Performing governance: 
*Dragons’ den* and the practice of judgement

David Nolan

Abstract

In this paper I analyse the role played by a particular reality TV format, the popular UK ‘business pitch’ program *Dragons’ den*, to consider the work of television in not only valorising a culture of enterprise, but serving as an effective governmental technology. In doing so, I argue for the need to move beyond both the question of realism versus artifice, on one hand, and a mere focus on the work of ‘representation’ on the other. To do so, I draw on arguments regarding how forms of neo-liberalism not only accept, but embrace, the constructed nature of social life. Similarly, like other entrepreneurial formats, *Dragon’s den* not only erases both the boundaries between external reality and television’s games, but also largely disregards traditional concerns for naturalism in favour of a self-conscious display of performance as a characteristic of both television and reality. However, while this can be (and has been) read as providing representational support for neo-liberal ideology, it can also be read as merely one aspect of its performance as a neo-liberal technology. I focus on *Dragons’ den* as a text that becomes both intelligible and pleasurable through the organisation of a particular mode of normative judgement. In this respect, it is one among many neo-liberal technologies that position individuals as both bearers of, and constantly subject to, a disciplinary gaze that both produces and rationalises an economy of reward and punishment as a mundane feature of contemporary socio-political relations.

Introduction

*Dragons’ den* is a ‘business pitch’–based reality TV format, in which budding entrepreneurs seek to convince a group of businesspeople (the ‘dragons’) that their particular venture is marketable and thereby worthy of investment. Originating in Japan under the title *Tiger of

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money (Mané no tora), versions of the format have been produced in 22 countries including, briefly, an Australian version that was trialled by Channel 7 in 2005 (before being dropped because of low ratings). In this paper I focus on the UK version of the program which, at the time of writing, is currently being re-broadcast for Australian audiences via ABC2 and ABC iView. In contrast to its failed Australian counterpart, the UK version has been phenomenally popular, with BBC2 commissioning nine series since the program’s launch in late 2005, along with a number of spin-off programs. These have included How to win in the den, Dragon’s den: where are they now? and Business nightmares, a program focusing on costly mistakes made by otherwise successful brands and companies hosted by Dragons’ den presenter (and BBC economics editor) Evan Davis.

In this paper I draw on other work that has considered how reality TV formats operate as governmental technologies to focus in particular on how Dragon’s den relies upon and extends its audiences’ literacy in the language and techniques of business to produce a spectacle that is both intelligible and pleasurable for viewers. However, rather than merely operating as a pedagogic technology or a means by which audiences are afforded opportunities to refine their knowledge of how to conduct themselves to achieve business success, I focus in particular on how the program both promotes an awareness of, and extends an effective disciplinary gaze into, everyday social relations. To this end, I focus on three areas. Firstly, I address the particular form of realism embodied in reality TV formats. While its relation to ‘reality’ is a rather familiar theme in discussions of reality TV, my concern is less to revisit this for its own sake than to highlight the affinity between the realism of reality TV and forms of social constructivism that characterise certain articulations of neo-liberalism themselves. Secondly, I draw on other work that has focused on the manner in which related reality TV formats provide representational models (and thereby ideological support) that naturalise a neo-liberal ethos. While such analyses are insightful, however, a focus on the ‘representational’ work of such programs is insufficient, in that these tend to focus on the forms of knowledge produced by these programs at the expense of a consideration of the significance of emotional engagement. Thus, in my analysis, I draw on previous analyses of reality TV and neo-liberalism and work that has considered the role of media in processes of governing to
consider how, in its performative aspect, *Dragons’ den* can be read as a technology that positions its audience as both bearers and, ultimately, subjects of an effective disciplinary gaze.

**Making up reality**

As Montemurro noted, ‘one of the most contested issues related to reality television has to do with the possibility of producing reality’ (2008: 93). While the relationship between the constructed scenarios presented by these programs and extra-textual reality is itself invited by these programs, however, discussions of whether reality TV is ‘real’ or not tend to founder upon the inevitability of textual construction. In this sense, discussions of reality TV have inherited a set of epistemological problems that have also dogged discussions of documentary forms (Winston 1995; Nichols 1991). While discussion of the ‘reality’ of actuality genres tends to be compromised by an implicit positivism, more sophisticated approaches have preferred to consider differences in generic conventions and expectations separating actuality from fictional forms, which demark different perspectives of viewing (such that documentary presents an account, albeit constructed, of existent reality rather than purely imagined, fictional scenarios).\(^{2}\) Generic conventions, in this way, not only demarcate distinct forms, but also rely upon different expectations of producers as the basis of an ethical contract: that producers should not present excessively distorted, misleading or purely fabricated accounts. Of course, actuality forms also bring attendant and distinctive ethical problems regarding the treatment of subjects, as well as whether the intrusion and publicity involved in representing real people is justified, a problem that producers have traditionally responded to through the invocation of an ethic of ‘public service’.

Part of the interest and novelty of ‘reality TV’ lies in its simultaneous relation to and departure from such traditions of representing actuality. It is on this basis that John Corner (2002), for example, situated reality TV as a ‘post-documentary’ form that is both informed by

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\(^{2}\) Following Nichols, I use the term ‘actuality’ here to refer to genres that depict footage, actors and/or scenarios that have an existence beyond the space of textuality, while acknowledging that any representation inevitably involves a process of textual construction. The term ‘actuality’ is preferred to ‘reality’, which involves a stronger ontological claim, in order to distinguish this basic distinction from claims to ‘the real’ that may be mobilised by texts or genres themselves.
and involves a significant departure from a tradition of observational documentary. Thus, in a passage referring to *Big Brother* that insightfully captures the particular paradox that underpins reality TV, Corner argued that the program

consciously and openly gives up on the kinds of ‘field naturalism’ that have driven the documentary tradition into so many contradictions and conundrums over the last eighty years, most especially in its various modes of observational filming (cinema verite, direct cinema and the various bastardized ‘fly-on-the-wall’ recipes of television). Instead, *Big Brother* operates its claims to the real within a fully managed artificiality, in which almost everything that might be deemed to be true is necessarily and obviously predicated on their being there in front of the camera in the first place. (2002: 256)

The value of this analysis is its shift from the epistemological dead end of the ‘reality value’ of the form to a focus on what is particular about the form of ‘realism’ it presents. This theme has also been pursued by others. Justin Lewis (2004), for example, has considered the complexity of media realism in a world in which media portrayals are an intrinsic part of our everyday knowledge, and in which viewers do not necessarily privilege extra-textual reality. Jonathan Bignell, by contrast, extended Corner’s analysis by suggesting that what is particular to reality TV realism is that ‘realisms are possible inasmuch as they admit that they are objectively false and do not claim to be real’ (2004: 86). While this appears initially nonsensical, this analysis nevertheless finds support in Annette Hill’s analyses of viewer responses to reality TV, in which she finds that, while viewers are overtly conscious that they are watching a highly constructed (indeed, manipulated) scenario and sceptical about the authenticity of contestants’ behaviour, an attraction of reality TV nevertheless lies in a perception that it offers ‘moments of truth’ that reveal the ‘true person’ behind the performance (2005: 74).

While this is valuable, questions have been raised about the adequacy of approaches to the realism of reality TV that are excessively generalising and rely too heavily on tracing a lineage with documentary genres. Wesley Metham (2006), for example, has argued not only that more attention needs to be paid to the prevalence of games in reality TV ‘gamedoc’
formats, but that the nature of the contract may depend upon the game. Thus, for example, while *Big brother* performances are always predicated on a performance of authenticity that is key to achieving popularity among audiences, other formats may encourage contestants to purely adapt themselves to the internal world of the game and to become the person that winning demands. Metham illustrated this point by reference to *Paradise hotel*, in which the winning contestant justified their duplicity by clearly separating their game playing from their real persona. While this might suggest that such a genre does not invoke realism at all, Metham argued that significance of games in reality TV genres is that they blur the distinction between ‘the social’, as an extent domain outside the game space, and the game:

The elements of the social and the game are at work in all reality TV programs. In reality television the faces of the social and of the game continually shift places, the social is undermined through the game, but the social re-emerges. Though the genre undermines the social, it also cannot exist without the social … reality TV is caught in a vacillation between the social as-it-is and the social as a game. (Metham 2006: 243, 245)

While one might again question the generality of this analysis, it marks an important departure from Corner’s more linear framework of judgement. Indeed, having situated reality TV as a continuation and departure from documentary, Corner judged it negatively by comparison to the latter. While Corner identified documentary as belonging to a ‘civic’, Griersonian tradition of social realist filmmaking that sought to produce ‘alternative’ and critical perspectives on social and political life, he suggested that reality TV formats exist primarily as entertaining forms of diversion that are ‘far less clear in terms of their use value’ (2002: 262).

Corner here invoked a rather familiar diagnosis that is akin to many critiques of tabloidisation, wherein another idealised ‘civic’ form (news) is diagnosed as having been displaced by entertainment and trivia. Others, however, suggest that the ‘use value’ of reality TV is an ideological one, extending the characteristic inequalities of contemporary capitalism. Mark Andrejevic, for example, suggested that reality TV’s realism parallels, while working to extend, contemporary capitalist relations. Thus, he asked rhetorically: ‘Why is reality TV
pretending that it’s real, so that we can cannily believe it’s phony, when it accurately portrays the reality of contrivance in contemporary society?” (2004: 17)

Andrejevic suggested that reality TV extends the logic of capitalism in two particular ways. Firstly, it serves as a means by which, through interactivity, the work performed by audiences in the service of advertisers (as originally analysed by Dallas Smythe) is extended through an ‘interactivity’ that is an extension of a process of enclosing traditional spaces of leisure. Secondly, as indicated above, it presents contrived scenarios that mirror, and thereby naturalise, the contrivances of contemporary capitalist relations. Nick Couldry and Jo Littler proposed a similar analysis in their analyses of Big brother (Couldry 2008) and The apprentice (Couldry and Littler 2011). They suggested that reality TV games bear a particular affinity with, and serve to naturalise, a neo-liberal ethos that has increasingly come to govern everyday workplaces. Thus, Couldry and Littler focused on how both programs naturalise and legitimise surveillance; rely on an acceptance that contestants must conform to the requirements of an absolute external authority; and negotiate the performance of team-based work tasks while continuing to operate on the basis of self-interested individuality. Equally, the terms of each game rest upon a performance of authenticity that rests upon a successful re-modelling of the self, such that success becomes premised upon the marketable authenticity borne of ‘being yourself’, with the significant proviso that this self must have internalised the values of an external authority (whether that be the employer or the market) against which individuals come to be judged.

Such examples of ‘self-work’ are clearly also relevant to other ‘lifestyle’ genres in which ‘self-work’ constitutes a central theme. Indeed, in contrast to Corner’s dismissal of the ‘use value’ of reality TV and ideological analyses that suggest that reality TV naturalises values that ultimately serve others’ interests, Hay and Ouellette (2008), drawing explicitly on Foucault, focused on the pedagogic value of reality TV, and the ‘use value’ it offers audiences in its provision of recipes for negotiating the demands of contemporary life. In reframing reality TV as a ‘technology of government’ and mode of ‘responsibilisation’ that works through the exercise and rehearsal of normative judgement, Hay and Ouellette’s work shifts attention
beyond representational aspects of such programs to consider the processes through which subjective refashioning is facilitated through viewing formats. It is with this focus in mind that I now turn to analysing the ‘reality game’ of Dragon’s den.

**The game of life: neo-liberal constructivism and Dragon’s den**

Following Metham’s point regarding the characteristic blurring between the social and games, it is notable that an aspect shared in common by otherwise distinct forms of neo-liberal government is an eschewing of ‘naturalistic’ in favour of a ‘cultural’ view of markets. Mitchell Dean (1999: 55–59, 149–175) has emphasised this point by reference to two distinctive styles of neo-liberal thought, articulated by the postwar German ‘ordoliberal’ movement, on one hand, and the influential arguments of Frederick Hayek on the other. Both the ordoliberals and Hayekian liberalism depart from classical liberalism in that they no longer regard markets as natural entities inhabited by rational calculating individuals, but they do so in rather different ways. The ordoliberal view of markets is ‘profoundly anti-naturalistic and “constructivist”: it is no longer a domain of quasi-autonomous processes but a reality to be secured by an appropriate juridical, institutional and cultural framework’ (Dean 1999: 56). While it is not the role of the state to direct the market, it does perform a vital role in securing the conditions within which markets can operate, protecting markets against potentially ‘distorting’ social forces, and extending market forms to non-economic areas of life, such that these might be governed through the operation of both enterprise and individual choice. Hayek’s perspective, by contrast, sees the market not as something that has or can be contrived by forms of state rule. Rather, both markets and the rule of law that enables markets to operate stand as products of a ‘cultural evolution conceived as the development of civilisation and its discipline’, through which ‘rules of conduct are selected that help human groups adapt to their social environment, prosper and expand’ (quoted in Dean 1999: 156). Within Hayekian liberalism, markets themselves, forms of individuality that are adapted to and shaped within market environments, and forms of regulation that provide the political and legal conditions upon which markets can operate are all outcomes of a civilising process that is necessarily independent of the constructive work of any particular governmental agency.
Neo-liberalism cannot merely be reduced to two of its articulations, however influential these may have been, any more than it is best understood as a translation of theory into practice. Nevertheless, we may note that these distinctive forms of neo-liberal thought serve as rationales for rather different forms of neo-liberal government (since the former regards markets as themselves constructed through effective practices of state rule, while the latter positions them as a product of an independent cultural process against which the role of government is defined). Notwithstanding such difference, however, both are ‘anti-naturalistic’ – though not ‘anti-realist’. On the contrary, not only do both regard markets as real entities with their own properties and effects that must be respected, but they also each position markets as the primary reality around which the role of government is to be defined and delimited. In this respect, neo-liberalism also partakes in the paradoxical realism that is characteristic of reality TV, in which ‘reality’ is unambiguously presented as the product of a practice of construction, a fact that does not diminish, and may enhance, its realist status.

Such realism may be seen to be particularly strongly enacted in market-based programs like *Dragons’ den* and *The apprentice*, which each contain elements that further blur the distinction between ‘game’ and ‘reality’. Firstly, unlike the imaginatively contrived scenarios of, say, *Survivor* or *Big brother*, the premises of both shows are grounded in verisimilitude (relating to, respectively, the market phenomena of the business pitch and the long-form interview). Likewise, rather than offering cash prizes that serve to differentiate the world of television from that of everyday life, in both of these programs the prize is the offer of a partnership that extends beyond the world of television into the ‘real world’, in the form of a business partnership or a job that will involve a continuation of, rather than departure from, the work performed on television. Indeed, in both cases, the ‘prize’ is yet to be earned in a corporate environment that will depend on the successful performance of business acumen.

In this analysis, I am particularly concerned to consider how the structure of the engagement performed by the program positions viewers as bearers of an effective disciplinary gaze. Here, I seek to respond to Couldry and Littler’s critique of analyses that suggest programs serve as
pedagogical technologies that extend neo-liberal norms to viewerships for their failure to address how ‘processes of power are inherently unstable and always rely on people’s participation in their own subjectivisation’ (2011: 266). Rather than viewing pedagogy as passive, on the one hand, or assuming that ‘participation’ necessarily destabilises it, on the other, I focus on how Dragons’ den constructs a means through which audiences may be recruited to participate in a certain pleasurable performance of judgement that may be carried beyond the program. Given this focus, I will touch on representational aspects of the program, albeit briefly since I wish to argue that the significance of Dragons’ den moves beyond its textual construction of reality. Thus, I suggest how the program might be seen to function as an effective disciplinary mechanism that rests not only on its provision of knowledge, but its emotional exhortation for viewers to apply that knowledge in a process of judging – and reforming – themselves and others.

In representational terms, Dragons’ den also has attributes that construct the market in ways that parallel those highlighted in work discussed above. In particular, the dragons, like the figure of Donald Trump and Alan Sugar in The apprentice, are represented as possessors of a charismatic and individualised authority, such that their business success is associated with their personal qualities. Indeed, their attributes are explicitly mythologised, both through the connotations of their status as superhuman ‘dragons’, and by reference to their representation as ‘self-made’ men and women. Indeed, all references to other social factors that might have contributed to their success are erased, with the exception of a reference in the program’s introduction to how one of the dragons ‘left school with only three O-levels’, reinforcing a myth that the market is a ‘level playing field’. This authority is bolstered through the use of BBC economics editor Evan Davis as the show’s presenter. Davis performs a crucial role in the mise en scène of the program, in that he performs an impartial role (narrating and explaining aspects of the dragons’ judgement to viewers, without directly passing judgement himself). Greenfield and Williams (2007) have traced the historical emergence of such commentators as part of a broader ‘financialisation’ of news that has contributed to the production of a ‘financialised we’, translating the somewhat esoteric language of the market into compelling dramatic narratives, while constructing its audience as ‘possessors of an
identity as shareholders or would-be shareholders, characterised by financial independence (or the struggle to attain it), seized by aspirations and disposed to consider events as opportunities for investment’ (2007: 419). Davis provides an intertextual seriousness to Dragons’ den in his role of translating economic knowledge into ‘common sense’, while bolstering the credentials of the program as a bona fide representation of the market.

The use of Davis also signifies the program’s desire to incorporate a pedagogic dimension. Dragons’ den offers an entertaining means through which audiences gain access to forms of expert commentary regarding the necessity of business planning, market testing, gaining entrepreneurial experience and, not insignificantly, drawing on relevant forms of expertise. Both Davis and the dragons themselves frequently emphasise that what the achievement of an investment involves is not only an investment of capital, but also the opportunity to gain from the benefit of the dragons’ expertise in establishing and growing a business. Viewers also gain indirect access to such expertise through the program, and viewers’ postings on the BBC website frequently emphasise the value they place on what they have learned from the program. In this respect, Dragons’ den reproduces the broader promise of self-improvement that Hay and Ouellette (2008) located as key to the genre’s appeal. If this pedagogic dimension locates the program as a source of disciplinary training for viewers, however, the program is not without a punitive dimension: indeed, the two are mutually supportive.

**Discipline and humiliation**

Couldry argued that reality TV operates as a ‘theatre of cruelty’, offering ritual enactments of the ‘truths’ of neo-liberalism, which ‘would be unacceptable if stated openly, even if their consequences unfold before our eyes every day’ (2008: 3). This description appears particularly relevant to Dragons’ den, a program in which humiliation forms a key part of the program’s spectacle. Indeed, both in its introduction, and in previews for subsequent episodes at its close, the program continuously centres on the harsh criticisms made by the dragons, highlighting lines such as ‘I’ve never heard anything so ridiculous in all my life’, ‘I think this has all the ingredients of the classic business disaster’, and ‘I just question why you’ve turned up today’. Although not all would approve of such humiliation, it remains a central aspect of
the spectacle enacted for the viewer’s pleasure. Furthermore, whether we approve or disapprove of it, the use of humiliation on the program is not presented as arbitrary but rationalised: that is, the program operates an economy of reward and humiliation which rests on the market logics articulated and embodied by the dragons themselves.

_Dragons’ den_ not only offers a means by which audiences gain access to forms of television-accredited market expertise, but operates as a spectacle of public humiliation, such that the failings of a proposal are treated as moral failings for which the subject is morally admonished. Indeed, an important aspect of the show’s realism relies on the premise that both failure and success are not arbitrary, but rest upon a system of objectively existing rules of conduct defined by the market itself. As the dragons lambast the shortcomings of proposals, these are presented as a failure to conform to the norms of marketability, demand and planning that are presented as emanating from the market as an objectively existing reality. In this way, _Dragons’ den_ constructs a position wherein the viewer takes a (sadistic) pleasure in a process of public judgement, in which the dissemination of expertise provides an apparently transparent means of inviting spectators to participate vicariously in a process of normative assessment. Thus, though viewers may disapprove of the _manner_ in which judgements are made, it is the process through which the viewer becomes party to the process of judgement (which is made, for the purposes of television, on the viewer’s behalf) that makes the program both intelligible and pleasurable. While we might disapprove of how individual applicants are treated, this treatment is nevertheless made comprehensible as deriving from a failure to conduct themselves according to norms whose basis is not subjective, but produced by the given reality of the market itself. These ‘rules of the game’ are presented as deriving both from ‘real life’ and from the conditions upon which the program is intelligible for viewers.

Whether viewers agree with the treatment of particular individuals may, in this respect, ultimately be irrelevant to its operation as a disciplinary mechanism, which locates the individual as both bearer and subject of an effective governmental gaze. Several authors who have investigated such disciplinary aspects of reality TV (Trottier 2006; Andrejevic 2004;
Palmer 2003) have drawn not upon Foucault’s model of ‘panopticism’, but also upon the discussion of ‘synopticism’ developed by Thomas Mathiesen (1997). While Foucault’s discussion of ‘panopticism’ needs no introduction, Mathiesen disputed the trajectory of Foucault’s account of a shift away from a form of power (associated with both public celebrations and executions) in which the many witness the power of the few, to one in which the few observe and act upon the conduct of the many. The major problem with this account, he suggested, is that it ignores the rise of the mass media during exactly the period at which Foucault posited such a transition occurs. The media, Mathiesen argued, is not primarily ‘panoptic’ but ‘synoptic’: rather than an ‘all-seeing’ (pan-optic) power, the prefix ‘syn’ means ‘together’ or ‘at the same time’ (Mathiesen 1997: 219). Mathiesen argued this appears more apt to describe mass media, which typically produce a situation in which the many see the few (whether these are politicians, journalists or celebrities). Here, his concern is not to deny that panopticism plays a major role in modern power relations. However, not only is the growth of its opposite, the synopticon, also evident over the course of the same historical period but, he suggested, ‘they together, precisely together, serve decisive control functions in modern society’ (1997: 219).

This perspective on the joint functioning of panopticism and synopticism provides an illuminating perspective on the operations of Dragons’ den. Clearly, the program performs synoptically, as a form of mass spectacle in which the few are presented before the many. Clearly, too, it provides a means by which an elite, privileged few (the multimillionaire ‘dragons’) are placed in a position in which they can make their pronouncements, and communicate their perspectives, to the many. This power to articulate the terms of normative business judgement is, in addition, enhanced by the fact that it is presented as an accessible, ‘common sense’ perspective, rather than in the esoteric language of economics. This connection between the judgements of the dragons and the judgements of viewers flatters the audience into the belief that such judgements, indeed the entire spectacle of the program, are made on their behalf. Like other ‘spectacles of shame’ discussed by Gareth Palmer, the program operates as an instrument of discipline in which ‘the power of the norm is vested in
the audience’ (2003: 132). The subject who departs from market-based norms is both provided with advice (discipline) and/or subjected to ridicule (punishment).

However, this process also incorporates panoptic dimensions. Most obviously, such programs come into being through the operation of a whole machinery of audience research, which seeks to deploy ever more sophisticated techniques to survey viewing habits and preferences as a basis for constructing further programs they will watch. Regardless of whether the object is to generate ratings and revenue, to ‘educate’ audiences, or both, the goal is to deploy techniques of surveillance to act upon how viewers regulate their own conduct. Thus, the technique of shaming, featured on previous successful examples of reality programming, is redeployed as a disciplinary means to persuade viewers to watch Dragons’ den. More significant, however, is the manner in which the entrepreneurs featured are also ‘ordinary people’ that are likely to be socially familiar (if not personally known) to members of the audience. In this respect, the position of ‘observer’ of its synoptic spectacle is strictly temporary, coinciding only with the actual duration of the program (and even then rather ambiguously). At the moment they turn away from the program, the audience members return to a position in which they, like those they have watched, must concern themselves with the problem of adapting themselves to a market environment. The peculiar effect of reality TV, in this respect, is to construct a third position, neither strictly panoptical (the few watching the many) or synoptical (the many watching the few), but which merges the two functions to produce a mechanism through which the many come to watch the many, such that each audience member becomes both the bearer of, and is made subject to, the normative gaze of market rationality.

**Conclusion**

I have engaged with Dragons’ den not only to analyse how it might be seen to operate as a neo-liberal technology of government, but also to consider the particular affinity between the rise of such formats of reality television and neo-liberalism itself. Unlike earlier forms of liberalism that positioned markets as deriving from natural processes of exchange and subsistence, neo-liberal thought has tended to view markets as particularly valorised cultural
phenomena associated with effective state action and/or a ‘civilising process’. In this respect, *Dragons’ den*‘s realism, achieved through its effective erasure of the distinction between the entertaining spectacle enacted for the purposes of attracting and engaging viewers and a wider market environment, both mirrors and reproduces a social constructivist epistemology characteristic of neo-liberalism as an approach to governing. However, while the manner in which the ‘market games’ that form a particular sub-genre of reality television ideologically mirror (and thereby naturalise) the forms of knowledge and world views characteristic of forms of neo-liberal governing undertaken elsewhere, my concern in this paper has been to extend a focus beyond the ‘representational’ work of television to consider how it might be seen to operate as a technology of government in its own right, and in particular how processes of self-fashioning might be tied to processes of emotional engagement with television’s games. No doubt many viewers feel highly ambivalent about the punitive rituals of humiliation performed on *Dragons’ den*, and in this respect the program may open up a space within which the neo-liberal conduct and its cruelties can be critically engaged with. Nevertheless, this does not necessarily diminish the program’s effectiveness as a neo-liberal technology that shapes subjects’ identities and conducts both directly, through its provision of pedagogic instruction, and indirectly through its contribution to a social environment in which particular imperatives of conduct form the basis of everyday practices of judging selves and others.

**References**


