



Andrew Billen

Miss Naked Beauty (Channel 4)

★★★★☆

Imagine (BBC One)

★★★★★

Suggs' Italian Job (Sky Arts 1)

★★★★☆

The standup Reginald D. Hunter observes in his act that men, being so busy running the world, simply do not have the time to suppress women as much as they would like to. So they get women to do it for them. After years of taking an unhealthy interest in sex, style and makeovers, Channel 4 now employs an elfin stylist called Gok Wan to liberate women from the tyranny of lookism. Gok's message is that women must be free to be women in all their variedly shaped, imperfectly complexioned, underweight glory. Hallelujah! Next C4 will be telling us that moving home is futile, suggesting we eat more takeaways and holding counselling courses for nonentities with an irresistible desire to star in a reality television series.

Gok's latest vehicle, **Miss Naked Beauty**, is, paradoxically, a beauty contest although a bizarre one in which the contestants are not allowed to beautify themselves. The prize is to be C4's natural beauty ambassador, to "write up" (what-

make-up was exterminated. "Girlfriends, I love you!" shrieked Gok, perhaps to prevent aberrant images of the Holocaust popping into viewers' minds.

The women were left to confront their unadorned visages in their mirrors. One claimed that she had not looked at her unmade-up face in years. (Obviously she could put on her lipstick while blindfolded, but how did she apply the mascara?) Another wept because her washed-away foundation covered her acne scars. For a man some of this stuff was genuinely revealing. I had always assumed that women pierced their faces in the spirit of punk, to revolt us. But Dawn from Glasgow, a Madonna in dyed-black hair, painted eyebrows and three nose rings and three lip rings, said she wore them to increase her allure.

This disgracefully compulsive programme was a mass of contradictions. It crusaded to empower women, yet patronised them in the process. It insisted on a woman's right to make choices yet scolded them when they chose mascara. It was presented by a man who, as he admitted, made his living from applying make-up, and by a beautiful woman, Myleene Klass, who interviewed the pale and spotty from beneath the cover of slap herself (although she insisted that she used much less than in her prime). Personally, I was with Six Studs. Applying dollops of the stuff in preparation for the judges who would whittle the 25 remaining hopefuls down to 12, Dawn declared: "Today I choose to wear make-up. Tomorrow I may choose not to."

Clare Beavan of **Imagine** came up with a delightful and near perfect film on the



Here come the girls (and Gok)

Gok Wan and Myleene Klass joined forces to liberate women from the tyranny of lookism

power and influence of the love story. Proceeding via word association more than anything else, the documentary galloped past Jane Austen, courtly love, *Brief Encounter*, the songs of Hal David, Mills and Boon and *Lolita*, before arriving at the tentative conclusion that modern-day love stories were doomed because most of the obstacles to contemporary Romeo and Juliets getting together — class, race, war, stiff upper lips — had been removed. Happy endings were becoming ineluctable. Helen Fielding spoke well and Jeffrey Eugenides even better. Claire Tomalin made the valuable point that Jane Austen did not write love stories but satires that contained love stories as plot devices. It was just a lovely film with scholarly interviews conducted al fresco, weird monochrome cartoons of Shakespeare stories, and the clips *juste* from the movies *juste*. The only blemish

— which showed up the beauty of the rest of the programme — were the nonsensical interventions of *Imagine's* favourite Freudian, the penis-nosed and pubic-haired Adam Phillips, who "explained" that when we fall in love for the first time we are re-creating the moment we fell in love with our parents. Obviously.

In its HD glory, **Suggs' Italian Job** was visually lovely, too, but it suffered from a fatal lack of intellectual ambition. It was only one step up from a tourist board travelogue. Suggs deserves better. He is a presenter who is bright and witty. He was confronted with the iconic Alessi lemon squeezer — the one that looks like a spacecraft from *The War of the Worlds* — and the designer told him that it was the most controversial lemon squeezer in history. But then, observed Suggs, there was not much competition for that title. ●

andrew.billen@thetimes.co.uk