

ABSTRACT

Title of Document: THE LINEAMENTS OF PERSONALITY:
ESQUIRE AND THE PROBLEM OF THE
MALE CONSUMER.

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The male consumer has proven problematic for historians of consumer culture and gender. By approaching consumption as the expression or by-product of gender identity, historians and other commentators on gender fail to account for consumer culture as an important site where difference is itself constituted through the goods we purchase, the items we desire and the worlds we imagine. To this end, the male consumer becomes problematic when prevailing historiographic models construct him solely as a rational, goal-oriented purchaser of goods or as an amoral libertine who rejects responsibility for fleeting pleasures. Both approaches are untenable since they rely upon a problematic rhetoric of gender essentialism. What I argue for instead is an approach that places consumption within the unsettled discursive practice of gender. In this sense, the problem of the male consumer speaks in part to a larger issue in historiography, namely how we historicize pleasure and desire. My work on *Esquire* in the period from 1945-1965 attempts to address this gap by

examining the role of cultural intermediaries in developing a discourse on socially legitimate forms of consumption.

Against the background of the misogynistic “Masculinity Crisis” rhetoric, the postwar mass culture debates and a nascent counterculture, *Esquire* transformed itself from a crude men’s magazine to one of America’s premier periodicals. Between 1956 and 1963, *Esquire* published work by such distinguished figures as Richard Rovere, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., Norman Mailer, Saul Bellow, Dwight Macdonald, Paul Goodman, Diana Trilling, Terry Southern, and Nat Hentoff. During this same period, *Esquire* also ran monthly fashion spreads, service articles on the newest consumer goods, travel advice columns and an annual Christmas gift guide. Through the figure of the “Uncommon Man,” the name given to the magazine’s imagined reader, and the rhetoric of the “New Sophistication,” *Esquire* attempted to negotiate the tension inherent in its contradictory parts. Drawing on research in cultural and intellectual history, gender theory, material culture studies and the sociology of culture, my dissertation investigates how *Esquire* opened a discursive space in which men could simultaneously construct themselves within and outside of consumer culture.

THE LINEAMENTS OF PERSONALITY: *ESQUIRE* AND THE PROBLEM OF
THE MALE CONSUMER.

By

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Dedication

For Mary.

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Introduction: The Problem of the Male Consumer

Section I: An Introduction to Esquire

In the early 1980s, my father purchased a subscription to *Esquire* as part of the cost of entering the Publisher's Clearinghouse Sweepstakes. When a new issue arrived at our house, my father would rarely read it, opting instead for the latest issue of *Life* or *Time* (also purchased through the Publisher's Clearinghouse). I, on the other hand, became an eager reader of *Esquire*. Though I admit much of what I read was beyond my teenage sensibilities, I still remember looking through the magazine and enjoying it at a visual level. To this day, I have strong memories of the advertising and the fashion spreads, particularly Ogilvy and Mather's scandalous Paco Rabanne campaign. Having grown up in a middle-class household in an ethnic working-class suburb of Detroit, the images of conspicuous consumption that ran throughout the magazine were fascinating, foreign and alluring. Yet, for my father, *Esquire* ran counter to his conception of "man at his best." In short, discussions of mid-life crisis, leather pants, impotence, Yves Saint Laurent, cocaine, Tom Robbins, the East Village art scene, and supply side economics had little bearing on his sense of what manhood was. Instead, his conception of manhood looked to more traditional sources like the Army, work, fraternal organizations and (especially) the Catholic Church for guidance. Not surprisingly, the subscription to *Esquire* ran out in due time and was not renewed.

If I were to describe my father's feelings toward *Esquire*, it would be one of profound ambivalence. Some twenty years later, the magazine's market research offers up a clue to the root of his ambivalence. The typical *Esquire* reader at the beginning of the 21st century is male, in his late forties, married, has an expendable annual income of over \$47,000 dollars, is either a professional or in upper management, is interested in the arts and current affairs and is an avid consumer of clothes, technology and spirits. He is, as the *Esquire* Media Kit sums up, an affluent, educated and successful man who values "quality over fleeting trend."¹ This profile of the typical *Esquire* reader has remained surprisingly consistent for the past half-century. Undoubtedly, my father's ambivalence was rooted in his alienation from *Esquire*'s class-based masculinity. By no means was he among the "working wealthy" that the magazine spoke to.² More importantly, the magazine's obsession with consumer goods had little relevance for a man who bought his clothes off the rack, used Aqua Velva and enjoyed having beers with his friends at the local bar. As far as my father was concerned, an obsession with tailoring, fragrance or viniculture seemed frivolous, pretentious and unmanly.

My father is certainly not alone on this count. Despite the recent emergence of the Metrosexual and the Hip-Hop Playa (both advocates of conspicuous hedonistic consumption), the sense that consumer culture is the realm of women and homosexuals is

¹ *Esquire* Media Kit, <www.Esquiremediakit.com>.

² *ibid.*

thoroughly ingrained in how some men think about gender roles and gender difference.³ If we examine what consumer behaviour researchers, pop psychologists and mass media pundits have to say on the subject, we quickly find widespread agreement that men are uncomfortable, even powerless, as shoppers and that the department store and the shopping mall is a foreign and inhospitable land. Furthermore, when men do shop, the experts tell us, they practice a thoroughly rational, utilitarian and value-centered form of consumption.

Historians have largely accepted this logic by observing a division between men and women that understood consumption as a woman's activity. While this paradigm has been challenged by some feminist historians who argue that such models are uneven in that they do not address the experience of working-class and minority women, the reigning model that locates consumer culture squarely within women's experience has become part of the conventional historical wisdom.⁴ For historians of masculinity, this conventional wisdom is problematic on two counts. First, it treats the consuming male as either an aberration or as the rational Other to the irrational female consumer. Secondly,

³ The British journalist and cultural commentator Mark Simpson is widely credited with the invention and popularization of the term. In what was apparently the first use of "Metrosexual," (*The Independent*, 15 November 1994), Simpson describes the Metrosexual as "a commodity fetishist: a collector of fantasies about the male sold to him by advertising." The narcissism and image-consciousness of the Metrosexual, Simpson continues, is reliant upon many of the same designers and periodicals central to Nixon's study. See Simpson, *Male Impersonators: Men Performing Masculinity* (New York and London: Routledge, 1994). Where the Metrosexual projects an ambiguous sexuality, the Playa's display of "bling" is unapologetically heterosexual to the point of misogyny. The Playa is the latest descendent in a long line of flashy African-American male styles. See Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998) for a history of pre-World War II style.

⁴ Susan Porter Benson, "Consumer Cultures." In *A Companion to American Women's History*, edited by Nancy A Hewitt (Oxford, UK and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 2002), 274-294.

it avoids thinking about how gender difference is produced through the *gendering* of consumption. Rather than being the by-product of essentialist rationalism, male discomfort with consumption is instead one aspect of the process through which hegemonic masculinity is asserted. As the historical analysis of consumer culture continues to expand, we are slowly seeing a growing interest in a more complex understanding of gender and consumer culture.

The present study builds upon this work by suggesting that the male consumer presents historians and other scholars of gender with a unique opportunity to think about the centrality of consumption to identity. What I refer to as the “problem of the male consumer” is both a theoretical problem that asks us to reconsider how we think about gender and a methodological problem that seeks to rethink how historians approach the practice of consumption. In particular, I ask how we can rethink the male consumer as a hedonistic consumer, that is, a consumer who finds pleasure not only in the goods he consumes but in the physical and psychic practice of consumption as well.

The concept of the hedonistic consumer is most closely associated with Colin Campbell’s *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism*.⁵ Campbell asks how hedonistic consumerism could function within a capitalism that is characterized by Max Weber’s well-known Protestant Ethic paradigm. Suggesting that consumption is characterized by an “inexhaustibility of wants” that is antithetical to the level-headed rationalism Weber privileges, Campbell posits that the austerity of the Protestant Ethic

⁵ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumerism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987).

was supplemented by a hedonistic Romantic Ethic. Both, Campbell maintains, were crucial to “the legitimation of an essentially ‘bourgeois’ way of life.”⁶

Campbell’s analysis begins by asking why the conventional historical and sociological accounts of the emergence of 18th century British commerce evade any sustained discussion of the nature of consumption. In his examination of the work of Neil McKendrick and Harold Perkins and their attempts to explain the genesis of the “consumer revolution,” Campbell acknowledges that both argue for the centrality of demand as the driving force of this revolution. Yet Campbell finds their accounts “wanting.” As he continues, both McKendrick and Perkins rely on a model

which places the emphasis upon emulation, and yet no good reason is given to explain why people should have become more actively emulative at this time...It may well be that if demand was the key to the Industrial Revolution, then fashion was the key to demand, but as yet no adequate explanation for either the origin or functioning of that phenomenon has been offered.⁷

Campbell further refines his argument in the following chapter when he suggests that the central lacuna in the aforementioned texts is that, “the central role played by changed values and attitudes is not properly explored.”⁸ For Campbell, this must necessarily include a discussion of consumption as hedonism.

For Campbell, the complete satisfaction of wants and needs is a chimera. He pointedly recognizes that our conception of a product and its imagined effect will never be commensurate with its reality. Thus, consumers are left in a frustrating cycle of

⁶ *ibid*, 137.

⁷ *ibid*, 34.

⁸ *ibid*,36.

idealization and disappointment. However, rather than condemning consumer culture, Campbell suggests that modern consumption is characterized by an “illusory hedonism”; that is, a constant drive towards pleasure and satisfaction. Thus the potential for bitterness is assuaged by a “daydreaming” which constantly reproduces “a continuing longing, from which specific desires repeatedly spring.”⁹ Modern consumption for Campbell is best understood as an ideology which speaks to the potentialities of the future; what can be as opposed to what is.

Crucially, this involves considering the ways in which hedonistic consumption is negotiated within the prevailing norms of hegemonic masculinity. It is important to point out at this juncture that my aim here is not to posit hedonistic consumption as a form of cultural resistance. My interest in hedonistic consumption and the male consumer is less about proscribing “solutions” to hegemonic masculinity than it is about coming to terms with how men are constructed, constricted and encouraged as desiring, consuming subjects.

Masculinity, like femininity, is not a stable or singular identity. There are multiple ways of being a man. Moreover, race, class, and sexuality further complicate the reducibility of gender to a monolithic binary.¹⁰ To this extent, R. W. Connell argues for a relational approach to gender in which hegemonic, subordinated, complicit and marginalized masculinities exist. Because Connell’s theory of hegemonic masculinity relies on a Gramscian theory of hegemony, the power of the Hegemon is neither fixed nor

⁹ *ibid.*, 95.

¹⁰ Robert W. Connell, *Masculinities*, Second Edition (Cambridge: Polity, 2005), 67-87.

uncontestable. For Connell, hegemonic masculinity exists to answer “the problem of patriarchy, which guarantees (or is taken to guarantee) the dominant position of men and the subordinate position of women.”¹¹ Therefore, what counts as a “real man” is always subject to change as hegemonic masculinities interact with other forms of masculinity and femininity.

As Connell continues, hegemonic masculinity relies upon an “exemplary masculinity” to regulate the boundaries of acceptable masculinity.¹² Media, in this case, plays a central role in the cultural work of articulating the boundaries of hegemonic masculinity. Though Connell does not discuss consumer culture directly, it is clear that how men shop and what they buy are also indispensable elements of the symbolic regulatory function exercised by exemplary masculinity. As men clothe their bodies, maintain their appearance through exercise, body products and cosmetic surgery and surround themselves with material goods, they look to mediated images of masculinity in their project of constructing the self. Thus, an analysis of how cultural intermediaries frame, produce and articulate masculinity is as vital to our understanding of the male consumer as the activities of actual male consumers. This is, in the final analysis, an historical question. If we accept Connell’s assertion that masculinity is relational and provisional, then we accept the need to reject the question “what does it mean to be a man?” in favor of the time-bound “what did it mean to be a man in this specific historical context?” It also means making some crucial decisions on the role of agency, structure

¹¹ *ibid*, 77.

¹² *ibid*, 214-215.

and subjectivity within the historical narrative. This tension is especially evident in the historical analysis of consumer culture where the object of study is at once a lived practice and a way of thinking about the world. For the purposes of this study, my aim here will be to scrutinize the historically specific discourse of cultural intermediaries in the formation of male subjectivities. It is here that we turn our attention to *Esquire*.

Founded in 1933 by Arnold Gingrich, David Smart and William Weintraub, *Esquire* is the oldest general interest magazine for men currently in publication.¹³

Though the magazine has gone through numerous changes in ownership, editorial leadership, appearance and editorial philosophy over the past seventy-plus years, it has for the most part retained an active interest in championing a well-rounded, well-dressed and well-versed model of ideal masculinity. In articulating the magazine's ethos,

¹³ To date, only two book length historical treatments on *Esquire* exist: Hugh Merrill's *Esqy: The Early Years at Esquire* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995) and Carol Polsgrove's *It Wasn't Pretty Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun? Esquire in the Sixties* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995). Merrill and Polsgrove discuss what are arguably the two most important periods in *Esquire*'s long and storied history. Despite their various strengths (namely, exhaustive research), both studies are plagued by problems common to journalism history as written by journalists. For both authors, there is a tremendous emphasis on recreating historical scenes to understand what individuals were experiencing or thinking. Polsgrove, for example, engages a technique where through exhaustive research she recreates conversations she was never part of. Furthermore, Polsgrove's account verges on hagiography in its suggestion that *Esquire*'s success in the sixties was directly reducible to Hayes' idiosyncratic vision and temperament. Merrill does much of the same in his account, though there the subject is founding editor Arnold Gingrich. This is not to say that these studies are without value. Polsgrove is particularly useful for understanding the internal dynamics of *Esquire*'s editorial department as it struggled to produce a magazine that was highly critical of the Johnson administration's handling of the war in Viet Nam while at the same time convincing advertisers not to desert the magazine. Nevertheless, Polsgrove and Merrill cannot resist the reporter's temptation to tell a riveting story populated by interesting characters. Certainly, these are well-written books. What goes missing, however, is interpretive critical historical analysis. Despite their best attempts, neither author is able to explicate *Esquire*'s importance to cultural and social history. Unlike Mary Corey's exemplary *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1999), Polsgrove and Merrill struggle when forced to dispense with personalities and confront cultural sensibilities. This was particularly true of their approach to masculinity. In the final analysis, Merrill and Polsgrove have little more to say about the subject than to state that men gravitated to *Esquire* because it suited their tastes.

Esquire's current tagline "Man at his Best" leaves no doubt that a mastery of the consumer marketplace is a unassailable aspect of masculine identity. This indeed was part of the Gingrich's vision when he founded the magazine in 1933. Complaining that the editors of women's magazines had convinced advertisers to all but give up on the male consumer, Gingrich saw *Esquire* as an advocate for a new breed of urban men who took leisure, appearance and sophistication seriously. It is this vision that has guided *Esquire* for much of its seventy-plus year history.

The period the present study will examine, 1945-1965, is notable mainly for *Esquire*'s dramatic shift in editorial philosophy beginning in 1956. *Esquire* entered the postwar period publishing racy pin-ups, second-rate detective stories and sensationalistic exposés. By the end of the fifties, *Esquire* abandoned the pin-up for the fine art photography of Bruce Davidson and Richard Avedon, replaced the detective story with fiction by John Cheever, Saul Bellow and Terry Southern, and published serious non-fiction by Richard Rovere, Dwight Macdonald and Norman Mailer. This dramatic sea change in editorial philosophy was underscored by an unsettled cultural landscape marked by a burgeoning postwar consumer culture, a contentious debate over mass society, the gestating women's movement and the nascent counterculture, all of which significantly contributed to debates on the meaning of masculinity. If *Esquire* was "The Magazine for Men," as it claimed, what did this mean at this particular historical juncture, particularly as the magazine radically redefined its editorial philosophy in the late fifties? How did it defend its redefinition of masculinity from misogynistic and homophobic attacks on one hand and charges of middlebrowism and Packardian status

seeking on the other? Moreover, how did the magazine negotiate its commitment to social criticism and quality fiction with its equally pressing commitment to promoting leisure and consumption? Finally, and most importantly, what can an analysis of *Esquire* tell us about the historical problem of the male consumer?

The male consumer remains a problem for historians, in large part because he disturbs so much of the conventional wisdom surrounding the history of masculinity and manhood. The divergent treatments of *Esquire* and *Playboy* in the historical literature on masculinity and manhood stand as an illustrative case in point. Over the course of seven-plus decades, *Esquire* has served simultaneously as a chronicle and a barometer of American manhood. Yet, save for Bill Osgerby's recent *Playboys in Paradise* and Tom Pendergast's *Creating the Modern Man*, the vast majority of the work on the history of masculinity generally bypasses *Esquire* in favor of Hugh Hefner's *Playboy*.¹⁴ This is not altogether surprising. First, because *Esquire* has changed ownership and editorial direction so often, it is difficult to discuss *Esquire* as having a unified worldview outside its advocacy of leisure and consumption. This is not the case for *Playboy* which, to this day, adheres to the precepts first laid out in Hefner's long-running (and long-winded) "Playboy Philosophy" column from the early 1960s. More significantly, *Playboy*'s brazen celebration of hedonistic consumption regularly takes center stage in the historical literature on masculinity largely because it better fits the crisis narrative that dominates the historiography of masculinity and manhood.

¹⁴ Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001). Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

Michael Kimmel, a key commentator on contemporary masculinity suggests, the history of masculinity is “a history of fears, frustrations and failures.” characterized by a profound sense of loss and dislocation.¹⁵ In *Men in the Middle*, James B. Gilbert suggests that historiographic commentary on masculinity has largely (and unhelpfully) conceived its subject as being in a perpetual state of crisis where men are either unable to define what masculinity is or to live up to gender role expectations.¹⁶ This struggle, in turn, produces a wide variety of masculinities, each its own response to the crisis of identity. However, if there are multiple ways of being a man, it is not because historians widely accept anti-foundational theories of the instability of gender categories. Rather, as Kimmel suggests, it is evidence of the internal crisis men face that forces them to abandon a natural sense of self and instead to seek manliness through “obsessive self-control, defensive exclusion, and frightened escape.”¹⁷

Barbara Ehrenreich’s widely cited *Hearts of Men* attributed *Playboy*’s dramatic success to the fantasy of escaping this crisis of self.¹⁸ *Playboy* was the secret map that led men to the pirate’s treasure of sex, consumption, and style. The flight from responsibility it engendered was the logical answer to the stifling conformity of the

¹⁵ Michael Kimmel, *Manhood in America: A Cultural History*, Second Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2005), 6.

¹⁶ James B. Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago, 2005).

¹⁷ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 6.

¹⁸ Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City and New York: Anchor Bay and Doubleday, 2003).

1950s, particularly as described by Elaine Tyler May in *Homeward Bound*.¹⁹ For May, the pressures to conform to an unrealistic set of ideals created marriages that were unhappy and unfaithful. Despite the realization of the suburban American dream, women and men sought release from the prison of expectation, resigned to a life of misery. Hedonism, Ehrenreich argues, represented a cathartic liberation from the stifling responsibilities of work, family and respectability. To this end, *Playboy* promised an escape from the “bondage of breadwinning.”²⁰ In *Playboy*, historians located a defiant ideology of eternal bachelorhood that rejected traditional strictures of thrift, sacrifice and industry. Joe Dubbert, in a study that predated Ehrenreich’s, offered a similar assessment. For Dubbert, *Playboy* did away with “qualities of humanity and compassion” in favor of a cool detachment that sacrificed emotional maturity for fleeting pleasure.²¹ In the final analysis, *Playboy*’s rebellion may have been empty, sophomoric and misogynistic. It, however, also offered historians a powerful affirmation of their interpretation of manhood as an oppressive, unrelenting and unforgiving ideology.

To this extent, *Esquire* presents a curious challenge to the history of masculinity. In short, is the “escape from responsibility” model the only model historians have to account for male consumption? When men consume as a form of leisure, do they necessarily abrogate their commitments to their spouses, families, professions and

¹⁹ Elaine Tyler May, *Homeward Bound: American Families in the Cold War* (New York: Basic Books, 1988)

²⁰ Ehrenreich, *Hearts of Men*, 51.

²¹ Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man’s Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1979), 267-269.

communities? Is rational, utilitarian shopping the only avenue for men to participate in consumer culture? The model of consumption developed in *Esquire* casts doubt on these assertions. In the language of mid-20th century social criticism, the imagined *Esquire* reader was neither inner-directed nor outer directed; neither conformist nor non-conformist; neither organization man nor rebel. If we examine the magazine's content, internal editorial correspondence and the limited market research that is available to scholars, we gain a sense that the imagined *Esquire* reader of the postwar era was altogether something different. Explaining what that "something different" was and how it relates to the intersection of consumption and masculinity will be the work of this dissertation. In doing so, this dissertation will address a key challenge faced by both historians of consumer culture and historians of gender, that is the defining and coming to grips with the problem of the male consumer. One of the most productive ways to approach this question is through what feminist theorists of the body refer to as "embodiment," the process through which subjectivity is imposed upon and articulated through the body.

Section 2. "Masculine as a Moustache"

Writing in his memoir, Arnold Gingrich recalled his anxiety that *Esquire* would be misconstrued as a "lavender" magazine.²² Much of the challenge in the first several issues then was to find a balance between sophistication and toughness. Kenon Breazeale has suggested that much of this was accomplished through a defensive reliance on

²² Arnold Gingrich, *Nothing But People* (New York: Crown Books, 1971), 81.

misogynistic and homophobic rhetoric and imagery.²³ Derogatory references to “sissies” and “golddiggers” abounded, as did regular proclamations of *Esquire*’s manliness. One ad for *Esquire* provides an interesting illustration. The ad, which appeared in *Esquire*’s second issue (January 1934), declared *Esquire* to be as “masculine as a moustache.” This is an interesting analogy to draw upon for several reasons. On the one hand, the analogy works because facial hair is one of the clearest public markers of natural gender difference.²⁴ On the other hand, the historical context in which this ad appeared in problematizes its claim to masculine toughness because the trimmed moustache of the 1930s required significant maintenance. Gone was the age when men could publicly sport thick and overgrown facial hair, as in the nineteenth century fashion for “lambchop” style sideburns. With the development of the Gillette safety razor in 1903, the clean-shaven and moustache-less man entered into the mainstream. While the beard had largely disappeared from respectable public life (save for academia and the arts), the moustache remained provisionally acceptable. Those men who chose to keep their moustaches were required to maintain them with regular trimming and the use of various tonics and waxes. A quick and unscientific survey of interwar magazines suggests that

²³ Kenon Brezeale, “In Spite of Women: *Esquire* Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer,” In *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, ed. Jennifer Scanlon (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 226-244.

²⁴ Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America’s Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998), 145. Other key works on beauty, cleanliness and hygiene include Anne McClintock, *Imperial Leather: Race, Gender and Sexuality in the Colonial Conquest* (New York: Routledge, 1995), Lynne Luciano, *Looking Good: Male Body Image in Modern America* (New York: Hill and Wang, 2001), Suellen Hoy, *Chasing Dirt: The American Pursuit of Cleanliness* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

the most popular moustache for young men in the period was the high-maintenance pencil moustache.

Esquire's "masculine as a moustache" proclamation is valuable to this end because it illustrates a central contention at the heart of body theory. Drawing on interdisciplinary theorists who include Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Norbert Elias, Michel Foucault, Judith Butler, Susan Bordo, Bryan Turner, and Elizabeth Grosz, body theory posits a denaturalized and de-essentialised human body that is a socially constructed site of inscription and discursivation.²⁵ As Judith Butler explains in her influential *Bodies that Matter*, "what constitutes the fixity of the body, its contours, its movements, will be fully material, but materiality will be rethought as the effect of power, as power's most productive effect."²⁶ In other words, the body may be real but it is not natural since how we define and indeed know our bodies through gender, sexuality, race, (dis)ability, appearance, and health are the products of a discursive power that is anything but natural. Bodies, as Elizabeth Grosz correctly asserts, are the "very 'stuff' of subjectivity." They cannot, as Grosz continues, "be adequately understood as ahistorical, precultural, or

²⁵ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, Routledge Classics series (London and New York: Routledge, 2002), Norbert Elias, *The Civilizing Process, Vol. 1: The History of Manners* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1978), Michel Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979), Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* (New York: Penguin, 1984), Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), Bryan Turner, *The Body and Society: Explorations in Social Theory* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1984), and Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994). For a splendid introduction to the study of the body see *The Body: A Reader*, eds. Mariam Fraser and Monica Greco, Routledge Student Readers series, (London and New York: Routledge, 2005).

²⁶ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 2.

natural objects in any simple way.”²⁷ Thus, body theory would argue that *Esquire*’s moustache is thus a synecdoche for natural masculinity that reveals the unnaturalness of masculinity.

The contribution of body theory to the scholarly debate over the identity politics has been particularly notable amongst cultural and intellectual historians drawn to critical examination of the institutions, techniques and discourses that produce corporeality. Body theory, however, is not without its critics. Though the critiques vary in their sympathy for the project of body theory, there is agreement on two points. First, many critics dismiss anti-essentialist body theory for being too theoretical and insufficiently empirical. Chris Schilling for example argues that the dematerialization of the body, particularly in Foucauldian theory, means that the “biological, physical, or material body can never be grasped ... as its existence is permanently deferred behind the grids of meaning imposed by discourse.”²⁸ For Schilling, this translates into a problematically dehistoricized body that is acted upon by trans-cultural and trans-historical discursive forces. In rejecting a social constructionist or discursive body theory, Schilling notes that, “society is brought so far into the body that the body disappears as a phenomenon that requires detailed historical investigation in its own right.”²⁹ Schilling’s concern with the overtheorization of the body is valid to the extent that if the concept of the discursive body is to have any analytical power, it needs to have what Elizabeth Grosz refers to as

²⁷ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, ix.

²⁸ Chris Schilling, *The Body and Social Theory* (London: Sage Publications, 1993), 80.

²⁹ Schilling, *The Body and Social Theory*, 81.

“the specific modes of materiality.”³⁰ Intellectual and cultural history is, in this sense, vital to body theory in that they supply a history of the discourses, techniques and practices which produce the body. In *Making Sex*, Thomas Laqueur, in the strongest terms possible, insists upon the materiality of the body. However, he also reminds readers that the very notion of a natural body is untenable, suggesting that “attempts to isolate it from its discursive, socially determined milieu are as doomed to failure as the ... anthropologist’s efforts to filter out the cultural so as to leave a residue of essential humanity.”³¹

The second issue cuts to the heart of body theory’s political efficacy. Some feminist critics have long argued that anti-essentialism depoliticizes women’s experience by degrading the materiality of the body.³² Second wave feminism has a historical political investment in the material body, particularly in issues of body image, representation, reproduction, women’s health and sexual violence. To suggest the body is “merely” a discursive effect, critics contend, is counter-intuitive and politically disempowering. The title of Laura Downs’ 1993 critique of historian Joan Scott (“If ‘Woman’ is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night?”)

³⁰ Grosz, *Volatile Bodies*, 156.

³¹ Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 16.

³² See for example Carole S. Vance, “Social Construction Theory: Problems in the History of Sexuality” in *Homosexuality, Which Homosexuality?*, ed. Dennis Altman (London: Schorer and GMP, 1989), 13-34 and Barbara Epstein, “Why Poststructuralism is a Dead End for Progressive Thought,” *Socialist Review*, Vol. 25, No. 02 (1995), 83-119. Judith Butler has been at the center of the most contentious debates surrounding feminism and body theory. Sarah Salih, *Judith Butler*, Routledge Critical Thinkers series (London: Routledge, 2002) is a readable introduction to Butler’s work and her exchanges with her (at times) hostile interlocutors.

is symptomatic of the incredulousness and even open hostility some feminists have to anti-essentialist body theory.³³ This critique of body theory in turn has been challenged by Joan Scott, Judith Butler, Elizabeth Grosz, Susan Bordo, Sandra Bartky, Denise Riley, Margaret McClaren and Moira Gatens who all argue that feminism's political struggles must extend beyond the material body and enter into the realm of discourse.³⁴ It is here, they contend, that feminists can intervene and challenge the repressive binary of man/woman by addressing the production of gender as a category of analysis. As Scott writes, gender history should not be solely concerned with the different ways men and women lived and expressed gender difference, but instead it should also ask "how sexual difference is itself articulated as a principle and practice of social organization."³⁵ One only needs to examine the recent debates in feminism around the gender identity of transgender individuals to appreciate the validity of body theory's stress on the discursive.³⁶

³³ Laura Lee Downs, "If 'Woman' is Just an Empty Category, Then Why Am I Afraid to Walk Alone at Night? Identity Politics Meets the Postmodern Subject," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (April 1993), 414-437. For Joan Scott's devastating rejoinder, see Scott, "Tip of the Volcano," *Comparative Studies in Society and History*, Vol. 35, No. 2 (April 1993), 438-443.

³⁴ Joan Wallach Scott, *Gender and the Politics of History*, Revised Edition (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter: On the Discursive Limits of "Sex"* (New York: Routledge, 1993), Elizabeth Grosz, *Volatile Bodies* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1994), Susan Bordo, *The Male Body: A New Look at Men in Public and in Private* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), Sandra Bartky, "Foucault, Feminism and the Modernization of Patriarchal Power" in *Femininity and Domination: Studies in the Phenomenology of Oppression* (New York: Routledge, 1990), 63-82, Denise Riley, "Am I That Name?": *Feminism and the Category of 'Woman' in History* (London: Macmillan Press, 1988), Margaret McClaren, *Feminism, Foucault and Embodied Subjectivity* (Albany: SUNY Press, 2002) and Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies: Ethics, Power and Corporeality* (New York: Routledge, 1996).

³⁵ Scott, "Some More Reflections on Gender and Politics," *Gender and the Politics of History*, 207.

³⁶ Susan Stryker and Stephen Whittle, *The Transgender Studies Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2006) is one of the best entry points into a complex and, at times, contentious debate between feminism and queer

What these critiques of body theory suggest is unease with an epistemology in which agency, self-determination and resistance to discursive power are seemingly all but absent. Judith Butler has noted in the introduction to *Bodies That Matter* that such concerns rely upon humanist assumptions that privilege an *a priori* individuated subject. In refuting this argument, Butler suggests that the “I” “neither precedes nor follows” subjectivity, but is itself an effect of discourse.³⁷ Thus, for Butler, sex is not the foundation from which gender follows, but another layer of difference where boundaries and norms are settled. This settling is the basis of what Butler refers to as “the process of materialization.” Butler makes it clear that she does not reject the reality of the body, as is often claimed by her detractors, but instead rejects a “pure” body that stands outside of discourse. The function of body theory, as Butler concludes, is to take materialization seriously by asking, “what qualifies as bodies that matter, ways of living that count as ‘life,’ lives worth protecting, lives worth saving, lives worth grieving?”³⁸

As bodies enter into the matrix of social relations, consumer goods make visible the body’s relationship to hegemonic discourses of the self. Pierre Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is important in this regard. Bourdieu understands habitus as a “system of dispositions” through which we internalize the values and norms that validate the

theory/activism. Judith Halberstam, *In a Queer Time and Place: Transgender Bodies, Subcultural Lives* (New York: New York University Press, 2005) and *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998) are important theoretical interventions.

³⁷ Butler, *Bodies That Matter*, 9-12.

³⁸ *ibid*, 16.

apparent naturalness of social class.³⁹ Crucially, this means articulating class through a discourse in which social difference is marked by an incremental denial of the corporeal. Where lower class tastes were marked by their responsiveness to tactile and immediate pleasures, the taste judgments of the upper-classes spoke of a pure aesthetic that implied “the superiority of those who can be satisfied with the sublimated, refined, disinterested, gratuitous, distinguished pleasures forever closed to the profane.” In this sense, habitus depends upon the negation of the social through the perceived naturalness and individuality of taste judgments. By denying their social origins, taste judgments reproduce domination by masking the social networks that “fulfill a social function of legitimating social difference.”⁴⁰

Sociologist Arthur Frank has noted that Bourdieu’s concept of habitus is crucial to an understanding of the body; particularly what Frank calls the “mirroring body.”⁴¹ For Frank, Bourdieu advances a theory of the social world that is defined through the material goods that become an extension of the self. In this sense, there is neither authentic interior nor inauthentic exterior. Not surprisingly, Frank places the mirroring body within the realm of consumer culture. Yet, the mirroring body, ironically, need not consume since here “consumption is less about actual material acquisition than it is about producing desires” since the important act of consumption was completed by the desiring

³⁹ Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgement of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984), 6.

⁴⁰ *ibid*, 7.

⁴¹ Arthur Frank, “For a Sociology of the Body: An Analytical Review” in *The Body: Social Process and Cultural Theory*, eds. Mike Featherstone, Mike Hepworth, and Bryan S. Turner (London: Sage Publications, 1991), 36-102.

gaze that extends the body “through the endless assimilation of the world’s objects to one’s own body, and of one’s own body to the world’s objects.”⁴² For the mirroring body, desire is inherently insatiable because it is contingent upon the body’s relationality to other bodies. As Frank notes, “in the world of the mirroring body, projection and introjection take place in seamless reciprocity.”⁴³

What is notable in Frank is that the emergence of the mirroring body is concurrent with new forms of social subjectivity that privilege the visual. Art and film historians, most notably Jonathan Crary, have argued that the proliferation of visual stimuli in the 19th century constitutes nothing less than a visual turn.⁴⁴ The intersection of bodies and consumer culture, to this extent, depends upon an awareness of the body on display since, as Rachel Bowlby and Michel Maffesoli point out, consumer subjectivities are formed in the practice of looking.⁴⁵ In one sense, this is what Warren Susman argued in his well-known discussion of personality.⁴⁶ Indeed, the modern project of becoming “somebody” necessitates an investment in the display of the self in order to secure the approval of others.

⁴² *ibid.*, 63.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 62.

⁴⁴ Jonathan Crary, *Techniques of the Observer: On Vision and Modernity in the 19th Century* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1992) and *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle and Modern Culture* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2001).

⁴⁵ Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Drieser, Gissing and Zola* (London: Methuen, 1985), Michel Maffesoli, “The Ethic of Aesthetics,” *Theory, Culture and Society*, Vol. 8 (1985): 7-21.

⁴⁶ Warren Susman, “Personality and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture” in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century* (Washington: Smithsonian Books, 2003), 271-285.

Nowhere is this dynamic more evident but less understood than in studies of fashion. Serious historical work on fashion has only begun to depart from its origins in art history (history of styles, techniques and designers) and business history (industrial history [i.e. textile, fur, etc.], history of clothing retail) and begin to ask questions regarding fashion and the construction of gendered, raced, sexualized and classed subjectivities. Tim Edwards' *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* is an important study in this regard since Edwards' aim here is to understand why men's fashion is often neglected in historical and sociological accounts of body adornment.⁴⁷ For Edwards, this is a key point since attitudes towards men's fashion articulate "the persistence of gendered attitudes, gendered relations, and gendered stereotypes concerning men, masculinity and their place in society."⁴⁸ It is here that we turn our attention to the problem of the male consumer. Following Edwards' analysis, we have no reason to maintain the erroneous notion that male consumption somehow reflects an authentic male self. Male dispositions to the marketplace are not the product of biology. Rather it is much more productive (and accurate) to argue that it is through their engagement (or lack of it) with the marketplace that men construct their identities as men. Furthermore, if we follow Connell's argument that competing definitions of masculinity struggle for hegemony, then male (dis)comfort with consumption becomes a aspect of the

⁴⁷ Tim Edwards, *Men in the Mirror: Men's Fashion, Masculinity and Consumer Society* (London: Cassell, 1997).

⁴⁸ *ibid*, 4.

process through which hegemonic masculinity is secured, legitimized, challenged, reproduced or lost.

Section 3. The Problem of the Male Consumer

In the past quarter century, we have seen the emergence of a vibrant and heterogeneous body of historical scholarship on American consumer culture.⁴⁹ As is the case with studies of consumer culture in anthropology and sociology, no one sub-discipline, research methodology or interpretive paradigm dominates the field. This is due in part to the multiple definitions of consumption and consumer culture that circulate throughout the literature. In what follows, I will build upon Sharon Zukin's definition of consumer culture as an "institutional field"; that is, "a set of interconnected economic and cultural institutions centered on the production of commodities for individual demand."⁵⁰ This definition is attractive in that it understands consumer culture as more than an economic process in which goods are produced and exchanged. On the other hand, it also avoids the pitfall of the cultural interpretation that overinflates the power of the consumer in the name of cultural resistance. Ultimately, what Zukin's definition allows us to do, is to see consumer culture as neither manipulation nor liberation but as an extraordinarily complex web of institutions and actors with competing interests and

⁴⁹ For an excellent review of recent scholarship in the history of American consumer culture, see Susan Strasser, "Making Consumption Conspicuous: Transgressive Topics Go Mainstream," *Technology and Culture*, Volume 43, Number 4 (2002), 755-770.

⁵⁰ Sharon Zukin and Jennifer Smith Maguire, "Consumers and Consumption" in *The Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 30 (2004), 175.

agendas. The openness of this model allows scholars a certain flexibility in how they approach the field.

For numerous historians, the intersection of gender, media and consumption has proven to be a productive space to engage the critical interrogation of the practices, institutions and ideologies that define contemporary and historical consumption. Indeed, Richard Ohmann has argued that the history of the magazine is inextricably tied to the history of consumer culture.⁵¹ While the genesis of the magazine is located in such eighteenth century titles as *American Magazine and Historical Chronicle*, *Gentleman and Lady's Town and Country Magazine* and *New York Magazine*, it was not until the late nineteenth century that the magazine was fully established as a viable commercial medium. Driven by changes in printing technology (esp. the development of the halftone and lithograph processes), the emergence of the late 19th century advertising industry, and the passage of the Postal Act of 1879 (which set a cheaper postal rate for magazines), the magazine format positioned itself to serve a middle class that increasingly linked its sense of self to material culture.⁵² Crucially, this intersection between magazines and consumer

⁵¹ Richard Ohmann, *Selling Culture: Magazines, Markets and Class at the Turn of the Century* (New York and London: Verso, 1996).

⁵² Frank Luther Mott, *A History of American Magazines* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1938-68) and Theodore Peterson, *Magazines in the Twentieth Century*, Second Edition (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1965) are the standard histories of the magazine format. Ohmann, *Selling Culture* and David Reed, *The Popular Magazine in Britain and the United States, 1880-1960* (London: The British Library, 1997) are two newer studies that take an active interest in magazines and the formation of class and gender consciousness.

culture rested on the ability of magazines to present a particular vision of the world to their readership.⁵³

Research into women's magazines is perhaps the best example of this line of inquiry. Two exemplary studies, Ellen Gruber Garvey's *Adman in the Parlor* and Jennifer Scanlon's *Inarticulate Longings*, provide numerous examples of the ways magazines positioned women as consumers, "tutored" them in the practices of consumption and encouraged them to see the marketplace as a vital tool for self-transformation.⁵⁴ At the same time, Garvey and Scanlon are quick to note that women's magazines were crucial in establishing and reiterating an understanding of the marketplace as a gendered space defined by a female-consumer/male-producer dichotomy.

⁵³ In this sense, the editors, writers and art directors that produce magazines are cultural intermediaries. Existing in the space between producers and consumers, cultural intermediaries are more than taste makers, though this too is an important aspect of their cultural work. For numerous commentators, cultural intermediaries exist to pre-digest the world and to provide an interpretive frame that legitimizes certain forms of social being. Pierre Bourdieu is often credited with introducing the term in *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art: Genesis and Structure of the Literary Field*, trans. Susan Emanuel (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1995) builds upon his work in *Distinction* by examining the crucial role literary salons, publishers and critics played as literature constituted itself as a "autonomous literary field." For recent surveys of the literature on cultural mediation, see Sean Nixon and Paul du Gay, "Who Needs Cultural Intermediaries?" *Cultural Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 4 (2002): 495-500 and David Wright, "Mediating Production and Consumption: Cultural Capital and 'Cultural Workers'" *The British Journal of Sociology*, Vol. 56, No. 1 (2005): 105-121. For an excellent discussion of cultural intermediaries and the cultural work of magazines, see Mary F. Corey, *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999). For an important discussion of editors as cultural intermediaries see Christopher Wilson, "The Rhetoric of Consumption: Mass-Market Magazines and the Demise of the Gentle Reader, 1880-1920" in *The Cultures of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, eds. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 39-64.

⁵⁴ Ellen Gruber Garvey, *Adman in the Parlor: Magazines and the Gendering of Consumer Culture, 1880s-1910s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996). Jennifer Scanlon, *Inarticulate Longings: The Ladies Home Journal, Gender and the Promise of Consumer Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1995).

A similar strategy can be located in the recent spate of research on men's lifestyle magazines. Historical scholarship on male consumers is still in its infancy. Yet, it has already produced a number of excellent book-length studies by Sean Nixon, Frank Mort, Bill Osgerby, Paul Jobling and Tom Pendergast.⁵⁵ A key problematic for these authors is the interpolation of the male subject into consumer culture. Collectively, their aim is to offer an alternative to the dominant analytical tendency in historical and cultural studies that constructs consumption as something that is foreign and unnatural to the heterosexual male. Thus in conventional historical arguments, men's magazines often rationalize consumption by forcing it into goal-oriented rubrics (i.e. looking good to get the job/the girl, having the right equipment and/or skills to impress the right people).

Joyce Appleby's elegantly understated definition of consumption as the "desiring, acquiring and enjoyment of goods" is helpful in that it reminds us that consumption is marked by an irresolvable tension between rationality and irrationality.⁵⁶ In other words, the consumer, regardless of gender, is perpetually aware of the tension between practical utility and hedonistic desire when considering a purchase. How we answer the question, "why do I need this?" informs our understanding of consumption in this regard. While some purchases may clearly fall to one side or the other of this divide, most consumption

⁵⁵ Sean Nixon, *Hard Looks: Masculinities, Spectatorship and Contemporary Consumption* (UCL Press: London, 1996). Frank Mort, *Cultures of Consumption: Masculinities and Social Space in Late Twentieth Century Britain* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2001), Paul Jobling, *Man Appeal: Advertising, Modernism and Menswear* (Oxford and New York: Berg, 2005). Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000).

⁵⁶ Joyce Appleby, "Consumption in Early Modern Social Thought," in *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence Glickman, (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1999), 130.

for most people lies somewhere in the middle. Herein lies what I see as the historical problem of the male consumer. While an awareness of this tension between rationality and irrationality and utility and desire is evident in studies of the female consumer, it is relatively absent in discussions of her male counterpart.⁵⁷

In this sense, Mark Swiencicki's "Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style and the Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930" is indicative of the problems facing historians of masculinity and consumption.⁵⁸ Originally appearing in 1998 in the *Journal of Social History*, Swiencicki offers a reading of male consumption patterns that seeks to address the "elision of the male consumer" in the historical literature.⁵⁹ Using data culled from the 1890 Census of Manufacturers, historical budget studies and a content analysis study of late Victorian advertising, Swiencicki argued that men were active and eager participants in the late-nineteenth century consumer culture. In quantifying the existence of the male consumer, Swiencicki argued that male consumption was often relegated to leisure goods and services while female consumption was most evident in day-to-day goods and services (i.e. food, household goods, etc.). As consumers of such goods and services as sporting goods, lodge memberships, and Turkish Baths, men outspent women by a margin of 2 to 1 on leisure and recreation. Nevertheless, Swiencicki argues, the

⁵⁷ Three exemplary studies in this regard are Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer's Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003), Kathy Peiss, *Hope in a Jar: The Making of America's Beauty Culture* (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1998) and Alison J. Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999).

⁵⁸ Mark Swiencicki, "Consuming Brotherhood: Men's Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930" In *Consumer Society in American History: A Reader*, ed. Lawrence Glickman (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999), 207-240.

⁵⁹ *ibid*, 207.

perception that “consumerism” is widely associated with women continues to frame much of the historical and sociological research on consumer culture. “Until the male consumer becomes an object of widespread study,” Swiencicki concludes, “...the ideology of the separate spheres will continue to distort history and sociology’s view of women, men and consumerism.”⁶⁰

Swiencicki is correct in demanding that historians and sociologists pay greater attention to the male consumer. However, Swiencicki’s rationalist definition of consumption, where consumption is understood as a pragmatic exchange tied to use-value, is unable to account for the genesis or perseverance of the historical imbalance that he perceives in his study. As Jean Christophe Agnew and others have suggested, because rationalist paradigms cannot quantify irrationality, pleasure, desire and sensuality in consumption, they tell us little about the formation of consumer subjectivities.⁶¹ Thus, Swiencicki’s study misses its mark by focusing its attentions on the *practice* of consumption (the actual buying) rather than the *discourse* of consumption (how we think about goods).

Nowhere is Swiencicki’s argument more problematic than in his discussion of gender and advertising. In attempting to make the claim that the male consumer did exist in the early twentieth century, Swiencicki turns to an examination of advertising in *Field and Stream* and *Outing* magazines. There he finds Gillette razor blades ads that boast of

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 240.

⁶¹ Jean Christophe Agnew, “The Consuming Vision of Henry James,” in *The Cultures of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, eds. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 65-100.

“steel of neolithic hardness” or Postum ads that salute “those who appreciate strength and health.” He goes on to further suggest that advertising in general interest magazines was explicitly targeted at men. For example, he argues that 39% of all ads in the July 5, 1925 issue of the *Saturday Evening Post* are directed exclusively at men, while only 16% are directed at women. From this he makes the claim that “male consumers were targeted 2.5 to 5 times more heavily than the were female consumers.” Despite the “mountain of evidence” that he apparently uncovered, a befuddled Swiencicki is left wondering “why have so many scholars missed such data and gone on to describe the advertising (and consuming) audience as ‘feminine’?”⁶²

What is important to note, and what Swiencicki’s methodology cannot address, is that consumption is associated with women not because they bought more than men but because the practices that define consumption (i.e. shopping) have been read as feminine. Swiencicki’s data certainly confirms that men acquired and (we assume) enjoyed goods. Yet, how did they desire them? What socially sanctioned forms of consumer longing or fantasy were available to men? In short, what is missing is a sense of consumption as irrational, unproductive, hedonistic pleasure. To arrive at this position, however, would require a different methodology from the realist empiricism in Swiencicki; a methodology that sees gender as a complex and problematic category. It also requires that we rethink our theoretical understanding of consumption.

Colin Campbell’s *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumption* addresses so much of what I find problematic in Swiencicki’s piece. In his conclusion,

⁶² Swiencicki, “Consuming Brotherhood,” 29-231.

Campbell correctly notes that “the cultural logic of modernity” is driven by the “tension” between reason and desire.⁶³ Thus, hedonism and daydreaming is not a rejection of instrumental consumption as much as it is its Janus-faced opposite. They are, as Campbell argues, necessary to the reproduction of a capitalism that privileges a boundless individualism. For Campbell, modern consumption is largely about the cultural struggle to produce discourses of consumption that negate the contradiction between instrumentality and desire by emphasizing the need “to integrate discrete patterns of behaviour into a larger, and fundamentally balanced system.”⁶⁴ In other words, capitalism works when sober fiscal responsibility and decadent hedonism and fantasy are brought into a productive tension. However, rather than positing a Jeekyll and Hyde model of the consumer, Campbell argues that puritan and romantic tendencies are “serially institutionalized” into bourgeois consumption through the production and control of desire.⁶⁵

One place where we can see Campbell’s “daydreaming” paradigm at work is in Mike Featherstone’s discussion of lifestyle. Through lifestyle, Featherstone suggests that contemporary consumption is marked by a discourse of “individuality, self-expression, and a stylistic self-consciousness.”⁶⁶ Unlike Veblen’s notion of conspicuous consumption, Featherstone’s theory of lifestyle is based on customization rather than

⁶³ Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic*, 227.

⁶⁴ *ibid*, 223.

⁶⁵ *ibid*, 223-224.

⁶⁶ Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London: Sage, 1991), 83.

emulation. Lifestyle, in this sense, is an assemblage of a variety of disconnected consumer goods which are brought together to express an individual style. To this degree, lifestyle's central feature is its persistent management and cultivation of the self. It never culminates in a finished product. Instead, it is always already in process. Because it is a perpetual work in progress, Featherstone argues that lifestyle encourages the consumer to think beyond rationalism and to embrace the constantly shifting fantasy of self-actualization. This, however, is not to say that Featherstone completely jettisons any reference to structure within his analysis. To the contrary, the paradox of lifestyle is that its expression of individual style is dependent upon the development and expenditure of cultural capital. Lifestyle is always already a product of the discourses that legitimate "particular tastes as *the* legitimate tastes."⁶⁷

This, in turn, necessitates new forms of historical research that move beyond the quantitative social history methodology employed by Swiencicki. Frank Mort, for example, calls for an analysis that would scrutinize the "power dynamics of consumption" through localized, micro-social research.⁶⁸ Mort's Foucauldian research programme would examine the development of the design, advertising, marketing and distribution of specific goods and services, the interaction between professionals within the consumer industries and the cultural intermediaries who mediate their work, and how real people (not theoretical abstracts) make purchasing decisions and the subsequent use

⁶⁷ *ibid*, 87.

⁶⁸ Frank Mort, "Paths to Mass Consumption: Britain and the USA since 1945," in *Buy This Book: Studies in Advertising and Consumption*, eds. Mica Nava, Andrew Blake, Iain MacRury and Barry Richards (London: Routledge, 1997), 30.

and misuse of their purchased goods. Such an approach, Mort argues, is necessary since “it is *outside* work, *outside* the formal politics structures, in the world of holidays, home interiors and superstores that [people] have a sense of power and freedom to express themselves, to define their sense of self, to mould the good life.”⁶⁹ To produce wholesale condemnations of consumption then is to deny and degrade the very real pleasures at the heart of consumption. It is only when we approach consumer culture as inherently complex and resistant to generalization that we begin to appreciate its dynamic and contradictory presence in everyday life.

As much as commentators like Swiencicki try to rationalize and “make sense” of it, consumption will always retain its irrationality and its deep ties to a pleasurable and sensual consuming desire. Thus, historians who take consumption as their object of study must seriously address the notion of desire. However, this does not mean a retreat to charges of manipulation and the fostering of “false needs.” Such critiques are problematic because they are too quick in their dismissal of the importance of fantasy, as both a psychic and cultural practice. In short, we would be remiss if we did not at least acknowledge the crucial binary of the fantasy of consumption and the consumption of fantasy in our work. The problem of the male consumer then revolves precisely around this issue. In the historical treatments of gender and consumer culture, the mechanisms that suppressed the male consumer as a desiring subject have gone largely unnoticed.

⁶⁹ Frank Mort, “The Politics of Consumption” in *New Times: The Changing Face of Politics in the 1990s*, eds. Stuart Hall and Martin Jacques (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1989), 170.

What made Sean Nixon's *Hard Looks* so revolutionary (and welcomed) was the attention he paid to this lacuna.

Using a broadly Foucauldian model of institutional analysis, Nixon made the argument that structural shifts in the fashion, advertising, and media industries of the 1980s encouraged a new type of male consumer. Dubbed the "New Man," Nixon differentiated this new male consumer from the rest of his gender through his self-absorption, vanity, and hedonism. Following an earlier study by Frank Mort, Nixon placed the emergence of the "New Man" within the profound institutional reorganization occasioned by emergence of post-Fordist techniques of "flexible accumulation" and "flexible specialization." In short, the rapid segmentation of the fashion industry in the mid-1980s gave designers, retailers and other related cultural intermediaries the freedom to imagine a new type of male consumer; one whose relationship to consumer culture was essentially depthless and irrational. For Nixon, the hairless, chiseled and underwear clad Calvin Klein model that hovered over Time's Square in the mid-eighties was the epitome of this new masculinity. The central importance of cultural intermediaries in this case cannot be overemphasized. For Nixon, the culture industries did not invent the "New Man." Rather, they reoriented male consumers by recasting the discursive boundaries that defined masculinity.

Interestingly, Pendergast, Osgerby and Jobling all made similar arguments regarding shifts in masculinity and consumption in their respective studies. Like Nixon, they located historical moments where dramatic shifts in the relations between production and consumption introduced new forms of male subjectivity that challenged prevailing

norms of heteronormativity. These new subjectivities were marked by many of the same tendencies Nixon described in his late-Eighties “New Man”: vanity, narcissism, self-consciousness and hedonism. The key difference, of course, is that Pendergast and Jobling located their “New Men” in the interwar period, while Osgerby located his version of the “New Man” in the “Swinging Bachelor” of the post-war period.

While acknowledging the importance of Nixon’s study, Jobling and Osgerby both questioned the novelty of the “New Man.” Jobling, for one, argued that underwear advertising in the interwar period employed many of the same visual and rhetorical tropes Nixon claims as the innovative province of the “New Man.” Osgerby makes a similar argument in his contribution to the anthology *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines*, arguing that “it was misleading to see the narcissistic masculine consumer as unique to Britain during the 1980s and 1990s, and there was a need to locate contemporary archetypes within a much longer history of active and overt practices of commodity consumption.”⁷⁰ For Osgerby, this history included the turn-of-the-century dude, the interwar rake and the postwar swinging bachelor. Doubtless, we can extend this genealogy even further back to include the *flâneur*, the dandy and the fop.

Clearly, there is little to gain from such genealogies if we restrict the argument to an exercise of determining the “New Man’s” family tree. Such exercises are ultimately useless if they do not pay attention to the interplay of power, identity and consciousness in consumer culture. David Kuchta’s masterful *The Three Piece Suit and Modern*

⁷⁰ Bill Osgerby, “A Pedigree of the Consuming Male: Masculinity, Consumption and the American ‘Leisure Class’,” *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines*, ed. Bethan Benwell, *Sociological Review Monographs* (Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2004), 58.

Masculinity presents one version of this approach by illustrating how fashion and consumption in Early Modern Britain materialized the ideological struggles between royalist Cavaliers and republican Roundheads.⁷¹ The oppositional ideology of the Roundheads saw the fashion excesses of the court, particularly its obedience to French fashion trends, as tyrannical, corrupt and effeminate. To read this dispute solely as a debate over fashion standards is to miss the embodiment of pressing economic and cultural struggles within daily life. As Kuchta notes in regard to the nascent capitalism of the Roundheads, “mercantilism was not an abstract, amoral discussion of the balance of trade, but a *gendered polemic about material practices*, about the cultural and economic meanings of beer and wine, wool and silk, the virtues and vices of sauces and spices.” (Emphasis added)⁷² This is an important observation, particularly when we consider that the types of masculinities these studies highlight are largely identified by their tenuous, even problematic, relationship to productive labor. Masculinity in this case is instead produced within an ethos of hedonistic leisure that foregrounds a consuming desire as a source of pleasure, what Colin Campbell refers to as “the other Protestant Ethic.”⁷³

In an important foundational essay, Jean Christophe Agnew argued that the social historian’s urge to quantify and measure reality is methodologically incapable of making

⁷¹ David Kuchta, *The Three-Piece Suit and Modern Masculinity: England, 1550-1850* (Berkeley, University of California Press, 2002).

⁷² *ibid.*, 74.

⁷³ Colin Campbell, *The Romantic Ethic and the Spirit of Modern Consumption* (Oxford: Blackwell Books, 1987).

sense of “the cognitive appetite” for goods.⁷⁴ The inability to measure this appetite, Agnew continued, should not dissuade historians from acknowledging consumption as a “habit of the mind” through which we come to understand the world and our place in it. Agnew’s reading of Henry James’ fiction, for example, reveals a world mediated by a “consuming vision” in which individuals were trapped in “the contradictory experience of the commodity world.” For Agnew, consumer goods are not passive signifiers of class, but polysemic symbolic entities whose meanings are uneasily grounded within contestations over power. These contestations necessarily rely upon the reproduction of power through the consumer marketplace. This extends beyond the meanings of goods themselves to the process through which goods are desired and procured.

To this end, the identification of women and gay men as consuming subjects given to irrational, narcissistic and sexualized forms of consumer desire and activity requires the acceptance of a rational white heterosexual middle-class male subject as its normative opposite. The apparent “naturalness” of this relationship posits consumption as a form of social power through which the Other is regulated, disciplined and, if necessary, expelled from the social body. Consider for example the discourse of domesticity and its policing of women’s immersion into consumer culture. As Mary Louise Roberts astutely notes, domesticity provided an important and effective check on the perception that women could not be trusted to control their own desires or their own

⁷⁴ Jean Christophe Agnew, “The Consuming Vision of Henry James,” in *The Cultures of Consumption: Critical Essays in American History, 1880-1980*, eds. Richard Wightman Fox and T.J. Jackson Lears (New York: Pantheon Books, 1985), 65-100.

money.⁷⁵ In the regulatory logic of domestic responsibility, domesticity sanctioned women's participation in the marketplace without the danger of their succumbing to the delirious power of hedonistic consumption.⁷⁶

Just as Peter Gay argued that the diagnosis of hysteria safeguarded male sexual primacy by regulating female sexual desire, the growing discourse on the female shopper served a similar regulating function, particularly as women's financial independence grew.⁷⁷ Edward Bok wrote countless editorials in his *Ladies Home Journal* extolling domestic femininity that fulfilled "woman's mission to make life gentler and more beautiful."⁷⁸ Likewise, Roland Marchand points out that a significant segment of interwar advertising professionals viewed the female consumer as "emotional, irrational and lacking in self-control" and thus requiring the disinterested guidance of advertising

⁷⁵ Mary Louise Roberts, "Gender, Consumption and Commodity Culture," *American Historical Review*, Vol. 103, No. 3 (June 1998): 817-844.

⁷⁶ This is not to say that domestic life was completely repressive. There is certainly ample work in social and cultural history that has argued that women found pleasure and even resistance within domestic consumption. Alison Clarke, for example, has shown how suburban women turned Tupperware parties into spaces where they could escape the isolation and drudgery of housework and forge supportive communities that went beyond the immanent function of the party. Similarly, Jessamyn Neuhaus' recent *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* makes the perceptive distinction between "cookbook instruction" (that is, the recipes in the cookbook) and "cookbook habits" (the degree to which women conformed to the written recipes). For Neuhaus, the alteration and personalization of recipes, and the exhortations against such activity, demonstrates the difficulty of conceiving of domesticity as entirely repressive. However, such studies do not deny the disciplining function of domesticity. Alison Clarke, *Tupperware: The Promise of Plastic in 1950s America* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1999) and Jessamyn Neuhaus' recent *Manly Meals and Mom's Home Cooking: Cookbooks and Gender in Modern America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003).

⁷⁷ Peter Gay, *The Education of the Senses* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 197.

⁷⁸ Edward Bok, Untitled Editorial, *Ladies Home Journal*, May 1898, 14.

professionals.⁷⁹ One such guide, Christine Frederick's important 1929 study *Selling Mrs. Consumer*, was equally a field report on consumer behaviour and a tool of social domination that it insisted upon a proper (and deeply Taylorist) notion of thoroughly rationalized and modernized nexus of consumption and homemaking.⁸⁰

Like the "nervous" or "hysterical" woman unable to control her passions, the pleasure shopper gave in to her consumptive desires at her own risk. The similarities between unhealthy sexuality and unhealthy consumption are salient because both rely upon the tacit acceptance of a female psyche that must perpetually struggle between the rational and the irrational. Sharon Zukin provides a striking example of this in her recent ethnography of contemporary shopping practices.⁸¹ In her discussion of narcissism and desire, Zukin suggests that women must regularly struggle with a deep-seated sense of guilt when shopping. It is worthwhile here to quote Zukin at length,

when we women desire goods because of their sensuous qualities, we tend to think these desires are signs of personal or even a biological flaw. The more sophisticated and self-aware we are, the more we try to distance ourselves from our urges... We fear these urges today just as women at the turn of the century feared that they were prone- as their detractors claimed- to kleptomania.⁸²

Zukin brings together a number of german themes here. First, Zukin's respondents are explicitly aware of the dichotomy between good consumer desire and bad consumer

⁷⁹ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 131.

⁸⁰ Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York: Business Bourse, 1929).

⁸¹ Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004).

⁸² *ibid*, 91.

desire. It is crucial to note the degree to which her respondents and sources problematize, even pathologize, pleasure. Secondly, Zukin's respondents understand the good desire/bad desire dichotomy as a perfectly natural element of the female mind and not as a discourse that effectively regulates their participation in the marketplace. Finally, it is important to note that the good desire/bad desire dichotomy crucially excludes heterosexual men. As Zukin notes in reference to a *Los Angeles Times* column on "the perfect pair of jeans,"

while men 'research' and plan their purchases around specific products, and count this as an example of their superior, rational approach to shopping, the reporter's attempt to describe in precise detail the jeans she desires only makes her appear less rational and more obsessive.⁸³

This is not a simple matter of a sexist double standard but evidence of consumer culture's central role in managing and expressing gender identity.

This, in the final analysis, is the problem of the male consumer. How do we as historians come to understand the construction and maintenance of gender identity in consumer culture and acknowledge men as desiring consuming subjects without falling into the problematic rhetoric of an essentialist "masculinity crisis"? How we desire goods (or not) is just as important as how we acquire them. In this sense, the problem of the male consumer speaks in part to a larger issue in historiography, namely how we historicize pleasure and desire. Indeed, one of the central drawbacks in much of the work in the history of gender and consumer culture is its over-reliance on quantitative research and its allegiance to recovering actual lived experience. As important and vital as this

⁸³ *ibid*, 92.

may be, the privileging of lived experience sidesteps crucial questions about subjectivity, discourse and desire. As I have suggested above, the tension between rationality and irrationality that is so evident in discussions of women's consumption is all but missing in discussions of the male consumer. Instead, the male consumer exists as a single dimensional entity engaged in rational, purposeful consumption. Rare is the study that acknowledges male consumption as an occasion for anxiety, repression and pleasure. Yet, it is there in advertising, in the design of retail spaces, in articles and photo spreads on the latest consumer goods and in virtually every other space through which men confront consumer culture. This dissertation is about how the project of the cultivation of the (male) self displaces and sublimates the anxiety, repression and pleasure of consumption. It is also about the centrality of cultural intermediaries in articulating legitimate forms of masculinity. In short, my interest in *Esquire* between 1950 and 1963 is in its imagination of the consuming male.

Section 4: The Lineaments of Personality

Writing in a November 1958 feature on the masculinity crisis, historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. called for men to develop their "lineaments of personality" through greater awareness of art, humor and politics.⁸⁴ The appearance of this essay in *Esquire* is notable for a number of reasons. First, it helped promote *Esquire* as a serious magazine. Beginning in 1957, editors Harold Hayes, Clay Felker and Rust Hills, eagerly transformed what had been a crude men's magazine into a respected and sophisticated

⁸⁴ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. "The Crisis of American Masculinity," *Esquire*, November 1958, 65.

publication. The presence of Schelisinger in its pages was instrumental in lifting its reputation. Secondly, in his prescription, Schlesinger defined *Esquire*'s imagined readership: a cadre of intelligent, sophisticated and well-rounded men eager to break the chains of conformity. Finally, in his demonization of mass culture, Schlesinger defined his masculine ideal as necessarily oppositional to consumer culture. This is an important point to consider since *Esquire*, despite its flirtation with high culture, was still a magazine that advocated vigorous participation in consumer culture. This tension necessarily produced a magazine of seemingly conflicting identities. One is devoted to the arts, the other to commerce. One is cynical about the world, the other less so. One seeks enrichment through ideas, the other enrichment through things. In short, it reproduced the long-standing cultural conflict between the mind and the body. In what follows, I will examine how the editorials, opinion pieces, literary and film criticism, articles and visual elements in *Esquire* opened a discursive space in which men could simultaneously construct themselves within and outside of consumer culture.

This study opens with *Esquire* at its creative nadir. The vibrant dynamo that had been *Esquire* ran out of steam by the mid-forties. Though the War had kept the magazine alive, it had also sapped it of its sophistication as it sought to appeal to the G.I. and the Grunt on the frontline. Arnold Gingrich's departure in 1946 only hastened its decline. Chapter One, "You Have Forsaken the Average Man": The Postwar Crisis of Masculinity and the Genesis of the "New" *Esquire*," develops the history of *Esquire* during its period of transformation (roughly beginning with Gingrich's return in 1952 to the hiring of Hayes, Felker and Hills in 1956-57). Central to this transformation was the

reconceptualization of masculinity. Any changes *Esquire* needed to make required redefining the magazine's readership. Yet, if *Esquire* was to remain the "Magazine for Men," this redefinition necessarily required a new model of masculinity. In redefining its vision of the masculine ideal, *Esquire* directly engaged in two important and, at times parallel, bodies of postwar social criticism: the "crisis of masculinity" and the "mass culture debate." Crucially, this critical engagement gave birth to *Esquire's* ideal reader, the so-called "Uncommon Man."

Chapter Two, "The Prehistory of Uncommonness," introduces the reader to the ethos of unproductive leisure that defined *Esquire* from its inception in 1932. Though my study takes the tumultuous period of the fifties and early sixties as its subject, the thirties are nonetheless important on three counts. First, *Esquire's* advocacy of male consumption was groundbreaking in that it opened consumption up to men in ways that had been unthinkable. Not only did *Esquire* encourage men to shop, it encouraged them to pursue a life of unproductive leisure that emphasized pleasure, fantasy and desire. Secondly, in doing so, *Esquire* synthesized a number of complimentary discourses on modern masculinity into a coherent, modernist ideology. Finally, it was the legacy of *Esquire* in the 1930s that served as the template through which Arnold Gingrich and his editors recreated *Esquire* in the fifties.

The development of "uncommonness" into a coherent worldview is the subject of Chapter Three, "A New Genre of Men": Sophistication, Consumption and the Uncommon Man." Here I am particularly interested in *Esquire's* development of a new ethos of consumption and leisure, dubbed by the editors as "New Sophistication." What

made sophistication new? In part, it was its democratic nature. Anyone could become sophisticated, as demonstrated by the “culture boom” of the late fifties and early sixties and its multiple avenues towards refinement. In the increasingly postmodern world of the image, sophistication largely depended more upon consumption than it did on the depth of contemplation. Nowhere was this more evident than Rust Hills’ attempts to shape *Esquire* into a mass circulation little magazine. More importantly, the “New Sophistication” ethos evidenced an important shift in how certain marketing professionals and cultural intermediaries were thinking about consumers. As the language of market segmentation and lifestyle slowly gained currency, magazines like *Esquire* became important laboratories in which a new world of consumption was cultivated.

No three figures were more central to *Esquire*’s identity in the early sixties than Dwight Macdonald, John F. Kennedy and Norman Mailer. Serving as the public face of the transformed *Esquire* (Macdonald and Mailer as contributors, Kennedy as idealized image), the trio embodied a gospel of a heroic modernist masculinity that seized upon a dynamic rhetoric of individualism, intellectualism and sophistication. Chapter Four, “Macdonald/Kennedy/Mailer: Uncommonness, Embodiment and Heroic Masculinity,” examines in depth each figure’s place within the discourse of uncommonness. Central to my analysis is an awareness of how bodies and physical sensation figure into the rhetoric of heroic masculinity. For all three men, the body, and by extension its materialization through consumer culture, was a problematic source of pleasure and revulsion. This is all the more important when we consider that the heroic masculinity they represented depended upon a modernist theory of corporeality that was increasingly under suspicion.

Nowhere was this skepticism more evident than in *Esquire*. The dissertation concludes with an epilogue in which I consider the demise of the “Uncommon Man” in the mid-sixties. The studied seriousness of uncommonness gave way to an editorial philosophy that encouraged cynicism, incredulousness and irreverence. As evidenced by the New Journalism, the Dubious Achievement Awards, and George Lois’ covers, after 1964 *Esquire* had lost faith in the project of the “Uncommon Man.” In part, this was because the investments the magazine had made in a vibrant liberal politics resulted in a bitter disillusionment with the political process. Moreover, this new style at *Esquire* emerged out of what Susan Sontag famously referred to as the “New Sensibility.” In its embrace of a cultural style that favored Andy Warhol over Jackson Pollock, *Esquire* advocated what could only be called straight camp.

Writing in the introduction to *Smiling Through the Apocalypse*, an anthology of the best of *Esquire*’s non-fiction from the 1960s, editor Harold Hayes pointed out that, “a magazine’s promise is the delivery...of its own version of the world, its special attitude toward the reader.”⁸⁵ For Hayes, *Esquire*’s *weltanschauung* was expressly conditioned by the cultural and intellectual currents of the day. “Against the aridity of the national landscape of the late Fifties,” Hayes remarked, “we offered to our readers in our better moments the promise of outright laughter”⁸⁶. Beyond laughter, *Esquire* offered its readers a powerfully coherent model of the self. Crucially, it was a model that relied

⁸⁵ Harold Hayes, “Introduction,” in *Smiling Through the Apocalypse: Esquire’s History of the Sixties*, ed. Harold Hayes (New York: McCall Publishing Co., 1969) xviii.

⁸⁶ Hayes, “Introduction,” *Smiling Through the Apocalypse*, xix.

upon vigorous participation in consumer culture. In his discussion of Charles Baudelaire in “What is Enlightenment?”, Michel Foucault noted that modernity compels modern man “to face the task of producing himself.”⁸⁷ Nowhere is this production of the self more evident than in consumer culture. Nevertheless, the desiring, consuming male subject remains a problem for those scholars invested in the study of consumer culture for no defensible reason. What is needed, and what this study presents, is an approach to the male consumer; an approach that above all else understands consumption as a discursive practice and acknowledges the centrality of cultural intermediaries in the securing of the masculine sense of self.

⁸⁷ Michel Foucault, “What is Enlightenment?” *The Foucault Reader*, Paul Rabinow, editor, (New York: Pantheon Books, 1984), 42.

Chapter 1: “You Have Forsaken the Average Man:” The Postwar Crisis of Masculinity and the Genesis of the “New” *Esquire*

Section 1: “The Magazine for ‘Fairies’, Old Maids, or What Have You”

“As we head into our twenty-fifth year, the thought is comforting that there’s nothing quite so permanent as change.”

Arnold Gingrich¹

In 1958, *Esquire* marked 25 years of uninterrupted publication with a special silver anniversary issue. *Esquire* celebrated this feat with the 317 page October 1958 issue that featured such notable contributors as Tennessee Williams, Frank Lloyd Wright, F. Scott Fitzgerald, Arthur Miller, and Malcom Cowley listed on the magazine’s shiny silver cover. Inside, readers could find: Wright expounding on the illegitimacy of the real estate agent; Charles De Gaulle reminiscing on his encounters with “F.D.R. and Ike;” an exchange on film criticism between director Otto Preminger and *New York Times* fixture Bosley Crowther; fiction by Irwin Shaw and Roger Vailland; selected letters of F.Scott Fitzgerald; and cultural criticism by Reed Whitmore, Rueul Denney and Robert M. Hutchins. On the surface, the issue was *Esquire*’s opportunity to celebrate twenty-five years of continued existence in one of the most competitive industries. In content and appearance, the issue harkened back to the heady days of the thirties when *Esquire* was the smart and dapper upstart on the “quality” magazine scene. However, the issue was

¹ Arnold Gingrich, “Flashback to the Vintage Years,” Publishers Page, *Esquire*, October 1957, 10.

not merely an exercise in self-congratulatory nostalgia. As most readers would soon discover (if they hadn't done so already) *Esquire* was evolving into one of the most interesting and forward-thinking mass circulation magazines available. Thus, the Silver Anniversary issue served as an opportunity to definitively close one chapter in the magazine's illustrious history while simultaneously opening a new one.

That *Esquire* was changing was a fact that was not lost on many stalwart *Esquire* readers. From the time of founding editor Arnold Gingrich's return from early retirement in 1952, the magazine had been slowly eliminating the risqué features that made it so popular during the Second World War. Angry letters poured into *Esquire*'s offices decrying the loss of "our magazine." As one reader charged,

Esquire is not a man's magazine anymore. . . you've gone panty waist-- you're giving us he-men nice Rollo stories, eruditely written, but who'in'll (sic) wants to be educated by (an) . . . all-male magazine! The average man wants realism without a Louisa Olcott (sic) vocabulary. He wants to hear the lions roar and the elephants trumpet--and that's what we formerly got in *Esquire*.²

As early as 1955, a full two years before the full scope of *Esquire*'s change became apparent, readers accused the magazine of abandoning its core constituents (i.e. "real men") in favor of an editorial outlook that allegedly courted dandies, liberals, intellectuals, snobs, or a combination thereof. "Are you catering to the morons sitting on their tailbones drooling over Liberace?" inquired one reader.³ Another reader wrote in

² Claude A. Lindsey to Arnold Gingrich, 10 September 1959, Arnold Gingrich Papers, Box 19, University of Michigan, Bentley Historical Library (hereafter cited as Gingrich MSS).

³ John D. Sherwin to *Esquire*, "Sound and Fury," *Esquire*, June 1955, 15.

complaining that, “you have hit the low water level by abandoning your girlie-girl pages for topics about segregation in the churches.”⁴ Still another wrote,

I started reading *Esquire* when it was ‘The Magazine for Men,’ when it contained the beautiful works of Pattey (sic), Vargas, etc. Now more and more with each issue, it seems to be the magazine for ‘fairies’, old maids, or what have you.⁵

A similar complaint was registered by a reader from Washington D.C. who grouched that

Esquire used to be a glamor magazine, but month by month it is losing it’s zing and class. It appears that the Sarte (sic), avant garde beat generation and other’s of that ilk have taken over. I say raus mit em, and return to authority the specialists on les filles with photo’s (sic) of leggy, provocative, glamorous, and beautiful women. No more arty stories, or ones with a message, but something on the Hemingway and Somerset Maughan (sic) type. Throw away that clean scrubbed look. So get on the beat man and return to normalcy which means less interior decorating motifs, chaps with capes, etc., but more and better exotic’s as they say in the night club trade.”⁶

In a similar vein, a reader from High Point, NC wrote “with all sincereness, I request that your executive board review *Esquires* of the thirties with a view to bringing the magazine back to the men of this country, rather than aiming at the “Beatnik” and the “Ivy League” dandies.”⁷

For other letter writers, the changes at *Esquire* were less a matter of wrists than they were of brows. *Esquire*, according to one irate reader, had become a “snob’s

⁴ Anonymous, n.d., Box 19, Gingrich MSS.

⁵ The writer is referring to pinup artists George Petty and Alberto Vargas. Joaquin de la Roza to Arnold Gingrich, 13 February 1959, Box 19, Gingrich MSS.

⁶ L.A. Anderson to Arnold Gingrich, 27 August 1958, Box 19, Gingrich MSS.

⁷ F.A. Fletcher, Letter to the Editor, Sound and Fury, *Esquire*, March 1960, 16.

magazine from cover to cover” featuring literature that “stinks,” travel features for the “filthy rich,” and fashion that is “sickening.”⁸ Another suggested that

You might consider how many more readers you could attract by once again publishing at least some of the lusty, gusty, MASCULINE . . . fiction and articles--instead of standing on your assumed literary pinnacle, looking down your nose at common mortals.⁹

In another letter, the same writer wrote, “Your new readers have to be bon-vivants, or clothes-horses, or gadabouts, or snobs. You have forsaken the average man.”¹⁰

To these and other similar remonstrations, *Esquire* publisher Arnold Gingrich would send a simple form letter that stated

Over twenty years ago I wrote that *Esquire* was not the magazine for everybody, and I guess that’s still true. Apparently, in the course of years, you’ve changed, I’ve changed and we both know damn well the magazine has. But can you think of any other American institution that hasn’t?

In closing, Gingrich would add that “quite possibly some of the other men’s magazines, which have made something of a policy of imitating or reviving the features of *Esquire*, would be a better bet for you.”¹¹

While Gingrich originally sought to merely recapture the glory of *Esquire*’s first four years (1933-1937), his youthful editors (Harold Hayes, Clay Felker, and Rust Hills) gave him a magazine which was more daring, more literate, more irreverent and more relevant than the old “Esky” had ever dared to be. To be sure, by the mid-sixties *Esquire*

⁸ Forest C. Dana to Arnold Gingrich, 23 August 1958, Box 19, Gingrich MSS.

⁹ Erle Johnston to Arnold Gingrich, 20 November 1961, Box 19, Gingrich MSS.

¹⁰ Erle Johnston to Arnold Gingrich, 11 October 1961, Box 19 Gingrich MSS.

¹¹ Arnold Gingrich to Alvin E. Coleman, 26 August 1958, Box 19, Gingrich MSS.

became known for its controversial George Lois-designed covers, nurturing the so-called “New Journalism” and publishing fiction which was deemed too controversial for other mass-circulation literary magazines such as the *New Yorker*, the *Atlantic*, and *Harper’s*.¹² This was, to be sure, an important factor in the dissent and dismay expressed in the letters to the editor. For many readers, commentary by Aldous Huxley, fiction by Truman Capote and political reportage by Richard Rovere were hardly substitutes for the titillating pin-ups and riveting shoot-em-ups they had grown accustomed to. But in a different sense, the dissent was less about the contents of the magazine than it was about the definition of masculinity which the magazine advocated. While the magazine continued to deliver a mix of fashion, fiction, and essays, the manner in which this mix was articulated was markedly different. By retaining its billing as “The Magazine for Men,” *Esquire* seemingly told its readers that the conventional sense of masculinity once championed by the magazine was irrelevant, and perhaps, even embarrassing. Despite the venomous barbs readers hurled at the magazine, the “new” *Esquire* had embraced the “Uncommon Man,” the vigorous and self-assured urban(e) sophisticate, as its model of modern masculinity.

Section 2: From *Esqy* to *Esquire*

Esquire’s three principal founders, Arnold Gingrich, David Smart and William Wientraub, all had their roots in the advertising and marketing of men’s apparel. The Chicago-based trio had spent the better part of the period between 1927 and 1932

¹² This most notably includes Truman Capote’s novella *Breakfast at Tiffany’s* which *Esquire* published in its November 1958 issue after it had been rejected by *Harper’s Bazaar*.

working on such fashion trade magazines as *Gentlemen's Quarterly* and *Apparel Arts*.¹³ In November of 1932 at the request of clothier Rogers Peet, they began to piece together successive dummies of a new fashion booklet which was interspersed with articles of interest to men. Dubbed *Esquire*, the new venture evolved over the next month from a simple fashion booklet that, in Gingrich's words, "not even a pansy would want to be caught dead with" to an extravagant tabloid-sized magazine.¹⁴ With each successive dummy, the trio struggled to produce a cost-effective fashion magazine which even the manliest of men would be willing to purchase.¹⁵ Bill Weintraub, for his part, was uneasy with the idea of the magazine. As Gingrich reports in his memoirs, Weintraub "couldn't imagine that men would ever part with their own money for a male counterpart of *Vogue* or *Harper's Bazaar*."¹⁶ In his letters to star contributor Ernest Hemingway, Gingrich was at pains to assure him that the *Esquire* reader will not be effete or bookish. "This magazine," claimed Gingrich, "is aimed at guys who never heard of the *Dial* or the *Broom* or the *Seven Arts* or the *Little Review*."¹⁷

¹³ Gingrich, *Nothing but People*, 81.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ As Hugh Merrill reports, trade magazines such as *Apparel Arts*, were displayed in men's clothing stores and used as a sales aid. A merchant could simply "show a customer a copy of *Apparel Arts* and then offer to order anything that wasn't in stock." Hugh Merrill, *Esqy: The Early Years at Esquire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 29. The *Gentlemen's Quarterly* title became defunct in the late twenties but was resurrected as an *Esquire*, Inc. title in 1957.

¹⁶ Gingrich, *Nothing but People*, 81.

¹⁷ Arnold Gingrich to Ernest Hemingway, 4 August 1933, Box 1, Gingrich MSS.

Esquire first hit the newsstands on September 15, 1933. Leading off with a journalistic piece by Ernest Hemingway, the inaugural issue contained contributions by Ring Lardner, Jr. Dashiell Hammett, Douglas Fairbanks, Jr., golfer Bobby Jones, and boxing champ Gene Tunney among others. The issue also featured color fashion spreads, advice columns and advertisements that touted the benefits of making it up the corporate ladder. Gingrich promised readers that month after month, they would be treated to an outstanding mix of fiction, essays, and humor by some of the best writers around as well as news on the latest in men's fashion and leisure. In short, *Esquire* was a unique venture. True, the *New Yorker* featured a similar mix of fiction, essays, and humor. However, their mascot, the foppish dandy Eustace Tilley, was hardly a figure to attract an audience of the "strong-willed individuals" Gingrich sought. After all, as Gingrich made perfectly clear, *Esquire* was intended to as "a magazine for men only."

Despite its impressive layout and equally impressive roster of contributors, magazine industry insiders gave *Esquire* little chance to survive. The initial print run called for 105,000 copies with only 5,000 copies allocated for newsstand sales with the remainder earmarked for men's clothing stores across the country. According to Arnold Gingrich, Mike Morrissey of the American Newsstand Company (the largest newsstand distribution service at the time), advised the trio that "there are at this time, in this country, just five thousand places where even one copy of any fifty-cent item can be sold on the newsstand. So let's have five thousand, but don't be surprised if you don't sell more than half of them." In short order, Morrissey was proven wrong. The first issue of *Esquire* promptly sold out. Within a day, newsstands were clamoring for more copies to

satisfy consumer demand.¹⁸ Copies which had sat in men's clothing stores were redirected to metropolitan newsstands. By the end of the month, the magazine had proven itself a dynamic success, forcing the decision to convert from a quarterly to a monthly publication schedule.¹⁹

Over the next five years, commentators hailed *Esquire* as the *enfant terrible* of the magazine world. Much of this notoriety was of course due to the naughty sophistication of the magazine's cartoons and drawings. Moreover, the magazine's carefree mix of seriousness and gaiety impressed friend and foe alike. In a decade renowned for its earnest celebrations of the American people, *Esquire* seemed content to celebrate its lack of commitment.

Esquire's meteoric rise to prominence began to cool by 1938. Internal struggles over editorial control, declines in subscription and newsstand sales and the waning of the magazine's novelty all signaled a decline in *Esquire's* quality. By 1940, David Smart had effectively taken editorial control from Gingrich. The entry of the United States into the Second World War provided *Esquire* an opportunity to shed its bon vivant image and repackage itself as a magazine for the All-American G. I. From 1942 to the end of the war, *Esquire* provided men on the frontlines with Varga Girl pinups, hairy chested adventure stories, profiles of weapon systems and the monthly "Goldbricking with *Esquire*" feature that solicited jokes from servicemen. By dispensing with sophistication,

¹⁸ The Writer's Institute, *Esquire: A Publication Portrait* (New York; Hawthorn Books, 1962), 4, Box 4, L. Rust Hills MSS, Lilly Library, Indiana University (hereafter referred to as the Hills MSS)

¹⁹ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 106.

Smart kept *Esquire* alive and developed a new audience for the magazine. Yet this would not be enough.²⁰

In the years following the Second World War, *Esquire* was mired in a financial and creative malaise. Worn out by the government's prosecution of *Esquire* and frustrated with Smart's constant meddling with the magazine's content, Arnold Gingrich retired from *Esquire* in 1946.²¹ *Esquire*, Gingrich complained, "was being steered, editorially, by every breeze that blew. Instead of correcting some of the vagaries that had crept in with the war years, they were perpetuated and even allowed to proliferate."²² Without Gingrich at the helm, the magazine had lost the man who had single-handedly turned *Esquire* into the magazine of Hemingway, Drieser, and Fitzgerald. In the following years, the situation would only worsen.

After Gingrich's departure, Smart had formally assumed the dual titles of Publisher and Editor. Plagued by falling circulation, renewed post-W.W.II competition,

²⁰ For more on *Esquire* during the war years see Chapter 6 in Merrill, *Esqy*. For a sophisticated reading of the Varga Girl see Maria-Elena Buszek, "Of Varga Girls and Riot Grrrls: The Varga Girl and WWII in the Pin-up's Feminist History," *Pin-up Grrrls: Feminism, Sexuality, and the Pin-Up Genre* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, forthcoming). For a discussion of *Esquire*'s place within WWII era outreach efforts see, Beth Hervey, "Sandwiches, Sugar and *Esquire*: The Lima Service Canteen During World War II," *Northwest Ohio Quarterly*, Vol.72, Nos. 3-4 (2000): 66-75.

²¹ In 1943, the Office of the Postmaster began hearings to withdraw *Esquire*'s second-class mailing privileges on grounds of obscenity. According to the Postal Act of 1879, magazines could be mailed at a lower second class rate provided that the materials did not offend prevailing standards of decency. For the next three years, *Esquire* (represented in Washington by Gingrich) and their attorneys fought the U.S. government all the way to the Supreme Court first as *Walker v. Esquire* and later as *Hannegan v. Esquire*. Ultimately, and with the help of such witnesses as H.L Menken, *Esquire* had succeed in defending itself against charges of obscenity. See chapter 7, "Esqy Goes to Court" in Hugh Merrill, *Esqy: The Early Years at Esquire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995) for a more developed account of the proceedings.

²² Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 167. *Esquire*'s most popular feature during the war years was the Varga Girl pinup. 2005).

and the failure of Ken and Verve, Smart kept *Esquire* alive by providing readers with service articles on men's health issues, pulpish mysteries and westerns, more cartoons and more pinups. However, as Hugh Merrill points out, it was not only the editorial side of *Esquire* that had suffered. Longtime advertisers such as Kuppenheimer and I. W. Harper whiskey had closed their accounts with the magazine. The prestigious back cover once graced by Harper whiskey was now the property of Pabst Blue Ribbon, a beer traditionally associated with the working class. Despite such a crisis, Smart continued to publish what he believed men wanted: tough-guy stories, dirty jokes, and bosomy beauties. Clearly, changes were needed in order to address the laundry list of ailments that had accumulated over the past decade. If *Esquire* were to be successful in winning back advertisers and "restoring" itself to the prominence it enjoyed in the thirties, it would require a radical break with the recent past. While the implementation of *Esquire*'s overhaul began as early as 1952, it would not be until the final three years of the fifties that the changes would manifest themselves for the readers of *Esquire*. The "Big Change" at *Esquire* would ultimately culminate in the July 1961 "New Sophistication" issue where one writer described sophisticates (and ostensibly *Esquire* readers) as those who possess an awareness of the world that "commands the...virtues of breadth, judgment, and self-assurance."²³

So thorough was this transformation that by 1961 John Crosby of the New York Herald Tribune would proclaim that *Esquire*, the onetime home of the Varga girl, now "assumes you're a part of the avant-garde, or otherwise what are you doing reading the

²³Stephen White, "Defining the Term," *Esquire*, July 1961, 43.

magazine?”²⁴ Likewise, in reviewing the 30th Anniversary issue, Newsweek used such terms as “polished”, “suave,” “cosmopolitan,” and “balanced” to describe the transformed *Esquire*.²⁵ A brief example illustrates the depth of *Esquire*’s editorial makeover. *Esquire* established its critical reputation in the thirties by publishing some of the most important commentators on contemporary culture: Gilbert Seldes, George Jean Nathan, and William Lyon Phelps. In the years following World War II, sophisticated criticism in *Esquire* was largely replaced by a boorish brand of consumerism. In an editorial from 1950 entitled “Little Esky Gets Along” the anonymous author (most likely David Smart) writes

The way we see it, when a man takes the time to read a movie or a book critic, he’s got something on his mind: to wit, what show will he see or what book should he read. It’s a rare guy who wants to hobnob with the reviewer just to learn what books or shows that gentleman doesn’t like and how many clever ways he can think up to say so. That may be art, but it ain’t helpful. *Esquire*, gentlemen, intends to be helpful.²⁶

By the end of the decade, the consumerist anti-intellectualism advocated in “Little Esky” was duly replaced by criticism penned by Dorothy Parker, Martin Amis, Martin Mayer and Dwight Macdonald; criticism that, to borrow a phrase from “Little Esky” intended to be insightful. For Gingrich and his young editors, this shift from Esky to *Esquire* marked the emergence of the “Uncommon Man.”

²⁴ John Crosby, “You and the Avant-Garde,” *New York Herald Tribune*, 22 May 1961.

²⁵ “Thirty Years of *Esquire*,” *Newsweek*, 16 December 1963, 88-89.

²⁶ Anonymous, “Little Esky Gets Along,” *Esquire*, 1950,

Section 3: Angry Men and the New Language

The “Uncommon Man” emerged at a time when the question of masculinity figured prominently in academic and popular discourse. Between 1947 and 1963, commentators in American magazines and newspapers decried the emasculation and disappearance of “real men”. In an article characteristic of the “masculinity in crisis” rhetoric, Robert Moskin, writing in *Look*, claimed that recent scientific research has come to one conclusion; that the American male, “is no longer the masculine, strong-minded man who pioneered the continent and built America’s greatness.” Ominously he added that the “experts pin most of the blame for his new plight squarely on women.”²⁷ Reflecting this sense of loss, novels, movies and plays were full of self-loathing men who were unable to overcome their sexual, social, or psychological neuroses. Tom Rath, the downtrodden protagonist of Sloan Wilson’s *Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* and Kyle Hadley, the drunken and ineffectual millionaire playboy in Douglas Sirk’s *Written on the Wind* are but two examples. These and other similar figures struggled with the supposed burdens of manliness and usually lost the battle.

Pundits of all stripes looked for reasons as to why the American man had fallen on hard times. Some, like Philip Wylie, blamed American mothers for suffocating their sons’ masculinity. By developing a sentimental attachment to “mom,” American men were unable and/or unwilling to become the self-sufficient dynamos which traditional masculinity called for. In short, a generation of mothers had produced men who were

²⁷ Robert Moskin, “The American Male: Why do Women Dominate Him?” *Look*, February 04, 1958, 77.

soft, mentally and physically. Psychiatrist Edward Strecker declared “momism” as being detrimental to our national health. As Joe Dubert notes, Strecker claimed that “one of the chief ingredients of momism had been possessiveness, an unwillingness to let sons develop a sense of masculine independence, a firm basis for growing into powerful and confident men.”²⁸

Other commentators, often writing from the social sciences, blamed the large bureaucratic organizations that so many men were entering into as being the cause of this “crisis.” Organizations functioned because they were able to subdue individuality, independence, and self-reliance--the hallmarks of masculine identity. Instead they sought men who knew how to work within organizations. David Riesman and his associates suggested in *The Lonely Crowd* that the so-called “glad-hander” had replaced the self-made man as the model of successful businessman. In the *Organization Man*, William Whyte argued that organizational emphasis on well-roundedness acted as a safeguard against individual brilliance. The most cynical view was that of C. Wright Mills who grimly equated the white collar professional with a “cheerful robot.”²⁹

Another line of reasoning saw “womanization” as the cause of the decline of American manliness. Women’s control of the domestic sphere had become so overwhelming that the home became a foreign land to men. “The American home,”

²⁸ Dubert, *A Man’s Place*, 240. Philip Wylie, *Generation of Vipers* (New York: Reinhart, 1942) is the central text in this discourse.

²⁹ David Riesman with Nathan Glazer and Reuel Denney, *The Lonely Crowd* (1949), Abridged Edition, (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1961), 126-127, William Whyte, *The Organization Man* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1956), C. Wright Mills, *White Collar* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1951), 233-235.

complained Philip Wylie, "...is becoming a boudoir-kitchen-nursery dreamed up by women, for women and as if males did not exist as males."³⁰ Other commentators, painted women as the beneficiaries of male toil. A panic stricken Robert Moskin asked "Does the American father have any role at all beyond procreation and money-making?"³¹ Even when the American man did participate in the home, home-repair chores forced on him by his wife further humiliated and emasculated him. William Iversen, in a 1963 *Playboy* article, bitterly notes that in the case of men on film or television,

Simply by saying "I do," he (the American male) is transformed from a handsome gray-eyed world beater into a goggle-eyed jerk in Genius-at-Work apron, who burns the steak, paints himself into corners and and causes geyser-like leaks to spring from the plumbing. In April, he's a mathematical moron who pulls his hair at the sight of an income-tax form and for the rest of the year he's a four star slob³²

Regardless of how much they complained, men were unable to break this reign of womanization simply because as *Nation's Business* commentator Cameron Ship succinctly notes men were the "sucker sex."³³

Esquire followed suit by engaging in an editorial philosophy Gingrich had dubbed "Blood and Thunder."³⁴ In the years following World War II, *Esquire* had joined the

³⁰ Philip Wylie, "The Womanization of America," *Playboy*, September 1958, 77.

³¹ Moskin, "The American Male," 79

³² William Iversen, "Love, Death and the Hubby Image," *Playboy*, September 1963, 194

³³ Cameron Ship, "Men are the Sucker Sex," *Nation's Business*, October 1952, 32

³⁴ Arnold Gingrich to Jerry Jontry, Interoffice memo, 15 August 1955, Box 11, Gingrich MSS

chorus of misogynistic Jeremiahs who saw a “feminine invasion” in every facet of American life. In a February 1949 editorial, Gordon Sweester bitterly complained that the masculine “roar” has been drowned out by “the cozy tearoom furniture squatting in his living room...the gabbling crones who weekly fuss up the place with cards and gossip...the chintzy philosophy deceptively lying in wait everywhere, like a creeping, predatory, and innocent-appearing vine.”³⁵ *Esquire*, mused Sweetser, was for the man whose personality was “broad enough and varied enough to step up to the bar for a slug of forty rod, straight, or to step out in tie and tails.” As Sweetser reminded his readers, “It takes a Man to do that.”³⁶ The emphasis on toughness was deliberate. Elsewhere Sweetser celebrates the special bond between father and son by dubbing it “an exclusive club.” “America,” Sweetser proclaims, “is a father and son land: a Man’s World.” To celebrate Father’s Day, Sweetser urged readers to peruse the magazine’s Father’s Day gift spread. However, as he cautioned readers, these gift ideas weren’t for everyone. To be sure, “only a real man could dream with such gusto.”³⁷

Nowhere was *Esquire*’s tough masculine style more blatant than in its detective fiction. Tellingly, authors such as William Francis, James West and Henry Kane (aka the “Hurry Kane”) produced stories which ignored the model of the existential and world-weary private detective perfected by Raymond Chandler and Dashiell Hammett and instead took the violent exploits of Mickey Spillane’s dim-witted Mike Hammer as their

³⁵ Gordon Sweester, “A First-Rate Man,” *Esquire*, February 1949, 5

³⁶ Gordon Sweetser, “The Power of Surprise,” *Esquire*, May 1949, 5

³⁷ Gordon Sweester, “Once Upon a Lifetime,” *Esquire*, June 1949, 5

standard. George Grella, for one, has suggested that Spillane's work can be best understood as a "perversion of the American detective novel."³⁸ To be sure, where Chandler and Hammet wrote meditations on morality and alienation disguised as detective stories, Spillane's Mike Hammer stories are little more than a thinly veiled excuse for accounts of sensationalistic and gratuitous sex and violence. Furthermore, as Grella rightly points out, Spillane's stories are marked by a quasi-facist subtext where Hammer acts as a "plainclothes Nazi."³⁹ As Grella correctly sums up, "Spillane makes the toughness of Hammet, the insights of Chandler and the compassion of Ross Macdonald seem like sissified and effeminate stuff indeed."⁴⁰

While Spillane's disciples at *Esquire* never engaged in the homophobia or radical right wing politics characteristic of Mike Hammer pieces, they did nevertheless share Spillane's misogyny and predilection for simply plotted narratives. With titles like "Armchair in Hell" (January 1948), "Hang by Your Neck" (December 1948), "Report for a Corpse" (July 1947), "Hot Blonde, Cold Blonde" (July 1948) and "The Murder Trick" (May 1950), *Esquire's* detective fiction left little to the imagination. As a whole,

³⁸ George Grella, "The Hard-Boiled Detective Novel" in *Detective Fiction: A Collection of Critical Essays*, Robin W. Winks, ed. (Woodstock, VT: Countryman Press, 1988), 116. Grella is not alone in this assessment of Spillane's career. See also, Jesse Berrett, "Gresham's Law of Culture: The Case of Mickey Spillane and Postwar America" in *Scorned Literature: Essays on the History and Criticism of Popular Mass-Produced Fiction in America*, eds. Lydia Cushman Schurman, Deidre Johnson and Madeline B. Stern (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 2002), Gabrielle Dietze, "Gender Topography of the Fifties: Mickey Spillane and the Post- World-War II Masculinity Crisis," *Amerikastudien/American Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4 (1998): 645-56, and Charles Silet, "The First Angry White Male," *Armchair Detective: A Quarterly Journal Devoted to the Appreciation of Mystery, Detective and Suspense Fiction*, Vol. 29, No. 2 (Spring 1996): 195-199

³⁹ *ibid.* 117

⁴⁰ *ibid.* 118

the stories relied on a simple formula: a detective is hired to do a job, gets double crossed and beaten, has women throw themselves at him and somehow winds up solving the crime. To be sure, for detective stories, these narratives are surprisingly thin on the actual work of detectives. What made the stories attractive was not their thrilling narrative as much as their desire to titillate readers with lurid details of sex and violence. Take for example the initial description of Sherry White in Francis' "The Brass Monkey"

She was lying on her side under the broken window, gagged and tied, wrists together behind her and ankles tightly bound. She was a nice-looking girl- deep red hair, big green frightened eyes that followed me as I walked to her, and a trim neat figure, full-shaped breasts and slim hips. There wasn't any doubt about the figure because except for the gag and the ropes. She was naked as a fresh tongue in a butcher's showcase.⁴¹

The conflation of sex and violence, particularly in the analogy of the naked body to the fresh tongue, plays into *Esquire's* gynophobic discourse. True, the femme fatale was a convention of the hard-boiled detective story. However, when she shares space with Sweetser's hairy chest editorials or Robert Ruark's advocacy of spousal abuse, it brings into sharp relief the level of masculine desperation in postwar America.⁴²

It is significant then to note that all of these stories were accompanied by illustrations that, for the lack of a better term, could be called cheesecake noir. An illustration of a nude, bound and gagged Sherry White, for example, supplements "The Brass Monkey". Ruby Fabian, the spider woman in James West's "Leopard Spots" is

⁴¹ William Francis, "The Brass Monkey," *Esquire*, September 1949, 96.

⁴² Robert Ruark, "What Hath God Wrought?" *Esquire*, October 1950, 61. Ruark suggests that spanking or some other form of corporal punishment is the only alternative for the male who has lost control of the liberated woman.

shown with a phallic cigarette clenched between her teeth.⁴³ In front of her, an assortment of half-empty glasses of whiskey, an opened bottle, and an ashtray full of spent and crushed cigarette butts. The caption accompanying the illustration read, “The look in her eyes could set you talking to yourself, but the big miracle in shock treatment was the rest of her.” More explicit in her sexuality was the illustration of Mona in Henry Kane’s “Armchair in Hell.”⁴⁴ Clad in a strapless black dress and adorned by jeweled bracelets, rings and necklace, Mona is posed in a crouched manner that is simultaneously threatening and sexual. “This was Mona...Mona of the angry, passionate, beautiful face.” The conflation of danger and sexuality so common to these illustrations is perhaps best illustrated in the artwork accompanying George Zuckerman’s “The Case of Lela Cade.”⁴⁵ Lounging on a couch, the titular Lela Cade is rendered as possessing long shapely legs and buoyant breasts which are accentuated by her striped swimsuit. To her left, a half-empty glass of liquor. But it is her face that catches our attention. Her squinting stare and voluptuous red lips visually reiterate the story’s tagline; “She more than attracted him; she compelled him, and from the first fiery moment of their affair he began to learn what heaven and hell were really like.” These women then lacked the sophistication of the Petty girl and the spunk of the Varga girl. Rather they were sexual in a way that was cold, heartless, and sinister. Much like their silver screen counterparts, the femme fatales

⁴³ James West, “Leopard Spots,” *Esquire*, October 1948, 64.

⁴⁴ Henry Kane, “Armchair in Hell,” *Esquire*, January 1948, 99.

⁴⁵ George Zuckerman, “The Case of Lela Cade,” *Esquire*, March 1949, 70.

in these illustrations were coded as being simultaneously dangerous and irresistible.⁴⁶ In *Esquire*'s "Man's World," women had gone beyond being the incompetents who could not cook and dared to defile masculine spaces with patterned wallpaper. To be sure, *Esquire* built much of its original reputation by taking aim at the prudish busy-body devotees of the women's magazine.⁴⁷ However, *Esquire* in the thirties also made it clear that it saw the liberated "modern" woman who cut her teeth on speakeasies, cocktail parties, and avant-garde literary salons as an ally. By the late forties however, that woman had largely disappeared from the magazine's editorial vision. Against the background of postwar reconversion and its attendant shifts in gender roles, *Esquire* saw all but the most compliant and submissive women as potential threats.

Dr. J.B. Rice's vitriolic "Woman; The Overrated Sex" makes this point clear with great efficiency.⁴⁸ Rice promptly proclaims that he is "burnt up" over the deluge of articles "pointing out the physical, mental, and moral superiority of females over males." This brand of "female propaganda," Rice continues, was particularly interested in degrading "male dignity." In the main, Rice is primarily concerned with debunking claims that women are as a whole healthier than men. Rather than basing his assertions

⁴⁶ The literature on the femme fatale in film noir is extensive. See for example the essays in *Women in Film Noir*, E. Ann Kaplan, ed. (London: BFI Publishing, 1978) or *Shades of Noir*, Joan Copjec, ed. (London: Verso Books, 1993). The construction of the femme fatale in feminist film criticism is particularly indebted to Laura Mulvey's discussion of the castrating woman. See Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema" (1975) in *Visual and Other Pleasures* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1989).

⁴⁷ See for example John D. Swain, "Four Recipes for Men," *Esquire*, July 1934, 69 or Murdock Pemberton, "If You Must Get Married," *Esquire*, June 1936, 109.

⁴⁸ J. B. Rice, M.D., "Woman: the Overrated Sex," *Esquire*, February 1950, 30

on “hard” science, Rice instead explains female healthfulness as the product of laziness. “I bet,” he contends, “that if there were a disease that singled out inactive people to attack, females wouldn’t show up so well in the mortality tables.” To be sure, it is exactly because men, in their roles as breadwinners, are more likely to suffer from stress-related ailments such as heart-disease and ulcers, that Rice upbraids women for wanting a “Santa Claus” who would “take the raw edge off the economic struggle” while simultaneously chastising those “career girls” who demand equal pay for equal work. Unlike the man who slavishly struggles through the workweek, Rice portrays “career girls” as layabouts who spend more time to fixing their hair, gossiping and drinking tea than they do on “the typewriter, the accounts or even the customers.” Men, it would seem, were the real losers in the postwar economic order.

It should be noted then that all of the implicit desires for leisure and a worry-less existence located in Rice’s article manifest themselves on the next page in a pin-up entitled “Rhumba Number.” There we find an illustration of a young lady clad in panties and mangas, the iconic frilly-sleeved shirt worn by mid-century Cuban orchestras. The accompanying lyrics, to be sung “with a thick rhumba accent,” inform us that the young woman is named Esmeralda and is endowed with the “universal shape.”⁴⁹ Between the pulp detective stories, Rice’s essay and the “Rhumba Number” pinup we see the essence of *Esquire* in the early postwar period. At the intersection of these three texts, we find a magazine unsure of how to reach its audience. The old formulas of sex and sophistication or, after 1940, just sex seemed ineffective in exciting readers. The reality

⁴⁹ Al Moore, “Rhumba Number,” *Esquire*, February 1950, 31.

of life in the postwar world called for a new way to speak to American men. For better or worse, it was angry and malicious. To be sure, this trio of texts brings to light many of the themes which were central to the postwar “crisis of masculinity” discourse.

The days of this jaundiced and misogynistic editorial policy however were numbered. With the Sweetsers’ ouster, Smart had begun to tinker with the magazine again. More service articles, more fashion pieces and a better grade of fiction began to slowly appear in the magazine. Furthermore, the magazine almost entirely stopped bemoaning man-the-victim and began to celebrate man-the-achiever. Helen Lawrenson’s “What Has Become of the Old-Fashioned Man?” is a case in point.⁵⁰ Reassuring her readers that women “are not looking for a bully or a master” or a “rough tough guy who will beat our ears off,” Lawrenson posits that what women are looking for is “a man we respect but do not fear.” This man “will be tender, romantic, protective, but will stand for no monkeyshines.” In Lawrenson’s account, men like Ezio Pinza, Clark Gable, Spencer Tracy, Earl Louis Mountbatten, and even Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru are precisely this type of man not because they make women swoon, but because their persona demands respect; a “man among men” in other words. True, Lawrenson’s essay falls prey to numerous misogynistic stereotypes (i.e. women are treated as creatures “whose chief function is to make life more pleasant for men” or “You’ll be surprised as how happy she’ll be” when the man asserts his presence in a relationship). Furthermore,

⁵⁰ Helen Lawrenson, “What Has Become of the Old-Fashioned Man?”, *Esquire*, February 1951. Lawrenson made her mark as one of *Vanity Fair*’s brightest writers. Soon after *Vanity Fair* was absorbed by *Vogue* in 1936, Lawrenson began doing freelance assignments for *Esquire*, often under the pseudonym “Anonymous.” She caused a major stir with her October 1936 piece “Latins are Lousy Lovers.” Lawrenson’s work began to appear under her by-line in the late forties.

her list of ideal men strikes readers as not being so much old-fashioned as just simply old. Nevertheless, Lawrenson's piece is notable in its subtle but important attempt to do away with the angry and violent man in crisis in favor of the confident and self-assured man. Yet, for all the celebrations of masculine gusto, *Esquire* still found space to publish such worrisome pieces as "Hernia: The Man Crippler," "Gout--For Men Only" and "Arthritis: The Old Enemy."⁵¹ Man-the-achiever was clearly a work in progress.

Esquire too was a work-in-progress. A series of chance encounters with the recently returned Arnold Gingrich had convinced Smart that only by returning to the spirit of the "old" *Esquire*, did the magazine stand a chance at survival. While initially wary of Smart's advances, Gingrich was eventually won over by Smart's sincere desire for rapprochement and his plans to resurrect the "old" *Esquire*. With an explicit understanding that Smart was not to meddle in editorial affairs, Gingrich officially returned to *Esquire* in June of 1952. Three and a half months later, David Smart passed away and Arnold Gingrich was elevated to the dual position of Publisher-Editor. In his new position as Publisher, Gingrich had finally gained the sort of editorial control he had always relished. "Reviving" *Esquire* became an obsession. As Gingrich would later explain, the intent was "not for a new *Esquire* but rather...an attempt at a re-finding of the youth of *Esquire*."⁵²

⁵¹ Walter Ross, "Hernia: The Man Crippler," *Esquire*, May 1951, 77. Walter Ross, "Gout--For Men Only," *Esquire*, September 1951, 63. Miriam Lincoln, M.D., "Arthritis: The Old Enemy," *Esquire*, August 1951, 48.

⁵² Arnold Gingrich, *Esquire Bulletin*, 21 January 1958, Box 11, Gingrich MSS.

One of Gingrich's first moves was to replace Art Director George Samarjan with the young Austrian designer Henry Wolf.⁵³ Born in Vienna in 1925, Wolf had emigrated to the United States 1941 after studying graphic design in Paris. After a three-year stint in the U.S. Army, Wolf returned to his studies while working at various advertising agencies. It was during this period that Wolf had studied at the New School for Social Research's Design Laboratory under the direction of Alexey Brodovitch. In 1952 Wolfe had joined the staff of *Esquire* as a lettering man and by the end of the year he had been elevated to the position of Graphics Editor, a euphemism for Art Director.⁵⁴ Samarjan, who in the words of Steven Heller was disposed of "Soviet style," was widely blamed for the poor state of *Esquire*'s visual identity.⁵⁵ The magazine, Gingrich recalled, looked like "a road company version of *Cosmopolitan*."⁵⁶ In a 1958 *Print* feature on Wolf, Gingrich recognized the daunting nature of the task that faced Wolf as he began his tenure at *Esquire*.⁵⁷ Wolf was charged with the thankless task of redesigning the magazine so as to reflect *Esquire*'s newly-discovered vitality and sense of purpose. However, the aesthetic

⁵³ Though most commentators, Henry Wolf included, credit Gingrich with the discovery and rise of Henry Wolf, Gingrich himself claims that it was David Smart who first suggested moving Wolf from the bowels of the art department into its leadership. See Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 187-189.

⁵⁴ Wolf would have to wait until 1957 to be named Art Director.

⁵⁵ Steven Heller, "Esquire and Its Art Directors: A Survivor's Tale" in *Graphic Design History*, Steven Heller and Georgette Ballance (New York: Allworth Press, 2001), 52. Samarjan's dismissal from *Esquire* was brief and sudden. As Wolf recalls, he was fired on a Friday afternoon. When Wolf returned to work on Monday, it was as if Samarjan had never worked at *Esquire*. This account is relayed in Heller, "Esquire and Its Art Directors", 52.

⁵⁶ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 187

⁵⁷ Anonymous, "Henry Wolf: Strategic Designer," *Print*, March-April 1958, 13-28.

problems Wolf faced paled in comparison to the corporate culture at *Esquire*. “Before he happened to us,” Gingrich noted, “we yielded to nobody in the vigor and stature of our contempt for art directors and art directing.”⁵⁸ Yet within a few short months, Wolf had won Gingrich’s respect and admiration. This in turn translated into a relatively free reign in redesigning the magazine.⁵⁹

Unlike Samarjan’s cluttered layouts, Wolf’s minimalist designs understood the value of an understated composition that focused the reader’s attention on the visual and textual elements on the page. The layout for “Wit’s Wit,” Laurence Greene’s profile of Abe Burrows, was typical of Wolf’s aesthetic in that it depended upon the interplay between negative space, photos and text. Under Wolf’s reign, photography also became an important part of the visual mix. Unorthodox croppings, sequential photographs, photos which bled across pages and the spontaneous and effervescent photography of Dan Wynn and Ben Somoroff all became important elements of the magazine’s look. Equally important were the stylishly modern illustrations by Tom Allen, Robert Weaver, Tomi Ungerer and R.O. Blechman. Wolf also introduced the widespread usage of sans serif fonts into the magazine, further emphasizing the magazine’s modernity.⁶⁰ However,

⁵⁸ *ibid*, 15.

⁵⁹ Heller. “*Esquire* and Its Art Directors,” 53-54.

⁶⁰ Sans serif fonts such as futura, kable and universal were conventionally associated Euro-modernism. Influential Bauhaus designers Laszlo Moholy-Nagy and Herbert Bayer in the 1920s called for a typographical revolution which would obey principles of geometric design. The “New Typography,” as it came to be known, sought to do away with ornamental type and replace it with font styles whose modernness was evident in its clean lines and machine-like precision. See Richard Hollis, *Graphic Design* (London: Thames and Hudson, 2001), Peter Dormer, *Design Since 1945* (London: Thames and Hudson, 1993) and Katherine McCoy, “American Graphic Design Expressions: The Evolution of American Typography,” *Graphic Design History*, 3-11.

Wolf's most lasting contribution to the magazine was to, once and for all, solidify a consistent visual identity for *Esquire*.⁶¹ As Wolf explained, the aim was to develop a respect for design amongst the editorial staff "by integrating design into the product, from the first editorial concept and through to the finished production job."⁶²

Wolf's redesign of the cover is instructive in this regard. Until George Lois was hired in 1963 to do cover layouts, the *Esquire* cover, as designed by Wolf and his successor Robert Benton, was marked by a number of key features. The covers were often conceptual in nature, relying either on a clever visual pun or on a carefully orchestrated motif. The covers also employed the newly stylized Esqy logo in novel ways. The December 1953 cover, for example, illustrates both tendencies in its Archimboldoesque rendering of Esqy through candy canes and Christmas tree ornaments. Images of women also played an important role in Wolf's covers. *Esquire* was still widely regarded as a girlie magazine, and despite Wolf's objections, girlie photos were to remain important visual elements. However, Wolf did command enough sway to differentiate the women on his covers from those found in the illustrations of

⁶¹ As original as Wolf's work in *Esquire* was, it is necessary to acknowledge his debt to his teacher, Alexey Brodovitch. From 1934-1958, Brodovitch served as art director at *Harper's Bazaar*. It was under Brodovitch's watch that the *Bazaar* shed its dowager image and cultivated a stance that favored modernism, sophistication and an irrepressible Francophillia. Much of this was of course due to the design innovations Brodovitch introduced. Furthermore, the Brodovitch's relationship with Editor Carmel Snow allowed Brodovitch the freedom to experiment with composition, cropping and photography. It would not be an overstatement to suggest that the relationship Wolf enjoyed with Gingrich was similar to the one shared by Snow and Brodovitch. To be sure, this is but one of many parallels *Esquire* shared with the *Bazaar*. Brodovitch left the *Bazaar* in 1958 and was succeeded by Wolf as Art Director. For more on Brodovitch, see Andy Grundenberg, *Brodovitch*, Masters of American Design Series (New York: Harry N. Abrams, Inc., 1989).

⁶² "Henry Wolf: Strategic Designer," 21.

Petty, Vargas, Moore, and Chiriaka. Where the pin-up made the woman the center of attention, the women who appeared on the *Esquire* covers of the late fifties and early sixties were features of the overall design logic.

The August 1953 cover illustrates this reasoning effectively. The background is composed of alternating red and white horizontal stripes. An image of a young woman in a bathing suit is then placed in perpendicular relation to the horizontal stripes. To visually accentuate this relationship, the stripes on the woman's bathing suit alternate between black and white vertical swaths. Furthermore, the photo is inverted so as to place the woman's head at the bottom of the page. What this accomplishes then is to place the vertical lines of the swimsuit at the center of the cover. What our eyes are drawn to then is not the image of the woman, but the conflict between the horizontal and vertical stripe stripes. The final element of the layout can be located if we follow the model's outstretched arm. Bouncing off her fingertips is a red and white beach ball emblazoned with the Esky logo. The logic of the design takes what would otherwise be a rather routine "summer issue" cover and infuses it with an inventive attention to composition. The visual effect here is akin to that of a collage in that we approach the image as a collection of independent elements placed into conflict with one another with meaning emerging dialectically from the composition. Nearly two decades later Wolf would write that the good design can only flourish in an environment where advertisers and the mass media would assume that their audiences are intelligent, thoughtful and creative. The worst thing for design is to look "upon the America outside of New York

as a large playground of subnormal adolescents.”⁶³ Instead Wolf suggests that “the more the masses get treated and talked to as intelligent adults, the more discerning and demanding they become.”⁶⁴ While it would not be until the end of the fifties that this ethic would completely take hold at *Esquire*, Wolf’s visually innovative covers point to the emergence of a new editorial consciousness in which the magazine would begin to move ever so tenuously towards a greater sense of sophistication.

The tenuousness of the transformation is of central importance. Gingrich, under the banner of the “New Language,” chose to exercise a curious mix of caution and bombast in the remaking of *Esquire*’s postwar image. Many of the changes were more symbolic than substantive. On the one hand, the magazine canceled its extensive backlog of mysteries and westerns and threw away nearly a million dollars worth of ads for “fly-by-night novelties.”⁶⁵ On the other hand, the magazine continued to publish stories and features that were more sensationalistic than sophisticated. Tellingly, Gingrich characterized the slow pace of change as “sweating off some of the fatty tissue around the girth of the magazine’s readership.”⁶⁶ To be sure, Carol Polsgrove argues convincingly in her account of *Esquire* in the 1960s that the magazine that would emerge in the late

⁶³ Henry Wolf, “Profile,” *Graphic Designers in the USA*, Vol. 1 (New York: Universe Books, 1971), 98.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* Wolf’s discussion of graphic art and the mass audience clearly shows the influence of the “Creative Revolution” which challenged many long-standing assumptions in the field of commercial graphic art. Thomas Frank has suggested that the work of Wolf’s contemporaries, Bill Bernbach, and George Lois in particular, can be best understood within the postwar critique of mass culture. See Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture, and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

⁶⁵ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 190.

⁶⁶ Gingrich to Jerry Jontry, Interoffice Memo, 15 August 1955, Box 11, Gingrich MSS.

fifties was more the product of the young editors Gingrich had brought in than any long term plan conceived by Gingrich himself.⁶⁷ In his defense, Gingrich insisted that the slow pace of *Esquire's* change was “a fate less dire than what might have befallen it if we had undertaken to try to change it completely overnight.”⁶⁸ For all of the praise Gingrich has rightfully received as an editor's editor, the “New Language” period is marked by a series of ill-conceived attempts to generate interest in *Esquire*.

Born during the final months of David Smart's tenure, the so-called “New Language” was devised to provide the magazine with a “skin-change” and to “regain the title of ‘America's most discussed magazine.’” Convinced that men wanted a magazine that was full of bravado, Gingrich and his staff commissioned writing that attempted to draw readers in through the sort of controversy “word-of-mouth” can produce. One of the gambits Gingrich pursued was the tactic of commissioning intentionally inflammatory features. By “raising a rumpus,” Gingrich had hoped that people would buy the magazine to see what the fuss was all about. One such article was “Californians are Crazy” which appeared in the February 1953 issue of *Esquire*. As proposed by Gingrich

...it will go out of its way to insult the whole giddy state, though the bulk of its content is aimed at Hollywood idiocies. But it will generalize from these, to infer that everything about the state is wacky, from their dress habits and architecture to their business ways and even their manner of treating their dead--goofy cemeteries, etc. This should get us--at the very least--a flood of the old-fashioned Sound and Fury, and at best some extra newsstand sales.

⁶⁷ Carol Polsgrove, *It Wasn't Pretty Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun?: Esquire in the Sixties* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 9-144.

⁶⁸ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 191.

The resultant article lambasted California for being “nutty as a fruitcake.”⁶⁹ “A single city block,” writes Frederick Van Ryn, “...can-and does- produce more nuts of every kind and description than say, the whole Commonwealth of Massachusetts.”⁷⁰ Like “Californians are Crazy,” “Let’s Secede from Texas,” (April 1953) and “Let’s Stop Laughing at Brooklyn,” (November 1953) played the controversy card by taking tired old stereotypes and blowing them out of proportion. The attack on Texas, for example, did little more than string together a series of inflammatory comments such as “And by the same token I think its high time we got wise to the geographical hemorrhoid that is the miserable state of Texas and cut the thing out of the Union.”⁷¹ No subject was taboo. Texans were upbraided for being loud drunken boors with too much money and too little sophistication. Even the women of Texas could not escape chastisement. “If the girls are pretty,” suggests Bernard Dorrity, “they’re Mexican. If they look like horses, they’re Texans.”⁷² The subsequent outcry did manage to produce the sort of controversy Gingrich had hoped for. The citizens of Lufkin, TX burned all extant copies of the issue. Numerous threats were made against author Dorrity, including a challenge to a duel.⁷³ The magazine received so much mail regarding piece that it led Gingrich to claim that not

⁶⁹ Frederick Van Ryn, “Californians are Crazy,” *Esquire*, February 1953, 23.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*

⁷¹ Bernard Dorrity, “Let’s Secede from Texas,” *Esquire*, April 1953, 57.

⁷² *ibid.*

⁷³ Sam Akin to *Esquire*, “Sound and Fury,” *Esquire*, July 1953, 6.

since the famed 1925 standoff between Clarence Darrow and William Jennings Bryant has there been a confrontation that was as contentious.⁷⁴

The shock and controversy gambit was not restricted to the regional articles. *Esquire* had also entered into the field of investigative journalism. Articles such as Monroe Fry's "The International White Slave Traffic" or Alvin Davis' "The Fix in Sports" relied on a time tested mixture of prurient sensationalism and moral outrage to entice potential readers into buying an issue of the magazine. Fry's piece, for example, informed its readers that one of the most tragic consequences of World War II was the emergence of an underground economy in which European children were sold into prostitution. The problem is so widespread, Fry reports, that not even the most advanced nations, working under the aegis of the United Nations can defeat it. Beyond a sense of journalistic activism, the shift to investigative journalism was conditioned largely by an attempt to match the success of the exceedingly popular men's periodicals *True* and *Argosy*.⁷⁵ Though both magazines predated *Esquire* (*Argosy*, 1882; *True*, 1919), they did not reach prominence until the early forties. Both relied on non-fiction pieces which detailed the exploits of soldiers, outdoorsmen, and other manly types. Described by Tom Pendergast as "*Esquire* for the beer and poker set" *True* and *Argosy* addressed their masculine audience with tough and direct rhetoric. If circulation figures are any indication, the formula worked well. In the early fifties both *True* and *Argosy* could

⁷⁴ *ibid.*

⁷⁵ For more on *True* and *Argosy*, see Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 223-242.

claim circulation which exceeded one million. *Esquire*, on the other hand, was stalled in the mid-700,000 range. In the end, the investigative journalism, like the regional attack pieces, did little to expand *Esquire*'s readership. By 1954, the attack pieces were largely discarded only to be replaced by the "Shopping Streets" features and Monroe Fry's sympathetic series of sketches of American towns. By administering a patient long-term transformation, *Esquire*'s attempt to strike out in new directions while conterminously preserving many of the features older readers had grown accustomed to produced a magazine that was uninspired at best. *Esquire*'s uncertain sense of self became so pronounced it led one reader to make the observation that *Esquire* is "a confused magazine" while another was more vicious, referring to the magazine as "the biggest assortment of nothing I've ever seen."⁷⁶

The fate of the pin-up is a telling example of the difficulty Gingrich and company faced in remaking the magazine. Following the acrimonious departure of Alberto Vargas in 1946, *Esquire* continued running pin-ups illustrated by Fritz Willis, Al Moore, Ernest Chiriaka, and Roswell Keller among others. Though *Esquire* had built much of its reputation on its Varga Girl pin-ups, the growing availability of girlie magazines (i.e. *Rogue*, *Dude*, *Wink*, *Brief*, *Titter*, *Flirt*, etc.) many with photographs much more explicit than what appeared in *Esquire*, had made the magazine's brand of cheesecake obsolete. In March 1953, the magazine introduced a new pin-up feature-- *Esquire*'s "Lady Fair." One part pin-up and one part consumer service feature, the "Lady Fair" in question would be photographed (not illustrated) in a stylish dress or negligé, surrounded by the latest in

⁷⁶ Henry Sloan and Victor Brunt, "Sound and Fury," *Esquire*, April 1954.

consumer goods. Taking the dictum that “sex sells” to its logical conclusion, all the items in the spread were for sale at one of the fine stores listed on the next page. By the end of the year, the “Lady Fair” feature would eliminate the consumer service material and function as a “decent” pin-up, that is, one in which the model was fully clothed. Over the next three years, numerous up-and-coming starlets appeared in the “Lady Fare” feature. This list significantly included the African-American actresses Dorothy Dandridge (June 1954) and Ertha Kitt (February 1955).

The last-gasp of the pin-up was in the much-trumpeted return of George Petty to the pages of *Esquire* in the January 1955 issue. The Petty Girl was synonymous with the *Esquire* of the thirties, therefore it made perfect sense to bring Petty back into the fold if Gingrich’s aim was indeed to “restore” *Esquire* to prominence it once enjoyed. Despite the numerous letters in the “Sound and Fury” section celebrating the return of the Petty Girl, the issue failed to generate the sort of newsstand and subscription sales Gingrich had hoped for. The return of the Petty Girl was carried out on two fronts. Petty had agreed to produce calendars for 1955 and 1956. Additionally he would provide illustrations for deluxe spreads in the January 1955 and 1956 issue. For all of their optimism, the hopes of Gingrich and company were dashed by the poor sale numbers for the 1955 calendar. “I had hoped,” Gingrich wrote to Petty in November 1954, “that with the long buildup we had devoted to the return of the Petty Girl....we could engender enough excitement and anticipation to stimulate a lively sale of the calendar.”⁷⁷ The reality of the apparent lack of interest in the Petty Girl however had “blasted” all of

⁷⁷ Arnold Gingrich to George Petty, 26 November 1954, Box 11, Gingrich MSS.

Gingrich's hopes for generating excitement or newsstand sales.⁷⁸ Having already committed to *Esquire* to a Petty Girl calendar for 1956, Gingrich would turn to gimmicky stunts such as using Petty Girl illustrations for the August and November 1955 "Lady Fair" gatefold spreads and producing Petty Girl playing cards. Not coincidentally these issues coincided with the major campaigns for the 1956 calendar. The "great disappointment" Gingrich experienced was perhaps to be expected in a media environment where *Playboy* had emerged as a leading men's magazine.⁷⁹ When faced with the fresh-faced buxom Playmates, the Petty Girl seemed hopelessly outdated. *Esquire*, Gingrich would later quip, "might have actually done better with the news that the Gibson Girl was back."⁸⁰ Following the Petty fiasco, Gingrich had made the decision to eliminate the gatefold pin-up altogether as soon as the annual printing contract expired.⁸¹ With the final "Lady Faire" feature in 1956, *Esquire* had put an end to its days as a girlie magazine.

Section 4: Enter the Young Turks

By 1955, the failure of the "New Language" to revitalize *Esquire*, had reinforced the sense that magazine's future was dependent on differentiating itself from magazines like *True*, *Argosy* and, most significantly, *Playboy*. In large part, this meant a retreat

⁷⁸ *ibid.*

⁷⁹ Arnold Gingrich to George Petty, 17 October 1955, Box 11, Gingrich MSS.

⁸⁰ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 192.

⁸¹ Arnold Gingrich to Jerry Jontry, interoffice memo, 06 August 1973, Box 15, Gingrich MSS.

from sex and sensationalism and a return to the magazine's sophisticated literary roots. Despite its reputation for its pin-ups, Gingrich had always thought of *Esquire* in the company of Menken's *American Mercury* or Crowninshield's *Vanity Fair*. By his own admission, the question of *Esquire*'s image, or perceived lack of it, began to vex Gingrich. "Just to say that we were a man's magazine," Gingrich admits, "was neither enough nor even very helpful."⁸² Increasingly, Gingrich began to admit that an appeal to a younger audience was essential to the magazine's economic and editorial survival. Market research information convinced Gingrich that the generation of postwar men possessed more discretionary spending than previous generations. According to one study commissioned by *Esquire*, the average reader was in his early to mid-thirties, college educated, relatively well-off and an eager consumer.⁸³ Furthermore, as Carol Polsgrove correctly notes, the GI Bill had produced an audience of young, college-educated professionals who were "eager to taste the delights of the mind, the cultivation of spirit and sense--and have fun doing it to?"⁸⁴ Suddenly, *Esquire* was given a new lease on life. However, as the 53-year old Gingrich admitted, he was losing touch with what younger men were interested in. *Esquire*'s jazz features are instructive in this regard.

Esquire began covering jazz with Charles Edward Smith's "Collecting Hot" which appeared in the February 1934 issue. Over the next two decades, the magazine

⁸² Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 198.

⁸³ Arnold Gingrich, "Picturing You as a Young Success," *Esquire*, July 1956, 6.

⁸⁴ Carol Polsgrove, *It Wasn't Pretty Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun?* 38.

would publish numerous pieces on jazz, in addition to sponsoring a prestigious annual jazz poll and hosting a series of concerts in New York and New Orleans.⁸⁵ So when *Esquire* began to expand its jazz coverage in the mid-fifties, it hardly seemed aberrant. The form, however, was undergoing tremendous changes, both musically and culturally. The Be-Boppers of the 1940s had given way to two new schools of composition: Hard-Bop (most clearly represented by Art Blakey's Jazz Messengers, the Horace Silver Quintet, and the Clifford Brown/Max Roach Quintet) and the Cool-School style (*Birth of Cool*-era Miles Davis and a host of white California-based musicians, the most notable being Gerry Mulligan, Chet Baker, Shelly Mann and Dave Brubeck).⁸⁶ Unlike Louis Armstrong's exceedingly danceable "hot" numbers or even the driving blues and gospel based sounds of the Hard-Boppers, the cool jazz contingent insisted on approaching jazz as a meditative art form; a point, driven home by Arnold Shaw's "The Cool Generation" (May 1954) and "West Coast Jazz" (September 1956). In both pieces, Shaw stresses the inherent listenability of the cool style. "Cool jazz," Shaw reports, "aims at the mind and heart, rather than the feet."⁸⁷ For those musicians associated with the cool style, improvisation, the hallmark of previous jazz styles, slowly gave way to a more complex

⁸⁵ For more on jazz in *Esquire* in the period from 1933-1950, see Merrill, *Esquire*, chapter 6 and pp. 121-123.

⁸⁶ The emergence of the West Coast cool style is most thoroughly discussed in Ted Gioia, *West Coast Jazz: Modern Jazz in California, 1945-1960* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992). Eddie S. Meadows, *Bebop to Cool: Context, Ideology and Musical Identity* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2003) is an exacting musicological study of the two styles. Alyn Shipton, *A New History of Jazz* (London and New York: Continuum, 2001) provides a detailed if highly opinionated history of the form. For a thoughtful and engaging discussion of the cool and hard bop roots of free form and avant-garde jazz see Iain Anderson, *"This Is Our Music": Free Jazz, Cultural Hierarchy, and the Sixties*, (Ph. D. Dissertation, Indiana University, 2000).

⁸⁷ Arnold Shaw, "The Cool Generation," *Esquire*, May 1954, 42.

musical structure which relied heavily on counterpoint. As Jimmy Giuffre explained to Shaw, “much of the listening pleasure comes out of hearing not just a solo improviser but the interplay and counterplea of two or more instruments.”⁸⁸

The nature of the cool sound in turn led to a significant recasting of the discourse surrounding jazz. The cool-school, along with the emergent avant-garde, demanded that jazz be treated of as an equal of European concert music. Thus it should not be surprising to see the emergence of concert halls, college campuses and jazz festivals as the preferred venues for this new jazz. Though LeRoi Jones derided the largely white, college-educated audience the cool schoolers attracted for liking “a little culture with their popular culture,” the charge did carry some merit.⁸⁹ Unlike the hard-boppers who drew on gospel and blues, the cool school instead looked to conservatories for inspiration. Most notably, Dave Brubeck, who almost single-handedly introduced such terms as “fugue” and “rondo” into the jazz vocabulary, had learned his trade from Arnold Schoenberg and Darius Millhaud, two giants of modern composition. This in turn led to an intellectualization of the manner in which jazz was discussed.⁹⁰ Poet Kenneth Rexroth, for example, wrote in a May 1958 piece that jazz is “the only American music worth taking seriously.” He went on to characterize the jazz audience as “people who are

⁸⁸ As quoted in Arnold Shaw, “West Coast Jazz,” *Esquire*, September 1956, 79.

⁸⁹ LeRoi Jones, *Blues People: Negro Music in America* (New York: Quill Books, 1963), 214. Race, of course, is a central issue in any discussion of the cool style; particularly since there is an ever-present danger in the discourse on cool to reinscribe the radicalized binaries of white/mind:black/body.

⁹⁰ Readers here are reminded of the befuddled Vince Everett (Elvis Presley) attempting to make sense of the cocktail party conversation of two jazz aficionados in the 1957 film *Jailhouse Rock*.

seriously concerned with music.”⁹¹ In a similar vein, Dizzy Gillespie wrote in a June 1957 piece

jazz....has never really been accepted as an art form by the people of my own country....To them jazz is music for kids and dope addicts. Music to get high to. Music to take a fling to. Music to rub bodies to. Not ‘serious music.’ Not concert hall material. Not music to listen to. Not music to study. Not music to enjoy purely for its listening kicks.⁹²

Jazz, in short, became the province of what *Esquire* contributor George Frazier referred to as the “intellijazzia.”

For those of Gingrich’s generation, this was an odd way to appreciate what had been first and foremost dance music. Gingrich himself endorsed this position by citing Louis Armstrong’s “West End Blues” as the ideal jazz record.⁹³ Nevertheless, the divergent approaches to jazz signaled to Gingrich that if he was to reach the younger audiences he wanted he would have to put the magazine in the charge of men who understood this audience. Throughout the course of 1956, Gingrich would slowly dispose of editors and replace them with younger men who made up in intelligence and moxy what they lacked in experience. By 1957, editorial collective Gingrich referred to as the “young Turks” was complete. With the exception of fiction editor L. Rust Hills who had come from the world of literary reviews, the “Young Turks” had cut their teeth on general interest magazines. Harold T.P. Hayes (Assistant to the Publisher) developed his skills at *Pageant* while Ralph Ginzburg (Articles Editor) and Clay Felker (Features

⁹¹ Kenneth Rexroth, “Jazz and Poetry,” *Esquire*, May 1958, 20.

⁹² Dizzy Gillespie with Ralph Ginzburg, “Jazz is Too Good for Americans,” *Esquire*, June 1957, 55.

⁹³ Arnold Gingrich, “Footnote to this Issue’s Added Feature on Jazz,” *Esquire*, January 1956, 6.

Editor), the final two members of the quartet, were veterans of *Look* and *Life*, respectively.

The “Young Turks ”would be instrumental in transforming *Esquire*, yet only Hayes would remain long enough to relish the achievement. Ginzburg was the first to leave in 1958 after a protracted disagreement with Gingrich over the publication of an article on erotic literature.⁹⁴ Felker and Hayes would continue to share editorial duties until 1962 nightclub altercation with comedian Mort resulted in Felker’s dismissal. Felker would then go on to found *New York* magazine. Hills departed in 1964 to oversee the fiction department at the *Saturday Evening Post*, another legendary magazine attempting to make itself over. Hayes would eventually become Editor-in-Chief in 1963, a position he would hold until his acrimonious departure from the magazine in 1973.⁹⁵ In the six years that this editorial collective functioned as a unit they managed to push *Esquire* into territory Gingrich had never dreamt of. *Esquire* had gone beyond being a “class” (some would say middlebrow) publication and became a sophisticated, daring, and refined arbiter of taste. As Gingrich noted in *Nothing But People*, when *Esquire*

⁹⁴ As Carol Polsgrove details the affair, Ginzburg had written a feature on erotic literature in the collections of prominent libraries. Killed by the advertising department (who was trying to preserve newly-won blue chip accounts), Ginzburg would go on to develop the article into a best selling book. A promotional appearance on the *Mike Douglas Show*, all but sealed Ginzburg’s fate--He was fired the next day. See Polsgrove, *It Wasn’t Pretty Folks, But Didn’t We Have Fun?*, 39-40.

⁹⁵ For a detailed account of Hayes’ rise to power, see Polsgrove, *It Wasn’t Pretty Folks, But Didn’t We Have Fun? Esquire in the Sixties*, especially chapters 1-5.

published the libretto to Samuel Barber's opera *Vanessa* in the December 1957 "there was no shock in it."⁹⁶

Following Gingrich's return in 1952, *Esquire* increasingly turned to a gospel of leisure that was oddly reminiscent of Gingrich's 1930s sermons on "The New Leisure." Leaving behind the chest-beating features and fiction of the late forties, Gingrich celebrated the postwar era as the manifestation of his vision of an age of leisure. Notably however, *Esquire*'s postwar discourse of masculine leisure recognized the emergence of the suburb. Particularly between 1949 and 1953, with its emphasis on home improvement features and service articles which touted the latest in gadgets for the home, we can safely suggest that leisure in *Esquire* was defined by the demands of the home; thus perhaps explaining the emergence of grilling as a masculine pursuit. Of particular note are the home improvement pieces by architect Jule R. Von Sternberg (i.e. "Build an Extra Closet," May 1953; "Installing a Fan--It's a Breeze," July 1953). If men had to be tied to the home, do-it-yourself "permitted the suburban father to stay at home without feeling emasculated or being subsumed into an undifferentiated entity with his wife."⁹⁷ A similar movement occurred with the 1950s boom in hobby activities. The increasingly sophisticated technology of stereo hi-fi equipment, for example, allowed men a domestic forum in which they could display their technical mastery.⁹⁸ Similar observations could

⁹⁶ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 210-211.

⁹⁷ Steven M. Gelber, "Do-It-Yourself; Constructing, Repairing, and Maintaining Domestic Masculinity" in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, Jennifer Scanlon, ed. (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 83.

⁹⁸ *Esquire* would catch onto the hi-fi fad fairly late. It would not be until 1957 that Martin Mayer would

be made about fly-fishing and golf, two activities that received considerable coverage in *Esquire*.

Playboy proved to be the greatest challenge to Gingrich's project of reestablishing *Esquire* as the bible of leisured living. From its 1953 debut onwards, *Playboy* had advocated a mix of intellectual sophistication and arrested adolescence in which the titular playboy and his bosomy playmates would reject the world of responsibility for one of libertine leisure. Furthermore, *Playboy*'s mix showed a fascination with consumer culture; particularly with home electronics. What separated *Playboy* from other magazines of its ilk was a commitment to a lifestyle based on this mix of consumption, sophistication and sex. The 1956 *Playboy* Penthouse Apartment feature, for instance, reveled in its dizzying amalgamation of gadgets and name-brand furnishings--Saarinen tables and Knoll cabinets sharing space with automatic closet lights, hi-fi equipment and a bedside panel from which the bachelor could control the lights, curtains, locks, and stereo equipment.⁹⁹ In *Playboy*'s logic of consumption, the playboy was ultimately a homebody. "We like our apartments." Hefner famously proclaimed in *Playboy*'s inaugural issue, "We enjoy mixing up cocktails and an hors d'oeuvre or two, putting a little mood music on the phonograph, and inviting in a female acquaintance for a quiet

begin offering readers essays on the latest stereo equipment. The literature on the cultural history of hi-fi is relatively underdeveloped. David Morton, *Off the Record: The Technology and Culture of Sound Recording in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2000) is one of the few forays into the subject matter.

⁹⁹ "Playboy's Penthouse Apartment" (1956), reprinted in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, 94-99.

discussion on Picasso, Nietzsche, jazz, sex.”¹⁰⁰ Unlike *Esquire*, *Playboy* was the epitome of modern living.¹⁰¹

Esquire, for its part, desperately attempted to differentiate itself from *Playboy*. By the late fifties the magazines were neck-in-neck in their attempt to dominate the men’s magazine market.¹⁰² Furthermore, Hefner had taken to claiming *Playboy* as the true successor to the *Esquire* of the thirties; a claim which irked Gingrich to no end.¹⁰³ Unlike *Playboy*, the “new” *Esquire* seemed to suggest that being a well informed, well-versed, well-read, and well-dressed adult could be fun. For *Esquire*, leisure was not an escape from the world of responsibility but the reward for a job well done. It was, in short, a magazine for men who had “arrived.”¹⁰⁴

This then was the key distinction upon which *Esquire* would build its differentiation from *Playboy*. Rather than focusing on sex and hedonistic leisure, the

¹⁰⁰ Hugh Hefner, “Introduction,” *Playboy*, December 1953. For more on *Playboy*, see Thomas Weyr, *Reaching for Paradise: The Playboy Vision of America* (New York: Times Books, 1978), Bill Osgerby, *Playboys in Paradise: Masculinity, Youth and Leisure-Style in Modern America* (Oxford: Berg, 2001) and Gail Dines, “I Buy It for the Articles: *Playboy* Magazine and the Sexualization of Consumerism in Gail Dines and Jean M. Humez, eds., *Gender, Race and Class in Mass Media* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1995), 254-262.

¹⁰¹ Consider for example, that the very same mid-century design aesthetic which was central to the *Playboy* apartment was savaged in a 1955 piece by Helen Lawrenson for being “morbid” and “grotesque.” See Lawrenson, “Are There Pixies in Your Parlor?” *Esquire*, May 1956, 46.

¹⁰² In the period of 1955-1960, *Esquire* managed to maintain a circulation in the mid-800,000 range. Conversely *Playboy* saw major increases in circulation each year (1956, 227, 605; 1958, 788, 350; 1959, 858, 656; 1960, 940,767; 1961, 1, 090, 908). All figures are derived from N.W. Ayer and Sons, *Directory of Newspapers and Periodicals* (Philadelphia: N.W. Ayer and Sons, published annually).

¹⁰³ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 193-194. Much of what Gingrich says about *Playboy* is replicated in documents found throughout his papers.

¹⁰⁴ Jerry Jontry to Sam Ferber, Interoffice Memo, 15 November 1957, Box 11, Gingrich MSS.

magazine would publish material featuring the “interests and pursuits that characterize a class audience.”¹⁰⁵ Most significantly, this meant the return of serious criticism to *Esquire*’s pages. From 1955-1957, Aldous Huxley, Paul Gallico and George Jean Nathan would be the public faces of the “new” *Esquire*. Ironically, this triumvirate demonstrated all that was right and wrong with the “New Language” initiative. Unlike the Neanderthal detective fiction of the early fifties, they possessed a sense of sophistication, dignity and decorum. How else would we characterize Gallico’s admonishment of those men who refused to wear a proper dinner jacket?¹⁰⁶ As a group, they were cultured, opinionated and reveled in heterodoxy. Gallico, for example, drew a tremendous amount of criticism from *Esquire* readers for harshly reprimanding those men who could not stomach the idea of a female executive. “Are our businessmen so infantile and insecure,” he wondered, “that they can see in women nothing but creatures who either exalt their vanity or are a threat to their sense of complacency?”¹⁰⁷

For all of their candor and savoir-vivre, *Esquire*’s mid-fifties critics were a problematic fit. To begin with, they were all of an older generation. Gallico had been associated off and on with *Esquire* since the mid-forties, Huxley had established his reputation in the Thirties and Nathan co-edited the *American Mercury* with Menken in the 1920s and later wrote a theater column for *Esquire* in the late thirties. It is a curious decision then to build the “new” *Esquire* around writers who were treated with the

¹⁰⁵ Gingrich to Jerry Jontry, Interoffice Memo, 15 August 1955, Box 11, Gingrich MSS.

¹⁰⁶ Paul Gallico, “This Man’s World” *Esquire*, January 1956, 127.

¹⁰⁷ Paul Gallico, “This Man’s World” *Esquire*, April 1956, 50.

reverence and respect of museum objects. Furthermore, especially in the case of Huxley and Nathan, the writing smacked of patrician condescension. When Huxley wrote on the banality of totalitarianism or the failure of the government to protect its citizenry from bad literature, he addressed his readers as if he were lecturing them.¹⁰⁸ In turn, the writers often seemed out of touch with the concerns of the contemporary world. Nathan, for one, surmised that Tennessee Williams' success was based more on the fad-conscious nature of sycophantic theater critics than on Williams' ability to articulate the confusion of modern sexuality and gender roles. Finally, all three were prone to write on topics that would seem beyond the pale for a men's magazine. Huxley, for example, devoted his September and October 1956 columns to defenses of hypnotism and the paranormal. Of the three, only Gallico could consistently offer a column that treated *Esquire* readers as mature and intelligent adults. Whether the issue was the dehumanization and the pin-up (October 1956) or resignation in the face of a political system that fails to inspire idealism (May 1956), Gallico articulated a sense of masculinity that was intelligent without being condescending, stylish without being fey, sincere without being maudlin. In short, he embodied the qualities of Man-the-Achiever that the "New Language"-era *Esquire* attempted to project.

By 1957, all three had left *Esquire*; Gallico and Huxley took on other projects, while Nathan succumbed to illness. Just as the triumvirate had left *Esquire*, the "young Turks" arrived. Over the next two years, the new editorial face of *Esquire* would begin to dramatically reassess the meaning of manhood. Rust Hills and Clay Felker, in particular,

¹⁰⁸ Aldous Huxley, "From the Study of Aldous Huxley" *Esquire*, June 1956, 50 and October 1955, 55.

were both avid readers of the social criticism that was setting the world of the little magazines on fire. Conventionally referred to as the “Mass Culture” critique, this body of work was interested in the moral and psychological effects of massification on the individual.¹⁰⁹ As Richard Pells correctly notes, in the body of work which makes up the mass culture debate, “one discovered a country filled with paradox and potential discord.”¹¹⁰

Though the critics who are nominally associated with the mass culture critique took on a variety of topics, the homogenization of culture and resultant the loss of genuine experience stands as the central theme in their work. Two targets stood out in particular: the bureaucratic organization and the mass media. In *White Collar*, C. Wright Mills asks with a tremendous sense of bitterness, ‘What is there that does not pass through the market? Science and love, virtue and conscience, friendliness, carefully nurtured skills and animosities....The market now reaches into every institution and every relation.’¹¹¹ For many of the critics associated with the mass culture critique, there was an implicit sense that the mass culture had robbed men of their opportunity to exercise

¹⁰⁹ Some of the best works on the mass culture debate include Thomas Bender, *New York Intellectual: A History of Intellectual Life in New York City from 1750 to the beginnings of Our Own Time* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), Paul R. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), Neil Jumonville, *Critical Crossings: The New York Intellectuals in Postwar America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991), Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s*, 2nd Edition (Hanover, NH: Wesleyan University Press- University Press of New England, 1989), and Alan Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist left From the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

¹¹⁰ Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, 187.

¹¹¹ Mills, *White Collar*, 161.

those qualities that had traditionally defined manhood. Dwight Macdonald's "Masscult and Midcult," while not directly commenting on gender, clearly repeats the soft/tough dichotomy by insisting on that "a work of High Culture ...is an expression of feelings, ideas, tastes, visions that are idiosyncratic." Where High Culture is seen as "revolutionary" and "heroic," Mass Culture is a "distraction," "easy to assimilate," and "indifferent."

As a quartet of feature pieces from 1958 illustrate, the searing critiques of postwar American culture left an indelible mark on *Esquire's* editorial staff. Peter Maas' "Waste of an Old Warhorse," Joseph Wechsberg's "Germany's New Student Princes," John Lloyd Wright's "In My Father's Shadow," and John Cellon Holmes' "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," are united in the dissolute portrait they paint of American males struggling with the burdens their gender has placed upon them.¹¹² The nature of the burden of masculinity in each account however differs in significant ways. Maas' piece is the one tied to the most traditional notions of manliness. While at face value a profile of Lt. General Lewis "Chesty" Puller, considered by many to be "the Toughest Marine in the Corps," Maas' uses his piece as a platform from which to lash out at a Marine Corps that has been reduced to a modern bureaucratic organization led by a coterie of Reismanesque "glad-handers." In Maas' account, fantastic tales of Puller's battle tested bravado are in constant tension with more sober analyses of an organization which sought

¹¹² Peter Maas, "Waste of an Old Warhorse," *Esquire*, January 1958, 47-50, Joseph Wechsberg, "Germany's New Student Princes," *Esquire*, January 1958, 93-98, John Lloyd Wright, "In My Father's Shadow," *Esquire*, February 1958, 55-57, John Cellon Holmes "The Philosophy of the Beat Generation," *Esquire*, February 1958, 35-38.

to punish a drill instructor who had inadvertently contributed to the death of six recruits.¹¹³ At issue was not merely whether the young sergeant was guilty of negligence, but as Maas astutely notes, “the methods by which it (the Marine Corps) had historically transformed shambling boys into peerless fighting men.”¹¹⁴ For Puller, this was a moot point. Basic training, the old General suggested, is meant to be oppressive and cruel because war is oppressive and cruel. Any attempt to lighten the severity of the training will only result in a fighting force that will be unable to stand up to the challenges of battle. “What makes me so continental mad,” Puller steams, “is to see any emasculation going on.”¹¹⁵

Weschberg’s profile of German dueling fraternities likewise engages the nexus between violence and manliness. However, where Maas’ profile of Puller is colored by equal measures of wistfulness, admiration and incredulousness, Weschberg’s account treats the duelists as a delightful, if not somewhat bizarre, throwback to more gentlemanly times. The dueling fraternities, Weschberg reports, were founded in 1860, a product of growing Prussian hegemony. Once a week the fraternity brothers assemble to engage in a *Mensur*, or student duel. Clad only in boots, trousers, a protective gauze around the neck and chain link goggles to protect the eyes and ears, the duelists fought until blood had been drawn. Because dueling has a long history of repression, first under

¹¹³ The case in question involved Sgt. Matthew McKeon who on April 08, 1956 led a group of recruits on a late-night disciplinary march through the marshland near Parris Island. As Maas reports, “In the darkness the platoon panicked and six recruits drowned.” Maas, “Waste of an Old Warhorse,” 47.

¹¹⁴ *ibid*, 47.

¹¹⁵ *ibid*, 50.

the Versailles Treaty and later under Allied Law 122, the fraternities, or Landsmanschaft, act like secret societies, replete with their own arcane regalia and rituals.

Despite the fact that, by Weschberg's own account, much of Germany's industrial and political leadership has ties to the Landmanschaften, Weschberg repeatedly characterizes them as "an anachronism--but a happy one."¹¹⁶ More representative of the German student youth was "Wolfgang," a young "independent" student, who plays piano at a student tavern in order to pay for his medical training. The rift between German student cultures is brought into sharp relief during a discussion between Wolfgang and a young duelist by the name of Karl-Heinz. It is worthwhile here to quote Weschberg's piece at length

"...The duels are obligatory under the code. I fought six."

"Why?" asked Wolfgang

Karl-Heinz gave him a puzzled glance. I saw that these two young Germans would never understand one another. They might as well have lived on different planets.

"You've got it all wrong," Karl-Heinz said. "The Mensur gives you the chance to prove yourself. It makes you belong among your fraternity brothers. They stand around you while you duel. it doesn't hurt when you get hit. It hurts when you get stitched up the doctor in front of everybody. No anesthetics must be used, though a drop of cognac may be permitted. You're in agony, but you don't wince and you keep quiet."

"Because you are a man," Wolfgang said, dead-pan.

"I'm glad you understand," said Karl-Heinz. "Prosit!"¹¹⁷

Wolfgang's sarcasm underlines the depth of the disillusionment in traditional modes of masculinity amongst the new breed of "modern" students.¹¹⁸ Of the Landsmanschaften,

¹¹⁶ Weschberg, "Germany's New Student Princes," 93.

¹¹⁷ *ibid*

¹¹⁸ Weschberg suggests that the "modern" independent students have embraced "a healthy trend of

Wolfgang bitterly complained that “they simply haven’t learned the lessons of the past.”¹¹⁹ And herein lies the crux of the matter for both Maas and Weschberg; how does modern masculinity define itself? In either case, the burden of tradition weighs heavily. Do men reject the warrior in favor of the emasculating organization or do they accept the modern world as essentially progressive and manly violence as regressive?¹²⁰ Read in tandem, neither essay provides a concrete answer. Instead, the reader is left struggling with the burdens the past has placed on his shoulders.

The burden of the past likewise figures heavily in John Lloyd Wright’s piece on his father, the famed American architect Frank Lloyd Wright. Where Maas and Weschberg’s pieces sought to negotiate the centrality of violence in the construction of masculine self-identification, Wright’s piece focuses on another equally important facet of masculinity: the psychic relationship with the father. Repeatedly Wright confesses that he was wrought with the feelings of inadequacy; the “problems” of being a “great

tolerance and internationalism.” Similarly, he describes Wolfgang as a hardworking student who “admires the West.” A little more than a decade removed from the Second World War, the contrast between the two students betrays a sense of worry regarding a resurgent autocratic German military class.

¹¹⁹ *ibid*, 93.

¹²⁰ The latter reading of masculinity would have been familiar to readers of the 1950 study *The Authoritarian Personality*. While the tome is widely regarded for its inquiry into the formation of the Fascist psyche, it does raise a number of salient points regarding masculinity and violence. Most notably, Adorno, et. al. make a number of compelling suggestions which posit aggressiveness and a predilection for violence as a way to compensate for myriad shortcomings. See chapters seven, eleven, and twenty in Theodore Adorno, et.al., *The Authoritarian Personality* (New York: Harper and Row, 1950). For a contemporary reassessment of *The Authoritarian Personality* see Martin Roiser and Carla Willig, “The Strange Death of the Authoritarian Personality: 50 Years of Psychological and Political Debate,” *History of the Human Sciences*, Vol. 15, No. 4 (2002): 71-96.

man's" son as he refers to it.¹²¹ Professionally and personally, the Wright family name hung like an albatross around his neck. At one point, Wright reports that "My father was so busy establishing himself as The Architect of the Ages that he often forgot his children's names."¹²² Elsewhere, Wright recalls how his father deliberately failed to assign him any credit for his work on the Imperial Hotel in Tokyo, despite the fact that he served as his father's personal assistant on the project. This in turn led to embarrassing episodes where potential employers accused Wright of lying on his resume.¹²³ Most damningly, Wright recalls his father's "monumental indifference" to his own career in architecture.¹²⁴ The only sensible solution Wright concludes was to "become independent of the Great Architect Father."¹²⁵

While Wright is ultimately forced to become his own man, the anguish of his father's hostile indifference overwhelms his account of the moment of liberation. As such, it is treated in a brief paragraph at the end of the piece. Furthermore, Wright's psychic declaration of independence ("So I became independent of the Great Architect Father and solved the overwhelming problem that had beset his maverick architect son") is undercut by his recapitulation to the power of the father. "I am fated to be known by

¹²¹ Wright, "In My Father's Shadow," 55.

¹²² *ibid.*, 55.

¹²³ *ibid.*, 56.

¹²⁴ *ibid.*, 56.

¹²⁵ *ibid.*, 57.

the general public,” declares a resigned Wright, “not as John Lloyd Wright, my christened name, but as Frank Lloyd Wright’s son, my given name.”¹²⁶

Though Wright does not directly employ the language of psychoanalysis (particularly that of the “oedipal complex”), the psychoanalytic dimension of Wright’s personal recollections are unmistakable, particularly in a culture where psychotherapeutic treatments had gained steady acceptance.¹²⁷ The tortured nature of Wright’s account bears more than a passing resemblance to the therapeutic purging advocated by the so-called “talking cure.” As Wright’s memoirs make clear, the child who grows up in the shadow of the distant father suffers greatly, a point which appeared with great regularity in the literature on fatherhood. In the wake of Dr. Benjamin Spock’s best-selling *Common Sense Book of Baby and Childcare*, postwar parenting manuals increasingly stressed the importance of the father in the mental development of the male child. The father after all is a boy’s first and most important model of masculinity. While the weak and effeminate father was clearly not acceptable, neither was the harsh and emotionally distant father. What the manuals called for was what Robert Griswold has referred to as

¹²⁶ *ibid.*

¹²⁷ For more on the popularization of psychotherapy in the postwar United States, particularly Freudian psychoanalysis, see David Park, *Putting the World on the Couch: Cultural Authority as a Dimension of Mid-20th Century Popular Psychiatry and Psychoanalysis* (Ph.D. diss., University of Pennsylvania, 2001), Molly Rae Rhodes, *Doctoring Culture: Literary Intellectuals, Psychology and Mass Culture in the Twentieth-Century United States*, (Ph. D. diss., University of California--San Diego, 1997), Ellen Herman, *The Romance of American Psychology: Politics and Culture in the Age of Experts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995) and Nathan G. Hale, Jr., “From Bergasse XIX to Central Park West: The Americanization of Psychoanalysis, 1919-1940,” *Journal of the History of the Behavioral Sciences*, Vol. 14, No. 4 (1978): 299-315.

a “companionate mode of fathering.”¹²⁸ Though as Jessica Weiss correctly notes, this “companionate mode” rarely translated into equally shared parental responsibility, it nevertheless recast the relationship between fatherhood and masculinity.¹²⁹ As she astutely notes, “by focusing on fathering, experts claimed tenderness and nurturing as male qualities, staking out a new terrain for ‘real’ men.”¹³⁰

Though this change in gender roles and parenting may have encouraged a reassessment of parental duties, it nevertheless relied upon the dichotomy of father-the-breadwinner and mother-the-homemaker. Masculine self-identification remained inextricably tied to one’s work. To be sure, we find this theme explicitly present within the pieces by Maas and Wright. For a figure like Chesty Puller, his manliness rested on his ability to do a job. In a similar sense, much of the power of Wright’s piece can be located in his lamentations that his name had hindered his professional development. Even Weschberg’s portrait of the landsmanschaften engages in this reverence for work by valorizing the hardworking medical student at the expense of the dandyish leisure class fraternity brothers. The most radical attack on masculinity in the fifties was then found not in the changing role of the father but in the critique of the modern bureaucratic

¹²⁸ Robert Griswold, *Fatherhood in America: A History* (New York; Basic Books: 1993), 207. Michael Kimmel has suggested that this “companionate mode” most commonly manifested itself in hobbies fathers and sons could share. See Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 246-247.

¹²⁹ Weiss notes that overwhelmingly, men took over the realm of play, while women were assigned the hard work of childrearing. This in turn associated dad with “excitement” and mom with maintaining “order.” Jessica Weiss, “Making Room for Fathers: Men, Women, and Parenting in the United States, 1945-1980,” in *A Shared Experience: Men, Women and the History of Gender*, Laura McCall and Donald Yacovone, eds. (New York: New York University Press, 1998), 354-355.

¹³⁰ *ibid.*

organization. Throughout the fifties, the yoke of work had become a target for the rising class of social critics and bohemians. While critics like David Riesman and C. Wright Mills attacked the modern corporation for its propensity to dehumanize its workers, the writers and poets of the Beat movement rejected outright the reverence middle-class Americans held for work. As Norman Podhoretz noted derisively, Jack Kerouac and the Beats seem “to feel that respectability is not a sign of moral corruption but of spiritual death.”¹³¹

This theme forms the basis of John Cellon Holmes’ “The Philosophy of the Beat Generation.” Appearing in the February 1958 issue alongside Wright’s “In My Father’s Shadow,” we are presented with two tortured meditations on the self, and by extension, the definition of masculinity. Where Wright’s psychic torture was ultimately private, the torture of the Beats, Holmes reports, comes from living in a world without meaning. Holmes opens by suggesting that the critics of the Beats have erroneously taken their fondness for “fast cars, wild parties, modern jazz, sex, marijuana, and other miscellaneous ‘kicks’” as a sign of their capitulation to a sense of meaninglessness.¹³² On the contrary, Holmes suggests that the Beats are seekers who look outside of the norms of society to reclaim their souls. “One thing they would all agree:” writes Holmes, “the valueless abyss of modern life is unbearable.”¹³³ The Beats, in short, are “a

¹³¹ Norman Podhoretz, “The Know-Nothing Bohemians,” *Partisan Review*, Vol. 25, No. 2 (Spring 1958): 306.

¹³² Holmes, “The Philosophy of the Beat Generation,” 35.

¹³³ *ibid.*, 38.

generation groping toward faith out of an intellectual despair and moral chaos in which they refuse to lose themselves.”¹³⁴ Elsewhere, Holmes notes that “the cataclysms of this century have obliterated the rational, humanistic view of Man on which modern society has been erected.”¹³⁵

Though Sal Paradise and Dean Moriarty, the protagonists of Jack Kerouac’s epochal *On the Road*, lived the Beat lifestyle, for Holmes the Beat philosophy was most clearly epitomized by James Dean, particularly in his performance as Jim Stark in 1955’s *Rebel Without a Cause*. Though Dean himself was not personally connected to the Beat writers, he was nevertheless held in their high esteem. As Jim Stark, Dean embodied the cultural disorientation the Beats recorded in their novels and poems. Holmes, for example, notes

In Dean, they saw not a daydream Lothario who was more attractive, mysterious and wealthy than they were, or a virile man of action with whom they could fancifully identify to make up for their own feelings of powerlessness, but a wistful, reticent youth, looking over the abyss separating him from older people with a level, saddened eye; living intensely in alternate explosions of tenderness and violence; eager for love and a sense of purpose, but able to accept them only on terms which acknowledged the facts of life as he knew them: in short, themselves.¹³⁶

To be sure, *Rebel Without a Cause* is a film about failure; the failure of the family, educators, law enforcement and others charged with the fostering of well-adjusted young people. In his reading of *Rebel Without a Cause*, James Gilbert has suggested Jim “must

¹³⁴ *ibid.*

¹³⁵ *ibid.*, 37.

¹³⁶ *ibid.*

act to establish an identity which his parents and society refuse to grant him.”¹³⁷ Much like Jim Stark, Holmes suggests that the young men who make up the ranks of the Beat movement are struggling against a world that has denied them “the creative power of unfettered individual soul.”¹³⁸

Individually, each of the four pieces is touched by a sense of loss. The old models of masculinity no longer make sense in the organized and bureaucratized postwar world. Collectively they ask us if the passing of the heroic, Great Man is a moment of sorrow or jubilation. Or more to the point, is a world without Chesty Puller or Frank Lloyd Wright necessarily a better place? The cacophonous chorus answering this question suggests the very real limits of the critiques raised by Mills, Riesman and Whyte. C Wright Mills, in his conclusion to *White Collar*, suggests that there is no way out of the discontent felt by the “new middle class” precisely because “they hesitate, confused and vacillating in their opinions, unfocused and discontinuous in their actions.”¹³⁹ For all of its critical insights, the critique of the mass man ultimately offered only stasis instead of solutions. We need only look at an early chapter of Sloan Wilson’s *Man in the Gray Flannel Suit* to have this position upheld. Unable to articulate the dissatisfaction in their life, symbolically emphasized by the growing crack in an otherwise ideal suburban tract home, Betsy Rath confesses to her husband Tom, “Your job is plenty good enough. We’ve got three nice

¹³⁷ James Gilbert, *A Cycle of Outrage: America’s Reaction to the Juvenile Delinquent in the 1950s* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1986), 188.

¹³⁸ Holmes, “The Philosophy of the Beat Generation,” 38.

¹³⁹ Mills, *White Collar*, 353.

kids, and lots of people would be glad to have a house like this. We shouldn't be so discontented all the time." To which Tom meekly replies, "Of course we shouldn't!" And yet the discontent was there; intolerable and unresolvable.

Under the auspices of the "Uncommon Man," *Esquire* attempted to provide an escape from the apparent malaise that had so centrally informed the language of mid-20th century cultural critique. The "uncommon man," who for all intents and purposes was synonymous with the "typical" *Esquire* reader, was "a sophisticate in the classical sense: knowledgeable, selective, interested in everything in the world around him."¹⁴⁰ By the same token however, the "uncommon man" was not a libertine playboy, a rebellious greaser, a highbrow nor a disengaged outsider. Rather, the "uncommon man" offered men a version of masculinity as being defined by a mature adulthood that was well-informed, well-versed, well-read, and well-dressed. Through this figure, *Esquire* would advocate a cultural worldview that welded a libratory politics of self-actualization to the libratory practices of a market place increasingly informed by divergence, segmentation and lifestyle. Culminating in the magazine's July 1961 issue on the "New Sophistication," *Esquire* would enter the sixties with a revived sense of purpose and identity. After blindly groping in the dark throughout much of the fifties, *Esquire* had

¹⁴⁰ Harold Hayes, as quoted in *Esquire, Inc., The Big Change* (New York: *Esquire, Inc.*, 1962), 8, L. Rust Hills Papers, Box 3 Indiana University, Lilly Library (hereafter cited as Hills MSS). *The Big Change* was a booklet sent out to *Esquire's* advertising salesmen in order to help them "explain" the new *Esquire* to weary advertisers who fell in to one of two camps. The first camp was composed of a sizable number of advertisers who were put-off by the magazine's former reputation as "skin mag" and were unaware of its editorial overhaul. The second group was composed of those advertisers who had abandoned *Esquire*, fearing it had become too highbrow. The booklet was meant to be distributed either as a stand-alone or with a short film (also entitled *The Big Change*).

found its way again. Paradoxically, *Esquire*'s future would necessitate a return to the past.

Chapter 2: The Prehistory of Uncommonness

Section 1: "A Male Counterpart of Vogue or Harper's Bazaar." Esquire and Modern Urban Masculinity in the 1930s

The discourse of uncommonness that informed *Esquire's* rebirth in the late fifties drew upon the magazine's origins as the *bon-vivant* tough guy of the post-Depression publishing world. From its inception in 1933 to the magazine's WWII era editorial shift to accommodate its new military audience, *Esquire* was the authority on men's fashion and leisure. As a testimonial from "E.L.B" which ran in the January 1935 "The Sound and the Fury" letters section attests

I have read religiously every issue of *Esquire* and now I feel it my bounden duty to confess to you that I consider myself a better man for having done so. My clothes are not the eyesores they once were; waiters say I have a pretty taste in foods and wines; I am completely at ease in some isolated covert in the Connecticut marshes or in a fashionable salon; and now, people do not laugh when I sit down at the piano.¹

For "E.L.B" and thousands of other men, *Esquire* was more than a magazine. To be sure, it was a guide and a confidant in that project of fashioning a thoroughly modern urban masculinity. At the center of this new masculinity was Arnold Gingrich's self-styled gospel of the "Art of Living."

From its beginnings as a fashion booklet which was meant to be sold exclusively at men's clothing stores, *Esquire* evolved into the leading men's magazine of the 1930s with an editorial mix in which quality fiction and sage advice concerning fashion, entertaining and etiquette would co-mingle with tough-guy

¹ E.L.B., "But Eskie Can't Even Waltz," "The Sound and the Fury," *Esquire*, January 1935, 11.

stories, blue humor and buxom pinup girls. As one commentator noted, it was an “unholy combination of erudition and sex.”² Through its feature pieces and advertising, the magazine attempted to instruct the young bachelor in how to get ahead in life by dressing right and making the right (consumer) decisions. Finally whether it was through the dirty jokes, the countless cartoons or through the (in)famous monthly pinups by George Petty, the magazine actively championed a notion of sexuality which was by turns sophisticated and cynical. Falling somewhere between *Vanity Fair* and the *National Police Gazette*, *Esquire* constructed a fantasy of sophisticated masculinity by providing entrance into the world of sporting, cocktail parties and beautiful women for those men whose breeding was less-than-satisfactory. *Esquire*, as one ad for the magazine promised, would make the average man, “think like Einstein, talk like Noel Coward, look like Gable, dress like Wales, act like Casanova.”³ Defying the conventional wisdom that most men had little interest in or time for fashion, lifestyle advice, or discussions of the arts, *Esquire* burst onto the scene insisting that these were the things men needed, whether they knew it or not.

A 1936 *Scribner's* profile by Henry Pringle suggested that the appeal of the magazine was in its urbanity and sophistication. To be sure, in *Esquire* we find a magazine that embraced the concept of lifestyle marketing some thirty-years before the term entered the vocabulary of marketing professionals. For Pringle, the *Esquire* reader was the consummate “city slicker”; a man who drank too much, drove too fast,

² Henry F. Pringle, “Sex, Esq.,” *Scribner's*, March 1938, 33.

³ *Esquire* advertisement, *Esquire*, January 1935, 171.

was given to outbursts of profanity and found no subject too sacred for a good natured lampooning. But most importantly, he was well aware of all that was new and exciting. The *Esquire* reader, Pringle claimed, was “apt to be a trifle overeager to be the first with new things from cocktail recipes to clothes and cars.”⁴ In short, what made *Esquire* attractive was not its endless supply of drawings of bosomy semi-nude women, its blue jokes, its lush design, its collection of lifestyle advice columns or its ability to solicit fiction from some of the top writers of the day. Rather it was all of these items in combination. Until the Second World War necessitated a format change, *Esquire* reigned as the leading gospel of a masculinity based on the tenets of sophistication, urbanism and perfectibility. The style of masculinity *Esquire* offered to its readers purposely and gleefully celebrated modern values over traditional ones. Critical of Victorian middle-class virtue and small-town celebrations of self-denial, *Esquire* suggested that modern manliness could be found in pleasure, consumption and unproductive leisure.⁵

Various historians, most notably Warren Susman, have suggested that the post-Depression culture of the 1930s was marked by its distinct difference from the tumultuous and reckless “Jazz Age” twenties.⁶ Nevertheless, the Thirties did carry over an important cultural struggle from the previous decade; namely the question

⁴ *ibid*, 39, 88.

⁵ It is important to note that *Esquire* was not alone in its disregard for genteel culture. Magazines such as *Vanity Fair*, the *New Yorker*, the *American Mercury* (and its predecessor, the *Smart Set*) regularly took aim at those who they deemed as sufficiently unsophisticated and old-fashioned: moralists, prohibitionists, and small-town folk. These “smart” magazines are dealt with in greater detail below.

⁶ For comparison see “Culture and Civilization: The Nineteen-Twenties” and “The Culture of the Thirties” in Warren Susman, *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*, (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 2003).

how to cultivate a modern sensibility. To define oneself as being modern meant more than just being up-to-date. To be sure, it meant adherence to a set of values which were at odds with those which fell under the rubric of the “traditional.” The modernist/traditionalist conflict, of course, can trace its roots as far back as the late nineteenth century, if not further. But with the emergence of urban culture in the 1920s as the dominant culture, advocates of traditionalism opened a new offensive on the modern. Nowhere was this tension more apparent than in the struggle over how the self was to be defined. As the decade progressed, the language of personality became synonymous with being modern. It is then at this point that we must ask, what does it mean to be modern?

Throughout the twenties and thirties, commentators of all stripes offered a variety of analyses that either celebrated the “modern” world as an opportunity for endless excitement and reinvention or decried the loss of masculine virility at the hands of a popular culture which privileged passive enjoyment over active work. Ann Douglas has helpfully suggested that at the center of the moderns’ thematic concerns was an attempt to do away with the overbearing and sexually repressed Victorianism that was foundational to traditionalist ideology. For writers like Ernest Hemming way, F. Scott Fitzgerald, and Hart Crane, a modern sensibility meant “Christian beliefs and middle-class values would never be a prerequisite for elite artistic success in America.”⁷ Against the “feminized” culture of nineteenth-century Bible-reading and sentimental fiction, the moderns strove to produce a “masculinized” culture that broke all aesthetic and moral boundaries. Similarly, the

⁷ Ann Douglas, *A Terrible Honesty: Mongrel Manhattan in the 1920s* (New York: Farrar, Strauss, and Giroux, 1995), 8.

moderns reacted against the Protestant ethos of self-purification and self-discipline by championing a lifestyle of leisure and sexual abandon. To be modern, regardless if one was a man or a woman, meant a disregard for piety, sobriety, and chastity. A cartoon in *Collier's* played upon this cultural iconoclasm by showing a young flapper-type innocently asking her seemingly shocked mother "Mother, when you were a girl, didn't you find it a bore to be a virgin?"⁸ It was no mistake that the young girl in the *Collier's* cartoon bore a strong resemblance to Louise Brooks, an actress who had built her star equally around her distinctive bob haircut and her frankness in discussing her sexual exploits.

For other Americans, being modern was expressed through less libidinous measures. Often cast in terms of 'character' and "personality," this debate acknowledged the changing cultural landscape which men were forced to contend with. Most dramatically, this meant a reconfiguration of how work and leisure were defined. The emergence of the modern bureaucratic organization at the turn of the century, coupled with the ascendancy of theories of management based on such concepts as "Taylorism" and "Fordism," introduced a concept of work that veered dramatically from the no-nonsense Horatio Alger model of the late nineteenth century. Where hard work, diligence and honesty were once the bedrock of a successful professional career, modern middle-class professionals found themselves increasingly paying more attention to their appearance and to their ability to amiably work within a corporate organization.

⁸ *Collier's*, April 1927

Esquire's success was ultimately dependent upon these shifts in the definition of masculinity. While "character" was never fully disposed of as a definitive concept, it was modified greatly by the emergent discourse of "personality."⁹ Notwithstanding a crippling Depression, *Esquire* succeeded because American men, or at least that sector of men who saw themselves as modern, had thoroughly internalized the doctrine of personality that had gradually transformed the character-based Victorian masculinity of their fathers and grandfathers. What *Esquire* added to this discourse of perfection was its addition of leisure, relaxation and pleasure as equally important sites through which men expressed and perfected their personalities. As various editorial pieces, advice columns, and advertisements would repeatedly remind readers, the perfectible man was a perpetual work-in-progress.

Henry C. Link's 1936 *Reader's Digest* article "Personality Can Be Acquired," provides an example of how this tendency towards valorizing the "go-getter" played itself out in the popular press.¹⁰ Link goes beyond defining personality simply as those qualities which make a person unique by suggesting that personality is measured by the ability to "interest and influence other people."¹¹ For Link and other advocates of personality testing and training, the ability to present one's self as confident, intriguing and authoritative was the key to success and future happiness. Even among schoolchildren, an aura of an effective personality was central to forging good relationships. According to Link's "Personality Quotient" test, children who

⁹ To be sure, many of the tenets traditionally associated with character- duty, sacrifice, morals, loyalty, etc.- would become central to the Cultural Nationalism advocated by figures like Archibald MacLiesh.

¹⁰ Henry C. Link, "Personality Can Be Acquired," *The Reader's Digest*, December 1936, 1-4.

¹¹ *ibid*, 1.

retracted themselves from group activity, who engaged in solitary leisure activities such as reading, collecting or music and who “sulk or lose their temper when things don’t suit them” are more likely than not to score low on personality tests. On the other hand, the children that scored high were consummate joiners who practiced the habit “of remembering and repeating good stories, of introducing people to each other, of going around with a group of friends rather than a single one...” and so on.¹² Even at this young age, Link claimed, individuals are drawn to the magnetic personality. While Link’s examples are meant to encourage the personality testing of children, his underlying message is unmistakable. As he suggests, “In business, in government, and in all the social relationships, a good mind or a good character is handicapped unless coupled with an effective personality.”¹³

The publication of Dale Carnegie’s *How to Win Friends and Influence People* in 1936 was a watershed moment in the popularization of personality. By synthesizing the clinical work of Allport, et. al. with the turn of the century New Thought movement, Bruce Barton’s best-selling *The Man Nobody Knew* (1924) and a growing body of literature in the success magazines (Orson Swett Marden’s *New Success* being the most prominent), Carnegie’s success manual joyfully mocked nineteenth century success manuals which preached above all else that success was the product of perpetual toil.¹⁴ To be successful, Carnegie insisted on what John

¹² *ibid*, 3.

¹³ *ibid*, 4.

¹⁴ Dale Carnegie, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*, Revised Edition (New York: Pocket Books, 1981). The New Thought Movement was an off-shoot of nineteenth century Spiritualism. Drawing on an unorthodox interpretation of Mary Baker Eddy’s Christian Science philosophy, New Thought taught that personal transformation could be enacted through self-actualizing thought. In

Cawelti has termed as “mental transformation.”¹⁵ Simply, hard work alone would only ensure more hard work. For Carnegie, the only way to move up in life was to broadcast a positive attitude. Turning to the language of the marketplace, Carnegie urged his readers that “you have a product and that product is yourself.”¹⁶ More than an axiom for positive-thinking, Carnegie’s injunction for self-promotion is central to understanding the logic of personality.

It is difficult, if not impossible, to understand the emergence of this cultural logic outside of the emergence of the modern city. The 1920 census had revealed that for the first time in the nation’s history the majority of its population resided in urban as opposed to rural areas. Though it was a small majority (51% versus the 49% still living in rural areas), it nevertheless pointed to the growing dominance of the urban sphere in American life. The five previous population counts had all registered at least a 4% increase in the urban populace over the previous decade’s census.¹⁷ The ramifications of this demographic shift are significant. The city, as Paul Boyer explains, served as the locus for fears concerning modernization and the attendant displacement of traditional values.¹⁸ Already the center of American industrial and

other words, positive thinking will lead to positive results. New Thought faded from prominence in the early 20th century only to resurface in 1960s pop psychology (i.e. *I’m O.K., You’re O.K., I’ll See It When I Believe It*) and in New Age inspired practice of Affirmations. For an engaging history of the movement see Beryl Satter, *Each Mind a Kingdom: American Women, Sexual Purity and the New Thought Movement, 1875-1920* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1999).

¹⁵ John Cawelti, *Apostles of the Self-Made Man* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 210.

¹⁶ Dale Carnegie as quoted in Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 200.

¹⁷ United States Bureau of the Census, *Historical Statistics of the United States: Colonial Times to 1957* (Washington: United States Bureau of the Census, 1965).

¹⁸ Paul Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), vii. For a highly useful historiographic essay on this topic see Charles W.

trade activity, the city was quickly becoming the center of American culture. Most significantly, American mass media had found a home in the nation's urban centers. Most of the nation's major newspapers and magazines were published in either New York, Boston or Chicago. The emergence of network radio at the end of the twenties only exacerbated the dependence of small town America on entertainment that expressed an urban point-of-view. As their "alien" inhabitants increasingly shaped urban centers, Anglo-Protestant commentators began to complain that the cities were becoming as foreign as their inhabitants were. Congressman Jasper Napoleon Tincher, for example, compared the urban and the rural areas by suggesting that "on the one side is beer bolshevism, unassimilating settlements and perhaps many flags-- on the other side is constitutional government; one flag, stars and stripes."¹⁹ Further adding to this sense of dislocation was the breakneck pace and tenor of urban life. Marked by a boisterous, anarchic and at times maddening heterogeneity, urban survival (in any sense of the word) was predicated on the development of a set of values that contrasted sharply with the traditional Victorian values embodied by the concept of character. For the urban dweller, the "urban personality" was defined by flexibility and relativism.

The "urban personality," to use Louis Wirth's term, was constructed in such a way as to negotiate the maddening tensions of city life. This was necessary because as Wirth explains,

Eagles, "Urban-Rural Conflict in the 1920s: A Historiographical Assessment" *The Historian*, vol. 49, no. 1 (Nov. 1986): 26-48.

¹⁹ Jasper N. Tincher as quoted in Sean Dennis Cashman, *America in the Twenties and Thirties: The Olympian Age of Franklin Delano Roosevelt* (New York: New York University Press, 1989), 47.

Cities...comprise a motley of peoples and cultures, of highly differentiated modes of life between which there often is only the finest communication, the greatest indifference and the broadest tolerance, occasionally bitter strife, but always the sharpest contrast.²⁰

In a similar manner, Lewis Mumford enthusiastically endorsed the concept of the “poly-nucleated city.” Cities were necessary, Mumford suggested, because they satisfied “the essential human need for disharmony and conflict, elements whose acceptance and resolution are indispensable to psychological growth.” The “poly-nucleated city” would then be “intellectually simulating” enough to “never degenerate into a ‘model community.’”²¹ City dwellers were forced to cope with an ever changing set of problems, thrills, temptations and circumstances. Under these conditions immediacy thrived as an appropriate tactic through which urban-dwellers could make sense of their world and offset a sense of being overwhelmed by city life. The popular culture of early twentieth century urban America replicated and thrived on the shock, sensationalism, and novelty of urban life. Amusement parks, motion pictures houses, spectator sports stadiums, World’s Fair midways, dance-halls, department stores, and vaudeville and burlesque halls all built their reputations on enticing their audiences with promises of unique, exciting, and even dangerous experiences.²²

²⁰ Louis Wirth, “Urbanism as a Way of Life” (1938) in *The City Reader*, Richard T. LeGates and Frederic Stout, eds., Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2000), 103

²¹ Lewis Mumford, *The Culture of Cities* (New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1938), 485.

²² The literature on the emergence of urban popular culture is extensive. Some of the best examples include Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century: Why Commercialism Won in Modern America* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2000), David Nasaw, *Going Out: The Rise and Fall of Public Amusements* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993), Kathy Peiss, *Cheap Amusements: Working Women and Leisure in Turn-of-the Century New York* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1986), *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and Culture at the Crossroads of the*

Mark Dyreson provides an engaging example of this in his discussion of the emergence of spectator sports in the 1920s.²³ As Dyreson points out, Progressive notions of “athleticism” as a “forum for moral education” informed the ideology of sporting at the turn of the century. Reforms sought the arena of play and leisure as a space where character and citizenship could be best developed. Among the many “ministers of reform” Dyreson points to, none was more important than Theodore Roosevelt. For Roosevelt, “athleticism” ensured that the young, particularly boys, would grow up with a firm sense of self. His concept of the “strenuous life” bitterly castigated the emergent urban commercial culture. To counter the “flabbiness” and “slothful ease.” of modern life, Roosevelt advocated “training in barbarism, violence and appropriation.”²⁴ Through sport, men could reassert their control over a culture that increasingly thrived on commodification and standardization. By the 1920s, the Progressive dream of a national culture based on middle-class Victorian values began to pale in the face of the growing attractiveness of the unproductive leisure offered by commercial amusements. Rather than turning to sports for moral education and character building, Americans sought escape from the tedium of their day-to-day

World, William R. Taylor, ed (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), Elaine Ableson, *When Ladies Go a-Thieving: Middle-Class Shoplifters in the Victorian Department Store* (New York: Oxford University Press,), Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992)

²³ Mark Dyreson, “The Emergence of Consumer Culture and the Transformation of Physical Culture: American Sport in the 1920s” *Journal of Sports History*, 16, 3 (Winter 1989): 261-281.

²⁴ Theodore Roosevelt, as quoted in Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 182-183. Roosevelt’s speeches “The Strenuous Life” (1899) and “The Pioneer Spirit and American Problems” (1900) are collected in *Addresses and Papers of Theodore Roosevelt*, W.F. Johnson, ed. (New York: Unit Book Publishing, 1909). For a penetrating discussion of Roosevelt and the gender politics of Progressivism see Arnoldo Testi, “The Gender of Reform Politics: Theodore Roosevelt and the Culture of Masculinity,” *Journal of American History*, 81 (March 1995), 1509-33.

routine. Spectator sports (baseball in particular) provided fans with an experience of collective sensationalism. While, as Dyerson correctly reminds us, baseball paid homage to democracy, opportunity, individualism, and hard work, character values which elevated it to the “national pastime,” these values were nevertheless being subverted, or at very least, eclipsed by such new values as celebrity, commercialism, and sensationalism. The enshrining of the “home run” stands as a case in point. “The press,” Dyerson notes, “commented that the growing importance of the ‘longball’ represented the craving for excitement which permeated the ‘Jazz Age’”²⁵

Film historian Ben Singer has suggested that this addiction to excitement is best captured by the term “hyperstimulus.”²⁶ Drawing on the work of German sociologist Georg Simmel, Singer suggests that the disorienting experience of modern urban life was best characterized by an “intensification of nervous simulation.”²⁷ Disregarding the caveats of the cadres of eager moral reformers who had emerged in opposition to this new culture, the popular desire for instant gratification and relatively effortless fun suggested displeasure with the Victorian ethos of self-restraint, self-sacrifice and moral uplift found in periodical like the *American Magazine*. As Gary Cross duly notes,

fun, fashion and fantasy goods gradually ceased to be frivolous and vain to the respectable bourgeoisie. Instead, they became a release from boredom, a form of youthful vitality, a means of self expression

²⁵ Dyerson, 274

²⁶ Ben Singer, “Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism,” in *Cinema and the Invention of Modern Life*, eds. Leo Charney and Vanessa R. Schwartz (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1995), 75.

²⁷ George Simmel as quoted in Singer, “Modernity, Hyperstimulus, and the Rise of Popular Sensationalism”, 73.

and freedom from stuffy tradition. Not only had the crowd become more civilized,” but a new morality of fun made joining it acceptable.²⁸

Increasingly in this culture of “youthful vitality,” escape from “stuffy tradition” meant the rejection of the trappings of “manliness” and character. Rather than being tied down by an antiquated code of manhood, young men increasingly turned to the ever-changing currents of popular fashion and image to construct their personality. In their advertising, their entertainment, their success manuals and even their spirituality, the importance of maintaining an image of being seen as interesting and influential was repeatedly driven home.

This is not to say that this new urban culture had silenced the supporters of traditional, character-based values. On the contrary, even advocates of personality training like Henry C. Link, pointed to the importance of character education as a supplement to the development of an amiable personality. More importantly, while the 1920s and early 1930s bore witness to an increasingly powerful mass culture, the era also saw the emergence of various movements that sought to defend “traditional values.” Service clubs, scouting, Protestant fundamentalism, and moral reform crusades provided Americans with ways to “rebel” against the twin threats of modernization and urbanization. As heterogeneous as this anti-modernist backlash was, the common denominator which united all of these factions was their defensive posturing. In no instance was there a proclamation that the necessity of an organization rested in anything but its ability to defend Americans from modern values. The 1925 trial of schoolteacher John Scopes for teaching evolution, battle over the censorship of motion pictures, the escalation of anti-immigrant and anti-

²⁸ Cross, *An All-Consuming Century*, 59.

radical rhetoric and the decade long conflict that pitted “wet” and “dry” factions against each other were some of the many flashpoints at which the traditional and the modern clashed.²⁹

By the time *Esquire* appeared on the scene in 1933, the Great Depression, the growing threat of fascism, and the growing dissatisfaction with the incessant gaiety of “Jazz Age” hi-jinks had cast a new light on the modern/traditionalist conflict. As Robert Sklar contends, “to the Thirties little of the Twenties seemed worth salvaging—not its cultural conflicts, not its intellectual independence and artistic freedom, not its business ideology, not its frantic sense of frivolous pleasure, of lawless disorder, of uncontrolled change.”³⁰ And to be sure, if we scan the products of American culture in the Thirties, we find a new seriousness in art and literature, and a popular culture which celebrates the small town and the common man. Furthermore, critics and artists alike called for the cultivation of a truly American cultural nationalism. No individual artifacts of the era are more emblematic of this shift than Frank Capra’s

²⁹ The most ominous expression of this cultural tension was the rebirth of the Ku Klux Klan in 1915 under the auspices of Col. William J. Simmons. Strengthened by the success of Prohibition and the anti-radical Palmer Raids, the Klan would become active in local and state politics by running on a platform which featured a tireless (and at times violent) campaign against “dope, bootlegging, graft, night clubs and road houses, violation of the Sabbath, unfair business dealings, sex, marital ‘goings-on’ and scandalous behavior,” (Chalmers 33) in addition to the more radical anti-Catholic, anti-Jew and anti-minority rhetoric. Following the 1925 conviction of Indiana Grand Dragon David Stephenson on manslaughter charges and Stephenson’s subsequent revelations detailing the extent of the corruption of top Klan leadership, the movement lost its ability to claim a moral voice. David M. Chalmers’ *Hooded Americanism: The History of the Ku Klux Klan* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1987) is the most thorough account of the Klan’s first century. Other notable studies include, Richard K. Tucker, *The Dragon and the Cross: The Rise and Fall of the Ku Klux Klan in Middle America* (Hamelin, CT: Archon Books, 1991), Nancy MacLean, *Behind the Mask of Chivalry: The Making of the Second Ku Klux Klan* (1994) and Kenneth T. Jackson, *The Ku Klux Klan in the City, 1915-1930*, Second Edition (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1992).

³⁰ Robert Sklar, “Introduction” in *The Plastic Age, 1917-1930*, Robert Sklar, ed., The American Culture Series (New York: George Braziller, 1970), 24.

1936 fish-out-of-water comedy *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town* or Thornton Wilder's sentimental *Our Town*.

This is however not to say that the Twenties were completely forgotten. Despite bearing the familiar blue eagle of the National Recovery Administration, *Esquire* trafficked in a giddy nostalgia for the decade. So prominent was this tendency that Henry Pringle concluded his profile of the magazine by characterizing the “American Male of 1937 as revealed by the ethnologists of *Esquire*-Coronet Inc.” was nothing less than a throwback to the “Jazz Age.”³¹ Suggesting that this creature was sorely out of place in the world of the New Deal, Pringle concluded that “what he likes is the Old Leisure of 1929-- and what he stands for is more mistresses and more champagne.”³² While this characterization is not entirely fair, it nevertheless points to the importance of recognizing the impact of the Twenties on *Esquire*'s outlook, particularly in regards to consumption. Moreover it recalls one of the most intriguing facts regarding *Esquire*'s history. *Esquire*, the magazine of sophisticated leisure for men, was born during the Depression.

Section 2: *Esquire*, Masculinity and Post-Depression Consumer Culture

The severe economic downturn which began with the market crash of October 1929, proved devastating to millions of Americans. Yet, despite the dire state of the economy, calls for revolt and new social orders were effectively relegated to the margins. Most Americans, as James R. McGovern reminds us, “were far from

³¹ Pringle, “Sex, Esq.,” 88. *Coronet* was a magazine launched by David Smart in 1936 as part of Smart's ill-advised attempt to surpass *Time-Life*'s Henry Luce as the dominant American media mogul. For a full account of the origins and calamitous demise of *Coronet* see Merrill, *Esqy*, 61-80.

³² *ibid.*

flattened by their economic problems.” Family and community networks, accommodation by merchants and others to lower prices, and a mass media that constantly reiterated messages of hope, the importance of perseverance and a devotion to the promise of “Tomorrow” pulled many people through the hardest of times.³³ This is an extraordinarily insightful approach to the Depression. Most surveys of the Great Depression will invariably focus on those who were effected by the events of 1929-1933 most directly: hourly-blue collar and low-level white collar workers. Unemployment became the order of the day particularly in the industrial sector,. Yet, as Gary Cross suggests, while the Depression devastated certain sectors of the economy, others were only marginally affected. Wages for salaried workers, for example, only saw a quarter percent drop between 1929 and 1932.³⁴ Hourly wage earners, on the other hand, saw their wages reduced by over half during the same period. Furthermore, Cross points to the relative strength of the consumer marketplace (particularly in home appliances and radios) during the lean years of 1929-1932. While the crisis year of 1932 saw significant decreases in all categories of consumer goods, starting in late 1933 and continuing through 1934, consumption of consumer goods began to shift upwards. Likewise, 1934 saw modest declines in unemployment and a reinvigorated faith in the American economy. To be sure, it was not until the spate of bank holidays in 1932 that most middle and upper class Americans would feel the effects of the Depression.³⁵

³³ Jamers R. McGovern, *And a Time for Hope: Americans in the Great Depression* (Westport: CT: Praeger, 2000), xi.

³⁴ Gary Cross, *An All-Consuming Century*, 71.

³⁵ For a general discussion of the Great Depression see Robert S. McElvaine, *The Great Depression:*

Esquire attempted to take advantage of this changed world by presenting itself as a public service. “What more opportune occasion for the appearance of a new magazine,” Gingrich suggested “--a new kind of magazine--one that will answer the question of what to do? What to eat, what to drink, what to wear, how to play, what to read--in short a magazine dedicated to the improvement of the new leisure.”³⁶ Born in leftist struggles for a shorter working week, the “New Leisure” was taken up by the business community as a way to fix the problem of unemployment, particularly among white-collar workers.³⁷ Proponents of the “New Leisure” suggested that with the advent of the machine age, the twelve-hour day was an anachronism. So great was this faith in machine-aided labor that some overly utopian commentators saw the work week being whittled down to as little as ten or fifteen hours a week.³⁸ With the coming of the Depression, employers found further utility for the rhetoric of the “New Leisure.” For some it justified the slashing of hours. Others suggested that the

America: 1929-1941 (New York: New York Times Books, 1984). ABC-Clio Information Services, *The Great Depression: A Historical Bibliography* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-Clio Information Services, 1984) is a useful but sorely out-dated guide to the historical literature. Studs Terkel, *Hard Times: An Oral History of the Great Depression* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1970) is an engaging account of the Depression by those who experienced it. For a discussion of the effect of the Depression on the middle class, see Loren Baritz, *The Good Life: The Meaning of Success for the American Middle Class* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1989). For discussions of masculinity and the Depression see Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 191-221, and Joe L. Dubbert, *A Man's Place: Masculinity in Transition* (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall, 1979), 191-229.

³⁶ *ibid.*

³⁷ Readers seeking insightful discussions of the history of the working day are advised to examine *Worktime and Industrialization: An International History*, Gary Cross, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988) and David R. Roediger and Philip S. Foner, *Our Own Time: A History of American Labor and the Working Day* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1989). For a discussion of European labor trends see Gary Cross, *A Quest for Time: The Reduction of Work in Britain and France, 1840-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989).

³⁸ For a trenchant critique of this position see Floyd Allport, “This Coming Era of Leisure,” *Harpers Magazine*, November 1931, 641-652.

“New Leisure” provided men with a new way of thinking about unemployment. Regardless if men were working only a thirty-hour week or not at all, commentators from various fields suggested that the time should be looked at as a time for leisure and self-improvement and most definitely not as a emasculating set-back.³⁹ As Gingrich proclaimed in a promotional booklet version of the first issue, *Esquire* sought to address an entire class of men who “have had leisure thrust upon them.”⁴⁰

The advocacy of leisure presented problems for Gingrich. To be sure, much of the contemporary commentary on the “New Leisure” dwelled on the supposed “challenges” it presented. The most pressing challenge, commentators claimed, was to ensure that the “gift” of leisure would not be trifled away on cheap amusements. Instead, the newly abundant leisure time should be spent on self-improvement and refinement of character. An editorial in the *Publisher’s Weekly* offered a familiar argument when it suggested that “because the majority of us have made work our most important interest we have forgotten not only how to play but how to idle profitably.”⁴¹ L.V. Jacks, writing in the *Rotarian*, answered this charge with an equally familiar response: “easier living, better working hours, ample leisure, all mean nothing if they are not intelligently employed in purposes of cultural or kindred

³⁹ See Benjamin Kline Hunnicutt, “The New Deal: The Salvation of Work and the End of the Shorter-Hours Movement” in Cross, ed., *Worktime and Industrialization*, 217-243 and Roediger and Foner, *Our Own Time*, 243-256 for discussions of the fate of the Shorter-Hours movement. Both correctly suggest that while a shorter working day may have been touted as a cure for the unemployment, by 1934 the tonic of shorter hours had been abandoned by the Roosevelt White House in favor of work relief and full employment programs.

⁴⁰ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 102.

⁴¹ “The New Leisure,” *Publishers’ Weekly*, 09 Spetember 1933, 747.

natures.”⁴² The challenge for Gingrich and *Esquire* was to articulate the doctrine of the “New Leisure” in a way that would equate self-improvement with consumption.

Prior to *Esquire*’s appearance on the scene in 1933, periodicals targeting a male readership had appeared in several loosely defined genres. The most aggressively hair-chested were the outdoorsman magazines such as *Sports Afield*, *Field and Stream*, and *Outdoor Life* that made their debuts in the final years of the nineteenth century. Following the example of Theodore Roosevelt, Owen Wister, and Fredric Remmington, the outdoorsmen magazines urged beleaguered urban men to take-up sporting as a tonic for the restoration of manhood.⁴³ The struggle for survival presented men with an object lesson in the meaning of toughness.

Convinced that modern men had become soft, advocates of the “strenuous life” pointed to communion with the natural world as one way in which men could regain a sense of pride and self-worth. One commentator, for example, suggested that a true

⁴² L.V. Jacks, “New Leisure to Learn,” *The Rotarian*, May 1934, 50. The issue of the “New Leisure” proved to be a popular topic. Between 1928 and 1935, roughly one-hundred articles and editorials were published on the subject. Most argued for the importance of a productive sense of leisure. See for example Andrew Corry, “Leisure and Culture,” *Commonweal*, 12 January 1934, 291-292, Earnest Elmo Calkins, “The Lost Art of Play,” *The Atlantic*, April 1933, 438-446, Arthur Pound, “Out of Unemployment Into Leisure,” *The Atlantic*, December 1930, 784-792, Leon J. Richardson, “Books and Leisure,” *Library Journal*, 15 May 1933, 442-445. Readers are also advised to examine the periodicals *Recreation* and *Playground*. Published by the National Recreation Association, both journals were exceptionally vocal supporters of the discourse of the “New Leisure” as a site for character-building. See Robert Lawrence Goldman, *Meanings of Leisure in Corporate America, 1890-1930* (Ph.D. diss, Duke University, 1977). The Playground movement (spearheaded by the NRA) is also covered in Boyer, *Urban Masses and Moral Order in America, 1820-1920*.

⁴³ Michael Kimmel reports that all three figures were urban-dwellers who either suffered from a debilitating malady or had no sense of toughness. All three underwent an epiphany of sorts when they had ventured west and encountered the wide-open spaces that greeted them. *Manhood in America: A Cultural History* (New York: Free Press, 1996), 135-155.

sportsman “must possess a combination of virtues which fill him so full that no room can be left for sin to squeeze in.”⁴⁴

Similarly concerned with manhood and character were the “success” magazines such as *American Magazine*, the *Athletic Journal*, and *Collier’s* which emerged in the first decades of the twentieth century. In attempting to confront and make sense of a quickly changing world where mechanization, formal business education and corporate bureaucracy had slowly but surely replaced the businessman who had gotten by on “horse-sense” and virtue, the “success” magazines provided solace to bewildered men by steadfastly celebrating what Tom Pendergast has referred to as “the Victorian cult of character” through their celebration of the “self-made man.”⁴⁵ Whether through the championing of the strenuous life or through profiles of successful figures (most often businessmen) and fictional accounts of individuals overcoming tremendous odds, outdoorsmen and success magazines articulated a conception of masculinity that was based on “hard work, integrity, dedication, and self-control.” The “self-made man,” was a success because of discipline and moral fortitude.

In both instances, the definition of manhood which circulated in these magazines was dependent on the maintenance and defense of middle-class values and propriety. This stood in sharp contrast to the alternative version of masculinity found

⁴⁴ R. B. Roosevelt as quoted in Colleen J. Sheehy, “American Angling: The Rise of Urbanism and the Romance of the Rod and Reel.” in *Hard at Play: Leisure in America, 1840-1940*, Kathryn Grover, ed. (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1992), 84.

⁴⁵ Tom Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man: American Magazines and Consumer Culture, 1900-1950* (Columbia and London: University of Missouri Press, 2000), 111-121. As Pendergast makes clear, the success magazines were a direct off-shoot from the *Saturday Evening Post*, in their content and in their allegiance to “Victorian Manhood.”

in off-color humor magazines like *Capt. Billy's Whizbang*, *Smokehouse Monthly*, *Ballyhoo* and the *Calgary Eye Opener* as well as in the "true adventure" pulps such as *The National Police Gazette*, *Battle Stories*, and *True*. These titles provided readers respite from the arduous routines of character building by trading in the earthy pleasures of ribald humor and blood-soaked accounts of urban crime and depravity. Tellingly, these magazines were found only in such bastions of masculinity as the barbershop and the pool hall. Unlike the outdoorsmen and success magazines, these magazines offered men a version of masculinity that was rough, coarse, and urban. Where the outdoorsman magazines sought retreat from the increasing heterogeneity and uncertainty of urban life, magazines like the *National Police Gazette* suggested to men that the bustle and anxiety of city life could be energizing and fascinating.

Despite this lineage, *Esquire* claimed to be the first magazine exclusively for men. While the above titles were all written and marketed for men, they only responded to a single facet of a man's life; be it business or fishing. *Esquire's* contribution to the world of men's periodicals resided in its attention to the whole man. Central to this holistic approach was a fervent acclamation of the gospel of perfectibility. *Esquire* in this sense followed in the footsteps of an entire line of 1920s business magazines which sought to capitalize on the dramatic transformation in how success was defined. As business organizations became larger and larger, the language of "hard work" was replaced by such alien concepts as "magnetism," being a "go-getter" and most importantly, "personality." In such business magazines as the *New Success*, Tom Pendergast suggests, "advertiser and editor spoke ...the language

of the perfectible man.”⁴⁶ While business magazines such as the *New Success*, took up the banner of personality in the mid-twenties, until *Esquire*’s debut, no other magazine articulated the pleasures of the intertwined cultures of consumption and personality to the masculine consumer as clearly or as directly. Readers were seemingly told that looking and acting like a “go-getter” need not stop once one left for home. In *Esquire*’s pages, readers were encouraged to “identify themselves with leisure, good reading, stylish clothes, fashionable accessories.” not because they would be considered inferior or out-of-step if they did not, but because these were all good things.⁴⁷ In *Esquire*, fashion spreads revealed a world of luxury and relaxation, full of smart-looking gents in evening wear who did not seem the least bit worried about what they were wearing. The copy accompanying the illustrations described the fashions with only the slightest hint of admonishment against a fashion *faux pas*. In contrast to “scare ads” which preyed on men’s insecurities, *Esquire* welcomed men into the realm of consumption by underscoring the compatibility of consumption and masculinity.

As numerous studies have suggested, by the mid-thirties, the male-producer/female-consumer dichotomy had been firmly enshrined in the consciousness of advertisers, magazine publishers and retailers.⁴⁸ Two influential books of the late

⁴⁶ Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 124.

⁴⁷ Pendergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 206.

⁴⁸ The literature on the gendering of consumption is voluminous. Ellen Furlough’s bibliographic essay, “Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective: A Selected Bibliography” in *The Sex of Things: Gender and Consumption in Historical Perspective*, Victoria de Grazia with Ellen Furlough, eds. (Berkeley; university of California Press, 1996) is an indispensable roadmap to the literature. Some of the best examples are collected in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, Jennifer Scanlon, ed. (New York; New York University Press, 2000).

twenties, *Advertising to Women* by Carl Nether and *Selling Mrs. Consumer* by Christine Frederick argued that in the hands of “Mrs. Consumer” was a “staggering percentage of spending power;” nearly half of all purchases were made by women, while another 24% were made with their partners in tow.⁴⁹ Furthermore, over 80% of purchases made in drug stores, department stores, electrical supply stores, and jewelers were made by women, with men accounting for the majority of purchases only in automobile dealerships and hardware stores. No wonder advertisers were more than willing to advertise in women’s magazines and to pitch their ads towards women in the general interest magazines. “It is apparent,” declared Fredrick, “that women have developed a very special faculty and ability for spending.”⁵⁰

Despite the overwhelming evidence, Gingrich refused to concede the consumer sphere to “Mrs. Consumer.” “It is our belief, in offering *Esquire* to the American male,” Gingrich proclaimed, “that we are getting around at last to a job that should have been done a long time ago--that of giving the masculine reader a break.” The general magazines, Gingrich contended, “have bent over backward in catering to the special interests and tastes of the feminine audience.” Nowhere is this clearer than in the belief that an audience of male consumers does not exist. “What we can’t figure, for the life of us, is why woman-readership should be valued so highly as to make a stepchild out of the interests of male readers.” Upon this, Gingrich

⁴⁹ Christine Frederick, *Selling Mrs. Consumer* (New York ; the Business Bourse, 1929), 13, 54-59. Carl Nether, *Advertising to Women* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1928). Men accounted for only 12.5% of all purchases while 14.7% made up the final category of “none purchased.” Frederick’s statistical data is based on a study she conducted with H.L. Holingsworth. For an instructive biographical sketch of Frederick, see Janice Williams Ruthford, “A Foot in Each Sphere: Christine Frederick and Early Twentieth Century Advertising” *The Historian*, 63,1 (2001): 67-86.

⁵⁰ *ibid*, 13.

proclaimed, “This is one magazine that is going to try to be general but is determined to stay masculine.”⁵¹

Yet, how alien was this new culture of personality and consumption to the male consumer? Mark Swenicki has suggested that contra conventional logic, men were courted as consumers and did participate in the consumer culture as purchasers of sporting goods and other leisure-related goods.⁵² While, as Swenicki effectively argues, men did buy things, it is not until the twenties that we begin to see the development of a rhetoric which attempted to entice men into consumption by appealing to their desires as opposed to their rationality. It is around this very issue of pleasure and desire that the question of the consuming males revolves. “What had once seemed the very negation of respectable middle-class manhood- the refusal to grow up and the insistence that work yield individual gratification and pleasure-,” suggests Woody Register “were now the essential ingredients of manly success in a modern consumer economy.”⁵³

As an undergraduate at the University of Michigan (1921-1925), Arnold Gingrich had experienced this new order of manly consumption firsthand. While, by his own account, most of his time was spent either working, studying, or traveling to

⁵¹ Arnold Gingrich, Editor’s Notes, *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 4. Fredrick’s own numbers suggested that in the case of men’s clothing, men were the dominant consumers making up 65% of all purchases. Even more importantly, men accounted for nearly 100% of purchases of suits, shoes, shirts and collars. It was only with such quotidian supplies as underwear and socks that women approached parity with men. Fredrick, *Mrs. Consumer*, 55.

⁵² Mark Swenicki, “Consuming Brotherhood: Men’s Culture, Style and Recreation as Consumer Culture, 1880-1930,” *Journal of Social History*, 31 (Summer 1998).

⁵³ Woody Register, “Everyday Peter Pans: Work, Manhood, and Consumption in Urban America, 1900-1930,” in *Boys and Their Toys: Masculinity, Class, and Technology in America*, Roger Horowitz, ed., Hagley Perspectives on Business and Culture Series (New York and London: Routledge), 201.

Madison, WI to see his soon-to-be first wife, Mary Ellen Rowe, Gingrich was nevertheless, not isolated from the socially liberal world of the college campus. Michigan sociologist Robert Cooley Angell in his 1928 study *The Campus* described undergraduate life in Ann Arbor as revealing “little desire for a broader and deeper understanding of life.”⁵⁴ In its place, Angell writes, was a seemingly endless procession of football games, mixers, dances, and “petting parties.” The “contemporary preoccupation with the immediately stimulating rather than with the vital aspects of life” further exacerbated the aversion to intellectual pursuits.⁵⁵ Elsewhere, Angell faults “externalism” and its manifestation in “commercialism” as the incubators of undergraduate anti-intellectualism.⁵⁶

If, as Angell suggested, anti-intellectualism and thrill-seeking defined the undergraduate experience for the vast majority of students, what value did going to college present? At Greek-dominated Michigan, for example, college life for many young men and women was less about education than it was about making connections. As Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz notes,

The collegiate culture created by the wealthier students of an earlier era had great appeal to aspiring middle-class young men hoping for business success. In college they might make connections, learn how to lead, and assume the manners and

⁵⁴ Robert Cooley Angell, *The Campus: A Study of Contemporary American Life in the American University* (New York and London: D. Appleton and Co. , 1928), 4. I have been unable to uncover any records indicating whether or not Gingrich knew Dr. Angell, either as a teacher or as an acquaintance.

⁵⁵ *ibid*, 149.

⁵⁶ *ibid*, 18. “Externalism,” though never succinctly defined by Angell, can be best defined as a synonym for personality. “Commercialism” is Angell’s term to describe the culture of consumption. His definition of commercialism as the “undue preoccupation with the production, appropriation, and consumption of material things” falls in line with the anti-consumer culture jeremiads of such contemporaries as Stuart Chase and F.J. Schlink.

appearance of the American elite.⁵⁷

In short, the student who successfully integrated into college life was not the bookish outsider but the consummate joiner. It was in college that aspiring young men learned how to negotiate the demands of the peer group. Following the latest fads in fashion and leisure became a full-time occupation, as did having a good time. In a telling passage, Angell advances this characterization by portraying undergraduates as being “ultramodern”

There is a sophistication about their conversation, a fashionableness about their clothes, and air of condescension toward their elders, which often sets heads of greater experience to shaking. University men and women in our day are sure of themselves and of the age in which they live.⁵⁸

This mentality proved to be a central building block for *Esquire*, which over the years would target its address to the socially ascendant college man whose vision of a manly life was based on play, leisure, and sophistication.

To be sure, readers of the magazine’s inaugural issue found Ring Lardner’s paean to Princeton, “Princeton Panorama,” and fashion pages which pointed to what the stylish collegians at Yale were wearing. Lardner, for one, uses his piece to rebuke figures like Angell by insisting on the primacy of the social function of the university. “Graduates of a place like Princeton,” writes Lardner, “look back on it fondly, not as the spot where they first learned the elements of biology, but the site of some of their most enjoyable experiences and the place where they made some valuable contacts

⁵⁷ Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz, *Campus Life: Undergraduate Cultures from the End of the Eighteenth Century to the Present* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1987), 119.

⁵⁸ Angell, *The Campus*, 7

and learned a lot of practical lessons not included in the textbooks.”⁵⁹ The significance of Lardner’s piece to *Esquire* becomes apparent if we consider the magazine as a surrogate for the peer group. Simply, the benefits of college life often depended on being able to fit in. And, for many students, the peer group provided the guidance they sought.

The peer group emerged from the decline of traditional forms of couple formation. In place of calling-on, chaperoned visits, and the introduction of suitors via family acquaintances, came the Byzantine system of dating. As young people flocked to public amusements and institutions, couple formation relied on personality and reputation rather than strength of character. Thus, the visual presentation of oneself became central to any future romance. Rather than relying on the consistency of character and the sage influence of church and family, young men and women turned to their peers for advice. The penultimate social goal was to be “popular,” for popularity paid off in dates and in influence among ones peer group.⁶⁰

Peer groups and dating circles relied on what John Spurlock and Cynthia Magistro have referred to as “social performance.”⁶¹ Much like the young executives climbing the corporate ladder, the young women and men who sought influence within and from their peer groups relied on the ability to bring appearances and actions into accord with what was expected of them. “The peer culture,” suggests

⁵⁹ Ring W. Lardner, Jr. “Princeton Panorama,” *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 68.

⁶⁰ Paula Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful: American Youth in the 1920s* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977). Chapters 3-5 deal with the peer group in great detail.

⁶¹ John Spurlock and Cynthia Magistro, *New and Improved: The Transformation of American Women’s Emotional Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

Paula Fass, “demanded repeated demonstrations of conformity and forced the constant process of readaption to new fads, styles, and attitudes, and into a rapid assimilation of commodities and beliefs.”⁶²

The power of peer group suggestion was not lost on advertisers. Throughout the 1920s and 30s, advertisers reformulated their address from one of product description to what Roland Marchand has termed as the “side-by-side” approach. Acting as “coach and confidant,” advertising copy insinuated a peer-like relationship by offering helpful advice that steered the consumer away from social embarrassment by continuously reminding them that they were being watched and judged. Warts, dandruff, poor complexion, too much hair, not enough hair, poor fashion sense and “intestinal fatigue” were among the myriad imperfections which advertising claimed could be conquered through correct product purchases.⁶³ As one ad queried, “Why risk anxiety and embarrassment when it’s so easy to use Deodo every day?”. Another comforts consumers by reminding them that “... the skilled woman knows that in Manon Lescaut Face Powder she has an ally that leaves her beauty undimmed by sun and wind.”

The “modernization” of advertising’s discourse was reliant on the shift from an unwavering and highly disciplined version of self which stressed denial and sacrifice to a version which, in the words of Warren Susman, was predicated on “self-fulfillment, self-expression, self-gratification”: what we generally term as the

⁶² Fass, *The Damned and the Beautiful*, 226.

⁶³ Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity, 1920-1940* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), 9-16.

shift from character to personality.⁶⁴ It is easy to see why advertising and marketing professionals welcomed and enthusiastically nurtured this culture sea-change. In order to take advantage of the new language of self, advertisers developed two powerful discursive weapons: the awareness of social type and the importance of first impressions. Each concept preached the seriousness of appearance. Consumers were compelled to identify with the figures who easily avoided negative first impressions by successfully assembling a series of goods into an image which broadcasted such qualities as confidence, vigor, intelligence, desirability, or importance. This was clearly the case for female consumers. As Peiss notes, the culture of personality transformed the world into a stage where “women were thus urged to transform the spectacle of themselves into self-conscious performances.”⁶⁵ But what of the male consumer?

For its part, advertising targeted at male consumers was remarkably similar in that it too stressed the importance of social perception. While *Esquire* readers would see scare ads from time to time, more often than not the magazine would run ads which featured young, good-looking, well-dressed men flanked either by women or symbols of power. A Stetson ad which ran in the March 1935 issue provides a pertinent example. The visual center of the ad is a young man with a firm but smooth jaw, dressed in a sharp suit, leather driving gloves and a crisp Stetson hat. At his side, a stylish young woman gazing admiringly at him while they take in a ride in his automobile. Above him, copy that screams “In the matter of Style, it is so essential to

⁶⁴ Susman, “Personality and the Making of Twentieth Century Culture,” 280.

⁶⁵ Peiss, *Hope in a Jar*, 142.

be right.”⁶⁶ A similar ad from the January 1935 issue, employs all the same totems, well-dressed man, stylish, adoring woman, fast car. But this time they are being used to sell a car--the 1935 Auburn Speedster. The only copy present here (other than the name of the vehicle) is three lines in the lower right-hand corner assure consumers the car is “Certified 100 mph or more.”⁶⁷ In each of these ads, the reader cannot help but to notice the confidence and virility that consumer goods make possible.

The visual tropes found in these ads are typical of the hundreds of ads *Esquire* ran in the mid-Thirties. These tropes are found in the fashion illustrations as well. Rarely did a fashion illustration feature a lone man. Instead, they almost always featured groups of men. The men wearing the featured outfits would almost always be placed into a situation where they are the center of attention and admiration. An illustration from October 1935 has our model as the center of attention in a courtroom or legislature of some sort.⁶⁸ Around him, old men dressed in conservative (re: dull) suits are captivated by the rhetorical prowess of the young man dressed in the finely tailor blue Herringbone suit. A similar dynamic is at play in a March 1935 illustration in which a young man in double breasted dark grey flannel suit (just like, we are told, the one the Duke of Kent prefers) is greeting a fashionable young lady, who to no one’s surprise, lovingly admiring her gentleman caller.⁶⁹

⁶⁶ Stetson advertisement, *Esquire*, March 1935, 4.

⁶⁷ Auburn advertisement, *Esquire*, January 1935, 10.

⁶⁸ “Another Outfit for the Average Man,” *Esquire*, October 1935, 130.

⁶⁹ “Something We Predicted Just a Year Ago,” *Esquire*, March 1935, 142.

Unlike the ads that employed scare tactics or engaged psychodramatic scenarios to sell their products, ads and spreads that invited readers to imagine themselves as participating in a particular social milieu succeed largely because they were able to distract readers from the inherent fiction of the ads. A suit or a car, in and of themselves, do not have the ability to change an individual's social standing. Yet, despite this fiction, advertisers repeatedly instructed young men that a positive self-image was the key to making a successful first impression. The "parable of the First Impression" was so pervasive, suggests Roland Marchand, because it responded to a culture that was becoming increasingly more anonymous. Following T.J. Jackson Lears' concept of the "discontinuous self," Marchand holds that the first impressions mattered precisely because older forms of social contact that emphasized the importance of character had diminished in importance. In their place emerged an amalgam of institutions that actively suggested that the external was the best index to the internal. Armed with magazines like the *Esquire* and the *New Success*, young white collar types ingested a doctrine of the infinitely perfectible self. As Pendergast notes, this was especially true of the importance given to appearance. Being a "go-getter" meant looking like a "go-getter." Self-help manuals, chest expanders, shoe polish, razors cologne; all of these items appeared in advertisements that promised men an extra edge. However, it was clothing ads which articulated this discourse most aggressively. Clothing ads repeatedly reminded men that it was incumbent upon them to wear "smart" and "correct" fashions. An April 1936 ad for Stein-Bloch tailors seemingly guaranteed men that they would be "in the money by Easter." if they wore a Stein-Bloch suit. After all, the ad reminds us, "It's good business to look

your best.”⁷⁰ A November 1935 ad for Fashion Park advised men that “the social season is here...More people...more parties...more chances to rise and shine if you feel properly suited and sure of yourself.” To further underscore the necessity for new clothes the ad goes on to remind the reader that “men who are on the upgrade and moving ahead are expected to look the part.”⁷¹ What was important was that here was an image men could emulate. As an editorial in the *New Success* noted, “Your appearance will be taken as an advertisement of what you are.”⁷²

Esquire took this logic even further. The social judgments did not end with appearance but continued onto liquor, automobiles, books, music and a myriad of other leisure activities. While *Esquire* rarely if ever castigated its readers outright, the awareness of what was beyond the pale was always self-evident. While the presence of critics and experts of all stripes did certainly underscore the magazine’s authority in dictating a version of sophisticated leisure, the magazine’s consistency in this matter can be traced directly to Arnold Gingrich’s desire to produce a magazine which functioned as a masculine cultural intermediary. As Gingrich admitted to Ernest Hemingway, “The magazine is devoted to drinking, eating, clothes, humor, music...sports, fiction.”⁷³ Where distinctions between high and low were once markers of breeding and character, in the new world of personality, mass media, and consumer culture they had been transformed into the perpetually shifting elements of

⁷⁰ Stein-Bloch advertisement, *Esquire*, April 1936, 202A

⁷¹ Fashion Park Advertisement, *Esquire*, November 1935, 13.

⁷² Orison Swett Marden, “Look Successful If You Would Be Successful,” *New Success*, January 1920, 25. Quoted in Perdergast, *Creating the Modern Man*, 123.

⁷³ Arnold Gingrich to Ernest Hemingway, 4 August 1933, Box 1, Gingrich MSS.

the ensemble known as the self. By putting visceral impressions and immediate experience ahead of reflective intellectual contemplation, style before substance if you will, Americans were consistently reminded that the project of perfecting the self was always in progress. The instant success of *Esquire* affirmed Gingrich's sense that the time was right for the appearance of a magazine like *Esquire*. In the thirteen years between the 1920 census and the appearance of the first *Esquire*, the commercial culture of personality, despite a cataclysmic economic depression, developed into the dominant discourse of American culture. By advocating a world of manly leisure that based on pleasure and consumption, *Esquire* transported this discourse from the boardroom to the living room. In short, *Esquire* sought to introduce American men to what Gingrich would call the "Art of Living."

Section 3: The "Art of Living" in Post-Prohibition America

As the nation slowly emerged from the Depression, *Esquire* Editor Arnold Gingrich saw a return to a more mature and restrained hedonism of the Twenties. For *Esquire*, the marketplace rather than the speakeasy would become the site for hedonistic displays. Reinforcing this utopian vision was an emerging doctrine referred to as the "New Leisure." Gingrich's solution was to celebrate the "New Leisure" as an entry to "the art of living." Yet, what does "the art of living" mean? *Esquire* attempted to answer this question by running an essay by Columbia University president Nicholas Murray Butler in its inaugural issue. As we shall see, Butler's equivocation of leisure with a cultivation of talents which are innately human would be one which would ultimately be at odds with *Esquire*'s ideology. In "The New Leisure," Butler declared that, "One of the most obvious objects of life is to

learn how to live.” As Butler explains, an individual “becomes increasingly human” as he begins to learn that life is composed of work and leisure. To enjoy leisure is to live a more complete life. Through reading, listening to music, visiting art museums, and cultivating new hobbies, humans separate themselves from other living creatures that have no concept of leisure. Furthermore, leisure, if practiced properly, is beneficial in that it makes for better workers. To this end, Butler suggests that institutions such as adult education, public library reading rooms, and fraternal organizations play an important role in helping people enjoy their leisure time.⁷⁴

One is instantly struck by how poorly Butler’s prescriptions fit into *Esquire*’s world of manly pursuits. Quite simply, Butler’s conception of leisure is one that advocates “rest” and on the development of character. His critique of movies as “cheap, vulgar, and debasing sex plays,” his assertion that adult education is required in order to provide “guidance from competent sources...as to one’s standards of judgment,” and his advocacy of “interesting and helpful” is in line with similar contemporary critiques of unproductive leisure. For Butler and his contemporaries, the “New Leisure” offered not only an opportunity for self-enrichment but also an occasion to revolt against the dehumanization of modern life.⁷⁵ The recreational pursuits Butler advocates in fact stem from time-honored character building programs

⁷⁴ Nicholas Butler Murray and S. J. Woolf, “The New Leisure,” *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 13.

⁷⁵ This is particularly true of Allport’s “This Coming Era of Leisure.” In exceptionally strong language, Allport suggested that a life in which work is eliminated through the machine will be less meaningful. “The rose which has been stripped of its thorn,” suggests Allport, “is no longer completely the rose.”(648).

associated with the gospel of the “genteel tradition” advanced by Antebellum and Gilded Age ministers, writers, and educators.⁷⁶

As Joan Rubin has suggested, the “genteel tradition” was predicated on the development of “‘inner growth’ and ‘full and harmonious training.’”⁷⁷ For scholars such as nineteenth century theologian and philosopher William Ellery Channing, acculturation was valuable only when it was employed in the service of “nurturing a mind and spirit consistent with ‘Christian character.’”⁷⁸ This ethos survived into the twentieth century in the form of reading clubs, Dr. Eliot’s Five Foot Shelf of Books and the various “Great Books” programs that sprung up in higher education. Middlebrow tastemakers like Dorothy Canfield Fisher suggested that a clear-cut choice had been presented to the American people; conveniently summarized in the lecture title, *Learn or Perish*. Fisher, according to Rubin, insisted that “if Americans educated their “individual minds” for the sake of spiritual, rather than material, gain, they would ‘enhance’ the quality of ‘national thinking’ and preserve the democratic process.”⁷⁹

The “New Leisure” Nicholas Murray Butler spoke of in his *Esquire* article is, in final analysis, sorely out of place in *Esquire*. Certainly, one could find relaxation in Butler’s regimented and disciplined sense of leisure. However, when we look at the inaugural issue of *Esquire*, we become acutely aware that the notions of leisure

⁷⁶ *ibid*, 13.

⁷⁷ Joan Shelley Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1992), 5-6.

⁷⁸ *ibid*.

⁷⁹ *ibid.*, 126.

advocated by Butler and *Esquire* were at odds. Contra Butler, *Esquire* seemingly dismissed the language of character building and refinement in favor of personality and visceral experience. Yet, this new language was also structured around rules and taste judgments. An ad for Cadillac bears the caption “Impressions mean so much.” The accompanying copy reminds readers that America’s business leaders “know full well that of all those material possessions which bespeak a man’s place in general life of his community, none is more instantly recognized than the automobile.”⁸⁰ The fashion spreads reiterate the association of personality with material possessions. “For the College Upper Class Man or Younger Grad” reminds readers that “the average upper classman of the more (fashion) aware type wouldn’t be caught dead in anything but a bruised dark brown snap brim hat” and that Harris and Shetland tweed are “universal among the better dressed members of the fashion setting groups...at Princeton and Yale.”⁸¹ In its desire to construct a culture of manly leisure, *Esquire* gladly accepted the proposition that regardless if one was spending a night on the town or at home entertaining friends and acquaintances, what was not acceptable or desirable were poor manners, poor taste and an ignorance of what was up-to-date and smart. As I will argue below, this attention to the social judgments articulated through the language of taste and smartness manifested itself most vividly in *Esquire*’s coverage of spirits-related content and in its convention challenging cartoons.

⁸⁰ Cadillac Advertisement, *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 5.

⁸¹ “For the College Upper Class Man or Younger Grad,” *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 59.

While *Esquire*'s "masculine as a mustache" form of addressing itself to its readers was novel, its emphasis on sophistication was not.⁸² By his own admission, Gingrich patterned *Esquire* along the lines of such so-called "smart magazines" as *Vanity Fair* and *American Mercury*.⁸³ For these titles, "smartness" came to be identified with an elegant look and an intelligent (but not intellectual or academic) content. As George H. Douglas reminds us, Frank Crowninshield, the founding editor of *Vanity Fair*, "liked to say that his magazine was a conversation piece in New York society." Similarly, *The Smart Set* (a precursor to the *American Mercury*) proclaimed on its cover that it was "A Magazine of Cleverness" and "The Magazine of Fifth Avenue."⁸⁴

George H. Douglas has argued that, smart magazines, by one definition, can be identified as magazines created and designed for the social elites. However, "the better magazines of this sort," Douglas adds, "dropped all extravagant pretensions to snobbery...and often became phenomenally successful with large audiences far outside the gentry."⁸⁵ Much of their success, it can be argued, came specifically because of their association with the upper-crust. In a culture increasingly concerned with the how-to's of personality, the "smart magazines" provided not only a primer on taste but served as an index to inform others that one was in the know.

⁸² The quoted phrase is adapted from an *Esquire* subscription appeal, *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 117.

⁸³ Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 83.

⁸⁴ George H. Douglas, *The Smart Set: 50 years of Literary Revelry and High Jinks at Vanity Fair*, *The New Yorker*, *Life*, *Esquire* and *the Smart Set* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1991), 1.

⁸⁵ *ibid.*

This was particularly true of a magazine such as the *New Yorker*. Since its founding in 1925, the *New Yorker* has published an impressive cross-section of the American literary establishment. The *New Yorker* made its name as an *ex post facto* home for the Algonquin Round Table as well as publishing work by E.B. White, James Thurber, S.J. Pearlman, Ring Lardner, Robert Benchley and Ogden Nash. In doing so, it simultaneously provided an alternative to the banality of the *Reader's Digest* and the obtuseness of the "little magazines." Mary Corey has suggested that the *New Yorker* produced a "geography of the mind," a telling phrase which precisely pinpoints the ability of the magazine to provide fleeting access to the world of the sophisticated set.⁸⁶ The Manhattan created in the pages of the *New Yorker* bore little resemblance to the real city. Instead it was a world, if one were to believe the "Talk of the Town" column, populated by a cast of characters who were by turns odd, charming, tragic, extravagant, sophisticated or eccentric. Never were they boring or dangerous. Clearly, this was not the New York of the *Forward* or the *Post*.

Common to all of the "smart magazines" was a cavalier attitude towards drinking. Many of the *New Yorker's* regular writers, for example, were celebrated equally for their writing and their drunken escapades.⁸⁷ Where magazines such as *McCalls* and the *Ladies Homes Journal* regularly ran articles in support of Prohibition, *Vogue* and *Vanity Fair* ran stories or essays where cocktails were an integral part of the social fabric in addition to editorials in favor of Repeal.⁸⁸ *Vogue*

⁸⁶ Mary Corey, *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999).

⁸⁷ See Anne Douglas, *Terrible Honesty*, particularly p. 23-26 and 475-477.

⁸⁸ See Kenneth D. Rose, *American Women and the Repeal of Prohibition* (New York: New York

chronicled the inaugural visit to the United States by British photographer Cecil Beaton. Of the flurry of cocktail parties, mixers, formal dinners, informal gathering and so on, Beaton proclaimed “Never in my life have I seen or drunk so much drink.”⁸⁹ This cavalier attitude extended to speakeasies as well. By criminalizing liquor, the advocates of prohibition had unwittingly forced groups with little common ground into association with one another. In the world of speakeasies and blind pigs, class, gender and sexuality, and to a lesser extent race, became seemingly irrelevant as sophisticates and gangsters gathered to drink, socialize, dance and be entertained.

With the full repeal of the Prohibition in December, 1933, *Esquire* became a repository for advice and advertising concerning all manners of spirits, as well as a guide to nightlife and thoughtful hosting. While much has been made of *Esquire*’s emergence during the darkest days of the Great Depression, it is worthwhile to remember that *Esquire*’s birth was also concomitant with the vigorous movement to repeal the Eighteenth Amendment. By the time the magazine’s inaugural issue hit the newsstands, a resolution calling for a constitutional amendment to repeal Prohibition had been passed out of Congress. By the time the second issue, dated January 1934, made its appearance on December 5, 1933, thirty-seven states had approved the amendment, thus making legal spirits available once again.

While repeal of Prohibition was welcomed by the hundreds of Americans who had tired of choosing between drinking powerful, and at times deadly, “bathtub gin,” choking down unappetizing “near beer” or paying top dollar for illegally imported

University Press, 1996). Chapter four is of particular interest in that it deals with the explicit class nature of the Repeal debate.

⁸⁹ Cecil Beaton, “Diary Written after One Week in New York,” *Vogue*, 5 January 1929, 118.

wine and liquor, the post-Prohibition world was equally frustrating to the social drinker who, seemingly overnight, was confronted by a maddening array of whiskeys, gins, rums, brandies, cordials, wines and beers. Furthermore, the months following Repeal saw an explosion in the nightclub trade. Extant clubs and dancehalls eagerly reintroduced legal public drinking while less reputable speakeasies and blind pigs sought ways to legitimize themselves. Finally, the cocktail party transformed itself from an alternative to drinking in speakeasies to a required function on the upper-middle class social calendar.

Outside of men's clothing and fashion accessories, no single consumer good was better represented in *Esquire* than liquor. In the January 1935 issue alone, nine out of the twenty-five full-page advertisements were for spirits. Where full-page ads commanded the front half of the editorial sandwich, the back portion featured ads which were a half-page or smaller. Once again, advertising for liquor dominated, with nearly two-dozen ads at the half or quarter page size. In addition to the abundance of liquor ads, *Esquire* also featured regular features on spirits as well as a nightlife column entitled "Painting the Town with *Esquire*."

The repeal of Prohibition revealed that the practice of drinking had changed dramatically--particularly in regards to the gendered nature of public social drinking. In the speakeasies which became so important to illegal wet economy, women (often unescorted--formerly a clear-sign of a prostitute), became a regular fixture. Prior to Prohibition, when public drinking had been restricted to saloons and hotel bars and restaurants, a strict code of over-determined masculinity was enforced. While hotel bars and restaurants, such as the Delmonico and the Waldorf, allowed escorted

women into dining areas, the bar was strictly marked off limits. A similar logic prevailed in saloons. Most saloons did not admit women patrons. Those that did allow women entrance did so only with the understanding that the woman was there to purchase liquor or beer and would vacate the premises once this transaction was completed. The saloons that allowed such a policy often kept a separate private entrance for women.⁹⁰ Despite the disparities in class, similar discourses rationalizing these exclusionary policies prevailed. For the hotel bars, the time after dinner was a time for socializing. It was also a time to do business. As Lewis Erenberg suggests, the “presence of women insured a high standard of male decorum and an air of civilization and social formality.”⁹¹ By excluding women from the more informal exchanges, men insured a social space “removed from the more elevated and formal public world.”⁹² Likewise, the saloon was defined as a space in which men could resist “feminization.”⁹³ However, rather than talking business or public affairs, the saloon established itself as a site for the display of masculinity through hard drinking, gambling and brawling. Saloons, for example, only served beer and hard liquor. Where cocktails were regularly served at hotel bars, the masculine code of the saloon viewed such beverages as suspect. Furthermore, where hotel bars operated primarily as a social club following a dinner, saloons provided a surrogate home to

⁹⁰ Catherine Gilbert Murdock, *Domesticating Drink: Women, Men, and Alcohol in America, 1870-1940* (Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

⁹¹ Lewis A. Erenber, *Steppin' Out: New York Nightlife and the Transformation of American Culture, 1890-1930* (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1981), 11.

⁹² *ibid.*, 11.

⁹³ Kimmel, *Manhood in America*, 124-125.

workingmen. Within this atmosphere, complained morality crusaders, the honest workingman was driven to poverty, separated from his family, and drawn into a life of sloth and vice. As Rev. Billy Sunday put it, the saloon, “is an infidel...it respects the thief and it esteems the blasphemer; it fills the prisons and the penitentiaries...I tell you that the curse of God Almighty is on the saloon.”⁹⁴

Despite their differences, the curse that ultimately fell upon both hotel bars and saloons was Prohibition. Passed into law on January 16, 1919, the Eighteenth Amendment was the culmination of some twenty years of campaigning by the Anti-Saloon League and other Dry organizations. The aims of the reformers were varied. Some progressive reformers saw it as a form of social engineering through which working-class communities could be reinvigorated. Other reformers saw it as a route to Americanization and insurance against treason. The largest group of reformers however saw Prohibition as a powerful weapon against urbanization, modernity and the destruction of traditional American values. As Lewis Erenberg points out, Prohibition was “the province of small-town Protestants bent on establishing the primacy of their values on the encroaching, more glamorous culture of the ethnically and sexually heterogeneous urban areas.”⁹⁵ Or to put it another way, the battle over Prohibition pitted the “traditional” against the “modern.” In the ensuing decade, Prohibition would prove an important force in altering the ways in which Americans enjoyed themselves. Those who sought liquor were forced into dealings with the Underworld or drinking in speakeasies. Often located in cellars or in backrooms of

⁹⁴ As quoted in Andrew Sinclair, *Prohibition: The Era of Excess* (Boston: Little, Brown, and Co., 1962), 63.

⁹⁵ Erenberg, *Stepping Out*, 235.

respectable businesses, speakeasies provided patrons with a place to buy and consume liquor. At times, speakeasies were little more than unfurnished rooms. Others were much more ornate. Often times, the speakeasy would provide entertainment, musical or otherwise, to compete with the more upscale nightclubs. Yet all possessed some sort of mechanism to quickly hide all evidence of drinking in case of an unexpected visit by the police.

This gray-market world of drinking in cafes, dance-halls and speakeasies however was tempered not so much by the forces of Prohibition, but by oversaturation and then Depression. Erenberg notes, for example, that by the late twenties there were over seventy cabaret nightclubs serving a well-heeled clientele in New York alone. If we estimate that the number of cafes and speakeasies was roughly equal or greater than that, we can gain a sense of how crowded the field was. Simply put, supply outstripped demand. In fact, most speakeasies did not make it out of the Depression. The nightclubs and cafes that did make it into the thirties found a rough time of it until 1935.⁹⁶ The repeal of prohibition, of course, contributed greatly to this turn of affairs. The news of repeal was met with glee along Broadway and other entertainment districts. Impresario Billy Rose was one of the first in the night club trade to take advantage of the new turn of events. In addition to hosting a party on the day the twenty-first amendment was passed out of Congress, Rose gained prominence for opening four successful nightclubs in by 1938: the Casino de Paree, the Music Hall, the Cas Manana, and the Diamond Horseshoe.⁹⁷ With drinks back on

⁹⁶ Lewis Erenberg, "From New York to Middletown: Repeal and the Legitimization of Nightlife in the Great Depression," *American Quarterly*, 38, 5 (Winter 1986): 764.

⁹⁷ Lewis Erenberg, "Impresarios of Broadway Nightlife" in *Inventing Times Square: Commerce and*

the menu and the economy slowly groping its way out of Depression, going out was once again in *Vogue*.

The world of Post-Repeal drinking however was one that was alien to those raised on speakeasies and bathtub gin. Starting with the January 1934 issue, *Esquire* courted this audience by offering regular monthly features on alcohol, gastronomy, and other related lifestyle issues. Murdock Pemberton, in an April 1936 column, comforted readers who worried that “there is something sissy about knowing how to cook.”⁹⁸ Similar fears were allayed in articles on spirits connoisseurship, interior decorating, and etiquette by suggesting that there is no shame in enjoying life and all it has to offer. The magazine also carried stories in which nightlife was featured prominently, such as the three part series by celebrity bartender Jimmie Charters which ran from May to August of 1934. In April of 1935, *Esquire* added a “Painting the Town with *Esquire*” column which plugged various New York (and occasionally Chicago) night spots in the form of a gossipy discourse. What united all of these was an explicit sense that Prohibition did much more than make life difficult for drinkers. It had made what was known as “civilized drinking” obsolete. Charles Hanson Towne, writing in the inaugural issue of *Esquire*, bitterly complains that “with gin and whisky in the foreground, and the old simplicities tossed to the background, it is coarse and crude and - yes- vulgar.” “Our taste is gone, our values have been destroyed,” laments Towne, “and it will take a generation to get them back again.”⁹⁹

Culture at the Crossroads of the World, William R. Taylor, ed. (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1991), 172. See also Joseph Lanza, *The Cocktail* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1995).

⁹⁸ Murdock Pemberton, “If He Could Only Cook,” *Esquire*, April 1936. 54,194-195.

⁹⁹ Charles Hanson Towne, “the Lost Art of Ordering” *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 109.

Andrew Sinclair points out that the popularity of the speakeasy was in some ways hastened by the Anti-Saloon League's campaign against fine dining establishments which served alcohol. Culinary institutions such as the Delmonico, the Knickerbocker Grill, the Paradise and the Cushman were all shutdown by the mid-twenties.¹⁰⁰ Also contributing to the demise of "civilized drinking" was the very nature of how drinking was conducted. Bootleg liquor was potent. This leads us to two points. First, it was not meant to be enjoyed in the sense one enjoys a glass of wine or a single-malt scotch. Bootleg liquor, by most accounts, was barely drinkable and certainly unworthy of savoring. Secondly, in order to cut its potency, many drinkers insisted on diluting the alcohol with such adjuncts as fruit juice, tonic water, and syrupy sodas. Unlike such pre-Prohibition cocktails as the Martini which emphasized a simplicity in its mixing, the new cocktails were gaudy complicated affairs.¹⁰¹ As one wag put it succinctly, "a generation brought up on the curves of Jean Harlow cannot be expected to admire the smile of Mona Lisa."¹⁰² To this end, staff writers such as Lawton McKall and Murdock Pemberton would repeatedly cast drinking in the world of gentlemen's clubs and formal affairs, mentioning Prohibition only to berate it. Prohibition, or "the Great Insanity" as Mackall referred to it, destroyed the art of drinking by substituting the logic of quantity and potency over the

¹⁰⁰ Sinclair, *Prohibition*, 232.

¹⁰¹ For the emergence of the cocktail, see Sinclair, *Prohibition*, Lanza, *The Cocktail*, and Andrew Barr, *Drink: A Social History of America* (New York: Carroll and Graf, 1999).

¹⁰² Frederick van Ryn, "there's No Repealing Tastes," *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 47.

logic of quality and character.¹⁰³ *Esquire* sought to create a new generation of drinkers, “drinkers whose palates care and aspire and demand” by associating drinking exclusively with images of sophistication.¹⁰⁴ On this account, the pieces by Lawton Mackall bear further examination.

Lawton Mackall’s first *Esquire* byline was a September 1934 piece entitled “England’s Wine” which introduced readers to Port. Claiming that Americans had to “defer” their appreciation for Port because “our palates must attain their gustatory puberty,” Mackall went on to explain the appeal, history, and of the wine by framing it in a rambling narrative about his “induction into the Cult of Port.”¹⁰⁵ Mackall’s induction, it seems, came quite by accident. Embroiled in a dispute with a waiter, Mackall was saved by a British gentleman who offered to translate, and subsequently, mediate the dispute. Inviting Mackall to his table, the gentleman offered the unsuspecting Mackall a glass of Port. His first taste, he tells us, was “velvety seduction with an undertone of uplift.”¹⁰⁶ With his reservations regarding Port dispelled, Mackall writes of his host, “he sipped it appreciatively; apparently did not regret its being too good for the general drinking public. Nor did I.”¹⁰⁷ As the piece continues, Mackall takes his reader through the Port-making process as practiced in Oporto, Portugal and a Port tasting at the British Association, all the while

¹⁰³ Lawton MacKall, “The Pot-Luck of the Irish,” *Esquire*, October 1935, 165.

¹⁰⁴ Lawton McKall, “For Gentlemen and Wine Scholars,” *Esquire*, November 1934, 46.

¹⁰⁵ Lawton McKall, “England’s Wine,” *Esquire*, September 1934, 48, 156.

¹⁰⁶ *ibid.*, 48.

¹⁰⁷ *ibid.*

interspersing the piece with historical anecdotes as to why Port was “England’s wine.” A sidebar differentiating ruby, tawny, white, and vintage Port styles completed the package.

In and of itself, the piece provided a template for all Mackall pieces to come. The typical Mackall piece was generally on a type or family of alcohol. Thus, “Season of Uplift” dealt with brandy, while “Soup to Sillabub” dealt with sherry and so on.¹⁰⁸ Mackall’s pieces were also notable for their historical depth. In each essay, Mackall would develop extensive accounts of how a particular drink came to be and what customs surrounded its consumption. His piece on the Spanish wine known as Madeira begins with the rather sad tale of why ninety-two gallons of the wine never joined Napoleon on St. Helena’s.¹⁰⁹ Mackall’s real talent, however, laid in his ability to convey the sense that the real pleasure in wine and spirits wasn’t derived from drinking it in a wanton fashion but from the obsessive connoisseurship they engendered. The world Mackall painted was one filled with well-heeled epicureans who would rather sit with their palliative of choice than engage with the world at large. For Mackall, the true connoisseur was no dilettante who merely dabbled in wine or spirits. He (and it was always a “he”) was committed to the sacred cause. Collecting and consuming Madeira, Port, Sherry, Ale, and so on, was a full-time affair. And in Gingrich’s regime of “The New Leisure,” such obsessions were permissible for they combined the discourses of consumption and personality in a

¹⁰⁸ Lawton Mackall, “Season of Uplift,” *Esquire*, December 1935, 54; “Soup to Sillabub,” *Esquire*, December 1934, 53.

¹⁰⁹ Lawton Mackall, “For Gentlemen and Wine Scholars,” *Esquire*, November 1934, 46.

way which struck out beyond the realm of the professional or business realms and asserted themselves as wholly masculine.

While their primary function was to ostensibly educate *Esquire* readers on how to refine their drinking tastes, Mackall's essays always managed to avoid the drab language of service articles by affecting the pose of a bon vivant who was in with the posh set. Mackall's authority derived equally from his deep knowledge of wine and spirits as it did from his prickly, bitchy and aristocratic personality. Mackall describes Napoleon as "not belonging in a Madeira world" on the grounds that he was a "roughneck." "So let him get the hell out of this article," protests Mackall, "This is for deserves only."¹¹⁰ Or take for example his tirade against those who attempt to pass off moonshine (or worse) as "real" post-Repeal bourbon. Citing an incident where he was bamboozled into buying a glass of bootleg whiskey, Mackall complains

Unfortunately, slick workers of this sort seldom give themselves away so obligingly. You get stung, and that's all there is to it: and your victimization is due, not to the fact that you don't care what kind of stuff is poured into your glass, but because the general clientele doesn't. It is though you...asked for hasenpfeffer and drew the stewed carcass of a quadruped whose dying utterance had been "meow!"¹¹¹

Mackall's indignation served as a call-to-arms. Rather than "bending a couple of chairs around the head waiter's neck," Mackall proposes that the proper response to "stop this swindle" is for whiskey aficionados "to do the practically unprecedented

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

¹¹¹ Lawton Mackall, "John Barleycorn, Esq." *Esquire*, April 1935, 74.

thing of familiarizing themselves with the taste and character of good whiskey.”¹¹² For Mackall, the pedagogical impulse was at the heart of these articles. His knowledge is to be shared. It is, however, an undemocratic type of sharing. In the end, only those with sophisticated palates can truly understand the ecstasy and pleasure of a perfectly aged glass of Port.

Lawton Mackall, of course, was only part of a larger discourse within *Esquire* on drinking. Articles on dining or hosting always included some discussion of wine and spirits. Stuart Howe’s “Dining without Pain” suggests that all dinner parties should begin with one or two cocktails, be followed by a sherry to accompany the soup, wine with the entree, champagne with the dessert and brandy or cordials with the coffee.¹¹³ *Esquire* would also offer regular features on current drinking terminology. Lester V. Berrey’s “Fashions in Language” suggested “there is a finesse in language as in clothes and the man of today is expected to be quite as discriminating in his speech as in his dress.”¹¹⁴ More to the point, Jean DeJournette’s “Poppings of the Corks,” posits that the post-Repeal world has developed so quickly and with so many variations, that a man must be aware if he is using a term in a phrase in the proper social context.¹¹⁵ Frank Shay’s December 1934 article, “Ten Best Cocktails of 1934” consolidated all of the above tendencies and took them to their logical conclusion by naming such elegant drinks as the Dry

¹¹² *ibid.*

¹¹³ Stuart Howe, “Dining without Pain,” *Esquire*, March 1934, 113.

¹¹⁴ Lester V. berry, “Fashions in Language,” *Esquire* 1934, 82.

¹¹⁵ Jean DeJournette, “Poppings of the Corks,” *Esquire*, April 1934, 36.

Martini, the Old-Fashioned, the Vermouth Casis, and the Champagne Cocktail, among others as being worthy of enjoyment.¹¹⁶

Advertising provided another facet of the pedagogical discourse surrounding drinking by providing a powerful supplement to *Esquire's* editorial content. Visual and textual representations of alcohol of as sophisticated and prestigious often reinforced discussions of sophistication and prestige by such figures as Lawton Mackall. A January 1936 ad for Vat 69 scotch features a photograph of a butler serving Vat 69 to two men in tuxedos, lounging in leather chairs. The tagline reads, "In clubs the world over and wherever "Quality Tells," it's "Vat 69, please!"¹¹⁷ Likewise, a pre-Repeal ad for Budweiser, invites "those with a flair for living" to taste "something more than beer."¹¹⁸ An illustration of a polo player straddling a horse in full gallop provides the visual focus of the ad. The most telling example, however, is a January 1936 ad for Gilbey's Gin. With a tagline reading "These gentlemen are our best advertisement." the reader's eyes are drawn to a photo of two middle-aged men in formal wear enjoying a gin cocktail and each other's company. The photo itself is cropped in a diamond pattern. The bottom corner of the photo then points to an illustration of a bottle of Gilbey's gin. Between these three elements, a reading becomes enforced; men of status drink Gilbey's¹¹⁹.

¹¹⁶ Frank Shay, "Ten Best Cocktails," *Esquire*, December 1934, 40,179-180.

¹¹⁷ Vat 69 advertisement, *Esquire*, January 1936, 16.

¹¹⁸ Budweiser advertisement, *Esquire*, January 1934, Back Cover.

¹¹⁹ Gilbey's advertisement, *Esquire*, January 1936, 22A.

Not all of the liquor advertising in *Esquire*, however, suggested the linkages between sophistication and alcohol consumption. Following Repeal, a number of producers capitalized on the recent memory of Prohibition in order to differentiate their product from others in the marketplace. One version of this tactic was to turn to history. The Johnnie Walker ad that ran in the January 1934 issue prominently featured the tagline “Welcome one old friend who’s really old.”¹²⁰ A November 1935 ad for Dewar’s points to the over fifty gold medals the distiller has earned in their storied past. Other ads use Prohibition to remind readers of what they were forced to drink during Prohibition. A Martini and Rossi Vermouth ad from February 1934 stirs up bad memories of the overly sweet concoctions that passed for cocktails during Prohibition by inventing a character named Roscoe, the “little boy who ate candy before his supper” and who “still serves sweet cocktails.”¹²¹

The Martini and Rossi ad, however, also points to a third rhetorical strategy operating in *Esquire*’s liquor advertising. In much of the advertising to appear between 1934 and 1936, the copy is concerned with an explicitly pedagogical discourse. The Martini and Rossi ad, for example, suggests that “Martinis are made with Martini Vermouth.”¹²² Likewise, another Martini and Rossi ad explains the differences between the two standard types of vermouth.¹²³ An ad for Bacardi rum

¹²⁰ Johnnie Walker, *Esquire*, January 1934, 3.

¹²¹ Martini and Rossi advertisement, *Esquire*, February 1934, 6.

¹²² *ibid.*

¹²³ Martini and Rossi advertisement, *Esquire*, January 1935, 169.

pleads “Viva Cuba! But please, please Senor mix that wonderful Bacardi Cocktail just like this”¹²⁴

Fredrerick Van Ryn, writing in an Autumn 1933 column, suggested that “of all the fine arts the Art of Drinking is most difficult to master”¹²⁵ The difficulty arises because the manly code of drinking to intoxication is jettisoned in favor of a drinking practice which favors slow and appreciative consumption. The “art of drinking,” if we are to follow *Esquire*’s discourse, is not practiced in order to forget troubles, to loosen up, or to satisfy some other psychological need. It is practiced out of the sheer enjoyment for the beverage of choice. Thus drinking becomes one of the most visible examples of *Esquire*’s appropriation of the New Leisure.

Section 4: Modernist Masculinity

An important aspect of the masculinization of consumption in *Esquire* was its integration into a tough modernist mindset. Setting aside the sermons on the redemptive nature of high culture that was identified largely “feminized” middle-brow, *Esquire* preached an aggressive masculinity that looked to a modern urban world in which the collision of high and low forms produced an exciting, virile aesthetic culture. Here it is helpful to examine the Gilbert Seldes’ tenure as *Esquire*’s entertainment critic. A former editor of the influential American literary journal *The Dial*, Seldes distinguished himself by becoming one of the earliest champions of mass culture. His most important work in this regard was the 1924 survey *The Seven Lively Arts*. By championing George Herriman’s “Krazy Kat” comics, Mack

¹²⁴ Bacardi advertisement, *Esquire*, August 1934, 14.

¹²⁵ Frederick Van Ryn, “There’s No Repealing Tastes, *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 47.

Sennett's Keystone Cops, vaudeville, and, most importantly, the films of Charlie Chaplin as "the most intelligent phenomena of their day," Seldes attempted to force a definitive break with the aesthetic standards of the "genteel culture."¹²⁶ By forcefully arguing for the legitimacy of the "high levity" found in the work of these figures, Seldes, Paul Gorman suggests, "was determined to rescue entertainments from genteel prejudice and establish them as necessary features of modern life."¹²⁷ This is not to say that Seldes accepted the mass entertainments without reservation.¹²⁸ To be sure, his praise for a figure like Chaplain rests in Chaplain's skill as an artist. The best of the lively arts, Seldes suggested, are akin to the best of the high arts when they show a sense of authenticity, skill, intelligence and creativity. More importantly, they were bereft of artifice, pretension, and the reverential seriousness found in what Seldes referred to as the "bogus" arts (i.e. Pucinni operas or Ibsen plays). Gilbert Seldes' inaugurated his post as *Esquire's* "Lively Arts" commentator with a pean to the dying world of burlesque. In "I am Dying, Little Egypt," Seldes suggests that the demise of burlesque has left a hole in the cultural landscape that its successors in the high-class revues and in musical theater have been unable to fill. "No one," Seldes argues, "has yet discovered where the next batch of great

¹²⁶ Gilbert Seldes, *The Seven Lively Arts*, 2nd Edition (), 294-295.

¹²⁷ Paul R. Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in Twentieth-Century American* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 77.

¹²⁸ Seldes was more than willing to suggest the "minor" arts could descend into vulgarity and irrelevance. A particularly troubling example was Seldes refusal to fully acknowledge Jazz as an African-American musical form. While Seldes did note that its roots were grounded in the African-American popular culture, Seldes instead chose to celebrate the (white) Jazz bandleader Paul Whiteman. For a fuller critique of this issue see Gorman, *Left Intellectuals*, 80-81. Furthermore, as Gorman helpfully points out, Seldes tactically praised individuals and not entire genres or mediums. Thus he could praise Chaplain while dismissing his impersonators without any apparent contradiction.

comedians and dancers is coming from.”¹²⁹ Seldes’ commentary showed a genuine appreciation and respect for the coarse humor and peek-a-boo naughtiness of the burlesque show. In many ways, Selde’s column defined *Esquire* probably better than any other feature in the magazine’s debut issue. Not only was it an erudite, thoughtful and, at times, sympathetic account of “nakedness, dirty jokes, and roistering fun,” it also served as a guide to the world of the sometimes coarse but never dull “Lively Arts.”

The “Lively Arts” column in *Esquire* continued in this vein. Beginning with the Autumn 1933 issue, Seldes’ column appeared monthly until 1946. In that time, he covered subjects as diverse as the pressures on American women to conform to a particular image of femininity pushed by the cosmetics industry to a dressing-down of sports writers whose use of purple prose detracts from the reporting of an event to a survey of the sad state of musical theater on Broadway.¹³⁰ In the September 1935 issue, Seldes revisited (or more accurately, reworked) his celebratory sketch of Krazy Kat, “the first character in our popular mythology.”¹³¹ On several occasions he devoted his column to taking verbal potshots at artists by referring to them as “the worst people in the world” in one essay while in another proclaiming that the “itch for art is beginning to corrupt the good commercial film.” In “The Half-Way Van Winkle,” Seldes posits a “half-time Rip Van Winkle, a gentleman who had the good fortune to fall asleep at the beginning of the new era and did not wake up until now.”

¹²⁹ Gilbert Seldes, “I Am Dying Little Egypt,” *Esquire*, Autumn 1933, 40.

¹³⁰ Gilbert Seldes, “Cosmetically Sealed,” *Esquire*, December 1935, 86; “Is Sports an Art or an Orgy?” *Esquire*, December 1934, 71, 144; “Extremely Foreign Affairs,” *Esquire*, April 1936, 52, 165.

¹³¹ Gilbert Seldes, “The Kat Comes of Age,” *Esquire*, September 1935, 131.

Having surveyed the paltry state of cultural affairs, Seldes suggests his sleeper “might ... decide that he had not slept half long enough and go back for another ten years.” Pessimistically, Seldes adds, “There are moments I am afraid I would not attempt to dissuade him.”¹³²

It was however the emergent medium of radio, or commercial broadcasting to be more specific, which particularly intrigued Seldes. As with his writing on other popular entertainments, Seldes found numerous examples of radio performers who could enter into his “Lively Arts” pantheon: Fred Allen, Jack Benny, Rudy Vallee and Bing Crosby being the most prominent. However, there was much about radio that dismayed Seldes as well. In “Professor, I’m Through,” for example, he lampooned the growing trend of educational radio.¹³³ As Seldes points out, “There are dozens of places to get education and very few to get entertainment.” “If we are to smack the radio down,” he continues, “let us do it with a definite purpose: to raise its level of entertainment.”¹³⁴ Much of Seldes ambivalence towards radio is summed up in the opening paragraph to “Male and Female Radio”

At the end of the year 1933, the annus mirabilis of recovery, radio broadcasting is the most successful and the most annoying, the most inescapable and the most insufferable racket ever put over on the American public and its great friend, the American businessman.¹³⁵

¹³² Gilbert Seldes, “The Half-Time Van Winkle,” *Esquire*, May 1935, 82.

¹³³ Gilbert Seldes, “Professor, I’m Through,” *Esquire*, February 1935, 64, 114. For an engaging historical analysis of the rise and fall of educational radio see “Information Please! Book Programs on Commercial Radio” in Rubin, *The Making of Middlebrow Culture*, 266-329.

¹³⁴ *ibid*, 114.

¹³⁵ Gilbert Seldes, “Male and Female Radio,” *Esquire*, January 1934, 35.

One month later Seldes begrudgingly amended his characterization of radio by admitting that “radio has shown a faint intention of developing its own material and making itself tolerable.”¹³⁶

Seldes’ eagerness to celebrate the exuberance of modern life in the face of the respectability of Victorian decorum fit well into Gingrich’s “art of living” program. In his “Lively Arts” column Seldes introduced a theme which would become ubiquitous in the magazine’s pages; that the distinctions between the high and the low and the refined and the vulgar were becoming increasingly questionable. As Seldes’ biographer Michael Kammen notes, “Seldes disliked the terms highbrow and lowbrow because he felt that they created or conveyed a misleading if not a false dichotomy.”¹³⁷ Significantly, this exuberance would be defined not only as modern but as thoroughly masculine. Published in *Scribner’s* in March of 1934, Seldes’ “The Masculine Revolt” voiced many of the concerns found in Gingrich’s column in the inaugural issue.¹³⁸ Lamenting the domestication and feminization of “tough” male social spaces (i.e. pool halls, speakeasies, boxing and wrestling matches), Seldes noted with glee that a revolution was afoot in American life to reclaim a social space that was exclusively masculine. The gangster picture, for example, brought men back into the movie theater. No longer in danger of being lost to “women, children, and esthetes,” men flocked to pictures like *Public Enemy* because they were “not

¹³⁶ Gilbert Seldes, “Pick ‘em Where You Find ‘em,” *Esquire*, February 1934, 70. By the mid-forties Seldes would find himself working in the broadcasting industry, first in radio and then in television. See Chapter 7, “Radio and Television,” in Kammen, *The Lively Arts*, 284, for a more thorough account of Seldes’ relationship to broadcasting.

¹³⁷ Kammen, *The Lively Arts*, 91-92.

¹³⁸ Gilbert Seldes, “The Masculine Revolt,” *Scribners*, March 1934, 279-282.

prettified and feminized.”¹³⁹ Furthermore, men flocked to modern furniture precisely because it was the antithesis of the “daintiness and discomfort which come down to us from the eras of women’s greatest ascendancy, Queen Anne and the time of the two Louis, the Directory and the First Empire.”¹⁴⁰ In its place, we find a tough aesthetic based on “leather, glass, tubing, copper--all products of the machine which men invented and love.”¹⁴¹ Modern furniture and interior design, Seldes contends, set out to “make rooms in which no woman can be comfortable.”¹⁴² In a telling passage, Seldes bitterly complains that “whatever could be covered, they covered in chintz or taffeta or antique chairs. Whatever was porcelain was smothered in chiffon and silk, usually in pink. Whatever was an ornament in itself--a faucet, a handle--became ornate.”¹⁴³

If “The Masculine Revolt” was nothing more than a tirade against feminine taste, we could easily dismiss Seldes’ objections as mere sexism. However, a more serious theme is operative in Seldes’ piece. “Feminization,” as used by Seldes does not refer to the taste of all women. Rather it should be understood as a code word for the sort of disciplined, obedient and virtuous life suggested by anti-vice, anti-gambling and anti-drinking social reformers as well as advocates of productive

¹³⁹ *ibid*, 279.

¹⁴⁰ *ibid*, 280.

¹⁴¹ *ibid*, 280.

¹⁴² *ibid*, 280.

¹⁴³ *ibid*, 280.

leisure, particularly those engaged in acculturation programs.¹⁴⁴ For Seldes, the crime was not the dominance of the woman in the American home but rather the cruelty of the Victorian ethos of separate spheres. Having conceded the home to the woman, Seldes seems to suggest that the only avenue available for men to express their masculinity was through business and industry, the “male substitutes for art, intellectualism, and society” as Seldes put it.¹⁴⁵ For Seldes, and by extension Gingrich/*Esquire*, this situation was untenable. To restrict a man’s entire identity to his work created a being who was essentially empty. Here Seldes suggests we would do well to think of Sinclair Lewis’ Babbitt, a character “driven...to the fatuous extremes of his religion of business.”¹⁴⁶ The respite from the relentless world of work which the “New Leisure” offered, however, was a poor substitute particularly when we consider its dependence on the language of self-improvement and refinement. In the final analysis, the version of the whole life offered by the “New Leisure” was too polite, too refined and too constricted to appeal to the masculine sense of self. In its place, Seldes suggested a male culture which was lively, exuberant and most importantly, tough. However, toughness did not necessarily mean a Rooseveltian obsession with violence and cruelty. If we follow Seldes’ cultural criticism, as well as the essays and stories that appeared in *Esquire*,

¹⁴⁴ For a discussion of the rise of “feminization” in American culture see Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture*, Revised Edition, (New York: Noonday Press, 1998).

¹⁴⁵ *ibid*, 282.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid*, 282. Seldes’ animosity to business can also be located in his 1932 pamphlet *Against Revolution*. Having denounced communism, Seldes nevertheless called for a radical rethinking of capitalism, similar to those advocated by John Strachey’s *The Coming Struggle for Power*. Part and parcel of this, Seldes claimed, was to dispense with the “Horatio Alger myths.” See Michael Kammen, *The Lively Arts: Gilbert Seldes and the Transformation of Cultural Criticism in the United States* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), 185-187.

toughness could equally be equated to an aversion to sentimentality and artifice. It should be of little surprise then that Gingrich describe his new publishing venture to Hemingway as being “aimed at all the ex-Babbitts.”¹⁴⁷

To one degree or another, the arguments developed by Seldes in “The Masculine Revolt” were replicated in numerous pieces which appeared in *Esquire*. Some, like Bruce Henry’s “Women are Like Gongs” or Marcel Desage’s paranoid “She’s No Longer Faithful If--” series were patently misogynistic.¹⁴⁸ Others expanded upon themes Seldes had merely suggested. Stuart Howe in “Manners without Etiquette” writes “I do not mean to imply the abolition of good manners in favor of extreme informality. Manners, however, should be consistent, should have logical reasons for being and should be noticeable only in the breach.”¹⁴⁹ Frank Shay’s “The Best Men are Cooks,” while ostensibly a piece on how to cook such staples as venison, smoked ham, planked fish and Bouillabaisse, opens with an attack on the housewife who depends upon women’s magazines for her cooking tips. “She (the housewife) must know,” Shay writes, “that we liberated males are busy returning back to fundamentals.”¹⁵⁰ *Esquire*’s foray into interior design (not, we should note, decor) “The Bachelor at Home,” by G. McStay Jackson, dryly notes that “functional design threw off the yoke of the traditional in the skyscraper, in the airplane, in the

¹⁴⁷ Gingrich to Ernest Hemingway, 4 August 1933, Box 1, Gingrich MSS.

¹⁴⁸ Bruce Henry, “Women are Like Gongs,” *Esquire*, December 1937, 73. Marcel Desage, “She’s No Longer Faithful If--” ran in *Esquire* from April to December of 1936.

¹⁴⁹ Stuart Howe, “Manners Without Etiquette,” *Esquire*, May 1934, 82.

¹⁵⁰ Frank Shay, “The Best Men are Cooks,” *Esquire*, May 1934, 24, 139.

automobile, in the streamlined train, and now at long last ... the home.”¹⁵¹ By defining modern design as employing a “minimum of useless ornamentation,” Jackson appears to underscore the very same conflation of modernism and masculinity that was at the center of Seldes’ piece.

An important ingredient in *Esquire*’s appeal to modernist masculinity was its collection of bawdy, spicy and sophisticated cartoons. In the magazine’s 1930s heyday, *Esquire* offered its readers an average of 16-20 full-page cartoons per issue, many in full color. The *New Yorker* cartoon provided an important template for the *Esquire* cartoon.¹⁵² The chief innovation of the *New Yorker* cartoon was its categorical insistence on simple “drawings” with single-line legends, a notable departure from the convention advanced by *Life* and *Punch*.¹⁵³ Moreover, the *New Yorker* cartoon, when successful, was able to distill the magazine’s entire *weltanschauung* into a single line; a dynamic that *Esquire*’s editors sought to replicate. This, however, is not to say that *Esquire* cartoon’s were mere carbon copies of those in the *New Yorker*. Unlike their competitor, *Esquire*’s cartoonists

¹⁵¹ G. McShay Jackson, *The Bachelor at Home*, *Esquire*, November 1935.

¹⁵² The *New Yorker*’s cartoons have emerged as a cottage industry of sorts. In addition to numerous cartoon anthologies, *New Yorker* cartoons have received a second life in calendars, t-shirts, mugs and so on. Furthermore, as a particularly memorable *Seinfeld* episode demonstrated (“The Cartoon,” original air date 29 January 1998), the ability to “get the joke” serves as a marker of sophistication. To be sure, *New Yorker* cartoons have become some of the popular items adorning faculty office doors. For two excellent studies on the *New Yorker* see, Mary F. Corey’s *The World Through a Monocle: The New Yorker at Midcentury* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1999) and Judith Yaros Lee, *Defining New Yorker Humor* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi: 2000).

¹⁵³ According to Dale Kramer, *New Yorker* editor Harold Ross disliked lengthy legends that detracted from the humor of the image. While numerous historians (most notably Ann Douglas) have accepted Kramer’s explanation for the origins of the *New Yorker* cartoon, Judith Yaros Lee has argued that the emergence of the *New Yorker* cartoon had less to do with Ross’ taste than it did with the decline of the “illustrated joke” cartoon. For Yaros Lee, the innovation of the *New Yorker* cartoon was the mutual dependence of the legend and the graphic image. Dale Kramer, *Ross and the New Yorker* (New York: Doubleday, 1951), 129. Yaros Lee, *Defining New Yorker Humor*, 205-206.

rendered their illustrations in full color and did not have to fight for space. The latter is an important point since *New Yorker* cartoons often seem like space fillers.

Through their prominent placement, *Esquire*'s cartoons suggested that they were an integral part of the editorial mix. This was particularly true of the racy or spicy cartoon, populated by such stock character as the gold-digger on the make, the septuagenarian patsy, the overly amorous cad, and the bubble-headed chorus girl.¹⁵⁴

The spicy cartoons reveal an unapologetically carnal world in which etiquette and moral codes become the basis for ribald humor. While many "spicy" cartoons utilized ample and cleverly hidden displays of feminine nudity, other cartoons of this genre traded on the mere suggestion of sex; the more illicitly the better. A cartoon in the May 1936 issue presented a young man in evening clothes on the phone. "I can't see you tomorrow darling, I'm getting married--how about the day after?" reads the legend. Another cartoon, this time from March 1935, features a Jean Harlow-type blonde suggestively offering a pair of gloves to a handsome young man in a tuxedo. "Here, better wear these," she tells her suitor, "--my husband is a fingerprint expert." The overt sexuality in these cartoons has a double-function. First, it provides a leveling of sorts by pointing to sex as the common denominator that unites all men. Secondly, it subtly reminded readers that sophistication and masculinity could be equated, thus, as Kenon Breazle argues, easing any fears of effeminacy which may have been produced by the presence of fashion pieces and interior design columns.¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ Pringle, "Sex, Esq.," 33.

¹⁵⁵ Kenon Breazeale, "In Spite of Women: *Esquire* Magazine and the Construction of the Male Consumer" in *The Gender and Consumer Culture Reader*, Jennifer Scanlon, ed (New York: New York University, 2000).

The most popular of the spicy cartoons however veered away almost entirely from the social commentary. Instead, such cartoons as the E. Simms Campbell “Sultan” series substituted the wry commentary on contemporary sexual politics with misogynistic jokes in which women literally became objects for sale. In a January 1936 cartoon, a bevy of nearly naked women stands on a platform. A rotund man in a fez, appears to be whispering something into one of the girls’ ears. A merchant off to the side angrily admonishes him, “Please do not handle the merchandise!” A “Sultan” cartoon from January 1934 shows three nearly naked women in the background, while the Sultan, an elderly gentleman and an obese woman stand in the foreground. The Sultan looks on in shock and surprise as the old man asks him, “What would you give me on a trade in?”

Esquire, of course, did not invent the “racy” cartoon. The *Ballyhoo* and its predecessor, the *Judge* and *Captain Billy’s Whiz Bang* as well as the pin-up calendar series issues by the Brown and Bigelow calendar company were among the numerous publications that dealt in sexually explicit cartoons and illustrations. But unlike *Esquire*, they were relegated to the exclusively male confines of the barbershop, the garage and the pool hall while *Esquire* often found entrance into the drawing rooms of many a fashionable address, a situation that Frank Delacorte, publisher of the *Ballyhoo*, could’ve only dreamed about. But the social acceptance of *Esquire*’s version of the “racy” cartoon points to an important shift in attitudes regarding sex and sexuality; particularly among the “Smart Set” at whom the magazine was being aimed. Here once again, the indelible fingerprint of the twenties surfaces. Bolstered by figures in the early 20th century feminist, free-love, and marriage reform

movements, a considerable number of young men and women in the period following World War I began to question the very institutions which had framed and defined gender relations; namely, heterosexual courtship and marriage. In doing so, they redefined not only the parameters of gender relations but also the ways in which those relations were represented.

Figures such as Havelock Ellis, Edward Carpenter, Ellen Key, Margret Sanger, Floyd Dell, and Lorine Pruette, among others, questioned the logic of the Victorian code of sexuality which steadfastly denied the place of erotic pleasure within the sex act. Heavily influenced by Freudian psychology, the sex reformers of the twenties recast sexual pleasure as natural and beneficial. This led to the rethinking of many of the sexual taboos of the nineteenth century. Most radically, a number of reformers recognized that “aberrant” forms of private and public sexual expression such as masturbation, pornography and homosexuality had gained a greater degree of legitimacy. Victorian prohibitions against masturbation as “self-abuse,” for example, were challenged by such reformers as W.J. Robinson and W.H. Robie, who saw the dire warnings against the practice as “shamefully and stupidly exaggerated.”¹⁵⁶ Similarly, as George Chauncey and Lillian Faderman have pointed out, homosexuality gained greater acceptance among certain sectors of the urban elite during the twenties, becoming a fixture on the sophisticated social scene and giving rise to the “pansy craze” and to “lesbian chic.”¹⁵⁷ By the mid-thirties, however, much

¹⁵⁶ Kevin White, *The First Sexual Revolution: The Emergence of Male Heterosexuality in Modern America* (New York: New York University Press, 1993), 63.

¹⁵⁷ George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture and the Making of the Gay Male World, 1890-1940* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 301-329; Lillian Faderman, “Lesbian Chic: Experimentation and Repression in the 1920s” in *The Gender and Consumer Reader*, op.cit., 153-165.

of the desire to challenge sexual mores had been challenged by a resurgent moralism. The increasing regulation of radio content, the establishment of the Production Code Authority to monitor motion pictures, and the prosecution of James Joyce's *Ulysses* on obscenity charges in 1933 point to a dramatically changed climate. Nevertheless, among the "modern," an open, even cynical, attitude towards sexuality was seen as necessary.

Through its comics and illustrations, *Esquire* offered its readers more than a series of "dirty" drawings. Rather, the artwork was an audacious conflation of the modern tenets of consumption, urbanism, sophistication and sexuality. No single figure embodied this better than the Petty Girl.¹⁵⁸ The creation of graphic artist George Petty, Petty Girl was not a specific girl. Her face, hair color, and hairstyle were constantly changing. What did not change was her physique, appropriately described by a former *Playboy* assistant art director as "streamlined."¹⁵⁹ Evolving from a recurring cartoon character to a pinup feature, the Petty Girl, writes Kenon Breazeale, "was both source and example of the generic anatomical formula used to depict women in a vast majority of *Esquire*'s illustrations."¹⁶⁰ A typical example of the Petty Girl cartoon, in this case a cartoon found in the March 1935 issue, finds a

¹⁵⁸ The most thorough scholarly studies of the pin-up can be found in the essay which accompanies Charles G. Martignette and Louis K. Meisel, *The Great American Pin-Up* (New York and Berlin: Taschen America, 1996). See also, Despina Kakoudaki, "Pinup: The American Secret Weapon in World War II." In *Porn Studies*, ed. Linda Williams (Durham, NC: Duke, 2004), 335-369 and Maria Buszek, "Or Varga Girls and Riot Grrrls: The Varga Girl and WWII in the Pinup's Feminist History." In *Essays on the Occasion of the Exhibition "Alberto Vargas: The Esquire Pinups."* Available at www.ku.edu/~sma/vargas/buszek.htm

¹⁵⁹ Reid Austin, as quoted in Merril, *Esqy*, 39.

¹⁶⁰ Breazle, "In Spite of Women", 234.

woman who is naked, save for the translucent robe she is wearing, looking out of the window of her stylish Art Deco bathroom. With one arm akimbo, she speaks over the phone with an apparently irate neighbor. “If your husband can’t sleep why don’t you pull your shade down” reads the legend. Despite (or perhaps because) the young woman is turned away from the reader, thus granting only a view of her posterior, the cartoon succeeds as a piece of erotic humor. The reader, who is presumably male, understands the joke because he ostensibly shares the fictional husband’s desire to see more of our feminine bather.

The Petty Girl led a double life in the pages of *Esquire*; as a character in the magazine’s cartoons and as a visual element in ads for Old Gold cigarettes. In the Old Gold ads, the Petty Girl was often in the company of a bizarre figure who appeared to be a hybrid of Harold Lloyd and the Michelin Man. Often the male figure would be presented as a nuisance that could be made less irritating by smoking an Old Gold cigarette. In the cartoons, the Petty Girl also began her existence in the company of a lecherous old man. By 1935, Petty jettisoned the old man in favor of cartoons (such as the March 1935 example discussed above), in which the Petty Girl appeared in the middle of a phone conversation. It was left then to *Esquire*’s editorial department to devise a gag for the illustration. By the end of 1935, all but the telephone was eliminated from Petty’s illustrations. Given *Esquire*’s tabloid size, the Petty Girl illustrations quickly became popular as pinups. To capitalize on this success, the Petty Girl made her debut as a double-gate fold illustration in the December 1939 issue. Almost as soon as she appeared in this larger-than-life format, she disappeared. From April 1940 to January 1941, Petty was engaged in a bitter

dispute with *Esquire* over fees and ownership of his illustrations. This dispute proved to be Petty's undoing. Though he would eventually sign a one-year contract with *Esquire*, the Petty Girl would be ousted by the more amply proportioned Varga Girl. It would not be until January 1952 that the Petty Girl would return to *Esquire*.

In one regard, what the Petty Girl illustrations, along with the E. Simms Campbell's "Sultan" cartoons and the various gold-digger cartoons, most obviously provided *Esquire* readers with was an opportunity to gaze at idealized "dream girls" in various stages of undress. More importantly, the cartoons functioned as the most public embodiment of the magazine's implicit discourse on desire, consumption, and visual pleasure. The lavish cartoons, the fashion spreads and the advertisements in the magazine all operated under the assumption that the pleasure of looking was central to the fantasy of transformative consumption. In other words, the gaze that was fixed on these images was not an objective, externalized gaze, but a highly subjective one that repeatedly invited the observer into the fantasy world before him. This, of course, is the logic that the practice of advertising was built upon; the equivocation of material goods with images of prestige and/or pleasure. Yet, for a magazine so thoroughly "masculine," to speak of the desiring gaze in regards to a suit of clothing or an automobile, was problematic at best. As late as April 1940, the New York Sun ran advertising in *Esquire* which reminded readers that "in the home life of just about every active, substantial New York man who's going places in a business and social way is the woman who does the bulk of his buying."¹⁶¹ Despite Gingrich's panegyrics to the pleasures of consumption, the male-producer/female-consumer

¹⁶¹ *New York Sun* advertisement, *Esquire*, April 1940, 6.

dichotomy remained well enshrined. By creating a space in which the gaze is constantly invited to participate in a fantasy world, be it carnal or material, *Esquire* ostensibly reconciled the explicit pleasure of looking at consumer goods with manliness. Within *Esquire*'s discourse of virile masculine pleasure, looking is no longer an emasculating act which marks the limitations of the observer but a proactive one which creates the world which awaits the ascendant young man. This however is not to say that the *Esquire* cartoon was exclusively interested in sex gags. *Esquire*'s cartoons at times shared the *New Yorker*'s wry sense of humor in which social mores were lampooned and belittled. Through its comics and illustrations, *Esquire* offered its readers more than a series of "dirty" drawings. Rather, the artwork was an audacious conflation of the modern tenets of consumption, urbanism, sophistication and sexuality.

Given this, Paul Webb's long running "Mountain Boys" series provides us with an intriguing space to think about the cultural politics of consumption and sophistication in post-Depression America. The "Mountain Boys" made their *Esquire* debut in November 1934 and appeared monthly thereafter until 1948. As Anthony Harkins notes in his exceptional *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon*, the hillbilly had numerous cultural meanings in the 1930s: backwards ignoramus, democratic populist, plain-spoken wise man, resilient survivor, violent savage and independent spirit.¹⁶² Webb's "Mountain Boys" drew heavily on the negative stereotypes of the hillbilly most often associated with H.L. Mencken's "The Sahara of the Bozart"; an infamous attack on the "poor white trash" of the rural

¹⁶² Anthony Harkins, *Hillbilly: A Cultural History of an American Icon* (New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

South. In comparison to the sophisticates found in other *Esquire* cartoons, the “Mountain Boys” were feeble-minded primitives. Webb’s gags often revolved around outhouses, technological ignorance, and a crudeness that was out of step with the modern world. The “Mountain Boys,” Harkins notes, “represent a complete inversion of the *Esquire* ideal and exist in a realm wholly removed from the magazine’s fantasy world.”¹⁶³ In matters of dress, manners and sexuality, the “Mountain Boys” played the Other to *Esquire*’s worldly sophisticates. “The Mountain Boys,” however, played another less evident role in *Esquire*’s advocacy of the “Art of Living.”

A key emphasis of the cultural nationalism of the Thirties was the rediscovery and valorization of American folklife as evidenced by Alan Lomax’s ethnographic field recordings project, Frances Goodrich’s widely read *Mountain Hometowns*, or the spate of folklife festivals that sprung up across the Appalachians in the mid-late thirties. In the cultural nationalism of the thirties, as supported by the New Deal, we find a fetishization of traditionalism and anti-consumerism. *The New Frontier*, a 1934 documentary produced by the USDA, touted the benefits of experimental communities where houses were built from available raw materials, handwork was valorized, meals were prepared and served communally and the freedom from consumption translated into an appreciation of life. Cultural nationalism presented a challenge to the “Art of Living” in two instances. First, it threw its weight behind the critics of modernism by championing the “simple gifts” of the traditional way of life. Secondly, it fed directly into the New Deal-era consumer activism of what Lizabeth

¹⁶³ *ibid.*, 107.

Cohen has called the “Citizen Consumer” that in turn weighed consumption down with the language of responsibility, rationality and utility.¹⁶⁴ The unspoken threat in all of this for *Esquire*, of course, was the female reformer. An important element of the modernist discourse was the gendered vilification of the reformer. Unlike the thoroughly modern girls who smoked and drank, kept up with fashion, and read Joyce and Fitzgerald, the reformer, and her alter ego the housewife, was an amalgam of fears of a repressive, sober moralism that sought to control hedonistic consumption. Though the “Mountain Boy” cartoons never directly comment upon this phenomenon, their dim-witted hi-jinks fed into *Esquire*’s demonstrable ambivalence regarding the New Deal and its threats to the ethos of “The Art of Living” and its neo-Jazz Age hedonism.

Admittedly, what the cartoons in *Esquire* provided readers with was a social acceptable opportunity to gaze at idealized “dream girls” in various stages of undress and to laugh at social mores. More importantly however, the cartoons functioned as the most public embodiment of the magazine’s implicit discourse on desire, consumption, and visual pleasure. As Kenon Breazeale correctly argues, the lavish cartoons, the fashion spreads and the advertisements in the magazine all operated under the assumption that the pleasure of looking was central to the fantasy of transformative consumption.¹⁶⁵ In other words, the gaze that was fixed on these images was not an objective, externalized gaze, but a highly subjective one, which repeatedly invited the observer into the fantasy world before him. This, of course, is

¹⁶⁴ Lizabeth Cohen, *A Consumer’s Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003).

¹⁶⁵ Breazeale, “In Spite of Women”

the logic that the practice of advertising was built upon; the equivocation of material goods with images of prestige and/or pleasure. Yet, for a magazine so thoroughly “masculine,” to speak of the desiring gaze in regards to a suit of clothing or an automobile, was problematic at best. Despite Gingrich’s panegyrics to the pleasures of consumption, the male-producer/female-consumer dichotomy remained well enshrined. By creating a space in which the gaze is constantly invited to participate in a fantasy world, be it carnal or material, *Esquire* ostensibly reconciled the explicit pleasure of looking at consumer goods with manliness. Within *Esquire*’s discourse of virile masculine pleasure, looking is no longer an emasculating act that marks the limitations of the observer but a proactive one that creates the world that awaits the ascendant young man.

1938 proved to be the highpoint for the “Art of Living.” The fading novelty of the magazine, declining subscription and ad sales and a bitter conflict between Gingrich and Publisher David Smart contributed to a downward slide that was only briefly offset by the Second World War. Moreover, by the end of the forties, the “Art of Living” seemed more like a relic of the thirties than a vital and virile ideology. As American men readjusted to the postwar economic boom, *Esquire* redefined the cultural meanings of masculinity, sophistication and consumption. By 1957 *Esquire* had jettisoned all but the most highbrow vestiges of its past. As a new cadre of editors, led by Harold Hayes and Clay Felker, emerged, *Esquire* set about to transform itself into one of the most important and respected magazines of the 1960s. It was, no doubt, a turn of events that would have amused Publisher Arnold Gingrich

who in a 1935 editorial brashly proclaimed, “The last thing we want is to be respected. We’ll take love or hate, but save the respect for the *Atlantic*.”¹⁶⁶

¹⁶⁶ “Social Notes and Miscellaneous,” *Esquire*, September 1935, 5. Though the editorial was written anonymously, it was most likely authored by Arnold Gingrich.

Chapter 3: “A New Genre of Men”: Sophistication, Consumption and the Uncommon Man.

Section I: Defining Uncommonness

In the years following World War II, the commercially successful genre of the suburban novel synthesized a number of key currents in postwar social theory and criticism in its portrayal of bucolic suburbs and ultramodern office buildings filled with disaffected and angst-ridden characters like Marjorie Morningstar and Tom Rath. In an October 1957 review essay, *Esquire* feature writer Enno Hobbing suggested that the corpus of this new breed of social problem novel failed as an effective critique of the postwar condition because it exposed its authors as irrelevant and disconnected intellectuals who forfeited their right to the mantle of cultural leadership.¹ In place of the listless Jeremiahs, Hobbing called for the emergence of “a new genre of men” who would “unite the senses and revive the passions” through their impassioned embrace of experience and a rediscovery of the authentic self.

Over the next four years (1957-1961), the logic of the “new genre of men” would be axiomatic in the pages of *Esquire*. Embodied in the form of the Uncommon Man, *Esquire*’s ideal reader of the period was defined as a worldly, well-dressed and well-informed sophisticate who craved the cutting-edge “serious” fiction, incisive essays, sagacious criticism and irreverent features that were part of the eclectic mix

¹ Enno Hobbing, “The Gray Flannel Novel,” *Esquire*, October 1957, 20.

Esquire offered its readers. Moreover, *Esquire*'s Uncommon Man was a consumer who paid attention to advertising, service features and fashion spreads.

The Uncommon Man, beyond whatever else we can say about him, was a marketing profile the editorial and advertising departments at *Esquire* created in order to provide readers and advertisers a coherent sense of whom the magazine was for. Nevertheless, such moves always assume a set of ideological dispositions that legitimize specific forms of social being. As such, the Uncommon Man was an attempt to appropriate the anxious rhetoric of the postwar mass culture debate and to rearticulate it in the form of a powerful discourse of self-actualization through sophisticated consumption. The emergence of the Uncommon Man paradigm at this particular historical juncture is salient in that it engages one of the key issues faced by intellectual of the postwar period, namely the apparent futility of the mass culture critique. Paul Gorman, for example, argues a common theme in the history of postwar cultural criticism when he suggests that critics and intellectuals like Dwight Macdonald, C. Wright Mills, and David Riesman were unable to move beyond critique and into action. Daniel Horowitz's brilliant discussion of the critics of postwar affluence likewise reminds us that a similar lack of programmatic solutions undercut the unrelenting analyses of John Kenneth Galbraith and Vance Packard.²

There are three preliminary theses on "uncommonness" that will frame my reading of *Esquire* in the period between 1956 and 1961. First, "uncommonness" was an attempt to solve the seemingly permanent problem of the self by cultivating a

² Paul Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture in 20th Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996). Daniel Horowitz, *The Anxieties of Affluence: Critiques of American Consumer Culture, 1939-1979* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2004).

stable and coherent individualism in an age where the apparent threat of conformity was pervasive. Though as Mark Jankovich has pointed out, conformity was more chimera than social fact, the threat of exposure as a conformist was a powerful, if paradoxical, incentive to consume. After all, was not this the lesson of the Moscow Kitchen Debate?³

Secondly, “uncommonness” emerged within the nascent discourse of segmented lifestyle marketing. At the heart of lifestyle marketing was a reorganization of social being through categories that were fluid, flexible and fragmented. Though categories of social analysis such as sex, race and class continued to structure the construction of market profiles, they nevertheless diminished in importance in relation to how people connected disparate activities (both within and outside of consumption) into a coherent narrative. Nevertheless, despite the apparent coherence of such lifestyle narratives, consumer identities are decidedly provisional and relative. The cultural work of a market identity such as the Uncommon Man was to impose a sense of order upon consumer behaviour, to produce a sense of meaning within consumption and to negate the profound sense of alienation postwar critics of affluence located within consumer culture.

Though postwar social critics wrote for both men and women and sought to address what they perceived as a universal condition, the question of an imperiled masculinity was never far from the surface. Social critics like David Riesman, Vance Packard, Dwight Macdonald and Paul Goodman gravitated towards a critique in

³ Mark Jankovich, “Othering Conformity in Post-War America: Intellectuals, the New Middle Classes and the Problem of Cultural Distinction,” in *Containing America: Cultural Production and Consumption in 50s America*, eds. Nathan Abrams and Julie Ingles (Birmingham: University of Birmingham Press, 2000), 12-28.

which alienation and disaffection became synonymous with impotence and castration. The solutions they sought spoke to a sense of emasculation and a fear of powerlessness. Though sometimes this fear would manifest itself in the form of an explicitly misogynistic screed (i.e. Wylie's *Generation of Vipers*), more often than not it was sublimated into more anonymous fears of the suburb, the organization, the mass and so on. Uncommonness, in this third sense, was a rhetoric of a heroic masculinity. If lifestyle granted the Uncommon Man as sense of coherence, heroic masculinity framed his politics. As defined by James Gilbert, heroic masculinity is informed by a yearning for a to return to an authentic masculine ideal in which individuality is reaffirmed by bridging the "yawning gulf between what American culture defined as ideal masculine behavior...and the mundane lives of men at home, within the family, at work."⁴ Nowhere was this clearer than in the vilification of the Organization Man and the cult of sophisticated toughness that had emerged around Kennedy's New Frontiersmen. In another sense, however, the politics of uncommonness were also an attempt rethink the very question of masculinity in the postwar world. To be sure, save for Norman Mailer's ranting or the occasional article on fishing, it is difficult to find an argument for a return to a prelapsarian masculinity in the pages of *Esquire*. Instead, the Uncommon Man looked to the heterogeneous world of urban consumer culture to locate a sense of self.

Section 2: "So Futile, So Destructive is this Solution!": Uncommonness and the Besieged Masculinity of the Organization Man.

⁴ James B. Gilbert, *Men in the Middle* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 31.

With the possible exception of David Riesman's *Lonely Crowd* or Vance Packard's jeremiad trilogy (*The Waste Makers*, *The Hidden Persuaders*, and *The Status Seekers*), no other work associated with the postwar critique of mass society was as widely read as William Whyte's *The Organization Man*.⁵ Whyte's beleaguered figure became a convenient and at times effective distillation of the growing discourse of discontent that emerged in the late 1950s. For historian Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., the commercial success of *The Organization Man* suggested that anxiousness over conformity was not restricted to the intellectual classes.⁶ The problem, as Schlesinger saw it was located in the alienation from an identity. The inability to answer "who am I?" had become *the* problem of the age.⁷ Indeed, it received frequent airings in the pages of *Esquire*. As the Uncommon Man paradigm took shape, *Esquire* moved to a position that tacitly advocated those parts of the mass culture critique that questioned the viability of the social ethic Whyte's *The Organization Man* proposed.

The Organization Man was widely praised by legions of reviewers for its portrait of the new American executive. Nate White, writing in the *Christian Science Monitor*, proclaimed *The Organization Man* an "angry, sophisticated, disturbed book" that "merits a careful and wide readership." Gordon Harrison's review for *The Nation* likewise found the book to be pessimistic, but nevertheless "brilliantly clear."

⁵ William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (1956; reprint with a new forward by Joseph Nocera, Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002). An excellent synopsis and discussion of *The Organization Man* can be found in Richard H. Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age: American Intellectuals in the 1940s and 1950s* 2nd ed. (Hanover NH: Wesleyan University Press/University Press of New England, 1989), 232-238.

⁶ "What Worries You Most About America?" *Esquire*, February 1959, 48.

⁷ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "The Crisis of American Masculinity," *Esquire*, November 1958, 63-65.

The Catholic social justice organ *Commonweal* praised the book for being “stimulating” and for raising “the right questions about the Organization.” Amongst social science and business practitioners, reviewers faulted Whyte for his inattention to quantitative data or his inability to contextualize the Organization Man within larger socio-economic currents. General Mills Chairman Harry A. Bullis, for one, suggested in *Management Review* that Whyte “fails to emphasize sufficiently that the economic motive is a powerful one and that ‘economic man’ cannot be divorced from ‘social man.’” Noting Whyte’s shortcomings as a social scientist, William H. Form nevertheless praised the author in the pages of the *Administrative Science Quarterly* for authoring “one of the most significant occupational studies to date.” The most appreciative review however came from former *Esquire* columnist Gilbert Seldes who surmised in the pages of the *Saturday Review* that “the book is a revelation--and it is about revolution.”⁸

Indeed the book did become a lightning rod for heated debate. Lambasting or lampooning Whyte, for example, became a *de rigueur* activity for the nation’s business press, with many complaining that they had never actually met an Organization Man or that the figure was a caricature.⁹ Others saw fit to extend Whyte’s study to those realms of American culture Whyte himself only hinted at in

⁸ Nate White, “To Keep Us From Being Standardized,” *Christian Science Monitor*, 06 December 1956, 11, Gordon Harrison, “Generation of Ciphers,” *The Nation*, 19 January 1957, 62-64, Review of *The Organization Man*, *Commonweal*, 22 February 1957, 542, Harry A. Bullis, Review of *The Organization Man*, *Management Review*, Vol. 46 (May 1957): 89-90, William H. Form, Review of *The Organization Man*, *Administrative Science Quarterly*, Vol. 2, Num. 1 (June 1957): 124-126, Gilbert Seldes, “The Organizational World of William H. Whyte, Jr.,” *Saturday Review*, 26 January 1957, 30.

⁹ The more serious examples of this critique include Lyman W. Porter, “Where is the Organization Man?” *Harvard Business Review*, Vol. 41 (November 1963): 53-61 and Robert C. Leonard and Reta D. Artz, “Structural Sources of Organization Man Ideology,” *Human Organization*, Vol. 28, Number 2 (Summer 1969): 110-118.

the opening sections of *The Organization Man* but did not elaborate. For these critics, the problem of the Organization was not limited to business but was much more widespread. William Kirkland's essay on modern pastoral education for *The Christian Century*, for example, clearly suggests the powerful reach of the "Social Ethic" into the work of the clergy. Against the specter of "group-think," Kirkland called for seminaries to produce ministers who were prepared to confront the modern world. "Drastic cultural change is coming at us so thick and fast nowadays," writes Kirkland, "that only the liberated mind, the perceptive thinker, the scholar-minister can hope...to be a discerning pastor to the anxious and confused multitudes that fill the churches."¹⁰ In short, Whyte gave birth to a neologism that synthesized a decade's worth of anxiety into a concise and damning phrase. For many Americans, the Organization Man was the epitome of all that was wrong with American business and by extension, American society.¹¹

¹⁰ William H. Kirkland, "The Organization Man and the Ministry," *The Christian Century*, 23 April 1958, 492-494.

¹¹ Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker have noted that the generation of post-Sixties entrepreneurs who built successful businesses on the principles of decentralized management are credited with the demise of the Organization Man. Reared on post-Freudian psychology, cybernetics, and computer information systems, Leinberger and Tucker suggest that the generation of post-sixties business leaders thrived in non-conventional business environments that redefined the very notion of the Organization. This argument is supported by Mary Britton King, whose survey of the management literature from the late seventies through the mid-nineties found that post-sixties management has been increasingly dependent on organizational models drawn from Eastern philosophy, post-Newtonian physics and the "direct democracy" politics of the New Left. Thus there exists a clear lineage from Fritjof Capra's *The Tao of Physics* and James Gleick's *Chaos: Making a New Science* to Tom Peters' *Liberation Management* and Peter Senge's *The Fifth Discipline*. Similarly, Eric Guthey locates within the high-tech sector a strong predilection for an antimanagerialism that is grounded in neo-Romanticist notions of individualism and personhood derived from such sources as the sixties counterculture, free market libertarianism and the human potential movement. Paul Leinberger and Bruce Tucker, *The New Individualists: The Generation After The Organization Man* (New York: Harper Collins Publishers, 1991), Mary Britton King, "Make Love, Not Work: New Management Theory and the Social Self," *Radical History Review*, 76 (2000): 15-24. Eric Guthey, "New Economy Romanticism, Narratives of Corporate Personhood and the Antimanagerial Impulse" in *Constructing Corporate America: History, Politics, Culture*, Kenneth Lipartito and David Sicilia, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 321-342,

What was at issue for Whyte was the maintenance of the “Social Ethic” through which organizations socializes their managerial workforce. Repeatedly Whyte reiterated his assertion that his study was not an examination of mindless conformity or that his subjects were the “cheerful robots” who figured so prominently in Mills’ *White Collar*. The “Social Ethic” in question instead creates an environment that engenders a particular type of personality; namely one which exhibits a predilection for “belongingness” and “togetherness.” The Organization Man, Whyte tells us, longs to be part of the group. In this sense, he willingly sublimates his own desires and needs to that of the group. The power of the group then is not that it forces the individual to conform but that the individual sees group-determined subjectivity as natural, beyond reproach and preferable to an individualism which threatens alienate one from the group. Whyte further points out that it is the “beneficence” of the Organization that fortifies its power.¹² Within these strictures, individual growth is stunted. In large part, Whyte’s difficulty in offering an alternative to the Organization Man stemmed from his reluctance to denounce the

Though much of contemporary management theory uses concepts that are antithetical to the “social ethic” described by Whyte, there is nevertheless good reason to assert that the Organization Man is still with us. A key feature of the hi-tech corporations which defined late nineties business culture has been their investment in unconventional work environments and organizational culture. Ostensibly, the argument goes, basketball courts, generous family leave policies and direct e-mail access to the CEO produce an environment where “knowledge workers” are expected to perform to the fullest extent of their creative abilities. Often held up as the apex of the post-sixties managerial revolution, it is prudent to note that corporations relied on these methods in order to engender the *gravitas* which produced the same sort of group fidelity Whyte once critiqued. See Joseph E. Stiglitz, *The Roaring Nineties: A New History of the World’s Most Prosperous Decade* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003), James Surowiecki, *The Wisdom of Crowds: Why the Many Are Smarter Than the Few and How Collective Wisdom Shapes Business, Economies, Societies and Nations* (New York: Doubleday, 2004), and Matthew Symonds, *Softwar: An Intimate Portrait of Larry Ellison and Oracle* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2003) for recent examples of business writing that positively engages a revitalized version of the Whytian social ethic.

¹² Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 12. The key discussions of Whyte’s thesis can be found in Chapters 1, 4 and 5.

Organization *tout ensemble*. Whyte never went so far as to suggest that large organizations were illegitimate social institutions.

Apart from some specific suggestions regarding the way social scientists study group dynamics, Whyte can only leave readers with vague exhortations to “fight The Organization.”¹³ However, Whyte repudiates nonconformity, disengagement and a return of the nineteenth century industrial autocrat as alternatives to the present situation. Instead, the individual is encouraged to be conscious of the social dynamic in play and thus “turn away from the collective that so haunts our thoughts.”¹⁴ No one was more forceful in critiquing Whyte’s inability to formulate a solution to the problem of the “Social Ethic” than C. Wright Mills. Writing in the *New York Times Book Review*, Mills praised Whyte’s ability to describe the world of the *Organization Man* as “among the best available.” For Mills it was this attention to detail which ultimately diverted Whyte from recognizing the larger socio-economic forces at play. By not taking account of the “economic basis and the political meaning of the white-collar ideologies he so intelligently describes,” Whyte is revealed as a “earnest, optimistic Boy Scout” whose critique is based on a vague belief in the power of individual will to single-handedly engender change.¹⁵

Mills may have faulted Whyte for championing an “illusion...of personal will,” but it is on this very basis that *Esquire* sought to save masculinity from conformity. Despite the regular appearance of articles by seasoned business

¹³ *ibid.*, 404.

¹⁴ *ibid.*

¹⁵ C. Wright Mills, “Crawling to the Top,” Review of *The Organization Man* by William H. Whyte, *New York Times Book Review*, 09 December 1956, 6, 26.

journalists who largely accepted the “common sense” of the Whytian social ethic, from 1958 onwards *Esquire* drew increasingly closer to an oppositional-critical position spurred on by the ascendancy of new editors who were avid readers of the little magazines and reviews, the economic viability of a market in high culture and the elevation of affluence to the category of social problem.¹⁶ Though *Esquire* never directly attacked the Organization Man model, it and similar models were at the heart of the magazine’s critical outlook. This is especially true of the advocacy of “well-roundedness” that provided the foundation for the cultivation of the Uncommon Man. Perceptive readers will remember that “well-roundedness” was also an essential feature of the Organization Man’s personality profile. For Whyte, “well-roundedness” served not only to promote the viability of the group but also to protect against the genius or prodigy who could ostensibly outshine or disrupt the group. If so, on what grounds did *Esquire* offer the “well-rounded” Uncommon Man as an alternative to the group-identification of the Organization Man?

There are a number of issues at play here. On the one hand, “well-roundedness” in theory addresses the dual bogeymen of overwork and single-mindedness. On this point, the Organization Man and the Uncommon Man agreed. Whyte’s young managers for example regarded the top executive whose life was consumed by company affairs to be a dying breed. As they reported to Whyte, leisure, family and so on were the reward for a job well done. Few, it seems, saw the value of enjoying business for its own sake. Similarly, *Esquire*’s Uncommon Man

¹⁶ See for example, John Keats, “The Education of the Power Elite,” *Esquire*, April 1959, 84-86, Robert Weaver, “The Bright Young Men in Business,” *Esquire*, September 1958, 41-42, and Edward McCreary, “The New Industrial Elite,” *Esquire*, April 1960, 108-111.

recognized leisure as the space in which “liberated” men could reassert their sense of self and reclaim their masculinity. Beyond this aversion to overwork and single-mindedness, “well-roundedness” represented two very different approaches to work, leisure and the self.

For Whyte, “well-roundedness” was an essential feature of the professional profile of the young manager.¹⁷ Corporate training programs, Whyte suggested, sought to produce managers with broad capabilities and interests. This in turn would allow managers to be moved as the organization as it saw fit to do. This broadness also sought to discourage and ferret out men with a passion for a particular type of work. By discouraging task attachment within the team, “well-roundedness” sought to protect against the territorial battles that could very well impede the harmony of the group. Thus “well-roundedness” became synonymous with “well-adjusted”; a necessary character trait in the organization's regime of the “practical team player fellow.” In Whyte's usage, “well-roundedness” was the result of a lifetime of training in corporate blandness.

At *Esquire*, “well-roundedness” came to mean something else. First, “well-roundedness” acknowledged the endless variety of leisure choices available to the man of means. A central component of the magazine's marketing was its catholicity of interests. Where magazine's such as *Holiday*, *Sports Illustrated*, *Field and Stream*, and so on, addressed specific interests, *Esquire* sought to collect the best writing in all fields of leisure and culture. As Publisher Arnold Gingrich pointed out

sports are an integral part off any intelligent man's leisure pursuits.
So, for that matter, is travel. But no more and no less than books,

¹⁷ Whyte, *The Organization Man*, 129-137.

theater, music, food, drink, humor etc. . . . all the elements that make up today's total leisure.¹⁸

There are several points to examine here. Most striking is the emphasis on balance; the “no more and no less” that commands the regime of “total leisure.” A skeptic may suggest that this emphasis on balance was but another version of the “well-adjusted” personality who forewent passionate immersion in a topic in favor of a measured and well-considered sampling. To a degree, this is a valid critique.

Esquire, as Gingrich's pitch suggests, was too interested in “total leisure” to really give its editorial content over to a single topic; the July special topic issue being the sole exception. This however should not suggest that the Uncommon Man shied away from the sort of passionate immersion the Organization Man was conditioned to avoid. An earnest urgency marked *Esquire*'s investment in the Uncommon Man. If men were to save themselves, they could do no worse than to look to culture.

This was a point emphasized by Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. in his important “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” which appeared in the November 1958 issue of *Esquire*. Schlesinger had spent the better part of the mid-fifties advancing a model of liberalism that attempted to acknowledge the needs of a dramatically changed world in which affluence had replaced deprivation as the most pressing social problem. In defining this new “qualitative liberalism”, Schlesinger claimed that the New Deal won the battle for “a job, a square meal, a suit of clothes, and a roof.”¹⁹ “The issues

¹⁸ Arnold Gingrich to *Esquire* Subscribers, “A Report from the Publisher of *Esquire*,” 11 April 1962, Box 11, Arnold Gingrich Papers, Benteley Historical Library, University of Michigan (hereafter cited as Gingrich MSS), 1.

¹⁹ Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr., “The Challenge of Abundance,” *The Reporter*, 03 May 1956, 8-11., 9. This is not to say that Schlesinger ignored the poverty that continued to plague many Americans. He freely admitted that pockets of poverty continued to exist; a situation he found inexcusable. Nevertheless, Schlesinger continued to claim that “the central problems of our time are no longer

of 1956,” Schlesinger suggested in a *Reporter* essay, “are those which make the difference between defeat and opportunity, between frustration and fulfillment, in the everyday lives of average persons.”²⁰ Notably, Schlesinger included “the bettering of our mass media and the elevation of our popular culture” in his laundry list of issues “qualitative liberalism” would champion.²¹ For Schlesinger, “the quality of civilization to which our nation aspires in an age of ever-increasing abundance and leisure.” would define the success of postwar liberalism.²²

Schlesinger’s November 1958 essay was an attempt to address masculinity from the point of view of qualitative liberalism. For Schlesinger, the ability to answer “who am I?” hinged on the cultivation of a distinctly virile masculine identity, the “lineaments of personality” as the historian referred to them. “The key to the recovery of masculinity” writes Schlesinger, “does not lie in any wistful hope of humiliating the aggressive female and restoring the old masculinist order.” Instead, it is incumbent upon the American male to develop his personality through three “techniques of liberation”: satire, art, and politics.²³

In Schlesinger’s scheme, satire would dissolve “the pomposity of society,” while art restores “the inwardness, and thereby identity, of man.” Politics on the

problems of want and privation.” This contention would prove the basis for an important (and heated) exchange with Leon Keyserling. See Leon Keyserling, “Eggheads and Politics,” *New Republic*, 27 October 1958 and “Galbraith and Schlesinger Reply to Leon Keyserling,” *New Republic*, 17 November 1958.

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

²² *ibid.*

²³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” *Esquire*, November 1958, 63-65.

other hand are liberating only when they become truly democratic. In language that points to the rise of John F. Kennedy, Schlesinger writes

Our national politics have become boring in recent years because our leaders have offered neither candid and clear-cut formulations of the problems nor the facts necessary for intelligent choice. A virile political life will be definite and hard-hitting, respecting debate and dissent, seeking clarity and decision.²⁴

The necessity of these “techniques of liberation” is nothing short of messianic. “If we want to have men again,” Schlesinger concludes, “... we must first have a society which encourages each of its members to have a distinct identity.”²⁵

When read within *Esquire*’s project of recasting its editorial identity, Schlesinger’s “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” along with Hobbing’s exhortative conclusion to “The Gray Flannel Novel”, served as a compelling template for the “new” *Esquire* and its project of remasculinizing sophistication. Indeed, when Schlesinger locates masculine malaise in the dissatisfaction of “spending.... existence, not as an individual, but as a member of a group,” he is, in essence, describing the Uncommon Man. Unlike the “intellectuals” who drew Hobbing’s ire, the “New Sophisticates” who read *Esquire* would develop their “lineaments of personality” by actively engaging in the world around them.

In many ways, Schlesinger’s tonic for masculine malaise reflected in David Riesman’s discussion of autonomy in the final chapters of *The Lonely Crowd*. Unlike the adjusted (conformist, inner-directed) or the anomic (nonconformist, outer-directed), the autonomous, Riesman suggests, will be “capable of conforming to the

²⁴ *ibid.*

²⁵ *ibid.*

behavioral norms of their society.... but are free to choose whether to conform or not.”²⁶ For Riesman, autonomy can progress only when a coherent sense of self develops. This requires a self-consciousness in which the autonomous can “recognize and respect” their own “feelings...potentialities...limitations.”²⁷ Riesman’s collaborator Reuel Denney echoes these findings in his essay “Individuality and the New Leisure,” published in *Esquire* one month before Schlesinger’s piece. By calling for “the rediscovery of the traditional leisure activities such as reading, listening to music, and conversation,” Denney, like Schlesinger, sees an escape from the thrall of conformity in the arts and in leisure, in activities that lead to “the individual’s intensification of the enjoyment of living,” that men can find themselves again.²⁸

Esquire editors were receptive to the notion that abundance was somehow unfulfilling. Recontextualized within *Esquire*’s discourse of the Uncommon Man, social critique such as Mills’ “The Intellectuals Last Chance” (October 1959) and Paul Goodman’s “The Mass Leisure Class” (July 1959) suggested complementariness between *Esquire*’s libratory discourse of self-actualization and the critique of mass culture.²⁹ Mills’ piece appears to be a summary of *The Power Elite*; particularly in its argument that the “overdeveloped society” (re. the affluent/abundant society) is the product of a power structure “dominated by a few hundred corporations,

²⁶ David Riesman, et. al., *The Lonely Crowd*, 242.

²⁷ *ibid.*, 259.

²⁸ Reuel Denney, “Individuality and the New Leisure,” *Esquire*, October 1958, 91.

²⁹ C. Wright Mills, “The Intellectuals Last Chance,” *Esquire*, October 1959, 101-102. Paul Goodman, “The Mass Leisure Class,” *Esquire*, July 1959, 70-72.

economically and politically interrelated, which together hold the keys to economic decision.”³⁰ Awash in a sea of consumer goods and gripped by status panic, the overdeveloped society has in turn produced an apathetic populace in which the ideal of the Renaissance Man (where the answer to the “cultural problems of freedom and individuality are embodied”) is supplanted by a mass society of “cheerful robots.” At face value, and divorced from the context of *Esquire*, Mills’ essay is clearly positioned as a call to arms to the intellectuals who had through either complacency or resignation disengaged from the political struggles of the day. In a series of rhetorical questions, Mills attempts to goad the Intellectual out of his complacency and to remind him of his continued relevance

is it not clear that no answers will be found unless these problems are confronted? Is it not obvious that the ones to confront them, above all others, are the intellectuals, the scholars, the ministers, the scientists of the rich societies?³¹

If Mills had posed this question in the pages of any one of the little magazines or magazines of opinion that made up the world of the postwar intellectual, the answer would be self-evident. Yet, in the pages of *Esquire*, the obviousness of the response is less certain.

The vacuum produced by the disengagement of the intellectual required new leadership to step in and take over. In the absence of the intellectuals, the emergent breed of new sophisticates who embrace the world provided leadership. Ultimately, the negation of Mills’ structural critique in favor of his call for a defense against the deterioration of the human mind “in quality and cultural level” is in line with

³⁰ Mills, “The Intellectuals Last Chance,” 102.

³¹ *ibid.*, 102.

Esquire's project of cultivating, in the words of Pierre Bourdieu, a "new petite bourgeoisie" that would function as the "new intellectuals" of the postwar world.³²

A similar dynamic occurs in Goodman's "The Mass Leisure Class." Billed by *Esquire* as "a hardheaded, negative look at leisure and the American Dream," Goodman's essay rejects reigning sociological conceptions of leisure as "a planned, purposive activity" which saves "the millions of people...from fooling around or being drowned in canned entertainment and spectatoritis."³³ Following this model, the divide between leisure and work is erased as leisure becomes either as demanding as work or simply an extension of work. Goodman, for example, observes that the leisure activities of the executive set often result in an "ulcer-producing fear" of a failure to project the necessary "having-a-grand-time-glad-you-are-here" attitude. Beyond relaxation, what modern leisure lacks, Goodman suggests, is any allowance for the expression of individuality and personal fulfillment. The social pressures surrounding leisure and "having a good time" are such that any deviation from the model will only incur negative social judgments.

The contradiction is obvious. Goodman delivered his "negative" indictment of leisure in the pages of a magazine explicitly engaged in the project of promoting leisure. Yet, as with Mills, the indictment does not disrupt *Esquire*'s editorial mission but instead contributes to the ideology of the Uncommon Man through the tacit

³² Pierre Bourdieu, *Distinction: A Social Critique of the Judgment of Taste*, translated by Richard Nice (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1984). Bourdieu includes individuals engaged in social and medical services, cultural intermediaries, art craftsmen, small art dealers, secretaries and junior commercial executives in his category of the new petite bourgeoisie. See in particular pp. 354-371 for Bourdieu's discussion. His reference to the new petite bourgeoisie as "the new intellectuals" is on p. 370. See also, Burt Glinn, "New York's Spreading Upper Bohemia," *Esquire*, July 1957, 47-52.

³³ Goodman, "The Mass Leisure Class," 70.

understanding that it is in leisure and consumption that men who are unwilling or unable to follow the example of the Beats can find succor from the impositions of the Organization. To be sure, Goodman's critique differs little from Gingrich's celebration of the "New Leisure" in the early thirties since both seem to yearn for leisure that is profoundly redemptive and restorative. Thus, when Gingrich spoke to his advertising salesmen in 1958, he explicitly reminded them that *Esquire's* commitment to leisure rested in its improvement and not simply in its enjoyment.³⁴ More importantly however, the reclamation and reinvention of leisure becomes necessary as a corrective to the scourge of the other-directed Organization Man.

Section 3: "An Intellectual Kick": The Uncommon Man and the New Sophistication

One of the key innovations *Esquire's* editors introduced was the July special issue. Unlike the issues released near the Christmas holiday, summer issues are notoriously hard sells for advertising revenue driven publications. The guiding principle of the special issue concept was to take a month most advertising salesmen essentially wrote off and to produce an issue that would excite advertisers through a creative exploitation of a central unifying theme. In doing so, the July special issue format became *Esquire's* clearest exposition of the breadth and urbanity the magazine had cultivated under the editorial direction of Harold Hayes and Clay Felker. Of the July issues produced between 1960 and 1964, no one issue was more illustrative of what was going on at *Esquire* than the July 1961 issue on the "New Sophistication." While the term circled in and out of the magazine, it was not until appearance of the

³⁴ Arnold Gingrich, "Media Director's Luncheon Remarks," Inter-office Memo, 21 January 1958, Box 11, Arnold Gingrich Papers, Bentley Historical Library, University of Michigan. Hereafter cited as Gingrich MSS.

July special issue that the magazine attempted to define this doctrine with any precision. Here figures as diverse as Dan Wakefield, Gay Talese, Alfred Hitchcock, Richard Rovere, Helen Lawrenson, James Baldwin, and Dean Acheson among others attempt to define the “New Sophistication” as it applied to the arts, politics, and society. Unlike the “old” sophistication, the “New Sophistication” was less interested in cultivating an appreciation and knowledge of consumer goods and social manners than, as commentator Stephen White put it, an awareness of the world that “commands the...virtues of breadth, judgment, and self-assurance.”³⁵ Likewise, Arnold Gingrich noted that an insatiable quest for knowledge and experience that is not limited to one sphere or dimension of life defined the “New Sophistication.” To further delineate the old from the new, Gingrich pointed to a July 1936 issue of *Esquire*. Despite its reputation for sophistication, the issue demonstrates very little awareness of a world outside of immediate pleasure. This is stunning considering that this issue was coterminous with the rise of fascism in Europe, a slow rise out of the depths of economic depression at home, and a growing hostility between Japan and China. However, as Gingrich tells us, “reading that issue, you’d think the most important thing to happen that month was that you could now get beer in cans.”³⁶

While many of the contributors to that special issue attempted to define the “New Sophistication” in similar intellectual terms, Marya Mannes’ “A Lady’s Version of the Sophisticated Man,” is interesting in that she defines sophistication by

³⁵Stephen White, “Defining the Term,” *Esquire*, July 1961, 43.

³⁶ Arnold Gingrich *Esquire* July 1961 This is not to say that the *Esquire* of the thirties had no interest in politics. Articles and opinion pieces on the growing threat of Euro-fascism were regular features in the magazine. See for example Johannes Steel’s “Horizon for Hitler,” *Esquire*, September 1935, 31.

the very terms Gingrich seemingly wishes to de-emphasize. Where Gingrich drew sophistication away from the realm of the material, Mannes unapologetically locates it in home décor, fashion, reading material and so on. A telling paragraph illustrates this tactic with great efficiency

The sophisticated man has many passions and I salute them in the two foot pile of magazines on his desk which can range from *The Listener* to *The Bulletin of Atomic Scientists*, or in the unframed prints, abstract or classical, stacked on available ledges against the wall, awaiting hanging. I am also comforted by the presence in his kitchenette of hunks of cheese, some fruit, and a round loaf of bread, if nothing else. I suspect that his medicine cabinet may be rather full, for the price of sophistication is an awareness so constantly acute that it must be blunted from time to time. I would rather see a collection of pills than a rowing device.³⁷

Mannes' piece is intriguing in the sense that she reminds *Esquire* readers that intellectual sophistication has a material expression. Regardless of how sophisticated a reader may be intellectually, if his sophistication is not reflected in the way in his lifestyle, then how can he be truly sophisticated? Unlike the Intellectual, *Esquire's* Uncommon Man, if we read between the lines, understood this. In reading *Esquire*, we find a pervasive faith in consumption as an integral part of the project of sophistication. The remedy for homogenization was to not only become a well-read in fiction, philosophy and the arts or to be well-versed in the subtleties of foreign affairs, but to also become a better-informed and more discriminating consumer. This was as true of fall fashions and liquor as it was of books, recorded music, and film. As Arnold Gingrich explained to his advertising salesmen, the "New Sophistication" issue would prove that *Esquire* readers possessed "a combination of curiosity and

³⁷ Marya Mannes, "A Lady's Version of the Sophisticated Man," *Esquire*, July 1961, 60.

superiority.”³⁸ In short, the Uncommon Man could justify himself as an individual on the grounds that he was more knowledgeable, better dressed, and more refined than the average man.

The Uncommon Man that *Esquire* championed emerged from a context in which the sophisticated consumer became not only evident but also attractive to producers. As Arnold Gingrich argued in a series of speeches given to advertising professionals and businessmen, a larger shift in the cultural consciousness necessitated *Esquire*'s shift to uncommonness. The emergence of a market for high culture in the late fifties signaled for Gingrich that the nation was in the throes of a “culture boom;” an “intellectual kick” as he described it.³⁹ Aided in no small part by the introduction of the 33 1/3 rpm record, the stereo hi-fi system, and the mass-produced paperback, as well as the constant improvements in television technology, “cultured” leisure became easier to enjoy.⁴⁰ Furthermore, the ascendancy of the New Frontiersman gave culture a cache that seemingly combated the anti-intellectualism that Richard Hofstadter had written so famously against.⁴¹ As Gingrich suggested, this “onward and upward rush to total culture,” was as unprecedented as it was

³⁸ Arnold Gingrich, *Esquire* Sales Meeting, 14 April 1961, Box 11, Gingrich MSS

³⁹ Gingrich, “Magazines and the Culture Boom,” Presentation given to the Publication Production Managers luncheon, New York City, 13 March 1962. Box 8, Gingrich MSS, 2.

⁴⁰ Alvin Toffler, *The Culture Consumers: A Study of Art and Affluence in America* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1964) is an enthusiastic contemporary account of the Culture Boom. See also Michael Kammen, *American Culture, American Tastes: Social Change in the 20th Century* (New York: Basic Books, 1999).

⁴¹ Richard Hoffstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life* (New York: Vintage, 1963). Hoffstadter himself was sufficiently impressed with Kennedy, whom he described as having “brought back to presidential politics the combination of intellect and character . . . a combination in which a respect for intellectual and cultural distinction and a passion for intelligence and expertise in public service are united with the aggressive and practical virtues (227).

unavoidable. Citing the “speed of our transportation and the speed of our communications,” Gingrich claimed we lived in a world of “instant culture” where ignorance had become inexcusable.⁴²

Yet, on what grounds did Gingrich justify such claims? In his speeches Gingrich pointed to such factors as the growth in the number of retail outlets for quality paperbacks, the rise in museum attendance, the strength of the box office for theater, opera and classical music, and the popularity of amateur musicianship as key indicators that a “maturing of American taste” was afoot. Yet these figures, in and of themselves, are not as impressive for Gingrich as the fact that they came at the expense of other more traditional leisure activities, such as bowling, golf, and fishing. Thus, Gingrich was at great pains to mention that “there are more people who go to art museums than there are who go fishing” or that “there are more amateur musicians than there are amateur golfers.” Endowed with a prosperous economy, Gingrich argued that sophistication was available to every American.⁴³

Where *Esquire* celebrated this democratization of culture as the tonic for masculine malaise, others took a more jaundiced view. Of the many invectives against middlebrow and status seeking produced in the postwar era, Dwight Macdonald’s “Masscult and Midcult” remains one of the clearest rejections of democratized high culture. Though “Masscult and Midcult” is conventionally understood as the apex of Macdonald’s pessimism, the piece contains a number of statements which may suggest an alternate, and perhaps, unorthodox reading of the

⁴² Gingrich, “The Maturing of American Taste,” Presentation given to the Adcrafters Club of Detroit, 27 October 1961. Box 8, Gingrich MSS, 2.

⁴³ *ibid.*, 3-8.

seminal piece. The issue at hand for Macdonald was the survival of High Culture in the face of the perceived attack from mass culture (masscult) and middlebrow culture (midcult). In short, Macdonald took great pains to ask how High Culture is to survive without accommodating the mass and the middlebrow cultures. While he flirted with the elitist solutions developed by Eliot and Ortega y Gasset among others, Macdonald ultimately stumbled upon a fact of modern consumer culture; the mass market was changing. As he noted “the mass audience is divisible, we have discovered.” Thus that a “more specialized audience” can exist and be “commercially profitable” is demonstrated for Macdonald by many of the same things Gingrich pointed to in his discussion of the culture boom: “sales of quality paperbacks and recordings and the growth of art cinema houses, Off-Broadway theaters, concert orchestras and art museums and galleries.” Ultimately, the importance of the culture boom lies not in its intellectual consequences, but in its importance to commerce; for this is the space in which we see the emergence of not only an audience but also a market for culture. Though Macdonald was not entirely pleased with this solution, he nevertheless recognized that the cultural levels were not so much blending as they were fracturing into diverse and differentiated market segments.⁴⁴

By the early 1950s, special interest titles had effectively challenged the general interest magazines’ dominance of the periodicals market, the most notable being *Holiday* and *Sports Illustrated*. As David Abrahamson has illustrated in his study of the postwar magazine market, titles like *Life*, *Look* and the *Saturday Evening Post* demonstrated a gross misunderstanding of the changing nature of American

⁴⁴ Dwight Macdonald, “Masscult and Midcult,” 58-62, 69-74.

culture.⁴⁵ Where the general interest magazine paid allegiance to the undifferentiated mass audience, the new breed of specialized magazines offered advertisers active and quantitatively discreet audiences of consumers who were readily interested in discovering new products and services. First suggested in 1956 by Wendell Smith in the *Journal of Marketing*, market segmentation, the practice of marketing goods to discrete, well-defined groups of consumers, revolutionized the advertising and marketing practice.⁴⁶ The advertising and marketing community did not fully embrace market segmentation until the early seventies with the development of psychographic research methodology. Periodicals however were amongst the earliest responders to the important changes in market research. Under the aegis of the developing science of market segmentation, researchers began to acknowledge the existence of these multiple markets and the necessity to reach those markets in an appropriate idiom.⁴⁷

Market segmentation achieved hegemony in part because it responded to the profound structural changes fomented by post-industrial capitalism. It also responded to a growing public sentiment that saw advertising and marketing as a shell game in which the most irrelevant changes in a product's make up were overblown to compensate for the general lack of innovation. As Thomas Frank succinctly

⁴⁵ David Abrahamson, *Magazine-Made America: The Cultural Transformation of the Postwar Periodical* (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1996).

⁴⁶ Wendell R. Smith, "Product Differentiation and Market Segmentation as Alternative Marketing Strategies," *Journal of Marketing*, Volume 21 (July 1956): 7.

⁴⁷ An exhaustive history of the rise of market segmentation as marketing theory and practice is yet to be written. However, Lizabeth Cohen's *A Consumers' Republic: The Politics of Mass Consumption in Postwar America* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2003) provides an excellent introductory account. See also Joseph Turrow, *Breaking Up America: Advertisers and the New Media World* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997).

concludes, agencies scrambled to find ways to convince consumers that “the solution to the problems of consumer society was--more consuming.”⁴⁸ One solution, as practiced by figures like Bill Bernbach, was to produce self-reflective advertising that, in the words of Frank, “took this skepticism into account and made it part of their ads discursive apparatus.”⁴⁹ For those professionals who were less willing to let go of market research, advances in computer technology and the growing alliance between market research and the social and behavioral sciences would give birth to the concept of lifestyle.

Lifestyle was central to the logic of the new breed of special interest magazines as well as to general interest magazines like *Esquire* and *Vogue* that targeted specific audiences. Mike Featherstone argues that lifestyle is not merely another term for Veblenesque conspicuous consumption but rather, the active construction of an identity through the choices made by consumers. As he continues, through lifestyle, consumers “display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions.” In short, individuality becomes an aesthetic project.⁵⁰ To be sure, the individual, in this sense is not someone who exists outside of the market. Rather, following Dick Hebdige, the individual under “lifestyle” is a bricoleur. The job of cultural intermediaries like *Esquire* was then to provide individuals with coherent frameworks around which they could construct their individuality.

⁴⁸ Thomas Frank, *The Conquest of Cool: Business Culture, Counterculture and the Rise of Hip Consumerism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), 55.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 63.

⁵⁰ Mike Featherstone, *Consumer Culture and Postmodernism* (London and Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE Publishing, 1991), 83-86.

This was particularly apparent in the features, fiction, and criticism which appeared in *Esquire*. An advertisement for the magazine that ran in *Time* declared that *Esquire* emphasized the uniqueness of the *Esquire* reader. To wit, “Like Russian caviar, Dutch gin, and Swedish movies, *Esquire* isn’t for everybody. To be precise, it is edited for only one man in 59.4.”⁵¹ What would that man see in *Esquire*? In just an eight year period (1957-1965), *Esquire* published essays by John K. Galbraith, Gore Vidal, C. Wright Mills, Harvey Swados, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., and Paul Goodman, criticism by Nat Hentoff, Martin Amis, Dorothy Parker, Diana Trilling, Martin Mayer and Dwight Macdonald, reportage by Tom Wolfe, Norman Mailer, Terry Southern and Gay Talese and fiction by James Baldwin, John Barth, Tennessee Williams, Thomas Pynchon, Alain Robbe-Grillet, Saul Bellow, John Cheever, and Ralph Ellison among others.

The heady but accessible editorial mix found in *Esquire* impressed readers to the point that a 1963 marketing survey found that nearly half of all *Esquire* readers questioned described the magazine as “cultural, intelligent, literate, sophisticated,” while another 29% referred to it as “entertaining.” When asked which words described the *Esquire* reader, 33% of those polled answered, “sophisticated, urbane, up-to-date,” while another 23% suggested “intellectuals, eggheads, well-educated.” The survey also revealed that the majority of *Esquire* readers were men (90%), professionals or executives (80%) and in their late thirties and early forties.⁵²

⁵¹ *Esquire* advertisement, *Time*, August 17, 1962, M1.

⁵² “The New *Esquire* Subscriber,” 1961, Box 11, Gingrich MSS, 12

Any way you choose to look at it, this was an attractive audience for advertisers. Unlike the readers of *Esquire* circa 1945-1952, these readers did not need to be shamed into making a purchase. Rather the advertising provided them with lifestyle images they could identify with (or at least imagine); confident travelers who broke away from the crowd, aficionados of quality (as opposed to mere luxury), literate sophisticates who could handle an Italian roadster and a beautiful woman with equal measures of skill and grace. As Arnold Gingrich expressed in his speeches on “Today’s Customer,”

The whole point of this quality revolution is that it proves that people today are no longer naïve enough to be taken in by the superficialities of Gee-wiz styling, and they are also developing an immunity to Gee whiz selling. They are aware enough and knowledgeable enough to appreciate and to look for, those “individual differences of a quality nature.”⁵³

As Gingrich would conclude, this new brand of consumer was “too ‘civilized and sophisticated’” to fall for “the old mass-production psychology that assumed that they were suckers for conformity.”⁵⁴

Section 4: The Mass Circulation Little Magazine: *Esquire*’s Literary Culture

In the late fifties and early sixties, no single department at *Esquire* was more invested in the discourses of “uncommonness” and “sophistication,” than the Fiction department under the direction of L. Rust Hills. Hired in 1956, Hills oversaw the cultivation of a literary sensibility at *Esquire* that straddled the line between middle- and highbrow taste. Abandoning nearly a decade of pulpy detective stories, Hills claimed that the preferred *Esquire* short story was serious to the degree that “when it

⁵³ Gingrich, “Today’s Customer.” Presentation delivered at the Los Angeles Advertising Club, 26 March 1963, Box 8, Gingrich MSS.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

is not funny, its very very serious...and sometimes when its funny, its very very serious too.” Hills then added, “It’s not dull. It may be hard; it may sometimes even be shocking...but never dull. It’s meant for grown ups.”⁵⁵ Though Hills explicitly dissuaded authors from submitting stories that were too experimental or avant-garde, the new brand of prose was in general more complex in its plotting of narrative, description of characters and usage of language than what had been appearing in the magazine. Unlike “An Armchair in Hell” or “Hang by Your Neck” (unambiguously plotted stories which dealt with starkly delineated moral absolutes), the fiction which appeared in *Esquire* in the late fifties and early sixties was less certain about its moral underpinnings. It was, in short, a body of work that was at turns self-conscious, self-reflexive and self-doubting. It was also a body of fiction which offered up a new type of protagonist: world-weary, befuddled by the absurdities of the modern world, and unable to strike back in a meaningful fashion.

An example of this new protagonist was the character of Moses in John Cheever’s “The Death of Justina” (November 1960). Cheever’s protagonist is indicative of the futility and powerlessness the author (like many American intellectuals of the period) saw in modern life. The absurdities of bureaucratic and organizational politics repeatedly confound Moses as he suffers his boss MacPherson and embarks on a quixotic errand to obtain a death certificate for his wife’s elderly cousin Justina. What makes Moses’ trials all the more absurd is the refusal of municipal authorities to grant the certificate to Moses because his house was zoned in an area that did not permit death. At one point, the family doctor advises Moses,

⁵⁵ Quoted in *Esquire*, Inc. *The Big Change*, 11, Box 3, L. Rust Hills Collection, Lily Library, Indiana University, Bloomington, IN. Hereafter cited as Hills MSS.

“You can take the old lady and put her into the car and drive her over to Chestnut Street where zone C begins...As soon as you get her over to zone C, It’s all right. You can say she died in the car.” Eventually Moses goes to the mayor to seek an exception to the town’s zoning laws. Though the Mayor eventually relents, he castigates Moses for seeking an exemption in the first place

...it’s just that it happened in the wrong zone and if I make an exception for you I’ll have to make an exception for everyone and this kind of morbidity, when it gets out of hand, can be very depressing. People don’t like to live in a neighborhood where this sort of thing goes on all the time.”⁵⁶

After cousin Justina’s funeral, Moses heads back to his office where he finds some advertising copy he had written scribbled with a message from his boss MacPherson, “Very funny, you broken-down bore. Do again.” The story ends not with a confrontation or an epiphanic moment, but with Moses writing a series of parodies of copy that MacPherson rejected. In the end, the futility of this gesture could only result in Moses’ termination. Rebellion, it seems, had become empty and self-destructive.

L. Rust Hills was born in 1924 in Brooklyn, NY. After a stint as a third mate in the U.S. Merchant Marine, Hills attended Wesleyan University where he earned a bachelor’s and master’s degree in English. Hills would spend the next six years between Europe and the United States teaching creative writing and co-editing a literary review entitled *Quixote*. When his marriage to writer and *Quixote* co-editor Jean Rikhoff had failed, Hills returned to New York to teach creative writing at the New School where he caught the attention of *Esquire*’s departing Managing Editor

⁵⁶ John Cheever, “The Death of Justina,” *Esquire*, November 1960, 128.

Leonard Wallace Robinson. Hiring Hills as the magazine's fiction editor was one of Robinson's final acts before leaving *Esquire* for *Colliers*. Given Hills' eye for young talent and his well-developed connections with American creative writing programs, Hills seemed like a natural choice to rebuild *Esquire*'s literary reputation. Hills opened *Esquire* to authors who generally avoided the "slicks." Moreover, he was particularly receptive to running longer pieces that most magazines would reject. The trick for Hills was to convince the editorial and advertising staffs at *Esquire* that material was marketable. Dire as the new fiction was, it ran in *Esquire* because it responded to dominant currents in contemporary social criticism. Furthermore, it drew on *Esquire*'s self-identification as a magazine for well-rounded, serious sophisticates. This then was the essence of *Esquire*'s new literary culture.

Under Hills' watch, *Esquire* published Tennessee Williams' *Sweet Bird of Youth*, Truman Capote's *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, Paddy Chayefsky's *The Goddess* and the first chapter of Saul Bellow's *Herzog* in their entirety. By the time Hills left *Esquire* in 1963, he had managed to publish an impressive array of significant writers. A partial list of authors who published in *Esquire* under Hills would include Edward Albee, John Barth, Isaac Bashevis Singer, Saul Bellow, Thomas Berger, Paddy Chayefsky, Truman Capote, Roald Dahl, John Cheever, Stanley Elkin, Bruce Jay Friedman, Ivan Gold, Joseph Heller, Wright Morris, Thomas Pynchon, Alain Robbe-Grille, Philip Roth, Alan Seager, William Styron, Kurt Vonnegut, and Tennessee Williams.

As Hills shepherded *Esquire*'s literary turn, Arnold Gingrich took every chance he could to remind readers of *Esquire*'s literary legacy and the need to restore

a sense of sophistication to the magazine, to “rescue *Esquire* from bawdity” as one wag put it.⁵⁷ Step one in this process was to jettison thousands of dollars worth of stories. *Esquire*, Gingrich explained, was “tied up in dubious editorial inventory--the mysteries and Westerns and whiz-bang stories that had made the magazine such a far cry in the mid- and late forties from its literary standards of the early and mid-thirties.”⁵⁸ While *Esquire* certainly had no intention of publishing detective fiction again, Hills and his staff made it clear that they were equally uninterested in experimental fiction, defined by Hills as “stream of consciousness stuff...stories which the author wants to set different type sizes...stories with made-up words...stories which switch from red to black typewriter ribbon for ‘effect’.”⁵⁹ Instead, *Esquire*, from 1957 onwards, sought out fiction that was “complex in thought, in characterizations, in various levels of meaning, in symbolism.”⁶⁰ In short, *Esquire* sought out what Hills referred to as “the little magazine story.”⁶¹

The small-circulation literary reviews known as little magazines were a fixture of the Euro-American literary scene since the 1890s. However, it was the emergence of literary modernism in the 1910s and 1920s that forever linked the little magazine to

⁵⁷ Stanley Marcus, as quoted in Arnold Gingrich, *Nothing But People: The Early Days at Esquire, A Personal History, 1928-1958* (New York: Crown Publishers, 1971), 193. For Gingrich’s sermon’s on *Esquire*’s legacy see the “Publisher’s Notes” column in *Esquire*; in particular January 1955, October 1957, and November 1958.

⁵⁸ Arnold Gingrich, *Nothing But People*, 190.

⁵⁹ Hills, quoted in The Writer’s Institute, *Esquire: A Publication Portrait* (n.p.: Hawthorn Books, 1962), 19, Box 4, Hills MSS.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*, 18.

⁶¹ Rust Hills, “*Esquire* Fiction Policy,” n.d., Hills MSS, Box 3. See also, Rust Hills’ standard solicitation letter, n.d., Box 3, Hills MSS.

experimental literature and solidified its identification as an alternative to the polite literary fare found in the “slicks” or mass-circulation magazines. The most notable of these little magazines, the *Dial* or the *Little Review* for instance, offered readers what Mark S. Morrison has suggested was a “counterpublic sphere”; that is an oppositional space “to challenge the dominant public sphere’s control of public discourse.”⁶² The rhetoric emanating from the little magazines was at once oppositional and messianic. The commonplace assertion in the little magazines was an insistence that their presence was necessary if only to provide relief from the suffocating commercial culture. The *Little Review*’s Marianne Anderson, for instance, had claimed that her interest in the *Review* was to produce “creative opinion”, something she had found lacking in her native Indiana.⁶³

The revolutionary zeal of the little magazines had softened to a large degree by the middle of the century. Of course, there remained those publications that defied convention (literary, political and moral) with little regards to the consequences. Here one especially thinks of titles like George Hitchcock’s *Kayak*, Irving Rosenthal and Paul Carroll’s *The Big Table* or Ed Sanders’ *Fuck You: A Magazine of the Arts*. Most little magazines however had found it necessary to affiliate with a funding source that was institutional in nature. The wealthy “angels” who had faithfully supported the little magazines of the interwar years had begun to disappear from the

⁶² Mark S. Morrison, *The Public Face of Modernism: Little Magazines, Audiences and Reception, 1905-1920* (Madison: The University of Wisconsin Press, 2001), 12.

⁶³ Quoted in Ellen Gruber Garvey, “Out of the Mainstream and into the Streets: Small Press Magazines, the Underground Press, Zines and Artists’ Books” in *Perspectives on American Book History: Artifacts and Commentary*, eds. Scott E. Casper, Joanne D. Chaison, Jeffery D. Groves, *Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book* (Amherst and Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 2002), 370.

scene. Most little magazines of the 1950s and 60s instead relied upon an affiliation with the academy (The *Kenyon Review*, The *Sewanee Review*, *Salmagundi*), a publishing house (The *Evergreen Review*) or sought grants and other forms of formal external funding in order to continue publishing. The effect of this shift was notable. While the little magazines still differentiated themselves from the “slicks,” the messianic compulsion had disappeared. What emerged then was largely a group of magazines that published *belles lettres* for a small coterie audience that prized its detachment from popular tastes.

Hills’ *Quixote* was, in this sense, typical of the post-war little magazine. Founded in 1954 by Hills, Jean Rikhoff Hills and Burt W. Miller, *Quixote* had a limited press run and operated mostly on the funding provided by subscriptions. Though *Quixote* had never published a programmatic statement on its editorial philosophy, a casual examination of the magazine reveals a publication that attuned to the dominant literary trends of the day while at the same time eschewing any support for experimental fiction. At *Quixote*, “serious” fiction ruled the day, evidenced by the preference for contributions from writers molded by creative writing programs. John Sheply’s “Monsieur Soboloff Dances Until Midnight” provides a good example of the sort of material Hills selected for *Quixote*. The plot is straightforward: Soboloff has an important appointment to keep. Despite this, he agrees to have dinner with a young American woman identified only as Marianne. As the night of drinking and dancing progresses, Soboloff finds himself growing increasingly attracted to Marianne, a feeling she shares. Near the story’s conclusion, Marianne invites Soboloff back to her hotel room. Soboloff respectfully declines her offer in order to

keep his appointment. As we learn through the internal monologues that structure much of the piece, Soboloff works for a shadowy organization known only as The Committee (ostensibly the International Rescue Committee). Repeatedly Soboloff struggles with a desire to escape the danger and intrigue of his calling. At one point, he ponders escaping Europe for the Utopian shores of Israel. At another, he struggles with his attraction to Marianne and the explicit promise of carnal pleasure held out by her invitation at the story's conclusion. Engaging an amalgam of realist and modernist techniques, Sheply offers up a reiteration of the existentialist hero who struggles with the consequences of political commitment.⁶⁴ For Soboloff, the suffering of hundreds of refugees who depended upon him for their survival outweighs the temptation of a night of carnal pleasure.

While the fiction Hills published in *Quixote* may have sometimes been derivative or amateurish, it nevertheless pointed to Hills' penchant for "digesting" dominant trends in creative writing. Emerging from the world of literary reviews and MFA programs, Hills relied on his contacts with academics, editors, and literary agents in redeveloping *Esquire's* literary offerings. More than any other element of the new *Esquire*, the fiction offerings announced the magazine's willingness to abandon its bawdiness in favor a more refined sensibility. A cursory glance through the magazine's "Sound and Fury" section (circa 1957- 1960) would reveal a mixed reception for the type of fiction Rust Hills was bringing into the magazine. For every letter applauding the publication of Leslie Fiedler's "Nude Croquet" or Philip Roth's "Heard Melodies are Sweeter" there would be another castigating *Esquire* for its drift

⁶⁴ John Sheply, "Monsieur Soboloff Dances Until Midnight" *Quixote*, No. 4 (Autumn 1954), 34-45.

towards “degenerate” and/or “highbrow” fiction and pleading for a return to the “masculine” fiction of the forties and early fifties. In doing so, *Esquire* entered into a long-lived debate over culture and gender. In his recent study of mid-century masculinity, James Gilbert demonstrates how discussions of taste rely on the language of gender. As Gilbert writes, “almost every position in this broad discussion, at one time or another, invoked the ultimate slur that the other side was contributing to the emasculation of American culture.”⁶⁵

As the fifties ended, the question of what constituted “men’s fiction” was increasingly in doubt. While tough-guy stories continued to find outlets in crime magazines and in the cruder pin-up titles, the mass circulation titles like *Playboy* and *Esquire* had committed to fiction with a decidedly literary bent. While certain authors affiliated themselves with one of the two magazines (i.e. Terry Southern and Gay Talese were “*Esquire*” writers while Herbert Gold and James Jones were “*Playboy*” authors), many published simultaneously in both. Where the magazines differentiated themselves was in the literary cultures they had cultivated and the vision of masculinity these cultures espoused. At *Playboy*, Associate Editor A. C. Spectorisky filled his magazine with fiction that was, in his words, “creatively virile.” Couched within a rhetoric that combined male fear with a hedonistic fascination with consumer goods, *Playboy* sought fiction that the fiction that vigorously reaffirmed the masculine ego; a sentiment captured wonderfully in Spectorisky’s dismissal of what he referred to as “castration-defeat-doom” stories. In articulating what sociologist R.W. Connell has referred to as “hegemonic masculinity,” *Playboy* tended to favor

⁶⁵ James B. Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 189.

authors practiced in developing well-crafted stories with strong characters and defined beginnings, middles and ends.⁶⁶ Given this, it should be of little surprise that the spirit of Ernest Hemingway had found a home in *Playboy*, especially when we consider Hugh Hefner's repeated desire to replicate *Esquire* of the 1930s. The bulk of what *Playboy* published under Hemingway byline was a series of aphorisms disguised as an advice column or memoirs by people who had known Hemingway. The fact that "Papa" had little direct contact with the magazine was irrelevant. For *Playboy*, Hemingway's aura was enough to sufficiently certify the magazine's virility.

Esquire's literary culture, on the other hand, reflected a Modernist concern with form, the individuality of the author and the oppositional function of literature. The *Esquire* Writer's Symposium series organized by Hills is perhaps the best and clearest manifestation of the magazine's literary aspirations. The series, which ran from 1958-1964, was ostensibly organized by *Esquire* to provide readers an opportunity take part in a discussion with the top writers of the day. However, as Hills admitted to Richard Scowcroft, "the point of these symposium (sic) from out (sic) point of view, is to convince the public as a whole of this legitimacy of *Esquire's* in the field."⁶⁷ The symposia operated with a straightforward format. Over the course of two or three nights, three to four invited guests spoke on a symposium theme in front of an audience of *Esquire* subscribers, scholars, and students. The keynote speaker(s) would change each night but all of the panelists would have the

⁶⁶ Robert W. Connell, *Gender and Power: Society, the Person and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Polity, 1987),

⁶⁷ Rust Hills to Richard Scowcroft, 18 February 1960, Box 3, Hills MSS.

opportunity to respond to that evening's keynote address. Lest readers fear that *Esquire* was moving too recklessly into the territory of the *Partisan Review*, *Dissent* or some other highbrow "magazine of opinion," promotional materials framed the symposia in the language of a potential bar fight. "As to being stuffy: not much chance of that" proclaimed the copy. It continued,

Bringing together a group of extremely articulate writers, each with a deeply felt point of view, plus an alert young audience with some well-developed ideas of their own, then turn them loose upon each other, practically guarantees exciting fireworks (not to say verbal mayhem).⁶⁸

Though the debates were often contentious, they rarely resulted in the promised fireworks. Nevertheless, the symposia series boasted an engaging cast with writers as diverse as Leslie Fiedler, Saul Bellow, Dorothy Parker, Wright Morris, Mark Harris, Norman Mailer, Dwight Macdonald, Ralph Ellison, John Cheever, Philip Roth, James Baldwin, Nelson Algren, Vance Bourjaily, William Styron, Gore Vidal, Edward Albee, Bernard Malamud and Robert Penn Warren.

The most successful of the symposia, in terms of the quality of the debate and response, was the 1959 Iowa City symposium. Co-sponsored by Paul Engle and the Writer's Workshop, the participants (Harris, Mailer, Macdonald and Ellison) grappled with the topic "The Writer in a Mass Culture." The exchange before the audience at the sold-out McBride Auditorium over those two nights was in many ways typical of the late fifties intellectual discourse. Mark Harris boldly proclaimed "the writer has no business reaching for a mass audience" and that "art and mass distribution are

⁶⁸ *Esquire* Literary Symposia pamphlet, Box 3, Hills MSS

incompatible.”⁶⁹ Norman Mailer likewise painted a grim picture, warning that journalism represented the vanguard “of a slow and gathering totalitarianism in American life.”⁷⁰ Finally, Dwight Macdonald presented a draft version of “Masscult/Midcult” to the attentive audience. Only Ellison refused to join the fray, instead insisting that mass culture had a vital role to play in exposing readers to literature. Ellison, for example, offered that his first exposure to Mann, Hemingway and Faulkner came through *Esquire*. The success of this symposium was in framing a particularly clear vision of the author as craftsman in the new *Esquire*.

The creative process, its joys and its dangers were at the heart of symposium discussions. *Esquire*’s literary culture invested itself in the question of what it meant to be creative in a conformist age. Beyond the symposium series, *Esquire* revisited this issue in interviews, memoirs, and works-in-progress features that offered readers a chance to examine the creative process from the author’s point-of-view. Transcripts of Archibald McLeish’s correspondence with Elia Kazan during the staging of *JB* (May 1959) or the extensive exchange between James Jones and William Styron on the art of the novel (July 1963) are but two examples of this tendency to fetishize creativity in the pages of *Esquire*. Indeed, the insider-focus of these features does shed light on the creative process in an engaging manner. Beyond this however, what value does the emphasis on the writer-at-work have for the Uncommon Man? Mike Featherstone has argued that under the regime of lifestyle, the self is an aesthetic project that reflects a “stylization of life.” Inherent in this sense of lifestyle as a “life

⁶⁹ *Esquire* Literary Symposium transcripts, State University of Iowa, 4/5 December 1959, Box 3, Hills MSS, 3.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 15.

project,” is a self-consciousness and an awareness of the “in-process” nature of the self as a work-in-progress. Thus, the author and the Uncommon Man share a common language of creation, destruction and rejuvenation. The creative agonies the writer suffers, in short, become the folklore of masculine individualism.

In the introduction to the 1979 edition of *Cavalier and Yankee*, historian William R. Taylor noted the serendipity in the genesis of his project with the rise of New Frontier. John F. Kennedy and the New Frontiersmen had reinvigorated Washington with a sense of purpose and mission. This, Taylor suggested prodded him into thinking about how character is cultivated. In examining how the Southern gentry understood themselves as being essentially different from the Northern Yankee, Taylor studied Southern reading habits and the ideologies of the fictions Southerners consumed. For Taylor, adventure stories and the court romances of Sir Walter Scott reflected and reinforced dominant notions of social order. Taylor’s analysis then posits the concept of a “social imaginary,” that is, a repertoire of social knowledge that informs social being.⁷¹ For Taylor, this represented what he called a “mythmaking frame of mind.”

The narratives of individualism and conformity that circulated through *Esquire* in the late fifties and early sixties reaffirmed the need for men to express their sense of self. *Esquire*’s “mythmaking” suggested that consumer culture was the most legitimate site for these expressions of the self. Nevertheless, try as it might, *Esquire* could not fully contain the tension at the heart of the intersection of the mass culture

⁷¹ This is an important area of inquiry for historians. Two key studies are Raphael Samuel, *Theaters of Memory: Past and Present in Contemporary Culture (Vol. 1)* (London: Verso, 1994) and Michael Kammen, *Mystic Chords of Memory: The Transformation of Tradition in American Culture* (Vintage: New York, 1993).

critique and the needs of advertising. This is most clearly demonstrated in the ideology of “heroic masculinity” as expressed in the prose of Norman Mailer, the film reviews of Dwight Macdonald and *Esquire*’s infatuation with the Kennedy mystique. In the chapter that follows, I will build upon the dual notions of mythmaking and heroic masculinity.

As *Esquire* entered the sixties, its editors could not fail to see that in several short years they had moved the magazine into exciting new territory. Regardless if the topic is advertising or editorial content, there was little if anything left in *Esquire* that linked it to the magazine that entered the fifties as a repository for detective stories, pin-ups and ads for zip-guns and Pabst Blue Ribbon beer. In discussing the legacy of the *Partisan Review*, Richard Pells notes that the journal was “required reading for intellectuals” due in large part to its impressive roster of contributors.⁷²

As he continues,

In any issue, one might find an essay, story, or poem by Edmund Wilson, Saul Bellow, Paul Goodman, Meyer Schapiro, Alfred Kazin, Leslie Fiedler, Daniel Bell, C. Wright Mills, Arthur Schlesinger, Diana Trilling, Pauline Kael, James Agee, Irving Howe, Harold Rosenberg, Richard Chase, Ralph Ellison, James Baldwin, Norman Mailer, Bernard Malamud, Robert Brustein, Mary McCarthy.⁷³

Pells’ point is a salient one for our examination of the “new” *Esquire*. Twelve of the twenty-one figures Pells lists also published in *Esquire*. While *Esquire* was by no means a mass circulation version of the *Partisan Review*, *Dissent*, or *Commentary*, it nevertheless acknowledged the growing sophistication of its readership by crafting a magazine that addressed them as adults. And unlike the “ethic of fun” advocated by

⁷² Richard Pells, *The Liberal Mind in a Conservative Age*, 73.

⁷³ *ibid.*

Playboy, *Esquire* preached a discriminating form of consumption as an indispensable component of the “New Sophistication.”⁷⁴ Under the command of Hayes, Felker and Hills, sophistication and intelligence were no longer words for men to fear. *Esquire* (circa 1957-1961) reassured American men time and time again that these qualities were important, necessary and above all else, manly.

⁷⁴ Bill Osgerby, “A Pedigree of the Consuming Male: Masculinity, Consumption and the American ‘Leisure Class,’” *Masculinity and Men’s Lifestyle Magazines*, Bethan Benwell, ed., *Sociological Review* Monograph series (Oxford, U.K. and Malden, MA: Blackwell Publishing, 2003), 77.

Chapter Four: Macdonald/Kennedy/Mailer: Uncommonness and Heroic Masculinity

Section 1: The New Frontier of Heroic Masculinity

The discourse of uncommonness that defined *Esquire's* editorial outlook in the late fifties and early sixties was cultivated from and against the critique of mass culture that had gained prominence in the 1950s. While uncommonness accepted the argument that bureaucratized mass culture left little, if any, room for expressions of individualism, it largely dismissed the prescriptions of commentators like Vance Packard who argued, "the trend towards hedonism represents regress."¹ Against critics like Packard, *Esquire* fashioned a language of uncommonness that celebrated consumption as one of the last spaces in which men could cultivate their sense of self.

Central to *Esquire's* advocacy of sophisticated consumption was a doctrine of heroic masculinity that championed toughness, intelligence and individuality. As we have seen in the previous chapter, *Esquire* cultivated heroic masculinity through its rearticulation of the mass culture critique into a rhetoric of sophisticated consumption. The presence in *Esquire* of cultural intermediaries such as Dwight Macdonald, John F. Kennedy and Norman Mailer secured the magazine's claims to cultural leadership.

Two observations frame our discussion of heroic masculinity. First, heroic masculinity bears the indelible mark of its formulation within the gender politics of postwar liberalism, the 1960 presidential campaign and the subsequent emergence of

¹ Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers* (New York: D. McKay Company, 1960), 233-34.

the New Frontier. As John Hellman argues, the presidential campaign of John F. Kennedy ran on a promise to restore adventure, excitement and the politics of the possible to American political life.² Nowhere was this captured more vividly than in Kennedy's 1960 acceptance speech before the Democratic Party and its declaration that the nation stood on the edge of a "New Frontier." The choice facing voters, Kennedy argued, was a simple one: choose the politics of complacency or choose the politics of adventure.

Robert Dean and Kyle Courdileone have persuasively argued that the "New Frontiersmen" who flocked to Washington in the early sixties were the product of a decade long struggle to remasculinize American liberalism through what Courdileone dubs as the "Cult of Toughness."³ For Courdileone, an obsession with "ballsiness" defined this "cult" through its "unconcealed delight in risk taking and sexual adventure."⁴ Taking Kennedy's *Profiles in Courage* and Arthur Schlesinger, Jr.'s *The Vital Center* as their bibles, the "New Frontiersmen" sought to recast liberalism in their image and thus, forever dispensing with the unmanly specters of Alger Hiss and Adlai Stevenson. Throughout their written works and public statements, we find the repeated return to the binaries of hard and soft, brave and cowardly, and adventurous and complacent and, as Dean argues, an "adulation of power, glamour,

² John Hellman, *The Kennedy Obsession: The American Myth of JFK* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1997).

³ Robert Dean, "Masculinity as Ideology: John F. Kennedy and the Domestic Politics of Foreign Policy," *Diplomatic History*, Vol. 22, No. 1 (Winter 1998): 29-62. Kyle A. Courdileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War* (New York: Routledge, 2005). See also Robert Dean, *Imperial Brotherhood: Gender and the Making of Cold War Foreign Policy* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 2003).

⁴ Courdileone, *Manhood and American Political Culture in the Cold War*, 201.

adventure, and virility, its fixation on appearances, ‘identity’ and the psychology of image manipulation.”⁵

For Hellman, we cannot understate the importance of Ernest Hemingway to this ethos. As Hellman argues in *The Kennedy Obsession*, Kennedy’s decision to invoke Hemingway in the opening section of *Profiles in Courage* sought to connect the then young senator with arguably the Ur-icon of American heroic masculinity.⁶ This move is notable on three counts. First, it perfectly articulated the heroic ambitions of Kennedy and other tough guy liberals. Secondly, given Kennedy and Hemingway’s shared history of debilitating ailments, it draws attention to a pervasive engagement with the body. Robert Dean has argued that the “New Frontiersmen” “identified the strength of the body with the strength of the state.” Thus, for Kennedy, an engagement with the body often translated into an attempt to deny or disguise corporeal reality. Third, as numerous Kennedy biographers have claimed, *Profiles in Courage* was Kennedy’s attempt to remake his public image into that of a heroic liberal. Thus, the invocation of Papa is best understood within a project of self-actualization through which the self is radically reconstructed.

The Hemingway connection is doubly salient since it also informs the second key observation on heroic masculinity. The rhetoric of toughness in heroic masculinity is rarely independent of a masculinist ideology of individuality, authenticity and oppositionality. Andreas Huyssen’s important “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other” located this ethos within Frederick Nietzsche’s

⁵ Dean, “Masculinity as Ideology,” 62.

⁶ Hellman, *The Kennedy Obsession*, 63-85.

“aesthetic vision of the artist-philosopher-hero, the suffering loner who stands in irreconcilable opposition to modern democracy and its inauthentic culture.”⁷ As Huyssen continues, this type of heroic masculinity led to the development of a modernist aesthetic that devalued a feminized mass culture while advocating a vibrant practice that confirmed the masculinity of a “purely individual consciousness,” what Huyssen refers to as the “masculinist mystique.”⁸ Huyssen does make clear that this was but one articulation of modernism. It was, however, a crucially important one for it is here that we find canonical modernism. In recent years, scholars have demonstrated the existence of other modernisms that challenged the “masculinist mystique.”⁹ Nevertheless, despite the entrance of Virginia Woolf, H.D. and Djuna Barnes into the modernist Canon, it is the masculinist modernists and their obsession with aesthetic and gender purity that forms our understanding of modernism.

It is between the two poles of the “cult of toughness” and the “masculinist mystique” that we will explore the *Esquire* careers of three key cultural intermediaries. Our interest in Dwight Macdonald will be in the idiosyncratic film criticism he produced for *Esquire* between 1961 and 1965 and its overriding concern with modernist notions of aesthetic integrity. Our discussion of Kennedy will focus on *Esquire*’s coverage of the 1960 presidential campaign. In particular, we will pay close attention to the *Esquire* contributions of Kennedy’s most eager promoter,

⁷ Andreas Huyssens, “Mass Culture as Woman: Modernism’s Other,” *After the Great Divide: Modernism, Mass Culture, Postmodernism* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1986), 51.

⁸ *ibid.*, 53. It is, incidentally, interesting to note that Huyssen’s list of masculine moderns includes Filippo Marinetti, Ernest Jünger, Wyndham Lewis and Ferdinand Céline, all of whom succumbed to the fascism.

⁹ See Rita Felski, *The Gender of Modernity* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1995).

Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. Finally, the chapter will conclude with an examination of Norman Mailer's "Big Bite" column. Mailer's presence in *Esquire* between 1960 and 1964 is instructive since his tortured meditations on masculinity are an object lesson in the rhetoric of heroic masculinity and its limitations. As disparate as this group may seem, they share a number of important connections, not the least of which is a centrality to *Esquire*'s public profile in the early sixties.

Section 2: The "Congenital Critic" Meets the "Uncommon Man.": Dwight Macdonald at/and *Esquire*

The development of a renowned corps of critics was a prominent feature of *Esquire*'s attempt to reach the newly sophisticated man. A 1962 promotional booklet entitled *The Big Change* pointedly asked, "Who reads *Esquire*? What kind of man is he?"¹⁰ In short, the kind of man who would read Dorothy Parker (books), Joseph Wechsberg (gastronomy), Martin Mayer (classical music and sound technology), Nat Hentoff (jazz), Richard Joseph (Travel), Robert Daly (Sports), Gore Vidal (all of the above) and Dwight Macdonald (movies). "The subjects they (the critics) write about...and the editorial response they provoke," the booklet suggests, "gives us a glimpse of a well-rounded man."¹¹

Of the critics that *Esquire* had assembled, no one was arguably more popular than Macdonald. And to be sure, with the possible exception of Dorothy Parker, none of *Esquire*'s other critics were as accomplished. Macdonald had established his reputation in the thirties as one of the most eloquent and contentious writers on the

¹⁰ *Esquire*, Inc., *The Big Change*, 4, Hills MSS, Box 3.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 4.

Left. In the pages of the *Partisan Review* he railed against Stalinism, took on Van Wyck Brooks and Archibald MacLiesh's advocacy of cultural nationalism and opened up a dialogue with Clement Greenberg which resulted in Greenberg's seminal "Avant-Garde and Kitsch."¹² By 1944, long-standing disagreements with *PR* editors Phillip Rahv and William Phillips over US involvement in World War II forced Macdonald to resign.¹³ In place of *PR*, Macdonald founded *politics*. Though it lasted only five years (1944-1949), it was remarkable for the sheer number of important figures it published: Albert Camus, Simone Weil, Hannah Arendt, C. Wright Mills, Bruno Bettelheim, and such Frankfurt School exiles as Leo Lowenthal and Theodore Adorno. Furthermore, as Stephen Whitfield and Gregory Sumner have argued, *politics*' radical humanism and anti-totalitarianism was central to the prehistory of the New Left.¹⁴

But the journal also marked a period of growing disillusionment with political solutions for Macdonald. Increasingly, he had become cynical as to whether "The

¹² The most comprehensive accounts of the *Partisan Review*'s early years are James Gilbert, *Writers and Partisans: A History of Literary Radicalism in America* (New York: Wiley, 1968) and Alan M. Wald, *The New York Intellectuals: The Rise and Decline of the Anti-Stalinist Left From the 1930s to the 1980s* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1987).

¹³ At the center of the Macdonald-Rahv polemic was the question of the *Partisan Review*'s editorial position regarding the war against Hitler. Rahv was insistent in his belief that it was necessary to place support behind Churchill and Roosevelt in the fight against fascism. Macdonald on the other hand was steadfast in his opposition to the Allied war effort claiming that victory would not only mean the defeat of fascism but the consolidation of bourgeois capitalist hegemony (and in the Soviet Union, Stalinist totalitarianism). In place of supporting what was felt to be an "imperialist war of aggression," Macdonald and his allies (chiefly Clement Greenberg and Victor Serge) called for a widespread fomenting of revolution among the European and American working class. For more on Macdonald's exchanges with Rahv see Michael Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition: The Life and Politics of Dwight Macdonald* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 89-127 and Wald, *The New York Intellectuals*, 193-225.

¹⁴ Stephen Whitfield, *A Critical American: The politics of Dwight Macdonald* (Hamden, CT: Archon Books, 1984), Gregory Sumner, *Dwight Macdonald and the politics Circle: The Challenges of Cosmopolitan Democracy* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).

Revolution” would or could occur. Upon surveying the cultural landscape, Macdonald had determined that the ossifying effects of mass culture were to blame for this state of affairs. Showing the growing influence of the Frankfurt School in his thinking, Macdonald created a furor when in “The Responsibility of Peoples” he suggest that the notion of collective German guilt for the Holocaust was without merit, for the German people were themselves caught within a process they could not control.¹⁵ As Macdonald explained,

It is a process...which is going on in our own society, in England, and in Russia,. . . even faster than in Germany itself. Modern society has become so tightly organized, so rationalized and routinized that it has the character of a mechanism which grinds on without human consciousness or control. The individual...is reduced to powerlessness vis-à-vis the mechanism. More and more, things happen TO people.¹⁶

Like many intellectuals on the anti-Stalinist left, Macdonald argued that political parties were incapable of addressing the central problems of the day. As Richard Pells points out, “one could not expect political parties or mass movements to express much dissatisfaction in a time of breathtaking prosperity.” Furthermore, mass movements did not address what Macdonald and his ilk saw as the key dilemma for the postwar United States: the powerlessness and alienation of life. In rejecting

¹⁵ Macdonald’s biographer Michael Wreszin maintains that while Macdonald was familiar with the work of Theodore Adorno, Max Horkheimer, etc., they were not particularly influential in his thinking (Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, 289). Paul Gorman and Martin Jay, on the other hand, are much more adamant regarding the influence of the Frankfurt School on Macdonald (Gorman, *Left Intellectuals and Popular Culture*, 176-181 and Martin Jay, “The Frankfurt School in Exile,” *Perspectives in American History* 6 (1972): 339-385). While, as Gorman admits, Macdonald most likely did not grasp the full depth of Critical Theory, he nevertheless saw its importance in the development of his critique of mass culture. Macdonald, Wreszin notes, was particularly impressed by the work of psychologist and Frankfurt School affiliate Erich Fromm (Wreszin, *A Rebel in Defense of Tradition*, 102-103).

¹⁶ Dwight Macdonald, “The Responsibility of Peoples” (1945) in *Memoirs of a Revolutionist* (Cleveland: Meridian Publishing, 1958), 51.

political solutions, Macdonald chose to refocus his energies on the cultural sphere. As a contributing writer for the *New Yorker* and the *Encounter*, Macdonald became the scourge of mass culture, publishing monumental jeremiads against the Book of the Month Club, the Revised Standard King James Bible, James Gould Cozens, and the cult of “How To” aficionados. Most notably however, Macdonald produced a series of essays in which he attempted to create a comprehensive critique of mass culture.

“The Theory of Popular Culture” appeared in *politics* in 1949, was revised in 1953 as “A Theory of Mass Culture”, and appeared in the *Partisan Review* its final version as “Masscult and Midcult” in 1960. Through each revision, Macdonald’s contempt for mass culture and its audiences became more apparent. Where in 1949, he could take up a position that saw the possibilities of uplift through high culture, by 1960 Macdonald was calling for the unequivocal separation of high culture from the mass and middlebrow cultures. “So let the masses have their Masscult,” proclaims Macdonald, “let the few who care about good writing, painting, music, philosophy, etc. have their High Culture and don’t fuzz up the distinction with Midcult.”¹⁷

At issue for Macdonald was the status of art as a mass produced commodity. In language that echoed Greenberg’s “The Avant-Garde and Kitsch,” Macdonald suggested that what was troublesome about Masscult and its “bastard” Midcult was not the ineptness or vacuousness of their content but the absence of all that one finds in High Culture: a creative vision, a refusal to create for the satisfaction of audience tastes, and the inherent difficulty of the text. To borrow the title of one his most

¹⁷ Dwight Macdonald, “Masscult and Midcult” (1960) in *Against the American Grain* (New York: Random House, 1962), 73.

celebrated political essays, the root of creative expression is always man. Without a critical presence directing the movement of the brush or the shape of a stanza, art becomes bereft of what makes it valuable. On these grounds, Macdonald contended that “Masscult. . . is not just unsuccessful art. It is not even art. It is anti-art.” For Macdonald, the danger of Masscult is its creation of cultural artifacts marked by “formula, built-in reaction, (and) the lack of any standard except popularity.”¹⁸ As he says of Earl Stanley Gardner’s books, they “seem to have been manufactured rather than composed.”¹⁹ Similarly, Midcult acts in a similar way in that it takes High Culture and vulgarizes it by opening it for the masses.

Despite only having written sporadic film criticism prior to being hired as *Esquire*’s resident film critic, Macdonald relished his new role as a relentless defender of film art from the supposed banalities of mass culture. The “Backstage with *Esquire*” feature which announced Macdonald’s debut in the pages of the magazine boldly declared that *Esquire* had hired Macdonald, a critic with “belligerently high standards.” Promising a critic who was unafraid to stir up trouble, the piece suggests that “Macdonald ...plunges into movie company screening rooms equipped with a Mephistophelian beard and a reputation to match.” Macdonald, the blurb continues, “practically single-handedly corrected the over enthusiasm of some of America’s most prominent reviewers” in their appreciation of James Cozzens *By Love Possessed*. The blurb concluded with Macdonald offering his approach to

¹⁸ *ibid.* 5.

¹⁹ *ibid.*

reviewing films, “Even if one doesn’t like a film there’s always lots to say--perhaps even especially.”²⁰

Macdonald entered onto the film criticism scene at a time when an appreciation of film art became serious business. In a 1991 interview with filmmaker George Hickenlooper, film critic Roger Ebert fondly recalled the vivid and exciting world of early sixties cinema. “When I was going to college,” Ebert recalls, “part of your experience consisted of finding out who such people as Federico Fellini, Akira Kurosawa, Ingmar Bergman, Vittorio DeSica, Orson Welles, Alfred Hitchcock, Howard Hawks and John Ford were.”²¹ This cinematic education was aided by a network of student film clubs and arthouse theaters which prospered in almost every major college town and urban area.²² But it was the growth of a serious and eloquent film criticism at the end of the fifties which fueled the obsession of the “film generation.” Stanley Kauffman, who immortalized the film generation in his 1965 essay of the same name, was but one of many critics who had gone beyond reviewing films by penning thoughtful essays which analyzed films and sought to explain their

²⁰ “Backstage with *Esquire*,” *Esquire*, March 1960,

²¹ George Hickenlooper, *Reel Conversations: Candid Interviews with Film’s Foremost Directors and Critics* (New York: Citadel Press, 1991), 364.

²² For accounts of the post WWII art house boom see Barbara Wilinsky, *Sure Seaters: The Emergence of Art House Cinema* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2001), Greg Taylor, *Artists in the Audience: Cults, Camp and American Film Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Janet Staiger, “With the Compliments of the Auteur: Art Cinema and the Complexities of its Reading Strategies,” *Interpreting Films: Studies in the Historical Reception of American Cinema* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1992), 179-195, Douglas Gomery, *Shared Pleasures: A History of Movie Presentation in the United States* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1992), David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), Robert P. Kolker, *The Altering Eye: Contemporary International Cinema* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983).

aesthetic and social importance to their audience.²³ And to be sure, no discussion of late fifties/early sixties American film culture would be complete without mentioning the work of Kaufmann, Andrew Sarris, Pauline Kael, Susan Sontag, Penelope Houston, John Russell Taylor, John Simon, Manny Farber, Penelope Gilliatt, or Parker Tyler. The thoughtful, reflective and serious film criticism which blossomed in this period, as David Bordwell points out, was necessitated in large part by the obtuse nature of post-World War II cine-modernism.²⁴ The critic exercised an exegetical function by explaining what a film “meant,” how it enriched film art, or how it illustrated contemporary debates in psychoanalysis, existentialism, Marxism, etc.

Macdonald avoided overtly analytical reviews and instead wrote evaluative critiques of individual films. From time to time, however, he did venture to explain his methodology to *Esquire* readers. As a critic, Macdonald was drawn to the formal aesthetic analyses of Rudolph Arnheim and Irwin Panofsky.²⁵ For Macdonald, films were not to be judged on the reputation of a director or their social or political importance. Rather they were simply to be judged on their own merits as either aesthetic successes or failures. When *Esquire* reader Ray Fisher wrote into the magazine to protest “nobody ever defined the role of the critic to Mr. Macdonald,” he

²³ Stanley Kauffman, “The Film Generation,” *A World on Film: Criticism and Comment* (New York: Harper and Row, 1966), 415-428.

²⁴ Bordwell, *Making Meaning*, 43-70.

²⁵ Rudolph Arnheim and Irwin Panofsky were among the first critics to suggest that film criticism should be concerned with locating and explicating the qualities that made the medium unique rather than explaining how film was or was not like the other arts. Arnheim’s key writings on film can be found in *Film as Art* (London: Faber, 1958--originally published in 1933 as *Film*) and *Film Essays and Criticism*, Brenda Benthien, trans.(Madison: University of Wisconsin, 1997). Panofsky’s key work on film can be found in *Studies in Iconology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1939).

took Macdonald to task for being unsympathetic to the medium.²⁶ Macdonald responded by suggesting it is because he holds the medium of film in such high regard as an art form that he comes off as being unsympathetic. “But often the best way to be positive,” concludes Macdonald, “is to be negative.”²⁷

Yet the impression that “Macdonald hates movies” circulated widely and at times, it would seem that Macdonald’s critics were right, a situation Macdonald was in part responsible for.²⁸ He regularly came off as a cranky old man who could barely see beyond his limited canon of Griffiths, von Stroheim, Eisenstein, *Citizen Kane*, Donskoi, Chaplin and Keaton. Likewise, he was quick to dismiss what he felt was faddish, pretentious, or obscure, a point Macdonald succinctly underscored in his review of *Saturday Night and Sunday Morning* by suggesting that “novelty is not a substitute for art.”²⁹ Beyond being simply a matter of taste, Macdonald’s dismissals were always built upon his distrust of cultural snake-oil salesmen, be they Hollywood producers, middlebrow playwrights or avant-garde “visionaries.”

²⁶ “Sound and Fury,” *Esquire*, August 1960, 14.

²⁷ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, November 1960, 50.

²⁸ A case in point: Macdonald often drew the ire of critics who worked for daily and weekly publications by judiciously picking and choosing which films he would write about. Often, as John Simon reports, he would send his sons to judge if a film was worth seeing. This in addition to the special constrictions of working on a monthly publication where issues went to bed two months before their street date resulted in Macdonald’s pieces appearing anywhere from a month to a year after a film’s initial run. This in turn suggested laziness and antipathy to some readers. Macdonald defended his critical habits in his review of *Hud* (September 1963, 50). John Simon added a further defense by suggesting that because of his selective approach to film reviewing, Macdonald “was able to resist the indiscriminateness, spurious enthusiasm, bitterness, or cynical indifference that befall so many writers on film.” John Simon, “Introduction,” in Dwight Macdonald, *On Movies*, Second Edition, (New York: Da Capo; 1981), iii.

²⁹ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, February 1961, 42.

Beginning with his first column in the February 1960 issue of *Esquire*, Macdonald repeatedly reminded readers that nowhere were the cultural struggles he was concerned with more blatant than in the world of cinema. *The Sounds of Music* (which he refers to as “The Sounds of Mucous”) provides us with a paradigmatic example of the Masscult film.³⁰ Macdonald begins his comments by noting that the film has grossed over 60 million dollars and had won five Oscars. Sardonicly reasoning that the film had everything an audience could want, he posits that, “the only puzzle is why it grossed only sixty million and didn’t win all the Oscars.” Just in case we’re still not convinced, Macdonald cites the film’s child actors as examples of how perfectly the film is designed to be “pure unadulterated kitsch” that is “pulling them in”

Children, seven, from six to sixteen, assorted sexes, each as cute as a little red wagon, cute enough to make your heart ache, or your teeth...Carefully varied as to their personalities and each in his or her way craftily appealing, they go through their routines with the docility of a troupe of trained dogs.

Thus, the chief sin of *The Sounds of Music* was that it was manufactured for an audience. In order to achieve this all signs of individuality and creativity were evacuated. Yet, this film was not alone. Macdonald merely singled it out as being symptomatic of a Hollywood system in which art became product; a shining example of the “banal professionalism of Hollywood.”³¹

It would however be a gross oversimplification to say that Macdonald’s criticism operated through a strict binary where Hollywood films were, by definition,

³⁰ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, August 1966, 16.

³¹ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, September 1963, 50.

bad and foreign films, good.³² What annoyed Macdonald was the pomposity of the “New Hollywood” and their attempt have it both ways-- as creators of art and producers of entertainment.³³ The result, Macdonald suggests, could never be anything more than the “tepid ooze of Midcult.” The result of the mixed intentions is showcased in an addendum to his review of Michaelangelo Antonioni’s *L’Eclisse*. Macdonald bitterly complained of the American distributor’s attempts to excise the film’s coda; “a montage of atmospheric street shots.” The matter went beyond a simple case of a distributor attempting to make a film more palatable for his public. To be sure, the incident irked Macdonald because it was illustrative of the stasis in American filmmaking. Bitterly mocking the distributor’s logic, Macdonald surmised “the stars don’t appear in it...so lop it off!”³⁴ Surveying the contemporary scene,

³² Macdonald saved some of his most savage venom for those films, foreign and domestic, which demonstrated pretensions towards seriousness. See, for example, his discussion of Lindsay Anderson’s *This Sporting Life* in the May 1964 issue or his December 1961 skewering of *Splendor in the Grass*. In a June 1966 piece, Macdonald fondly recalled his enjoyment of genre films made between 1930 and 1950. Unlike the overwrought moralizing of the “bad good film” (i.e. *Marty*, *On the Beach*, *The Pawnbroker*), films like *Bringing Up Baby*, *Shop Around the Corner* and *Sullivan’s Travels* were deemed “lively” and “authentic” because they accepted their position as entertainment without any claims to seriousness or art. The “good bad movie” was, as Macdonald surmises, a “quite respectable product Hollywood used to make in the thirties and forties before it succumbed to the ravages of Culture.”

³³ The “New Hollywood” here refers to the system of independent production houses which arose in the wake of the demise of the Studio System. Independent firms such as Humphrey Bogart’s Santana Pictures and Burt Lancaster’s Hecht-Lancaster company ostensibly offered directors and actors more discretion and freedom in their work. But as Macdonald sagely points out in a July 1960 column, “they are like prisoners freed too late--Hollywood is in their bones...They are independent financially but dependent aesthetically.” For more on the demise of Hollywood and the rise of the Independents see Thomas Schatz, *Boom and Bust, 1940-1949*, History of the American Cinema Series (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), Thomas Schatz, *The Genius of the System: Hollywood Filmmaking in the Studio Era* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1988), David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Modes of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985).

³⁴ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, February 1964, 34.

Macdonald lamented in a 1966 column, “why can’t we make movies anymore...none of the important postwar schools have been American.”³⁵ .

The important schools, of course, were by and large European. When Macdonald gave a foreign film a bad review, he at least appreciated it as failed art--a far cry from his rejection of the mechanized Hollywood product he loathed. A “work of High Culture,” Macdonald suggested in his “Masscult and Midcult” essay, “however inept, is an expression of feelings, tastes, visions that are idiosyncratic.”³⁶ Significantly, Macdonald noted, Europeans make films as a “personal statement, while ours are the product of technicians whose style is routinized.” This in turn leads to foreign filmmakers creating “a human cinema” which “occasionally throws up a work of art.”³⁷ Despite his distaste for trendy directors like Ingmar Bergman, Macdonald was nevertheless forced to admit that “one is never quite sure what to expect, cinematically, in a Bergman film, a state of suspense I find exhilarating.”³⁸ This was, needless to say, a far cry from the Hollywood film whose design and production Macdonald likened to “a new automobile in Detroit.”³⁹

Nowhere was Macdonald’s praise for European “human cinema” more explicit than in his reviews of Federico Fellini’s *8 1/2*. A lengthy appreciation in the January 1964 issue followed an effusive capsule review in the September 1963 issue.

³⁵ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, August 1966, 16.

³⁶ Macdonald, “Masscult and Midcult,” 5.

³⁷ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, July 1960, 28.

³⁸ *ibid.* 30.

³⁹ *ibid.* 28.

In both pieces Macdonald continually returned to the film's ability to remain "humorous, rhetorical, sensuous, hardheaded, lyrical, full of sharply realistic detail and also of fantastic scenes" while essentially remaining "light, fluid" and "delightfully obvious."⁴⁰ For Macdonald, Fellini's lack of intellectual pretension was the film's strongest suit. This is not to say that Macdonald did not find the film to be profound. Unlike his contemporaries, Macdonald refused to savage the film for its lack of depth. "The 'serious' critics," suggests Macdonald, "have by now become habituated to profound, difficult films which must be 'interpreted' from the language of art...into the language of philosophy."⁴¹ To apply this treatment to *8 1/2* would be to miss the aesthetic pleasures of the text. Macdonald leaves no doubt that this is a pleasurable text. Compared favorably to Mozart's *Magic Flute*, Handel, and other vestiges of Baroque art, Fellini's film is hailed as a masterpiece which succeeds in "being complex but never ambiguous."⁴²

It is clear then that what excited Macdonald was the visceral nature of the medium. Macdonald repeatedly noted how a good film made him feel. In his May 1960 review of the rereleased *Children of Paradise* Macdonald admitted that he "positively skipped out into Eighth Street."⁴³ Likewise, Macdonald informed readers that he went to see Tom Jones "with the oddest mixture of anxiety and

⁴⁰ Dwight Macdonald, "Films," *Esquire*, January 1964, 152.

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Dwight Macdonald, "Films," *Esquire*, September 1963, 50.

⁴³ Dwight Macdonald, "Films," *Esquire*, May 1960, 36.

anticipation.”⁴⁴ Dismissing claims that “Macdonald hates the movies,” Macdonald was adamant that what he loved about the medium was its ability to allow spectators to see the world anew. More than just a storytelling device, film utilizes editing, shot composition and sound in ways which can create new realities. This more than anything contributed to the fiction the “Macdonald hates the movies.” Indeed, films that failed to excite the critic aesthetically were more often than not dismissed as failures. Given the standards Macdonald employed, more films were reviled than hailed. Yet, in reading his reviews of *8 1/2*, *Hiroshima Mon Amour* or *Jules and Jim*, it becomes apparent that Macdonald loved the medium. The attempts of the “serious” critics to interpret films, Macdonald suggests, repeatedly missed this point. For Macdonald, no one was more guilty of corrupting film criticism than the American auteur critics.

While nominally associated with Andre Bazin and *Cahiers du Cinema*, American-style Auteurism found its greatest champion in Andrew Sarris. In a series of articles which culminated in “Notes on the Auteur Theory,” Sarris suggested that the film criticism should, in the final analysis, be concerned with locating the “interior meaning” of a film. “Interior meaning,” Sarris theorizes, “is extrapolated from the tension between a director’s personality and his material.”⁴⁵ For Macdonald, this approach was untenable. Auteurism in principle, Macdonald argues, forces the critic to abrogate the responsibilities his position demands; to evaluate an artwork on

⁴⁴ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, February 1964, 26.

⁴⁵ Andrew Sarris, “Notes on the Auteur Theory” (1962) in *Film Theory and Criticism*, Third Edition, Gerald K Mast and Marshall Cohen, eds. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1985), 538. Sarris’ piece originally appeared in the Winter 1962-63 issue of *Film Culture*.

its aesthetic merit to the exclusion of all other factors. By defending the works of so-called “pantheon directors” as being beyond reproach, the auteurist denies that “even the greatest artists, being men and not gods, are fallible.” Macdonald continues, “the specific objection is that this kind of grading is appropriate to eggs but not to works of art, where the criteria must be more complex because the object judged is more complex.” When faced with a work which is a blatant failure, the auteurist critic engages in “acrobatic feats of *ad hoc* theorizing... in order to defend Hitchcock or Preminger’s latest clinker.”⁴⁶

Macdonald illustrated this in an amendment to his March 1964 review of Otto Preminger’s *The Cardinal* by arguing that “the defects of *The Cardinal* were so patent as to present a real problem to the *politiques des auteurs* ideologues--since in their canon Otto Preminger is a very “in” director.” Citing Andrew Sarris’ review of the film which appeared in the December 12, 1963 issue of the *Village Voice*, Macdonald claims Sarris’ response was “bold and ingenious.” Sarris shared many of Macdonald’s concerns regarding the film. Yet they are all made irrelevant since according to Sarris, “the big merit of *The Cardinal* is the sheer size and audacity of its conception. It has become fashionable in America to overlook the grandeur of Preminger’s design so as to carp at the gaffes of his detail.”⁴⁷ Macdonald, who was never very good at being decorous, refers to these justifications as “hot air.” In short, rather than rewarding sub par filmmaking with undeserved kudos, the critic’s primary responsibility must always be concerned with first, evaluating the text as it is, and

⁴⁶ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, October 1964, 62.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* Macdonald originally took on the auteurists in his October 1963 review of *The Birds*.

secondly, calling for the expansion of the aesthetic possibilities of film art. "Praise is agreeable always," claims Macdonald, "...but I should think it would be more helpful if it were informed, that is, cut by the tartness of criticism, even the acid of rejection."

A case in point is his treatment of the New American Cinema. A long time opponent of the postwar avant-garde, Macdonald saw filmmakers like Jonas Mekas as doing little to advance the cause of aesthetic innovation. In its place, Macdonald contended we got cutting-edge hokum. Where a critic like Stanley Kauffman attempted to soften his blows against Mekas and company by treating them as being full of misguided youthful enthusiasm, Macdonald took joyful aim at them. Referring to such films as *Harlot* and *Hallelujah the Hills* as an affront to film art, he dubbed Andy Warhol as "the Ponzi of the movie world" and Mekas as an "impressive publicity expert."⁴⁸ That such films could prosper, Macdonald, rather than chalking it up to the filmmakers' youth, surmises that impressionable young audiences looking for "real art" will often fall under the spell of the first charlatan to cross their path and "boldly assert they are avant-garde."⁴⁹ Thus we receive the following pronouncements: *Flaming Creatures* is declared as not having "much artistic value," *Cool World* is a disaster, and Cinema 16 devotees are masochists.⁵⁰ On Casavettes

⁴⁸ *Harlot* is reviewed in the August 1966 issue. Macdonald's assessment of *Hallelujah the Hills* can be found in the July 1964 issue.

⁴⁹ Dwight Macdonald, "Films," *Esquire*, August 1966, 16.

⁵⁰ *Flaming Creatures* is mentioned in passing in the August 1966 column. *Cool World* is reviewed in the July 1964 issue. Macdonald's tirade against Amos Vogel's Cinema 16 film society can be found in the April 1962 issue. For more on Cinema 16, see *Cinema 16: Documents Toward a History of the Film Society*, Scott Macdonald, ed. (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002).

second version of *Shadows*, Macdonald proudly proclaimed, “he has been accused of selling out by some of the far-out critics, but I’m glad he did.”⁵¹

Dwight Macdonald’s film criticism was, in the final analysis, the product of a sharp mind that steadfastly refused to join the crowd. A Mencken for the atomic age, Macdonald’s criticism was also eminently readable. John Simon’s “Let Us Now Praise Dwight Macdonald,” is one of the few rare appreciations of Macdonald’s skill as a film critic. Here Simon reminds his readers that one of Macdonald’s chief virtues was his humor. As Simon explains, “this is where Macdonald triumphs. Though his wit can be sharp as anyone’s...he excels at humor, jollity, making his point with good clean fun.”⁵² To be sure, we can find numerous examples of Macdonald’s rhetorical skill. In his infamous piece on *Ben-Hur*, Macdonald suggested that where “Griffith can make a hundred a crowd, Wyler-DeMille can reduce a thousand to a confused cocktail party.”⁵³ Likewise, the Museum of Modern Art is dressed down for hosting retrospectives celebrating the careers of Joe Pasternak and Joseph E. Levine. “These celebrations of Hollywood producers by art museums,” writes Macdonald, “are as if the ASPCA protected the floggers instead of the horses.”⁵⁴

⁵¹ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, March 1962, 16. *Shadows* exists in two versions, the second containing a superfluous credit sequence and a more linear narrative. For correspondence between Casavettes and Cinema 16’s Amos Vogel concerning the two versions see Macdonald, ed. *Cinema 16*.

⁵² John Simon, “Let Us Now Praise Dwight Macdonald,” *Movies into Film*, 1967-1970 (New York: Dial Press, 1971), 410-414. The piece originally appeared in the October 1969 issue of *The New Leader*.

⁵³ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, March 1960, 54.

⁵⁴ Dwight Macdonald, “Films,” *Esquire*, November 1966, 78.

Yet, despite the flippancy, Macdonald's greatest virtue according to Simon, was his sophistication and breadth. As Simon explains,

Macdonald is an educated man, interested in almost all things and knowledgeable about many... it is impossible to read a page of his without feeling in the presence of a man who possesses varied information and dispose of it with a liberality untainted by ostentation.⁵⁵

If Simon's description of Macdonald sounds oddly familiar to that of *Esquire's* Uncommon Man, it is not by accident. Macdonald and *Esquire* both exhibited a wicked iconoclasm and breadth of knowledge which was mutually reciprocated. Richard Schickle once wrote that James Agee's best feature as a critic was "his eagerness to find some silver threads among the dross." This Schickle claimed served as "a necessary corrective to all those critics who could scarcely hide their contempt for movies."⁵⁶ To no one's surprise, this was a not-so-veiled jab at Macdonald. His unwillingness to fall in line with current fashions and his eagerness to speak his mind complimented *Esquire's* discourse of individualism. If we take this into account, the notion of Macdonald having a "Mephistolean beard and an attitude to match" moves beyond being a novel description of the critic and reveals itself as an important feature of Macdonald's public image. Furthermore, Macdonald's acidic wit no longer seems cranky when we find it sharing space with the Dubious Achievement Awards, George Lois covers of Andy Warhol falling into a can of soup or Terry Southern's satiric essays on such varied subjects as Mississippi cheerleaders and Mickey Spillane.

⁵⁵ Simon, "Let Us Praise Dwight Macdonald," 410.

⁵⁶ Richard Schickle, "Introduction," *Second Sight: Notes on Some Movies, 1965-1970* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1972), 23.

No doubt, one of the factors that determined Macdonald's success at *Esquire* was the toughness that backed up his cutting wit. In many ways, Macdonald's film criticism brings to mind another *Esquire* critic—Gilbert Seldes. Though the two spent the bulk of the fifties and sixties locked in a bitter war of words, Macdonald and Seldes nevertheless shared a critical sensibility that was informed by early 20th century modernism. This was especially visible in their identification with a masculinist avant-garde. In his public image, Macdonald projected a variety of qualities *Esquire* readers could identify with. He was a contrarian, an intellectual, a wit, erudite, and tough. A letter published in May 1960 issue cuts to point. "Hiring Dwight Macdonald did it! I must join the chorus of 'egghead' jubilation over the metamorphosis of *Esquire* into something to be read rather than seen. Long live the new editorial policies!"⁵⁷

Section 3: The Uncommon President: *Esquire*, JFK and the Politics of Sophistication

When Arnold Gingrich undertook the task of revitalizing *Esquire* in 1952, he never intended the magazine to be political. By the end of the 1960s, *Esquire* had cultivated a reputation for publishing provocative (and at times inflammatory) political content. Indeed, among mass-market magazines, *Esquire* was one of the few to take an openly oppositional stance to the war in Viet Nam. Indeed, how else do we explain Editor Harold Hayes' decision to dispatch Jean Genet, Terry Southern, William Burroughs and John Sack to cover the 1968 Democratic Convention? Likewise, George Lois's iconoclastic cover for the November 1966 issue (a Hubert Humphrey dummy resting on Lyndon Johnson's knee) was so explicitly unambiguous

⁵⁷ James R. Sloane, Sound and Fury, *Esquire*, May 1960, 14, 16.

in its criticism of Humphrey's defense of the escalating war in Viet Nam that Humphrey would hereafter refer to Lois as "a no good sonofabitch."⁵⁸ Even the most casual perusal of *Esquire* from 1963 onwards, reveals a magazine with an angry, irreverent and subtly radical content that was not too far removed from carnivalesque nose-thumbing found in the more festive underground papers of the day.

Despite all the contrary evidence, Arnold Gingrich continued to insist on the primacy of apolitical lifestyle journalism to *Esquire's* editorial identity. Gingrich, for example, used the occasion of Dwight Macdonald's return to the *Esquire* fold in the January 1967 issue as its resident political commentator to reiterate the contention that "*Esquire...* has no politics of its own."⁵⁹ This in turn contributed to Macdonald's elevation to his new post. As Gingrich continued

This magazine's only ism is, and always has been, againstism. So when a nonpolitical magazine looks for a political columnist, it naturally figures that it couldn't settle for less than a man who.... can be depended upon to be against everybody.⁶⁰

In one sense, Gingrich was correct. *Esquire* was not a political magazine in the way the Nation, Dissent, or the National Review were. This is not to say however that the magazine was bereft of political content. From its beginnings, *Esquire* had dabbled in politics. It was however, the sort of political discourse best reserved for cocktail parties: banal, ill-informed, limited. Gingrich and Publisher David Smart did attempt to launch a bona-fide "magazine of opinion," but *Ken*, like many other of Smart's ill-

⁵⁸ George Lois, *Covering the 60s: The Esquire Era* (New York: Monacelli Press, 1996), 16.

⁵⁹ Arnold Gingrich, "Look Out Politics! Here Comes Macdonald!," *Esquire*, January 1967, 6.

⁶⁰ *ibid.*

fated publishing ventures, failed miserably.⁶¹ As the magazine began its wartime shift to pinups and pulp fiction, the political content began to disappear, save for the blatantly patriotic pieces which were meant to keep War Production Boards satiated. Though a vaguely political piece would occasionally find its way into the magazine in the postwar years, it would not be until the arrival of the “Young Turks” in the late fifties that *Esquire* would see political content with any regularity.

To this end, the 1960 Presidential election and the rise of John F. Kennedy would prove to be vital to the magazine’s development in three ways. First, the upcoming election allowed *Esquire* to expend its newly found cultural capital by showcasing writing by prominent journalists, intellectuals and politicians. Secondly, the emergence of Kennedy gave birth to a rhetoric of remasculinized liberalism. A key figure in this discourse was historian and liberal activist Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. who would publish six pieces in the magazine between 1958 and 1960. Beginning with the call for a “virile political life” in 1958’s “The Crisis of American Masculinity,” Schlesinger’s essays advocating a revitalized liberalism found a receptive home in *Esquire*. A notable feature of these essays is Schlesinger’s not-too-subtle concern with masculinity. This is a salient point to consider particularly since

⁶¹ In the second half of the thirties, Smart had become convinced he could challenge Henry Luce as America’s dominant media tycoon by launching three new magazines: *Coronet*, *Verve* and *Ken*. Of the three, only *Coronet* prospered; surviving well into the sixties. *Ken* (A Scottish slang term for understanding) was originally devised as an alternative to the *Nation* and the *New Masses*. As Hugh Merrill explains, Smart was impressed by the commercial viability of what Michael Denning refers to as CIO culture. Smart, for one, considered it an untapped resource. *Ken* ideally would join the *Esquire*’s brand of lifestyle feature writing with the gruff proletarian writing popularized by the Popular Front (i.e. *Waiting for Lefty*, etc.). The end result however was disastrous. *Ken* folded in only eighteen months. For more on *Ken* see Hugh Merrill, *Esquire: The Early Years at Esquire* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 67-80. For Denning’s discussion of CIO culture see *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (London: Verso, 1997).

the youthful and virile public image of Kennedy was dependent on its differentiation from Richard Nixon and Adlai Stevenson. Finally, and most importantly, Kennedy's image serendipitously mirrors *Esquire's* Uncommon Man in its sophistication, taste, engagement and vibrancy. In a very real sense, Kennedy was the antithesis of the Organization Man. Though the magazine would begin to sour on the President near the end of his term, the initial coverage clearly communicated a familiarity with Kennedy's masculine style.

The cutting irreverence displayed by *Esquire* in the late 1960s did not develop overnight. *Esquire's* movement to political content was at first measured and respectable, relying heavily on noted and well-established political journalists of the day, most notably *New Yorker* Washington correspondent Richard Rovere. As Harold Hayes took increasingly greater control over the magazine's editorial operations, evidence of *Esquire's* sartorial future began to emerge. The editorial content Hayes sought to develop was rife with conflict, contradiction and ambiguity; qualities antithetical to the safer pieces that Clay Felker sought for the magazine. Thus in the months leading up to the 1960 election we find an unusual amalgam of hard-nosed political analysis and the more unorthodox features which would serve as the foundational basis for the "New Journalism."

No issue was more serious than the coming election. For many commentators, the question of who should be president was often as important as the persistent question of what kind of man the president should be. This was a particularly pressing question for the nation's liberal intellectuals who had steadfastly supported Adlai Stevenson in his failed Presidential bids. Throughout the fifties,

popular media outlets such as *Time* had waged a relentless war on those intellectuals who refused to affirm American greatness. Commenting on a *Time* profile of Columbia's Jacques Barzun, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. noted that unlike the article's subject (who was dubbed a "Man of Affirmation"), most American Intellectuals were dismissed as "Men of Protest"; "a disgruntled collection of snobs, grouches and expatriates grumbling and griping in the outer darkness."⁶² Similarly, intellectuals were regularly derided as "eggheads"; a term that had come to illustrate what many Americans disliked about the intellectually inclined, particularly those holding degrees from or associations with the Ivy League schools. As Richard Hofstadter noted, "Eisenhower's decisive victory was taken by both the intellectuals themselves and by their critics as a measure of their repudiation by America."⁶³ Words and phrases like "superficial," "a supporter of middle European socialism," "a person of intellectual pretensions," "supercilious," and, most damningly, "feminine" were regularly associated with the egghead Intellectual.⁶⁴ Even more disturbingly, Intellectuals, particularly those employed by the government as foreign and economic policy experts, were routinely suspected of being part of a homosexual fifth column.⁶⁵

⁶² Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. "Time and the Intellectuals" in *The Politics of Hope* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 233.

⁶³ Hofstadter, *Anti-Intellectualism in American Life*, 4.

⁶⁴ As quoted in Arthur Schlesinger, "The Highbrow in American Politics," *The Politics of Hope* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1963), 222.

⁶⁵ For a discussion of the homophobic dimensions of red-baiting see John D'Emillio, "The Homosexual Menace: The Politics of Sexuality in Cold War America," in *Making Trouble: Essays on Gay History, Politics and the University* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992), 57-73, John D'Emillio, "The Bonds of Oppression: Gay Life in the 1950s" in *Sexual Politics, Sexual Communities: The Making of a Homosexual Minority in the United States, 1940-1970*, Second Edition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998), 40-53, Martin Duberman, *About Time: Exploring the Gay Past*, Revised Edition, (New York: Meridian Books, 1991), Robert Corber, *In the Name of National*

In concert, the “intellectual” label, the constant references to “Adelaide,” the patrician detachment and the public whispering campaign regarding his sexuality had hurt Stevenson immensely. As the 1960 election approached, Democratic activists searched for a candidate who could undo the apparent damage the Stevenson campaigns had inflicted on the party. Within this context, Eric Sevareid’s “The Ideal Candidate” (October 1959), Eleanor Roosevelt’s “Reflections on the Next President” (August 1960) and Arthur Schlesinger’s “The New Mood in Politics” (January 1960) offered *Esquire* readers three distinct meditations on the nature of leadership. Though they differ in varying degrees, each presents a model that is heavily dependent on explicitly gendered constructions of leadership. This response to gender, and masculinity in particular, I suggest, figured prominently in the political fortunes of the Democrats in 1960.

Sevareid was perhaps the most adamant in insisting on a model of leadership marked by a steely resolve and an unshakable inner-strength that could be mastered only by the most self-aware of individualists. In seeking the “ideal candidate”, Sevareid notes that unlike Eisenhower, a man unable to move beyond his “small-town, old fashioned upbringing,” the candidates of 1960 must be men who can “understand society as a pulsing dynamic contest of forces, constantly affected and altered by the power of new ideas and new conditions.” The boldness of the modernist impulse likewise required a man who could stand against the rising tide of mediocrity and conformity that had gripped American life in the postwar era.

Security: Hitchcock, Homophobia and the Political Construction of Gender in Postwar America (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993) and Jennifer Terry, *An American Obsession: Science, Medicine and Homosexuality in Modern Society* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999)

Sevareid, ever the thoughtful student of postwar cultural criticism, cautions readers to heed the danger of wedding the preference for safety and charm over brilliance and accomplishment to the electoral system. To be sure, this explains the success of Dwight Eisenhower, who Sevareid backhandedly compliments as “the ideal candidate.” It is in fact against the very notion of Eisenhower as being an ideal candidate that we find the meat of Sevareid’s critique.⁶⁶

For Sevareid, “idealness” needs to be divorced from electability and reoriented towards the business of governance. The ideal candidate therefore must be more than a charming face readily willing to endorse a Pollyanna-ish world-view. By allowing personality to win, Sevareid suggests political leaders are tacitly reminded that it pays to avoid “the hard and fateful issues.” It was for this reason that the Kennedy candidacy proved worrisome to Sevareid. Unlike Stevenson, Kennedy traded on his charm, personality and good looks. Without a strong record of congressional achievement, Sevareid worried that a Kennedy presidency would only escalate the growing irrelevance of the Presidency. Furthermore, it would leave the United States without strong leadership in a time when it needed it most.⁶⁷

Sevareid’s explicit insistence on the substance of accomplishment over the ephemerality of personality relies heavily on the active and heavily gendered rhetoric of character. To be sure, Sevareid unambiguously articulates this position in his support for the “rule of the men and the boys.” As he explains, “the boys in politics are those individuals who want positions in order to be something; the men are those

⁶⁶ Eric Sevareid, “The Ideal Candidate,” *Esquire*, October 1959, 174-182, 175, 176.

⁶⁷ *ibid.*, 178, 179.

who want positions in order to do something.” Through his insistence that “it is utterly imperative that we elect one of the men,” Severeid imagines a vital, aggressive and confident model of leadership. However, for all of its reliance on nineteenth century models of manliness, Severeid’s leadership model is one that is wholly contemporary in its concerns. On one hand, much of the article acts as an apologia for the oft-maligned masculinity of Adlai Stevenson. In Severeid’s account, it was Stevenson and not the banal and grandfatherly Eisenhower who had demonstrated real leadership. Against the slanderous tag of “Adelaide,” Severeid goes to great lengths to demonstrate that Stevenson had repeatedly proven himself as the more authentic leader. On the other hand, it is impossible to separate Severeid’s discourse on leadership from the pessimistic social analysis of the fifties. Much like the postwar social critics who held individuality as a tonic for conformity, Severeid envisioned vigorous and vital leadership as the mechanism through which the political culture of “blandness” and “compromise” will be broken. In language that clearly echoed Whyte’s *The Organization Man*, Severeid maintained that leadership could not prosper if it is relegated to “feeling all possible pulses before making the first timid steps in any direction.” Effective change, Severeid concludes, can be fomented only when we choose a leader who is willing to take the necessary bold steps. This insistence on “boldness” is apocalyptically reiterated in the article’s conclusion with Severeid’s grave warning that the “American portrait is growing dim.” “Only the boldest strokes from the boldest hands” Severeid adds, can restore the “strong and vivid colors.”⁶⁸

⁶⁸ *ibid.*, 181, 182.

Like Severeid, Eleanor Roosevelt was a former Stevenson supporter who was troubled by the ascendancy of Kennedy and the lack of a credible opposition to the young senator. Though she would ultimately make her peace with Kennedy and serve in his administration, her efforts in the 1960 campaign were resolutely directed to questioning the Senator's qualifications for the Oval Office.⁶⁹ Refraining from the explicit masculinist-utopianist idealism of Severeid's essay, Roosevelt's "Reflections on the Next President" lays out a clear legislative agenda for the coming year: meeting the Soviet threat, breaking the back of Jim Crow segregation, disarmament, environmental stewardship, and strengthening the United Nations as a forum for international disputes. These tasks, Roosevelt reminds *Esquire* readers, require the steady hand of a man who is ready to assume such awesome responsibility. To this end, her language utilizes phrases that reinforce the masculine vitality that the position necessitates. He must have "unchallenged integrity." Likewise, he must educate, meet challenges and reaffirm policy. He must, in short, make the decisions which "may well affect our future well-being as a nation." The resolve and character necessary to carry out these tasks are repeatedly emphasized through the simple employment of "man"; as in "this man in the White House," "this man must meet the challenge," "the man we elect," and so on. Of course, Roosevelt's intention here may have been to undermine confidence in Kennedy by circuitously making his

⁶⁹ For more on the relationship between Eleanor Roosevelt and JFK see Black, *Casting Her Own Shadow: Eleanor Roosevelt and the Shaping of Postwar Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996). See especially chapter six, "Challenging the Party: John F. Kennedy and the Election of 1960." and William E. Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR: From Harry Truman to Bill Clinton, Second Edition* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1993).

youthfulness an issue.⁷⁰ Even if this was the case, it only reinforces heavily gendered construction of leadership so evident in Severeid's essay.

If we consider the intersection of a masculinist model of leadership and a subsequent distrust of Kennedy as being the ties which bind Roosevelt and Severeid together, then the *Esquire* contributions of Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. provide an interesting rejoinder to the leadership debate. Like Severeid and Roosevelt, Schlesinger was a Stevenson confidant and a liberal activist, primarily through the Americans for Democratic Action (ADA). Following Stevenson's defeats in 1952 and 1956, Schlesinger had taken up an advocacy of a pragmatic liberalism to meet the challenges of the prosperous fifties under the banner of qualitative liberalism. As early as 1952, Schlesinger could sense that postwar prosperity and suburbanization had altered the political landscape. Set loose in the new suburban frontier, ethnic whites and the working class, the core constituency of the Democratic Party, began to increasingly turn to the Republicans. For Schlesinger, prosperity and abundance engendered this shift. As he sardonically notes, "having been enabled by Democratic Administrations to live like Republicans, the new suburbanites ended up by voting like Republicans." Regeneration could only occur by shifting liberalism away from New Deal concerns (i.e. poverty, industrial regulation, housing, etc.) towards the politics of affluence, or as Schlesinger would put it in a 1956 Reporter essay, from quantitative to qualitative liberalism.⁷¹

⁷⁰ Eleanor Roosevelt, "Reflections on the Next President," *Esquire*, August 1960, 45-46. The animosity between Kennedy and Roosevelt reached critical mass when Roosevelt sent Kennedy a condescending telegram that began, "MY DEAR BOY I ONLY SAY THESE THINGS FOR YOUR OWN GOOD." Leuchtenburg, *In the Shadow of FDR*, 80.

⁷¹ Schlesinger, "The Challenge of Abundance," 8, 9.

Schlesinger's activism took a number of forms in the 1950s. Having already gained recognition for his work on behalf of Stevenson, the ADA and other liberal organizations, Schlesinger became a much-sought after essayist, producing numerous pieces which to the horror of many historians and ADA liberals appeared in such unlikely forums as *Life*, the *Saturday Evening Post*, *Colliers*, *Vogue* and *Esquire*.⁷² Schlesinger also continued practicing history by producing a three-volume biography of Franklin D. Roosevelt. *The Age of Roosevelt* [*The Crisis of the Old Order* (1957), *The Coming of the New Deal* (1959) and *The Politics of Upheaval* (1960)] was a monumental work of activist historiography, which invoked Van Wyck Brooks' notion of a "usable past." In the main, Schlesinger disparaged teleological, mechanistic models of historiography (i.e. Marxist history) as "a form of myth which abandons testable propositions, moves beyond tangible evidence, and commits itself to the notion that the past has a single unique structure."⁷³ What history did provide was a series of lessons or explanations available to guide historically-minded policy-makers. "A President," Schlesinger noted in 1960, "must be deeply soaked in the traditions of the country to have an instinctive grasp of the resources and responsibilities of his job."⁷⁴ As evidenced by the Presidential "cram course" Schlesinger had developed for *Esquire*'s September 1960 issue, the lessons of history

⁷² Schlesinger however saved his most substantial pieces for the political opinion establishment: *The New York Times*, the *Nation*, and the *New Republic*. The best of these essays are collected in *The Politics of Hope* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1963).

⁷³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "The Thread of History: Freedom or Fatality?" *Reporter*, 15 December 1955, 45-47. For a comprehensive treatment of Schlesinger's public and academic work see Stephen P. Depoe, *Arthur M. Schlesinger, Jr. and the Ideological History of American Liberalism*, Studies in Rhetoric and Communication series (Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1994).

⁷⁴ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., "Cram Course for the Next President," *Esquire*, September 1960.

required a fertile and flexible mind in order to be absorbed. From idealistic treatises (i.e. Herbert Croly's *The Promise of American Life*) to clear-eyed studies (R.F. Fenno's *The President's Cabinet*), Schlesinger's Presidential reading list holds a "limitless curiosity" as axiomatic to the responsibilities of the Office of the President.⁷⁵

It should be of little surprise then that Kennedy had been an enthusiastic reader of the Age of Roosevelt or that he often drew on Schlesinger's analysis of "heroic leadership" in his first days in office.⁷⁶ As such, it is nearly impossible to extricate the Age of Roosevelt from the context of its writing, particularly if we consider the portrait of the vigorous and sharp-witted leader sketched out by Schlesinger. An especially pertinent example can be found in the conclusion to *The Coming of the New Deal*, where Schlesinger asserted the vital necessity of being able to negotiate the lessons of the past and the challenges of the future. FDR's "heroic leadership" rested largely on his understanding of the responsibility of the President to create a vision of America's place in the world. As Schlesinger writes

Implanted within him, there must be an image...of the kind of America he wants, of the vision of the American promise he is dedicated to realize, of the direction he believes the world is moving...It was this astonishing instinct for the future which above all distinguished Roosevelt.⁷⁷

⁷⁵ *ibid.*, 60.

⁷⁶ James MacGregor Burns, *John Kennedy: A Political Profile* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1959), 217. Leuchtneburg, *In the Shadow of FDR*, 99.

⁷⁷ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Coming of the New Deal* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1959), 587.

Schlesinger's prescription for Presidential leadership was double-edged. Unlike Eisenhower, Roosevelt never had to appoint a Presidential commission to define what the national purpose was.

As noted by Allen Matusow, the thorny question of national purpose was an unavoidable issue in the 1960 campaign.⁷⁸ To this end, Schlesinger's "The New Mood in Politics," first published in *Esquire* in January 1960, attempted to synthesize an entire decade's worth of work on the future of postwar liberalism by providing a vision of national purpose which was heavily dependent upon a vigorous resurgent liberalism.⁷⁹ Engaging the cyclical model first developed by his father in 1949, Schlesinger claimed that the United States was on the brink of a new political cycle, one which will be "spirited, articulate, inventive, incoherent, turbulent."⁸⁰ In its most simplified and unsophisticated form, the cyclical model Schlesinger engaged simply suggests that American political history can be understood as a series of cycles in which a specific *mentelite* presides. For Schlesinger, this is most clearly marked by the back and forth shifts between epochs of advancement and consolidation where activist political cultures give way to passive caretaker governments. Subsequently, discontent over the lack of a "national purpose" would surface and foment a return to an engaged political culture. Not surprisingly, the upward motion of the cycle was

⁷⁸ Allan J. Matusow, "Kennedy and the Intellectuals," *Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 7, No. 4 (Autumn 1983): 140-153, 147.

⁷⁹ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. "The New Mood in Politics," *Esquire*, January 1960, 58-60.

⁸⁰ *ibid.*, 60. For the origins of Schlesingerian cyclical history see Arthur Schlesinger, Sr., *The Paths to the Present*, (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1949), 93-98. Schlesinger, Jr. later synthesized his thinking on cyclical history in "The Cycles of American Politics" in *The Cycles of American History* (Boston: Houghton-Mifflin, 1986), 23-48.

most often identified with a Democratic administration, while Republicans presided over the eventual downward motion. In the case of the 1960s, the turbulence and crisis of the Great Depression, the New Deal and World War II had given way the torporific 1950s. The decade in turn produced a political culture marked by “fatigue” and “exhaustion” in which crises, both foreign and domestic, had been pushed aside so as not to contradict the dominant discourse of affluence and prosperity. By Schlesinger’s estimation then, the 1960s would produce a vibrant political culture of “reorientation” which would exude the qualities of “motion,” “leadership,” and “hope.”

“The New Mood in Politics” is a key piece for Schlesinger in that it reaffirms a number of themes that had been present in his work while reconsidering and modifying others. The qualitative liberalism Schlesinger had trumpeted in the mid-fifties was very much present, particularly in the author’s clear distinction between the issues of the past and those of the so-called “new period.” While he repeats much of the rhetoric found in 1956’s “The Challenge of Abundance,” the tone had changed noticeably. Influenced by the growing prominence of sociological and journalistic critiques of the mass culture, Schlesinger’s *Esquire* essay refocuses his earlier efforts at uplifting “the quality of civilization” to a direct engagement with mass culture. The problem of “spiritual malaise” Schlesinger had eluded to 1956 had become a full-fledged “desire for reappraisal, the groping for something better.” Citing such varied phenomenon as the Beat Generation, Billy Graham, the revival of satire and the surprise success of tomes like *The Affluent Society*, *The Lonely Crowd* and *Doctor Zhivago* as examples of the desire for a “renewal of conviction” that the new politics

of the 1960s is engendering. At the heart of the new politics is an indictment of postwar consumption for creating the conditions in which the intolerable sense of dislocation and purposelessness is allowed to foment.⁸¹ In one striking passage Schlesinger rejects the contention of economists like Raymond J. Saulneir who suggest that the “ultimate purpose (of the economy) is to produce more consumer goods.” Sounding very much like Vance Packard, Schlesinger retorts

Not to produce better people or better schools or better health or better national defense or better opportunities for cultural and spiritual fulfillment--but to produce more gadgets and gimmicks to overwhelm our bodies and distract our minds.⁸²

Most damningly, this fascination with consumption had produced a misalignment in national priorities by shifting away from the common good in favor of private gain. This, in turn, produces a nation unable to compete with the Soviet Union. To be sure, the essay is permeated by a vigorous anti-Communist rhetoric that harkens back to *The Vital Center's* exhortations to restore a “resolute breed of men capable of the climactic effort” of defending democracy.⁸³

Like the essays by Severeid and Roosevelt, Schlesinger’s “The New Mood in Politics” is clear in its contempt for the leadership vacuum that had marked political life in the fifties. Where Schlesinger differs is in his barely veiled support for Kennedy. Not surprisingly, Schlesinger writes in *A Thousand Days* that Kennedy’s search for an identity was stimulated in large part by a memorandum Schlesinger had

⁸¹ *ibid.*, 58, 60.

⁸² *ibid.*, 60.

⁸³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *The Vital Center*, Rev. Ed. with New Introduction, (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1962), 256.

written which bore the suitably academic title “The Shape of National Politics to Come.” As Schlesinger describes the content of the memorandum, it becomes increasingly clear that it served as the basis for “The New Mood in Politics.” “Aspects of this argument,” Schlesinger surmises, “...evidently corresponded to things which Kennedy for some time felt himself.”⁸⁴ It is especially worthwhile to take note of Schlesinger’s near obsession with vigor and vitality in his framing of the new politics of the 1960s. Where Severeid saw these qualities as the hallmarks of a vacuous, image-obsessed media culture, Schlesinger sees them as being central ingredients to leadership in the age of the new politics. More to the point, they are necessary in large part because the political mood which will give birth to the dynamic new politics of the 1960s is inchoate, “a moment of doubt and suspense and anticipation” as Schlesinger characterizes it. In the final analysis, the function of the strong leader is not to negotiate a series of concrete challenges, which lie before him, but to harness the unformed political energy of the age.

If the American public was waiting for “a trumpet to sound,” there can be little doubt that in Schlesinger’s estimation Kennedy was the anointed trumpet blower. Having been a supporter of Kennedy’s since at least 1959, Schlesinger had become one of his most fervent advocates. Even with possibility of a third Stevenson campaign looming on the horizon, Schlesinger embraced Kennedy as being a serious man whose worldview balanced pragmatism with idealism. Moreover, the Kennedy charm that Severeid had so reviled had drawn Schlesinger to the Senator. Of his first visit to Hyannis Port, Schlesinger recalls being enamored by Kennedy’s “easy and

⁸⁴ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days: John F. Kennedy in the White House* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1965), 26.

casual wit.”⁸⁵ Similarly, in making the choice between Kennedy and Humphrey, Schlesinger admitted that he (along with John Kenneth Galbraith) found himself bound to Kennedy by “increasingly strong ties of affection and respect.”⁸⁶

Schlesinger was particularly committed to the Kennedy cause in large part because he saw Kennedy as the only legitimate successor to the pragmatic liberalism of Franklin D. Roosevelt. As he would later write in *A Thousand Days*, Kennedy and Roosevelt were both “natural Presidents.”⁸⁷ Furthermore, as an intellectual, Schlesinger publicly admired Kennedy’s fertile mind. Unlike Stevenson, Kennedy

was a man of action who could pass easily over to the realm of ideas and confront intellectuals with perfect confidence in his capacity to hold his own. His mind was not prophetic, impassioned, mystical, ontological, utopian, or ideological.....It had its own salient qualities-- it was objective, practical, ironic, skeptical, unfettered and insatiable.⁸⁸

Schlesinger had bitterly endured the anti-intellectual barbs thrown at Stevenson during the 1952 and 1956 campaigns. In Kennedy, he saw a politician who was not only Stevenson’s intellectual equal but a vigorous and charismatic figure as well.

The undeniable magnetism of Kennedy’s movie idol good looks and dapper fashion sense elevated him beyond most politicians, especially the dull and unimaginative Richard Nixon. In his memorable account of the 1960 convention, Norman Mailer echoed many of these sentiments by dismissing Stevenson as a ‘tired man with lame jokes’ while celebrating Kennedy as the “hipster as presidential

⁸⁵ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 25.

⁸⁶ *ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁷ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. *A Thousand Days*, 620.

⁸⁸ *ibid.*, 103

candidate.”⁸⁹ “The nation’s psyche,” he quipped, “must shiver in its sleep at the image of Mickey Mantle-cum-Lindbergh in office.” As the November election approached, Mailer wondered, “Would the nation be brave enough to enlist the romantic dream of itself, would it vote for the image in the mirror of its unconscious?”⁹⁰ Kennedy was, in the words of Joseph Alsop, “A Stevenson with balls.”⁹¹ Ultimately, whatever Kennedy’s actual policies may have been, the image he portrayed ran counter to that of the emasculated Organization Man. To be sure, Kennedy, or more precisely the public image of Kennedy, was an avatar of a new masculine style--a style which found a very comfortable home in the pages of *Esquire*. As such, Kennedy was inextricably linked to the project of a remasculinized liberalism.

Remasculinization is, by definition, a symbolic reversal of castration. Where emasculation denotes powerlessness and ineffectiveness, remasculinization should in turn suggest a restoration of the lost power. By explicitly linking masculine identity to self-awareness and enrichment, Schlesinger, writing in 1958’s “The Crisis of American Masculinity” defines this reversal in terms which refute the gynophobic nature of the postwar “masculine crisis” rhetoric and thus refuse to equate masculinity solely in terms of violence or gender-based power relations. Rather Schlesinger pushes the debate further by placing the self into an oppositional relationship with an other-directed culture of “glad-handers” and “organization men.” As such,

⁸⁹ Norman Mailer, “Superman Comes to the Supermart,” *Esquire*, November 1960, 125, 123.

⁹⁰ *ibid.*, 127.

⁹¹ Quoted in David Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest* (New York: Random House, 1969), 24.

remasculinization takes on an additional layer in its deliberate attempt to redefine the very definition of masculinity by displacing brutish manliness with a more refined and “Kennedy-esque” sense of gender identity; a point emphasized through his claim that “coolness itself was a new frontier. It meant freedom from the stereotyped response of the past.”⁹² This point is particularly well-taken in the inevitable comparisons between Kennedy and Nixon.

In September 1960, a lengthy pamphlet by Schlesinger was published under the title, *Kennedy or Nixon: Does it Make Any Difference?* further solidifying the image of Kennedy as the candidate for the new age.⁹³ Almost as if to silence those critics like Severeid who saw little depth to the Senator, the pamphlet went to great lengths to assure voters of Kennedy’s intellectual mettle and liberal convictions. Repeatedly Schlesinger reminded readers that Kennedy is committed, opinionated, resolute, bookish, engaged. At one point, Schlesinger goes as far as to dub the Senator as “exceptionally cerebral.”⁹⁴ Nixon on the other hand is dismissed as “other-directed,” “obsessed with the appearances rather than the reality of things,” and most damningly a “hollow man.”⁹⁵ In conjuring up the specter of the dreaded “Organization Man,” Schlesinger engages tactics similar to those employed by *Esquire*’s profiles of business leaders in his project of discrediting Nixon. In short, Kennedy was intellectually and experientially better prepared to lead the nation as it

⁹² Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*,

⁹³ Arthur Schlesinger, Jr., *Kennedy or Nixon: Does it Make Any Difference?* (Macmillan: New York, 1960).

⁹⁴ *ibid.*, 23.

⁹⁵ *ibid.*, 23, 18, 17.

faced a new world “in which the American people quickly collected itself for greater exertions and higher splendors in the future.”⁹⁶ .

The path from the “New Mood” to the New Frontier however was hardly preordained. Running alongside Schlesinger’s piece in the January 1960 issue were the results of an informal poll *Esquire* had commissioned which asked nation’s political, cultural and intellectual establishment who they believed should be President and what the key issues were. Of the 54 individuals who were questioned, an overwhelming majority (16) had come out for an as-of-then undeclared Adlai Stevenson, with only 5 coming out for Kennedy.⁹⁷ Among the respondents who had shown a preference for a Democratic candidate, be it Stevenson, Humphrey, Kennedy or Johnson, the issues at stake were surprisingly consistent. In addition to foreign affairs, civil rights and economic policy, respondents repeatedly called for an aggressive response to the changing tenor of life in postwar America, a “reawakening in the (American) mentality” as Poet John Ciardi put it, as being central to the 1960 race. Kennedy supporter Norman Mailer was even more blunt in his support for the Senator. By electing Kennedy, Mailer muses, “Washington politics would become less pious, and so give a grain of relief to a crucial American problem of our decade--the national boredom.”⁹⁸ Mailer, of course, would reiterate this claim in his widely-

⁹⁶ Schlesinger, “The New Mood in Politics,” 60.

⁹⁷ Walter Friedenber, “Who Should Be President in 1960? What Should the Issues Be?” *Esquire*, January 1960, 61-65. Crane Briton, Richard Chase, Malcolm Cowley, John Kenneth Galbraith, and Norman Mailer were the respondents who had identified themselves as Kennedy supporters. The remaining respondents had named Richard Nixon, Hubert Humphrey, Nelson Rockefeller, Lyndon Johnson, Styles Bridges, and Barry Goldwater as candidates they would support. Surprisingly however, after Stevenson, the largest bloc of votes (10) came from those who had refrained from selecting a specific candidate.

⁹⁸ *ibid.*, 63.

celebrated account of the 1960 Democratic Convention.⁹⁹ Yet he was not the first to notice the unconventional nature of the Senator in the pages of *Esquire*.

Famed political journalist Richard Rovere penned a cautious profile of Kennedy for the April 1959 *Esquire* in which he saw in Kennedy “freshness, vigor, even a kind of innocence” that had been desperately absent in American politics.¹⁰⁰ A close friend and confidant of Schlesinger (the two had co-authored *The General and the President* only a few years earlier), Rovere admits in his memoir that the final years of the Eisenhower administration were “sterile and depressing”¹⁰¹ The cruel irony for Rovere was that Kennedy’s youthfulness (both in appearance and personality) was fleeting, thus making 1960 the “last chance” for the Senator to seek the presidency.¹⁰² Painfully aware that the “bright glow of youth,” could only last for so long, Kennedy struggled to establish himself as a strong contender. To be sure, Kennedy was among the first politicians to understand the political value of a highly manipulated public image.

Kennedy had won the election of 1960 bolstered largely by his understanding of the dawning of a new media order and the centrality of image. W. J. Rorabaugh, for example, notes that Kennedy’s strategy of seeking the nomination via primaries rather than through the more traditional route of backroom deal-making required a

⁹⁹ Norman Mailer, “Superman Comes to the Supermart”, *Esquire*, November 1960.

¹⁰⁰ Richard Rovere, “Kennedy’s Last Chance to be President,” *Esquire*, April 1959, 65.

¹⁰¹ Richard Rovere, *Final Reports: Personal Reflections on Politics and History in Our Time* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1984), 152.

¹⁰² *ibid.*

substantial investment in the techniques of modern selling, leading Izzy Stone to carp that Kennedy stunk of the “phony smell of advertising copy.”¹⁰³ In a caustic reassessment of the Kennedy legacy, Gary Wills goes so far as to suggest that Kennedy’s obsession with image management resulted in an “Appearances Presidency” (as opposed to Nixon’s Imperial Presidency).¹⁰⁴ For example, it mattered little that privately Kennedy preferred Ian Flemming spy novels, Broadway musicals, Frank Sinatra or *Playboy* over the canonical high culture the White House publicly welcomed and encouraged. What did matter however was that Kennedy’s private taste did not interfere with the public perception of his administration as witty, cosmopolitan, sophisticated and refined. For critics like Wills, the pronounced split between the public and the private was unforgivably duplicitous and manipulative because it denied access to the authentic self. Of course, this assumes there exists such a thing as an authentic self. If we read Kennedy in this manner, we see not a master conniver, but arguably the first postmodern President; a simulacrum of presidential leadership. Moreover, Kennedy’s creation of the “Kennedy Image” returns us to the discourse of self-actualization discussed earlier in this chapter--but with one crucial difference.¹⁰⁵ Social critics such as Wills understood self-actualization as being largely dependent on a coherent Cartesian subject so central to

¹⁰³ W. J. Rorabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 11-12. I. F. Stone quoted in Roroabaugh, *Kennedy and the Promise of the Sixties*, 12. Originally in *I.F. Stone’s Weekly*, 07 Nov. 1960, 1.

¹⁰⁴ Gary Willis, *The Kennedy Imprisonment: A Meditation on Power* (Boston: Little Brown and Company, 1981), 149.

¹⁰⁵ It should be understood that John Kennedy was not the sole author of the “Kennedy Image.” A vast army of writers, publicists, spokesmen and pollsters, largely funded by Joe Kennedy’s fortune, were employed in the task of creating the image. In this sense, “Kennedy” should be read as denoting a corporate body. See Willis, *The Kennedy Imprisonment*, 127-150.

Wills' critique. In the case of Kennedy, the self that emerges was provisional, flexible and pragmatic.

This new sense of (political) self would receive one of its clearest expositions in Richard Rovere's "Gauging the Possibilities." Unlike many liberals, Schlesinger chief among them, Rovere recognized the inauthenticity of the Kennedy administration's public face. Rather than berate them, Rovere saw the Frontiersmen and their Chief as sophisticated political operators. For Rovere, the sophisticated politician understands one rule above all others--that "the essence of political adjustment is the appraisal of potential."¹⁰⁶ In short, what Rovere describes is the pragmatic realism advocated by Hans J. Morgenthau, Reinhold Neibuhr and Kenneth Waltz. For them realism was not the product of idealism but a response to "a hostile world."¹⁰⁷ To this end, political sophisticates like Kennedy, Roosevelt, and Martin Luther King, Jr. acknowledged the necessity of joining idealism to a practicality of means. And unlike Barry Goldwater (the apex of political boorishness according to Rovere), political sophisticates embraced the dictum of flexibility. As Rovere continues, sophistication arrives from recognizing that

there is nothing immoral or unfaithful in discarding an idea that has lost its youthful charm. . . Ideas do no demand to be adored; they demand to be studied and applied when it is useful to apply them

"Politics," Rovere concludes, "is the art of the possible and the possible is always in flux."¹⁰⁸

¹⁰⁶ Richard Rovere, "Gauging the Possibilities," *Esquire*, July 1961, 31-34.

¹⁰⁷ Robert Booth Fowler, *Believing Skeptics: American Political Intellectuals, 1945-1964*, Contributions in Political Science series (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1978), 139.

¹⁰⁸ Rovere, "Gauging the Possibilities," 34.

“Gauging the Possibilities” originally appeared as part of *Esquire*’s scene-setting July 1961 special issue on the so-called “New Sophistication.” Like the other entries in that issue, Rovere’s piece sought to map out a model of sophistication which, following Stephen White, was marked by an awareness of the world that “commands the...virtues of breadth, judgment, and self-assurance.”¹⁰⁹ There can be little doubt that these were qualities that informed the public image of John F. Kennedy in crucial ways. Moreover these Kennedy-esque “currents of vitality” were ones that *Esquire* wished to have itself attached to.¹¹⁰ The New Frontiersmen, as they were known, made no secret of their love of literature and the arts. Moreover, they were a dapper bunch that paid attention to their carefully tailored appearance. Finally, as David Halberstam reveals in *The Best and the Brightest*, they were a competitive and virile crew who “played squash and handball to stay fit” and who “climbed mountains to clear their minds.”¹¹¹ As far as the tastemakers at *Esquire* were concerned, the frenetic buzz emanating from Washington was perfectly suited to the magazine’s editorial identity.

One of Kennedy’s greatest virtues in *Esquire*’s eyes was his impeccable fashion sense. So admired was his taste in clothes that, as legend has it, Kennedy’s desire to go hatless set off an irreversible decline in hat sales.¹¹² *Esquire*

¹⁰⁹ Stephen White, “Defining the Term,” *Esquire*, July 1961, 43.

¹¹⁰ Schlesinger, *A Thousand Days*, 201.

¹¹¹ Halberstam, *The Best and the Brightest*, 40.

¹¹² Neil Steinberg, *Hatless Jack: The President, the Fedora, and the History of American Style* (New York: Plume Books, 2004).

acknowledged Kennedy's fashion-setting with a January 1962 spread, "The Monogram on this Man's Shirt is JFK." Rather than dressing up a series of models in "Kennedy style" suits, the spread instead engaged a series of photos of the President and described in detail some facet of the ensemble: ties, shirts, handkerchief, etc. Kennedy's suits for example eschewed the then-popular style of three buttons and thin lapels for a unique tapered cut which was finished off by a wider lapel and the return of the two-button single breast.¹¹³ In its appearance, the Kennedy suit was a perfect compliment to the Kennedy image. On one hand, Kennedy's preference for tapered cuts, dark colors and thin ties showed the unmistakable influence of the European designers who had made their mark with the International Style suit. On the other hand, the wide lapels and the return of the two-button jacket harkened back to the canonical style of the Brooks Brothers suit. The Kennedy Style was in other words a series of hybrids which informed the Kennedy image: conservative and modern, American and Continental, businesslike and high-fashion. *Esquire* too was produced from a similar series of hybrids. In its pages, literature and serious non-fiction thrived alongside Richard Joseph travel essays, send-ups of popular culture, loving (almost masturbatory) photospreads of new cars, Dwight Macdonald film reviews and an almost limitless series of ads which repeatedly congratulated the *Esquire* reader for his good taste. The cultural intermediaries at *Esquire* recognized the significance of the Kennedy image and followed suit.¹¹⁴ For at last, the Uncommon Man had found a champion.

¹¹³ "The Monogram on This Man's Shirt is JFK," *Esquire*, January 1962, 35-38.

¹¹⁴ David Newman and Robert Benton, "The New Sentimentality," *Esquire*, July 1964, 25-31.

Following the Kennedy's assassination, *Esquire* editor Harold Hayes tapped *New York Times* White House correspondent Tom Wicker to produce a profile of the slain leader. Wicker's assignment was a relatively simple one: go beyond the panegyrics and the "coming immortality" and produce a portrait of the President as a human being. Lauded by publisher Arnold Gingrich as "one of the most perceptive and profound pieces of writing to ever grace these pages," the resultant article, "Kennedy Without Tears," revealed a complex man who embodied the contradictions that characterized American attitudes to public service.¹¹⁵ With little sense of irony, Wicker's Kennedy was a committed idealist who excelled at the cynical "game" of politics. Wicker for example writes of being so moved by a Kennedy speech at the Hollywood Palladium in 1963 that he had convinced his editors at the *Times* to hold space so as to reprint what had been a "major address." In preparing the speech for his editors, Wicker realized that what had stirred him was not the words but the delivery. "There was nothing there," Wicker lamented, "nothing but rhetoric and delivery." For Wicker, the Palladium speech became an instance where Kennedy "had been playing the game unusually well."¹¹⁶

In the forty-plus years since Kennedy was felled by an assassin's bullet, the enigma at the heart of Wicker's portrait, the idealist vs. the game-player, continues to inform much of the writing on Kennedy. The "posthumous lives" of Kennedy, as Alan Brinkley judiciously points out, are disconnected from Kennedy the man and instead embody the myths and counter-myths through which we come to understand

¹¹⁵ Arnold Gingrich, "How Much Can You Tell a Magazine About its Cover?" *Esquire*, June 1964, 6. Tom Wicker, "Kennedy Without Tears," *Esquire*, June 1964, 108-111, 138-140.

¹¹⁶ Wicker, "Kennedy Without Tears," 140.

the Sixties.¹¹⁷ His biographers have in turn portrayed him as an idealist, a cynic, a realist, a bungler, an Machiavellian opportunist, the model of vigor, an invalid beset by a mind-boggling array of ailments, a hedonist. Any attempt to posit a Kennedy legacy is complicated by these multiple versions of Kennedy circulating through the historical consciousness. This should however not prevent us from the task.

For historians of masculinity, Kennedy is a decisive figure. The inability to pin down a single version of Kennedy serves as a convenient metaphor for the difficult job of producing definitive models of masculinity. Already complicated by race, class and sexuality, the fiction of a coherent and universal masculinity was further challenged in the postwar period by the emergent regime of lifestyle. As the mass market began to crumble in the mid-fifties under the pressure of the nascent science of market segmentation research, masculinity bifurcated into dozens of niches and target markets. Increasingly, men came to understand this new unstable reality. Where some retreated into a misogynistic utopian prehistory where men were men, others embraced the new ethic. Of course, as the history of masculinity has shown us, masculinity was never stable, singular or universal. What changed dramatically after World War II was the recognition of this fact as the cornerstone of the postmodern postwar economy. It is for this reason Kennedy is so crucial. Certainly, the style of Kennedy's masculinity was far from original. In it, we find the whole range of anti-Organizational masculine styles of the postwar era. The genius of Kennedy,

¹¹⁷ Alan Brinkley, "The Posthumous Lives of John F. Kennedy," *Liberalism and its Discontents* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998). The phrase "counter-myths" is attributed to neo-conservative revisionists Peter Collier and David Horowitz, *The Kennedy's: An American Drama* (New York: Summit Books, 1984).

however, was the articulation of this style in a way that legitimized it as a credible alternative to the timid, soft, gray-flannel Organization Man.

Section 4: Intolerable Celebrity: The (Public) Passion of Norman Mailer

In the wake of John F. Kennedy's victory over Richard Nixon in 1960, Norman Mailer proclaimed that it was his *Esquire* essay, "Superman Comes to the Supermart," that had tipped the scales in Kennedy's favor. In characterizing Kennedy as a youthful and vigorous antidote to the torpor of Eisenhowerian America, Mailer claimed his piece "added the one ingredient Kennedy had not been able to find for the stew--it made him seem exciting."¹¹⁸ As dubious as this claim may be, Mailer's essay proved to be important in other ways. Leaving behind the aesthetic and commercial failures of *The Deer Park* and *Barbary Shore*, Mailer would emerge in the 1960s as one of the most outspoken and bombastic critics of American life, producing what Morris Dickstein has called a "running autobiographical dialogue with the world."¹¹⁹ As Dickstein continues, Mailer consciously gravitated towards journalism (though he refused the title of journalist) because he sought "recognition outside of the accepted literary channels."¹²⁰ Crucially, *Esquire* initially pushed Mailer in this direction and provided the author with an important forum in which he cultivated the bellicose style and persona that first emerged in *Advertisements for Myself*.

¹¹⁸ Norman Mailer quoted in Mary V. Dearborn, *Mailer: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Co., 1999), 153.

¹¹⁹ Morris Dickstein, *Gates of Heaven: American Culture in the Sixties*, 2nd Edition (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997), 145.

¹²⁰ *ibid.*, 145.

In his recent study of celebrity authorship, Loren Glass argues persuasively that Mailer is the last celebrity author in the mold established by such noted modernists as Ernest Hemingway, Gertrude Stein and Henry James.¹²¹ An important suggestion in Glass' work is the assertion that Mailer is, in one sense, the last modernist. This is not just a statement regarding Mailer's literary style. In what follows, I suggest that Mailer's modernism responds to the same masculinist ideology of authentic individuality and heroic masculinity that informed the criticism of Dwight Macdonald and Gilbert Seldes. Unlike Macdonald and Seldes, however, Mailer's *Esquire* contributions vividly illustrate the waning power of modernism as an aesthetic practice and as a cultural sensibility.

Norman Mailer made his *Esquire* debut in the April 1953 issue with the short story "The Language of Men." Though this *Naked and the Dead*-era story of an embattled Army cook was widely praised by *Esquire* editors and readers alike, Mailer would not make a return appearance in *Esquire* until November 1959's "The Mind of an Outlaw." A reprint of the a chapter from the then forthcoming *Advertisements for Myself*, the piece detailed Mailer's Sisyphean struggle to publish *The Deer Park*. Two months later *Esquire* published "She Thought the Russians was Coming," an impressionistic account of life among Brooklyn street gangs that accompanied a photo-essay by Bruce Davidson.

In the November 1960 issue *Esquire* published, "Superman Comes to the Supermart," Mailer's celebrated account of the Democratic convention in which he famously identified John Kennedy as an existentialist hipster. Though the piece was

¹²¹ Loren Glass, *Authors, Inc.: Literary Celebrity in the Modern United States, 1880-1980* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 177.

widely praised for its abandonment of objective journalistic practice in favor of a highly impressionistic commentary, it very nearly ended Mailer's association with *Esquire*. Mailer complained of being shut out of the editing process, of editorial interference ("Supermart" had been substituted for "Supermarket") and the use of an old publicity photo of himself in the "Backstage" feature. Incensed over the apparent ill will the magazine had generated through these actions, Mailer announced in a letter published in the January 1961 "Sound and Fury" section that he was severing his ties to the magazine. "You got a good mag," wrote the author, ". . .but you gotta treat the hot writer right, or you'll lose him like you lost me."

The separation was short-lived. Mailer came back to *Esquire* in the July 1962 issue with his berating of Jacqueline Kennedy's televised tour of the White House. With this piece, Mailer began the most productive period of his association with *Esquire*. From 1962-1964, Mailer authored 26 pieces of varying length, culminating in 1964 with the eight-part serialization of *An American Dream*. At face value, it would appear that Mailer was a good fit at *Esquire* since his writing combined a certain degree of modernist intellectual sophistication with a hard-nosed masculinity. In other words, just the sort of thing to offset the charges of feminization and dandification that had been slung at the magazine since the late 1950s. As Hugh Merrill notes, Mailer was the magazine's "hairy chest," a function once executed by his literary hero Ernest Hemingway.¹²²

What occasioned this reversal? To begin with, Mailer returned to *Esquire* only after the magazine had agreed to run an apology for offending the author. In

¹²² Hugh Merrill, *Esquire: The Early Years at Esquire* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 148.

turn, Mailer had offered (or demanded, by some accounts) to write a monthly column and three features. The guaranteed fee was exorbitant (\$700 a column), but was rationalized through the argument that *Esquire* had paid a similarly inflated fee to secure the services of Ernest Hemingway in the 1930s.¹²³ Furthermore, Mailer demanded control over his pieces. As per the agreement, Mailer could kill a piece rather than allowing *Esquire*'s editors to bowdlerize it. Fearing losing Mailer for a second time, the editors were faced with a choice, as Carol Polsgrove notes, between "too much Mailer or no Mailer at all."¹²⁴

Dealing with Mailer's temperamental demands was a small price to pay for securing the services of a writer of his stature, they reasoned. This is not to say that all of the editors were keen on Mailer. Arnold Gingrich and Harold Hayes found Mailer to be particularly irksome and difficult to work with. A longtime friend and admirer of Hemingway, Gingrich was especially put off by Mailer's claim to Hemingway's legacy. Despite Gingrich's distaste for Mailer, the author's mix of masculine braying and quasi-mystical hokum appealed to a wide-swath of *Esquire*'s readership who looked to him as an important commentator on American life. Mailer, however, had numerous supporters, particularly amongst the younger members of the editorial staff. Of this group, Fiction Editor L. Rust Hills was Mailer's key champion. Hills had authored the apology letter which lured Mailer back in 1962, advocated accepting the heavy burden of Mailer's contract and had persuaded Arnold Gingrich to continue publishing the serialization of Mailer's *An*

¹²³ This would be roughly \$4300 in 2005.

¹²⁴ Carol Polsgrove, *It Wasn't Pretty Folks, But Didn't We Have Fun: Esquire in the Sixties* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1995), 66.

American Dream after the Publisher vehemently objected to Mailer's sexually explicit language.

What Mailer's allies at *Esquire* prized was the author's ability to articulate the main tenets of the mass culture critique in a way that avoided the charges of snobbery that bedeviled critics like Dwight Macdonald and Edmund Wilson. Rather than defending high culture from the alleged onslaught of mass- and middlebrow culture, Mailer appropriated the rhetoric of the 1950s masculinity crisis and rearticulated it in the language of the existential situation. Though the depth and complexity of Mailer's understanding of existentialism has regularly come under intense scrutiny, it is clear that the philosophy held a great attraction for Mailer. As George Cotkin correctly notes, existentialism allowed Mailer the intellectual space to work through the problems of good and evil that had been evident in his work as early as 1948's *The Naked and the Dead*. Moreover, the existentialist concern with the manifestation of the authentic self were largely in accord with Mailer's rhetoric of masculine primitivism. As Mailer explained to Laura Adams, "the only way we're going to be able to discover what the truth about anything might be is to submit ourselves to the reality of experience."¹²⁵

Existentialism also provided Mailer a vehicle to work through the contradictory trauma of celebrity. As Mailer's stock rose, his writing became increasingly concerned with the cost of fame. As Loren Glass points out in his excellent *Authors Inc.*, Mailer's simultaneous courting and rejection of celebrity was

¹²⁵ Laura Adams, "Existential Aesthetics: An Interview with Norman Mailer" (1975), ed. J. Michael Lennon, *Conversations with Norman Mailer* (Jackson, MS: University Press of Mississippi, 1988), 213.

consciously modeled on Hemingway's "dexterous straddling" of the divide between celebrity and literary respectability.¹²⁶ Unlike his idol, Mailer had been unable to secure neither celebrity nor respectability. The author's well-known struggles to replicate the success of *The Naked and the Dead* and his inability to impress the postwar literary establishment had left Mailer with a profound sense of failure.

Mailer saw himself, in a certain respect, as a victim of history. As he complains in *Advertisements for Myself*,

There was no room for the old literary idea of oneself as a major writer, a figure in the landscape. One had become a set of relations and equations, most flourishing when most incorporated, for then one's literary stock was ready for merger.¹²⁷

In existentialism, Mailer found a riveting critique of man's alienation from experience. Mailer redirected his animus towards the literary establishment into an ontology in which transgression and experience would free the individual from the corrosive, dehumanizing mass culture and restore heroic masculinity. Unlike the Hemingway hero who exercised his masculinity through his control over nature (one thinks of the Nick Adams stories, for examples), Mailer's heroes were cut off from nature. Modern man, Mailer would argue, had lost his connection to his primitive nature and the instinct for survival it had engendered. Lacking a coherent sense of self, modern man groped for meaningful experiences that would reconnect him with an awe-filled sense of the natural. Mailer had admitted as much in a 1964 interview with Steven Marcus. Claiming that "there's that godawful *Time* Magazine world out

¹²⁶ Glass, *Authors, Inc.*, 176-177.

¹²⁷ Norman Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: G.P. Putnam's Sons, 1959), 233.

there, and one can make raids on it,” Mailer imagines a cultural landscape where “there’s a vast guerilla war going on for the mind of man.” It is around the question of authenticity then that the battle will be won or lost. “Will we spoil the best secrets of life,” asks Mailer, “or will we help to free a new kind of man?”¹²⁸

The project of giving life “to a new kind of man” had been central to Mailer’s writing since the late fifties. His much-discussed “White Negro” essay is certainly the most well known manifestation of Mailer’s railing against the inauthenticity of modern life. Less known was Mailer’s “Big Bite” column in *Esquire*. Making its debut in the November 1962 issue and running in twelve installments, Mailer’s column had the luxury of minimal editorial interference. Though often unfocused and at times rambling, the column became an important workshop for a number of key themes that would permeate Mailer’s work in the sixties. Chief among them was the indelible sense of crisis that had gripped American men.

This sense of crisis took on a personal dimension for Mailer. As he wrote his inaugural column, news of Hemingway’s suicide became public. This occasioned a response from Mailer who lamented that Hemingway’s death was “the most difficult death in America since Roosevelt.” Yet, unlike Marilyn Monroe who had merely “slipped away from us,” Hemingway’s suicide becomes a final act of macho bravado. Through his violent end, Mailer imagined Hemingway taunting death; “You must try to find me now eternity. I am in little pieces.” For all of its tragedy, Hemingway’s

¹²⁸ Steven Marcus, “Norman Mailer: An Interview” (1964), *Conversations with Norman Mailer*, 99.

death stood as an object lesson in the existential moment. “What is bad,” wrote Mailer, “is to fear death so completely that one loses the nerve to contemplate it.”¹²⁹

In developing his existential ontology, Mailer argued that the recognition of the self can only occur when the self is forced into a liminal situation. Mailerian Existentialism is, in short, a commitment to passing through thresholds with no guarantee of the outcome.¹³⁰ For Mailer, what this situation presents the individual is a moment of clarity because it requires a good-faith commitment to face the unknown. What we can learn from Hemingway’s suicide, Mailer suggested in the December 1962 column, is “that the way we die, the style of our death, its condition, its mood, its witness, is not trivial.” The poignancy of Hemingway’s death amplifies for Mailer the desperate realization that Hemingway may have been the last of the durable heroes. “We use our legends as fast as we make them,” Mailer notes. Instead of allowing heroism to develop “naturally,” the process is quickened by an insatiable mass culture that seeks to “cash in” its profits.¹³¹

Having spent time as a junior member of the *Partisan Review* circle in the mid-fifties, Mailer was drawn to the critique of mass culture that had captivated the circle’s elder statesmen. The “Big Bite” column reflected this interest. Yet, Mailer’s interest in the subject had less to do with the preservation of a high art tradition than with the preservation of authenticity. As he did most famously in “The White Negro,” Mailer railed against the deadening of the authentic individual. The promise of hip laid in its

¹²⁹ Norman Mailer, “The Big Bite,” *Esquire*, November 1962, 134.

¹³⁰ Adams, “Existential Aesthetics,” 213-214.

¹³¹ Norman Mailer, “The Big Bite,” *Esquire*, December 1962, 168.

“affirmation of the barbarian.”¹³² Mass culture, on the other hand, undermined the individual at every step. Politics, for instance, was no longer about morality or “the art of the possible.” Instead the politician had become “a doctor of mass communications” who diverted the body politic from “from dread, from anxiety, from the mirror of the dream.”¹³³ Mailer’s well-known quarrel with Kennedy resonates with this theme.

As far as Mailer was concerned, Kennedy had betrayed the trust of those who had seen him as a new kind of leader, the existentialist politician, if you will. As the Kennedy administration cultivated the cultural sensibility of the “New Frontier,” it became evident to Mailer that he had misjudged the President. His attack on Jacqueline Kennedy revealed this resentment. In choosing the respectable high/middlebrow culture, Stravinsky, Frost and Miller (Arthur), over the hip avant-garde, Mailer, Ginsberg and Miller (Henry), Kennedy had revealed herself “as a phony... a royal phony.” “She was trying to be a proper First Lady and it was her mistake,” lamented Mailer.¹³⁴

If Jackie had betrayed the aesthetic promise of the hip presidency, her husband betrayed its moral promise. In a series of “Big Bite”, columns Mailer attacked Kennedy for the Bay of Pigs invasion and his administration’s handling of the October missile crisis. The missile crisis proved to be particularly troublesome since, as Mailer argued, Kennedy had proven to be “not necessarily brave.” In the

¹³² Mailer, “The White Negro,” *Advertisements for Myself* (New York: G.P. Putnam’s Sons, 1959), 355.

¹³³ Norman Mailer, “The Big Bite,” *Esquire*, October 1963, 50.

¹³⁴ Norman Mailer, “An Evening with Jackie Kennedy,” *Esquire*, July 1962, 61.

March 1963 column, Mailer reprimanded the President for allowing Charles Bartlett of the *Saturday Evening Post* to publish a piece questioning Adlai Stevenson's stance on Cuba. Mailer loathed the calculation of this move since, as he claimed, it sought to merely test the strength of the Right. Stevenson had become the proverbial canary in the coalmine. If he survived, it meant the American Right was weak. Defeat, on the other hand, meant a vibrant Right wing threatened Presidential authority. For Mailer, this move meant that the "good scientist" in government succeeded in evacuating substance from politics and replaced it with the type of technocratic management Galbraith advocated in *The Affluent Society*. Politics had become so meaningless, Mailer concluded, that the only people who would not vote for his imagined Kennedy/Goldwater "National Ticket" in 1964

will be a few hundred unreconstructed Birchites, a few followers of George Lincoln Rockwell, fifty very old socialists loyal to Daniel De Leon, five or six junkies, eighty-two beatniks brave enough to keep wearing beards, a covey of vegetarians, a flying squad of pacifists, the three bona-fide live Communists and the ten thousand members of the FBI who infiltrated the Communist Party."¹³⁵

Of course, Mailer was not alone in his complaints. C. Wright Mills and Paul Goodman developed similar critiques of the atrophied body politic. The Students for a Democratic Society's "Port Huron Statement," likewise, demanded a revitalized and meaningful politics. Richard Rovere lampooned the incestuous nature of the technocratic power structure in his sharp satire "The American Establishment."¹³⁶

¹³⁵ Norman Mailer, "The Big Bite," *Esquire*, March 1963, 98.

¹³⁶ Richard Rovere, "The American Establishment," ed. Harold Hayes, *Smiling Through the Apocalypse: Esquire's History of the Sixties* (New York: McCall Publishing, 1969).

Taken together, these critiques illustrate the discord that had fed the emergence of a New Left in the mid-sixties that, as George Cotkin correctly suggests, was heavily informed by Camus' *The Rebel*.¹³⁷ Where Mailer departs from this group of like-minded dissidents is in his turning away from any concrete analysis of social problems. For Mailer, the malaise that beset American politics was traceable to a failure of will.

Perhaps Mailer's most cogent attack in this regard came (tragically and ironically) in the November 1963 issue. In a "Big Bite" column that was longer than most, Mailer offered *Esquire* readers a précis of his waning enthusiasm for the President. Claiming his early support for Kennedy had been nothing less than a "pact with Mephisto," Mailer diagnosed the failure of the Kennedy administration as a failure to reject the politics of alienation. The alienation at the heart of Mailer's critique, however, is not Marx's. Rather, it is an alienation that speaks to the growing distance between man and authentic existential experience. In *Advertisements for Myself*, Mailer repeatedly castigates the "liberal mentality" that attempts to eliminate want. "I still feel rage at the cowardice of our time," writes Mailer, "which has ground all of us down into the mediocre compromises of what had once been our light-filled passion to stand erect and be original."¹³⁸ Likewise, Mailer complained in an interview with Eve Auchincloss and Nancy Lynch of his intense distaste for any system that is "programmatically" in its orientation. Sean McCann suggests that this

¹³⁷ George Cotkin, *Existential America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2003), 225-251.

¹³⁸ Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself*, 23.

radical individualism is derived from Mailer's discontent with the New Deal and the residual liberal legacy it had left behind.¹³⁹

The investment of postwar liberalism in rationalist management and universal humanism was for Mailer little more than totalitarianism by another name. Writing in *The Presidential Papers*, Mailer suggests the abolition of civil rights and the dictatorial consolidation of power no longer defined totalitarianism. Instead, totalitarianism was diagnosed as a "moral disease" that desensitizes the individual from his surroundings and his actions. In Mailer's eccentric definition of totalitarianism, bureaucratic society has done away with guilt, moral reflection, and responsibility and replaced it with a theology of comfort and the common good. In lamenting the "burial of the primitive," Mailer sought a return to a brutal Darwinian world of struggle, where men face death on a daily basis. What we lose in comfort and security, Mailer suggests, we gain in self-knowledge and a return to moral responsibility and the unmediated authentic self.¹⁴⁰

The conventional politics Mailer loathed could only be defeated with a deep knowledge of "the primitive understanding of dread." It is only through confronting death, Mailer argues, that men can return "authenticity and commitment ... to the center of the argument." In Kennedy, Mailer had envisioned a figure who understood this. Because Kennedy had been through war, suffered disease and faced death, Mailer believed Kennedy had a more profound understanding of courage,

¹³⁹ Eve Auchincloss and Nancy Lynch, "An Interview with Norman Mailer" (1961), *Conversations with Norman Mailer*, 41. Sean McCann, "The Imperiled Republic: Norman Mailer and the Poetics of Anti-Liberalism," *English Literary History*, Number 67 (2000): 293-336.

¹⁴⁰ Norman Mailer, *The Presidential Papers* (New York: G.P. Putnam and Sons, 1963), 175-176.

commitment and adventure. Mailer, however, never suggested how this would translate into policy. What we can assume though is that Mailer pined for a strong leader who made decisions based on convictions not expedience. Predictably, this fantasy dissipated as the New Frontiersmen poured into Washington. Mailer concluded that the Kennedy's promise, "would now be diluted, preempted, adulterated, converted and dissolved by the compromises of a new Democratic administration."¹⁴¹

There is much here that connects Mailerian existentialism to the inexplicably popular individualist philosophy of Ayn Rand. Both writers posit a social condition in which the anti-individualism (collectivism in Rand, totalitarianism in Mailer) repeatedly thwarts genius. In *The Fountainhead*, Howard Roark refuses to compromise his creative vision or to submit to the collectivist aesthetic advocated by Ellsworth Toohey. Unlike Peter Keating, an architect who gladly acquiesces to whims of his clients, Roark would rather break rocks in a quarry than be denied his vision. "Independence," Roark proclaims, "is the only gauge of human virtue and value. What a man is and makes of himself; not what he has or hasn't done for others."¹⁴² In Mailer's work, the author suffers the fools. The burden of celebrity and its demands on the author's ability to express himself proved intolerable for Mailer. He opens *Advertisements for Myself* with a hateful diatribe directed at "a most loathsome literary world" that turned its back on Mailer when he was unable to produce another *Naked and the Dead*-style bestseller. A decade of resentment

¹⁴¹ Norman Mailer, "The Big Bite," *Esquire*, November 1963, 60.

¹⁴² Ayn Rand, *The Fountainhead* (New York: Scribner, 2000), 681.

explodes as Mailer proclaimed “that the ambition of a writer like myself is to become consecutively more disruptive, more dangerous and more powerful.”¹⁴³ Much of Mailer’s corpus from the late fifties through the early seventies indeed dwells on this theme, cataloging the numerous indignities he has been subjected to (i.e. Mailer’s objection to *Esquire*’s decidedly mild tampering with “Superman Goes to the Supermart” or his inability to publish *Deer Park* in its original forms). It is likewise curious that Mailer’s *Esquire* contract, which allowed him to kill a piece if “excessive” changes were demanded, oddly mirrors Howard Roark’s destruction of his own creation in *The Fountainhead*.

For both writers, the fanatical obsession with a besieged individuality finds a further point of convergence around the question of gender. Women are the Other through which masculinity is either confirmed or denied, often through horrific acts of violence. Moreover, both writers create female characters that embody castration anxiety. Women, in short, are of value only when they can be subdued and conquered. Consider, for instance, that Mailer’s protagonists demonstrate a fascination with sodomy as a tool to humiliate and dominate women. Likewise, it is important to recall that Deborah Rojack’s murder in *An American Dream* is a direct reference to Mailer’s attempted murder of his second wife Adele, an act Mailer considered as transformational.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴³ Mailer, *Advertisements for Myself*, 22.

¹⁴⁴ The details of the attack and its aftermath are treated in Mary V. Dearborn, *Mailer: A Biography* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1990)163-169 and Hilary Mills, *Mailer: A Biography* (New York: Empire Books, 1982), 215-233.

The conflation between Mailer and Roark is all the more serendipitous when we consider Mailer's own attacks on modernist architecture. For both, Frank Lloyd Wright served as the model of the iconoclastic genius as architect. This informs what is otherwise a truly odd foray into architectural criticism. At the time Mailer was writing for *Esquire*, New York was undergoing a series of large-scale urban construction and redevelopment projects that would permanently alter the face of the city. The massive public works projects initiated by Robert Moses, the development of the Lincoln Center, slum clearance, and the growing popularity of the International Style and Le Corbusier's "Radiant City" model among urban planners, were all ample proof to Mailer that a "plague is near upon us."¹⁴⁵ That plague was found in the massive glass boxes that had begun dotting the Midtown landscape. It was also found in the demolition of old buildings that bore the luxurious Beaux Arts adornments modern architecture abhorred. Writing on the then-proposed destruction of Pennsylvania Station, Mailer proclaimed that a train station should signal the "critical moment of transition" at the end of a journey. This, in turn, meant that train stations "should properly be monumental, heavy with dignity, reminiscent of the past." Conversely, modern architecture, Mailer argues, was a rejection of the past. In place of the grand columns and marble staircases, travelers would find themselves underground in "plastic catacombs" that resemble the modernist influenced airport.¹⁴⁶

¹⁴⁵ Norman Mailer, "The Big Bite," *Esquire*, May 1963, 37. For an intellectual history of urban planning, see Peter Hall, *Cities of Tomorrow*, Updated Edition (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: Blackwell Publishers, 1996). Robert A. Caro's *The Power Broker: Robert Moses and the Fall of New York* (New York: Vintage, 1972) is a highly critical assessment of the career of the controversial planner. Jane Jacobs', *The Death and Life of Great American Cities* (New York, Vintage, 1992), originally published in 1961, is a classic critique of urban planning and serves as a useful companion to Mailer's diatribes.

¹⁴⁶ *ibid.*

It was in modernist architecture's rejection of history that Mailer saw the development of totalitarianism. "One cannot conceive of a modern building growing old," writes Mailer, "...it can only cease to function." Without a clear sense of a past, modern architecture points to a cultural discourse of immediate utility and to the surrender of imagination and individuality. In a revealing passage, Mailer argues that modern architecture accomplishes the work of totalitarianism by "behead(ing) individuality, variety, dissent, extreme possibility, romantic faith."¹⁴⁷ What the city dweller is left with is an environment that can only produce "deadness and monotony," a "nausea without spasm," a "living death." Ultimately, modern architecture succeeds, Mailer concludes, by "dislocating us from the most powerful emotions of reality."¹⁴⁸ In short, the modernist glass-box reifies the oppression of the bureaucratic-totalitarian state.

Mailer's defense of the Beaux Arts splendors of the Pennsylvania Station, regardless of their value as architectural criticism, are confusing largely because Mailer is regarded by many critics as the last of the modernists. Yet, Mailer's inconsistent aesthetic defies categorization in its eclecticism. In his corpus, we find traces of the rigors of *Partisan Review*-style modernism, a workman-like social realism and a violent libertine romanticism. Similarly, his political affiliations shifted repeatedly in this period, culminating in the curious self-styled creed of "libertarian socialism." If Mailer is a modernist, then his modernism is one that primarily responds to modernism's masculinist ethos.

¹⁴⁷ Norman Mailer, "The Big Bite," *Esquire*, August 1963, 21.

¹⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 24.

To this end, Mailer's modernism is most evident in his self-styled existentialism. Indeed, if there is a consistent theme at play, it is Mailer's conviction for the need to create situations that force *men* to confront those "powerful emotions" denied by feminized mass culture. Mailer's existentialism, as George Cotkin notes, departs from Sartre and Heidegger in its insistence on "a vision of transcendence" that would recuperate existence.¹⁴⁹ While Mailer spends much of the sixties elaborating this stance within a Kierkegaardian theology, his initial forays into existentialism equated transcendence with transgression. This, of course, is the central argument in "The White Negro." The hipster and the Negro, symbols of transgressive sexuality and violence, had become for Mailer what Genet had been to Sartre.

Boxing provided another convenient metaphor for Mailer to explore existential action, particularly in its mix of violence and corporeality. One of the most disturbing sequences in "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," Mailer's February 1963 account of the Patterson-Liston title fight, was the description of the night Emile Griffith bludgeoned Benny Paret to death. Paret had fallen into the ropes and was unable to free himself. Griffith took advantage of the situation and unleashed a brutal fury of eighteen straight punches to the Paret's head. Within minutes, Paret had fallen unconscious, suffering from a massive head trauma. He would linger in a comatose state before passing away ten days later. For Mailer, the brutality of moment lays bare "the religion of blood" that brings all boxers together. This "primitive...murderous and sensitive religion," Mailer continued, "...looks upon

¹⁴⁹ Cotkin, *Existential America*, 202.

death as a condition which more alive than life.” Boxing, the “existential venture” as Mailer calls it, for all of its desperate brutality fills Mailer with a sense of awe precisely because the sport thumbs its nose at the Establishment which sees brutality, pain and fear as “detritus from the past.”¹⁵⁰

However, it was not enough for Mailer to merely cover boxing, for that would have been itself an act of bad faith. Mailer put on the gloves himself and developed a small circle of sparring partners. Furthermore, Mailer transferred his ring experiences into the persona of a pugilist-intellectual. Much like Hemingway, who combined authentic ring experience with boastful attacks on other writers, Mailer repeatedly turned to boxing metaphors in discussing his own work.¹⁵¹ “Ten Thousand Words a Minute,” for example, opens not with an exposition on the combatants but with a curious passage in which Mailer discusses the class identifications of wordsmiths. Poets, Mailer proclaims, are aristocrats; “spoiled beyond repair.” The novelist on the other hand is “of the working class.” Reporters, naturally, are then creatures of the middle class, a continuation of the myth of the gray flannel professional. Echoing William Whyte, Mailer locates the reporter’s bourgeois identity in the observation that “their intelligence is sound but unexceptional.” The exception however is the sports reporter. By virtue of his work habits, the space he works in and the company he keeps, the sports reporter is the hybrid of middle-class rationality and working-class earthiness. By relocating or reclaiming the working-class identity of the sports

¹⁵⁰ Norman Mailer, “Ten Thousand Words a Minute,” *Esquire*, February 1963, 115-116.

¹⁵¹ For Hemingway’s confrontational stance to literary history see Paul W. Miller, “Hemingway vs. Stendhal: Or Papa’s Last Fight With a Dead Writer,” *Hemingway Review*, Vol. 19, Number 1 (Fall 1999): 126-141.

reporter, Mailer performs an ingenious rhetorical slight of hand. In what follows Mailer the (working-class) novelist becomes Mailer the (working-class) sports reporter. Entering into the Rabelaisian arena that is the Press Headquarters, Mailer describes a scene in which frenzied chain-smoking, half-drunk reporters jostle and fight each other for a quote, news, gossip, anything that he can put into his story. The coarse nature of the sports reporter becomes a survival mechanism for men covering a sport in which mobsters, criminals and other shady characters mingle. Moreover, the men covering boxing are dealing with men who can potentially kill another man on any given night. To be able to survive in this milieu requires toughness, as Mailer demonstrates when he begins to verbally spar with Sonny Liston at the end of the piece, pointedly telling Liston “I’m not your flunky.”¹⁵²

Mailer would use the pugilistic language elsewhere, most notably in “Norman Mailer Versus Nine Writers,” published the July 1963 special literary edition of *Esquire*.¹⁵³ The piece opens with a full-page photo of Mailer, dressed in a rumpled suit, his nubby, work-weary fingers in full view, positioned in the corner of a boxing ring (at Harlem’s Wiley’s Gym where the fierce Sugar Ray Robinson was training that day). The copy at the bottom right corner announces “On the next page: Norman Mailer vs. William Styron, James Jones, James Baldwin, Saul Bellow, Joseph Heller, John Updike, William Burroughs, J.D. Salinger, Philip Roth.” The effect is immediate. This is not a content list but a fight card and our literary pugilist is ready to take on all comers. With unforgiving precision, Mailer delivers a flurry of jabs and

¹⁵² *ibid.*,

¹⁵³ Norman Mailer, “Norman Mailer Versus Nine Writers,” *Esquire*, July 1963, 63-69, 105.

upper-cuts (not to mention the occasional kidney punch and shot below the belt) to the reigning figures in American letters.

The essay itself is best described as a series of short book reviews, a point emphasized by Mailer himself. “There is something lick-spittle about the second method: ‘Ten Authors in Search of a Viable Theme’ or ‘The Sense of Alienation in Eight American Novelists.’ ...I would rather pick up each book by itself and make my connections on the fly.”¹⁵⁴ The “connections on the fly” statement is significant since it suggests a critical faculty that is not academic or highbrow. Rather it is instinctual, street-smart and tough. It is also, “existentialist” in the sense that there is a direct confrontation between the text and its reviewer. Of the ten novels and short story collections Mailer reviews, none earned unconditional praise, though Mailer expressed a great fondness for Saul Bellow’s *Henderson the Rain King*. Conversely, Mailer’s patience grew particularly thin with that class of authors lauded by the middlebrow literary establishment. To this end, J. D. Salinger embodied the “aristocratic delicacy” of the middlebrow tastemakers. Dismissing Salinger as an author who writes for “high-school girls,” Mailer returned to a familiar theme in suggesting that what Salinger’s work lacked was an appreciation for “awe and terror.” The chief crime *Franny and Zooey* and *Raise High the Roof Beam* committed, however, was simply being inoffensive. In the unkindest terms, Mailer concluded that Salinger, “the most gifted minor writer in America,” wrote stories that would make “first-rate television.”¹⁵⁵

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.*, 65.

¹⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 68.

John Updike received a similar treatment, but to different effect. In language that misogynistic and homophobic, Mailer castigated Updike for his appeal to the literary establishment. Here it is worthwhile to quote Mailer's diatribe against Updike at length

His reputation has traveled in convoy up the Avenue of the Establishment, the *New York Times Book Review* blowing sirens like a motorcycle caravan, the professional muse of the *New Yorker* sitting in the Cadillac, membership cards to the right Fellowships in his pocket. The sort of critics who are rarely right about a book- Arthur Mizener and Granville Hicks- ride on his flanks, literary bodyguards. *Life* magazine blew its kiss of death into the confetti. . . . Updike's merits and vices were turned inside out. The good girlish men of letters were shocked by the explicitness of the sex in *Rabbit Run*, and slapped him gently for that with their fan, but his style they applauded.¹⁵⁶

The problem with Updike was not his writing *per se* (Mailer, in fact, mentions a begrudging respect for *Rabbit Run*) but his refusal to disavow the wishes of the middlebrow tastemakers. Where Salinger was hopelessly lost, that is, feminized, Updike showed glimmers of promise. Updike "could become the best of our literary novelists" Mailer contends, "if he could forget about style and go deeper into the literature of sex."

In her influential dissection of Mailer's *An American Dream*, Kate Millett identified Mailer as a "prisoner of the virility cult" who sees "sexual belligerence" as the "last resort of a ruling caste that feels its position in deadly peril."¹⁵⁷ Millett's comments are perceptive in that they strike at the heart of Mailer's critical methodology. Predictably, Mailer turned to the familiar rhetoric of death, dread and orgasm in diagnosing the sickness at the heart of American letters. No wonder then

¹⁵⁶ *ibid.*, 67.

¹⁵⁷ Kate Millett, *Sexual Politics* (New York: Ballentine Books, 1970), 20.

that Mailer dubbed the novelist as the “infantryman of the arts.”¹⁵⁸ The overheated quasi-mystical language of masculine authenticity so evident in Mailer’s other *Esquire* contributions is reproduced in his gendered dismissals of Salinger and Updike. To accuse a writer of writing for women was to unmask him as an interloper, a spy for feminized mass culture who had invaded the workshop of the serious writer. Furthermore, Mailer did away with the genteel notion of the Muse, and replaced her with “The Great Bitch.” Unlike the Muse, the “Great Bitch” tortures the novelist by granting him inspiration one moment and throwing him to the critical dogs in the next. The “Great Bitch’s” callousness is especially painful, since “a man lays his character on the line when he writes a novel.”¹⁵⁹ To write then is to experience the most painful test of one’s manhood, an agonizing experience that permanently changes the writer. Given this, are we at all surprised that Mailer’s writing studio in his Brooklyn Heights home, was accessible only through a series of catwalks and rope ladders?

In surveying the competition, Mailer concluded that it had become impossible to find a future for the novel. This was a conclusion that a number of his contemporaries, most notably Philip Roth, had voiced publicly.¹⁶⁰ In proclaiming the death of the novel, writers like Mailer had turned to new forms of literary expression. In the decade that would follow, the New Journalism would challenge the literary world’s easy classifications of fiction and non-fiction, literature and journalism,

¹⁵⁸ Mailer, “Norman Mailer Versus Nine Writers,” 105.

¹⁵⁹ Norman Mailer, “The Big Bite,” *Esquire*, June 1963, 28.

¹⁶⁰ Philip Roth, “Writing American Fiction,” in *Reading Myself and Others* (New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1975), 117-135.

fantasy and reality. Though Mailer is often included among the New Journalists, his inclusion is uneasy. As I will argue in the conclusion to this dissertation, the New Journalism sprang from a sensibility innately foreign to Mailer's primitive *Sturm und Drang*-like obsession with violence, individualism and modernity. It instead bore a fascination with the most banal features of modern life. Furthermore, it sought not to deplore these features but to acknowledge their presence as a fact of our daily life. In doing so, the New Journalism rejected Mailer's angry machismo and the hand-wringing of culture critics like Boorstin. Right under Mailer's nose, an ironic, irreverent and campy epistemic shift had occurred in the pages of *Esquire*.

The declining critical caché of the mass culture critique and Susan Sontag's subsequent rise to prominence as the advocate of the "new sensibility" and Camp engendered new ways to think about the individual, in mass culture. Norman Mailer's short-lived stint as an *Esquire* columnist embodies the aspirations of a declining heroic masculinity *ad absurdum*, evident especially in the critique of the emasculating effects of mass culture. For Mailer, (masculine) authenticity, defined as a robust, hypersexual individualism, was vitiated by a culture demarcated by mass media, mass consumption, the welfare state, and modernist architecture. Moreover, Mailer's presence in *Esquire* was largely dependent on his (self-engineered) celebrity. Indeed, Norman Mailer was the star of *Esquire*'s roster from 1962-1964. Though the relationship was often a torturous one, *Esquire*'s desire for recognition as a leading magazine of cultural commentary complimented Mailer's desire for recognition as a leading commentator on contemporary culture. *Esquire* positioned itself as a magazine for the open-minded and the fashion forward. Openly hostile to the literary

establishment, Mailer provided *Esquire* with the sort of impolite material that allowed the magazine's editors to crow about how they were more forward thinking and daring than the *New Yorker* or the *Atlantic*. Mailer's literary reputation, his political aspirations, his posturing as a public intellectual, his public boorishness, and his well-documented libertinism all served to produce a complex figure whose personality was larger than life. It was also a personality that made little sense in *Esquire* after 1964.

To this end, I conclude this section by contrasting two portraits of boxer Floyd Patterson. The first, written by Norman Mailer, paints Patterson as a damaged figure struggling to overcome demons so intense that when he loses to Liston, we understand it not as the victory of one superior fighter over another but the internal collapse of a man unable to commit to the existential moment. Gay Talese's profile on the other hand, is closer to melodrama in its tone. Where Mailer cloaked failure in the language of tragedy, Talese's Patterson is a figure of supremely absurd pathos, a self-professed coward who boxes. Nowhere in Mailer do we find a scene as hilarious or as heart breaking as Talese's revelation that Patterson carried a satchel with a fake appliqué beard so that if he loses he can slip out incognito.¹⁶¹ Rather than destroying oneself in an attempt to bridge and neutralize contradiction, the *Esquire*'s "New Sensibility" embraced it. Robert Benton and David Newman, in describing Humphrey Bogart as a figure who informs the New Sentimentality, write, "Bogart says that a man can both care and not give a damn."

Section 5: Whither the Uncommon Man?

¹⁶¹ Mailer, "Ten Thousand Words a Minute," 114, 118. Gay Talese, "The Loser," *Esquire*, March 1964, 140.

Esquire's editors, admen and designers- the technicians of lifestyle as Foucault might call them -recognized the specificity of the magazine's appeal and articulated it to an audience of sophisticated young professionals; "proto-yuppies" if you will. In *Esquire's* social imaginary, Dwight Macdonald, John F. Kennedy and Norman Mailer provided the Uncommon Man with a powerful, if at times flawed, model of masculinity. Most importantly, all three figures demonstrated a concern with the problems of authenticity, experience and embodiment. In their meditations on aesthetic production, political action and existential commitment, all three figures posited a model of masculinity that was virile, forceful and active. Moreover, they posited a masculinity that thrived on engagement. The discourse of uncommonness invoked these values in its embrace of an active program of self-actualization through sophisticated consumption and leisure.

Yet, *Esquire* built the Uncommon Man model upon a series of contradictions in which masculinity was simultaneously stable (i.e. heroic masculinity) and unstable (i.e. men's fashion). This, in part, was due to the tensions that resulted from clashes between editors and those between departments. Clay Felker, for instance, saw *Esquire* as a lifestyle magazine for sophisticated consumers. Sharon Zukin, in writing on Felker's post-*Esquire* success with *New York*, notes that Felker's ideal reader was the urban cosmopolitan "with a great deal of cultural capital who would also consume a wide range of information about real estate, business, celebrity gossip, new plays and movies, and fashion." Harold Hayes, on the other hand, preferred to keep commercial interests at arm's length and instead saw *Esquire* as laboratory for

engaging and iconoclastic non-fiction. It is my contention that the viability of the Uncommon Man sprang from this creative tension.

Esquire's turn towards the ironic in the sixties sought to make sense of a culture in which the pious critiques of the mass culture debates had gone stale. Dwight Macdonald and Norman Mailer offered a revision of the debate but it failed to resonate with readers no longer horrified by mass culture. Gone were the solemn celebrations of high culture and the earnest engagements with contemporary social problems. In their place was a new brand of social commentary that had little use for decorum or solemnity. Indeed, a new generation of intellectuals, writers, and journalists at *Esquire* had foregone the hand-ringing symposia on conformity and mass culture in *Partisan Review* and *Commentary* in favor of a cultural style that embraced popular culture in all of its gaudy, vacuous banality from an ironic distance and with tongue planted firmly in cheek.

Esquire's embrace of Sontag's "New Sensibility" acknowledged a world in which Soviet missiles in Cuba and violent segregationists ruled the nightly news but were then followed by Topo Gigio and the *Beverly Hillbillies*. The sensibility at the heart of *Esquire's* so-called "New Sentimentality" bid farewell to the heroic masculinity of the past in favor of one that advocated "getting carried away," "vulnerability" and "anxiety." In their attempt to explain the new cultural mood of the mid-60s, David Newman and Robert Benton's scene setting piece "The New Sentimentality" provided perhaps the most concise coda for the Kennedy years as seen through *Esquire's* eyes

Suddenly it was 1960 and John Kennedy was there, and the wise, the intellectual and the taste-making people did him homage. They

didn't think he was father or Gramps. They liked him because he was tough, because he was all pro, because he was a man who knew what he wanted and grabbed it. They loved that in him as furiously as the crowds loved Ike.¹⁶²

The cultural style of the “New Sentimentality” called for men who were sharp, professional, flexible and self-indulgent. For Newman and Benton, the cultural heroes of the new style were an odd bunch that effectively did away with such quaint concepts as values, ideals and character. They included Alfred Hitchcock (“He is the manipulation of the audience”) and Martin Buber (“the existential Jew”), Maria Callas (“She is the cult of Arrogance”) and Elvis Presley (“the end of Authority”), Michalangelo Antonioni (“He is the sentimental eroticism”) and Francois Truffaut (“He is style over content”). Above them all, stood JFK, the demigod of the New Sentimentality. He was in Newman and Benton’s words, “the pro, the operator the man who made his score.”¹⁶³ More so than anyone else, Kennedy articulated the “New Sentimentality” dictum that “your primary objective is to make your life fit your style” as the core of his image. In dispensing with masculinist rhetoric of authenticity and experience, Benton and Newman dealt the heroic masculinity of the Uncommon Man a fatal blow.

¹⁶² David Newman and Robert Benton, “The New Sentimentality,” *Esquire*, July 1964, 25

¹⁶³ *ibid* 25-28

Epilogue: The “New Sentimentality” and the Death of the Uncommon Man

Section 1: The New Sentimentality and the Culture of Celebrity

As Harold Hayes consolidated editorial control following Clay Felker’s ouster in 1963, *Esquire* became increasingly identified with an irreverent urbanity that drew its inspiration from such sources as Andy Warhol, Susan Sontag, *Mad* magazine, Paul Krassner’s satirical *Realist* magazine, the French New Wave and the clever anti-ads produced by Creative Revolutionaries Bill Bernbach, George Lois and Carl Ally. In turn, *Esquire* cultivated a masculine style that marked the demise of the “Uncommon Man.” What replaced “uncommonness”? In what follows, I will make the case for *Esquire*’s appropriation of Pop and Camp, what Frederic Jameson has called the “hysterical sublime,” as being emblematic of the sensibility that displaced the “Uncommon Man” and its attendant notion of heroic masculinity.¹

This epilogue offers a few thoughts on *Esquire*’s embrace of this new sensibility of irreverence and considers how it redefined the boundaries of sophisticated masculinity; or, to be more accurate, the boundaries of hip. Specifically, we will be interested in the way the New Journalism and the cover art of George Lois approached this new culture. In both, we find an ambiguity towards the consumer that stands in stark opposition to the contemptuous pronouncements issued by *Kulturkämpfers* Norman Mailer and Dwight Macdonald. *Esquire*’s new sensibility is barely able to hide its star-struck fascination with celebrities, teen

¹ Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1991), 34.

culture, and other manifestations of mass culture. Rather than railing against the lack of authenticity, we find instead a fetishization of surface, as if the image itself was preferable to the “real” person. The fascination with the image was a central feature *Esquire*’s worldview in the mid-sixties, especially as it was articulated in the philosophy of “the New Sentimentality.”

If we were to search for the heart and soul of *Esquire* in the mid-sixties, we could do no worse than to look to Art Director and writer Robert Benton. Harold Hayes, Arnold Gingrich, Clay Felker and Rust Hills may have had more power in deciding what would run in the pages of *Esquire*, but it was Benton who, in the words of graphic designer Milton Glaser, “formed the backbone of *Esquire*’s character at the time.”² Nearly a decade younger than his editors, Benton brought a hip cynicism to the magazine that differed sharply from the eager earnestness of *Esquire*’s engagement with highbrow culture in the final years of the fifties. In features such as “The In and Out Primer” (September 1957), “The Son of In and Out” (October 1958), “The New Sentimentality” (July 1964), “The Basic Library of Trash” (February 1965) and, most notably, the annual “Dubious Achievement Awards” (first appearing in the January 1962 issue), Benton, along with his collaborators Harvey Schmidt (the “In and Out” series) and David Newman, lampooned fashion, celebrities, fads, politicians, the “Establishment,” and a host of other not-so-sacred cows. Unlike the Jeremiahs who had dominated the postwar cultural scene, Benton was part of a new generation of intellectuals who questioned the critical opposition that had been at the

² Milton Glaser, quoted in Steven Heller, *Design Literacy: Understanding Graphic Design*, Second Edition (New York: Allworth Press, 2004), 96.

heart of the historical avant-garde. For this new generation, mass culture was not the enemy its detractors had made it out to be.

One of Benton's clearest statements of this new sensibility came in the piece he co-authored with Newman on the "New Sentimentality." Self-interested and self-indulgent, the New Sentimentality eschewed commitment and idealism in favor of a self-preserving individualism. Benton and Newman celebrated this cynical worldview, going so far as to suggest that the only way to survive was to adopt an attitude that was ironic, irreverent and qualified. It makes sense then that Benton and Newman claim Pop artist Roy Lichtenstein for the New Sentimentality. Unlike Jackson Pollock, who is representative of "the tradition of the Romantic Artist, the life burned out, the garret," Lichtenstein "is New because he puts art on, sees the terror in humor, has no values."³ The aesthetic of the New Sentimentality was the corollary to Theodor Adorno's oft quoted assertion that poetry could not exist in the wake of the Holocaust. There is indeed within the New Sentimentality a sense of exhaustion and surrender. Much like the Zurich radicals who founded Dada in the years following World War I, the New Sentimentality was a response to an environment in which idealism and commitment, it seemed, inevitably led to the atomic bomb and HUAC-hearings. If there was "terror in humor," it was because, as Leslie Fiedler quipped, "you can't fight or cry or shout or pound the table. The only response to the world that's left is laughter."⁴

³ Robert Benton and David Newman, "The New Sentimentality," *Esquire*, July 1964, 25.

⁴ Leslie Fiedler quoted in Anon., "The Black Humorists" in ed. Alan Pratt, *Black Humor: Critical Essays* (New York: Garland Publishing, 1993), 5.

The laughter of the New Sentimentality was cynical and brutal. It embraced absurdity, but not in the manner of the Existentialist. Where for Camus, absurdity was the tragic culmination of the struggle with a pointless existence, for the advocates of the New Sentimentality absurdity was *the* defining sensibility, a prerequisite to any definition of cool or hip. Unlike Camus, the New Sensibility did not seek “a politics of the possible based on a commitment that grew out of despair.”⁵ Instead, it evacuated outrage and desolation from its concept of the absurd and replaced it with irony, incredulousness and a vicious irreverence. In short, absurdity was the basis for an anti-politics of detachment with no commitment. To this extent, Andy Warhol becomes exemplary of this new sensibility. In such early sixties works as *Suicide* (1963), *Bellevue II* (1963), *Optical Car Crash* (1962) and *Red Race Riot* (1963), Warhol points not to the horror of the moment of death, but to its mundane nature. The reproducibility inherent in the silkscreen process, coupled with the repetition of images within the pieces themselves, reduces these traumatic scenes to mere images. “When you see a gruesome picture over and over again,” mused Warhol in a 1963 interview, “it doesn’t really have an effect.”⁶ Indeed, the name of the series, “Death in America,” suggests ubiquity, as if each of the individual moments of tragedy were undistinguishable from the next. Though numerous critics, Thomas Crowe chief among them, have attempted to recuperate Warhol as a Brechtian agitprop artist, the rapid slippage from tragedy to banality evident in these works suggests a different interpretive strategy, especially if we place the “Death in America” series into a

⁵ Cotkin, *Existential America*, 228.

⁶ Gwen Swenson, “What is Pop Art? Answers from 8 Painters, Part I,” *Art News*, 62 (November 1963): 60.

historical relation with celebrity, Warhol's other major thematic concern from the early 1960s.⁷

Like the traumatic images that make up the "Death in America" series, Warhol's celebrity portraits are fascinated with the reproduction and saturation of images. The source images that make up this corpus are drawn from publicity photos, news photos, and film stills. Paintings like *Portrait of Liz* (1963-64), *Sixteen Jackies* (1964) and *Marilyn Diptych* (1962) are essentially then about the celebration of surface and simulacra. As Christin J. Mamiya reminds us, Warhol (along with fellow Pop artists Claes Oldenberg, James Rosenquist, and Robert Rauschenberg) was fascinated by the built-in obsolescence of celebrity and its compulsion towards banality.⁸ Warhol's paintings of Marilyn Monroe, based on a widely circulated publicity photo, amply illustrate this by making clear that they are removed from any connection to the "real" Marilyn, instead further reifying an already reified image of the star. Far being a critique of the machinery of publicity, Warhol's celebrity paintings play with the libratory potential inherent in consumer culture. What celebrity/consumer culture offered was the possibility of creating a "prosthetic self."⁹

Much of this is captured in Benton and Newman's assessment of Marilyn Monroe in their "New Sentimentality" piece. Dubbing Marilyn a transitional figure,

⁷ Thomas Crowe, "Saturday Disaster: Trace and Reference in Early Warhol," in *Reconstructing Modernism: Art in New York, Paris and Montreal, 1945-1964*, ed. Serge Guilbaut (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1990).

⁸ Christin J. Mamiya, *Pop Art and American Consumer Culture: American Super Market* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1992), 98-111.

⁹ Jonathan Flatley, "Warhol Gives Good Face: Publicity and the Politics of Prosopopoeia," *Pop Out: Queer Warhol*, eds. Jennifer Doyle, Jonathan Flatley and José Esteban Muñoz (Durham: Duke University Press, 1996), 115-116.

Benton and Newman posit that the “New Sentimentality” embraced her only in death. “We mourn her neuroticism,” they proclaim. In the “New Sentimentality,” the individual accepted his neuroses. To be cured, to return to the unified self, was the goal of the psychoanalysis of the “Old Sentimentality.” The neuroses produced by fractured, multiple selves of the New, on the other hand, are taken in stride. “New Sentimentality brags about the problems,” write Benton and Newman. What celebrities offered the “New Sentimentality” was not a set of predigested stars but public personalities who “excite us in a personal way.” As Benton and Newman continue, “We save our adulation for the man who happens to say something directly to us.”¹⁰

If Warhol and the New Sentimentality represented one approach to celebrity, Daniel Boorstin suggested another. His 1961 study, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, articulated a bitter critique of mass culture that was heavily indebted to his contemporaries Dwight Macdonald, Arthur Schlesinger, Jr. and Ernest van den Haag. Boorstin complained that we “deceive ourselves” through our consumption of mass mediated images. So pervasive are they, Boorstin argued, that we take these “pseudo-events” for authentic reality. In a conclusion worthy of Jonathan Edwards or Cotton Mather, Boorstin issued an apocalyptic proclamation to a backslidden nation. “We must awake,” Boorstin writes, “before we can walk in the right direction.” As he continues

We must discover our illusions before we can even realize that we have been sleepwalking. The least and the most we can hope for is that each of us may penetrate the unknown jungle of images in which

¹⁰ Benton and Newman, “The New Sentimentality,” 25.

we live or daily lives. That we may discover anew where dreams end and where illusions begin. This is enough. Then we may know where we are, and each of us may decide for himself where he wants to go.¹¹

The historian's exhortation is notable for its air of desperation. As James Gilbert points out, much of the mid-century critique of mass culture suffers from an inability to articulate a solution to the "problem" of mass culture.¹² This is true of Boorstin. His qualified proclamations ("the least and the most we can hope for"; "This is enough") suggest a mix of blind faith and resignation. With no clear program to speak of, Boorstin can do no more than condemn mass culture and hope for the collapse of the regime of illusion. In doing so, Boorstin echoes the concerns of critics like Schelsinger who imagined the threat of mass culture in terms of gender. Nowhere is this clearer than in Boorstin's discussion of heroism and celebrity.

Unlike the hero, the celebrity found fame through publicity. In his oft-quoted definition, the celebrity is "a person known for his well-knownness" (sic).¹³ As such, the celebrity is devoid of any substance and offers little in the way of moral education. The celebrity exists only as long as the publicity machine celebrates her or him. "We try to become chummy, gossipy and friendly with our heroes," complained Boorstin.¹⁴ The hero, on the other hand, "was distinguished by achievement."

Boorstin goes as far as to suggest that the hero was the manifestation God's design, a

¹¹ Daniel J. Boorstin, *The Image: A Guide to Pseudo-Events in America*, 25th Anniversary Edition (New York: Atheneum, 1987), 261.

¹² James B. Gilbert, *Men in the Middle: Searching for Masculinity in the 1950s* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2005), 197-199.

¹³ Boorstin, *The Image*, 57.

¹⁴ *ibid.*, 58.

“flash of divinity.” He was, Boorstin concluded, “a big man.”¹⁵ The tragedy for Boorstin is the conflation and confusion of celebrities with heroes. In the world of the “human pseudo event,” fame overshadows achievement. Thus in a telling passage, Boorstin examines the *Celebrity Register* of 1959 and selectively points to the placement of Mortimer Adler, the Dalai Lama, Dwight Eisenhower, and Bertrand Russell in the company of Polly Adler, Dagmar, Anita Ekberg, and Jane Russell. The implication of gender is impossible to miss here, particularly since it falls in line with much of the overheated rhetoric of the “masculinity crisis.” More significant is that the binary Boorstin produces is purposely filled out with the most ephemeral of celebrities. They are, as Boorstin fumed, “a new category of human emptiness.”¹⁶

For Boorstin, celebrity and publicity only partially accounted for the “death” of the hero. Everywhere the historian looked, he saw fellow historians, social and behavioral scientists, writers and literary critics demythologizing the hero by either rendering him full of neuroses and perversions or insisting on scholarship that foregrounded attention to social, economic and political contexts over discussions of individual accomplishment. This in turn, Boorstin fumed, fomented a cultural zeitgeist in which heroes were deemed as expendable. But, it is precisely this conflation of masculinity, heroism, and substance that was roundly lampooned by the new sensibility that emerged in the early sixties. Benton and Newman, for example, suggest that patriotism (surely one of the clearest sites for the exercise of masculinity, heroism and substance) had no place in the New Sentimentality. Abandoning the idea

¹⁵ *ibid.*, 45-47.

¹⁶ *ibid.*, 58.

of selfless service, they advise readers that in the New Sentimentality, “you are proud only of your commitment to yourself.” For his part, Warhol took on the identity of the voyeuristic naïf as an antidote to the macho aggressiveness of Jackson Pollock, William De Kooning and the other Abstract Expressionists who regularly drank (and fought) at New York’s Cedars Bar. Writing in his memoirs, Warhol, with great amusement, imagines himself “in a bar striding over to, say, Roy Lichtenstein and asking him to ‘step outside’ because I’d heard he’d insulted my soup cans. I mean, how corny.”¹⁷

Section 2: The New Sentimentality, the New Sensibility and the Embrace of the Banal

Norman Mailer’s combative “Norman Mailer Versus Nine Authors” was one of the key articles in *Esquire*’s July 1963 special issue on American literature. The issue was an impressive collection of criticism and fiction that sought to take stock of the literary world circa 1963.¹⁸ Tucked away between the “works-in-progress” offerings, profiles of literary heavyweights and, of course, Mailer’s macho ranting was a Terry Southern profile of famed tough-guy writer Mickey Spillane. This piece is of interest for several reasons. First, where Mailer played at the role of a tough-guy, Spillane actually was one. This translated directly into their approach to writing. Mailer rhapsodized about the agony of creation and decried a literary establishment

¹⁷ Andy Warhol with Pat Hackett, *POPism: The Warhol 60s* (San Diego and New York: Harvest Books, 1980), 14-15.

¹⁸ Among the features included in the issue was a “Works in Progress” feature which gave readers a preview of new work by John Cheever, Robert Penn Warren, Edward Albee, Flannery O’Connor and Saul Bellow, profiles of Allen Ginsberg and Edmund Wilson, a conversation on the process of writing between William Styron and James Jones, Gay Talese’s vicious portrait of George Plimpton and the *Paris Review* crowd, a group photo of the surviving “Lost Generation” Modernists (i.e. Malcolm Cowley, Carl Van Vechten, and Virgil Thompson) and an offering of letters from F. Scott Fitzgerald.

that undercut the virility of its greatest talents. Spillane, on the other hand, simply wrote a series of violent formulaic detective novels that were immediate bestsellers. When asked by Southern to explain his formula for literary success, Spillane replied with his usual candor “Anybody can be a Winner—all you have to do is make sure you’re not a Loser.”¹⁹ Elsewhere, Spillane dismissed the literary critics who snort at his works. “The first printing of my last book was more than two million copies,” Spillane tells Southern, “—that’s the kind of opinion that interests me.”²⁰ As for style, Mailer is verbose and philosophical, constantly evoking his heroes Hemingway, Farrell and Lawrence. Spillane, on the other hand, wrote for men who cared little for the world of letters. Consequently, a Mike Hammer story is brutal in the economy of its narration. Take this excerpt from *I, the Jury*, Spillane’s first novel

The roar of the .45 shook the room. Charlotte staggered back a step. Her eyes were a symphony of incredulity, an unbelieving witness to truth. Slowly, she looked down into the swelling in her naked belly where the bullet went in. A trickle of blood welled out...Her eyes had pain in them now, the pain preceding death. Pain and unbelief

“How could you?” she gasped.

I only had a moment before talking to a corpse, but I got it in

“It was easy,” I said.

The language is as violent and ugly as the scene it portrays. It is curious then to consider that Spillane claimed he did not read Hemingway because Papa was “too morbid.”²¹

¹⁹ Terry Southern, “Mickey Spillane as Mike Hammer,” *Esquire*, July 1963, 76

²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ *ibid.*

Southern's profile is of interest for another reason. Despite Southern's own admission as being someone "with a Café Flore or Whitehorse Tavern orientation," the profile demonstrated little of the animus normally associated with writers who identify with the avant-garde. In Southern's piece there is not a single denunciation of Spillane's style, his cavalier attitude towards his craft or of a corrupt mass culture where *I, the Jury* and *Vengeance is Mine!* are bestsellers while more worthy works languish in obscurity. Instead, Southern admits that Spillane's deflating of the "Lit. Game is refreshment itself."²² Though Southern and Mailer were contemporaries, their divergent aesthetic sensibilities marked a fissure that would come to define American culture in the sixties. Where Mailer held on to the dogmas of modernism (the oppositional artist, the writer as individual, the creative process, etc.), Southern latched on to that wing of hipster culture that rejected the pieties of modernism in favor of a new aesthetic that celebrated banality, gaudiness, surface and absurdity in the form of Pop, Mod and Camp. After all, as Sally Banes reminds us, 1963 was the year that Andy Warhol, the Living Theater, Kenneth Anger, Jack Smith and Fluxus had exploded onto the New York art scene.²³ More importantly, this new sensibility marked a receptiveness to forms of masculinity that questioned the value of hegemonic masculinity. In other words, irony had replaced anguish as the defining aesthetic temperament of the age.

The British historian and literary critic Raymond Williams once suggested that the emergence of "forms and conventions . . . in art and literature are often

²² *ibid.*

²³ Sally Banes, *Greenwich Village, 1963: Avant-Garde Performance and the Effervescent Body* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1993).

among the very first indications that . . . a new structure (of feeling) is forming.”²⁴ A cursory survey of the arts in the mid-sixties validates Williams’ assertion. In the early-to-mid 1960s, “new” was easily the most overused adjective in the fields of culture and politics. In the span of five years, cinephiles experienced the French, Czech, and Japanese new waves as well as the Brazilian *Cinema Novo*. Theatergoers clamored for plays by the British New Wave (aka the Angry Young Men), while music aficionados were exposed to the New Folk Music as well as *Bossa nova* (New Beat). The literary set, meanwhile, celebrated the accomplishments of Alain Robbe-Grillet and the *nouveau roman* (new novel) and the new wave of science fiction (i.e. J.G. Ballard, Norman Spinard, Michael Moorcock, Samuel Delany, etc.). In the realm of politics, Americans, led by their youthful president, began the decade celebrating the promise of the New Frontier. By the middle of the sixties, young activists cultivated the alternative radicalism of the New Left. Historians likewise saw the rise of the “New History” in France and the “New Social History” in the U.S. Meanwhile in Sociology, symbolic interactionists and ethnomethodologists led the development of the New Sociology. Grouped together, it is tempting to view all of this “newness” as the machinations of a culture industry attempting to market its products through an appeal to either novelty or generational rift; a point driven home by Dwight Macdonald’s frequent condemnations of the early sixties film and art avant gardes.

Such dismissal, in the final analysis, is unsatisfying because it negates the genuine enthusiasm and desire of the young (though most were in their late twenties

²⁴ Raymond Williams, *Marxism and Literature* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 133.

to mid-thirties) to reinvent their respective mediums in ways that made cultural practice relevant for a generation raised on mass culture. One of the earliest and most perceptive attempts to make sense of the reign of the new was Susan Sontag's aptly titled 1965 essay "One Culture and the New Sensibility."²⁵ Originally appearing in *Mademoiselle* and later expanded in *Against Interpretation and Other Essays*, Sontag's essay opened as a vitriolic attack on C.P. Snow's well-known "two cultures" paradigm. Declaring Snow's formulation as "crude and philistine," Sontag instead posited that a "new sensibility" had emerged that conflated scientific and artistic/literary cultures into the titular "one culture." In a key passage, Sontag suggests that the "new sensibility" is "rooted" in

extreme social and physical mobility; in the crowdedness of the human scene...; in the availability of new sensations such as speed... and in the pan-cultural perspective on the arts that is possible through the mass reproduction of art objects.²⁶

The "new sensibility," Sontag continued, is furthermore dubious of the artificial distinctions between "high" and "low" culture on the grounds that the new culture is "more open to the pleasures of 'form' and style" thus allowing the singing of Dionne Warwick, to use Sontag's well-known example, to be experienced as a "complex and pleasurable event."²⁷

There is much in Sontag's analysis that calls postmodernism to mind. Her stress on style over content, on radical plurality and an advocacy of an ethic of fun are

²⁵ Susan Sontag, "One Culture and the New Sensibility," *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1966), 293-304.

²⁶ *ibid.* 296.

²⁷ *ibid.* 303

consistent with accepted definitions of postmodernism. Despite the fact that Sontag regularly rejected attempts to identify her with postmodernism, it nevertheless remains that Sontag's essay successfully captures some of the defining aspects of what Frederic Jameson has famously referred to as the "cultural logic of late capitalism."²⁸ It is in particular her awareness of the "very high speed and hectic" nature of the postwar condition and the aestheticization of everyday life that is of interest here. This attention to style informs an aesthetic that is defined through an effervescent in-the-momentness which sometimes borders dangerously on solipsism. Despite Sontag's claim that the "new sensibility" is "extremely history conscious," we need to pause and reconsider how she defines this awareness of the past; particularly when she points to nostalgia as a key feature of the "new sensibility." Because of its stress on sensations and feelings, Sontag boldly declared the art of the "new sensibility" to be an "extension of life"; a "representation of the new modes of vivacity."

The emphasis on the pleasures of form and style are, of course, central to her theses in "Against Interpretation" and "Notes on Camp." Described as such, we immediately draw connections between postmodernism and Camp.²⁹ Jim Collins, for one, sees postmodern culture as being defined by "hyperconsciousness," a "hyperawareness" of the text as it circulates through a media culture that is bursting at

²⁸ See for example Susan Sontag, "Writing Itself: On Roland Barthes" in *A Susan Sontag Reader* (New York: Farrar, Straus, Giroux, 1982) or Evans Chan, "Against Postmodernism, etcetera-- A Conversation with Susan Sontag," *Postmodern Culture*, Volume 12, No.1 (September 2001). For Jameson see *Postmodernism or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), 1991.

²⁹ See Fabio Cleto's introduction to section IV in *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 302-307 for a useful, if brief, survey of the intersection of postmodernism and camp.

the seams, a “bombardment of signs.” For Collins, the problems of self-expression and the anguish of the creative process so identified with the modernist artist fail to resonate in a mediascape where intertextual rearticulation provides the primary frame through which the world is experienced. As Collins concludes, to live in the postmodern world is to adapt to this condition and accept eclecticism and *bricolage* as the techniques which inform cultural production. Moreover, for Collins, it is this reality of “an intersection of multiple, conflicting cultural messages” that points to the formation of a postmodern politics rooted in the reality of the instability of the self.³⁰

Camp is described in similar terms. A 1997 episode of the popular animated series *The Simpsons*, has the openly gay character John (voiced by John Waters) defining camp as the fascination with the “tragically ludicrous or the ludicrously tragic.”³¹ In “Against Interpretation,” Sontag famously calls for an “erotics of art,” reasoning that criticism must turn its attention to showing “how it is what it is...rather than to show what it means.”³² More importantly, in her scene-setting description of camp, Susan Sontag astutely notes that camp is best understood through its “love of the unnatural: of artifice and exaggeration”³³ The language of artifice permeates Sontag’s discussion. Camp is “a vision of the world in terms of style,” “extravagant,” “the consistently aesthetic experience of the world.” Camp, as Sontag declares,

³⁰ Jim Collins, “Television and Postmodernism,” *Media Studies: A Reader*, eds. Paul Marris and Sue Thornham, Second Edition (New York: New York University Press, 2000), 380-384.

³¹ “Homer Phobia,” *The Simpsons*, Original Air Date: February 16, 1997.

³² Sontag, “Against Interpretation,” *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1986), 14.

³³ Susan Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” *Against Interpretation and Other Essays* (New York: Anchor Books, 1986), 275.

allows one to be “serious about the frivolous, frivolous about the serious.”³⁴ Camp’s history directly alludes to this aspect. In an important article, Mark Booth argued that Camp could be traced as far back as the Baroque era, if not further.³⁵ Camp, as Andrew Ross, points out has always involved a “rediscovery of history’s waste...the recreation of surplus value from forgotten forms of labor.”³⁶ This, more than anything else, may help explain the interconnection between Camp and Postmodernism.

Both draw upon practices of eclecticism and bricolage in the development of their aesthetic. Both are products of media and entertainment-obsessed cultures. Both rely upon a sensibility that is informed by irony and an appreciation of depthless banality. Finally, both champion an aesthetic that takes the collapse of the high art-low art distinction as its first principle. In short, both are explicitly aware of the excesses of culture. The most important linkage between the two, however, is in the way both problematize the unified subject. For postmodernism, this largely means a critique of teleology, metanarratives, and universalism. For Camp, it means exposing the fissures that hold identity, gender in particular, together. The notion of overdetermination, for example, is central to Camp critiques of a hegemonic masculinity that overinvests itself in manliness. Thus, the emergence of the clone, the leatherman and the bear in gay culture are *potential* articulations of this sort of

³⁴ *ibid.*, 279, 283, 287, 288.

³⁵ Mark Booth, “Campe-toi!: On the Origins and Definitions of Camp” in Cleto, *Camp*, 66-79.

³⁶ Andrew Ross, “Uses of Camp,” *No Respect: Intellectuals and Popular Culture* (New York: Routledge, 1989), 151.

critique.³⁷ Judith Butler's notion of the stylized (gendered) self is particularly pertinent in this case. As she argues, "gender...is an identity tenuously constituted in time—an identity constituted through a *stylized repetition of acts*" (italics in the original).³⁸

Given this, is *Esquire's* "New Sentimentality" Camp? The answer is a qualified yes. In a key assessment of Camp, Jack Babuscio suggests that irony, aestheticism, theatricality and humor were the basic elements of the Camp sensibility.³⁹ Each of these, to one extent or another, is present in the "New Sentimentality's" jettisoning of the tired virtues of character. Consider the "New Sentimentality" dictum, "Your primary objective is to make your life fit your style."⁴⁰ Is it very different from any of a number of Oscar Wilde quips celebrating the artificiality of the dandy? The "New Sentimentality" spoke to a sense of self that saw the self as a daily performance without grounding, existing in a consumer culture with no sense of the past. "It's about us, *now*" proclaim Benton and Newman. The "New Sentimentality" was self-obsessed with personal traumas but refused a cure because

³⁷ See for example Micha Ramakers, *Dirty Pictures: Tom of Finland, Masculinity and Homosexuality* (New York: St. Martins Press, 2000). Not all gay appropriations of macho masculinity can be read as parodies. For many men, the unironic identification with macho seeks to remove all traces of the effete queen and restore a normative masculinity to gay identity. See Martin P. Levine, *Gay Macho: The Life and Death of the Gay Clone* (New York: New York University Press, 1998).

³⁸ Judith Butler, "Performative Acts and Gender Constitution: An Essay in Phenomenology and Feminist Theory," ed. Sue-Ellen Case, *Performing Feminisms: Feminist Critical Theory and Theater* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990), 270.

³⁹ Jack Babuscio, "The Cinema of Camp (aka Camp and the Gay Sensibility)." In *Camp: Queer Aesthetics and the Performing Subject: A Reader*, ed. Fabio Cleto (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1999), 117-135.

⁴⁰ Benton and Newman, "The New Sentimentality," 25.

“we make those failures a part of our style.” Ultimately, Benton and Newman discern that “living in disguise is the smart way to be yourself.”⁴¹

Why then the qualification? The “New Sentimentality” is Camp in substance but not style. In surveying the “purveyors of the New Sentimentality,” there is little of the excessiveness and outlandishness that we conventionally associate with Camp. True, Benton and Newman include Audrey Hepburn/Holly Golightly, Maria Callas, Lady Bird Johnson, Jean Moreau, Marcel Proust, Marilyn Monroe and Carlo Ponti in their pantheon. But, they also admit Alfred Hitchcock, Martin Buber, Michelangelo Antonioni, Elvis Presley, Sonny Liston and Robert Lowell. If we can draw anything from either group, it is that the “New Sentimentality,” like Camp, celebrates, even adores, contradiction.

For Babuscio, the ability to create order from incongruity defined Camp’s dependence on irony and aestheticism. However, Babuscio (along with Moe Meyer and Richard Dyer) has insisted that the Camp sensibility can be understood only when it is grounded within the incongruous material and political realities of gay life.⁴² As Meyer argues, Camp was the rematerialization of the formerly invisible gay man.⁴³ In “It’s Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going,” Dyer further emphasizes the queerness of Camp by insisting that “Camp is the one thing that expresses and

⁴¹ *ibid.*

⁴² Babuscio, “The Cinema of Camp,” 118-119.

⁴³ Moe Meyer, “Reclaiming the Discourse of Camp,” ed. Moe Meyer, *The Politics and Poetics of Camp* (New York: Routledge, 1994), 3-5.

confirms being a gay man...Camp kept, and keeps, a lot of gay men going.”⁴⁴ In *Heavenly Bodies*, his scene setting study of stardom as cultural form, Richard Dyer posits that stars “embody that particular conception of what it means to be human that characterizes our culture.”⁴⁵ This perhaps explains not only the function of celebrity but the audience investment in mass culture as well.

Such a position is not surprising considering that Dyer’s intellectual and cultural identity was formed within the British gay communities of the 1970s. In his celebrated defenses of camp (i.e. “In Defense of Disco,” “Getting Over the Rainbow,” “Its Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going,” “Dressing the Part”), Dyer points to the essential value of degraded forms of popular culture to gay men.⁴⁶ In their enjoyment of, for example, disco music, operetta and the extravagant dance numbers conjured by Busby Berkeley, gay men create ways to cope with being gay in a straight world. Dyer’s discussion of Judy Garland’s gay following in *Heavenly Bodies* is instructive in this instance in that it illustrates a central theme found not only in his work on stars, but in his corpus as a whole. Here Dyer examines how gay men “created” Judy Garland by reading her well-publicized struggles as emblematic of their own. For Dyer, gay men are drawn to Garland because her performance of gender is so awkward and her execution of gender roles so forced as to throw conventional gender norms off kilter. Indeed, Judy Garland was no Deanna Durbin or June Allyson.

⁴⁴ Richard Dyer, “It’s Being So Camp As Keeps Us Going,” *The Culture of Queers* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 49.

⁴⁵ Richard Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies: Film Stars and Society* (New York: St. Martins Press, 1986), 19.

⁴⁶ Dyer’s essays are collected in *Only Entertainment*, Second Edition (New York: Routledge, 2002) and *The Culture of Queers* (New York: Routledge, 2002).

Similarly, she was not Rita Hayworth or Veronica Lake. In her ordinariness, her androgyny and her campiness, Garland articulates a sense of constant “in-betweenness”, a fabulously tragic sense of never belonging. “There is nothing arbitrary about the gay reading of Garland,” writes Dyer, “it is a product of the way homosexuality is socially constructed, without and within the gay subculture itself.”⁴⁷ For Dyer, stars are an essential component of modern capitalist societies, particularly in how they engage and negotiate the question of individuality and personhood. Where Boorstin and his followers, dismiss celebrity as a corrupter of the sense of self, Dyer holds fast to the notion that stars are central to our understanding of individuality.

Despite its obvious attractiveness as a type of politics, this argument is problematically reductive. To establish nomenclatures such as “Pop Camp” and “Camp Trace” or to distinguish “true” Camp from its appropriated non-gay manifestations seems to introduce an essentialism that contradicts the destabilizing impulse of Camp. Furthermore, it ossifies “the gay experience” and removes it from history. Pre-Stonewall Camp has a different agenda and different icons than Post-AIDS Camp, as Andrew Ross has argued.⁴⁸ Finally, such arguments sidestep the centrality of gay men to the very industries the critics implicate in the appropriation and popularization of Camp.⁴⁹ What is necessary is an appreciation of how Camp, in

⁴⁷ Dyer, *Heavenly Bodies*, 194.

⁴⁸ Ross, “Uses of Camp,” 162.

⁴⁹ See Caryl Flynn, “The Deaths of Camp” in Cleto, *Camp*, 433-457 for a stringent critique of Meyers, et. al.

whatever form it takes, makes certainty uncertain by exposing the ludicrous fictions that are essential to the maintenance of certainty.

It was this ethic, above all else, that guided *Esquire* under the leadership of its new editor, Harold Hayes. When Hayes assumed the mantle of Editor in 1963, some of the luster of the magazine's late fifties renaissance had worn off. Furthermore, the magazine was hampered by a heavy debt and on the verge of collapse. The "Uncommon Man" formula *Esquire* had developed in the late fifties had seemingly run its course. A bitter disagreement between Hayes and co-editor Clay Felker developed in the discussions on *Esquire*'s future, particularly how it should change in order to reverse the declining numbers in paid subscriptions and advertising revenue. Clay Felker saw *Esquire* as a lifestyle magazine in the complete sense of the term. As he would later do with *New York*, Felker saw *Esquire* as a resource to what was in (or out) for the cosmopolitan (male) consumer.⁵⁰ Felker's vision was, in many ways, closer to Gingrich's original vision of the magazine. Hayes, on the other hand, saw an opportunity to move social and political commentary into a new and original direction. As Hayes would write in the introduction to *Smiling Through the Apocalypse*, an anthology of *Esquire*'s non-fiction offerings from the sixties, "the idea was to suggest alternate possibilities to a monolithic view."⁵¹ Moreover, Hayes had little use for the service and fashion features, instead wishing to concentrate the magazine's efforts on developing exciting editorial content. If the "Big Change" period (1956-1961), was defined by *Esquire*'s bid for sober respectability, Hayes'

⁵⁰ Felker's development of New York magazine is covered in Sharon Zukin, *Point of Purchase: How Shopping Changed American Culture* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 169-196.

⁵¹ Hayes, *Smiling Through the Apocalypse*, xviii.

tenure would be remembered for its “irreverent, sassy and smart” hybrid of hipness and sophistication.⁵²

Section 3: Andy Warhol Drowning in a Soup Can: Esquire’s Irreverent Turn and the Emergence of Straight Camp

Under Hayes’ command, *Esquire* would finally emerge from debt, shake off the comparisons to *Playboy* and establish its iconoclastic identity. Carol Polsgrove has argued persuasively that the turn around at *Esquire* was due largely to the Hayes’ insistence that story ideas be generated in-house, an important factor in developing a consistent and successful editorial identity.⁵³ Equally important was *Esquire*’s insistence on relevance. *Esquire*’s transformation in the mid-late fifties was based on an assumption that the magazine appealed to young professionals in their twenties and early-mid thirties. Under Hayes, the magazine continued to target this demographic. However, while the target demographic may have been the same, their tastes had notably changed, particularly amongst the magazine’s younger readers. By the time Hayes took over, he was facing a readership that had been in the first wave of postwar teen culture. For young adults raised on *Mad* magazine, EC Comics, Elvis Presley and *Howdy Doody*, *Esquire*’s sarcasm was simultaneously sophisticated and familiar. As George Lois recalled, “the ruder the raspberry, the happier was Hayes.”⁵⁴ Lois’s iconoclastic covers, the Dubious Achievement awards and the cool

⁵² Polsgrove, *It Wasn’t Pretty Folks*, 52.

⁵³ Polsgrove, *It Wasn’t Pretty Folks, But Didn’t We Have Fun?*, 133-139.

⁵⁴ George Lois, *Covering the 60s: The Esquire Era* (New York: The Monacelli Press, 1996), 14. It should be noted that the pages in Lois’ book are not numbered. Thus the citation refers to an approximate page number.

detachment of the New Journalism for example, owed just as much to the send-ups in *Mad* as they did to avant-garde practices of recontextualization. In doing so, *Esquire* would join the movement toward the campy “new sensibility” valorized by Sontag.

George Lois produced his first *Esquire* cover for the October 1962 issue, a simple image of a lone knocked out fighter, lying in the middle of an empty ring in an equally empty arena. The fighter in the photo was wearing black trunks, a controversial choice given the upcoming Patterson-Liston title bout. Patterson wore black. In the months that followed, *Esquire* received a tremendous number of letters chastising them for calling the fight and especially in favor of the hated Liston. Though Lois had called it correctly, the controversy that ensued was typical of the reactions by both readers and advertisers to Lois’ *Esquire* covers. Lois had come to *Esquire* with a reputation as one of the young “Creative Revolution” raconteurs who had actively redefined the aesthetic possibilities of advertising in the late fifties. Hayes had brought Lois into *Esquire* to develop covers that would provide the visual compliment to *Esquire*’s editorial package. In his time at the magazine, Lois created dozens of memorable images: Andy Warhol sinking in a can of soup (tomato, natch), Ed Sullivan in a Beatles wig, William Calley (the “butcher” of My Lai) surrounded by a group of cherubic Asian children, mean-ole Sonny Liston as Santa Claus, Richard Nixon having make-up applied to his face in preparation for a televised debate, Hubert Humphrey as a ventriloquist’s dummy on LBJ’s lap, Roy Cohn with a halo over his head, Norman Mailer as King Kong and Germaine Greer as Fay Wray. It is his cover featuring another boxer, though, that I want to spend some time with.

The case of Muhammad Ali had become a cause celebre in the late sixties. When heavyweight champion Cassius Clay had converted to Islam in the late sixties, he refused induction into the military on ground of conscientious objection. In short order, Ali was charged with draft evasion, stripped of his title and denied the right to fight professionally. As the legal case dragged through the courts, support for Ali became one measure of opposition to the war in Viet Nam. The Ali affair likewise brought together two important features that had identified *Esquire*: an active interest in boxing and a fervent opposition to the war. In total *Esquire* ran two covers in support of Ali. The November 1969 cover featured such notables as Truman Capote, Michael Harrington, George Plimpton, Sidney Lumet, Theodore Bikel, Roy Lichtenstein, Bud Schullberg, James Earl Jones, and Howard Cosell gathered together in a boxing ring, demanding Ali's right to defend his title. The other cover, from April 1968, depicting Ali as St. Sebastian was based on a 15th century painting attributed to Andrea del Castagno.⁵⁵

The April 1968 cover is intriguing on a number of levels. It is an image defined by the vulnerable body unable to protect itself. Given Ali's reputation as a fast-talking fighter who could back up his boasts with vicious hits, it is curious to see Ali helpless and suffering. His broken body stands in sharp contrast to boxing's reputation as the final outpost of a resolutely and unapologetically masculine culture. Here, it is interesting to compare the April '68 cover to the November '69 cover, particularly in the way that the (masculine) boxer is taken out of the ring and

⁵⁵ This cover was honored in 2005 by the American Society of Magazine Editors as one of the 40 best covers of the past 40 years. Coming in at number three, it was one of three *Lois* covers to grace the top ten.

substituted with a covey of (unmasculine) intellectuals. By posing with his head turned away and his eyes turned upwards, the Ali photo further mitigates Ali's ability to speak on his own behalf, thus justifying the need for surrogates. Finally, it is curious that Lois would choose a to base his cover on a figure whose iconography is so thoroughly identified with camp. The image of St. Sebastian unites the elements of quiet suffering (restraints, pious eyes turned upward), an exposed, youthful and feminized body and the flamboyant spectacle of Catholic visual culture into a text whose campiness is unmistakable. Moreover, it is an image that is so heavily circulated in Western culture that it verges on the banal. What ultimately solidifies Lois' cover as unintentional camp is the seriousness of his intentions. In choosing the St. Sebastian image, Lois sought to make a somber comment on Ali's persecution. Absent any intention of irony, though, the cover can only rely on a series of thoroughly conventional readings to generate its meaning.

The April '68 cover's unintentional camp was offset by other features in the magazine that very intentionally mined camp for comedic effect. The foremost among them was the Dubious Achievement Awards. Developed in 1962 by Robert Benton and David Newman, the feature ran annually in the January issue as an irreverent exercise in the deflation of over inflated egos. Benton and Newman developed a simple but effective formula in which uncharitable photos were joined to sarcastic "awards." The 1962 edition, for example, featured a thuggish photo of Norman Mailer with the caption "White Man of the Year." Readers perusing the 1963 edition found a photo of a discombobulated Elsa Maxwell and the caption "Sights to Make Federico Fellini Flinch." One page over, Thalidomide was named as

the “Worst Free Sample” and the award for “Least Expected Souvenir for Fans Who Worked Their Way Up to the Front of the Stage” was attached to the following copy: “A bomb thrown at Ghana President Nkrumah was kicked away into the crowd by guards, killing four people.” There, of course, is little to laugh at here if we approach these items seriously and take them at their word. But this would mean missing the joke. “The point of Camp,” Sontag reminds us, “is to dethrone the serious.”⁵⁶ The Dubious Achievement Awards share this quality in their ironic detachment, their inability to respect power or tradition and their amused smirk when the artifice of power is exposed.

The most important manifestation of this sensibility at *Esquire* was the New Journalism. In the hands of Terry Southern, Tom Wolfe, Hunter Thompson, Joan Didion, Gail Sheehy, and Gay Talese, the New Journalism offered an alternative to the conventions of the journalistic “inverted pyramid” by engaging techniques more closely associated with fiction writing such as, interior monologues, composite characters, detailed description and experimental prose.⁵⁷ This, in and of itself, was not a new development. Daniel Defoe, William Hazlitt, Mark Twain, Stephen Crane, George Orwell, Damon Runyon, and Joseph Mitchell had all practiced what is generally referred to as “literary journalism” which, like the New Journalism, used literary devices in favor of the “inverted pyramid” formula. At *Esquire*, Norman Mailer and Richard Rovere had been writing literary journalism that fit this

⁵⁶ Sontag, “Notes on Camp,” 288.

⁵⁷ The Inverted Pyramid model is the most common formula utilized by journalists when putting a story together. Journalists normally will give a summary of an event followed by supporting quotes and data. As such, it goes from the most important to the least important elements of a story.

description since the late fifties.⁵⁸ Defenders of the New Journalism acknowledged this by suggesting the newness was located not in technique but in sensibility.

The most influential discussion of the New Journalism's method is arguably Tom Wolfe's introduction to his 1973 anthology, *The New Journalism*. For Wolfe, the New Journalism was an expression of the "artistic excitement in journalism" in the 1960s.⁵⁹ The fiction writers of the period, Wolfe contends, had become so inwardly focused in writing about the problems of the self in mass society that they had lost the ability and/or will to produce the sort of broad social sketches Balzac, Dickens and Gogol had once produced. As Wolfe explained,

Novelists seemed to shy away from the life of the great cities altogether. The thought of tackling such a subject seemed to terrify them, confuse them, make them doubt their own powers. And besides, it would have meant tackling social realism as well.⁶⁰

That task instead fell to the magazine journalists whose ability to absorb and recount social scenes was better suited to producing realist prose. Central to the New Journalist project, Wolfe continues, were a series of "devices" writers used to create a sense of immediacy and veracity: "scene-by-scene construction," "realistic dialogue," "third-person point of view," and a strict devotion to the recording of quotidian detail. What made the New Journalism "new" for Wolfe was the fact these writers were not just reporting events; they were capturing and reconstructing the vibrant social scenes

⁵⁸ For example, see Norman Mailer, "Superman Comes to the Supermart," *Esquire*, November 1960 or Richard Rovere, "The Question of Ezra Pound," *Esquire*, September 1957 or "The Last Days of Joe McCarthy," *Esquire*, August 1958.

⁵⁹ Tom Wolfe, "The New Journalism" in *The New Journalism*, eds. Tom Wolfe and E.W. Johnson (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973), 23.

⁶⁰ *ibid*, 30.

around them. “The-New Journalists...,” boasts Wolfe, “had the whole crazed obscene uproarious Mamon-faced drug soaked mau-mau lust oozing Sixties in America all to themselves.”⁶¹

Norman Mailer provides an interesting case study in this instance. Most surveys of the New Journalism include Mailer’s *Armies of the Night*, *Miami and the Siege of Chicago*, and *The Fight* within the New Journalism corpus. There can be little disagreement that *Armies of the Night* is experimental literary journalism in intention and execution. From the desire to conflate history and the novel to his decision to reference himself in the third person, Mailer’s journalism relies upon literary techniques that force the question of objectivity and truth to the foreground. In Mailer’s hands, literary journalism becomes a form of pointed social critique. To that end, it finds little in common with the New Journalists, particularly those explicitly identified with *Esquire* (i.e. Wolfe, Gay Talese, Terry Southern). For “Wolfe’s boys,” as Morris Dickstein refers to them, the point of the New Journalism was to inject yourself into the story but only as an observer.⁶² Where Mailer’s literary journalism is largely about Mailer, the New Journalists leave no such trace. The dénouement of Mailer’s “Ten Thousand Words a Minute,” for example, is not a portrait of the victorious Liston or the vanquished Patterson, but the long, machismo fueled exchange between Liston and Mailer that got Mailer thrown out of the post-fight news conference.

⁶¹ *ibid*, 31.

⁶² Dickstein, *Gates of Eden*, 139.

Compare this to Wolfe's introduction to his profile of teen custom car culture, "There Goes (Varoom! Varoom!) That Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," published in the November 1963 *Esquire*. The piece opens with a vivid tableau of undulating teens at a Burbank, CA teen fair. "The scene inside is quite mad," insists Wolfe as he begins to describe the girls with the bouffant hairdos in tight slacks, the Chris-Craft cruiser in the giant pool, and the legions of teens dancing non-stop, "--dancing the bird, the hully-gully, and the shampoo-- with the music of the hully gully band piped all over the park through the loudspeaker." At first overwhelmed and disoriented, Wolfe later admits "I was glad I had seen the cars in this natural setting, which was, after all, a kind of Plato's Republic for teenagers." The connection is once again emphasized when Wolfe waxes philosophical on the attraction of custom cars to teenagers. "I don't have to dwell on the point that cars mean more to these kids...They are freedom, sex, motion, color--everything is right there."⁶³

While Wolfe's observation of the scene is clearly a part of the narrative, he maintains a level of distance not found in Mailer's work. Robert Sommer, Thomas Meisenhelder and Michael Johnson have suggested that this tendency towards active observation is closer to the participatory models encouraged in cultural anthropology and Chicago School sociology than it is to journalism.⁶⁴ Where traditional journalism

⁶³ Tom Wolfe, "The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby," *The Kandy-Kolored Tangerine-Flake Streamline Baby* (New York: Bantam Books, 1999), 75. The piece was originally published in *Esquire* (November 1963) as "There Goes (Vroom! Vroom!) That Kandy Kolored Tangerine-Flake Baby."

⁶⁴ Michael L. Johnson, "Wherein Lies the Value?" *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 9, Number 1 (1975): 135-141, Thomas Meisenhelder, "Sociology and the New Journalism," *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 11, Number 2 (1977): 467-478 and Robert Sommer, "Tom Wolfe on Modern

is largely interested in describing the event, cultural anthropology looks to understand the context of the event and the structures that inform it, that is, Clifford Geertz's "webs of significance"⁶⁵ New Journalism shares this tendency in its obsessive attention to detail in its rendering of social scenes. Wolfe and the other New Journalists, Michael Johnson claims, uncover "the psychic structures buried beneath the taken-for-grantedness of everyday cultural forms."⁶⁶

Like Pop and Camp, the New Journalism prized surface over depth. The grand descriptive passages found in Talese or Wolfe rarely delve into the psychology of motivation. Instead, there is an apparent boredom with trauma, as if the Freudianism of the fifties had run its course and was now out of fashion. What mattered were personalities. We see this, for example, in Gay Talese's celebrated profile of Frank Sinatra from the April 1966 issue. In describing Sinatra's appearance, Talese writes,

... his fingers: they were nubby and raw, and the pinkies protruded, being so stiff from arthritis that he could barely bend them. He was, as usual immaculately dressed. He wore an oxford-gray suit with a vest, a suit conservatively cut on the outside but trimmed with flamboyant silk within; his shoes, British, seemed to be shined even on the bottom of the soles. He also wore, as everybody seemed to know, a remarkably convincing black hairpiece, one of sixty that he owns, most of them under the care of an inconspicuous little gray-haired lady who, holding his hair in a tiny satchel, follows him around whenever he performs. See earns \$400 a week. The most distinguishing thing about Sinatra's face are his eyes, clear blue and alert, eyes that within seconds can go cold with anger, or glow with affection, or, as now, reflect a vague

Architecture: Further Comparison of New Journalism and Social Science, *Journal of Popular Culture*, Vol. 18, Number 2 (1984): 111-116.

⁶⁵ Clifford Geertz, "Thick Description: Toward an Interpretive Theory of Culture," *The Interpretation of Culture* (New York: Basic Books, 1973), 5.

⁶⁶ Johnson, "Wherein Lies the Value," 139.

detachment that keeps his friends silent and distant.⁶⁷

The complexity of Sinatra's personality is revealed through the contradictions in his appearance. The juxtaposition of high end clothing and powerful blue eyes to "nubby and raw" fingers and a \$400 a week wig-mistress powerfully reaffirms Talese's Sinatra as at once powerful and vulnerable, authentic and phony. The passage is instructive in its ability to reconstruct description as a vital, even central, feature of the text. This tendency towards lush, perhaps even exhaustive, description put the New Journalism into conflict with the prevailing logic of twentieth century literature (particularly modernism) that saw description as, at best, a necessary evil.

It is for this reason perhaps that Wolfe's description of the New Journalism is so heavily indebted to the tradition of nineteenth century realism. If Wolfe pays special attention to Balzac, it is with good reason. Balzac, as Erich Auerbach suggested, understood the necessity of explicitly locating his characters within a richly described historical milieu. As Auerbach continues, "He...conceives this connection as a necessary one: to him every milieu becomes a moral and physical atmosphere which impregnates the landscape, the dwelling, furniture, implements, clothing, physique, character, surroundings, ideas, activities, and fates of men."⁶⁸ Wolfe's advocacy of a journalistic practice that sought to capture life is not altogether different, *in intent*, from that of Balzac, Gogol, Flaubert and Zola. In particular, Wolfe insisted that the rendering of what he calls "status life" (that is, the material

⁶⁷ Gay Talese, "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold," *The Gay Talese Reader: Portraits and Encounters* (New York: Walker and Company, 2003), 21. "Frank Sinatra Has a Cold" originally appeared in the April 1966 issue of *Esquire*.

⁶⁸ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature*, Translated by Willard R. Trask (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 473.

expression of social positioning) into descriptive prose was at the heart of the New Journalist project.

The New Journalism's development in the pages of *Esquire* complimented the magazine's sense of editorial mission. The mood at *Esquire*, as journalist Dan Wakefield would assert in a 1966 *Atlantic* article, was dominated by the ethos that "anything goes as long as it is interesting and true."⁶⁹ This model of freewheeling irreverence further informed the magazine's relationship to the reader. As the magazine shifted from the engaged heroic masculinity of the "Uncommon Man" to the ironic detachment of the "New Sentimentality," the importance of the public self remained the one constant that informed *Esquire*'s articulation of masculine identity. What had changed was the language used to describe it. Where the "Uncommon Man," ideally demonstrated his sophistication by thumbing his nose at mass culture and entering into the marketplace on his own terms, the "New Sentimentality" echoed Pop, Mod and Camp in their ambiguous positioning to the marketplace. The New Journalism was adept at capturing this ambiguity.

"Come Alive, America," Charles and Bonnie Remsberg's February 1965 account of a sweepstake winner's frenzied shopping spree, is exemplary in this instance. The Miller family of Taylorville, IL was the winner of a timed shopping spree in a local grocery store. They had thirty minutes to grab whatever they could off the shelves. Pepsi Cola, the contest's sponsor, would then pay for the bill. In this straightforward set-up, we see numerous themes at work: a debunking of the idea of the good life, the cynicism of the (Eastern) city and the innocence of the

⁶⁹ Dan Wakefield, "The Personal Voice and the Impersonal Eye," *The Atlantic Monthly*, June 1966, 86-90.

(Midwestern) town, Corporate America as manipulator of the hopes and desires of “everyday” Americans, and the surreal absurdity in the fanfare surrounding the spree. However, far from reading like an indictment of the “lords of masscult” (to borrow a phrase from Dwight Macdonald), the Rembergs engross themselves in the artificiality of the moment and of the Miller’s fleeting celebrity. The penultimate shopping spree is rendered not as a the tragedy of a gluttonous consumer culture but as a Rabelaisian free-for-all in which the *noblese oblige* of the corporate sponsors was all but disregarded as the Miller’s flaunted the discipline of the grocery store and cleared the shelves of over \$6000 worth of merchandise. The article closes with a Pepsi employee blaring a new Pepsi theme that encouraged shoppers to “Come alive.”⁷⁰

It’s a fascinating piece, especially in its ability to capture the rapturous glee in what was nothing more than a promotion. This fondness for banality then is in accordance with the ambiguity at the heart of the ironic sensibility that informed so much cultural production in the mid-sixties. We find a similar fascination with banality in *Esquire*’s celebrity profiles. The profile had been a long-standing ingredient in *Esquire*’s editorial mix. Profile writers, following the strategies of the “true success” model described by Charles Ponce de Leon, wrote complimentary pieces that sought above all else, intimacy with the powerful.⁷¹ The aim of the profile

⁷⁰ Charles and Bonnie Remberg, “Come Alive, America,” *Smiling Through the Apocalypse*, 191-200.

⁷¹ Charles Ponce de Leon, *Self Exposure: Human-Interest Journalism and the Emergence of Celebrity in American, 1890-1940* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2002), 108-109. The “true success” device figured centrally in the development of the genre of the newspaper and magazine personality profile. In his emphasis on the fascination with “exemplary lives,” Ponce de Leon shows how profiles of such disparate figures as politicians, entertainers and captains of industry articulated a consistent rhetoric on the attainment of success and the danger success presented. Central to this “master plot” of “true success” was an acknowledgement of the socio-economic shifts that had occurred in the final decades of the nineteenth century. With success no longer exclusively tied to land or business ownership, the social function of celebrity was to articulate a new discourse of success that,

was to humanize the profile subject (i.e. s/he's a real person) while at the same time deifying their accomplishments. This was a particularly successful model when the subjects were leaders of industry and politicians, both of whom regularly appeared in *Esquire's* profiles in the mid-1950s. With the development of the New Journalism, and the ascendancy of the "new sentimentality," portrayals of the famous and the powerful replaced celebration with cynicism.

The New Journalism technique of inserting the reporter into the story, for example, allowed for a new type of profile. In pieces such as Jack Richardson's "Mr. Fisher is Open" and Rex Reed's "Ava: Life in the Afternoon," getting the story becomes the story. Richardson's quixotic attempts to engage Eddie Fisher in a meaningful dialogue is repeatedly disrupted by hangers on, amorous groupies, fretful press secretaries, and a dimwitted Fisher, so trained by the culture industry that he could only answer questions with clichés. Throughout the piece, Richardson is told that Fisher is "open" yet no one was willing to explain what exactly this meant. Suspicious of *Esquire's* intentions, Fisher obfuscates Richardson's attempts to interview the singer. With a growing awareness that the few minutes he had chatted with Fisher in his Las Vegas dressing room were the extent of his interview, Richardson invokes Kafka's confused protagonist Joseph K. to describe his sense of disorientation and disbelief. Richardson finally leaves Las Vegas bemoaning the fact that he would never know what Eddie Fisher was really like. For all of its pathos, this

as Ponce de Leon argues "served a larger ideological program, promoting the notion that success happiness and self-fulfillment had little to do with material goods or social status." To the contrary, true success was marked by the ability to develop a coherent sense of self; "the ability to follow one's own course and achieve the 'piece of mind' that came from autonomy" as Ponce de Leon would characterize it.

is precisely the point of Richardson's piece. In short, there is no Eddie Fisher. Instead, Eddie Fisher is the collective of hangers-on, managers, press agents and fans who construct and regulate the identity that is Eddie Fisher.⁷²

Rex Reed's profile of Ava Gardner does the opposite. Unlike Richardson, Reed has full access to Gardner, perhaps too much as it turns out. "Inside the cheetah cage without a whip and trembling like a nervous bird," Reed's encounter with Gardner can only be described as bizarre, over-the-top and delicious. Gardner drinks too much, hurls insults at the studio system, flirts with men half her age, doles out hipster slang ("Drink time, baby!"), and summons all of her talent for pathos in decrying the war in Vietnam ("Look at them...they're such babies. Please don't go to Vietnam."). Reed's piece then is the flipside of the traditional profile. It celebrates the faded glory and the hackneyed tragedy of the star in decline. What would have been cause for concern in another forum (i.e. "What has happened to Ava Gardner?") is the basis for a rollicking confection. For Reed, Ava Gardner is Norman Desmond, albeit without the dead suitor floating in the pool.⁷³

Section 4: The End of the Laughter and the Return to Sobriety: A Conclusion

By the end of the 1960s, the freewheeling hi-jinks that had defined *Esquire's* style could not contend with the increasingly bleak cultural and political landscape. The war in Vietnam seemed to be without resolution. Urban race riots, deurbanization, bussing, and a radicalized black nationalism put to rest liberal dreams

⁷² Jack Richardson, "Mr. Fisher is Open," *Esquire*, December 1963.

⁷³ Rex Reed, "Ava: Life in the Afternoon," in *Smiling Through the Apocalypse*, 311-326. Originally published in *Esquire*, May 1967.

of a painless solution to the “race problem.” The student movement performed its best possible imitation of the 1930s Left by splintering into myriad, and increasingly violent, revolutionary factions, each promising to “Bring the War Home.” The Counterculture slipped into an irrelevance that was fueled by disillusionment, cynicism and exhaustion from the introduction of heroin and deadly hallucinogens such as PCP into the drug culture of the community.

Given this, it is easy to understand why *Esquire* began to slowly abandon its satiric and irreverent style. Simply put, there was little to laugh about anymore. With music magazines like *Rolling Stone* and *Creem*, taking up the second wave of the New Journalism (represented respectively by Hunter S. Thompson and Lester Bangs), *Esquire* turned its attention back to fiction and serious reporting. In this period, new fiction editor Gordon Lish was proactive in reestablishing *Esquire* as a respected fiction magazine. Lish, for example, published early important pieces by Raymond Carver, T. Coraghessen Boyle, Don DeLillo, and William Kotzwinkle. In non-fiction, the earnestness of John Sack and the scholarly-bent of Gary Wills had come to differentiate *Esquire* in the early seventies from its recent past. Though Hayes could still put together a brilliant issue, *Esquire* as a whole was suffering from a creative malaise.

Sensing a need to revitalize the magazine once again, Gingrich attempted to convince Hayes to step down as Editor and take his place as Publisher upon Gingrich’s eventual retirement. For much of 1972, Hayes wrangled with the board of directors at *Esquire, Inc.*, refusing to step down. He instead wanted both titles. The board would not budge and on April 05, 1973, Hayes left *Esquire*. In the years that

followed, the magazine was sold numerous times, went through several editors, became *Esquire Fortnightly* under Clay Felker (who himself had been expelled from *New York* by Rupert Murdoch) and returned to a monthly publication under owners Philip Moffit and Christopher Whittle. Moffit and Whittle redesigned the magazine and refocused its attention on lifestyle issues. They had also brought back Rust Hills as fiction editor. At the end of the eighties, Moffit and Whittle sold *Esquire* to the Hearst Corporation. Under Hearst, the magazine went through another round of tampering with its editorial mission. Notably this included a return to cheesecake and the development of the “Women We Love” feature. One part pin-up and one part celebrity profile, it attempts to hide its ogling function with claptrap celebrating strong, sexy women. In recent years, *Esquire* has fought off such competitors as *Maxim* and *Stuff* by focusing on an up market audience interested in designer clothes, food and wine trends, politics and sex. It has also continued the practice of publishing top-rate fiction. Don DeLillo, David Foster Wallace and David Sedaris are among the top names that regularly appear in the magazine. Current editor, David Granger, describes *Esquire* as a hybrid that responds to all of the interests men hold. “It is, and has been for nearly (sic) seventy years, a magazine about the interests, the curiosity, the passions, of men.”⁷⁴

In its current version, *Esquire* has come full circle to celebrate the qualities Arnold Gingrich found the magazine on 1933. Its clothing features are among the best and most reliable. Its coverage of food, consumer goods (particularly electronics) and leisure is highly respected. In short, today’s *Esquire* imagines its

⁷⁴ David Granger, “About *Esquire*,” <http://www.esquire.com/about/>, Accessed on March 15, 2006.

readers as the apex of status consumption. In many respects, today's *Esquire* is closer to its 1930s predecessor than the *Esquire* of the late fifties or sixties ever were.

In fact, we can argue that despite Gingrich's desire to return to the original *Esquire*, the magazine Hayes, Felker and Hills created radically redefined what it meant to be a man. In short, they had created a magazine that hinted at the possibility of an alternative oppositional masculinity. The Uncommon Man and his "New Sentimentality" successor suggested that masculinity crises and mass culture panics were, in and of themselves, dead ends. Each held up a model of masculinity built upon a process of self-actualization that depended upon a critical, even ironic, sense of world. It required an understanding that men need not abandon consumption but rather develop strategies that reassert the agency of the consumer. Moreover, *Esquire's* shifting sense of masculinity points us to some important lessons about masculinity itself.

The growing corpus in the history of masculinity, for the most part, holds on to the fiction that despite the multiple ways of being man, there is a tacit agreement that something called masculinity exists and that there is a way to make sense of the differences between men and women. Such approaches, even when they profess an anti-foundationalist orientation, nevertheless return to the language of essentialism when they unwittingly proclaim a search for an authentic self. This is a tradition that I have sought to question in my work. My sense of masculinity is that it does not exist, or to be more accurate, it can never be authentic or real. Rather, masculinity is but one of the many terms we use to make sense of difference and power. Uncovering the different forms of masculinity and, as Robert Connell suggests,

thinking relationally about their construction in regards to the embodiment, articulation and practice of gender identity is an important first step. However, we need to go further. To this end, I have attempted to think about masculinity and its relationship to the marketplace. My aim has been to argue that the way men and women consume are not by-products of gender difference but themselves important sites where difference is constituted. In the goods we purchase, the items we desire and the worlds we create, gender norms are enforced, contested and secured. In the case of *Esquire*, the Uncommon Man provided the magazine's readers a coherent and convenient mythology of self-actualization that neutralized the problematic anti-consumerist rhetoric of much mid-century social criticism, all the while advocating the critics' calls for a dynamic, virile and authentic masculine individualism. The problem of the historian of the male consumer then is to come to grips with the unsettled discursive practice of gender.

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