

A QUEER EYE FOR AGENCY

THE MANIFESTO

Armed with swatches, style and sass, the impeccably coifed quintet of *Queer Eye For The Straight Guy* entered the living rooms of heterosexual America (literally) with a mission to turn the stylistically-challenged into near-paragons of “fabulosity“- and with noticeable success. Running well into its 2nd season, Bravo’s hit series has given straight men something neither their partners nor mothers could ever provide: an augmented **AGENCY** over how to best represent themselves with tools provided by fellow men (albeit genetically better manicured). Once limited to a litany of ill-fitting options best reserved for Neanderthals (and freshman dorm rooms), these metro messieurs can now confidently strut into an enhanced version of themselves, newly equipped with a rainbow palette of options over accessories and *apertifs*.

What makes *Queer Eye* a delight to watch (with pen and paper on hand, right people?) is that our goal is not to change a person’s identity, but to guide (okay, dictate) participants through a wider range of lifestyle choices than were previously known. Furthermore, in this consumer society of **TECHNOLOGICAL SOMNABULISTS**, we help these hapless heteros by illustrating the reasons behind our recommended purchases rather than allowing them to concede consumption-consciousness to convenience and trends. Granted the transitions are often painful, much like my mama’s **BROCOLLI APPROACH** to child-rearing (“Darling, I know little boys aren’t supposed to prance on stage in skintight lycra, but I tell you it’s good for you” - oh how I owe her!); however, the resultant rebirth of our straight boy’s self-worth (say it with me, “I am worthy of pedicures and clean pores“) makes the occasional bleeding all the more worthwhile.

Dare I say (and dare I will) that what we have unfolding is a revolution of **CULTURAL AND SOCIAL NORMS**: a more tangible equality of the sexes where the appreciation for the personal aesthetic (some may say the “burden of beauty”) is no longer borne exclusively by society’s femme fatales. Furthermore, our goal is a cultural shift in the **AFFECT HUERISTIC** that governs a typical man’s emotionally-guided miscalculation over the supposedly adverse effect exfoliating will have on his perceived masculinity. Many men (gay and straight) carry strong **AVERSION TO RISK** when it comes to their socially perceived identity: trying something new, even if the benefits outweigh the perceived loss of familiarity, usually gives way to “safer” options that appear to guarantee against a loss of machismo (“Manicures are so gay. I’ll surely loose my drinking buddies if they find out I get facials after brunch every Sunday”).

Our goal is not to turn men into women, nor straight boys into homo-divas; neither is the show about getting in touch with one’s “feminine side” (trust me, there’ll be more than enough feminine touching once you’ve gone through our program). This is a celebration of masculinity in its most refined form: open-minded, considerate and sexually-secure men who have come to appreciate the frustrating liberation (or is that liberating frustration?) of discovering and asserting one’s own sense of style.

In many ways, this is a also a reclamation of the Culture **COMMONS** for the common man; a “Robin-Hooded” assertion that the appreciation of foreign film, ability to pronounce “*chateaux*,” and looking good in paisley (well, maybe not paisley) are not luxuries reserved for queens (insert pun here), but elements of a healthy creative culture that is itself a **PUBLIC GOOD** that should remain in the public domain. Some would say that allowing the common man to participate in “high” culture (which to me sounds more like an issue with substance abuse) would dilute the value and integrity of art - a **TRAGEDY OF THE COMMONS** that will result in a mass grazing of the cultural meadows

that will lead to its utter ruin. However, culture and the practice of art (at any and all levels) are not limited resources; through a collective **GIFT ECONOMY** predicated on collaboration for the greater good, art and design comprise a **COMMONS CORNUCOPIA** where value increases as more people participate in their simultaneous creation and consumption. Much like the ever-enhanced, open-ended software products built through the **OPEN SOURCE** philosophy of communal knowledge-sharing, culture is the kind of resource that is far greater than the sum of its parts.

Through the reverse-**PANOPTICON** of reality TV, we acknowledge that by allowing our millions of viewers to observe the transformation of just one specimen, we are in effect also serving the **PUBLIC INTEREST**. After all, a **CAPITALIST SOCIETY** is better served when its gender norms are less restrictive and its flailing skincare economy is bolstered by a new market. While we may easily be accused of rampant **PRODUCT PLACEMENT** (yes, everything you see in our show is commercially available), allow me now to pronounce that no company has ever paid the Fab Five to endorse one product over another. Our recommendations are based solely on a careful assessment of whether this brass door knob or that pair of aviators actually make sense for our client. However, we do realize that there are palpable **EXTERNALITIES** to even the most personal of consultancies: what item gets recommended (and in our case, televised) will be all the more likely to end up on someone's Christmas list. However, at the end of that day, the **MARKET VALUE** of aromatherapy massage or a well-decorated reading room is subsumed into the **OVERALL VALUE** of respite and reflection. The *cost* of a day in a spa may amount to \$150, but the *value* of pampering away the health-averse qualities of stress is, to quote the Mastercard, *priceless*.

Having consumed products without pause nor reflection, **TECHNOLOGIES** may **SEEM LIKE FORMS OF LIFE** that have evolved into things that have defined us rather than reflect who we are; however, when we use technology, we must always remember that they are first and foremost

personal **PROPERTIES** that we have purchased and therefore govern (repeat after me, “I control my cell phone. I can choose not to take a call. My property does not regulate who I am”). So no matter where you heard it from (although better if it was from us), make sure what you cook and how you upholster your ottoman asserts who *you* are, not who you *think* you should be - that, ladies and gentleman, is what having a Queer Eye is all about.

AGENCY : THE NEW BLACK

I once said that I hated the word *fashion* because it implied a *fashionable* philosophy reliant on trends that make a boy scout troop leader look like a backup dancer for Cher. Remember that while there are social costs to a fashion faux pas (think Bjork and the infamous “swan”), there are far more palpable costs when we sacrifice our sense of self to follow the crowd. When you buy a suit, for example, the **TRANSACTION COST** doesn’t start nor stop at the cash register: beyond the gas spent on driving between your house and the department store, there are hidden costs and returns attached to how confident you feel when, say, speaking to a Halliburton board meeting while wearing a classically tailored European cut versus a lime-green, eight-button, polyester number from the set of *Shaft*. To paraphrase an old adage, while the man makes the clothes, the clothes make the man- and what he is trying to convey- *stronger* and more effective (like a superhero’s sidekick, or a bullhorn on full blast).

Navigating the seasonal **EMERGENCE** of fashion trends can be very overwhelming: belts, buckles, loafers, shades, pinstripes, no stripes, half or full Windsor, tuck it in or keep it out (I mean your shirt, boys). Collectively, fashion items that were manageable on their own have amassed a greater complexity when merged into one monolithic concept of “the look.” We’ve all come across the trend **BOTTLENECK** (which is different from a trendy turtleneck, which looks great under a suede sport coat, but I digress). Like a flock of silver Miatas drifting through the Santa Monica freeway

during Christmas rush hour, trends clog up the primed-and-pressed pipeline, distracting and inhibiting you from getting to where you really want to be: a guiding principle that yields confidence in a style that is all your own.

So what are these guiding principles you ask? To answer this, allow me to borrow from the narrative **CONTINUITY SYSTEM** of **CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD CINEMA** that has governed the representation of cinematic time, space and causality from the early days of black and white *Casablanca* to the animated marvels of *Finding Nemo*. Few would deny that there exists an almost synergetic relationship between fashion and film, particularly in the US market (where would our worst/ best dressed lists be without a red carpet premiere?); apparel design itself is guided by time-tested (and contested) rules of shape, color and texture that, like the continuity system, offer creative strategies for meeting and challenging consumer demands.

Borrowing from the Hollywood principle of **CONCEALED ARTIFICE**, my clients learn that our modes of self-representation (i.e., your opal-crested cufflinks or the *lingonberry* brochettes you serve with the 1977 Bordeaux) should never draw attention away from the driving, governing narrative (i.e., YOU). Like a computer-generated special effect or a camera technique used in a well-crafted film, your designer choices should be used to *support* what you say and how you act, not dictate it; in other words, technology should leave you the way you were always meant to be: the star!

HIP TIP : USING CONNECTMATE

Here's a marvelous little miracle that has saved my dimpled derriere more times than should be legally possible: when in a couture crisis, turn to *ConnectMate*, a fascinating new mobile-phone service from the makers of *MobPizza*. Once used exclusively by Sicilian mafia heads and Afghan war lords, this fairly inexpensive software download allows you to locate a reputable stylist within seconds

of that award banquet through your mobile phone. Need a date to go along with that vintage CoCo Channel? *ConnectMate* also allows you to link-up with hundreds of your fellow fashionistas within a five-block radius. Thanks to *ConnectMate*, I found one of our participants a mauve-hued velvet pantsuit with matching Swedish twins named Sven and Ivor in time for the Tom of Finland awards banquet (oh wait, that was me!).

Concerned about your privacy? *ConnectMate* comes complete with data encryption services that allow users to screen who is trying to connect with them before agreeing to meet up (kind of like an advanced form of caller I.D.). With marketing companies eager to hunt you down with new product launches, your once **INALIENABLE RIGHT** to **PRIVACY** has become rather **ALIENABLE**- a precious commodity that can be, at your choosing, converted to sellable **PROPERTY**. My advice would be to never let your personal shopping history be sold to the retail store nearest you. Protect your privacy while you can and *connect!*

BIOMETRIC BRULEE

In our last book, I took a slight culinary risk and blamed the French. Since I have not been banned from entering Charles De Gaul (the airport, not my ex-boyfriend), I now take the liberty of blaming the English. While there are many things to appreciate about the British Isle (any archipelago ruled by a Queen and able to spawn Hugh Grant can't be all that bad), bad weather and bland cuisine are sure to make anyone board a ship in search for their taste buds. Granted, they do know how to Spice up a few pop stars here and there- though it would take a miracle for them to escape the country without a veritable strip search. For England (or more specifically, London) is now a gated community.

Taking their adoption of *Big Brother* reality TV a bit too far, the British have enclosed

themselves in a hedge maze of **BIOMETRIC**-enhanced closed-circuit television cameras that scan and quantify unique physical characteristics while matching them with **RELATIONAL DATABASES** that merge disparate data archives into comprehensive criteria for identifying the bad guys. In the manic desire for security, Londoners run the risk of turning from an **OPEN SOCEITY** (where people are provided freedoms over self-representation and movement without perpetual verification of identity) to a far less desirable **TRANSPARENT SOCEITY** predicated on an invasive **DATAVEILLANCE** infrastructure that seeks to predict behavior by analyzing streams of personal data.

But what does this have to do with food, you ask? Well, given the evident restrictions to the exercise of agency in a surveillance society, I would like to offer the culinary realm as a site for quiet civil disobedience. A society ruled by security cameras will likely restrict the cross-migration of people and cultures who, out of fear of being wrongly associated with a terrorist cartel, will likely head to friendlier states. Should the day come when all suspected ethnic groups are deported en masse and all that is left are the pale, pink perpetrators of preemptive prejudice (how's *that* for alliteration!), one bitter consequence would be the gradual transition from *tapenade* to tasteless, *brulee* to bland. There is simply no better way to experience an unfamiliar culture first hand (and to wake up a dozing palette) than to explore the wonders of international cuisine. And while one would be hard pressed to defend a recent purchase of anthrax as not connected to terrorism, shopping for hummus and salted seaweed wraps (should they still be available) is far easier to excuse.

So when the neighborhood becomes one giant set off of *Big Brother* and it becomes normal to walk across a Soviet-style check point to get into your boudoir, grab a dash of paprika, fold those *samosas*- and you just might last through the virtual strip search with you agency (partially) intact.

ESSENTIALS GUIDE

Daydreamer Design 2.0

This useful and stylish product allows you to record and download your dreams, memories, fantasies and nightmares about being trapped in an elevator with a band of homicidal circus mimes into a comprehensive design inspiration board. Using the newly launched dream sequencer, users can draw creative cues from their untapped subconscious. Don't worry, it's *your* dream, your recording-essentially, your intellectual property. Just be sure to **COPYRIGHT** your brilliant design concepts so you can maintain not only ownership, but also some level of control over how your creative work negotiates the parameters of **FAIR USE**. Just remember, once your designs have been revealed to the public, copyright or not, it does become something other creative types can parody or, better yet, use to educate.

But then again, thanks to the **DIGITAL MILLENIUM COPYRIGHT ACT OF 1998**, your property rights have just been secured an additional twenty years! So revel in your ability to sue those liberal neophytes with charges of **PIRACY** should they dare to "use" your work without compensating you. Not that WE think any of you, our dear readers, would ever do such a thing. You do believe in **FREE CULTURE**, after all? You do agree in keeping all creative works and informational resources in the public domain, don't you? If not, mail us a note and we'll be sure to send Carson back with a basket full of fresh cut broccoli.

FINAL EXAM KEY TERMS

1. Agency
2. The Commons
3. Copyright
4. property
5. Cultural/social norms
6. Externalities
7. Technological Somnambulism
8. Digital Millennium Copyright Act of 1998
9. Technologies as forms of life
10. Open Source
11. Panopticon
12. Public Interest
13. The Broccoli Approach
14. Classical Hollywood Cinema
15. Continuity System
16. Capitalism/Capitalist Economies/Capitalist Society
17. "Cinema of concealed artifice"
18. Affect Heuristic
19. Risk Aversion
20. privacy (as a commodity)
21. biometrics
22. open society vs. transparent society
23. relational database
24. dataveillance
25. Product Placement
26. Emergence
27. Bottleneck
28. Transaction Costs
29. The doctrine of fair use
30. Property
31. Piracy
32. Free Culture
33. Tragedy of the Commons
34. Cornucopia of the Commons
35. Public Goods
36. Alienable vs. Inalienable
37. Gift Economy
38. market value vs. other types of value