>47</sup> In Alexander Kluge's words, "the entrepreneurs have 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."<sup>48</sup> *QESG* viewers are led gently toward a makeover that will meld suburban

heteronormativity with urban hipness, as the fly-over states welcome a virtual gay parachute corps. The program's Web site offers 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" ([www.bravotv.com/Queer\\_Eye\\_for\\_the\\_Straight\\_Guy/Shopping\\_Guide/](http://www.bravotv.com/Queer_Eye_for_the_Straight_Guy/Shopping_Guide/)).

### CONCLUSION

In addition to this intrication with commodity fetishism, the trends I have outlined also produce a backlash. Attempts by queer marketers to emphasize the affluence of upper-class, white, male consumers have led to arguments by such groups as the American Family Association that there is no need for public subvention of AIDS research and prevention, or antidiscrimination protections for queers.<sup>49</sup> Cultural critic Richard Goldstein 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, 2001.<sup>50</sup> *American Enterprise* magazine headlined its post-September 11 cover "Real Men, They're Back," and it has been argued quite compellingly that hypermasculinity became not just patriotic but "a G[rand]O[ld]P[arty] virtue." Years later, 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. For Simpson, though, it confirmed the onward march of the commodity—after all, even NASCAR marketers were now promoting it metrosexually. Meanwhile, *Foreign Policy* magazine nominated the European Union as "the world's first metrosexual superpower" because it "struts past the bumbling United States on the catwalk of global diplomacy," and public-opinion data indicate that this aura of sophistication leads to majorities around the world seeking greater European than Yanqui influence in foreign policy.<sup>51</sup>

Some of the hype surrounding metrosexuality may be overdrawn, but the numbers indicate that objectification and subjectification are on the move. Thanks to commodification and governmentalization, the male subject has been brought out into the bright light of narcissism and purchase—a comparatively enlightened culture of consumption. These trends register an epochal reordering of desire. Like most forms of commodification and governmentalization, it will have numerous unintended consequences. It has coalesced with the new neoliberal world of TV to produce the phenomenon of *QESG*. A country of ghost-fearing, god-bothering Yanquis and alien visitors has embraced new forms of superstition: neoliberal queerness. Watch this space.

## NOTES

1. "Yanqui" is the term used by progressive Latin Americans and Latino/as within the United States to refer to the United States adjectivally, given the absence of a suitable alternative—"American" describes over twenty different countries, and it is inaccurate and, to many, offensive to appropriate it for one nation.
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