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Introduction

As the title of this anthology suggests, reality TV is both a historical and a programming phenomenon. From Allen Funt’s Candid Camera of the 1950s to 2007’s Kid Nation, reality TV owes much of its format and techniques to the documentary genre, in particular the camera’s focus on “ordinary” citizens and the drama and humor of their day-to-day lives evoked by the fly-on-the-wall approach. Reality TV has certainly come a long way since the hidden cameras of Candid Camera, and the breadth and variety of programming reflects the larger historical context driving content and ratings. PBS’s An American Family, for example, showed a family in crisis, the feminist and sexual revolutions of the 1970s serving as its backdrop. Three decades later reality TV shows about supernannies and wife swapping take place in a postfeminist society in which families farm out parenting and domestic duties but nevertheless still cling to traditional notions of motherhood. Critics may write off reality TV as trash or fluff, but the essays in this collection demonstrate how social and cultural trends inevitably shape the productions and audience reactions.

Although many of the following articles look at American TV shows, we also include Australian, British, and Canadian programming, which reflects not only the transnational appeal of reality TV, but also culturally specific concerns about individual and national identity. Programs like Outback House and Big Brother are just a couple of the programs analyzed in this collection, which explore the tensions between individual and community, the enduring legacy of racial, class, and gender inequality, the transformative power of technology in our daily lives, the creation of celebrity, and the breakdown of public and private spheres. Our authors also discuss the historical evolution and the potential and limits of the genre of reality TV as a whole. Representing various points of view—those of

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scholars of history, literature, and communications, and even a filmmaker whose work on the making of The Colony was suppressed because of her insistence on her project's honesty—this collection showcases how pivotal reality TV is to any study of popular culture's past, present, and future.

The idea for this collection first emerged when we guest-edited a special issue on reality TV for Film & History: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Films and Television. The overwhelming response we had to our call for papers suggested that scholars were aware not only that reality TV was not a passing trend but also that its relationship to history demanded attention. That latter realization is what even the most recent scholarship on reality TV still ignores. The media scholars Anita Biressi and Heather Nunn (Reality TV: Realism and Revelation, 2005), for example, focus on the hybridization of genres, exploring reality TV's roots in the documentary format, and Jonathan Bignell's Big Brother: Reality TV in the Twenty-first Century (2005) looks at the direction television culture is taking in the new century and how reality TV breaks with previous conventions. Annette Hill's Reality TV: Factual Entertainment and Television Audiences (2005) examines reality TV as a catch-all that tells stories about "real people"; Understanding Reality TV (2005) by Su Holmes (one of our own contributors) discusses how reality TV has constructed celebrity, fandom, surveillance, and the politics of representation for its audiences. Mark Andrejevic's Reality TV: The Work of Being Watched (2003) traces how surveillance-type programs like Big Brother have altered our attitudes about voyeurism and the increasingly important economic role played by the work of being watched, whereas Shooting People: Adventures in Reality TV by Sam Brenton and Reuben Cohen (2003) offers a harsh critique of the psychological ramifications of shows like Survivor and how viewers' attitudes about larger issues (such as war) have been influenced by reality TV.

Such studies of reality TV, while contributing to our own understanding of voyeurism and the authenticity of performance, have been done primarily by communications scholars and media critics. As historians, the editors of this collection have prompted their contributors to approach the topic of reality TV with specific questions in mind: for example, how has the genre evolved and what larger social, political, and cultural forces have affected reality TV programming? What do these programs say about their specific historical moment? How do reality TV programs treat and redefine history? We are especially interested in what Roy Rosenzweig describes.
as the role of the media as national educator. His 2000 national survey concluded that Americans felt a strong relationship to the past but that much of this feeling was based not on history books or classes taught by professional historians; instead, many connected to the past through family histories, the collection of memorabilia, museum excursions, and, tellingly for our purposes, reality TV. Rosenzweig concluded his findings with a warning to fellow scholars that we can no longer ignore that television has become a primary component of "national memory." Our contributors have certainly heeded Rosenzweig's command, and the essays that follow confirm how reality TV both reflects and defines national memory, as well as individual and collective identity in America and abroad.

Our analysis begins by discussing reality TV as a social experiment. Producers, subjects of the camera's gaze, and viewers of reality TV all take part in these televised experiments, which both challenge and reaffirm certain social mores and practices. In "Citizen Funt: Surveillance as Cold War Entertainment," Fred Nadis returns us to the early days, before reality TV even had a name, when Candid Camera turned our cold war paranoia about surveillance into a laugh-inducing gimmick. Allen Funt's "experiments in human nature" gently poked fun at his subject (or victim, depending on one's perspective) but also, according to Nadis, conveyed a serious message about conformity and blind obedience to authority that stood in stark contrast to the show's peppy theme song, "Smile, You're on Candid Camera." The subjects of Funt's seemingly playful look at mass psychology, however, were not in on the joke. How different such an approach to self-revelation seems from the more recent crop of reality TV programs, in which spouses freely discuss sources of marital conflict and parents complain about their children's bad behavior before millions of viewers. Though critics bashed Funt as a hypocrite and unscrupulous torturer, he proudly accepted his status as voyeur and made it acceptable for TV audiences to play that role as well.

Funt's turning of the camera on "regular Joes" has become a basic ingredient of reality TV, and as Lee Barron explains in "From Social Experiment to Postmodern Jokes: Big Brother and the Progressive Construction of Celebrity," ordinary men and women now appear to appear on such programs, hoping to achieve instant celebrity status for doing very mundane things. Using the U.K. version of Big Brother and its offshoot, Celebrity Big Brother, Barron contemplates the scripted nature of reality TV and the role of the producer in manipulating the "celebritizing" pro-
cess. Lost in the process has been the original intention of the program to be a social and psychological experiment and exercise in surveillance and coping strategies. Barron captures the carnivalesque spectacle of the Big Brother household and the media frenzy surrounding its residents.

Whereas Big Brother transforms the ordinary citizen into a household name, another recent trend in reality TV is the program spearheaded by an established celebrity whose purported mission is to educate as well as to entertain audiences. In “From the Kitchen to 10 Downing Street: Jamie’s School Dinners and the Politics of Reality Cooking” James Leggott and Tobias Hochserfer discuss how the celebrity chef Jamie Oliver’s effort to improve the quality of food served to children in British state schools triggered a national debate about the paternalistic role of the welfare state. As Prime Minister Tony Blair (1997–2007) promoted a vision of a classless society, Oliver’s tours of school cafeterias in largely working-class areas of England exposed (not always intentionally) stark divisions of class and gender. In addition to the serious social, political, and health issues Oliver’s show highlighted, Leggott and Hochserfer trace Oliver’s own evolution as a reality TV star as he juggles his masculinity with the feminized environment of the kitchen.

Oliver nobly tries to improve the diet and health of Britain’s youth (while promoting his cookbooks and boyish good looks), but The Biggest Loser aims to reshape the American adult body. Cassandra Jones, in her essay “The Patriotic American Is a Thin American: Fatness and National Identity in The Biggest Loser,” looks at one of the most popular staples of reality TV, the individual in need of transformation at the hands of “experts.” Jones describes the Survivor-like challenges the overweight contestants endure to “cure” themselves of fatness. The third season of The Biggest Loser, however, goes even further, equating bodily transformation with patriotism, positing the ideal American body as a thin body. Isolating the contestants on a Western ranch, the program upholds the myth of the self-made man (and woman) and reveals how the frontier informs our notions of fatness and weight loss.

The setting for reality TV programs need not be isolated ranches or exotic locales. As the essays in part 2, Class, Gender, and Reimagining of Family Life, indicate, when the camera is turned on the home and a family’s most private moments, plenty of drama unfolds. In “Disillusionment, Divorce, and the Destruction of the American Dream: An American Family and the Rise of Reality TV,” Laurie Rupert and Sayanti Ganguly Puckett
examine Craig Gilbert's groundbreaking documentary that chronicled the day-to-day experiences of the William C. Loud family of Santa Barbara, California. With the parents on the brink of divorce, a wife discovering feminism, and a confused son expressing his homosexuality, the Lounds were a dream come true for a director intent on exposing the myths behind the American dream and the bourgeois ideal of Home, Sweet Home. Rupert and Puckett not only provide a detailed analysis of the twelve-part series and its roots in documentary practice, but also show how Gilbert's use of editing and video confessional influenced future reality TV programs.

A year after PBS aired An American Family, British TV responded with its own version, The Family, focusing instead on a working-class household. Su Holmer's essay, "The television audience cannot expect to see too much reality: The Family and Reality TV," describes the class and gender politics surrounding the media debate over the program and the questions The Family provoked about privacy and television's role in reshaping the boundary between public and private. Like Gilbert, the director of The Family responded to charges of sensationalism by describing the program as a documentary, rooted in its specific social and political context. Looking at the American and British versions side by side, Holmer shows just how important such context is; the language and behavior of the upper-middle-class Lounds are shaped by the therapy culture and "let it all hang out" ethos so prevalent in 1970s America, whereas the working-class Wilkinsons, living in council (i.e., publicly subsidized) housing, frequenting the pub, and uttering profanities, worried middle-class critics about the image of postcolonial Britain the program would project overseas.

Three decades later, reality TV programs about the family may no longer aim for the seriousness of the documentary format, but as Leigh Edwards argues in her essay, "Reality TV and the American Family," shows like Who Wants to Marry My Dad? and Trading Spouses continue to put cultural anxieties about the family on display. Edwards explores the rhetoric of the family in crisis that permeates much of reality TV programming and how various programs contribute to the long-running "family values" debate. Tracing recurring narrative tropes in reality programs about the family, Edwards understands the source of the appeal of the "family circus" that "portrays real people struggling with long-running cultural problems that have no easy answers." Viewers have the voyeuristic opportunity to peer into other people's households (from celebrity families to ordinary parents seeking help from British nannies) and witness the
reality of diverse family practices. Noting that the current definition of the family is up for grabs, Edwards leaves us with the intriguing possibility that viewers might one day have nostalgia for the Osbournes as a model of the postmodern American family.

Edwards looks at families in need of a makeover, and part of the makeover process involves the reinforcement of certain beauty ideals and consumer practices. American reality makeover programs from The Biggest Loser to The Swan have their international counterparts, but as Sarah Matheson argues in "Shopping, Makeovers, and Nationhood: Reality TV and Women's Programming in Canada," Canadian cable channels aimed at female viewers sometimes put their own unique spin on this format. Matheson situates her discussion within a larger history of debates about women's television programming in Canada that accompanied the rise and decline of second-wave feminism. But critics of reality TV, who already lament its role in dumbing down popular culture, need not fear that current "lifestyle programming" oppresses women or reinforces sex-role stereotypes. Using the consumer advice program The Shopping Bags and the makeover series about plastic surgery Plastic Makes Perfect, Matheson describes how such programs complicate or disrupt discourses surrounding gender, nation, and television.

An altogether new type of nation is created in the reality TV program Kid Nation, which, according to Debbie Clare Olson in her essay "Babes in BonanzaLand: Kid Nation, Commodification, and the Death of Play," deliberately bombards children with threats to their innocence. In Kid Nation forty children, aged eight to fifteen, are charged with creating their own "brave new world" in Bonanza City, without any help or interference from adults. A show that stirred up controversy before it even aired, Kid Nation challenges its young participants to act like adults, dangling $20,000 gold stars as the price for their childhood. Olson reads the program as a paradoxical comment on a youth-obsessed society that nevertheless denies children the pleasures of play, teaching them to embrace consumer capitalism and class and gender prejudices to survive in a social Darwinian nightmare. That this experiment was not the ratings failure some critics predicted suggests the voyeuristic pleasure evoked by the dismantling of the fiction of childhood innocence.

Reality shows like Kid Nation and The Shopping Bags continuously prompt critics to lament the decline of quality television programming. The final part of this collection, Reality TV and the Living History Experiment,
looks at a subgenre of reality TV known as “living history” or “hands-on history,” described by its producers as “TV with a purpose.” Britain’s Channel 4 initiated the format with The 1900 House, and its ratings success has since led to similar programs in the United States and Australia. But, as the following articles suggest, these programs raise troubling questions about historical authenticity and reveal the pervasiveness of national myths. In 2002 London’s Institute of Historical Research hosted a conference on the theme History and the Media to explore the benefits and pitfalls of historical reality TV programming. Though many scholars regarded any involvement with the media as selling out, others argued that programs like 1900 House could in fact “convey the immediacy of history.” As the historian David Cannadine pointed out, in Britain alone historical reality TV has led to a surge in interest in history among the general public; coined “the new sex” by the media, historical programming continues to feed into nostalgia for the past but also reveals how the media have taken over “as the prime educator about the past” for a majority of viewers.

Julie Anne Taddeo and Ken Dvorak use the Anglo-American productions Regency House Party and Texas Ranch House to explore just how difficult it is to make “real” history. The producers and time-traveling volunteers are guided not by historians but by their own assumptions about the past, most of which derive from fictional representations (TV, novels, and movies). As the guests visit at the Regency-style manor, they try to reenact their favorite Jane Austen novels; the cowboys in Texas Ranch House live out their John Wayne fantasies, proving, as the producers put it, their “true grit.” The volunteers also experience the clash of their twenty-first-century sensibilities with their nineteenth-century re-created environments and value systems, which prompts them to re-write their own fictions of the past, to reject gender and racial inequality and defy any authority that stands in the way of their individual happiness.

This need of both the producers and volunteers to write a more “ethical” version of the past also shapes the Australian living-history programs The Colony and Outback House. In her essay “What about giving us a real version of Australian history?: Identity, Ethics, and Historical Understanding in Reality History TV,” Michelle Arrow critiques the refusal of these productions to tackle the violence of colonialism in Australia’s past. Arrow is particularly interested in how Australian viewers have responded to the issues raised in these programs. Is it even possible to present a heroic pioneer experience while omitting the convict origins of Australia or white
Australians' dispossession of indigenous peoples? These concerns sparked an ongoing debate among not just academics but also politicians and the media about the very nature and responsibility of history.

Aurora Scheelings, armed with the dual credentials of academic and documentarian, further explores the limits of living history programs that aim not only to re-create the past but to record "the experiences of those who relive it." In her essay "Living History in Documentary Practice: The Making of The Colony," Scheelings describes the confrontation that ensued with The Colony's producers and director over the making of the documentary she had been commissioned to film. Though she, like Arrow, notes some of the problems involved in the program's content (in particular the treatment of relations between aboriginals and white settlers), her main focus is the issue of the production process. Her involvement in The Colony offers rare insight into what she sees as the "ever-hybridizing world of documentary and factual program making" and how this hybridization negatively affects the presentation of historical "truth."

Reality TV continues to generate scholarly analysis, including the development of university courses examining this global phenomenon and the cultural significance of its programming. These shows, whether they aim to beautify and slim their contestants, teach children how to be adultlike consumers, instruct adults how to dance a nineteenth-century waltz, or simply document the day-to-day experiences of an English family in a re-created wartime suburb, continue to attract television audiences eager to empathize with their plights or even relish their failures. The importance of reality TV and the paradigm shift it has caused in television viewing and audience participation points to a more pervasive shift in cultural attitudes about self-exposure and the relationship between the individual and an increasingly global community. Will Internet social networking sites such as YouTube and Facebook replace reality TV productions? Or will electronically created avatars serve the individual cravings of people, constantly seeking adventure, romance, and celebrity? These current and future trends in popular culture will no doubt be tackled by other scholars, and we hope that this collection contributes to a lively debate.