Class Divisions in Serial Television

Edited by
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palgrave
macmillan

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ISBN 978-1-137-59448-8 ISBN 978-1-137-59449-5 (eBook)
DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59449-5

Library of Congress Control Number: 2016958107

Cover illustration: © Science Photo Library - MEHAU KULYK. / Getty Images

Printed on acid-free paper

This Palgrave Macmillan imprint is published by Springer Nature
The registered company is Macmillan Publishers Ltd. London
The registered company address is: The Campus, 4 Crinan Street, London, N1 9XW, United Kingdom

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Introduction: Class Di_visions and the Cultural Politics of Serial TV

Sieglinde Lemke and Wibke Schniedermann

This volume investigates the way depictions of class matters on television have increased in visibility and complexity since the advent of Reality TV in the final decade of the twentieth century and Quality TV in the first two decades of the twenty-first century. Our book argues that the Quality TV format in particular, with its sophisticated narrative and formal techniques, coincides with equally complex ways of exposing class divisions in contemporary US life, especially with social, political, and cultural transformations precipitated by the financial crisis. Television—perhaps the most middle-class of all US media—has begun to turn away from class denialism and to engage with a broad range of socio-economic issues. The stereotypical ways in which television programs once framed class—the lower class in particular—are now supplemented by those dedicated to exposing the economic and socio-psychological burdens borne by present day (lower-) middle-class families and individuals. The guiding questions underlying the analyses in this volume are thus: "how does it [the specific TV production and class representation] mean?" and how do TV shows construct class matters? (Mittell p. 339). Jason Mittel's *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* taught the contributors to

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S. Lemke, W. Schniedermann (eds.), *Class Divisions in Serial Television*, DOI 10.1057/978-1-137-59449-5_1

this volume to turn to the "operation aesthetics" of these shows. This leads many contributors to employ close readings of specific episodes in order to reveal how they function aesthetically. However, the second guiding question targets the class politics these shows articulate: how are class divisions and relations represented and how do they matter? Hence, we upend the critical tradition in TV and cultural studies that renders class matters invisible. With a keen eye on the aesthetic and formal devises the contributors to *Class Divisions in Serial Television* zoom in on the cultural politics of class. We analyze how the different socio-economic classes, their (lack of) cultural capital, and more generally classism is dealt with and we also investigate how the excesses of neoliberal capitalism are made visible in this new form of mass entertainment.

With these general ideas in mind we divided our volume into two parts. The first part investigates the phenomenon of class visibility particularly with a focus on the lower end of the class spectrum. The second part tackles those incidences when class exploitation and deceit, interpellated by the neoliberal imperative of success, becomes the subject of TV entertainment. These moments of social critique carry the potential, we believe, to disrupt or dismantle received forms of class division and class alignment. We tried to signify graphically the potential to offset the way class is commonly understood by choosing "di*visions" as the title for the second part of this volume. The "di"—albeit not rhyming with re:—and the * suggest the wildcard nature of viewers' responses to the televisibility of class and its potential to dismantle or disrupt received understandings of class matters. The bracketing of (di) in "visions"—the title for the first part—indicates that we examine representations of all social classes thereby registering class divisions and upending the general and academic tradition of class denialism.

(Di)visions is thus a double articulation; it signifies both the *classification* and the *visibility* of class in such popular media formats as serial television.[1] Departing from the typical triumphalist and a historical conception of contemporary television as a "golden age," (Di)visions instead argues that what we are witnessing is a "new wave" of US television that brings the complexity of class to the national and global screen. Recent shows have addressed such class-inflected issues as political corruption (*Scandal, West Wing, Homeland, House of Cards, The Good Wife*), corporate greed (*House of Lies, Suits, Arrested Development*), police brutality (*True Detective*), the cruelty of the drug trade (*Narcos*), and the undemocratic conditions in US prisons (*Orange is the New Black*). Our volume

zooms in on visual critiques of class that take the form of satirizing neoliberal governance and emotional capitalism (Mueller), or reveal the personal costs that the neoliberal financialization of daily lives affords (Leyda), or mock the self-chosen labor exploitation of the creative class (Erbacher). These televisual critiques have the potential to move viewers beyond the hegemonic middleclass perspective. Moreover, they can communicate a character's aware-ness of his or her position within the larger capitalist socio-political structure through cinematographic choices with camera position and angle serving as signifiers of class (Shapiro).

When we think of class and prime time television, we tend to think of stereotypical representations of working-class families. Consider Archie Bunker, the working-class hero (or anti-hero) of *All in the Family* (1971–1979). A critic of both the women's movement and people of color, Archie is represented as culturally conservative and ignorant, a blue-collar buffoon to whom the show's middle-class audience could feel superior. In contrast to the openly classist shows there was also the lesser-known sitcom *Laverne and Shirley* (1981–1983) showcasing two financially struggling factory workers who were, according to media scholar Robert Sklar, "aware of [their] class and of how it functions in their lives" (p. 16). This might explain why the show ran only for two years. The most popular sitcom on primetime US television featuring working-class life, however, was *Roseanne* (1988–1997). Roseanne and Dan Conner, whose family home is cluttered and tacky (at least to middle-class taste) and who self-mockingly talk about their restricted financial means were represented in a way that was neither objectifying nor dehumanizing. *Roseanne* displayed class pride, but certainly not class awareness.

Generally speaking, however, working-class life was rarely televised on prime time.[2] Among the most popular family series running on prime-time television were *Father Knows Best* (1954–1960) and *The Cosby Show* (1984–1992), which portrayed families who lived comfortably, meaning they had both cultural and economic capital, but only family quarrels to attend to. Both shows then implicitly advocated the "American Dream" myth that suggested that anybody, even a black family, could make it in the USA if only they tried hard enough. As a form of mass entertainment financed by selling commercials to middle-class consumers, it seems logical that the predominant mode of representing class presupposes middle-class normativity, flattering those viewers for their material and cultural capital, which presumably grants them a sense of superiority.

TV in the twenty-first century departs slightly, but noticeably, from these classist formats. In the first and second decades of the twenty-first century, a number of serial TV shows have not only increased the visibility of non-middle-class characters, but have also done so in ways that transcend the cliches of the past.

The Wire (2002–2008) is a prime example of this new trend.[3] With its exceptional setting in Baltimore's no-go zones, it brings the "truly disadvantaged" (to use the title of sociologist William Julius Wilson's book on class) to national attention. Compared to most TV shows before and since, its exposure of the USA's invisible class is both radical and intricate, coupling narrative complexity with an equally complex cultural politics. *The Wire* lacks a narrative center. Since "the action traces what happens between characters and institutions as they spread outward," Jason Mittell suggests that it epitomizes "centrifugal complexity" (p. 222). The way it portrays race- and class-based destitution, the way it exposes social inequality as well as institutional corruption (in the police force, the union, and local politics), has been described as social realism (Mittell p. 221), naturalism (Bieger p. 226), as well as hyperrealism (Havens p. 183). This aesthetic strategy enables the show to deviate from middle-class normativity while maintaining a largely middle-class audience. *The Wire*'s representational politics of class disrupts the long-standing media tradition of symbolically annihilating the USA's precariat and undermines the binary logic by which the precarious class had previously been portrayed on television.

Like *The Wire*, *Breaking Bad* (2008–2014) links narrative complexity to the televisuality of class. In this case, the White family, a Euro-American middle-class family, experiences financial volatility due to family patriarch Walter's cancer diagnosis and lack of proper health insurance. To save his family from bankruptcy, Walter enters the drug business. Debuting in 2008, the year of the financial crisis, *Breaking Bad* brought the financial vulnerability of the middle class to national attention (just as *The Wire* had done for the precarious class). White's story struck a chord with those millions of US residents (of all racial backgrounds) who lost their job or home during the recession.[4] It might not be coincidental that a show featuring a middle-class protagonist falling on hard times received ratings that went through the roof. What accounts for its tremendous popularity relates to, in part, the cultural climate but more specifically to the discourse on inequality and poverty that was prevalent at the time *Breaking Bad* was on the air.[5] Walter had to take on two jobs to make ends meet; neither his intelligence nor his work ethic could prevent his impending downward

mobility. Before Walter turned into the bad guy, the veritable recessionary rogue, he was a victim of an economy in which hard work and a good education no longer guaranteed middle-class security. Among the many who drew attention to this fact was President Obama who commented on the "dangerous and growing inequality and [the] lack of upward mobility that has jeopardized middle-class America's basic bargain—that if you work hard, you have a chance to get ahead" (2013).[6] Walter chooses a criminal route to get ahead and to become upwardly mobile, and his family home—once the bulwark and haven of middle-class suburbia—ends up in the crossfires of the international drug trade. *Breaking Bad*'s bold way of representing class matters then corresponds with larger socio-cultural transformations precipitated by the recession as well as with the president's and public's anxiety over the plight middle-class US-Americans faced in the years *Breaking Bad* was broadcasted.

The academy was quick to take an interest in these new developments within serial television. The period (2008–2013) also saw the emergence of Quality TV Studies. Within less than a decade, what was once frowned upon as a "low" form of entertainment had grown into an acclaimed genre whose denotation "quality" elevated television as an artistic form of narration that became a valid subject of critique in media, cultural, television, and American studies.[7]

But apart from close readings of *The Wire*, scholarship has yet to consider what is at stake when "class" enters the picture with Quality TV.[8] In Reality TV studies, however, Helen Wood and Beverley Skeggs's *Reality Television and Class* (2011) show the way this might be done. Among the many insightful analyses of class matters on Reality TV offered in that volume, Couldry's discussion of makeover shows is particularly noteworthy as it illustrates the nexus between class matters and neoliberalism. To Couldry, this reality TV format still invites viewers' denigration of working-class life but plays into forms of neoliberal self-governance as it teaches viewers how "some groups [should] be judged 'better' than others: for example [on account of their] language skills, obesity, levels of education" (38–39).[9] Reality television then allows viewers to embrace new moral economies, forms of judgment and aspirations, which are stimulated by the neoliberal imperatives of self-transformation.

In *Reacting to Reality Television: Performance, Audience and Value* (2012), Skeggs and Wood further explore the televisual mediation of self-performance and the symbolic violence some shows exert to examine the impact reality television has in the social world. With an eye on the class

politics that British reality television enacts, they distinguish the following narrative formats: Pygmalion, class conflict, class passing, and deserving poor narratives.[10] This helpful typology of class narratives is one way of approaching class on television. Yet, it does not apply to the shows we examine in this volume, which cover a wide range of different formats: fictional and factual television, serial television including genres such as comedy, drama, Reality TV, sitcom, and satire.

Our volume is less concerned with the impact these shows have on society than with modi of signification and visual representation. Its goal is to determine the signifying practices of class televisibility by drawing attention to both the reception and the production side of serial television. Some of our contributors devote considerable attention to how audiences decode televised class matters. Stephen Shapiro, for instance, differentiates among three modes of *teleintellect* and *telepraxis* that define the three major waves in twenty-first-century fictional TV. And in contrast to Skeggs and Wood, our volume concentrates on US serial TV, in which American Dream formats and personal success stories abound. In the few incidences of class conflict narratives (Skeggs and Wood name *Wife Swap* as their example) they are ameliorated by a melodramatic and reconciliatory articulation of class conflicts as Tanja Aho argues in her discussion of the Reality show *Undercover Boss*.

Starting with the basic assumption that any binary account of class representations on contemporary serial TV (merely contrasting negative with positive stereotypes) falls short of registering the nuances of recent depictions of upper-, middle- and working-class life, we organize our chapters not around stereotypes, tropes, or narrative formats but according to the way in which class has been approached by most sociologists of the twentieth century: along a stratification model. Our case studies are presented along the common hierarchical order proceeding in reverse from the bottom up. We start with analyses of TV shows that are set in the lower class (*Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*), move on to the middle-class (*Breaking Bad*), and then to so-called upper class settings and narratives (*House of Lies*).

The classist stereotypes through which some television programs frame social classes and particularly the lower class are of course still in place but they are also supplemented by (reality and quality) television shows that expose the injuries of class as well as the socio-psychological burden the current stage of capitalism puts on (lower and middle-class) families and

individuals. In other words, we are concerned with the visibility of class injuries and how this disrupts our received understanding of class matters.

Middle-class viewers watch these shows not only because they are persuaded by advertising campaigns, critical hype, or word-of-mouth recommendations, but also because they take a vicarious interest in the precarious lives of others. With intricate narrative arcs, in-depth character development, and an unflinching way of addressing subjects that used to be taboo in US television, these shows confront their audiences with unresolved socio-political issues that do not come cushioned with conciliatory solutions by the end of an episode or the season finale. The allure of contemporary serial and subscription TV—with its multiple, interlocking and twisted plotlines as well as an open-ended structure with suspense-generating cliffhangers—provides the bait for viewers to enter landscapes defined by social inequality. *Class Divisions in Serial Television* therefore contributes to the field of serial TV studies as it turns attention to a trend that manifests in the nexus of complex narrative TV and the complex cultural politics of class.

Among the first scholars to publish a book-length study on media representations and class in the USA was Diana Kendall. When *Framing Class: Media Representations of Wealth and Poverty in America* appeared in 2005, Kendall was one of the first to examine the denial of poverty and class matters in the media. In the cases where the US media portrays class it leads viewers to identify with people belonging to a superior social group. This process is filtered through a set of frames that shape our understanding of class divisions and economic inequality. These media frames predispose how we view, and vicariously relate to, the wealthy, the poor, and everyone else. Each of the five frames, specified in her book, is organized through a set of stereotypes (for instance the greedy rich, the lazy poor, the working-class hero) and metaphors (such as sour grapes, bad apple, and white trash), which explicitly or implicitly prefigure our understanding of class. The poor and the homeless for example are portrayed through the "fragile" frame presenting them either as statistics (Kendall 2011, p. 100), sympathetic (p. 106), deviant (p. 112), or exceptional individuals (p. 121).

We start the volume with a reprint of Kendall's foundational "Framing Class, Vicarious Living, and Conspicuous Consumption" because it is based on a model of class division that follows the sociological stratification model (developed by Dennis Gilbert and Joseph Kahl) differentiating between five classes defined in relation to income and educational

background. Our second contribution, Diana Owen's "American Media's Class Distinctions: 'Hillbillies,' 'Welfare Queens,' and 'Teen Moms,'" also based on a classification model, looks at the lower segments of society concentrating on negative representations of the poor, specifically in Reality TV formats such as *16 and Pregnant* as well as the controversial but popular show *Here Comes Honey* Boo Boo. Drawing on Maxwell McCombs, Robert M. Entram, and Dietram A. Scheufele, Owen applies the concept of framing and the social stratification model to turn our attention to the depiction of single mothers on welfare.

Owen's article traces the development of the welfare-queen stereotype from the 1960s to demonstrate how this stigma has functioned to accuse African-American women of illegitimately collecting welfare payment as a political campaign strategy. Owen then builds on the framing approach to explain how these highly constructed images inexorably impact the social realities of the USA's precariat. Structurally, media frames function to reduce complex social matters into comprehensible units, she reminds us, but this reduction, while perhaps inevitable when social realities are depicted by the mass media, tends to not only simplify those realities but also endorse a general disregard towards welfare recipients that reaffirms middle-class normativity. No wonder the vast majority of US-Americans self-identify as middle class in spite of empirical evidence to the contrary. These two essays, which tackle the representation of non-affluent US-Americans in the media and in television, suggest that class (di)visions—that is, the televisibility of the "lower" classes—and also class divisions following the hierarchical logic of class stratification, are salient in today's mediascape. They thus call for critical scrutiny and obviously allow for different interpretations.

Evangelia Kindinger's "The Paradoxical Class Politics in *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo*," diverges from Owen's assessment by foregrounding the paradoxes that shape the class politics of this production. Set in the poverty-stricken rural South in the small town of McIntyre, Georgia, it brings visibility to a class and region usually excluded from televised images as it introduces a middle-class audience to the 'real' lives of working-class and working poor—some might say, white trash—US-Americans living in the rural South.[11] The series' simple, funny format articulates an intriguing and contradictory cultural politics of class by purposefully utilizing the classist slur "redneck" while at the same time affirming and advocating a "redneck" lifestyle. Through this double strategy *Here Comes Honey Boo Boo* deflects the mandate to entertain its middle-class audience through

degrading images of redneck life. Kindinger demonstrates that the popularity of this show enabled a resignification of the term through its appropriation by the Thompson family demanding viewers to "better redneckognize." This family is not only caring and charming, it is proud of its lifestyle whose rituals (beauty pageants, mud rides, farting, couponing) are usually dismissed as vulgar or petty by dominant (middle-class) cultural standards. The Thompsons' transgressive embrace of redneck identity manifests in their linguistic practices (necessitating a redneck "dictionary" marketed as part of the considerable franchise of the series), eating habits, and leisure pastimes. It is also embodied, literally, by the matriarch Mama June who takes on the role of the family finance manager propagating her personal household hacks to save money and economize in order to feed a family of seven whose breadwinner contributes little. The gendered meaning of redneck connoting poor, white, male farmers is therefore also rearticulated through a matriarchal twist.

The premise of *Undercover Boss*, one of the longest-running reality shows on TV, is taken straight from fairytales like "The Prince and the Pauper": a CEO in disguise takes entry-level jobs in his own firm. In "Reality TV and Its Audiences Reconsidered: Class and Poverty in *Undercover Boss*," Tanja Aho observes that the CBS show makes visible the dire reality of class exploitation in a paternal format with the boss coming across as the good guy instead of the benefactor of labor surplus. Since this production eschews openly negative stereotypes and allows for cultural diversity in its representation of the laboring class, *Undercover Boss* might deserve praise for televising the laboring class thereby inviting a symbolic alignment (as Shapiro would have it) but Aho also spells out the neoliberal, pro-capitalist message that centers on the hard worker and the paternal CEO eclipsing the fact that low-entry workers have barely enough to pay their bills whereas their bosses often live in mansions. Due to its intended reconciliatory message, sentimental format, and tendency to personalize the systemic, *Undercover Boss* deflects criticism concerning the exploitation of the underpaid and uninsured.

To reassess received television scholarships—surveyed in her overview of developments in television studies, audience response theory, and convergence culture—Aho's analyzes viewer comments posted on the show's Facebook page, where the viewers vehemently discuss labor rights, workplace security, and social inequality.[12] This salient example of class encounters is about bridging and simultaneously downplaying class divisions in the USA. This Reality TV show both reveals and disguises

the exploitation of labor, by which wealth is accumulated in a capitalist economy, since its sentimental format and happy-endings peak in the highly-emotional release when the rich man (it is usually a he) praises and compensates his employee, usually moving him or her to tears.

Class exploitation is also the subject of Lena Dunham's serial comedy-drama *Girls*. This fictional portrait of twenty-something, odd yet compelling female urbanites confronted with college debt and the mounting threat of economic volatility introduces viewers to the plight of the creative class. These girls, most of whom were raised in upper-middle class homes and are therefore bestowed with a high degree of cultural capital lack the material means that would put them into the upper-middle class bracket that Eric C. Erbacher suggests (with reference to Richard Florida's concept of the creative class) in his contribution "Lifestyle Precarity and Creative Class Affirmation in the TV Series *Girls*." Their precarity, which results from exploitative work relations and the expectation that creative work should be offered (almost) free of charge, afflicts the creative class on a personal level. The hidden injuries of the precarious creative class, in other words, are pitched to the audience as a lifestyle choice. Erbacher charges this HBO show with failing to criticize the harmful effects of a neoliberal creative economy. To him, "the neoliberal dogmas of individualism, independence, entrepreneurialism," which promote the self-exploitation of that class, are both shown and cancelled out due to its obstruction of any sense of class awareness.

Erbacher's reading also exposes the invisible anxiety that haunts a generation that lives economically, culturally, and psychologically precarious lives. Featuring the precarious state of the USA's young educated urban creative class on primetime cable TV *Girls* offers more than light entertainment with a postfeminist twist; to the critical beholder it registers the psychic costs of an economy that is driven by the mandate of (self-)exploitation. *Girls* then both dramatizes and downplays the effects of a neoliberal economy. On a theoretical level, we might add, it also rearticulates the conventional class stratification model by disrupting a divisionary logic that would conventionally separate the (low-income) class of the *Girls* from the (comfortable) class of their parents.

The psychic injuries of class as well as the shifting terrain of class divisions is also at stake in Julia Leyda's analysis of *Breaking Bad* whose main character Walter White, initially a member of the lower-middle class, eventually secures his precarious financial state through spectacular criminal activities. Her chapter "The Financialization of Domestic Space in *Arrested*

Development and *Breaking Bad*," takes us beyond the class representation and framing approach to dismantle the capitalist logic that contaminates the family home and its inhabitants (*Breaking Bad)*. With the escalating financialization of the home during the 2000s, Leyda reminds us, the private home has been redefined as an investment that can yield equity; consequently, whatever is associated with the private, domestic space is permeated by a financial logic. Homeownership, once the staple of the American Dream that promised material as well as affective stability, enters a new, precarious state. Brought about in part by neoliberal ideologies of self-optimization and profit maximization, the financialization of everyday life and the home that TV series such as *Breaking Bad* expose, uses the drug trade, one of the most lucrative of capitalist businesses, as a vehicle of both narrative suspense and social critique.

The dehumanizing side of US neoliberalist capitalism is also televised in *Arrested Development*, which mocks the lies and scams that produced the housing bubble. The series' most salient theme, deception, "operates in tandem with its innovative form," Leyda observes in keeping with our volume's commitment to explore the nexus of content and form, serial aesthetics, and the cultural politics of class. Both shows criticize capitalism's greedy, ruthless practices gone awry in a deregulated market, which are commonly agreed to have brought the USA's economy to its brink. And both shows provide allegories of the demise of "the economically precarious white, middle-class, suburban American family." The fluctuating nature of class divisions and likelihood of downward mobility is salient in both *Arrested Development* and *Breaking Bad*. While the former comically portrays an upper-middle-class family in social decline after its patriarch has been sentenced to prison for committing fraud, the latter's protagonist initially threatened by bankruptcy turns into a top dog and recessionary villain (Sepinwall).

The heinous effects of deceit are further spelled out in Stefanie Mueller's "*House of Lies* and the Management of Emotions." Set in the upper class, it primarily features the world of chief executives working in the financial sector but replaces the sentimental format (of for instance *Undercover Boss*) with a more detached mode. As its title indicates, this Showtime production mocks the way in which the corporate finance sector makes profit through—as its leitmotif has it—"relationship business." To Mueller, the fictional CEO (played by Don Cheadle) provides "an aggressive masculinity as antidote" to the often-ridiculed feminization of professional relationships. When African-American protagonist Marty

engages in what is the signature aesthetic feature of the show—the breaking of the fourth wall—his consulting lessons teach the audience what it takes to succeed, but his lessons also satirize a corporate world run by emotions, specifically by greed, deceit, and mendaciousness. Mueller infers that this show "offers an emotional training site for its audience" to train the emotional habitus necessary to succeed in the professional sphere. But it also exposes its negative effects as it affects the private sphere eroding vital social values as trust.

Mueller draws on Eva Illouz's concept of emotional capitalism to discuss how the psychic costs of neoliberal governance are both revealed and ridiculed in serial TV productions like *House of Lies*. The glamor and allure of the upper class is deflected by the self-exposed lies and cruel attitude of Marty and his like, thereby inviting the audience to disengage or disaffect from the affluent class and thus possibly to engage in an act of realignment. Mueller then implicitly supports Steven Shapiro's thesis that subscription television's engagement with class offers a laboratory for financially volatile viewers, under economic erasure in recession-era USA, to practice new class alignments.

In "Realignment and Televisual Intellect: The Telepraxis of Class Alliances in Contemporary Subscription Television Drama" Shapiro provides us with a valuable concept that captures the shifting of class di*visions regarding the *telepraxis* of serial TV for it allows viewers to take an interest in, without necessarily identifying with, classes that are considered inferior to their own. Their own sense of financial insecurity makes viewers enter a symbolic alliance with the precarious class while still holding on to their self-proclaimed class affiliation. Not necessarily aware of class exploitation or conflicts, viewers tune in to serial TV shows that portray the pain of others or feature social critique in compelling ways thereby offering an incentive for class realignment.

Moreover, Shapiro offers an overview of the new "Golden Age" of television by distinguishing three "waves," each of which combines televisual intellect and telepraxis in its own distinct ways. The first wave is predominantly defined by HBO productions such as David Simon's *The Wire* and *Treme*. The second wave includes dramas such as *Justified* whose narrative structure and styles of camerawork differ from those employed in the first wave (as his contrastive readings of three scenes taken from *The Wire*, *Treme*, and *Justified* demonstrate). The second wave alters "the visual optics of subjectivity" and thus diverges from semiotic paradigms, namely the interpellatory model of subjectivity media scholars mostly use

to assess class alliances. Subscription television's third-wave dramas such as *Hemlock Grove* elicit middle-class alignment with the working class while also shifting loyalties beyond the personal towards previously derided social classes.

To conclude, the two parts of *Class Divisions on Serial Television* propose that reality and quality TV's intricate politics of class entices viewers to grapple with previously invisible socio-economic realities and to reconsider their class alignment. Again, it looks at the ways in which class is decoded by viewers, how the scripted meanings diverge from actual viewer's responses, and how these shows offer socio-political critiques and disrupt the hegemonic order of class.[13] As such our volume also invites a rethinking of the stratification model of class, which is shared widely among sociologists of the twentieth century and today's public but has been modified by among others Pierre Bourdieu and intersectional scholars.[14] The contributors to this volume extricate the various, shifting, sliding and complex ways in which class matters, divisions, and forms of exploitation have been screened. The financial precarity of the USA's (lower-) middle-class has, among other factors, functioned as a driver for the curiosity and concern with the televised "lower" classes. This, lesser-noticed, account for the popularity of serial television in our time might well be something worth exploring further.

Notes

1. For an industry whose revenues are estimated to amount to $145 billion, the very presence of class matters is a remarkable phenomenon. On this number, see *Continuum: Journal of Media & Cultural Studies*, 22:4, 2008. Given that this article was published in 2008 and that its prognosis of the estimated revue of serial TV most likely exceeds that number, it is perhaps indicative that no account of actual revenues can be found online.
2. In *Media Messages: What Film, Television, and Popular Music Teach Us About Race, Class, Gender, and Sexual Orientation* (Routledge, 2015), Linda Holtzmann and Leon Sharpe cite a quantitative study on class representations in family-based situation comedies broadcasted between 1946–1990, which revealed that 11 percent of the 262 analyzed shows dealt with working-class families and 70 percent with middle-class families (p. 183), from which they infer the "phenomenon of overrepresentation of the wealthy and underrepresentation of the working class and poor [throughout those] years of prime time television's portrayal of economic class" (p. 184).

3. This one show has single handedly elicited a wave of scholarly attention and has been the subject of numerous conferences including The Wire *as Social Science Fiction?* (University of Leeds, November 26–27, 2009), *Race and Justice:* The Wire (Harvard Law School, April 29, 2011), The Wire*: visages du ghetto, entre fiction et sciences sociales* (Université Paris Ouest, October 26–27, 2012), and *Screening Class* (University of Freiburg, June 28–29, 2013) also used *The Wire* as a starting point to "sound out" matters of class. Several contributors to this volume presented their work at that conference. And more recently, Yale University organized *Urban Narratives of Injustice: On* The Wire (November 6, 2015). The authoritative study to date is Liam Kennedy and Stephen Shapiro's The Wire: *Race, Class, and Genre* (University of Michigan Press, 2012).
4. Following Gosselin's diagnosis of the financially precarious situation most US residents experienced at the time the crisis hit, it might be safer to argue that the middle class could relate to the fictional Walter White whose personal downfall was triggered by his cancer diagnosis and the lack of a health insurance that would cover the treatment. His fate resonates with the anxieties a financially volatile middle class burdened by student loans, mortgage and credit card debt experienced in the teens.
5. See Lemke, Sieglinde. *Poverty, Inequality, and Precarity in Contemporary American Culture*. New York: Palgrave. Forthcoming 2016.
6. See President Barack H. Obama, "Remarks by the President on Economic Mobility." THEARC, Washington, DC. December 4, 2013. The White House. The White House, June 2014.
7. When Janet McCabe and Kim Akass organized a conference on what was (in 2004) considered a "new" form of entertainment, their colleagues snickered over the idea of 'quality' on television (pp. 1–2). Among the most influential publications are Robert Thompson's *Television's Second Golden Age: From Hill Street Blues to ER* (Syracuse University Press, 1997); Amanda D. Lotz's *The Television Will be Revolutionized* (NYU Press, 2008), Michael Hammond and Lucy Mazdon's 2005, *The Contemporary Television Series* (Edinburgh University Press), Jennifer Gillan's 2010 *Television and New Media: Must-Click TV* (Routledge), Brett Martin's *Difficult Men: Behind the Scenes of a Creative Revolution: From* The Sopranos *and* The Wire *to* Mad Men *and* Breaking Bad (Penguin Press, 2013), and probably most importantly Jason Mittell's 2009 *Television and American Culture* (Oxford University Press) and his 2015 book *Complex TV: The Poetics of Contemporary Television Storytelling* (New York University Press) as well as Frank Kelleter's *Serial Agencies:* The Wire *and its Readers* (John Hunt Publishing 2014 reprint). For publications in German, see for instance *Die neue amerikanische Fernsehserie: Von Twin Peaks bis Mad Men* (Dustin Breitenwischer et al., Paderborn: Fink, 2014)

or Laura Bieger's 2011 article " 'It's All in the Game'—David Simons *The Wire* als naturalistische Krisenerzählung" (see also bibliography).

8. For class matters in *The Wire* see: Potter, Tiffany and C.W. Marshall. The Wire: *Urban Decay and American Television*. London/New York: Continuum, 2009; and: Kennedy, Liam and Stephen Shapiro. The Wire*: Race, Class, and Genre*. University of Michigan Press, 2012.
9. Lisa Blackman makes a similar point discussing televisual affect in the same volume. She cites Couldry and Ouellette on the "choice-making neo-liberal" (qtd. in Blackman p. 239), and builds on more recent work (including McRobbie 2005; Jensen 2010) to claim that through reality TV shows class-based distinctions and "[d]ifferences to middle-class consumer, citizen and lifestyle norms are understood to be enacted through forms of symbolic violence, which involve the denigration of working-class tastes and habitus and their replacement with those consistent with the "choice-making neo-liberal" (qtd. in Blackman p. 239). The point Couldry makes in his contribution to *Reality Television and Class* (2011) is slightly different but related as he claims that "[reality TV acts out] in public the judgment process whose injuries an earlier sociology had treated as hidden" (p. 38). Referencing Richard Sennett's and Jonathan Cobb's classic *The Hidden Injuries of Class*, he then goes on to claim that reality TV is "[supplanting] general accounts of social, political and economic conditions […], replacing them with a new mode of social 'knowledge'," prefigured in reality TV shows, which affirms neoliberal mandates (p. 38).
10. Their list deserves to be quoted at length: "Pygmalion narratives (from female pauper to proper lady) structure many shows like *Ladette to Lady*, *From Asbo Teen to Beauty Queen*, class conflict is set up in *Wife Swap* and *Holiday Showdown* or class passing is encouraged in a show like *Faking It*. *Secret Millionaire* is a Channel 4 format in which a millionaire goes undercover in a poor community to decide who deserves his/her help in the form of large quantities of money, revealed at the end of the show in emotive moments of tears and gratitude, which resonates with earlier narratives of the deserving poor (p. 36).
11. See also Matt Wray and Annalee Newitz, eds. *White Trash: Race and Class in America*. New York: Routledge, 1997.
12. When Aho teases out the active involvement of viewers, she implicitly upends the classist tradition in media criticism that goes back to Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's notorious attack of the cultural industry, siding with those (cultural studies) scholars who acknowledge the agency and critical engagement of the audience in decoding these shows.
13. *House of Lies* satirizes the homoeconomicus as emotionally dysfunctional; *Arrested Development* and *Breaking Bad* reveal the destructive psychological effects that ensue when the private and the public are no longer sepa-