Inside out: men on the Home Front

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Abstract

This paper examines the representation of men as domestic experts in British lifestyle television programmes. It considers contemporary representations of the home, locating these in relation to changes in British primetime programming where a movement towards hybrid TV forms appears to rearticulate the mission to 'inform, educate and entertain' and to transform private matters into public spectacle. The paper examines the ways in which contemporary representations of the male domestic expert struggle to negotiate perceived boundaries between the 'inside' of private space and the 'outside' of the public sphere and between the categories of femininity and masculinity. It argues that in the homes and gardens series, *Home Front*, the figure of the designer provides a significant contemporary rearticulation of the male dandy, and aestheticism and camp become key strategies for the redefinition of the home and of masculinity as matters of lifestyle.

Key words:

Lifestyle, genre, home, television, masculinity, dandy, camp, *Home Front*

'We take it for granted that every woman is interested in houses…Men are forever guests in our homes, no matter how much happiness they may find there.' (Elsie de Wolfe, 1913, quoted in Forty, 1986:104)

'the desire for the beautiful home is assumed to be women's desire' (Ros Coward, 1984:64)

No place like home

As the statements above suggest, the representation of the home is marked by a strong association with women and with femininity. De Wolfe's book, The House in Good Taste, written at the beginning of the twentieth century, summarizes what had become common-sense in 19th century debates which concluded that the home was the natural place and instinctive interest of women, and that homemaking in all its forms was a feminine skill. Ros Coward's analysis of late twentieth century interiors magazines uncovers the same assumption. The magazines are addressed to and aimed

at a female readership, they present articles about other feminine concerns such as fashion alongside their features on stylish interiors, and in both they encourage an identification of women's bodies with homes, and of women's identities with the development of style. The home also becomes a showcase for the display of possessions, a space of entertainment, and a sign of the heterosexual couple's shared tastes and style.

Coward's critique reveals how, in the late twentieth century, the ideal home is increasingly represented as an arena for processes of self-fashioning. The contemporary ideal of femininity promoted in interiors magazines replaces earlier depictions of women as housewives with ones which stress the pleasures of individual consumption and the cultivation of image, a development which is reflected in women's magazines generally (Winship, 1987). As Coward also indicates, interiors magazines of the 1980s show the beginnings of a shift in which this ideal is promoted as a possibility for stylish men. This movement towards overlapping ideals of femininity and of a generalized modern consumer is increasingly evident not only in contemporary interiors magazines, but in fashion and lifestyle magazines aimed at male and female readerships. Today, both women and men are addressed as image-conscious consumers and the representation of the home as a stylish space has moved from the margins of popular culture to its centre.

This address must be understood in the context of the development of consumer culture and of the significance of consumption for modern and postmodern societies (Bourdieu 1984, Featherstone 1991, Lury 1996, Slater 1997). Contemporary consumer culture involves specific ways of understanding and experiencing the self, social relations and everyday life. 'Lifestyle' becomes an important means of signifying 'individuality, self-expression, and a stylistic self-consciousness' (Featherstone, 1991:83). Everyday life is spectacularized and 'aestheticized'. The exercise of taste becomes a key means of producing social and cultural relations, articulating the class position and aspirations of individuals and groups. New 'cultural intermediaries' increase in importance because of their ability to provide advice and guidance on matters of style and image creation (Bourdieu, 1984). These developments work to displace or challenge earlier notions of consumption as a *feminine* concern.

The processes by which men are addressed as consumers have been analysed in some detail where these relate to fashion retailing, grooming products and men's magazines (Mort 1996, Nixon 1996, Edwards 1997, Jackson et al 2001, Benwell et al 2003), but relatively little attention has

been paid to the ways in which the home has taken on new significance in relation to masculinity and consumption. Analyses of these processes show that the recasting of men as consumers is not a straightforward or easy business because it does violence to established categories of gender and the ways these have been related to a division between the private and public spheres. The cultural unease generated by the representation of the sensitive, narcissistic 'new man' in the 1980s and the aggressive, politically incorrect 'new lad' in the 1990s demonstrates that new representations of masculinity do not arise unproblematically or easily from social and cultural changes – and that their construction and reception involves a struggle over meaning. Indeed the success of the new lad figure has been seen as particularly successful in selling consumer culture to men precisely because it manages this struggle so satisfactorily for its intended audience – because it is 'predicated upon a wider understanding of masculine identity and "lifestyle"' (Edwards, 2003:142) and has found an acceptable way of giving young working-class men permission to 'use moisturiser, dress up and go shopping without appearing middle-class, effeminate or homosexual' (Edwards, 2003:144). Aspects of a 'new lad' style have found their way into popular media which focus on the home too – most notably in the presentation of British TV cooks such as the very popular Jamie Oliver, but this does not appear to be a key trend for re-presenting masculinity in relation to the home. In this paper I will examine the emergence of male domestic experts as cultural intermediaries and as figures of masculinity, and explore how these work to negotiate existing notions of gender and to express and embody aspects of consumer culture. I will argue that although a range of masculinities is on show in lifestyle media, the figure of the dandy and the use of camp are particularly useful for making sense of the ways in which a struggle over the representation of the home is currently played out.

Since the 1980s the genre of interiors magazines which Coward describes has grown considerably, a fate that specialist DIY publications aimed at a male readership have not enjoyed. The market for advice on the masculine skills of DIY appears to be shrinking, just as it is for instruction on the feminine skills of homemaking. Instead, there is a proliferation of glossy interiors magazines which rework earlier representations which depict the home as a woman's space or a site for do-it-yourself projects as a 'haven' and a space for the expression of 'authentic behaviour' (Forty, 1992:108) in the form of fashion statements. 'Do-it-yourself' and homemaking are redefined as 'home enhancement' (Mintel, 99), the labour implied in both is replaced by an emphasis on the pleasures of

transformation, and the home is represented as a stylish cocoon for the tasteful consumer. Alan Tomlinson has argued that the contemporary domestic ideal is that of 'home as personalized marketplace', the site of 'an unprecedentedly privatized and atomized leisure and consumer lifestyle' (Tomlinson, 1990:68). This observation is borne out by increased consumer spending on decoration rather than repairs, and a media 'obsession' with home improvements (Mintel, 99) which borrows heavily from the discourses of fashion and beauty rather than those of DIY instruction or housewifery. Interiors magazines present domestic spaces and objects of desire much as fashion spreads display the adorned body, and the language of fashion (elegance, funkiness, 'the new white') is frequently appropriated. Like fashion and beauty magazines, contemporary home improvement publications offer the reader a guide to the creation of a 'look' and encourage a pre-occupation with self-improvement and the development of taste. They share a fondness for narratives of transformation which are articulated in the 'before' and 'after' shots of makeovers. While there are variations in the ways that the content and the reader are gendered by these magazines, a general movement towards a mixed gender address is apparent within the genre. This development is consistent with the extension of matters of style and taste as issues for male consumers in men's magazines and with the movement of images of the transformed body and home from the margins of mainstream media to its centre.

In this paper, my aim is to examine the ways in which the private space of the home has become a form of public spectacle, not only in interiors magazines, but on primetime TV where decorating is 'hipper than sex' (Joseph, 1997:18) and the transformed home has become a key image for a culture dominated by a lifestyle ethos. My particular concerns are the ways in which contemporary representations of the ideal home struggle to negotiate perceived boundaries between the inside of private space and the outside of the public sphere and between the categories of femininity and masculinity. I will argue that this struggle is evident across the TV genre of lifestyle and within individual interiors programmes such as the UK's Home Front, achieving a precarious balance in the representation of male domestic experts such as Home Front's presenters, Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen and Diarmuid Gavin.

Lifestyle on TV

Television programmes which deal with homes and gardens are not a new phenomenon. Charlotte Brunsdon points to an older 'instructional' genre as the origin of contemporary home and garden programming, originally focussed on the acquisition of gardening, cookery or

dressmaking skills and addressed to the ‘amateur enthusiast’ (Brunsdon et al, 2001). It is only recently that this kind of programming has shaken off its old-fashioned 'hobby' image, becoming, along with other lifestyle programmes, the ‘defining genre’ of the 90s (Medhurst, 1999:26).

This new kind of programming embodies many of the characteristics ascribed to consumer culture more generally; it is focussed on personal issues of aesthetics and taste, it stresses spectacle and hedonism, it encourages the cultivation of a consumer sensibility and a concern with the development of an individual ‘lifestyle’. The address to an amateur enthusiast in search of instruction has been replaced by one which focuses on commodities, ‘looks’ and makeovers; typically, for example, there is a move away from the patient and sober cultivation of DIY techniques and towards the instant and emotional transformation of the home. Lifestyle programming may also be seen as a response to the wider changes in broadcasting where the proliferation of channels has created space for new and preferably cheap programmes, and where familiar distinctions between daytime and primetime, or education and entertainment appear to be disintegrating. Like other contemporary TV genres such as the docusoap, lifestyle programmes are also hybrid in form, and like the docusoap they blur the boundaries between fact and fiction, instruction and entertainment, the ordinary world and TV. For example, the popular British DIY programme, Changing Rooms, is a hybrid ‘leisure-based game show’ (Payne, 1998:29), focuses on home makeovers, features celebrity designers and viewers, and turns the homes of ordinary people into makeover settings for TV as the members of two households transform a room in each others’ homes. These makeover programmes are also interesting in terms of their representation of gender and sexuality; they are notably ‘macho free’ (Medhurst, 1999: 27), show a relatively high proportion of gay viewers, and favour the depiction of camp men. They are remarkably popular. The format of Changing Rooms, which started out small on the UK channel, BBC2 in 1996, has been sold around the world and has become a huge prime time success in Europe, Australia, New Zealand and the US. The growing popularity of home and garden programmes is demonstrated by their visibility on many mainstream TV channels and in the development of lifestyle channels such as Living TV in the UK and Home and Garden TV in the US.

In Britain, as in other countries, there is now an extensive range of such programmes on terrestrial and satellite television. The traditional magazine ‘hobby’ format (Gardener's World) has survived, but it is supplemented by programmes which emphasize quick-fix low

budget solutions to everyday DIY problems (DIY SOS) and those which feature expensive and extensive design projects (Home Front in the Garden), programmes which treat interior design as the extension of individual and idiosyncratic tastes (Fantasy Rooms) and others which see the transformation of the environment as a public spirited community project (Charlie's Garden Army). The new crop of home and garden programmes has created celebrities and sex symbols out of presenters such as Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen, Charlie Dimmock and Diarmuid Gavin, an indication of the current fashionability and prominence of this kind of programming and one which seems to confirm the suggestion that homes and gardens now connote stylishness, 'image' and pleasure.

Of all the new home and garden programmes, Ground Force and Changing Rooms have been the most successful in attracting high ratings and public attention, moving from their original slots on BBC2 to become popular primetime fare on BBC1. Both are leisure based game shows combining information and entertainment and replacing realist and instructional modes of presentation ('how-to' make or repair something) with those of melodrama and spectacle. Suspense and surprise are central to both; home and garden are transformed swiftly and in secret by teams of celebrity experts working alongside ordinary people. Constraints of time and budget add a strong sense of challenge and urgency to the projects and the climax of both programmes centres on the 'reveal' of transformed room or garden to its owner. As Charlotte Brunsdon notes, what is also revealed in this moment are 'some transformations in the national story British television narrates', in particular, the revelation of the ordinary as 'a public display connected to the domestic and personal, often accompanied by bursts of emotion' (Brunsdon, 2000). This moment of revelation might be taken to stand for a significant trend in media representation which can be traced through the movement of the lifestyle genre from the margins to the centre of British TV. This generic shift in which fashion, cookery, interiors and gardening programmes have replaced more traditional primetime fare is part of a wider shift in programming towards hybrid genres and forms (infotainment, docusoaps, reality TV) which transform the private, the ordinary and the everyday into public and extraordinary moments of entertainment.

The new centrality and popularity of hybrid TV genres has been the subject of public concern about ‘dumbed down’ programming in Britain, Australia and the United States, much derided in all three countries as representative of a ‘tabloid trend’ on television (Lumby, 1997:118). Key to this trend, Catherine Lumby argues, is a 'tendency to blur the lines between the public and private spheres' (Lumby,

1997:132) and between ordinary people and celebrities. Lumby argues that this trend 'only highlights a tendency already inherent in global mass-media culture' (Lumby, 1997:122) where public and private boundaries are eroded by media technologies and by women's invasion of a public sphere hitherto occupied by men and associated with masculinity. In this process, 'women's issues', the private, the body, family, emotions, appearance, relationships and gossip, are re-articulated in the media as matters of public interest. There is 'a new integration of forms of public and private interaction which used to be clearly separated' (Bondebjerg, 1996:29). In the case of lifestyle TV notions of the public sphere and public service broadcasting are redefined, information and entertainment are combined, and the sites and pleasures associated with femininity are opened up through a mixed gender address (Moseley, 2001). At the same time, the personal and ordinary becomes a form of public and extraordinary spectacle. This spectacularization of the personal is particularly noticeable in makeover programmes such as the fashion show, Style Challenge, where, through the staging of a 'moment in the mirror' (Moseley, 2000: 306), the participant first glimpses their transformed reflection in front of an audience. This emotional moment, replicated in the 'reveal' of the transformed home or garden in programmes like Changing Rooms and Ground Force, collapses private and public space and the distance between the ordinary person and televisual spectacle. Moseley argues that this moment, the 'key trope' of the makeover genre (Moseley, 2000: 307), is both deeply pleasurable and powerfully uncomfortable, hence the retreat to a safe position of sneering superiority by many commentators.

Not all lifestyle programmes privilege this moment of revelation to the same degree. As Moseley suggests, the format employed, for example, in the early series of BBC2's Home Front tended to favour the tasteful display of design objects over emotional displays of transformation. The revamping of Home Front as a 'quality' home and garden makeover programme presented by two male celebrity designers represents an interesting development of the lifestyle genre because of its attempt to spectacularize *and* dignify an interest in homes and gardens. It is this attempt, supported by the development of a specific form of masculine presentation that I will focus on in the following discussion.

Home Front, Inside Out

As Moseley argues, the original Home Front format differed from other home and garden makeover shows because of its 'emphasis on restraint, taste and design' (Moseley, 2000:302) and its relative lack of interest in human drama

and emotion. Although the series, presented by Tessa Shaw, did feature some makeovers, these were presented alongside demonstrations of decorative techniques and projects for viewers to carry out at home. This format, clearly drawing on elements from the earlier instructional leisure genre, also involved some attempt to recast an interest in interiors as a *design* issue, thereby linking itself to the more respectable arts programme.

In 2000, Jane Root, the BBC2 controller, announced the channel's intention to further concentrate on the production of 'expertise-led', 'documentary based' lifestyle programmes with 'stronger narratives' and 'more depth'. This shift towards lifestyle 'programming for grown-ups' (Robins, 2000:9) may be seen as an attempt to capitalise on the popularity of makeover shows and docusoaps and on the celebrity status of new designers, while developing these within a more serious and credible format.

The key features of this shift can be seen most clearly in the contrast between BBC1's Changing Rooms and BBC2's revamped Home Front, Home Front: Inside Out. The star-led leisure based game show, Changing Rooms, fronted by TV celebrity, Carol Smillie, pitches designers and ordinary people together in a low-budget race against the clock (£500 and two days to transform a room) with some rather temporary looking results. The new Home Front replaces the presenter, Tessa Shaw, with designers, Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen and Diarmuid Gavin, and documents their transformation of a client's room and garden from initial brief to finished project over a more leisurely three-week period and with a substantial, undisclosed budget. Unlike the relatively simple structure of Changing Rooms which moves between the two households as they work on their makeovers, the story of the Home Front transformations are told in a variety of ways - there is CCTV footage of the clients, voiceovers by the designers, footage of the building work as it is carried out, video diaries of the process by the clients, a range of discussions between clients, builders, project manager and designers, visits to shops and garden centres and instructional asides from designers on a particular design style, period, or technique. An hour long, big budget production, Home Front offers a 'quality' version of the cheap and cheerful makeover show and is the televisual equivalent of stylish interiors magazines such as Wallpaper and Elle Decoration. The moment of revelation which in Changing Rooms is condensed into the expression of delight or horror on the participant's face as their madeover room is revealed is also played out quite differently in Home Front. While the client's reaction is still an important part of the Home Front makeover, the camera lingers more

lovingly on the finished design itself than it ever does on the face of its happy owner.

Changing Rooms and Home Front are clearly part of the shift towards the representation of the home as a stylish space and of the new hybridity in television broadcasting. Both involve some reconfiguration of the private sphere as a public spectacle through the transformation of the ordinary and both open up gendered spaces and activities ('masculine' DIY and more particularly, the 'feminine' makeover) through a mixed gender address. However, Home Front's presentation of home enhancement as a matter of *design* emphasises taste and expertise to a greater degree than Changing Rooms and the prominence of its designer-presenters makes the male domestic expert far more central to its representation of the home. It is the designers' relationships with houses and with each other that emerge as the real focus of the narrative. Laurence and Diarmuid present, thereby establishing their voices as the voice of the programme, while their expertise as designers underscores their authority. These dual roles allow them to move between all stages and locations of the project. Their arrival and departure marks the beginning and end of the programme, their journeys between the client's house, specialists' workshops and inspirational buildings punctuate the narrative of the build, and it is they who step outside the home to offer authoritative accounts of the Art Deco movement or the history of the English romantic garden. Only the designers can travel between the 'inside' and 'outside' of the project, from the immediate task of choosing bathroom fittings through visits to bathroom specialists, inspections of period fittings in grand buildings, a history of bathrooms in Europe and back again. The strong narrative and 'depth' of the programme is constructed through this movement between inside and outside. The client's fantasy is fulfilled through the purchase of objects for the home and garden, domestic space is connected to the public spaces of shops, museums, stately homes and gardens, and the cultivation of its style is placed within an historical context. In the process, the emotional and spectacular pleasures of the makeover show are framed by a re-presentation of home and garden as spaces for cultivated self-expression, while elements of instructional presentation are infused with the ethos of arts programming. In its new format, Home Front addresses the viewer as someone who wants to know how to redecorate their bedroom, needs to be shown how to appreciate good design and expects to be diverted in the process. This form of address acknowledges the pleasures of transformation, the acquisition of skills which earlier instructional programming offered, and the cultivation of knowledge which arts programming suggests, re-articulating all of these as matters of *taste*.

By relating the ‘inside’ of the home to the ‘outside’ world and reinterpreting domesticity as a design issue, Home Front works to dignify a preoccupation with the home and with consumer culture. The client’s desire for a new kitchen and somewhere in the garden to entertain friends is re-presented as a quest for self-expression, knowledge and style. The use of designers to both mediate and represent this dignifying process depends on their expertise to elevate ‘feminine’ interests in the home and appearances and ‘masculine’ do-it-yourself prowess. Like the many other cultural intermediaries who populate lifestyle media, Laurence and Diarmuid carry some authority in this respect; they act as arbiters of taste and guides for the consumer. However, Laurence and Diarmuid’s status as designers marks them out as more special than other style experts; they are not merely commentators, but *practitioners* of design and the programme consistently emphasises their artistic talent, vision and understanding of design principles, movements and history. In Laurence’s case this is emphasized most frequently through references to his fine art training while Diarmuid’s expertise is framed in terms of instinctive and artistic flair. The ways in which the presentation of Laurence and Diarmuid combine elements of style expert and design practitioner mark a site of struggle within Home Front over the status of lifestyle concerns.

Laurence and Diarmuid may be understood as contemporary versions of the dandy in their commitment to 'living out the aesthetic principles of personal design' (Chaney, 1996:152), in the process transcending 'established social hierarchy' and pioneering 'a new form of public display…in new types of public space' (Chaney, 1996:153). The figure of the dandy is clearly appropriate for an understanding of the ways in which expertise in matters of style and taste has become central to contemporary consumer culture, yet the extent to which this is accorded status, authority and respect is both limited and contested. The dignifying of lifestyle concerns as a site for the expression of refinement and ‘culture’ is an uneasy process because these still signify as trivial, private - and feminine - matters. What is more, the figure of the dandy carries dangerous connotations of effeminacy and homosexuality, almost unavoidably highlighted in the presentation of male aesthetes with a strongly marked interest in the home. While the new Home Front has been at pains to distinguish itself from other makeover shows with its stress on quality, education and taste, it has not been exempt from criticism of its ridiculous designs and flamboyant presenters. Interestingly, subsequent series have chosen to make its designers even more central to the programme, both emphasizing Home Front’s design credentials

and respectability and focussing on the presenters' personalities and relationships in ways which seem to highlight their foppishness. These emphases are the site of a struggle over the status of lifestyle concerns and of new TV genres which aim to 'inform, educate and entertain'. They are also the site of a struggle over the development of consumer masculinity and over the representation of the home as a gendered space.

Re-gendering the home

As Forty argues, the nineteenth century redefinition of home as 'haven' linked the middle class domestic sphere with women and with femininity (Forty, 1992). The private space of the home was represented as the antithesis of work and public spaces, symbolising virtue, emotion, authenticity and love. An ideal of middle class women as 'angels' in the home supported this construction of the domestic as the moral heart of the nation and of women as the guardians of qualities which could not survive in the harsh industrial world outside. This was complemented more prosaically by an emphasis on women's role as homemakers, overseeing the running of the household and responsible for its appearance. The notion of homemaking as a feminine attribute, both as a form of service and as an expression of womanly skill and personality, was reiterated in sermons, journalistic writing and domestic advice manuals throughout this period.

Though Forty stresses changes in the significance of the home, from nineteenth century representations of it as a place of beauty and morality to its twentieth century incarnation as a model of health, efficiency and 'scientific' motherhood, the earlier connotations of homemaking and of 'a woman's touch' endured. But increasingly, in contemporary consumer culture, the home is presented as an important site of self-expression for both women and men. The 'feminine' worlds of fashion, beauty and the home are opened up to men, acquiring new centrality and changing status within the culture.

This renegotiation of gender can be seen in the re-presentation of feminine and domestic concerns as material for public consumption on primetime British TV. While some popular hybrid programmes like the sports/quiz show, They Think It's All Over or the sports/comedy show, Fantasy Football League represent masculinity as resolutely 'laddish' (Whannel, 2000), there is also evidence of a display of 'softer' masculinities, particularly in programmes focussed on the home. For example, popular US imports feature presentations of the lovable, domesticated 'wildman', Ozzy Osbourne, in reality show, The Osbournes, and of 'fab' gay style guides in Queer Eye for the Straight

Guy, while home-grown lifestyle programmes favour sensitive new men like the gardener, Dan Pearson or the designer, Oliver Heath and a rather camp, flamboyant type represented by designers like Laurence Llewellyn-Bowen and Graham Wynne. It is notable that many of these new representations are hybrids which work to contain and reconcile a number of gendered oppositions. For example, while the presentation of older lifestyle experts depends heavily on traditional notions of masculinity and femininity – the cookery expert Delia Smith is a sober, reliable domestic creature while Keith Floyd is a hedonistic adventurer – the gendered presentation of young male celebrity chefs like Gary Rhodes is more complex and the televising of his culinary journeys around Britain work to construct him as the site of a number of oppositions, between, for example, a united Britain and its regional differences, between traditional and 'authentic' and modern and adventurous approaches to food. (Strange, 1998). As a man who also performs the traditionally feminine work of a cook, Rhodes' presentation has a further opposition to deal with, one that Strange argues is resolved by the assertion of his masculinity through flirting, physical labour and 'hunting' (Strange, 1998:307). In a similar way, the presentation of the very popular 'Naked Chef', Jamie Oliver, presentation can be understood in terms of a re-negotiation of oppositions, as Rachel Moseley (Moseley, 2001) suggests. While many aspects of Jamie's presentation draw on 'new man' discourses which re-present masculinity through the embracing of feminine qualities such as sensitivity and affection, skills such as caring for children and interests such as relationships and the home, he is also constructed as a 'lad', notably through his cheeky, youthful and energetic style. As Moseley points out, this re-negotiation of gender extends to the aesthetic strategies and the construction of spaces employed in Jamie's programme, The Naked Chef. Jamie's 'softness' is often presented through 'harder' documentary or pop video styles emphasizing roughness, realism and urbanity, while the domestic space of his own home becomes a place not only for cookery, couples and family gatherings, but a party space and somewhere for the lads to hang out. Like Gary Rhodes, Jamie is constantly dashing, his journeys between the space of the home and of the city streets work to reconnect private and public spaces, and 'it is partly in the relationship between inside and outside, domestic and public, that the newness and complexity of his representation in terms of gender lies' (Moseley, 2001:38).

The characterization of new lifestyle celebrities like Gary Rhodes and Jamie Oliver involves a re-negotiation of traditional gender categories and of contemporary discourses of masculinity, chiefly through a precarious balancing of oppositions, of femininity and masculinity,

new man and lad, hard and soft, inside and outside. This attempt at balancing suggests tensions and dangers in the proposition that 'real lads *do* cook' (Moseley, 2001:32), just as the categorization of style issues as the province of gay men suggests a difficulty in bringing male heterosexuality and lifestyle together in Queer Eye for the Straight Guy. However, the emergence of male celebrities as appropriate figures to represent such domestic concerns as cooking and decorating implies that insofar as these can be represented as matters of style, taste and expertise rather than domestic labour it is successful. In Queer Eye, this move from the 'drab' and 'culture-deprived' straight world to the 'fab' gay world of 'style, taste and class' (Bravo TV, 2004), simultaneously works to make straight men over as consumers and to reinforce their masculinity – their new-found stylishness is almost always rated in terms of their improved success with women. This rearticulation of gender depends on the construction of masculine hybrids who are able to successfully re-invent themselves through their consumption practices. In the following discussion I will discuss how Home Front re-articulates gender, space and identity through the way it deals with oppositions of 'inside' and 'outside', through its concern with the development of taste and style, and in its representation of the male designer as a dandy.

Home Front and the Dandy

As I have argued, Home Front's emphasis on the figure of the male designer may be understood in terms of an attempt to produce 'grown up' lifestyle TV which dignifies low status and feminine concerns with the private, the ordinary and the home by framing these in relation to the grander concerns of public service broadcasting, arts programming and the pursuit of expert knowledge. However, this figure is itself a hybrid; an educator, art expert and design practitioner who is also an entertainer, style guru and celebrity presenter, and its hybridity is indicative of info-tainment genres, lifestyle and the uncertain status of both on contemporary TV. This is clear from the opening sequence of the programme in which the designers arrange a collection of house and garden items against a plain white backdrop. This sequence, in which home and garden are represented as empty space to be filled by designers' props certainly establishes the centrality of the designer rather than the domestic space of the client. Yet the way in which it does this makes use of a presentational and aesthetic style which, far from referencing the authority of the serious arts programme, relies on a rather camp re-interpretation of it. The presence of a clearly female, though 'abstract' assistant (a shape coloured the blue of television invisibility), the self-consciously stagy manner of presentation, the jaunty musical accompaniment and the

arch smiles of Laurence and Diarmuid at the end of the sequence seem to locate the programme in relation to its 'low' origins in daytime TV and to a feminine domestic sphere, while offering an ironic re-presentation of it. By acknowledging the low, feminine, domestic connotations of the interiors programme while relegating these to near-invisibility, the sequence attempts to re-negotiate a new space for the programme in relation to the televisual oppositions of daytime and primetime, and to the broader cultural opposition of a feminine, domestic sphere and a masculine, public sphere. That it does this through aesthetic strategies which offer an ironic nod and a wink to the trashy, the marginal and the feminine distinguishes Home Front from the cookery programmes I have discussed. Where these balance domestic concerns and masculine 'softness' with laddish modes of presentation and gritty, edgy styles, Home Front combines its preoccupation with lifestyle, spectacle and transformation with a self-conscious appreciation of their low status, and elsewhere in the programme with an attempt to dignify them. This range of styles and presentational strategies which the programme employs, and in particular, the hybrid characterisation of the designers, are central to an understanding of the ways in which Home Front attempts its revaluation of a concern with the home.

Like other lifestyle programmes, Home Front is characterised by hybridity. There are elements of earlier instructional programming in sequences where the designers demonstrate 'how to' achieve effects. Home Front's status as a makeover show is expressed in the contrast between grainy CCTV footage of the client's ordinary, everyday life and the swooping, lingering, dissolving shots of the transformed home, while its use of documentary style combined with humour and drama suggest a docusoap (Coles, 2000). While serious design concerns are emphasized through educational modes of presentation, the project itself is given 'human interest' through an emphasis on conflicting personalities, emotional encounters and developing relationships. The relationship between Laurence and Diarmuid is presented as a source of friction, humour and in later series, growing affection, and tensions between the designers and their clients are used to add drama to the narrative. Drama also comes in the form of obstacles; in many episodes heavy rain interrupts the projects, while last minute-hitches and the impending deadline work to create suspense. As the opening sequence of the programme indicates, Home Front also displays a fondness for tongue-in-cheek set-pieces, often featuring Laurence in costume and occasionally making use of special effects; Diarmuid materialises like a Star Trek character, while Laurence is shown delivering a lecture (on the subject of mauve, 'the new lilac') to an audience made up entirely of other

Laurences. This is consistent with the tendency of new info-tainment genres to mix styles and blur categories, and in the case of Home Front, it serves to highlight the role of the designer as a hybrid figure who informs, educates and entertains.

As the programme has developed, information has been increasingly supplanted by education and entertainment. Instruction is replaced by serious modes of presentation which characterise the designers as expert educators combined with playful and entertaining modes showing them camping it up and messing about. Both types of presentation also emphasize the centrality of the designers to the programme as the focus moves from the client's relationship with their home to the role and relationship of the male designers.

The hybrid figure which the male designer presents can usefully be understood as a contemporary version of the dandy, as I have indicated. As Susan Sontag argues, 'the dandy is the 19th century's surrogate for the aristocrat in matters of taste' (1990:288), providing a model of the refined and discerning connoisseur of culture and of 'the quest for special superiority through the construction of an uncompromising lifestyle' (Featherstone, 1991:67). An 'iconic image of modernity' (Chaney, 1996:6), the dandy may also be seen as an important model for the individual in contemporary consumer culture in which distinctions of taste, the pursuit of individual 'style' and the construction of lifestyles have become paramount. The seriousness with which these concerns are treated in Home Front stems partly from their centrality in contemporary culture, but is also an effect of the uneasiness which underlies the extension of tastefulness to the masses and of a continuing association of mass and also feminine culture with vulgarity. In this sense, Home Front's redeployment of the dandy-designer may be understood as an attempt to re-impose good aesthetic standards and to educate and guide its audience in the pursuit of an 'uncompromising lifestyle'. The home and an interest in its enhancement is effectively rescued from its hitherto marginal position in the culture, from its connotation of a private, feminine sphere and from the trashy and trivial status that modern lifestyle concerns still carry. The connection of the inside of the home to an 'outside' of art and culture and the elevation of the contemporary individual to a position of 'special superiority' appears as a further extension of the designer's ability to makeover and transform.

Seriousness functions as a means of rescue and transformation in Home Front, but this is combined with a playfulness which is articulated chiefly through the

programme's use of camp. Camp, as Sontag remarks, is 'a variant of sophistication' (1990:275) and more specifically, 'the answer to the problem: how to be a dandy in the age of mass culture?' (1990:288). The hybrid nature of the Home Front designers derives partly from the changing nature and significance of the dandy in contemporary culture. The refined aestheticism of the earlier dandy figure clearly informs the serious and educational role that Home Front's designers play, while their use of camp signals their function as playful entertainers. It also represents a response to the problem which Sontag identifies. The modern dandy is a 'Camp connoisseur' who takes 'ingenious pleasures' in the 'art of the masses' and 'appreciates vulgarity' (Sontag, 1990:289). Home Front's use of camp functions in a number of ways. It is another means of signifying taste and sophistication, implying a 'knowingness' which allows the designers to acknowledge their low subject matter, in the process transforming that acknowledgement into a sign of discernment. This self-consciousness provides a more contemporary form of connoisseurship which makes possible the appreciation of the vulgar and thus provides an additional means of rescuing lifestyle concerns. Home Front is concerned precisely with salvaging concerns of low status and it achieves this both through serious forms of presentation which elevate them and through more playful, self-conscious modes which send them up. When Laurence delivers his lecture on mauve he effectively combines the two, appearing to suggest that there is no necessary contradiction between the serious (knowledge, passion, good taste) and the playful (frivolity, flippancy, camp). A precarious balance of the oppositions which underlie Home Front's reconfiguration of the home on television is achieved here. Yet this balance also marks the uneasiness of Home Front's attempt to promote lifestyle concerns within the framework of the public service broadcasting mission to inform, educate and entertain and within the wider context in which the home still signifies as a marginal, private and feminine concern.

Fairies and Gnomes

The figure of the male designer is absolutely central to Home Front's representation of the contemporary ideal home. A contemporary version of the dandy, this figure is defined by his ability to transfigure the ordinary and make over reality and this is clearly crucial for his role in transforming the status and gendering of the domestic sphere. The male designer is also a remarkably well-balanced creature who combines his expertise with playfulness, his artistic talent with homemaking and DIY skills and his location in the domestic sphere with a very public role. This balancing of oppositions in the person of

the designer works on a range of levels; as a means of reconciling the domestic inside with the public outside, as a means of re-articulating the public service broadcasting mission to inform, educate and entertain, and as a reformulation of gendered roles and characteristics. It is also evident in the programme's use of space, its employment of various presentational styles and its hybridity as I have shown. However, this balancing act is also the site of uneasiness, not least about masculinity. The construction of masculinity in Home Front is worked out principally around variations on the dandy figure, through the conflicting masculine styles of the two designers and in the development of the relationship between them.

Although the reworked figure of the dandy is highly appropriate for the transformation of domestic concerns into matters of style and lifestyle into quality TV, the connotations of effeminacy and homosexuality evoked are problematic for the representation of contemporary masculinity. As male aesthetes, Laurence and Diarmuid both signify to some extent as effeminate. However, as in the presentation of other new figures of consumer masculinity, this problem is worked out through the negotiation of oppositions in masculine style, chiefly through a contrast between the two designers. A series of oppositions are apparent in Laurence and Diarmuid's characterisation. Laurence is identified with Culture, with the city and with 'indoors', whereas Diarmuid is identified with Nature, the countryside and the 'outdoors'. Certain other characteristics which are often played up in the programme serve to emphasise these differences – Laurence's Englishness appears to ally him with the other design experts involved in Home Front projects, while Diarmuid is Irish like the project managers employed to oversee the building work. In addition, Diarmuid's regularly expressed pleasure in planting, soil and getting his hands dirty contrasts with Laurence's understanding of his expert role as one which allows him to leave the actual 'work' to others. Laurence's expert status is further emphasized through references to his art school education and his paintings, whereas Diarmuid's training is rarely mentioned. A client comparing the two describes Laurence as someone who 'thinks a lot' and Diarmuid as a designer who 'works from his soul', a perception echoed by Diarmuid in his characterisation of Laurence's design technique as research based, 'level headed' and soulless compared to his own 'instinctive' approach. Laurence's ability to maintain an ironic distance from the design process and his articulate assessments of the each project can also be contrasted with Diarmuid's emotional involvement and, particularly in early episodes, a relatively inarticulate mode of presentation.

These kinds of differences work to associate Laurence with the mind and Diarmuid with the body, oppositions which have historically been coded as masculine and feminine. Other characteristics which the designers display work rather differently to suggest an opposition between the two in which it is Diarmuid who emerges as the more masculine figure, through a contrast between his forthright manner and plain appearance and Laurence's more 'girly' flamboyance, his fondness for clothing, shopping and gossiping and his ability to empathize, compromise, charm and reassure. Or as they put it themselves, Diarmuid is a 'gnome' while Laurence is a 'fairy'.

By recombining gendered characteristics within the programme, some semblance of balance is achieved, much as it is in the presentation of Jamie Oliver in The Naked Chef. However, whereas Jamie appears to successfully combine masculine and feminine attributes in his own person and derives his 'soft lad' masculinity from an interplay between new man and new lad figures, the gendering of the Home Front designers is worked out through their developing relationship and drawn with reference to the figure of the dandy. In many ways, this relationship takes the form of a romance and offers a further opportunity for the working through of the effeminacy and homosexuality which the dandy figure implies.

The development of the designers' relationship can be traced as a grudging, growing mutual affection which is worked out through the educational sequences which allow them to embrace their roles as aesthetes and through the entertainment sequences in which the designers make increasing use of camp style. Early episodes of Home Front emphasized the unlikely pairing of the two men as an 'odd couple' and the 'big potential for a designer strop' implicit in the presenters' banter, playfighting and disparaging remarks about each other's efforts. In later episodes, the banter is replaced by flirtation and the designers' frequent compliments on each others work. As Laurence and Diarmuid begin to understand and appreciate each others designs and ways of working, they grow to like each other too. The programme's increasing emphasis on the role of the designer as an educational guide serves to underline the presenters' embracing of the aesthete role and provides one way of transforming and dignifying their implied effeminacy as a sign of expertise and style. The use of camp is more interesting still, for it allows the presenters to acknowledge the gay connotations of this style and to send them up too. Camp becomes more central to Home Front as the romance between Laurence and Diarmuid develops, not only as a sensibility which informs the programme, but as a design style which informs their work. It also acquires an increasingly positive meaning within

the programme, a development which can be traced through the designers' use of the term, 'ponce'. This term is initially used as an insult in an episode when Diarmuid dismisses a painting by Laurence as 'poncy' and 'awful'. But when camp design becomes the explicit focus of a later episode, its meaning is transformed. Diarmuid's experimentation with camp style leads him to conclude that if 'camp is the enemy of taste' then 'taste is the enemy of creativity' and in later episodes he declares that, 'I'm actually the bigger ponce'. Camp functions here as another means of salvaging what is discredited and appears to bring about a shift in the relationship of the two designers which is increasingly presented as playful and affectionate. While their embracing of the aesthete role allows them to salvage their effeminate interest in the home as culturally 'good', their deployment of camp allows them to make the 'ultimate Camp statement: it's good because it's awful' (Sontag, 1990:292). It makes possible the salvaging of the implied 'awfulness' of their ponciness which becomes another way for them to resolve their differences and indeed, another measure of their sophistication, for it allows them to acknowledge the gay subtext of their relationship in an ironic way which sends it up and refuses to take it seriously.

The use of aestheticism and camp in Home Front may be understood as an extension of the balancing act carried out in the representation of lifestyle masculinity on TV. I have argued that this can be best understood in the context of a consumer culture which is making over masculinity across a range of sites. These makeovers work to disturb existing notions of gender and the relation of gender to public and private spheres. Such disturbances have been particularly noticeable around the male body as it has been reconfigured as a site for self-fashioning through consumption and the pursuit of style and re-articulated with reference to new hybrid figures of masculinity such as the new lad. A focus on the home as an arena for masculine self-expression is now also apparent and this is also articulated through hybrid figures who must somehow negotiate the oppositions of soft and hard, man and lad, gay and straight, inside and outside. It is notable that these figures are haunted by a cultural knowingness whether this takes the form of designer camp or new lad irony. This rather self-conscious balancing act is currently being played out in a range of cultural forms, but it is now particularly visible on lifestyle TV, given the current prominence and popularity of this kind of programming. In Home Front, this balancing act is a means of salvaging concerns and identities which carry low – feminine, gay, domestic – status in the wider culture, elevating these as signs of an 'uncompromising lifestyle' and a 'special superiority', and simultaneously sending them up as

trivial, ‘awful’ things. In both cases, lifestyle and a dandified form of masculinity emerge as a site of stylishness and a knowing sophistication. Though these retain a certain danger which is marked throughout the programme’s format, style and characterisation of its presenters, they appear as very contemporary, very appropriate resolutions to recent transformations in public broadcasting and in the more widespread makeovers of masculinity, domesticity and consumption.

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