

Oh, Reality:

As most of my friends know I have a long standing argument with a particular segment of our daily entertainment called "Reality TV". I have written about it, yelled about it, gone on with myself about it and generally bored everyone around me with the topic. It seems that almost everyone I know likes at least one of the offerings that fall under the reality heading. Whether it's Project Runway or Survivor or Dog it seems that there's something for everyone, except me.

I used to think that I was so against the genre because of the self evident fact that it can't really be reality. I mean if it's on TV it is already one or thirty steps removed from reality, right? If there are cameras and assistant directors and electricians and miles of cable in the room with you, here's a flash, it's not reality. The scene is a TV scene not a real life scene. That's what I used to think.

But after talking with so many people for whom this "non-reality" was not a bother I began to question my reasoning. I can see the point of view that says even if Dog needs to do five takes of breaking down a bad guy's door, even if the close ups have to be reshot in better lighting, it can still be seen as a realistic depiction of one of his adventures. At least it can be seen as the reality that Dog sees when he closes his eyes at night. Likewise the presence of a technical crew and catering wagon at a Survivor location can be ignored if you think you are watching people actually react, at the moment, to the set up that they're dropped into.

So what is it that still has me dismissing the whole genre, usually impaling the offending show on the point of my rapier wit? How can I still delight in belittling the giants of TV? I have realized that it's the BEHAVIOR of the various participants that makes my eyes roll. It's not the production values and the edits and the forced situations, no. It's the perfectly dreadful words and actions of the stars and wanna-be stars. Never has such a collection of vapid, vacant intellects been assembled. Never have such self-centered, shallow, petty humans been presented for our viewing pleasure. Backbiting, gossip, dishonesty, cruelty and sex have been substituted for plain talk and love.

Why do folks watch so much of it? What is so interesting about watching folks run on about absolutely nothing? I have no trouble with a well crafted story about the failings of our species. Heck, it's what most drama is based on. But why would I want to watch people actually behave badly? Why would I sit down and choose to watch some jerk acting like...a jerk? It's embarrassing. For me it's like watching someone throw up. Sure, it's real, but that doesn't make it worth my time.

This past week gave us the quintessential example of a logical outcome for extreme 'reality' focus. I am of course talking about the Colorado couple who faked a dramatic weather balloon ride for their small son. They had all manner of State services alerted, live TV coverage, up to the minute radio bulletins, the whole nine yards. Why did the boneheads do it? They did it because they were trying to improve their marketability for future offerings in the Reality TV circus. It'll probably work. They are indeed more famous than before the stunt. I'm sure there's more than one producer for whom these kinds of parents are just what the doctor ordered. I'm sure there are millions of viewers who would watch at least one episode of "I Made Myself Famous". That's the point isn't it? The point is to get famous. The point is to be on TV. It doesn't matter how you get there, just get there.

Shallow, petty and self-absorbed. That's the culture of Reality TV. That's why the Colorado duo is a great fit. I wonder if they've already sold their script to a production company. I hope so because if things work out to my way of thinking the first episode will also be the last as it covers, in all its verity, their sentencing and incarceration.