

**Reality TV: Remaking Television Culture.** Edited by Susan Murray & Laurie Ouellette. New York: New York University Press, 2004. 362 pp. ISBN 0814756883.

The 17 essays in this new collection tackle the genre, industry, cultural politics, and reception of reality TV in an effort to update television scholarship. Editors Susan Murray, NYU Department of Culture and Communication, and Laurie Ouellette, Department of Media Studies at Queen's College, City University of New York, argue that the theoretical and analytical methods in the field of television studies are no longer sufficient tools to analyze an increasingly complex and fragmented televisual environment. With the exception of Jennifer Maher's essay, "What Do Women Watch? Tuning In to the Compulsory Heterosexuality Channel," and Chad Raphael's, "The Political Economic Origins of Reali-TV," the works in this book are previously unpublished, and they endeavour to revise political-economic models of television production, situate global commercial strategies, and address the cultural relevance and reception of reality TV programming.

The editors divide the essays into four sections; nevertheless, the book basically engages two critical ideas. The first is that the wave of reality TV is a re-emergence, with the core characteristics of the genre rooted in postwar television that was designed as social observation. The second critical idea is that the commercial embrace of reality programming has resulted in an ongoing struggle between producers, participants, and viewers that has changed the landscape of television. The essays explore some of the earliest incarnations of the reality TV genre, including what Anna McCarthy calls the "First Wave of Reality TV," and the lead-up to and realization of Allen Funt's *Candid Camera* series. In the opening essay, McCarthy sets forth some of the key claims of this collection: that hidden-camera methods of making realistic television for social and cultural uses was the beginning of reality TV and that its (re)emergence in the 1990s is markedly different, not only in content and structure, but within the television industry as well. Ultimately, McCarthy emphasizes that reality TV "occupies a privileged place in aesthetic discourses about the medium and in each case, it is a place where TV and social and applied psychology come together" (p. 23). In particular, there is a marked difference between the status and prestige awarded to 1950s programs like *Candid Camera*, which used television as a visual tool for sociological analysis, and the disdain sometimes expressed for the current form of voyeuristic and endlessly recyclable reality programming.

The popularity of reality TV today can easily be misunderstood, according to Chad Raphael and Ted Magdar, who both dispute the myth that audience demand is behind the surge of reality TV programming. Raphael traces the union battles and deregulation of broadcasting in the 1980s, wherein political-economic conditions forced the television industry to seek new models of cheap production, licensing, and syndication. Ted Magdar's essay, "The End of TV 101," examines the business of network programming in the 2001-2002 season to lay bare the sweeping changes that have taken place in the entertainment industry. Magdar reveals three industry strategies unique to reality TV: the heavy use of product placement (*Survivor* segments featuring Doritos in the back of a new GM vehicle as a challenge prize, for instance); the expansion of product tie-ins (Magdar's example in this case is *Survivor* bug-spray); and the extension of the program beyond the box (encouraging audience members to participate in the program, most notably by voting on who will be eliminated from shows like *Big Brother* and *American Idol*). Magdar confirms that traditional revenue models used to produce network television programming have been superseded by business models where in which advertiser revenue is secured before a single episode is created. This framework firmly places the advertisers ahead of the viewers, and in programming, it translates to a reduction in risk—networks stick to templates that have proven popular.

One of the first successful reality TV programs served as a model for subsequent program development and character casting. Jon Kraszewski examines MTV's series *The Real World* for how it mediated race and reality by casting individuals who, based on their regional upbringing and social backgrounds, would have potential conflicts over race. His essay points to what has become predictable casting for reality programs like *Survivor* and *The Amazing Race*, where every season rural, conservative characters and urban, street-wise, liberal characters are cast. Kraszewski sets the scene for the 1992 debut of *The Real World* amid the racial tensions that the Rodney King trial had incited in the United States. Chuck Kleinhans and Rick Morris further this analysis and add that the celebrity sensationalism of the O. J. Simpson trial and hot-button issues such as child abduction, sexual abuse, and physically assisted suicide accounted for the emergence of the *Court TV* reality format.

In Elayne Rapping's essay "Aliens, Nomads, Mad Dogs, and Road Warriors: The Changing Face of Criminal Violence on TV," she delves further into the powerful role television plays in shaping and reinforcing the representation of "otherness" and the public perception of crime and criminality. Rapping claims the settings for shows like *Cops* and *America's Most Wanted* (staples of reality crime programming) have shifted from knowable cities to unknowable highways, trailer parks, and strip malls, creating a hinterland zone where crime and violence are alien and almost without context. She argues that the abandonment of attention to specific crimes justifies a move toward a totalizing social control of immigrants, people of colour, and the underclass in the United States that can be seen daily on television.

The blurring of public and private lives, where ordinary citizens use television to attempt to gain money, power, or even control over their lives, has been a major consequence of the surge of reality TV. Laurie Ouellette's essay on *Judge Judy* exemplifies this trend, arguing that lower-income women in particular are stepping outside of state-provided mechanisms to take charge of their private lives. Ouellette's discussion of "neoliberal citizens" taking charge of themselves in a mediated environment is related to the claim that participants on reality shows create a "media self." Nick Couldry invokes Foucault, as do many essays in this collection, to examine the way power is reproduced through "norms not just of control but also of expression and self-definition," (p. 58) as contestants attempt to create a media character. Couldry also introduces the label "game doc" as a hybrid sub-genre to describe shows like *Big Brother*, *Survivor*, and *Castaway*, where individuals participate as contestants in a society of surveillance. Mary Beth Haralovich and Michael W. Trosset treat the reader to an interesting application of mathematical theory to the narrative of *Survivor* as a "game." Their behind-the-scenes glimpse of methods of tape and character analysis used by the show's host, Jeff Probst, and producer, Mark Burnett, show how the probability of uncertainty is magnified by those doing the surveillance.

In part these essays bring the reader closer to an understanding of the people who actually participate in reality shows and the casting techniques used by producers hoping to increase the probability of striking certain tensions once inside the constructed "reality" situation. Kathleen LeBesco looks at the representation and reception of gayness as it has been portrayed on *Survivor*. LeBesco examines three seasons of *Survivor* for the ongoing dialectic between the representation of gay men and fan discourse drawn from two online communities: *MightyBigTV.com* and *SurvivorFire.com*. She argues that the fan communities produced contrary readings that valued sexual diversity, while at the same time demonstrating the active discourse in online communities that actively have writers produce show summaries, commentary, and criticism. She also discusses creative editing used to assist in the establishment of media characters that may be more in line with the producers' dramatic arc than the actual conduct of the show participants.

Justin Lewis' research on television reception suggests that the difference between reality and artifice remains at the heart of the pleasure and politics of television viewing. It

is precisely this keen observation and media awareness of the viewing audience that forms the context of Pamela Wilson's essay, *Jamming Big Brother*. Wilson explains how the online activist group Media Jammers used *Big Brother*'s innovative multilevel program delivery (television press accounts, Web feeds, and the CBS/AOL Big Brother website, which featured producer commentary) to attempt to subvert the relationship between the producers and participants. Ignoring the corporate rules of *Big Brother*, the jammers found the physical location of the house and began to invade the space of the show by sending messages inside the compound. In an effort to scare participants with the show's negative reception in the outside world, they even flew a plane at low levels with the message, "BIG BROTHER IS WORSE THAN YOU THINK—GET OUT NOW!" Wilson's research and her close scrutiny of the actions of the online communities, culture jammers, and producers of *Big Brother* provides valuable and timely insight into the complex relationships that exist between producers, participants, and audiences, and her contribution is a significant example of the type of observational research that went into many of these essays.

As one of the first collections of new research on reality TV, this book is absolutely necessary, and it will be of use to academics, students, and anyone seeking a better cultural understanding of the evolution and impact of this popular form. The authors walk the line between judgmental critics and keen observers; they sometimes step over this line, but they usually recover to deepen our understanding of television and to inspire new debates in the field. In the current climate of quick turnovers, any work trying to address reality TV and examine specific programs runs the risk of seeming out of date before it is even published. The staying power of this collection is not in its pop-culture currency, but in its multilayered response to the various incarnations and forms of reality TV. Long after the mantra "outwit, outsmart, and outlast" has passed from the media consciousness, this collection will be read by scholars and students attempting to historically reconstruct the era of reality TV, to situate the phenomenon, or to come to terms with new forms of television.

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