

Raymond Boyle and Lisa W. Kelly, *The Television Entrepreneurs: Social Change and Public Understanding of Business* (Farnham and Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2012), pp. 176, ISBN 978 1 4094 0322 7 (hb) £60

Raymond Boyle and Lisa W. Kelly's co-authored monograph *The Television Entrepreneurs* is a welcome addition to a small but growing and highly topical area of British television studies. One which deals with the relationship between UK cultures of business and entrepreneurship, and trends in the production practice and reception of reality TV and popular factual programming. The book constitutes the major output of the research project *Public Understanding of Business: Television, Representation and Entrepreneurship*, which was supported by the Arts and Humanities Research Council (ID no: AH/F017073/1). And it follows on from shorter form scholarship published elsewhere by the same authors in the journals *Celebrity Studies* (2010) and *Television and New Media* (2011), as well as sole authored work by Boyle in *Media, Culture and Society* (2008) and Albert Moran's collection *TV Formats Worldwide* (2009), from which some of the key ideas about 'business entertainment television' as a concept for this book germinated. It also joins work such as Eric Guthey et al.'s *Demystifying Business Celebrity* (2009) and Jo Littler's work on the cultural economy of celebrity CEOs (2007) in interrogating the changing relationship between business and celebrity culture, and in conceptualising the role of business in the popular cultural landscape.

The authors use the term 'business entertainment television' to describe what they present as a latter day turn in television towards the subjects of trade, retail, investment and other major issues and themes under the broader business umbrella, and they isolate two dominant strands, discussing them in terms of formatting

specificities that generally allow the examples to which they refer to be classified either as ‘troubleshooter’ shows, or as ‘business gameshows.’ They thence point to a number of key benchmark examples of both major strands of this form of television, and which they see as symptomatic of this turn. These include the UK iterations of *The Apprentice* (2005-) and *Dragon’s Den* (2005-) as examples of the ‘business gameshow’ format, and *Ramsay’s Kitchen Nightmares* (2004-9) and *Mary Queen of Shops* (2007) as examples of the ‘troubleshooter’ show. They return to these at different points throughout the book to elucidate, contextualise and anchor their research findings, which come from a range of approaches, among them: textual analysis, interviews with industry personnel (some of who have played key participant roles in facilitating the upsurge in business oriented programming on British television), and focus group based audience research. Some of the major interventions made by this work are thus as a result of the authors’ variegated methodological approaches to interrogating this televisual turn towards business.

At different points in the book the authors make various gestures towards the late 2010s impact of the global financial crisis, and the corresponding onset of recession in the British economy, on the developing form, tone and cultural negotiability of ‘business entertainment television’ (55-6). And they highlight things like the manifest need for programme makers to account for the huge changes unfolding in the economic environment in which UK business culture was operating at that time (35), the heightened use of celebrity experts in the kinds of business oriented television under discussion (35), and changes in subject participants’ attitudes to the credibility of advice offered in these programmes by celebrity business experts like Sarah Beeny and Mary Portas (66-7), which they attribute to changing feelings about business and enterprise in the aftermath of the crash. Such gestures are

tantalizing to the interested reader. But ultimately, and notwithstanding the titular emphasis on the social change that has accompanied the rise of this form, the discursive reconfiguration of business on television in light of the onset of recessionary culture is not, in the main, what interests the authors here. Their core concern is with how public understanding of business and entrepreneurship has changed in light of the rise to prominence of this strand of programming. And the findings of their audience research to this end certainly reveal a fascinating range of responses to it that serve well to defamiliarise some assumptions we might otherwise make about, for example, processes of identification, discourses of aspiration, and the role of celebrity culture in shaping popular discourse about business.

The spectre of Thatcherism in contemporary ideas about entrepreneurship and the rise of ‘business entertainment television’ is another key issue that arises from this book. The authors point towards the impact on UK business culture of the Thatcher government’s aggressive deregulation (31), its enthusiastic embrace of the free market (77), and to the negotiability of the figure of the ‘maverick’ entrepreneur (76) as well as ‘rags to riches’ (121) tales of social mobility through business entrepreneurship, both of which were normalised in Britain during the Thatcher era. But again, the stakes of Thatcher’s legacy with respect to the cultural normalisation of entrepreneurial discourse, of which the prominence of this spate of business programming and the present day plethora of celebrity entrepreneurs are arguably symptomatic contemporary manifestations, are not fully unpacked.

All of this is not necessarily to point to or suggest gaps in the book’s coverage. Rather it is to highlight the potential richness of this area of study that there are still so many more questions to be asked about matters arising from these authors’ research findings. The cultural politics, political economy and contextual specificities of the

current spate of business programming are just some of the issues that are well primed to be delved into further thanks to the important historical, empirical, and industrial research undertaken here. Meanwhile, and underscoring the extent to which there remains scope for new work to complement Boyle and Kelly, the form continues to be popular and omnipresent. This is evidenced both by the continuing health of ratings stalwarts *The Apprentice* and *Dragon's Den*, and also by the rise to prominence since the work for *The Television Entrepreneurs* was undertaken of 'business entertainment television' celebrities like Alex 'The Fixer' Polizzi – mentioned in the book for her role in *The Hotel Inspector* (2005-) – and Hilary Devey, whose run on *Dragon's Den* gave rise to starring roles in her own TV vehicles *Hilary Devey's Women at the Top* (2012) – merely the title of which highlights the need for more gender studies work on the figure of the celebrity entrepreneur, especially in light of the cultural saturation of Sheryl Sandberg's discourse of 'lean in' femininity – and *The Intern* (2013).

*The Television Entrepreneurs* is a highly illuminating explication of a very prominent and topical strand of twenty-first century British television content, and will surely prove to be valuable reading to those with an interest in UK cultures of reality TV and factual programming, audience research methods in television studies, and the figure of the entrepreneur and role of expertise in contemporary celebrity culture.

Hannah Hamad, King's College London