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Abstract

From the sea change in American television in the 1980s emerged a programming trend variously described as “infotainment,” “reality-based television,” “tabloid TV,” “crime-time television,” “trash TV,” and “on-scene shows.” The welter of terms created by television critics to describe these new programs masked their underlying connection as a response to economic restructuring within the industry. In this essay I offer a rough categorization of these programs, sketch the industrial context from which they emerged, and point to the economic problems they were meant to solve. I focus mostly on the distinctive conditions of prime-time series, putting aside made-for-TV docudramas and entire cable channels (such as Court TV) that may have similar production practices and genres.

Chapter of

Reality TV: remaking television culture (http://hdl.handle.net/2027/heb.08301.0001.001)

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