

THE ART OF WAR

by

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ABSTRACT

Today, reality TV is a major player in television programming. Derided by some and praised by others, the genre takes many forms and continues to evolve. Since its modern inception, a debate has raged over the effects of reality TV on society. I continue this dialogue by exploring the ethics behind reality television production. I take a personal perspective, examining my own attempt to produce reality TV. I created *The Art of War* as an experiment into ethically conscious reality TV production. *The Art of War* specifically examines the choices I and other producers face in series design, casting, and pre-production. I investigate how my production differs from others in the industry, specifically Animal Planet's *Call of the Wildman*. From this comparison, I draw an argument for including a wider variety of voices within the reality TV genre. I make a case for an alternative production format, based on personal responsibility for both reality TV producers and viewers. Reality TV wields cultural power and with that comes responsibility, not just for those viewing it, but also for those creating it.

INTRODUCTION

I've never seen anyone capture a wild raccoon by coaxing it into a sack – until I watched *Call of the Wildman*. Admittedly, I have limited raccoon experience. I know they can carry rabies, and I've watched them in movies as cute troublemakers.

Somewhere in the recesses of my mind, I remember seeing one on a late night stroll through a park. I guess my wildlife knowledge is probably on par with most *Call of the Wildman* viewers, and that's why Ernie Brown Jr.'s behavior seems so amazing.

In *Call of the Wildman* online episode extract “Only Kentucky Gentlemen Can Save Critters with Class,” Ernie Brown Jr., aka “Turtleman,” responds to a call: critter bandits are raiding tobacco at Kentucky Gentleman's Cigar Company. Along with his trusty side-kick Neal James and canine companion Lolly, Ernie investigates the problem warehouse. He sets up makeshift tobacco barrel traps and waits. Lolly senses something, and Turtleman rushes to the sound of barking in the next room. There he finds the culprits, two full-grown racoons. Turtleman slowly approaches one racoon. Face-to-face with this wild, potentially dangerous animal, he stares it down and coaxes it by hand into a cloth bag.

According to his online bio, hand catching wild nuisance animals is nothing new for Ernie Brown Jr:

As long as anyone can remember, if there's a critter problem in Kentucky, Turtleman comes to the rescue. Over the years, Ernie has handled just about every species of wild animal those woods have to offer - including raccoons, skunks, snakes, poisonous spiders and possums...Turtleman safely reintroduces frisky critters to nature using his self-taught trapping style (“Call of the Wildman”).

Every day, reality TV streams the lives of “real” people like Ernie into millions of homes around the world. These stories educate audiences about communities, races, animals, and cultures they would otherwise never meet (Elliot 148). Viewers have an opportunity to expand their breadth of human experience, and likewise an opportunity to reinforce false or bigoted stereotypes. With its audience growing world wide, reality TV increasingly wields broader cultural power (Palmer 77).

I created *The Art of War* in response to *Call of the Wildman*. Ernie gives viewers a taste of his rural, southern, white, male viewpoint on nature. But what about other perspectives? Animal Planet offers some twenty series in which wild animals or nature play a critical role. None of these shows contain a female lead character.

The Art of War began as an experiment in reality TV. I created the film for an academic program, completely separate from the six billion dollar commercial reality TV system (“On Air”). Because of my independence, I was free to explore alternative production formats. Without network oversight, I could take the time to ask myself ethical questions. I wanted to create a reality TV episode that could be commercially successful on a channel like Animal Planet and bring viewers a diverse perspective on nature, animals, and cultures.

That experience is valuable, inasmuch as it adds to the debate on the broader cultural effects of reality TV. Sociologists write analytical resources on the topic of reality TV (Wilson). Media critics chronicle everything from the genre’s economics, to its effects on societal values (Murray). I am a filmmaker and hope to add to the ongoing scholarly conversation by writing about the genre from the perspective of a reality TV

producer. Through my experience creating *The Art of War*, I found that reality TV is a business filled with technical aspects that can easily discourage an ethical discourse among its creators and viewers. This practice may only be remedied by honest discussions, and a greater education among everyone about what this genre has become and what it has the potential to be.

REALITY TV HISTORY - A CONTEXT FOR CREATION

Reality TV represents a television genre depicting the “real” lives, experiences, and circumstances of its subjects. The origins of reality television are traced back to the 1940s and *Candid Camera* (Block). It also has a history of use as a cultural tool, exemplified by the *Omnibus* (1952-1961) series. This program, sponsored by the Ford foundation, aimed to educate its American audience by giving viewers a glimpse into human nature and society (McCarthy 22). This first wave of reality TV was considered “highbrow.” Behavioral researchers regarded the representation of “real life” as a respectable genre and a windfall to liberal democracy (Ouellette 10).

Highbrow, liberal leaning reality television continued through much of the 1970s, epitomized by PBS’s *An American Family*. This show observationally portrayed the everyday lives of ordinary people. Its production was defined by the tenants of documentary contemporaries within the cinema verité movement (Murray 40). The parallels between documentary and reality TV, however, divulged with the rise of modern reality TV in the 1990s.

MTV’s *The Real World* ushered in the classic tropes of reality TV, and the term “reality TV” came into the popular lexicon in 2000, with the success of *Survivor* (Huff 11). Today, reality TV employs a set of major aesthetics, which distance itself from traditional documentary. It uses confessional style interviews intercut by hand-held verité footage of unscripted talent in highly produced scenes. Emotional musical cues and sound effects emphasize on-screen action.

A thorough discussion of what constitutes reality TV, as opposed to modern documentary, needs to account for more than a few aesthetic or production techniques. There are even those like John Corner who argue we are entering a postdocumentary cultural moment. Documentaries and reality TV extensively borrow modes of production and aesthetics from one another, making it difficult for viewers to decipher one from the other (Murray). Indeed, some modern reality TV shows, such as *American High*, use only traditional verité style documentary techniques (Murray 48). Complicating things further, today's television market is filled with a variety of reality TV genres and subgenres. These include areas such as competition (*Survivor*), dating (*The Fifth Wheel*), and lifestyle change (*New House New Life*), to name a few (Teffeteller 3).

Since the debut of *Survivor* (2000), reality television has enjoyed a wide populist appeal. It now dominates non-fiction programming on cable television in America, and its scope continues to grow around the world. For the first time in 2010, world wide viewers watched more reality TV than dramas and TV series (Paoli-Lebailly). However, the reality TV boom has not come without its critics. In 2001 Dean Valentine, president of UPN Entertainment, said:

I guess I've really come around to the opinion that reality television is starting to look a lot like heroin. You know, a really quick high [in the ratings] and then a really long, long low, then you need another fix again. Gladiatorial combat started with a couple of macho guys beating the hell out of each other, and ended up tossing a bunch of Christians and watching lions tear them apart. After a while, you need the kick, and the kick has to get higher and higher and higher. I don't really want to be a part of that (qtd. in Huff 21).

Valentine's sentiment was echoed by many others in the industry. As reality TV seemed to thirst for more wacky and morally ambiguous concepts and characters, critics responded. The Parents Television Council reported in "Reality TV: Race to the Bottom" that "The rising popularity of reality series, especially among young viewers should give parents pause" (qtd. in Huff 22).

Over twenty years, reality TV somehow evolved from elitist and academic to populist and crude, but such a broad condemnation of an entire genre seems too simple for many critics (Poniewozik). After all, *Queer Eye for the Straight Guy* progressively portrayed gays and lesbians (Huff 27). There is even scholarly evidence reality TV inspires and motivates its viewers to expand their horizons (Fritz 94). In Christopher Meyer's analysis of reality TV, he concluded that "reality TV is not only consistent with an ethical life; some watching of some of it can enhance one's life" (21). Today, a discussion of reality TV is akin to a discussion of pizza; the types, costs and reviews span the spectrum. However, because of its wide cultural prevalence, there is little doubt reality TV is powerful and complicated enough to require a serious discussion (Wyatt 176).

ETHICS IN REALITY TV CONCEPT DESIGN

The Art of War, started as an ethical question. What would a reality TV show look like which gave a voice to someone freeing nature instead of controlling it? One television show in particular helped shed light on this question. *Whale Wars* first premiered in November 2008 on Animal Planet. The show profiles Paul Watson, along with his crew of activists, working to harass Japanese whalers off the coast of Antarctica. *Whale Wars* proved a reality series could be commercially successful, running for six seasons, and use activism as the driving plot device for character motivation. *Whale Wars*' sixth season entailed only a two-hour special, and it remains uncertain whether Animal Planet will produce or air a seventh season (Khatchadourian).

The legally ambiguous actions taken by the Sea Shepherd Conservation Society produce the high-stakes drama reality television audience crave. They also cause legal problems for the network distributing the program. According to Watson, Japan has threatened the Discovery Channel and Animal Planet with lawsuits. Japan and Costa Rica have also filed criminal charges against Watson with Interpol (Khatchadourian). International legal complications may be taking their toll on the *Whale Wars* franchise and putting its future production in jeopardy (Thielman).

Could I create something to take the place of *Whale Wars*? Is there an appetite for a new reality TV show centered around environmental activism? I believe reverence for the natural world is important in sustaining the health and wellbeing of our society and our planet. I want the general public to see other people's appreciation for nature,

and reality TV can do that. To begin developing my idea, I first reviewed the newest most successful television series Animal Planet had to offer, *Call of the Wildman*.

In *Call of the Wildman* Season 3 Episode 21 “Get Otter My Pond” Ernie, Neal, and Lolly head to Pay Lake in order to uncover the “killer creature” that is eating all of the fish. It’s a recurring theme in *Call of the Wildman*: the cast is dispensed to a new location and new mystery, they work together to uncover which mysterious animal is causing problems, and then they hand capture and return the animal to the wild. It’s a repeatable framework for every episode, and it’s a structure imitated in other shows like Animal Planet’s *Gator Boys* and A&E’s *Billy the Exterminator*. All of these series utilize a different cast, location, animals, and production company; yet they employ similar narrative structures.

The Art of War needed a structure, something repeatable episode after episode. A motivating problem initiates character interaction and provides a narratively satisfying arc and ending. Profiling an environmentalist working to free nature simply wouldn’t be enough. I needed a goal for the characters, repeatable week after week, and with drama comparable to *Whale Wars*. An art performance protest fit the bill. Pulling off a large scale art performance would require characters to interact with one another. It also provided a simple repeatable dramatic structure that could escalate if the performance became dangerous or illegal.

The power of narrative is the power of reality TV. Producers and networks need to consider the ethical implications of the narratives they portray on television. Stories unite us as humans (Kearney). Stories of characters persevering, striving towards a better

life, or being generous toward others, can reinforce a common ethical ground we all share. Despite our differences: stories, even reality TV narratives, can motivate us to achieve our best humanitarian impulses (Fritz 94). The danger comes when television producers underestimate their role in the creative process.

It is important to consider reality TV as more than mindless entertainment, devoid of all moral or ethical consequence. Like other forms of pop culture, reality TV is an agent of social learning (Bunton 35). It is “an extension of the people from whom it springs and for whom it is created” (Bell, 16). Popular culture influences societal norms “constantly telling us how to think, how to dress, how to talk, what vocations are significant, and what we should do politically and economically; in sum, they tell us who to be” (Bineham 14). Research has even shown that reality TV actively affects opinions and perceptions of its viewers (Teffeteller).

With the power as a potential creator of cultural norms, I felt an obligation to create a product which showcased a point of view underrepresented in today’s reality TV market. I believe our modern way of life is unsustainable. We need to view nature as a valuable resource and not a commodity to be controlled and exploited. I am not alone. Almost all of my friends and family feel the same way, and so I felt personally responsible to bring people with this perspective onto a reality TV show.

THE ECONOMY OF REALITY TV

The rise and success of reality TV programming over the last two decades is largely due to economics of production. In the 1980s labor conflict and financial hardship motivated television networks to look for cheaper content, spurring the creation of non-fiction shows such as *America's Most Wanted*. By the mid 2000s, reality TV was being hailed as the savior of broadcast network television (Vanacker 111). A reality TV hour often costs less than \$300,000 to produce. Compare that to \$2 to \$3 million per hour of scripted content (Vanacker 112). Reality TV cuts costs by embracing low-end production values. Handheld vérité footage gathered with available lighting is cheap to produce, and reality TV pays on-screen talent much less than fiction series (Raphael 127).

Ted Madger argues that the economic model for television is not to give people programming they want to watch but to give people programming they are willing to watch. A unique triangular relationship exists between producers, advertisers, and viewers. That relationship is complex because it is almost impossible to predict the success of a television show until it airs (142). TV testing is common but rarely regarded as definitive by TV executives (Caves). The general rule, then becomes to play it safe and live by a few guiding rules, the first and foremost of which is to stick to established program norms and series. If it worked once, it will work again. Networks copy series and formats from earlier successful productions and from other networks. There is a reason *Law and Order* became a franchise, and that tactic is repeated for other programs like *CSI:(Name Any City)* (Madger 144).

I wanted *The Art of War* to continue the trend of cheap production budgets, a decision influenced by the fact I would be self-funding the project. I also wanted it to stick to other established genre norms. Although I would experiment with the concept design, casting, and pre-production of the film, I wanted the production and postproduction to follow the rules and guidelines set up by successful reality shows like *Whale Wars* and *Call of the Wildman*. I did not want to create an experimental film. I wanted to create something that would seem familiar and entertaining to reality TV audiences and executives. If *Whale Wars* could do it, so could I.

STEREOTYPES AND CASTING REALITY TV

Media activist Jennifer Pozner believes stereotypes are “endemic, even necessary” to some reality shows” (47). Reality TV stereotyping begins with casting. Producers choose characters to fill niche roles, regularly created by sexist and racist stereotypes (Bunton 31). A quick look at *Call of the Wildman* raises questions over its use of conventional racial and gender themes. Ernie and Neal portray quintessential southern rednecks. In “Get Otter My Pond” not a single minority or woman is ever on screen. In 2013 Animal Planet programmed at least twenty shows that dealt with wild animals and/or life in nature. None featured women or ethnic minorities as main characters.

I don’t know the production circumstances behind “Get Otter My Pond.” Like most viewers, I simply see the end product. I watch and then draw conclusions. It seems easy to criticize shows like *Call of the Wildman* for casting stereotypes. The more difficult goal is providing a viable alternative. To do that, I would need to rethink the casting process.

Unlike most reality TV shows, I was not going to use a casting agency or browse through video interviews of hundreds of applicants. Casting reality is big business, and a vital part to the success of any show. The application document for *Survivor* runs ten pages and requires the reality candidate to supply a videotape audition (Huff 35). Reality TV producers use casting agencies which hold open casting calls and place ads on-line in places like Craigslist:

Looking to cast personal fitness trainers to be featured on a new reality show series geared for network television! We are searching for personal fitness trainers with outgoing and

bold personalities looking to expand their careers in the health and fitness industry while taking part of a hot new network series and a chance to be offered employment at the most prestigious health club in Los Angeles (Personal).

This Craigslist ad made sure applicants included a brief description of why they would be great for the show, as well as a headshot. This type of casting finds people who are actively looking to be in reality TV. The ad claimed to be looking for personal trainers but was listed under the acting section, not the personal training section of Craigslist. The people who apply to these ads may be more likely to misrepresent themselves, then if producers were to seek out established personal trainers. The ethical question then follows: how are these people represented to the broadcast audience?

Actress Langi, who was cast on *For Love or Money 2* on NBC, was a full-time actress with credits on *Law & Order* and *Sex and the City*. Yet on the reality show she was billed as a party planner from New Jersey (Huff 40). What does this type of deception do to the power reality TV? I decided to go about casting *The Art of War* differently.

Instead of sending out an open call to people who may be desperate for on-screen fame, I emailed and called people already using their art to affect change. Google searches and conversations in the industry produced a number of people interested in the project and willing to take part in my experimental reality TV program. They were almost entirely white women, ranging in age from early twenties to late fifties. Lila Roo stood out among the group. She was willing to try anything and seemed okay with bringing her art into the “lowbrow” populist media of reality TV. In an interview with her she said, “I don’t watch TV. So if this show ends up being something I don’t like,

that's fine. As long as it helps animals and the environment, I don't care about the rest.

Maybe it will just be for other people and not me.”

I felt that her attitude was in line with what I was trying to do, and she was willing to take chances with the law and with societal norms, something that *Whale Wars* employed to help raise drama and ratings.

It's also worth addressing some sexist stereotypes could be drawn from casting Lila as the main character of a reality series that worked to free and protect nature. Certainly women have a voice and a role in deciding how and when our society should control nature. Ethically this marginalized voice needs to be included in reality TV programming. But casting a woman in this role is also casting a stereotype. It propagates the notion that women are relegated to the role of nurturers and protectors. Doubly Lila's art employs her body, often naked, and so by broadcasting this art through my lens as a reality television producer, I would also be objectifying her as a potential sexual object. I knew I would need to be careful in production. After discussions with Lila, I realized my producer role would entail limiting how much the show coerced Lila and her art.

If Lila could stay independent, represent herself and her body solely through her own artistic desires, then my casting decision could have an ethical foothold. After all, Lila creates her own art. I could draw a parallel between how Lila is represented in reality TV to Ann Kaplan's analysis of Madonna's music videos. Painted or dressed as an animal, I believe Lila's art helps to blur the female image. Outside the traditional maternal or sexualized norms, Lila's art makes more ambiguous not only the lines between male and female but between high art and pop art. Of course, my personal view

does not change how an audience interprets Lila, and so I talked to her about how her art would be presented on screen.

Once Lila was cast, I worked along with her to determine what issue she would take on. I told her about the bison hazing controversy. This seemed ideal for me. It was an issue with inherent tension. It was close to me, and I could get a production crew to film it cheaply. I sent Lila a DVD about the bison haze. After watching it, she became committed to the cause.

Next came the task of finding a supporting cast for Lila. Looking at the history of reality TV, the most successful series cast a mix of caustic, caring, and daring people (Huff 32). Lila works on her own, however shows like *Call of the Wildman* rely on at least two recurring characters. The relationship between these main characters provides entertainment throughout the show. Ernie and Neal constantly joke and depend on one another. In fact, the cast's ability to work together or not provides much of the success or failure of reality shows (Huff 32). I felt Lila needed a sidekick, a Neal to her Ernie. Lila needed someone to help build her art project and develop her character for the viewing audience. Lila seemed fine with the idea, when I told her I had someone in mind. I met Refah several years prior to *The Art of War* project. He has a unique personality, and I always thought he would be a perfect character for a reality show. Refah is methodical in his thinking, and very much opposite in his method and mindframe from Lila.

In *Call of the Wildman*, Ernie and Neal are two peas from the same pod. They always agree with one another, at least about the larger place of nature's role in the dominion of men. I wanted to try something different. If *The Art of War* was really ever

going to be commercially successful, it would need to appeal to a wide audience. So I hoped that Refah's more pragmatic view of nature might give all audiences a way to look at the issue of bison hazing and understand the unique perspectives being showcased in *The Art of War*. Refah grounds Lila.

Bison hazing is a complex issue, and Lila needed more than Refah to take on the issue. I met Mike Mease, head of The Buffalo Field Campaign in February 2013. His knowledge and access to the haze was vital, and he would be a perfect ally to teach Lila and Refah about the issue. Lila also wanted to meet and work with Native Americans who felt passionate about bison hazing. I arranged a group of Native drummers to play during her final performance. Mike Mease also assured me that Jimmy St. Gaddard, a Native American Blackfeet spiritual leader, would be at the Buffalo Field Campaign while Lila was there, and that he was willing to be a part of the production.

I cast *The Art of War* using my own process, atypical of reality TV's traditional practices. Yet I still cast characters in traditional racist and sexist roles. Refah fit the stereotype of the rational male doer, while Lila played the emotional female counterpart. Native Americans were cast in their traditional side role to the white outsiders. I am ethically against the noble savage stereotype, yet I cast and later edited a character to fit that role. More needs to be done. Future productions must look for other ways to break this mold and provide an audience with real world perspectives which challenge their social expectations.

PRE-PRODUCING REALITY TV

Before creating *The Art of War*, I learned the production techniques commonly used to create reality TV. I worked on the production and post-production of National Geographic Wild's *America The Wild*. I can only assume from articles I've read (West), that *Call of the Wildman* and other shows like it are produced in a similar manner.

Each episode starts with a short pitch and rough outline. Once approved by the network, producers turn that outline into a detailed treatment and script. The script specifies where the cast will go, who and what they will encounter, and how drama will unfold over the course of the show. Once the network approves the script, producers work to create a field production document outlining the production schedule, travel and hotel accommodations. They compile location and appearance releases, and all other production documents needed for the cast and crew to complete the production.

Although scenes are not scripted, each scene is staged. Every person Turtleman meets in *Call of the Wildman*, every animal he encounters is planned months in advance (West).

I wanted to be less intrusive in my production. I had an ethical duty to respect Lila's independence. I needed to allow her to make decisions on the fly about what she would do and where she would go. I wrote a production document outlining the scenes I hoped to get. I would not stage animals like in *Call of the Wildman* (West). Instead, I embraced a documentary style of preproduction for *The Art of War*.

Most reality TV like *Call of the Wildman* is scripted because networks are investing money and want to limit the chances of failure. The crew is hired, from producers to sound technicians, from my experience predominantly white middle class

men. These productions require technical knowledge and expensive equipment, which creates a gap between many of the people who create and those who consume mass media. There is a privileged access to the means of representing reality. Only people with money have the means to construct reality TV (Couldrey).

I did not take on this issue in *The Art of War*. My crew included a woman cinematographer, but no one from a disadvantaged background or outside my small group of white friends. I hope to have the opportunity to explore this issue further in future work. It's a question other reality producers should ask; is there a way to democratize the means of production for reality TV and other forms of popular entertainment? Characterized by low production quality, reality TV may be the perfect genre for individuals without traditional money or training to express their version of reality.

REALITY TV PRODUCTION AND POST PRODUCTION

Reality TV is a business. It is a response to economic conditions, primarily a network's need to cheaply fill hours of programming. A multi-billion dollar collaboration of cogged wheels churn out content; good, bad, and ugly. For *The Art of War*, the start of production was the end of the active ethical experiment and a plunge into television's business side.

Once on location, I directed the production team much as any reality producer would. I tasked myself with executing the production outline and no more. I directed cinematographers not to worry about composition, just get characters in frame and focus. I utilized every reality TV production tool and technique I knew to create the codified aesthetic. After all, an illusion of authenticity in reality TV creates a product audiences perceive as more credible than sitcoms or dramas (Bunton 35). A shaky camera implies what you are seeing is real. Audience studies show authenticity on television is important to audience enjoyment (Lewis 289).

CONCLUSION

It is easy to dismiss the ethical decisions I faced in the production and post-production phases. I was simply trying to fulfill the aesthetic norms I believed reality TV audiences desired. Confessional style interviews provided snippets I intercut to provide story context. I used editing techniques, including “frankenbyting,” a tactic of splicing together quotes from different contexts to make participants say what the producers need them to (Poniewozik). I tried to follow the reality TV recipe, and that seemed enough to distract me from asking myself any ethical questions about what I was doing, or how it might be perceived.

I imagine *Call of the Wildman* producers feel similar about their work. The technical process of filming and editing resembles a grocery order: get the establishing shot of the bait tank; then get the two-camera sequence of Ernie and Neal entering the building and an “on the fly” interview outside the building; feed lines for Ernie to say; and cut the beginning of one thought with the second half of another sentence. Edit in a flare transition and a musical sting before cutting to commercial break, and you’re done.

The technical grind provides a framework in which ethics become easier to dismiss. While editing, I did not care about staying true to timelines, or the complexity of characters. I cut down and simplified everyone. Lila became overly emotional, and Refah overly rational, reinforcing their established stereotypes, a technique common in reality TV. Kristie Bunton criticizes the heavily edited nature of reality shows. She believes it contributes to the distortion of certain social constructs and the perpetuation of common stereotypes (Bunton 32). Through staging, scripting, and editing, reality TV

narratives portray characters with fake values and make what is phony and false appear real and true (Spence 137). This deception is built into the economics of the production and audience expectation.

Certainly the idea that reality TV misrepresents reality is not completely lost on its audience (Lewis 290). A 2002 study by Annette Hill showed that viewers are highly skeptical of reality TV. More than fifty percent of the sample believed television programming about real people was at least sometimes “made up” (Hill). But the argument becomes complex when you begin to consider what is “real.” Justin Lewis writes:

The use of everyday words like “real,” “realistic,” or “authentic” does not coalesce into a coherent system of references. In other words, it is neither clear what is meant by real life or how it is signified televisually. Thus we cannot assume that reality TV—or even news and current affairs—is, despite its privileged status, any more or less successful in the signification of real life than television fantasy (291).

Simply trying to produce what is “real” is not enough. That goal is made impossible by the stratification of positions within a network production. If you are a reality TV editor, you answer to the producer, who answers to the showrunner, who answers to the network executive and on and on up the ladder. Who is responsible for the ethical integrity of reality TV?

Every time I put Lila or Refah in frame and in focus, I made an ethical decision about how to represent them. Every time a producer brings in another white male for Ernie to work with, he makes an ethical decision. Every time you turn on the TV, you

make an ethical decision. The ability to avoid scrutiny does not preclude personal responsibility.

Reality TV is constructed and its future will be determined by producers like me. Through creating *The Art of War*, I examined some of the choices reality TV producers face. I became aware of how the network and broadcast systems dismiss personal responsibility and in effect support the creation of ethically dubious products, while simultaneously creating an economic mode of production capable of educating and improving society. I believe reality TV's future can be improved if producers look to reform its production model and its distribution. We should reduce the corporate bureaucracy and embrace a diversity of perspectives.

The challenges behind making such a system both profitable and popular will be difficult. The internet provides a new platform for reality TV distribution, and that is where I will distribute *The Art of War*. I hope other reality TV producers look to the internet as an outlet for improving the modern modes and forms of reality TV. Through creating *The Art of War*, I encountered more questions than answers, but it is hopefully the beginning of a new discussion about how television and the internet will represent reality in the future.

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