You Can Never be too Rich or too Dim
Don Unger

Let's face it, whether we're personally a fan or not, Reality TV has become part and parcel of American culture. From the early 1990's and MTV's teen favorite, The Real World, chronicling the lives of a handful of 20-somethings given free digs in some of the most expensive cities in the world in exchange for squatting in front of the camera, to more recent hits like Survivor, which pit inane, money-grubbing, double-dealing John and Jane Q. Public against one another in the hopes of becoming a millionaire, or at very least becoming obscenely famous for having eaten bugs on national television, Reality TV has muscled its way into the American psyche. Furthermore, low-overhead, over-priced advertising spots and an audience with a penchant for voyeurism, mean the craze isn’t likely to end anytime soon. In fact, this formula for a ratings triumph has been pushed to extremes by shows like The Simple Life.

All pretense of capturing the minutia and complexity of real life, of displaying the human condition for the television viewer, have been cast aside in favor of manufactured situations where facsimiles of real people—millionaire bachelors, heiresses, out of work actors, retired hair-rockers, who routinely munch on bat’s brains, and the like—confront the realities of life for us salt-of-the-earth folk.

Combining two of America’s most guilty pleasures, having a fly on the wall view into a rich person’s life, no matter how vapid, and watching them fall from grace; the secret to the success of The Simple Life is not terribly complex. Step one, take two bottle-blonde beauties and separate them from their trust funds. Step two, construct a fish-out-of-water scenario where their psychological and emotional shortcomings will manifest themselves, such as a farm or a trailer park. Finally, put them in situations where these shortcomings create comic or dramatic tension, such as a shopping trip to Wal-mart or a
a job at a fast food joint. If the formula doesn’t work you can always script bits of dialogue and edit the footage for maximum effect.

Having scored a victory with such a formula, The Simple Life 2: Road Trip hits the small screen June 16th, but it appears that Paris Hilton will have some stiff competition for the crown of Reality television as Fux Television unveils its fall line-up, featuring Model Behavior. Combining the Simple formula and adding a low-fat dose of reality via shows like The Swan and VH-1's From Flab to Fab, Model Behavior is the travel log of two aspiring super models, Natalie St. Germaine and Meredith Plantall, as they span the globe in search of the perfect diet—the one that will help them lose those dreaded “last ten pounds” and secure modeling contracts.

In the pilot episode the chain smoking, foul-mouthed model-actress archetypes, Natalie and Meredith arrive in Gbartala, Liberia, a village some 90 miles east of the capital city of Monrovia. The producers have arranged for the models to participate in the distribution of food and water to the starving people of Gbartala, who are only now receiving aid, in the aftermath of Liberia’s brutal civil war.

In a new twist on an old adage, you can take the model out of fashion show, but you can’t take the fashion show out of the model, Natalie and Meredith spend their first week in Gbartala recruiting local women to participate in a fashion show for the benefit of UN Peacekeeping forces stationed in the village. Armed with attitude, a boom box and a trunk full of this season’s Parisian delights, the didactic duo set about their task. But, all altruistic intentions are ground to dust when Natalie, refusing to procure a bowl of rice for a malnourished, local woman, declares, “Honey, you look spectacular. Who knew we’d find a town full of supermodels?” Meredith chimes in with her own condolences: a cigarette, a pat on the back and the mantra, “No carbs after 5 pm, darling.”

Mid-way through their stay Liberia we learn that both Natalie and Meredith have been cheating on their diets by stealing food from the UN reserves and, despite protest from the show’s producers, the ladies cut their stay in Africa short in order to return to the United States. They schedule an emergency visit to the Beverly Hills Weight-loss and Holistic Therapy Center, where a “Dr. Niemeyer” provides each of them with a tapeworm. The hour-long pilot closes with Natalie returning, from the gym to their posh Beverly Hills Suite and the cliffhanger, “Natalie, you didn’t go to the gym? Darling you didn’t do any stomach crunches! Natalie, you could crush it!”

Future episodes of Model Behavior promise a “return to the poverty and desolation of the third world,” as well as trip to Poland where the ladies try the new Atkins-approved, carb-free, sawdust-bread diet.