

Shooting People: Adventures in Reality TV

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SHOOTING PEOPLE



ADVENTURES IN REALITY TV

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In the late 1990s the television landscape underwent a seismic change as the reality game shows Big Brother and Survivor won unprecedented audiences across Europe and the US. Subjecting their contestants to protracted seclusion from the outside world, the shows offered up a novel combination of mundanity and extremity, and bred a host of imitations which ranged from the absurdly inept to the outright sadistic. Shooting People explores the emergence of the form, its relation to documentary and its significance in a globalized TV industry. Sam Brenton and Reuben Cohen draw parallels between some of the methods employed to control contestants and techniques of incarceration and psychological interrogation, and expose the nefarious influence of psychologists and psychotherapists in the business of reality TV. This 'ultimate form of light entertainment' is also shown to be a perfect propaganda vehicle for an anti-political culture in which, in the absence of grand narratives, the personal focus, the detritus of selfhood, has become seen as the only story worth telling.