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Property TV

The (re)making of home on national screens

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ABSTRACT This article explores how home is made and re-made on national television screens by reference to new domestic lifestyle genres. Through a comparative analysis of the property TV of English-language broadcasters in the UK and US, as well as the minority-language Welsh broadcaster S4C, this article examines the inter-relationship of domestic scenes of private homes with the formation of national constructions of homelands and national belonging. The aestheticization of everyday home life is tied both to distinct material cultural practices and to the politics of taste in the formation of cultural identities within distinct national locales.

KEYWORDS do-it-yourself, home, identity, lifestyle television, material culture, nation, national screens, property TV, taste

Whilst a growing body of work has sought to assess the significance, history and politics of lifestyle television (Bell and Hollows, 2005; Brunsdon, 2003; Moseley, 2000), such studies have focussed primarily upon class and gender as prime analytic categories (Giles, 2002; Holliday, 2005; Philips, 2005; Taylor, 2002). Frances Bonner's (2005) analysis of the trade in lifestyle formats and Anna Everett's (2004) exploration of the US cable network HGTV are exceptions in that they explore the specificity of local programming, yet neither quite gets under the skin of property TV's relationship not just to local production/reception contexts, but also to the formation of national cultures and identities. This article addresses the national work of lifestyle television and considers how new formats mediate the long-standing intimacy of television's address and its capacity to make the national domestic. It examines how lifestyle might be understood not as the replacement of one mode of belonging by another (for instance, the primacy of class as paid-work by the privatized, aspirational culture of home ownership), but instead as an example of how long-standing units of identity and belonging such as 'nation' are re-cast and re-moulded within the cultures of contemporary consumption.

My analysis of taste on lifestyle television speaks both to the adoption of Pierre Bourdieu's (1984) work as a key referent in the analysis of this new televisual form, and to criticisms made by, for example, Celia Lury (1996) who has noted how Bourdieu's framework underplays the importance of national dispositions and attitudes towards the aesthetic and the diverse 'cultural repertoires' they make available to national subjects. Focussing upon a distinct sub-genre of lifestyle – the property show – this article explores the screening of house, home and belonging in three national broadcast locations. First, I examine British national television, with a focus upon the publicly owned publisher/broadcaster Channel 4; second, an example of minority-language media's airing of lifestyle is assessed in the shape of the Welsh-language fourth channel Sianel Pedwar Cymru (S4C); and finally, the US subscription broadcaster Home and Garden TV (HGTV) is considered as an example of how lifestyle television on the other side of the Atlantic throws into relief the more quotidian elements of such programming as they appear on European, but most especially UK, screens.

My interest is in how property TV brings together aestheticized shapings of home with scenes of national life, and does so imaginatively and educationally on our small screens. Property TV places the acquisition, exhibition, inhabitation or transfer of homes at the centre of lifestyle programming. It makes the idea and material realities of property ownership mundane, common, exhilarating and compelling. It places in the public sphere the narrativization and performance of home-making as an everyday activity. For some, this manoeuvre is indicative of an unhealthy shift (unhealthy, that is, for the body politic) from a public sphere characterized in media terms by hard news, quality drama and documentary, towards one marked by soft news, affective/sensational dramas, and makeover shows. As Charlotte Brunsdon et al. have argued, not only are the gendered dynamics of such critiques under-theorized by those who make them, but in using such 'falsely polarized categories of classification' they 'mask the more complex and interesting issues generated by those shifts' themselves (2001: 33). Houses pose a problem for arguments premised on the logic of public versus private. Joe Moran addresses this when he writes that:

> Houses are where we spend most of our quotidian lives … But the mundane everydayness of the house tends to be unacknowledged because, more than any other quotidian space, it has become entangled with a logic of privatized consumption. In modern western societies, the house owes its cultural and emotional power to its capacity to separate itself ideologically from the public spaces of everyday life. (Moran, 2004: 608)

My analysis of property TV seeks to traverse the citizen and consumer binary particularly as used in a wider thesis of the privatization of modern life. Robert A. Putnam's *Bowling Alone* (2000) stands as perhaps the

most canonical of social capital analyses of these changing patterns of sociability. As Lewis et al. (2005: 1) argue, 'Putnam presents the reader with a wealth of evidence suggesting that community-based and civic activity … is being replaced by individual or domestic forms of leisure or consumption. In short, rather than engaging with our fellow citizens, we are sitting at home watching TV.'

Watching property TV is a very particular, mediated form of engaging with our fellow citizens. Whilst it rests upon the close relationship of home ownership to citizenship in some national contexts, it also offers a compelling crossing of the domestic threshold. This traversal can be set against the point made by Daniel Miller (2001: 1) that in 'industrialized societies, most of what matters to people is happening behind the closed doors of the private sphere'. Property TV, in making the domestic national, sutures the making of home to the making of the nation, and more broadly to the making and negotiation of national belonging. In tracing how home – as property, place and the site of affective belongings – is articulated within distinct national frameworks, this article suggests that property TV can be read productively as an instance of 'banal nationalism' (Billig, 1995) operating within what Frances Bonner (2003) describes as 'ordinary television'.

Home, taste and property TV

Houses become homes through our material re-shaping of them, yet few of us can conceptualize our homes without relay to the place of their and our location. Home is always embedded in another map of spatialized meaning. As Judy Attfield argues:

> The dwelling can be conceptualised as a … space for the transaction of individuality, a starting point and return from the external world … Boundaries are not as impermeable as they might first appear. Just as important are the transitional points – the thresholds, windows, doors, entrances and exits, walls, and facades used to transact, allow, bar or control access to change. (2000: 178)

Our homes are always somewhere, linked to others on our street or against those on the other side of town. Such linkages may be played out in terms of class and ethnic distinctions and through the expressivity of style, but also through the imagined perspective of others' judgements. Allison Clarke's (2001) ethnography of home decoration on a north London council estate suggests that the boundaries of the home were – contra Attfield – quite fixed, with little visiting happening between residents. Clarke contrasts her findings with Marianne Gullestad's (1986) research into Norwegian home decorators, for whom neighbourly visits were more routine and more routinely anticipated: an example of how the domestic rhythms of everyday life may be nationally – as well as regionally and

class – varied. Clarke details significant efforts made by the working-class inhabitants of this state housing to maintain and alter their homes' appearance. In such cases, actual display to or intrusion by outsiders was not the point: it was the imaginative possibility of such events, and their attendant social meanings, that mattered:

> [T]his ethnographic example shows how the ideal home, as used to influence the construction of the actual home, becomes an internalised vision of what other people might think of one. Far from being a site of crude emulation, the house itself actually becomes the 'others'. The house objectifies the vision the occupants have of themselves in the eyes of others and … becomes an entity and process to live up to, give time to, show off to. (Clarke, 2001: 42)

We can perceive here a powerful history of working-class susceptibility to the external, judging gaze (see Skeggs, 2004). The working class is often positioned as lacking the cultural capital to actualize an aestheticized sense of self and of home, yet Clarke's working-class inhabitants demonstrate the routine and productive imaginative labour undertaken by those who do not own their own homes. This is worth keeping in mind when considering television's address to homeowners.

Since the mid-20th century at least, many men and women have laboured away their leisure time in pursuit of a distinct form of material cultural practice – DIY. In deciding that professionals were not required and that you could do-it-yourself, home improvers helped to transform our economic relationships to home, our rhythms of weekend life, and our susceptibility to and skill in self-fashioning at a time when resources – both material and temporal – were rapidly changing (see Goldstein, 1998). Lynne Segal (1988: 70) situates the rise of DIY in the context of the gendered changes of 1950s Britain, where men had 'returned from battlefield to bungalow with new expectations of the comforts and pleasures of home'. Alan Tomlinson (1990: 64) looks to an earlier period, arguing that in the aftermath of the First World War, we see a 'decreasing inhibition about design: the dwelling was to be an expression of personal taste, a personalized project'. Focussing on the US, Steven Gelber (1997) sees the emergence of DIY as a masculine cultural domestic practice stretching back to the 1890s and the increase in American home ownership. As I have argued elsewhere (McElroy, 2006), DIY is not a new phenomenon, but within the past decade, the highs and lows of home ownership and home improvement have been transformed from the relatively private stresses of DIY into mass-audience scenes of lifestyle formation. The DIY market, to which property TV is intimately tied, is nationally contingent, with those states where home ownership is most widespread being more likely to have an established and expanding DIY retail sector. The fashioning of house as home has become a public televisual spectacle, enabling us to witness and share in the triumphs and disasters of strangers' home styling, from their laminate flooring and garden decking to their period features and ambient lighting.

For some commentators, including the BBC journalist John Humphrys, in his 2004 McTaggart Lecture delivered to the Edinburgh Television Festival, these programming trends are 'damaging' because they 'erode the distinction between the public and the private, which is a profoundly important aspect of our culture' (Humphrys, 2004). However, television itself has transformed the material and social space of the home. As John Corner argues:

> Television reworks the meanings of home life in modernity by developing new modes of linkage and separation between world and home, between public and private … Within the new system of culturally formative alignments, home space becomes permeable to the public world and the wider popular culture in ways which effect a radical change in both. (1999: 87)

Humphrys was right to highlight the rise of a new form of television, one in which first-hand experience, high emotion and the witness of strangers' intimate human actions play a key role. For Rachel Moseley (2000: 301), makeover television is indicative of changes within public service broadcasting so that it 'now extends to the care of the self, the home and the garden'. In looking at property TV, we can add to this list the care of the nation and of our sense of place. It is possible to argue that property TV fulfils Reithian aims to inform, educate and entertain. Thus it informs the audience of house prices across the regions of the country, it educates them in making money from investing in and improving property, and it entertains in its narrative quest for the best price, the ideal home or the most accomplished interior makeover. The argument that a public service approach does not sit with this programming ignores both the informational and educational elements of such shows and, more importantly, their modes of address to viewers as home owners. Home owners – addressed as citizens and consumers – are also addressed as *imaginative* agents, their aspiration to change *itself* providing a route into citizenship via their stylized consumption. As Dorothy Hobson argues, 'Lifestyle programmes are redefining factual television – and to the extent that they address the practical interests and emotional needs of their audiences, executives could describe these programmes as addressing viewers' dreams and aspirations and citizens' rights' (Hobson, 2004).

In contrast, Giles (2002) regards property shows as offering false promises of empowerment and inclusion to the television audience. Instead, he sees a more regulatory mode at work: 'much of the time, lifestyle programming is more about educating the audience in judgements of taste than disseminating skills and knowledge' (2002: 607). Property TV may be homogenizing, in that fashionable design solutions are endlessly replayed so that, for example, it seems every episode of *Property Ladder* (Channel 4) or *House Doctor* (Five) advises us to replace carpet with wooden flooring. However, being educated in matters of taste is no small matter given that taste has itself become an important terrain for working out

social difference. Taste is an important audience hook, as John Ellis has argued of the BBC makeover show, *Changing Rooms*:

> The appeal of the programme lies in its address to questions of class and taste, style and appearance. This takes place across a powerful emotional dynamic, involving an insight into the nature of the relationships of the two couples, with their neighbours and even with the professional designers who behave with a degree of pantomime exaggeration. (Ellis, 2000: 174)

The ability to negotiate taste has come to be regarded as increasingly important in the formation of social identities and social hierarchies, especially within the context of shifts in other forms of social belonging such as social class and locale. Taste is an engine of contemporary material culture, one that both restricts and energizes creative possibilities for those subjects able economically and culturally to harness its potential. In their analysis of domestic styles and architecture in four upper- and middle-class neighbourhoods in the Danish city of Aarhus, Kirsten Gram-Hanssen and Claus Bech-Danielsen (2004) examine how taste operates within a context of cultural displacement and social mobility. Focussing upon 'a self-made man who has worked his way up as a businessman' who moved to a high-income neighbourhood, they explore how he and his family felt excluded by established residents. From the outset, the family felt diminished in the eyes of others because their house was a new build, albeit in an old villa style. The participants detail an extraordinarily vivid scene of polite disdain over everyday matters of domestic taste, one that is reminiscent of property TV's dramas:

> Woman: 'We travel once a year with our caravan and everything. It is a bit atypical out here.'
>
> Man: 'Yes, the others find that quite funny.'
>
> [...]
>
> Man: 'I just started to high-pressure clean our flagstones in the garden. The neighbours think it is dreadful that we clean the flagstones, as they have enough to do cleaning their floors.'
>
> Woman: 'Yes, there we are also a bit different.' (2004: 22)

Taste matters because it can be translated into economic value – for example, through enabling vendors to achieve a higher selling price for their property – and because it can enable some of us to form a sense of identity and commonality which may be eroded by the unsettling shifts of location and class that characterize a post-Fordist society. Taste, and its narrativization through lifestyle, may also offer a way of suturing older forms of belonging with new performances of cultural identity. As my analysis below suggests, property TV offers a space in which to draw upon distinct national forms of taste alongside a self-conscious awareness of newer lifestyles. For instance, in an episode of the Welsh commissioning

broadcaster S4C's *Pedair Wal* ('*Four Walls*', produced by the independent company Fflic for S4C), we meet a woman who has returned to Wales from London in order to teach in a local school. Her home is a converted primary school in the village of Manafon in Wales' most sparsely populated county, Powys. In an early scene we see the following sequence:

1. Long shot of silhouetted animals on a hillside;
2. Shot of a blue sky with clouds;
3. Mid-shot of a window of the school/house looking through to an old church;
4. Mid-shot of the roof and restored eaves of the school/house;
5. Close-up of a new hook with a rope holding down what we presume is a blind;
6. Mid-shot of an old Celtic cross in a graveyard.

At this point the presenter, Aled Samuel, asks Anne: 'is there comfort in living next to a graveyard?', and we then cut to the interior to see both standing on newly varnished wooden floors in a kitchen comprising an Aga, reclaimed sycamore wooden tops and MDF (medium density fibreboard) cupboards. Visually and discursively, we are invited to witness, and thereby participate in, the negotiation of the modern – signified by the familiar icons of home design, such as wooden flooring and metal hooks – and the historic – signified both through a naturalized landscape and by iconic images of an old Wales, in the form of the cross, the graveyard and the church. Taste here is a matter of selecting the right objects to create the right 'look' and thereby a pleasing lifestyle, but it is also occurring within another narrative – that of the migrant returnee whose sense of place goes beyond faithfulness to architecture and extends instead to a materialized sense of belonging conveyed on screen by the graveyard. An older form of belonging – one that is place- and linguistically based – is operating here alongside a familiar scene of a fashionably designed lifestyle. Whilst some of the actual objects, such as the flooring, are common to programmes in the genre, the chain of signification within which they are cast tells a more complex story of how we produce home. As Frances Bonner (2003: 5) argues, 'television programmes do not remain the same when surrounded by material originating elsewhere and watched by audiences with different cultural backgrounds'. Property TV may be less a radical break away from older forms of public service broadcasting, and more a gradual shift towards a self-conscious, and possibly anxious, concern with how to negotiate different ways of being at home both in one's own house and also within the wider geography and culture of which we are a part.

Making home, making nation

How does property TV function as the making and re-making of nation? One way to answer this is to consider television's role as a mass medium

that mediates nation through the symbolism of home, and does so precisely through its homeliness. David Morley examines how:

> national broadcasting can … create a sense of unity – and of corresponding boundaries around the nation; it can link the peripheral to the centre; turn previously exclusive social events into mass experiences; and above all, it penetrates the domestic sphere, linking the national public into the private lives of its citizens, through the creation of both sacred and quotidian moments of national communion. Not that this process is always smooth and without tension or resistance. (2000: 107)

Morley's caveat is vital; no nation and no form of belonging is without its exclusions. In the case of television programmes, this may involve a failure to represent all citizens, a failure to represent them in the round or, more ubiquitously, by establishing a sense of normality and everydayness which is itself exclusive. Several studies have pointed to the lack of representation of ethnic minorities on British television, and lifestyle programmes have been especially guilty of this exclusionary mode. As I argue below, however, the whiteness of property TV extends beyond the ethnic identities of participants, and instead operates as the very fabric or script through which ideas of home and nation are voiced.

Whilst nationalism is easier to see in instances of the sacred – say through the Royal Broadcasts from the home of the British monarch – it also operates at a low frequency, a repetitive, barely audible cue to belong. Michael Billig's concept of 'banal nationalism' is useful here. Billig defines banal nationalism as 'the ideological habits that enable the established nations of the West to be reproduced'. 'Daily,' he argues, 'the nation is indicated or flagged in the life of the citizenry' (Billig, 1995: 6). Property TV can be read as an instance of banal nationalism precisely because it flags the nation in the life not only of the citizenry, but also of the television audience. This is achieved in a myriad of ways. For example, property TV enables members of the nation to see one another in their own domestic spaces, thereby crossing boundaries which, given geographical and class distances, might never normally be crossed. For some, this journey into others' domestic lives is one of limitations of the property makeover format. Munira Mirza (2001) argues that 'The domestication of the nation's tastes has become so banal … Is a newly decorated room really that exciting? Especially when it is not even our rooms that have been changed, but those belonging to somebody we do not know.' Yet viewing pleasure stems precisely from seeing into other people's homes – a transgression of boundaries that makes the private world intimately known and familiar on the national screen. Intimacy and proximity are the modus operandi of much of the camera work of such shows, as they allow us to observe, as no polite guest easily could, the finest of details, from bedding to coving. Such spectatorial omniscience provides the audience with a sense of commonality and knowableness, despite the diversity of

participants and homes. This mode is simultaneously voyeuristic and idealistic; it provides an aspirational narrative, both for possession and for proximity, which the nation itself rarely allows.

This linkage of regional, class and stylistic difference can work as a metonymy of nation. The opening sequence of *Selling Houses* exemplifies how the nation is united via difference in a way that is architecturally rare on public, British streets. The sequence pans along a digitally imaged urban street in which different housing styles sit incongruously next to one another. This fictional terrace sets cottage, villa and detached mock-Tudor home alongside one another. Repeated fade-in and fade-out shots transform the houses as we pan along them, thus a brick-built home is changed to grey stone, whilst a cottage transmogrifies into a 1930s semi-detached house. The strange familiarity of this unreal street draws the audience into a shared sense of national architecture, whilst promising proximity and transformation via its technique.

Strikingly, many UK Channel 4 and Five shows also forge this linkage in their pre-title sponsorship sequences. Relatively new to British screens, sponsorship sequences have become an everyday element of ordinary television. Aimed at enhancing the profile of the sponsoring company, they suture the everyday world of consumption to the television programmes they precede. The UK energy company npower sponsors *Selling Houses*, and its sponsorship sequence takes a rectangular frame with rounded edges through which we see a white man sitting working on a laptop, whilst in the near distance a white woman and two children are seen calling to him. The use of a frame that recalls an older-style television also hinges the domestic private life to broadcasting in a fashion that is both nostalgic and contemporary. The scene recalls DIY magazine images of the 1950s and 1960s, in which the man of the family is pictured using tools (in this case a computer rather than a hammer) whilst being admired by the family. Today, however, this representation of laboured leisure further hinges the patterns of home decoration and acquisition to other forms of home work, in what Lynne Spigel has recently described as 'conspicuous production': 'In the smart home the resident is meant to be seen working all the time' (2005: 415).

The expert presenters of property TV make the search for home into a 'project' that is both laborious and leisured, and by repeatedly situating episodes in place, they operate as conduits for banal nationalism. Presenters often say something like; 'today we are in Liverpool' (a city in northwest England). This 'we' refers not only to the presenters, but also to we the viewers, we the audience, we the people who know Liverpool but perhaps only as an abstraction, a place we may never have been. This 'we' enables the assertion of a collectivity of those who recognize Britain – who see it, know it and are enjoined by that 'we'. As Billig argues, 'the deixis of homeland invokes the national "we" and places "us" within "our" homeland' (1995: 107). Channel 4's *Location, Location, Location* is especially notable for its

repeated use of a two-shot of the expert presenters, Kirsty Allsop and Phil Spencer, who remind us after each commercial break that 'we' are in a certain town or city. Repeated establishing shots, accompanied by lingering landscape scenes, re-situate the audience and link us to the quest for a new home. Making the place of the house visible helps anchor the narrative to an established – though not necessarily accurate – mental map. However, in lavishing so much time and camera style to shooting scenes of place, these shows are also establishing an ethnoscape, a poetic rendering of place that is imbued with the culture and history of the national collective. In explaining how ethnoscapes emerge and operate, Anthony Smith suggests that 'the terrain in question is felt over time to provide the unique and indispensable setting for the events that shaped the community' (1999: 150). Ethnoscapes pictured in the different nations' shows vary greatly, both in terms of their presentation and operation. I shall begin with the Welsh example, because it is the most overt example of an ethnoscape as Smith defines it.

The Welsh-language channel, Sianel Pedwar Cymru [Channel Four Wales], or S4C, was established in 1981 and broadcasts its own house show, *Pedair Wal* [*Four Walls*]. It is quite different in tone from the English-language property TV shows broadcast by the UK's Channel 4 and Five. Whereas, say, *Selling Houses* or *Location, Location, Location* enable us to witness the purchase or sale of houses as they unfold, *Pedair Wal* works as an in situ interview of what has, for the most part, already been done or is near completion. We do not get to see the daily work of DIY, nor the minutiae of buying or selling. Instead we see the end product and, in a limited way, the beginnings of the project. On the one hand, this variation diminishes the drama of the transformation narrative and decreases the sense of liveness that characterizes these shows. We, the audience, do not get to experience that sense of parallel lives being lived through the time of the project. On the other hand, the programme's tone is more intimate because we are effectively invited in to admire the owner's handywork. Unmediated by a professional designer or property developer, the audience enters the home anticipating achievement; the spectacle is likely to be one of success rather than failure. This is largely achieved via the show's presentational structure. Where *Location, Location, Location*'s Kirstie Allsopp and Phil Spencer, or *Selling Houses*' Andrew Winters, present as experts, *Pedair Wal* has a non-specialist broadcaster. In her analysis of garden lifestyle shows, Lisa Taylor suggests that:

> The instructional close-up sequence … accompanied by an authoritative voice-over is … an outmoded means of engaging contemporary audiences. Today's more common vocabulary of address is more likely to show the personality-interpreter in mid-shot partnership with his or her clients, assessing and interpreting their needs, or re-framing their garden dreams to fit the transformative remit of a makeover design. (2002: 488)

Fronting a programme with a non-expert presenter may circumvent the work necessary in making the expert seem ordinary. It also ensures that a hierarchy of knowledge is not brought into play in the relationship between participant and presenter. This presentational style has as much in common with the chat show interview as with the grammar of lifestyle programming. For example, whilst the mid-shots cited by Taylor are sometimes employed, it is more common for long-shots and shot-reverse-shots to be used in constructing face-to-face conversations about home between presenter and owner. There are fewer tracking shots and consequently far less movement. What movement does exist is often under the leadership of the home owner, who guides the presenter/audience through the home, whilst pointing out selected features. Seated conversations repeatedly take place within the home and often the dialogue follows a leading question-and-answer pattern. The look is quite formal, staged and more static than that found in other UK shows. Family history may lead to revelations of personal life stories, but the tone and dialogue is akin to proximate respect than intimacy per se; the home owner's life-story is as valued as the design itself. It is quite common for at least one of the three participants in any episode to be a migrant returnee. Consequently, talk of the physical house as home carries with it a wider understanding of home as a site of belonging, desire and expectation. Whilst the programme's respectful tone seems extraordinary when set alongside the vigour and ascerbic critique of many English-language shows, *Pedair Wal* demonstrates that the ways of achieving televisual ordinariness differ from one national context to another.

'Ordinary' can appear extraordinary when seen from a different cultural perspective. This is explained partly by the dynamics of Wales as a small nation of approximately 3 million people, of whom approximately 21 percent are Welsh speakers. In a sense, the viewers are already intimate, not only because they constitute a minority within a small linguistic population, but also because they are electing to view S4C regularly. In this context, intimacy may only be part of the point – distance may be required to avoid the ennui of familiarity. Voyeurism, after all, requires distance, and if the chances of knowing the participant, the place, or even the house are relatively high, then this distance may be vital for all concerned.

We can explore this further by looking at the representations of place in *Pedair Wal* and the national work such representations perform. Whereas shows such as *Location, Location, Location*, *Selling Houses* and *Grand Designs* examine the specificities of places often barely known by the audience, *Pedair Wal* anticipates the audience's knowledge of the chosen places, often mentioning them only once. This assumption may be wrong and may exclude that segment of the audience that does not possess such knowledge. Nonetheless, because within Welsh cultural life, especially within the Welsh-speaking community, an affiliation for place (*bro-garwch*) is a banal form of Welsh nationalism, the gaining of this

shorthand knowledge is itself a route into the Welsh community. *Pedair Wal* has been broadcast on S4C Digital, S4C's exclusively Welsh-language channel which broadcasts terrestrially in Wales and is available UK-wide via satellite. *Pedair Wal* has attracted a significant audience amongst non-Welsh speakers and learners who are able to follow by accessing the subtitling service. What at one level appears staged, laborious talk, may on another be read as educative, not simply of house design but of how to be at home within a linguistic community from which the viewer is either apart or is yet to fully comprehend. Simultaneously, the production of Welsh-lifestyle programming makes available to the audience the possibility of being contemporary through the medium of Welsh. It enables viewers to feel both at one with the wider UK TV culture and at the same time at home within the distinctiveness of being a Welsh speaker.

In contrast to S4C's broadcasting of home to a linguistically divided small nation, Home and Garden TV (HGTV) is a vast network operating nationally in the US cable television landscape. HGTV broadcasts a range of lifestyle programmes, from those premised on the search for a new home such as *House Hunters*, to makeover shows such as *Design on a Dime*, and those with a historical or nostalgic appeal such as *Restore America*. Distributed into 80 million US homes, HGTV's programmes, like much American TV generally, seem familiar yet alien to the European viewer. A perplexing feature is the frequent absence of place markers, even in a programme such as *House Hunters* (the nearest equivalent to Channel 4's *Location, Location, Location*). In an episode broadcast in August 2003, for example, we are welcomed by the presenter Suzanne Whang, and told that tonight's episode focuses upon Alex and Maria Romero and their search for a new home. His employer has transferred Alex to a new city. For the time being, they and their two young sons are living in a rented furnished apartment. Despite a detailed introduction, no mention is made of where they have moved from or where they are house hunting. Like *Location, Location, Location*, *Property Ladder*, *Grand Design* and others, *House Hunters* follows each commercial break with a synopsis to remind the audience and inform those just joined of the details of tonight's episode. On each occasion, 'new city' or 'a city they don't know' are used instead of place names. What initially seems a slight cultural difference appears increasingly like a deliberate omission. This is felt keenly in an early scene where the couple are screened talking about their feelings about their current home and their sense of loss of their former home. Speaking over a full screen image marked 'Former Home', Maria expresses longing for the space of 'our house in … uh … where we used to live'. The stilted stop at 'in', and awkward phrasing of 'where we used to live', suggest a censoring of place names that is unnatural to the speaker. Later, this is replayed when the family are screened at a children's playground, with Alex saying, 'I told Maria that the area that we are moving to is a lot different from where we came from.' These edits are especially peculiar

because the Mexican-American couple are clear in their articulation of unease in their new situation; they confess 'we feel displaced'.

The absence of detailed place markers is perhaps unsurprising in such a vast nation, and one which has a housing stock, at least in some states, which is more of a period and style than that in many British regions and European countries. Given the size and federal composition of the US, it may be less likely that American viewers will feel a geographical affinity with the location of the diverse homes and their owners. Finally, the absence of a very place-based format may make for a more easily exported product. Nonetheless, this does not mean that the ethnoscape is non-existent. Instead, it becomes generic, banal and unremarkable. Rather than becoming national through rapid clueing into place or through being educated in regional difference, US property TV offers ways of being national through the ubiquity of generic American living. In the American property TV ethnoscape, nowhere acts as everywhere.

The ethnoscapes in the English-language UK shows often work to validate the aspirational mobility of participants who want to move to what are implicitly and sometimes explicitly coded as 'better areas'. Class and race are together part of the rhetoric of upward mobility. What constitutes a 'better area' may be expressed in terms of who lives there, the cost and condition of housing in the area and the amenities it offers. Whilst some of these characteristics, especially those of class, are discussed openly – think for instance of the typical voice over of the presenter telling us that there are 'lots of great restaurants serving young professionals' – the articulation of these characteristics in terms of race is more covert. The tendency of some estate agents in multi-ethnic urban areas to direct white house-hunters away from ethnically diverse areas strikes me as one common reality excluded from televisual representations. Race is not absent from the meanings of property TV or from its ethnoscapes; indeed, British social mobility is played out on the geographical scene, and in doing so it normalizes both classed *and* raced meanings of the nation space.

An episode of *Selling Houses* broadcast in 2003 exemplifies this process. Andrew Winters introduces us to Clevedon, a seaside town near Bristol, a city in southwest England. He describes Clevedon as 'a place for Clifton émigrés', Clifton being one of Bristol's most affluent areas. Winters is seen strolling through a street filled with arty shops, uniformly white and middle-class, and announces that 'New restaurants and boutiques always spring up when professionals move into an area'. Deeply raced and classed understandings of British space thus appear as mundane, self-evident truths. By going uncontested, they become, to recall Smith's words, 'the indispensable setting for the events of the community' (Smith, 1999: 150).

Property TV marks its boundaries of ordinariness not only through exclusion, but also through partial inclusion. Lifestyle television's potential to democratize and be inclusive in its representations of the everyday is

often seductive and sometimes persuasive. Reading the home-makeover format in the US and UK, Anna Everett suggests that:

> Whereas soap operas, news sports, dramatic and comedic shows position race, gender, sexual preference and even age as socio-political problems to be overcome or fixed, TTV shows … reflect these issues that speak to contemporary social realities. Successful non-white couples, including blacks, Asians, and Latino/as, are shown not as societal threats, menaces and perils, but as 'everyday people' … *normal* and helpful suburban neighbours … These 'untraditional' families are not treated as special cases nor bracketed in ghettoized viewing blocs. Rather, they underscore the new 'reality' of American life that most other 'reality' shows fail to engage, or problematically sensationalize. (2004: 175)

It is notable how 'successful' operates here to link normality to the ownership of property. Those once deemed 'improper' subjects by the American constitution (notably African-Americans) may, in the 21st century, become proper suburbanites through home ownership, yet the exceptionalism of this non-white middle class goes only so far in eradicating both social inequalities of housing and dominant cultural configurations of proper personhood that are classed, raced and gendered (see Skeggs, 2004; Wood and Skeggs, 2004). Everett also notes a striking difference in the ethnic diversity of participants in US and UK versions of the domestic makeover:

> *Changing Rooms* seems to feature more urban (and even rural) environments with homogenous white homeowners … *Trading Spaces*, and its spin-off *Trading Spaces Family* by contrast, are predominantly set in American suburban communities where heterogeneity, in the form of interracial couples and families, is not unusual … Where *Trading Spaces* appears more inclusive in terms of race and gender, *Changing Rooms* seems more inclusive where class is concerned. (2004: 172)

Class and ethnicity together differentiate patterns of home ownership in the UK. These differences are attributable in part to the history of migration to the UK. For example, the Economic and Social Research Council (ESRC) notes that: 'Ownership varies markedly by ethnic group. In 2001, 80 per cent of Indians and 70 per cent of White British people and those of Pakistani origin were owner-occupiers, compared to only 25 per cent of those of Black African origin' (ESRC, 2007). In a sample episode of *Location, Location, Location*, for instance, we see a rare instance of a Black couple appearing on the show. They are moving from the ethnically diverse town of Slough, near London, into rural Berkshire, a less ethnically diverse and more affluent part of the county. With lingering shots of Windsor castle, Ascot and boats on the river, the scene epitomizes the ethnoscape of idealized England, whilst the montage tells a story of class mobility, an instance of both Black and middle-class flight from suburbia into the promise of rural England. English ethnoscapes are thus sutured to the personal quest of the house-hunters.

In one sequence, we are told that the presenters are 'trying to find a much bigger house for Anita and Paul'. What we are shown is, first, an old brick farmhouse on the river, then a boat on the river alongside green pasture. The narrative sequence allows the allure of the scenery to stand for a complex social narrative of flight, and in the appealing lighting and shooting of the rural scenes, it legitimises a narrative of desire for an English idyll. This narrative is re-told in a later sequence, when the audience is reminded of 'this week's project'. Opening with the image of a suburban house – named as Anita and Paul's – it cuts to a full screen image of an oak tree, a symbolic embodiment of English nature and tradition. No people are in-screen; the sheer size and age of the tree dominates. Thus, the rural ethnoscape is revealed and the promise of rooted belongings made available. This vision of England is national, but also local. For example, the house search takes the family to Binfield, described by one of the presenters as 'a great village'. The sequence consists of quiet country lanes that, although showing several detached houses, have no traffic or parked cars. Instead, we get lush gardens and a country gate, whilst the editing works to suture this image of quiet affluence to the family themselves. Rapid editing offers movement that contrasts sharply with the Welsh and US shows analysed above, whilst the use of drive-by camera shots connotes an ease of movement through attractive scenes of well-to-do houses. However, this iconography of English village life is undercut by Anita herself when she enters the home that has been so carefully placed to seem appealing. In contrast with the older large brick properties screened, the house presented appears modern and 'inauthentic'. It has new mock-latticed windows, has no front garden and fails to live up to the dream homes previously screened. Phil Spencer invites Anita to say what she thinks of it. She explains – with animated rejection – that 'I can't believe where I am!'. 'Where she is' is not just a reference to the house's location, but to the situation in which she finds herself. Anita is incredulous and frustrated at the realities of the rural housing market she wishes to enter in order to attain the lifestyle of middle-class Berkshire. Given that a repeated regulatory discourse in the show is the need to 'know your market' and be prepared to compromise, the programme itself works to co-opt this resistant position into a sign of personal rather than societal failure. Anita's vocal disappointment (recalling perhaps the Mexican-American couple's claim of 'we feel displaced') suggests that the promise of social mobility cannot be reconciled with her stylistic desires for a superior English rural property. Although the programme itself has visually constructed this idealized ethnoscape, Anita's desires are cast as irrational and ill-founded. For example, Phil draws out Anita's name in exasperation, as if to rebuke her for being so unreasonable. Anita's frustration speaks of a refusal to accept the regulation of classed desires, the 'being realistic' which both presenters push. For Anita, the everyday house is insufficient and she refuses to accept such a limitation on her

desires and aspirations. In this sense, she rehearses one of the most striking scripts in these shows – the desire to aspire and be mobile within the nation. However, the programme's narrative sees her exposed as being 'unrealistic' in having such desires. In her negotiation of the stylistic regime of limited house choices, Anita's taste and rejection of what is on offer provide a forceful example of how the ethnoscapes screened in property TV are sites for ordinary and banal exclusion.

Conclusion

Property TV is one example of the globalization of television genres, as the export of the BBC show *Changing Places* to the USA and its makeover as *Trading Spaces* demonstrates. However, in emphasizing the dynamism of transnational television production and consumption, we are in danger of neglecting both the differences between national programming and how national differences are put to use (see Waisbord, 2004). Taste and lifestyle are important arenas for the organization of social difference in post-industrial societies. How such forms of identity and belonging are adopted and intersect with existing social hierarchies and values may differ significantly between national contexts. This is clear in that sub-genre of property TV – the relocation format – which dramatizes middle-class flight from urban to rural locations via idealized landscapes of either the home nation or, as in the case of *A Place in the Sun* (Channel 4), those in another nation altogether. In reading property TV, we need to understand the place of national broadcasting within consumer cultures where home ownership and residential mobility are relatively high and where the middle classes increasingly invest in property. As a material cultural practice occurring alongside the rise of consumer culture, DIY and its historical development demonstrates how predominantly middle-class home owners have taken up the tools of manual and craft workers in order to realize, with their own hands, the imaginative possibilities of domestic transformation offered by media sources such as magazines, manuals and television programmes. However, to see either DIY literature or property TV strictly as 'how-to manuals' passively adopted by the audience is to underplay their importance as sources for browsing through scenes of national domesticity. Despite the technical and discursive efforts to make homes appear ordinary and everyday, property TV displays considerable selectivity, not only in editing participants and presenters, but also in the ideas of home and taste screened. Such selectivity may be enabling, educative or affirming to the audience's own negotiations of what it means to be at home in the national spaces they occupy. Like all forms of banal nationalism, exclusion is as central to the making of national belonging as is the possibility of cosy inclusion. As Anita's outburst demonstrates, dwelling within post-industrial nations often entails exclusion and thwarted aspirations even when equipped with financial and cultural capital.

Property TV offers us one way of seeing how real subjects on national screens negotiate inclusion and exclusion, belonging and the unfulfilled longing to belong.

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