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# I/Beverley Skeggs and Helen Wood

## Introduction: Real Class

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### **‘Is it really about class?’**

This was the question often asked when we presented our research at various seminars and conferences throughout the duration of our reality television project, ‘Making Class and Self through Televised Ethical Scenarios’.<sup>1</sup> The project, rather unusually since David Morley’s (1980) audience research on *The Nationwide Audience*, foregrounds issues of class in both textual and audience analyses. The fields of media studies and sociology have sometimes been rather reticent to acknowledge that *all* representations are at some level always about class. Television in particular, with its stories of everyday lives and ‘ordinary people’, represents the structure of social relationships, from the most intimate to the most global, which are *always* in one way or another *about* class.

Journalists have not been so hesitant. They have regularly and repeatedly pointed to the class dimensions at work in reality television, referring to them as classed pantomimes and morality plays. In the US, James Wolcott laments that ‘Reality TV wages class warfare and promotes proletarian exploitation’ (*Vanity Fair*, December 2009), while in the UK, Decca Aitkenhead reports:

No one knew that reality television could turn a person’s world upside down; reinvent a gobby young *Big Brother* girl from Bermondsey as a millionaire princess, or turn a council estate *Wife Swap* mum into a national hate figure. Nor did anyone realise that the class system would devour the genre, letting all our old prejudices run riot in the new cultural shorthand for vulgarity and exhibitionism. (*Guardian*, 15 June 2009)

While class may have, until recently, been ‘uncool’ in public debate and in the academy, reality television has made it spectacularly visible across our screens. Let us start with some obvious observations. First, there are many popular critical commentaries in which reality television as ‘trash’ inscribes a set of assumptions about participants and viewers based upon hierarchies of culture, taste and person-value. Second, the idea that reality television represents a crisis in civic public culture is largely framed around its inversion of public and private spheres in which matters of the everyday and the ‘ordinary’ are made centre stage. The term ‘ordinary’ is one of the many euphemisms used to stand in for ‘working class’, because in many different nations it is no longer

fashionable to speak about class identifications (Bromley 2000; Savage 2003; Sayer 2005). Locating the drama at the site of the 'ordinary' also suggests a greater purchase on the 'authentic' – a route informed by social-realist critique in documentary and film – which is often problematically associated with race and class formations (Gilroy 1990; Biressi and Nunn 2005). Third, in terms of the participants on reality television programmes, there is an over-representation of the working class, precisely because of their cultural and economic situation. Mimi White (2006), for instance, commenting on the American programme *Cheaters* (2000–), notes how the \$500 payment skews the class profile decisively, so much so that there is clearly a level of class exploitation at work. This is a point that is often obscured by the apparent democratising potential of reality television as access is opened out to members of the public. Fourth, the supposed access to a 'better life' and even to celebrity through reality television reinvents the myths of social mobility that abound in neo-liberal political culture. As chapters of this book address, the contours of celebrity themselves evoke a language of class antagonism around taste distinctions and judgments of talent which often result in the emergence of working-class celebrities as hate figures. It is ironic that lifestyle and reality television espouse mobility and choice at precisely the same time as the gap between rich and poor widens and social mobility rates remain stagnant, or even point downwards in the UK and the US (Brunsdon 2003; Andrejevic 2004).

Finally, many programmes specifically promote and develop formats of class antagonism (*Wife Swap*, *Holiday Showdown*, *The Simple Life*). Some develop the Pygmalion story where the working class are exposed as inadequate and in need of training in middle- or upper-class etiquette standards (*Ladette to Lady*, *My Fair Lady*) or even in commodity culture (*From Asbo Teen to Beauty Queen*), or must prove their worth in terms of deserving financial aid or benefit (*Secret Millionaire*, *How the Other Half Live*, *Benefit Busters*). Others pit working class against aristocratic culture (*What the Butler Saw*), or set the aspirational against the abject working class (*Wife Swap*); some identify deficient working-class practices and bodies (*Supernanny*, *What Not to Wear*, *You Are What You Eat*, *Honey We're Killing the Kids*) or revel in apparently pathological abjectness (*Ibiza Uncovered*, *Jersey Shore*, *Geordie Shore*). While extensive research has already pointed out that many lifestyle programmes promote and establish middle-class standards as normative and universal (Biressi and Nunn 2008; Lewis 2008; Palmer 2004; Ringrose and Walkerdine 2008; Taylor 2005; McRobbie 2004).

For these reasons, we think it is important to discuss television's intervention in class formations, particularly at a time when political rhetoric is diverting the blame for structural inequality onto personal, individualised failure (Skeggs 2004a). And this is the main problem. How do we explain this awkward tension between what is obvious to many newspaper commentators and critics and the sensitivities around a bold discussion of class that exist elsewhere? bell hooks argues:

Nowadays it is fashionable to talk about race or gender; the uncool subject is class. It's the subject that makes us all tense, nervous, uncertain about where we stand. In less than twenty years our nation has become a place where the truly rich rule. At one time wealth afforded prestige and power; but the wealthy alone did not determine our nation's values. While greed has always been a part of American capitalism, it is only recently that it has set the standard for how we live and interact in everyday life. (hooks 2000: vii)

A huge amount of rhetorical effort has gone into denying the existence of class, which makes sense as the privileged and those who represent them protect their interests. So in the UK, we have witnessed the denial of 'class' and 'society' by Conservative Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher and the denial of the 'social' by Conservative Prime Minister John Major. New Labour has claimed that 'the class war is over', with Prime Minister Tony Blair and his deputy stating, 'we're all middle class now' (curiously, while Deputy John Prescott was simultaneously being laughed at for his lack of language skills). Both UK governments (not that there was much difference between them – Margaret Thatcher claims her 'greatest achievement' was New Labour) over a period of thirty years have put a great deal of effort into delegitimising and reducing the power of trade unions. While in the US, the power of the state, expressed through McCarthyism, meant that to speak class was to be in serious danger of appearing anti-American (Weir 2007), an issue that reared its ugly head in the recent attack on Frances Fox Piven by the *Fox TV* news host, Glenn Beck (see Harris 2011).

When we have talked about reality television outside of the UK, we have sometimes met the response that class is a peculiarly British preoccupation, both on the shows and for British academics. But as Alessandra Stanley, writing in *The New York Times* about humiliation on US reality shows, suggests, 'the novelty lies in heightening the clash between the upper middle class and blue-collar America, a leitmotif of previous reality shows that has now become prominent' (23 April 2003). It is clear that some of the preoccupations on British reality television, with settings such as finishing schools and manor houses, hark back to a particular national formation (although *What the Butler Saw* aired on US PBS in 2003 as *The Manor House* with fairly good ratings).

Part of the impetus for this book comes from the recognition that class relationships have very different national inflections and we have included contributions from post-socialist Europe, Australia, as well as the US and UK. The main differences, which various chapters will go on to flesh out, lie in the history of the vernacular expression of class rather than in its theoretical explanation. In the UK/European traditions, class relations are usually spoken through antagonism, with a longer historical tradition of the celebration of working-class culture evident in the UK (Vicinus 1974; Vincent 1981). In the US, incorporation rather than antagonism structures the vernacular, which is founded in the myths of the American Dream where everyone who works is coded as middle class. This is complicated further by the categorisation of working-class black Americans as 'poor' and antagonism displaced onto struggles for civil rights, which also explains the need to racialise those outside the structures of work as 'white trash' (Wray and Newitz 1997). In Eastern Europe, socialism and ideals of the collective worker as inscribed by the state are being shed in the move to market economies. Such rapid transformation means that any mention of class is seen as retrograde, working against the progress of the nation (see Volčič in this volume). Interestingly, Australia has inherited some of the UK vernacular traditions where the history of British transportation haunts the class relations of the present. Discourses of Australia have historically been founded upon myths of egalitarianism that have been filtered through narratives of the rural 'man of the bush' (Western 1991). However, no matter how much effort goes into denial through political rhetoric, popular culture repeatedly returns like the repressed to the issue of class and has become one of the major conceits (or structuring absences) of reality television. As formats travel across national boundaries, we see a bizarre

mix of antagonism and incorporation, exclusion and abjection, but nearly always with the reification of individual volition as the solution to all problems.

Perhaps reality television's amplification of class can exist precisely *because* of the dominant rhetoric that class is less significant than it once was. The ever-mutating genre exists alongside political rhetoric and the claims of academic theory that in late-capitalist consumer-driven societies, class as a category is irrelevant or in decline: Ulrich Beck and Elisabeth Beck-Gernsheim (2002), for instance, describe class as a 'zombie category', a haunting but irrelevant nuisance that gets in the way of understanding individualisation. Dominant shifts in social theory around individualisation, which have sometimes been applied to explain the rise of ordinary people on television, suggest the decline of class as a salient category. These propositions are underpinned by the notion that because class formations have been altered by the decline in manufacturing industry and the rise of the service sector, the articulation of a class consciousness has disappeared with the decline in power of the unions, leaving us all able to refashion our 'mobile selves' in relation to a more flexible job market. We have been at pains to point out that such theories contribute to a new *ideology* of class, which occludes the causes of class (Skeggs 2004a; Wood and Skeggs 2008; Skeggs and Wood 2009).

If class *consciousness* is not what it once was, class *inequality* is certainly increasing. (As we write in 2011 from the British context, the UK coalition government's campaign to reduce the national debt involves a series of harsh cuts in public funding which will be felt most by the poorest of society. Unemployment is at 7.9 per cent and one in five young people between sixteen and twenty-five are now unemployed.<sup>2</sup> In the USA, the unemployment figure rose from 5 to 9 per cent between 2008 and 2010.<sup>3</sup>) New capitalist modes of production only reorganise those that cannot mobilise themselves around the shifting job market, leaving many – the so-called underclass 'chavs' in the UK, or the 'white trash' and racialised 'poor' of the US – related to the mode of production by their very alienation from it, discarded (literally and metaphorically) as the 'waste' of the 'system'.

Another explanation for the hesitancy around class is that media and cultural studies have responded to post-structuralist critiques of 'reductionism' and 'essentialism' (Morley 2009). Analyses of media and class were stymied by criticism of an overly reductive application of Marx's version of ideology which relied on the base/superstructure model (Murdock 1997). Assuming the base as the economic force which underpins and therefore determines the superstructure (the ideas of a society) is to oversimplify the tensions and complex relationships between the economy of culture and the cultural economy in social relations of production. Morley (2009) argues that Marxist analyses often read texts as simple 'reflections' of the ideas of the ruling classes, offering crude assumptions about the successful imposition of dominant ideologies, largely through a reading of Althusser's (1971) model of interpellation. Given this kind of determinism overburdened by explicating ideology, there was a retreat from the practice of making critical judgments about cultural products, as cultural studies in particular pursued the ordinary and the vernacular with zeal (Murdock 1997).

One answer has been to argue for the renewed relevance of political economy, and reality television has been evaluated in terms of its congruence with the capitalist economy of television production: cheap programming which is easily formatted and exported (Raphael 2004). This cues us

into the fact that media are both mode of production *and* cultural narrative. Moreover, technological advances and developments in the industry have meant that these two elements have become even more intricately entwined as production is more and more part of the text, and audiences become more and more involved in production. Nowhere is this more visible than in reality television's ongoing integration into other media platforms. As Mike Wayne (2003: 143) argues about the *Big Brother* phenomenon, "'text' is really too narrow a word", since it is 'haunted by the unequal exchanges of value, power and ethics which are indispensable to capitalism'.

## What Is Reality Television?

Debates about what exactly constitutes reality television are extensive within television production, journalism, marketing discourse and academic analyses. Su Holmes and Deborah Jermyn (2004) detail how reality television is far too diverse to be contained within a specific genre, drawing on techniques from light entertainment, lifestyle, daytime TV, talk shows, documentary and melodrama, in which key skills in television production shift from direction to casting and editing. It is precisely its hybridity and the speed with which it replicates itself that makes it difficult to define and pin down (Holmes 2008). However, Nick Couldry argues for maintaining the term 'reality television' because of its suggestiveness about the myth of the mediated centre: 'presenting itself as the privileged "frame" through which we access the reality that *matters to us as social beings*' (Couldry 2003: 58; our emphasis). We would further argue for keeping the term for what it indexes about the appearance of the material world in texts – for its contribution to the spectacularisation of class relations.

Reality television has often been cited as having antecedents in social-realist observational documentary in the UK (for a good account, see Biressi and Nunn 2005 or Bruzzi 2006), and in the social experimental tradition of liberal education in the US (see McCarthy 2004). Early examples include observational documentaries such as Paul Watson's *The Family* (1974) and in the US *An American Family* (1972). Later developments, potentially fuelled by the economic pressures on the television industry (Raphael 2004), saw observational cop shows like *America's Most Wanted* (1988) in the US and *Police, Camera, Action* (1994) in the UK. A new era of 'formatted documentary' (Hill 2007) was quick to develop, while exportable shows like *Big Brother* (2000), *Survivor* (2000) and *Idol* (2001) created lucrative franchises that were sometimes termed 'event' programming. At the same time, the mainstreaming of what were once daytime concerns into primetime television saw the feminisation of the schedule and the rise of lifestyle and makeover television (Moseley 2000). At the end of the 1990s and into the 2000s, shows like *Changing Rooms* (1997), *What Not to Wear* (2002), *Extreme Makeover* (2002) and *Extreme Makeover: Home Edition* (2003) offered transformative solutions to tired bodies, homes and gardens. These shows have begun to evolve into programmes with an even more strident moral/pedagogic agenda like *Supernanny* (2004), *You Are What You Eat* (2004), *The Biggest Loser* (2004) and *Honey We're Killing the Kids* (2006), largely promoted by Channel 4 and BBC 3 in the UK, and by The Learning Channel in the USA. For a more detailed discussion of the gender and classed elements of the pedagogic agenda in the numerous versions of makeover television, see Weber (2009). The reality landscape now looks incredibly diverse, with pedagogic shows surviving

among game and dating permutations such as *The Bachelor* (2002), shows which urge the reform of loutish men (*Tool Academy*, 2009), to those about relations with pets (*It's Me or the Dog!*, 2005), along with shows about heroic (working-class) masculinity (*Deadliest Catch*, 2005) and numerous challenges for celebrities (*I'm a Celebrity, Get Me Out of Here!*, 2002, and *Dancing with the Stars*, 2004).

Faced with such a range of programmes, defining the rise of the genre has proved difficult. For a time, the term 'docusoap' was used as a catch-all phrase (Bruzzi 2006; Dovey 2000; Kilborn 2003), but the event-focused lack of narrative structure and short timescale of many programmes called into question the soap element, while the formatted, melodramatic generation of conflict challenged the documentary elements. John Corner (2002) proposes that reality television is best viewed as part of television's 'post-documentary context', a contradictory cultural environment where viewers, participants and producers are less invested in absolute truth and representational ethics, and more interested in the space that exists between reality and fiction, in which new levels of representational play and reflexivity are visualised.

The establishment of lifestyle programming and its insistence on the exploration of the personal and intimate has given momentum to changes in documentary formats. One of the prevailing techniques from the makeover show is the camera's primary interest in the reaction to the situation, rather than the action – what Charlotte Brunson (2003: 10) calls 'the changed grammar of the close-up', where television evokes rather than represents. Rachel Moseley describes how:

Make-over shows ask the audience to draw on a repertoire of personal skills, our ability to search faces and discern reaction (facilitated by the close-up) from the smallest details – the twitch of a muscle, an expression in the eye – a competence suggested by Tania Modleski as key to the pleasure of soap opera's melodramatic form. These programmes showcase the threatening excessiveness of the ordinary ... These are precisely instances of powerful spectacular uber-ordinariness. (Moseley 2000: 314)

The regularity and importance of the close-up across all reality programmes, coupled with ironic music and juxtapositional editing, register the close proximity reality programming has to melodrama and its manipulation of affect. Private lives are transformed into public spectacle through an emphasis upon drama and performance over information. Helen Piper (2004) usefully offers us the phrase 'improvised drama' to describe how the banal observations of a series like *Wife Swap* (2003–9) are turned into moments of dramatic intensity.

The melodramatic tension of much reality television suggests more potential in the form beyond initial disappointment with a lack of documentary point of view. Holmes and Jermy's (2007) analysis of the ambiguities present in *Wife Swap* suggest that the focus on the struggles of the individual and their everyday labours reveals the very constructedness of 'typical' gender identities. While John Corner (2006: 73) suggests that it 'exposes some of the rhythms, tensions, and contradictions of everyday living and indeed the structures of wealth, class and culture in ways not open to more conventional [documentary] treatments'. Participants and viewers are at least opening themselves up to the possibility of re-imagining the routine and the everyday as they wrestle with aspects of discontent.

What is therefore interesting is *how* reality television forces class back onto the agenda. Whereas people 'in' the media were out of reach and belonged to a set of privileged elites, now the reliance on so-called 'ordinary' people as participants in all manner of games, trials and transformations, who allow their own behaviours and practices to be observed and recorded for entertainment, shifts the terms of debate. Holmes and Jermyn (2004) note that the one consistent feature of reality television is how the issues of cultural value continually plague the discussion, which is partly to do with this emphasis on what Francis Bonner (2003) calls 'ordinary everydayness'.

Some suggest that the use of 'ordinary' people is democratising, others that it is exploitative. The use of the term 'ordinary' should immediately alert us to the political archaeology latent in the word: as mentioned above, Roger Bromley (2000) proposes that 'ordinary' is one of the many euphemisms to emerge after thirty years of political rhetoric and academic theory claiming the demise of class, as a substitute for the term 'working class'. The class profile of those appearing on reality television is skewed towards the working class, which also reflects more widespread trends in participatory media which have altered the class and gendered dynamics across media more generally (see Griffen-Foley 2004).

Whereas previous analyses of social-realist documentary and drama could comfortably draw out the dominant position in the text, when media had a more obvious relationship with the state, or with other modes of capitalism, in reality television we are faced with questions of *self* representation, as well as representation. Increased access to the media has not necessarily produced access to full participation in democracy, or even more control over the semiotic forms of power, which calls for a re-evaluation of recognition politics (see also Fraser 1999; McNay 2008). This is an era, Graeme Turner (2010) argues, where the media has become so powerful that it operates in its own interest and where participation in media entertainment is a very different process to 'participatory democracy'. Now media do not just work to 'represent' cultural identities, rather they have the power to create them, as we see in the various permutations and values attached to forms of celebrity. Wood (2009) has argued elsewhere that television has interactive ways of establishing meaning with viewers which extend beyond models of representation. We must therefore look for other ways, *as well as* through representation, in which social inequalities are embedded into mediated processes (Wood 2010).

If the media occupies a mythical 'centre', as proposed by Nick Couldry (2003), we need to reassess how it functions. For Jack Bratich (2007), reality television is not just about the *representation* of society and culture, but a more ingrained *intervention* into those fields. Unpaid participation in media has collapsed the distance from which we might once have seen it as an ideological force operating from 'out there'. One response to the failings of ideology to fully explain ambiguities in media texts in the 1990s was to deploy postmodern critiques which talked about irony and playfulness. While reality television certainly plugs into that trajectory, the further collapse of modernist boundaries of production and consumption, and of text and audience, ironically put class, and more problematically ideology, back in the spotlight. Class inequality has offered up a convenient short cut to narrative oppositions in the absence of traditional scripting. Now that reality television inscribes 'performing oneself' as labour, what kinds of alienation might we be experiencing? To tell dramas

through 'real' people marks the editing and (sometimes) scripting of people as processes which attach value to certain modes of performance and behaviour over others. This is why so many outdated forms of class antagonism, like the use of finishing-school teachers to control recalcitrant pupils (as in *Ladette to Lady*, 2005–), can be resurrected without much curiosity. What modes of antagonism are at work when people perform themselves? Do we see new mediated forms of struggle where self-performance is the new 'spirit' which fuels profit accumulation? 'Real life' is broken down and commodified into forms of spectacle, encoding certain ways of seeing ourselves and seeing others which is constitutive (not just representative) of social hierarchies and distinctions. In the interests of lucrative entertainment, class is back, presented in new (mediated) ways.

Given that class has for some years now been marginal to the analyses of media texts, we think it useful first to offer a summary of class theories. We hope this will help to guide the reader through the rest of the book. We then explain some of the extant work on class and reality television and offer a route through the structure and chapters of the book.

## What Is Class?

The term 'class' is one of the most spoken, denied, euphemised and confusing terms bandied about in public culture and remains integral to the vernacular, from popular culture to government rhetoric and academic writing. In a UK MORI (1995) poll, over 50 per cent of the population specified that they 'felt' working class, but had huge problems defining what this meant. In a UK MORI (1997) poll for the TV programme *World in Action*, of those surveyed, 75 per cent of people said they were conscious of living in a society divided by class. And in 2002 in a UK MORI poll, 66 per cent of people surveyed claimed to feel 'working class and proud of it'. Nearly 50 per cent believed that Britain was more divided by class today than it was in 1979, and 70 per cent said they believed 'the class system is harmful to us and those around us'. More bizarrely, the 2002 poll also found that 55 per cent of those who would be categorised as middle class by occupation claimed to have 'working-class feelings'.

Sociologists Payne and Grew (2005) suggest that these uncertainties around 'knowing' and 'feeling' whether one is of a certain class, or whether one experiences society as classed, persist because class is incredibly hard to define and has come to stand in for so many things. Since the Ancient Greeks, the term 'class' has operated to include and exclude, to mark through classification and materialise inequalities, in an effort to organise and constitute understandings of value. The term is also used as a way of explaining *all* social organisation and is intimately tied to other complex understandings of nation, sexuality, race and gender. Payne and Grew maintain that in order to answer 'what is class?' would require a complex sociology essay, which explains why lay people have so much difficulty pinning down the definition. Below is our attempt to summarise the main arguments.

Classifications are never neutral terms, but emerge as the result of particular power interests that then get consolidated into abstract explanations. While they are shaped by interest groups in the social and material conditions of their emergence, they are also reinforced by their citation, their performative function and the struggles for legitimation that take place across different sites

of institutionalisation such as welfare, law, education and the media. Therefore, there are always struggles over the definitions of class-ifications and the power relations which instate and reinforce inequality. Social and media theorists are part of this legitimization/institutionalisation process and the current state of debates about class in social and cultural theory demonstrates the range of interests and perspectives at stake between those who want to use and organise around the category for purposes of social justice, and those who want to deny the existence of class to hide and legitimate their own privilege (see Savage 2003 and Skeggs 2004a for a development of these debates).

Put most simply, the term class explains distributive inequality through economic differentiation. For industrialised societies, class has been formed around the basis of capitalism, distinguishing between those who do, and those who do not, have access to the means of production. Yet even this is not straightforward, as key forms of economic organisation such as imperialism and colonialism, which established our current global economy, were indivisible from their moral legitimization – ‘the civilising mission’. For Max Weber ([1904] 1930), the project of capitalism was inseparable from its ‘spirit’ – that of Christianity – which was central to organising the labouring body and soul. The labouring body has been entwined with ideas about gender and sexuality. Capitalism shapes the divisions of labour – as raced, gendered and classed – not through the direct imposition of a model of perfect profit accumulation, but in negotiation with other histories of structured power such as patriarchy.

In this summary of the historical legacies that inform the use of the concept of class, we examine what is at stake in these particular definitions. Hopefully, this will enable the reader to identify why class is still a significant analytical lens for media analysis. It also draws attention to how ideas were transported into different spaces, via Marx and later Weber, in the making of national cultures, such as the Puritanism of the US, the communism of Eastern Europe and the ‘have a go’ denial of class in Australia, as demonstrated by the chapters in this book.

## Marx and Weber

There are two major theoretical/political trajectories in the development of class as a concept. These are abstractions about how class works – its causes and its manifestations – rather than understandings of empirical experience. The first, Marxist, approach prioritises the role of exploitation and struggle in the making of classes and social relations more generally. The second focuses on class hierarchies and status without reference to struggle and exploitation (see Cannadine 1998). For Marxists, class has a number of distinctive features: class is a *relationship* – i.e. it is always relative to other groups – and the relationship is *antagonistic* because it is always based on exploitation and control. Therefore, class is always about the struggle between groups over control, in which the exploiters and exploited fight it out. The antagonism is always formed in the process of *production*, and class is an *objective* relationship. For Marx, the ideas of society are always the ideas of the ruling class who have the means to put them into effect (access to the symbolic). It does not matter how people think about their subjective location (identity); rather, the location of people is entirely determined according to economic relationships of exploitation (Callinicos and Harman 1987).

The emphasis on antagonism means that, for Marx, class relations are *the* dynamic of history. This is epitomised by the struggle between those trying to extract (surplus) value from workers' labour power and the attempt by workers to restrict this extraction and wrestle back control over their time and energy. The form of this relationship of exploitation may change over time. For example, the development of the service economy and mutations into financialisation are not based on a direct labour relationship (e.g. sub-prime mortgages – see the brilliant analysis by Gary Dymski 2009), but ultimately, the relationship is always based on a struggle over the extraction and protection of value from bodies.

In Weber's ([1904] 1930) development of Marx, he shows how Calvinism's incitement to continual toil in order to generate one's place in heaven produced great dividends for capital. This analysis involved not just the imposition of the 'ideas of the ruling class' as Marx proposed, but a 'spirit' diffused through all our social relationships, including what we think of as our soul or subjectivity. In the US, we can see how the 'American Dream' operates as a 'spirit of capitalism', a pseudo-religious incitement deployed to similar effect to make impossible future success the means for enduring harsh labour conditions in the present and as a way of closing down alternative legitimate ways of being.

For Marx and Engels, it is the bourgeoisie that calls into existence the modern working class – the proletarians – 'who live only so long as they find work and who find work only so long as their labour increases capital' (Marx and Engels [1848] 1968: 51). In their analysis, class is a description of the conditions of existence of labour under capitalism. Class consciousness is not about identifying with a category but of recognising the exploitative conditions of one's existence. Weber ([1904] 1930) diluted the emphasis on exploitation and talked instead of 'life chances' and access to 'resources', and therefore many theorists have used Weber to develop ideas of status. The 'economic class' versus 'social status' dialectic has shaped two further directions: the insistence on politics and culture as major influences over class formation (Gramsci 1971; Williams 1961) and the insistence on the importance of consumption, rather than production (Veblen [1899] 2008), to the conditions of existence. Studies which focus on consumption often draw upon Weberian status hierarchies, where class becomes a marker of difference rather than a sign of exploitation.

While both Marx and Weber point to inequalities, Marx is more concerned with the practices through which those with resources reproduce their advantage. For Marx, one person's advantage is another's disadvantage: the capitalist exists to exploit the labourer; the material welfare of one group causally depends on the material deprivations of the other (see Wright 1997). For Marx, these advantages are institutionalised in law (property relations) and enforced (if challenged) through violence (the police/army) and by ideological state apparatuses, of which the media are but one.

## Measuring and Class-ifying

Marx's perspective is radically different to the other major etymology of the concept of class. This perspective sees no need for a revolution, but concerns itself with the precise nature of classification, employment 'aggregates', status and how to best conceptualise occupational groups in a hierarchical order. It began in 1665 with William Petty, who set out to calculate the value of the 'people' of England for taxation purposes, and was carried over to the US for administrative purposes.

Petty is attributed with devising what is now known as the 'political arithmetic' tradition of class analysis in order to enumerate what was otherwise unmeasurable (Poovey 1995). A person was conceptualised as a quantifiable, knowable, hence *governable object* tightly linked to national formations. James Thompson (1996: 26) documents how, throughout the eighteenth century, there was a 'drive toward an abstract and consistent and therefore predictable representation of exchange, that is, toward (new) scientific, quantitative, and mathematical modelling'. This tradition led to the British Government's Registrar General's five categories of social class based on the collation of occupational groups from professional/managerial to unskilled, which has recently expanded to include seven new categorisations, to take into account economic changes, such as the decline of the manufacturing industry and the rise of the service industry.

Emphasis on measurement and calculation deflects attention away from the reasons for inequality and into a methodological debate about how best to measure, as if divisions were the result of mathematical formulae. The significant difference between the two main perspectives is cause and effect: one tries to explain why classes come into effect, while the other measures the end product of historical social relations. Central to both is paid work: labour as a force which shapes all relations, and work organised into occupations for measurement. Feminist critiques point out that exploitation through paid labour is only one way in which capitalism operates, highlighting the significance of domestic labour for social reproduction which sustains exploitation by providing and servicing the workforce (Hartmann and Sargent 1981). Feminists have also critiqued the political arithmetic tradition arguing that measuring women's social class by the husband's and father's occupation is inadequate (see Crompton 1993; Stanworth 1984). There is some agreement, however, over the notion that even if children are not immediately born into work categories, they are born into classed routes, through access and exclusion. Most theorists of class agree that inheritance of social position at birth is the key to future trajectory.

These epistemological etymologies of the concept of class are premised on both understanding 'objective' social relationships (economic possibilities, means of production, divisions of labour, measurement of status differences) and, in some cases, attempting to understand how class consciousness comes into being (for Marx) and how the soul is generated from the spirit of capitalism (for Weber). The abstraction from the objective into the subjective (economic position will lead to a certain consciousness/soul) gives rise to huge theoretical complications and confusions when we try to understand class as a lived experience. Epistemological abstractions do not fit the ontological experiences, or even the mediation of lived experiences. The difficulty is exacerbated when we try to weave a third key thread into understandings of class: morality. And morality leads us into very different vernacular traditions in national expressions of class.

## **Morality and Culture**

Definitions of class often entwine ideas of a person's moral as well as economic value (Skeggs 1997, 2004a; Sayer 2005). As pointed to earlier, classifications have long fluctuated between moral and economic criteria. At certain periods in history, class was definable primarily by economic, monetary

and market value; at others, it was defined in relation to moral behaviour. During the 1850s and 1860s, for instance, there was less talk of working class and middle class, and more focus on the deserving and undeserving poor; of 'respectable artisans and gentlemen as emphasis was placed on moral rather than economic criteria' (Crossick 1991: 61). In the play for power and legitimation by the newly emergent middle class, morality became more central to defining class. Adam Smith (1757) the proponent of political economy, for instance, advanced the concept of economic self-interest as a moral (religious) imperative, one that now exerts its presence as a 'truth'.

It is not until the early nineteenth century that the term class regularly appears in discourse and is consolidated in descriptions of society. Some theorists argue that the term emerged to coincide with the rise of the 'middle sort' (Williams 1988). Dror Wahrman (1995) maintains that the crucial moment for fixing the idea of the middle class in Britain occurred around the time of the 1832 *Reform Act*, where the need for political representation allowed the middle class to be consolidated as a group. One of the central issues concerns the question of who had access to the symbolic means to legitimate themselves. Significantly, for this book, Terry Eagleton (1989: 22) notes how in order to legitimate their own claims for power, the middle class used the expression of 'taste' and the generation of distinctive cultures: 'the ultimate binding force of the bourgeois social order [were] habits, pieties, sentiments and affections' to which *they* attributed higher moral value. Displays of culture and morality were the means by which the middle class became recognisable, and claims to high culture and taste continue to be mechanisms for promoting distinction and exclusion (see Bourdieu [1979] 1986). We will explore Bourdieu's proto-Weberian analysis in more detail below, as it underpins the analysis of many of our authors.

The emergence of the term working class is subject to a similarly contested debate. Lynette Finch documents how in Australia, class emerged from the middle-class colonial welfare administrators as a category to define the urban poor. Carrying with them British definitions, they developed their own interpretations and categorisations that were particularly gendered and conceived through the interpretation of the behaviour of women from the urban slums:

The range of chosen concerns through which middle-class observers made sense of the observed, included references to: living room conditions ... drinking behaviour ... language (including both the type of things which were spoken about, and the manner in which they were referred to – literally the types of words used); and children's behaviour. (Finch 1993: 10)

As she notes, these were *moral*, gendered references where political arithmetic and morality combine through methods of observation. In an equally detailed historical analysis of British imperial discourse, Ann McClintock suggests that the concept of class has a historical link to more generalisable 'Others', who were known through the concept of degeneracy, a term applied as much to classifying racial 'types' as to the urban poor:

The degenerate classes, defined as departures from the normal human type, were as necessary to the self-definition of the middle class as the idea of degeneration was to the idea of progress, for the distance along

the path of progress travelled by some portions of humanity could be measured only by the distance others lagged behind. (McClintock 1995: 46)

Domestic servants, for instance, were often depicted by the racialised imagery of degradation – of contagion, promiscuity and savagery. As Friedrich Engels ([1844] 1958: 33) notes of the working class, it is 'a physically degenerate race, robbed of all humanity, degraded, reduced morally and intellectually to bestiality'. Engels' description, used in his case to advocate for social justice, is delimited by the prevailing gendered and raced discourses of his time which semiotically attach degeneracy to the working classes. In the bourgeois claim for moral legitimacy, domestic servants, in particular, became the projected object and location for dirt (see also Walkerdine in this volume). They were explicitly associated with the care of back passages, and the generalised poor came to be represented as excrement. Osbourne's pamphlet on 'Excremental Sewage' in 1852 represents the working class as a problem for civilisation, as sewerage that contaminates and drains the nation (Yeo 1993). Moreover, Nancy Armstrong (1987) notes how fears of women's bodies as carriers of degeneracy and contagion as the constitutive limit to proper personhood held particular significance for the Puritans in the establishment of America.

Gender, race and sexuality amalgamate in all class definitions. As McClintock puts it, 'the invention of racial fetishism became central to the regime of sexual fetishism which became central to the policing of the "dangerous classes"' (McClintock 1995: 182). This was all premised on protecting and drawing boundaries around economic interests through moral and cultural visibilities. Foucault, for instance, notes how the middle class, struggling to find the means to define themselves, used reference to commodification to regulate sexuality as a means of social identification:

The middle class thus defined itself as different from the aristocracy and the working classes who spent, sexually and economically, without moderation ... It differed by virtue of its sexual restraint, its monogamy and its economic restraint or thrift. (Foucault 1979: 100)

Economic metaphors abound, enabling us to see how the discourses of the economy infuse discourses of class, race, gender and sexuality, often by integrating moral categories of value such as aspiration and degeneracy.

However, value can only be realised through its use and exchange. For instance, through property and social contracts we see bodily value distributed and traded. The marriage contract legally institutionalises heterosexuality as the legitimate structure for the organisation of both gender and sexuality (and many would argue class relations through the consolidation of property relationships), which instead of operating through an antagonistic structuring dynamic relationship (like class) reveals an agreement drawn up at an intimate level that secures unequal power relationships (Pateman 1988). The heterosexual contract reveals that class, race, gender and sexuality do not work as equivalent and compatible categories. While it could be argued (as many feminists have) that men exploit (but are dependent upon) women through their domestic labour, we also know that many women voluntarily contract into that exploitation. This exploitation is different to the employment

contract, since it is enabled through ideas about romance and love, although, as Kipnis (1993) and Evans (2003) have documented, these contracts are always entwined with economic and cultural exchange relationships. Bourdieu (1977) maintains that the marriage contract is a key site for the misrecognition of power; a mystificatory device that makes intimacy appear as if it exists in a different space to capital exchange. And it is to Bourdieu that we now turn.

## **Bourdieu**

Drawing on Weber's modifications of Marx, Pierre Bourdieu (1985, 1987) takes up the legacy of life chances, status and (market) exchange by using metaphors of capital – economic, social, symbolic and cultural – as they accrue over time and space in different composition and volume, to describe how the middle classes reproduce their interests. His is a theory of social reproduction: the transmission of power and advantage that operates through processes of capital accrual and misrecognition of power. It is not a theory of direct exploitation but of legitimation, showing how one class gains advantage through institutionalised processes of exclusion (such as education and taste) and, by doing so, enact a form of symbolic violence. In the process, the excluded are also symbolically misrecognised as responsible for their own exclusion. He enables us to see how the middle classes amass resources while continually excluding others by installing boundaries around their advantage. These distinctions exclude and extend beyond the law, seeping into all social relationships.

Bourdieu's theories provide exceptional explanatory power (empirically and theoretically) for understanding how middle-class privilege remains unchallenged. As we have shown elsewhere, his ideas are particularly valuable for understanding formations of power and legitimation, but are much less useful for understanding the power-less (Skeggs 2004b). For instance, working-class culture is rendered valueless because it can rarely be capitalised upon in the fields of exchange (Boyne 2002). Likewise, gender has less value by default, as the fields of exchange are premised on masculine structural power (Bourdieu 1977). Skeggs (2011) has proposed elsewhere a development of Bourdieu's model into an understanding of 'person-value' in order to see how those who are not born into the middle class generate alternate value-chains in different spaces of exchange. Bourdieu has also been accused of reinforcing the very categories that he set out to unearth (Cook 2003), for just as he describes the taste culture of the middle classes, he also legitimises that culture as middle class (Ranci re 1983).

Bourdieu offers us a useful frame to understand middle-class power and *legitimation*. Mike Savage (2003) and Marilyn Strathern (1992) take this analysis further, demonstrating how values and cultural practices traditionally associated with the middle class and reliant on access to forms of cultural capital, such as educational leisure activities, eating and speaking, are not only convertible into value but are also increasingly becoming *the* normative, generating what Savage identifies as the new 'particular-universal'. He proposes that this echoes the larger social shift that occurred in the late twentieth century due to changing formations of deindustrialisation in the West. Strathern also demonstrates, through a study of English kinship, how normative value is given to specific middle-class practices. These practices, she argues, have come to increasingly define the Western social itself, marking out the proper against which the constitutive limit is established.

We can see this manifested, in particular, through what we call the 'normative performative', the iteration of the norm through bodily practices which enact the proper as if normal and habitual. When Judith Butler (1990) suggests that discursive *performatives* and embodied *performances* are both modes of citationality, she opens up the 'demand to perform'. Later in this introduction, we will explore how this relates to reality television and new visual imperatives to perform the norm. We might see this performance demand as just the latest form in a long line of historical techniques used to make the working class publicly 'appear' and be made accountable through specific ways of telling and doing. For instance, Carolyn Steedman (2000) details how the working class had to learn to historically tell themselves in front of law, generating legally fashioned classed subjectivity in order to receive poor relief. Telling was structured through moral redemptive narratives (influenced by Christianity), which enabled the working class to show that they were redeemable and hence 'deserving'. This leads Steedman to argue that ideas of self for the working class were shaped by legal interlocation and state welfare. Stanley Aronowitz (2004) also argues that power not only includes the ability to exclude, but also the ability to set the terms of the social through the telling of the past, present and future.

How do we trace these elements of social relations based on inequality, premised on forms of judgment, value and exchange, and which inscribe modes of performance through the contours of the shifting landscape of reality television?

## Theorising Class and Reality Television

The majority of recent work on reality television draws upon a Foucauldian frame using Nikolas Rose (1989) to chart the imperatives to self-governance as part of a broader neo-liberal political agenda which accompanies the repeal of state support (e.g. Ouellette 2004; Ouellette and Hay 2008; Palmer 2003). Particularly apparent in lifestyle and makeover television, middle-class tastes and values are normalised (Palmer 2004; Taylor 2005; Karl 2007; Karl and Doyle 2008) and offered as pedagogic guidance to those who are deemed to be failing in the skills of self-work and self-development that are necessary in the precarious 'new economy' (McRobbie 2004). In this vein, Samantha Lyle (2008) argues that a programme like *Wife Swap* assumes a 'middle-class gaze' as viewers are encouraged to judge normative behaviour. We have contributed to that debate by arguing that the lack of historical context given to the participants' situations in reality television texts means that the consequences of social and material forces are played out through the immediacy of the genre. Participants' failures, and sometimes their successes, are coded as psychological traits at the level of individual responsibility. While class inequality as an *explanation* is occluded from the text, it is a different step to suggest that this is evidence that class is now a zombie category that has been *replaced* by life narratives. Rather, we point out that imperatives to selfhood and responsabilisation are themselves an ideology, visible in other sites such as law and education, where the blame for inequality is shifted onto those at a disadvantage (Wood and Skeggs 2008).

Explanations which utilise the governmentality thesis of Rose (1989) have been criticised for adopting a functionalist explanation of the media, assuming that the pedagogic mode of governance

is easily passed on to audiences (Morley 2009), and drawing attention away from television's role in new forms of capital exploitation. As one of the most effective global industries for generating new sources of revenue, television has been highly adept at finding new markets: enabling new forms of exploitation through opening out the previously 'private' forms of intimate life (the rise and rise of the reality television format); challenging traditionally protected labour markets (flexible contracts for those working in the industry, and the blurring of the boundaries between employees and participants – see Jost 2011); and establishing new terms of market exchange with audiences (pay-per-view, for instance). Attention on governance can deflect attention away from the reason *for* governance, which is to lubricate the operations of capital.

We need to take into account the mutability of capital and class relations as we think about reality television. One further development of Bourdieu has taken an interesting direction by extending the Marxist idea of value-extraction. These theorists circumnavigate the determinism of Marx by showing how as capital finds new routes, 'lines of flight', and new forms of exploitation, we must recalibrate our understandings of exploitation. Laura Grindstaff (2002) and Eva Illouz (2003, 2007), for instance, note how new fields of value production have emerged through talk-show television. Grindstaff's research shows how the production process is geared towards 'the money shot' – the heightened dramatic moment when guests lose control. She argues that while this gives media 'access' to those once excluded, it only allows working-class participants to speak and 'rant' in certain ways under particular conditions, reproducing class difference in the process. Similarly for Illouz, shows like *Oprah* (1986–2011) exploit a 'culture of pain and misery'. 'Ordinary' peoples' performances of emotion generate audience viewing figures, producing not just symbolic violence (through humiliation and shaming) but also straightforward exploitation and the extraction of economic value. Oprah Winfrey has amassed a huge fortune by posing herself as the ultimate commodity in self-management through a whole media empire (Illouz 2003).

More recently, Hollows and Jones (2010) note the rise and marketability of 'the moral entrepreneur' as a new category of media celebrity. In a discussion of the British TV chef Jamie Oliver, who is responsible for reality programmes like *Jamie's School Dinners* (2005), they argue that Oliver produces value through promoting a mixture of morality and commodity, offering the solution to social problems through the market. Like Oprah, Oliver (and his sponsor Sainsbury's supermarket) has accumulated huge profits through identifying those in need of moral reform: symbolic denigration and exploitation that converts into economic capital. Likewise, Mark Andrejevic (2004) documents the value and exploitation involved in new forms of surveillance where reality television can be posed as 'the work of being watched'. He points to the double value that can be extracted from programmes – in the exchange itself for television's profit, and in the information that participants give up about themselves which is useful to the broader market, a process which further acculturates us into accepting systems of surveillance.

These new forms of exploitation and their mediation lead us into debates about the significance of affect to the forms of labour that make such exploitation more intense, subtle and directed to and from women, and from which it is less easy to be alienated as it operates in the field of intimate relationships (Skeggs 2010). Illouz (2007) maintains that economic relationships have become deeply

emotional, while close intimate relationships have become increasingly defined by economic models of bargaining, exchange and equity – or what she calls ‘emotional capitalism’ and ‘cold intimacy’. However, it could be argued that sentiment in other forms, especially romantic novels and their development into women’s magazines, have always offered a space of value production (see Thompson 1996; Berlant 2008). We argue that it is the use of unpaid ‘ordinary people’ marshalled from audiences into production regimes that intensifies the possibilities for exploitation.

Reality television therefore extracts value in different ways from the performances of the unpaid participants. This is not so far removed from the ‘enforced narratives’ of working-class telling that Carolyn Steedman describes above, which have now been extended by reality television into full-blown ‘enforced performances’. The telling is now accompanied by detailed doing, where numerous acts of behaviour are put on display as reality participants publicly perform (for entertainment value, not legal interlocutors) the performance demands of the programme.

As we referred to earlier, *pace* Butler, *performatives* are unconscious repeated gendered and classed enactments, while *performances* are full-blown conscious actions. What we often see on reality television is the performative made explicit. That which is meant to be normative, a citational form of social reproduction, becomes writ large as its component parts are revealed through ungovernable bodies and embodied excessive performances that cannot be controlled by the demands that have called them into effect. Participants are called on by producers to ‘be themselves’, ‘only more so’, in what Kitzman calls ‘an economy of recognition’ (cited in Grindstaff 2011). So when wives are swapped in *Wife Swap*, or participants are holed up together in the *Big Brother* house, or forced to undertake group tasks to get a job on *The Apprentice* (2005–), we see taken-for-granted unconscious performatives made into conscious deliberations and acts, as they are called into a public televised performance. Participants often fail to explain their behaviour when they are suddenly called to account for themselves to camera for conditions that are beyond their control in the ‘happenstance’ of reality programming (Wood and Skeggs 2008). Editing and ironic voiceover often focus in on the symbols of failure in what we have previously termed ‘the judgment shot’ (Skeggs, Thumim and Wood 2008, and see Tyler in this volume).

If class is performative in the same way as gender and heterosexuality, then it is routinely performed through the bodily hexis or habitus. As Bourdieu (1986) argues, repeated bodily movements and habits reveal class position, such as the bent body of the farm labourer. Bodily dispositions that appear as natural, normal and habituated are exposed through performance demands. Class inequalities in access to resources are revealed by the TV producers’ demand for people in need of transformation: the abject are expected to perform their abjection and the excessive are asked to perform their excess in order to display their need for transformation and education in the normative. Reality television through full-blown performance demands reveals classed and gendered bodies in the making and unmaking (see also Holmes and Jermyn 2008). Here, in the focus on the ‘immediacy’ of reality television, and in the tension over what will happen next, participants can surprise us as ‘affect seeps beyond containment’, which all of course enhances the entertainment value. It is precisely this revealing and opening out of the normative performative that we also found in our audience research. We found that viewers did not always take up the middle-class gaze or even the

pedagogic incentive to self-govern, but would make assessments of value based on their own experiences, resources and capitals. The affective immediacy of the text often brought about surprising connections that reached beyond the symbolic violence of the programmes. All of which makes us challenge the functionalist approach to reality television which assumes that governance works (Skeggs, Wood and Thumim 2008; Wood, Skeggs and Thumim 2008; Skeggs and Wood 2008; Wood and Skeggs 2011; Skeggs and Wood forthcoming).

## **Real Class in This Volume**

When we refer to class, we deploy these legacies to speak about class relations as:

- exploitation, where one group's advantage is another's loss
- generated through different forms of exchange, where the moral and the economic work through each other to produce new forms of value
- part of the changing moral 'spirit' of capitalism, where the 'self-investment' ethic shapes the neo-liberal capitalist dream
- the struggle over the establishment of middle-class values as normative and universal, which are made explicit through marking the constitutive limit
- a process of inscription written on bodies, which may appear as individualised and psychological failure but is in fact bodily habitus, produced as a direct result of social positioning.

We have therefore used these explanations to shape our collection, and the chapters which follow offer the reader a route through various positions on reality television's relationship to class. We have organised the volume into three subsections: Mediated Exchange and Judgment; Normalisation, Aspiration and Its Limits; Performing and Feeling Class.

### **Part One: Mediated Exchange and Judgment**

This section opens the book by setting out some of the frames and terms of exchange. Who is positioned as having value? How are we invited to make judgments of value? And how do these judgments play out through their mediation? The chapters note how social problems are rerouted through the reality formats, which entice particular performances. Identifying 'the threat to the nation' becomes a powerful device which enables attention to be diverted away from issues of class, while still performed through its idioms. In situations of rapid social transformation, the 'proper subject' is fought over in heightened moral debates about reality television. The chapters on post-socialist reformation show how the terms of exchange are not euphemised but made explicit by the evocation of dangerous pasts. They reveal a precarious situation in which talking about class remains difficult while traditional cultural arbiters of taste attempt to hold on to the power to frame moral value. This situation is fully resolved in post-colonial Australia, where it is the performance of labour that is evaluated as the sign of the good national subject. In many of the papers, labour is seen as a personal disposition

rather than a structuring division upon which the distribution of capital is based. The chapters set out how class formations on reality television work as structuring absences that are 'systematically displaced' onto other relationships (see Grindstaff in this volume).

By revisiting his arguments about the myth of the mediated centre in relation to Sennett and Cobb's (1977) work on the hidden injuries of class, Nick Couldry in Chapter Two shows how new class processes on reality television embed forms of moral judgment as a normalised set of relationships. Drawing on Max Weber's ideas of transparency, he maintains that people cannot see the connection between their class position and its causes because of the de-symbolisation of working-class culture which enables the legitimisation of middle-class standards (Parkin 1972). The 'hidden hand' of the market system enables reality television to make real social problems nothing more than part of the game or the format (see Biressi in this volume on programmes which intervene in unemployment, and Tyler in this volume for those which deal with teenage pregnancy). This goes some way to explaining the curious way in which class is both visible and invisible, present and yet denied across reality television, to which many of our authors allude.

In Chapter Three, Andrew Tolson, draws on a high-profile UK instance when a normalised set of classed judgments were meted out against Jade Goody (white working-class participant and at some time both a national love and hate figure) in the infamous bullying of Shilpa Shetty (middle-class Asian participant) debacle on UK *Big Brother*. As he explains, Jade represents the 'threat' of demotic celebrity, a working-class woman who used the media system to considerable material advantage. Her outburst towards Shilpa was publicly registered as a threat to national propriety, not class antagonism (which echoes the chapters by Andrejevic, Imre and Tremlett, and Weber in this volume), and was punished accordingly. By conducting a close reading of the transcript of the argument, Tolson reveals how it erupted through the moves made on both sides, and demonstrates clearly how language works as resource where cultural capitals are exchanged. Here, reality television offers a platform for 'unruly civility' which evokes class pathologisation to the advantage of 'good' television.

In Chapter Four, Mark Andrejevic reminds us of the different national frames that manifest around class on reality television as he compares the US and Australian versions of *Border Security*. He details the paradoxes at the heart of making spectacular that which is an unequally distributed resource – mobility. The programmes foreground the radical differences in mobility for different classed and raced groups. The 'border anxiety' expressed by the programme, which profiles airline passengers, enables viewers to recognise the differences between good and bad travellers. Bad (illegal) mobility enables class differences to be seen as a national threat, and viewers are educated to spot the differences by inhabiting the position of security guard. Elsewhere, Andrejevic (2004) has noted the significance of surveillance in the control of risk, and here he demonstrates how surveillance works to exclude people from sources of value. Class politics are transferred onto the threat to the nation represented by the 'outsider' through neo-liberal populism. What is interesting is that those *with* mobility capital – 'business class' travellers – are curiously invisible. Potentially, invisibility in media terms is now the more powerful resource, while the visible 'demotic celebrity' (Jade) is duly punished, and following Couldry, hiding power is the name of the game.

Zala Volčič and Karmen Erjavec in Chapter Five discuss the Slovene celebrity reality show *The Farm*, where the communal work space of the rural idyllic farm provides the backdrop to a recognisable reality competition involving various tasks. Here, the old 'spirit' of socialist collective work is marked in sharp contrast to the new forms of neo-liberal self-work espoused by the celebrity participants. The show seems to offer an insight into the rapid transformation and uneven development in Slovenia towards a more neo-liberal state. Myths of social mobility focused on the individual abound in the text and are celebrated by the young audiences of the show. This occurs while the reality of deepening class inequality is denied in public and academic discourse as out of step with the progress of the nation. In post-socialist Slovenia, class cannot be spoken, as it represents the old tradition from which the modern individual must perform their distance.

In Chapter Six, Aniko Imre and Annabel Tremlett discuss the Roma celebrity Győzike, a pop star who has consolidated his fame and fortune through reality television. The authors point out the difficulty in transferring some of the American and Anglocentric models which have thus far been used to explain reality television to the Hungarian context. While the star represents the kind of demotic celebrity discussed by Turner (2010), he is also representative of the Roma underclass which has been savaged by the rise of capitalism in Eastern Europe, demonstrating how discourses of class are also entwined with discourses of race. The rapid rise of commercial television in Hungary is accompanied by the rhetoric of the anxious intellectual elite who, in their play to hold onto power in times of change, are embroiled in a problematic moral dialectic of value. Again, this reality television programme comes to represent some of the difficult negotiations around class, race and national identity in a period of uncertain social transition.

Tania Lewis in Chapter Seven shows how in *MasterChef Australia* (2009–) media economic logics are not just about representation at the level of the symbolic (Turner 2010), but about how performances of value are made through labour and ethnicity. Labour stands in as a personal disposition rather than as a form of exploitation central to the formation of class relations. By promoting ethnicity as part of the romantic ethic of work (aspirational ethnicity as the new spirit of capitalism), in which subjects are ordinary, amenable and willing, working becomes the sign of the good national subject rather than a class relation. This operates against the background of precarious job markets where *MasterChef Australia* foregrounds ethnic 'cosmopolitanism' to 'pave over class differences'.

## Part Two: Normalisation, Aspiration and Its Limits

This section shows how the 'normative performative' is key to the making of class relations. New 'aspirational' reality television encapsulates the normative performative at its most alluring as a new wave of reality television, particularly from the US, foregrounds wealth and privilege. In this way, we see how aspiration is commodified and is firmly embedded as a branding process in which bodies are supposed to erase the signs of their labour. But there are tensions in trying to evade the realities of labour, as becomes clear when reality programmes enter into realms such as the labour market, and the myth of transformation available to all is exposed. There are limits to the normalisation process, and in deficit crisis times in Western economies some programmes are struggling to rebrand

their pitch. In property programmes, the performance of greed (making more capital through capital) has to be rerouted not just in case it looks morally suspect, but also because property is less likely to realise a return in the present climate. Turning the home into a place of sanctuary instead of profit capitalises on new shifts to affect in class formations of the performative normative.

Lisa Taylor opens this section in Chapter Eight with an analysis of the aspirational lifestyle reality show *The Hills* (2006–) which offers a very different and glamorous aesthetic compared to many other reality shows. She points to the visual allure of the show in which gender shapes dramatic life dilemmas and material wealth is the unacknowledged backdrop to success. No questions are asked about how these young women can afford and access such luxuries, as the historical context of privilege is denied and the dilemmas of the heterosexual contract distract attention. The stars are successful in their ability to self-promote while denying the resources that allow them to do so, which Taylor argues, *pace* bell hooks cited earlier, indexes the inevitability of wealth and privilege at the centre of national value.

Gareth Palmer picks up this thread of self-promotion as an extension of capital's 'line of flight' in Chapter Nine, which draws out the similarities between lifestyle shows like *10 Years Younger* (2003) and *What Not to Wear* and advertising styles. He proposes that the call to aspiration and transformation is straightforwardly promoted through the use of tried and tested advertising techniques which equate selling products with selling selves. He describes how TV stations have to maintain their brand by promoting the experience of pedagogical empowerment, 'watch this and learn how to transform yourself into something good'. Yet he also points to how the body reveals the limits to this incitement to labour as type, amount and possibilities for investment expose the gendered and classed dynamics of the self-branding imperative.

Anita Biressi in Chapter Ten analyses the paradoxes produced by the programme *Benefit Busters* (2009) which follows the extension of reality television into promoting social enterprise initiatives which aim to help people find employment. Such programmes reiterate historical notions of the 'deserving' and 'undeserving' poor through the discourse of social entrepreneurialism in which the modern individual must continually 'enterprise up' their capital to develop future potential. But economic reality spoils the makeover narrative of transformation as high unemployment and unwilling employers mean that the programme struggles to contain the 'truth' within the format. Biressi shows that some things exceed the model of transformation, and that while the show makes an effort to deny class, it is structural inequality after all which breaks open and reveals the conceit of the narrative frame.

In Chapter Eleven, Brenda R. Weber highlights how gender and class produce an explosive mix in the mythical narrative of the American Dream. In a number of chapters in this book, the blogosphere emerges as a site where vitriolic hate directed towards reality participants is poured out at the same time that viewer ratings rise. Indeed, affects of hate are lucrative. Weber looks at this phenomenon in the context of 'octo-mum' Kate Gosselin, who exposes the limits to the American Dream which promotes success as open to all. Using her motherhood as a route to celebrity and material wealth invites an outpouring of moral invective. By promoting the private life of her eight children, Gosselin flouts the game's gendered rules of propriety. While celebrity might be more available, this

does not mean that it offers access to symbolic power, since it is clear throughout the book that celebrity operates through a series of class oppositions that delimit taste and value. Gosselin is the constitutive limit to good motherhood. As in the case of Jade and Gyöziké, the affective reactions of the public are only harnessed further by the media machine to its own advantage as they drive up the media hype.

In Chapter Twelve, the final chapter in this section, Heather Nunn writes of a shift on British television from property to retreat television. Struggling to contain the trope of property investment as a means for profit in the face of the sub-prime scandal and the global downturn, UK programming has come to reflect a shift in investments in the home for the middle classes. Nunn examines the emergent role of the home as a positive investment in 'hope'. Reality television has repackaged its property programmes so that they offer affective security rather than financial insecurity – promoting a synaesthetic sanctuary in an insecure world. Divorcing the home from property and finance, Nunn argues, offers an intervention in a larger political re-imagining of sites of enrichment rather than sites of loss. We see reality television again emerging as part of a much larger attempt at national political reformation by which we are incited to assuage the disappointments of capital. Choice and investment are mobilised here as comfort rather than aspiration.

### **Part Three: Performing and Feeling Class**

This section of the book extends our analysis by examining reality television as a node in sociality, part of the social lives that we live, connecting us as bodies through the various forms of exchange and value-codings that make up class. A television production is one moment in this process. It feeds into and from the interconnected social relations in which we are located, to ourselves and to others, through affect, knowledge and bodily dispositions, but also through our feelings and experience of class over time and social space. The performances interrogated in this part of the book vary, from students attempting to become either performers or participants, to the enforced performances required by radically different US reality television programmes, to reality television participants' 'talking back' to their own performances through social networking sites, and to reality television's mobilisation of shame and pride as both historical and social.

Vicki Mayer in Chapter Thirteen draws on her research into the labour of the casters (the people who scout, select and promote participants) for reality television programmes and the labour of her students who attempt to work and perform in the reality television industry. Mayer was perfectly placed to discuss her students' (and her own) experiences and ambivalent feelings about reality television 'work' as they try and negotiate 'contradictory class locations' as both exploited and exploiter (Wright 1997) in radically different spaces of exchange. All the students had a clear knowledge of class and taste distinctions as they assessed which shows had value. They aimed for programmes that would enhance their already accumulated capitals and worked hard to perform their fit with the programmes' requirements and the casters' capitals. The interrogative nature of casting – asking questions about sex and sexuality, traumas, psyches and embarrassment – can be seen to be working at the minutiae of the episteme of class.

Exploring the 'performance logic' of reality programming in the US, Laura Grindstaff in Chapter Fourteen shows how the new televised environment capitalises on performances of class. Like Mayer, Grindstaff also investigated workers and participants on reality programmes. She discusses *Jersey Shore* (2009, a docusoap made for MTV about Italian Americans in New Jersey), where participants are expected to perform their class and ethnicity through excessive behaviour, leading her to propose that these cartoon-like behaviours are the equivalent of modern-day minstrelsy as they perform a 'trash face'. This face involves excessive expressiveness and is accompanied by a 'trash body' of which fat is the visible sign, pointing to the failure to achieve normative respectable restraint. Grindstaff argues that this is politics at the level of caricature, not surprising in a neo-liberal economy in which economic inequalities become more stark, cultural caricatures offer a method for encapsulating distinctions. Both Mayer and Grindstaff note the simultaneous denial of the existence of class through the American Dream while programmes are highly structured through class relationships.

Imogen Tyler also exposes the caricatured nature of British reality television through an analysis of 'Chav Mum' TV in Chapter Fifteen. This is not a traditional analysis of cheap television that amplifies stereotypes because it cannot come up with anything more challenging. Rather, it explores the whole social ensnaring process by which TV producers trap young mothers into performing a 'class act' with promises that are never met. Drawing on interviews with the mothers themselves, Tyler shows how they become aware of the negative loading of the filming and the editing process. They then transcode and reanimate their own images through the networking sites that led to the misrecognition of their value in the first place. This is a class value battle fought through the same circuits by which they were ensnared.

Also pointing to locations in time, space and circuits of value, in Chapter Sixteen Valerie Walkerdine analyses how affect is mobilised through class relationships on reality television. Walkerdine demonstrates how the shame and humiliation imposed upon television participants (to reveal their need for transformation) does not just work at the level of the ideological/discursive/representational. It also works through an affective register as shame is carried across history by trans-generational transmission from mother to daughter. By referencing the representation of working-class women historically as the source of dirt and disorder, she suggests that shame has already been embodied by working-class television participants and viewers through maternal transmission before they come into contact with the television. Women are predisposed to feel the shame of their historical value-positioning. This chapter directs us to the continued significance of historical materialism to ideas about which bodies count and how affects are carried through to the present. Walkerdine maintains that anxiety in the present is likely to be a result of positional insecurity in the past, where the gendered body is the transmissional link for classed experience.

Lisa Blackman pushes the deployment of affect in another direction in Chapter Seventeen by detailing how a British reality television programme called *The Choir* (2009) attempted to get people from a working-class area to work together to compete in a choir-singing contest. She analyses how singing together produced a form of collective sociality which transformed (historically produced) shame into pride, an act, she argues, that moves us from a singular individual understanding of television as a form of governance to something much more social and expansive. Like Walkerdine,

Blackman notes the significance of intergenerational transmission of class relations. But she gives us hope that it is not only the negative affects of shame, humiliation and anxiety that are historically transmitted. Through what she describes as 'performative routedness', ideas of revalued community can be regenerated and retained against the backdrop of incessant incitements to aspiration and individuality in a climate of increasing inequality and decreasing job opportunities.

Class is no longer the 'hidden injury' in exactly the same way that Sennett and Cobb proposed in 1977 and we hope this book fuels a more sustained analysis of the ways in which class formations are increasingly mediated.

## Notes

1. Funded by the ESRC. Our findings are accessible at: <<http://www.esrc.ac.uk/my-esrc/grants/RES-148-25-0040/read>>.
2. See <<http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12477563>> accessed 17 February 2011.
3. See <<http://www.tradingeconomics.com/Economics/Unemployment-Rate.aspx?Symbol=USD>> accessed 17 February 2011.

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