

Adorno on 'The Donald': Reality Television as Culture Industry

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There have been many profound changes in the realms of culture, media, and related technologies, as well as a change in their social significance in the past few decades. These changes have impacted all aspects and outlets of cultural production, and have in many cases, also had an effect upon society and social organization through reflection and obscuration of social reality. Regardless of these many changes, the concept of the 'culture industry', as developed by Theodor Adorno and other members of the Frankfurt school, continues as both a useful theoretical concept and as an analytical tool. It allows light to be shed on many aspects of the cultural landscape that attempt to obscure themselves from plain view. It further allows for a critical reading of mass culture, and shows how the aesthetic and critical quality that art and culture contained in other epochs has been superseded by superficial, mass-produced, and synthetic conformity. The mimic quality of modern individualism is key to this understanding of social reality as it serves the interests of domination, authority and preexisting social hierarchy at the expense of a possibly meaningful democratic expression for individuals. The conceptual tools offered by this approach continue in their effectiveness today as the mass-produced individual has become even more dominant. The newest particular form of this domination put on offer by the culture industry is 'reality television'. What this paper will therefore seek to accomplish is to utilize the conceptual tools offered by Adorno – specifically those relating to free time, the fetish character, the conveyed recipient, the neutered nature of culture under monopoly, and the 'sportification' of culture - in his critique of the culture industry and its irrational character in order to understand the overt and hidden messages contained in this newest offering in mass-conformity.

Reality television, as the name implies, suggests an attempt by television producers and their corporate managers to 'accurately' portray reality through the medium of television. It seeks, or at least purports to remove the scripted television show's dependability and predetermined endings, replacing them with 'real people' in 'real situations'. The dominant producers and managers of technocracy attempt to convey to the audience a conception of reality that is 'honest' because it is 'unscripted', and which can therefore be trusted as more 'real' than the honestly fictitious scripted program. Nothing could be further from the truth. Reality television is most often nothing short of a conceptual and practical lie. There is nothing realistic in the portrayal of aging metal stars and their celebrity friends who just happen to stop by during sweeps week. Neither are the situations experienced common place occurrences in one's everyday life; for instance, how often are we stranded on an island with a group of complete strangers with whom we compete for fabulous prizes? Or better yet, when was the last time you visited a small town to find two rich socialites terrorizing the local populous? As the situations portrayed are neither realistic nor commonplace, and the everyday occurrences that supposedly 'just happen' to the individuals are laughably non-common, it should be asked what the real purpose of this genre of television show is if not to give an accurate portrayal of reality?

This purpose can be discovered by conducting a qualitative study that mimics the one by Adorno within *The Stars Down to Earth: The Los Angeles Astrology Column*, and utilizing the

related conceptual tools he used in dissecting the culture industry. For Adorno, the astrology column was a 'symptom' of greater societal tendencies and indicative of the psychological states of members of the public at large (Adorno 1994:113). At the time he stated that the astrology column was part of the culture industry with the

specific ideology promoted by a publication such as the *Los Angeles Times* [being] pretty much the same as that emerging from the movies and television although the type of people at which it aims is probably somewhat different – there is some 'division of labour' also among the various mass media, mainly with regards to the various kinds of customers which each medium attempts to ensnare (Adorno 1994:120).

Like this qualitative content analysis, this paper will utilize the reality television show *The Apprentice* in an attempt to find what symptomatic characteristics it manifests of the culture industry as a whole. Like Adorno's astrology column, *The Apprentice* manifests many irrational and negative hidden qualities, while the glossy exterior presented is one of benign psychological and social competition where even the losers are winners. The concept that is presented is like an elimination challenge game, with the winner receiving an apprenticeship with Donald Trump ('The Donald'). Each week a contestant is eliminated through the process of a team 'challenge' portion, the losing team then being called into the boardroom where through argument and evaluation by the team-mates, Trump, and his henchmen George and Caroline, one member is eliminated. While competing, the contestants live in a fabulous loft in downtown New York, and are primarily comprised of individuals with Harvard MBA's, Law degrees, or profitable private business records (i.e. venture capitalists). The conception of reality presented by this show, and by the personified Donald Trump in the form of 'The Donald', is symptomatic of the new level of depravity in the culture industry and the pinnacle of its newest attempt to divorce cultural production from objective material conditions and social criticism.

'The Donald' experience 24-7

Adorno states that the concept of 'free time' "is nothing more than a shadowy continuation of labour" (Adorno 1991:168). Free time is 'shackled' to its opposite, work, which conveys the message that this time is neither entirely free nor spare; it should be occupied by some sort of productive diversion which gives fulfilment (Adorno 1991:162). Even if this concept has a redeemable side – one is not active within exploitative wage relationships at that precise moment - there is the further movement to 'unfreedom'. This is the gradual "annexing [of] 'free time,' and the majority of unfree people are as unaware of this process as they are of the unfreedom itself" (Adorno 1991:163). Also contained within the concept of 'free time' is that there are two homogeneous realms, work and play, which do not overlap and inflict upon the individual two separate attitudinal patterns (Adorno 1994:72). The free time of play is further limited in that it is one of the major tenants "*that pleasure itself is permissible only if it serves ultimately some ulterior purpose of success and self-promotion*" (Adorno 1994:74). People's free time has had blinders placed upon its already limited capacity by "the truncation of their imagination [which] deprives them of the faculty which made the state of freedom pleasurable in the first place" (Adorno 1991:167). They then resort to the limited and shallow cultural entertainment proffered up by the culture industry in an attempt to exorcise whatever aspect of

work that they can, but whose structure and content simply reinforce the social arrangement which has forced them into this situation in the first place (Adorno 1991:167). Adorno maintains that although by-and-large individuals do accept the substandard fare that is offered, they do so with reservation "in the same way that even the most naïve theatre or filmgoers do not simply take what they behold there for real" (Adorno 1991:170). In other words, he is of the opinion that the critical cognitive function that may reject this situation has not been completely subsumed, and that individuals may resist this process '*within certain limits*' (Adorno 1991:170).

What has happened since the period Adorno wrote causes a considerable cloud of doubt to be cast upon this final, somewhat positive assertion. What *The Apprentice* represents is the overcoming of the final obstacle to total unfreedom: the critical cognitive facilities of the individual. Free time has been utterly subsumed by unfreedom within the program, even more so than in other reality television programs. There is no longer any difference between work and play. Work is work; play is focused only upon work. The show itself reinforces this idea: winning team members are rewarded for hard work in the form of pep-talks and career advice from industry specialists. The winners are given more work as a reward for success, thanking 'The Donald' for so honouring them. The blurring of the line between work and play represents a change from the scripted situational television programs that formerly resided in these time slots. These shows at least offered a momentary escape from one's own particular life and setting; and if there were discussions of work it was as part of a larger whole as the characters still operated in the old paradigm of free time as structured play. A show that focuses only upon work, how to (supposedly) succeed in work, and what to aspire to as work destroys this distinction. Indeed it seems that the characters do nothing but work; enjoyment is to be found only within success and hard work. The former free time has become an unfree period of training in conformity for the forced working period. Free time is to be limited to observing others within their spheres of work. This further communicates the message that all periods of time are, and should be structured like the work period. What was once 'limited cultural fare' has become limiting cultural fare, encouraging one to think like a worker in all places and at all times.

Commodification and the fetishizing of 'The Donald'

Adorno notes that "Marx defines the fetish character of the commodity as the veneration of the thing made by oneself which, as exchange-value, simultaneously alienates itself from producer to consumer – 'human beings'" (Adorno 1991:33). The exchange value of a commodity has become totally dominant, destroying the use value, and making this exchange value itself the 'object of enjoyment' (Adorno 1991:34). No longer does the consumer enjoy the experience on offer, but it is the price that is paid for the object which gives it value – Adorno likens this phenomenon to valuing a musical performance based on the admission price paid rather than the quality of the performance offered (Adorno 1991:34). He states that "before the theological caprices of commodities, the consumers become temple slaves. Those who sacrifice themselves nowhere else can do so here, and here they are fully betrayed" (Adorno 1991:35). Those that reject becoming the 'temple slaves' to commodity fetishism are labelled as 'capricious and anarchistic' as opposed to the 'modesty' of the conformist (Adorno 1991:35). Adorno correctly interprets the process of fetishizing as occurring by way of a special relationship for cultural goods as

cultural entities typical of the culture industry are no longer *also* commodities, they are commodities through and through...ultimately, the culture industry no longer even needs to directly pursue everywhere the profit interests from which it originated (Adorno 1991:86).

The fetishized cultural commodity hides itself by way of recipient identification in a supposedly organic relationship that is really part of a manufactured whole (Adorno 1991:42). To Adorno, the consumer most caught up within this trap is the radio ham for whom actual quality is irrelevant; the experience is of a received total that leaves no room for individual agency to influence what is received (Adorno 1991:47).

The radio ham's experience is no longer the most fetishized; the experience of the reality television junkie has now taken precedent in this regard. The use value of television, its possibility as a learning medium, has been entirely subsumed by the exchange value: watching of the latest hit show and understanding it in its supposed complexity. There is no longer much, if any value placed upon the content of these shows: the 'reality' setting provided and the supposed escape from the mundane is their entire worth. Besides superficial and stupefied career advice for the upper-echelon of the business community – obviously not the shows intended audience – the only use-value contained within this type of show is impractical advice for bizarre situations (i.e. how to run a maze). The experience itself is contained within the exchange value the television show represents; the ability to relate to other enthusiasts, where those that spend the most time and have the greatest understanding of the complex minutia have the greatest prestige. The more time devoted to this process the more the watcher becomes like Adorno's imagined 'temple slaves', worshiping the characters, dressing like them, sometimes even betting substantial sums on their success. This devotion is based on a relationship where the recipient (the viewer) has no relationship with the characters yet personally identifies with them regardless of their lack of agency in effecting change on the characters.

This devotion accents the fact that the "new fetish is the flawlessly functioning, metallically brilliant apparatus as such, in which all the cogwheels mesh so perfectly that not the slightest hole remains open for the meaning of the whole" (Adorno 1991:39). Although it parades the agency of the characters on the television screen, it is still a performance that is presented as complete from the first moment (Adorno 1991:39). The audience may feel tension but it is empty; the event has already occurred, the individuals who play the characters have been affected and moved on with their lives outside the gaze of the television. Although the weekly instalments pretend to occur over a spread-out timeframe, like a conductor, the director or producer is an authoritarian ruler "at one stroke he provides norm and individualization: the norm is identified with his person, and the individual tricks which he perpetrates furnish the general rules" (Adorno 1991:39). This is one of the roles played by 'The Donald'. Although it seems that the competitors have agency – their skill at handling a task – the only real agency lies with Trump, and to a lesser extent George and Caroline. No matter what the characters do in the end, he holds the true power through his ability to dismiss them from the show. For example, Trump fired one character, Ivana, with the statement "I'm not hiring a stripper" while ignoring the failure of one of the other members of the group to stick to an agreed pricing scheme. In this sense, not only is the audience denied the ability to affect the outcome of a program that they invest emotional attachment in, but so are the characters acting within the show themselves. Their actions are prescribed for them – Trump chooses the tasks, their budgets, even their living

arrangements – and the outcome is decided in a similar totalitarian fashion: in the end it comes down to the arbitrary interpretation by 'The Donald' of the choices made by the characters.

As mentioned previously, part and parcel with the fetishism of culture is a 'regression' in reception (Adorno 1991:40). The subject individuals lose "the freedom of choice and responsibility, the capacity for conscious perception...[and] they stubbornly reject the possibility of such perception" (Adorno 1991:41). This state is related to the dominance of advertising in mediated discourse. Adorno states that "regressive listening is tied to production by the machinery of distribution, and particularly by advertising...[soon] nothing is left for the consciousness but to capitulate before the superior power of the advertised stuff and purchase spiritual peace by making the imposed foods literally its own thing" (Adorno 1991:42). The culture that is offered by *The Apprentice* in particular is saturated with advertisements, either for Trump's own businesses or through the tasks proscribed: they commonly involve new product design, hype, and placement for other brand name companies such as M&M/Mars. One character remarks "I can't believe how much care goes into each one of these [bars]; I'll never take it for granted again." Another portrays the bars that she helped create as "our babies" and refers to the bar inspection team as similar to "surgeons." Perhaps Adorno is right to note that "people are not only, as the saying goes, falling for the swindle; if it guarantees them even the most fleeting gratification they desire a deception which is nonetheless transparent to them" (Adorno 1991:89). While the audience may not completely fall for the swindle that is the television show in general, they do fall for the swindle that other consumer goods, especially highly commodified ones – such as candy bars which depend on brand name recognition to justify their pricing - are handled with the care afforded small children.

Making 'The Donald' within you

The swindle, the attempt to create a false reality positively portrayed where commodified everything is the norm, is part of the blurring of reality and falsehood. The cultural industry creates the supposed recipient with no regard to the real audience – itself part of the program to shape the audience whilst pretending to emulate their preferences. This is the continuing lie that is offered, that "beneath the mantle of adventure they smuggle in the contraband of utility and the reader is persuaded that he does not have to renounce any of his dreams if he eventually becomes an engineer or a shop assistant" (Adorno 1991:54). The individual, under the guise of adventure in supposedly everyday experience, is made "to look at apparently everyday items...[which] induces him to look at life itself as though it and its conflicts could generally be understood in such terms" (Adorno 1991:146). People are lead to believe that with a little luck they too can experience the life and times of 'The Donald,' and that social reality is such that we should behave as if market dynamics actually proscribe the most proficient course of action in all situations, including both the inter- and intra-personal. Adorno thought that people often emulated these proscribed mores to achieve the passport they need in a monopolized life (Adorno 1991:80). This administration does not retain its wholly imposed character and soon the individual proscribes it themselves out of more than utility (Adorno 1991:105-6). These mores serve, like the culture industry as a whole "in the 'service' of third persons, maintaining its affinity to the declining circulation process of capital, to the commerce from which it came into being" (Adorno 1991:87). The mores that are proffered by 'The Donald' and co. are much the same; they serve to legitimate the emulation of market dynamics by individuals which in turn legitimates the market society and its outcomes. As Adorno eloquently puts it "the favourite

argument of the whole- and half-hearted apologists, that culture industry is the art of the consumer, is untrue; it is the ideology of ideology” (Adorno 1991:159).

There is a specific target segment of the population for this program, one that is highly similar to that analyzed by Adorno in relation to astrology. In his study Adorno states that

the type of people we are concerned with take astrology for granted, much like psychiatry, symphony concerts or political parties; they accept it because it *exists*, without much reflection...they are hardly interested in the justification of the system (Adorno 1994:36).

It seems that the group of individuals who would watch *The Apprentice* fall under much the same heading; they take it for granted that *the market* exists without much reflection upon how it supposedly functions. The tasks that are designed to supposedly emulate the market are ridiculous and unrealistic as they ignore vast sections of their own proscribed market dynamic logic – i.e. make no economic sense – as well as ignoring the interpersonal relationships between Trump and other members of the upper-echelon of the business community that gain the contestants access to normally closed systems of commerce (i.e. access to Pepsi’s marketing department). The show, like the astrology column, creates the illusion that the average viewer is “a young person or one in his early thirties, vigorous in his professional pursuits, given to hearty pleasures which must somehow be held in check, [and] prone to romance” with a high level of socio-economic status akin to that of a ‘vice-president’ (Adorno 1994:61-2). In the astrology column this is done by signifying that an individual corresponds to the created persona that the advice describes (their sign); in the television show it is done by presenting twelve ‘average’ individuals all exhibiting these traits in competition for the job of president of one of Trump’s companies. The advice in both situations is to be ‘a successful go-getter’ but this is tempered by insisting that it must be done within the existing hierarchical structure (Adorno 1994:63,95). The twofold attempt manifests itself in the television show through the contrast created between the task and the boardroom. During the task the individuals are encouraged to act on initiative - within proscribed bounds which if broken result in sanction – but when called into the boardroom they are reprimanded in any attempt to speak out that violates ‘The Donald’s’ dominant position. For instance, although encouraged to ‘have it all out’ during the boardroom scenes, one character was reproached for addressing Trump with ‘look’ (to which an immediate ‘sorry sir’ was offered), while they were not reprimanded for using more hostile language with other characters. What happens, in effect, is that “the concept of order which it hammers into human beings are always those of the status quo. They remain unquestioned, unanalysed and undialectically presupposed...[so that] conformity has replaced consciousness” (Adorno 1991:90).

Respect for hierarchy and traditional social order is both the direct and indirect message of *The Apprentice* much the same as it is within the astrology column. In the astrology column, on the

overt level the traditional values of English Puritan middle-class society are promulgated, the hidden message aims at a frame of mind which is no longer bound by these values...the ‘message’ of adjustment and unreflecting obedience seems to be dominant and all-pervasive today (Adorno 1991:140)

What is presented in both situations are 'clear-cut prescriptions' for action by the individual where society's dominant value structure always wins (Adorno 1991:141). Within the show, for instance, there is never a 'surprise' ending where no one gets fired – although in one episode two people were fired for 'incompetence' – nor one where the rest of the characters openly dispute Trump's authority and/or take-over the company themselves. Even George and Caroline, who sometimes offer opinions that conflict with Trump's, will not press their cases once the decision has been made: they seek to show total agreement that moment he makes it explicit. This "hidden message will escape the controls of consciousness, will not be 'looked through', will not be warded off by sales resistance, [and is] likely to sink into the spectator's mind" (Adorno 1991:141). For Adorno, the hidden messages of the column involved compliance with social norms which was accomplished through invocation of three relationships: friends, experts, and higher-ups (Adorno 1994:105-9). The image of friends, who are a collective authority, is paralleled in the show through the forced peer groups in the competing companies. They act to limit action deemed 'weird' or 'too unconventional' and resulting in sanctions – i.e. one character was fired for 'acting weird'. The 'expert' is paralleled in the show by the use of the nameless individuals who help the characters accomplish their tasks; their motives are often left unquestioned, their reality unexplored, as are their opinions and advice. The third relationship is "the key figure...[and is] the *higher-ups*, the bosses, both in their capacity in business life and in their psychological role of father substitute" (Adorno 1994:109). In this light, Trump can be viewed as a father-authority substitute who holds great power over the characters as a 'continuous threat' since he always wants an 'accounting' by way of the boardroom scenes at the end of each episode (Adorno 1994:110).

'The Donald' as neuter

Much of Adorno's criticism of the culture industry relates not only to its structure but is also directed towards its content. He is critical of its commercial character since its results is that the difference between culture and practical life disappears; culture loses its critical ability to be critical (Adorno 1991:53). Commercial culture is parasitic in nature; it no longer relates to an object, but relates only to itself (Adorno 1991:56). There is also the monopoly character of this commercialization. An attempt to dissect a serious subject is no longer made, and the articulation of conflict disappears in favour of 'shocks and sensations' that appear and disappear without consequence (Adorno 1991:57-60). This is the progression that has accumulated in the reality television phenomenon in general, and the cult of 'The Donald' in particular. The conflicts on the show are either of an unimportant individual nature – i.e. 'she's too bossy' – or an inconsequential material level – i.e. the tasks have no great importance for those involved besides personal posturing. There is no examination of 'real' socio-structural conflict. Adorno seems to have anticipated this situation in his assertion that "the representation of living reality becomes a technique for suspending its development and thus comes to occupy that static realm which revealed the very essence of variete" (Adorno 1991:62). There is a total celebration of predetermination in the culture industry, *and reality television* that is denied only at a superficial level (Adorno 1991:62). The predetermined nature of culture, its non-examination of 'real' conflict means that

the concept of culture has been neutralized to a great extent through its emancipation from the actual processes of life experienced with the rise of the

bourgeoisie and the Enlightenment. The opposition of culture to the status quo has been deadened to a large degree” (Adorno 1991:101).

The culture of mass conformity lacks any real praxis and so becomes “a lubricant for the system” (Adorno 1991:102). This manifests itself in the program in the sense one gets watching the characters in all aspects of their lives: there is no real engagement but rather a following through of prescribed motions.

The observation by the characters of social norms in their performance is part of a larger aspect of the culture industry: its manufacture of standardized products. With even a cursory glance it could be noted that the entire reality television phenomenon is but slight variations on a similar theme. These slight variations lead not to expanded horizons of taste and experience but for a desire of the inherently similar; any distinction formerly placed between ‘high’ and ‘low’ culture must also be removed as “their static separation, which certain caretakers of culture have ardently sought...[is but] the neat parcelling out of music’s social field of force [and] is illusionary” (Adorno 1991:30). The effort to maintain a boundary between these realms is but a factor of marketability and thus should be opposed (Adorno 1991:31). The character of the reality television show should be understood as parallel to Adorno’s characterization of the standardized products of music, which “do not permit concentrated listening without becoming unbearable to the listeners, the latter are in any case no longer capable of concentrated listening. They cannot stand the strain of concentrated listening” (Adorno 1991:43). He further states that “again and again one encounters the judgement that it is fine for dancing but dreadful for listening” (Adorno 1991:43). This is like the reality television show; one is meant to watch it with others and bet on the outcome, but not to pay too much attention as the entire genre retains a profound similarity: an overemphasis on mundane matters that one would not call attention to if it happened in ones own life. When conflict or the discussion of serious matters is removed from ‘art’ or culture the possibility for poignant insights and discussion is removed: all that remains is empty pseudo-conflict.

‘The Donald’ as referee in the sportification of culture

Under the structural constraints of the culture industry all real examination of social conflict is removed and what remains is merely the ‘sportification’ of culture. With its (d)evolution “the culture business comes to resemble contests, those aptitude tests which check suitability and performance, and finally sport” (Adorno 1991:74). Every aspect, from form to means and content, tends to become an accomplishment that requires exact measurement (Adorno 1991:74). This is a manifestation of the ‘bourgeois spirit’ in challenge to the staticness of the feudal order; the bourgeois aesthetic being intrigue and “the triumph of calculation and money” (Adorno 1991:66-75). In parallel, the reality television program also represents, and is the representative of the ‘bourgeois spirit’. The shows commonly focus on the interpersonal alliances of individuals (intrigue), and specifically in *The Apprentice* the ‘triumph of calculation and money’ in winning the contests. The ‘hero’ of these programs is largely static. To be sure they may change an attitude or a personal relationship, but “the hero no longer makes sacrifice but now enjoys success. He does not come of age and assume freedom through his deeds for his career is simply the revelation of his conformity. Thus he is the intriguer who has ‘arrived’” (Adorno 1991:66). What has happened is that “mass culture has finally rewritten the whole of Hegel’s *Phenomenology of Spirit* in accordance with the principle of the competition” (Adorno

1991:75). This is specifically evident in 'The Donald's' world; market logic is the be-all and end-all of action where the success of individuals is often attributed to their 'competitive' nature. This pseudo-praxis is the permitted outlet for the frustrations of modern life where material competition has been eliminated (Adorno 1991:77-8). The imaginary world of 'The Donald' (the program) is the outlet that resolves the underlying tension created by the real world of Donald Trump (the oppressive wage-labour relationship of international monopoly capitalism). Culture after sportification is a ritual to subjection that is unavoidable in the material world (Adorno 1991:77).

The sportification of culture makes the empty ritual that is its celebration akin to a variety act. Each time something happens, at the same time nothing happens at all (Adorno 1991:60). This should not be surprising since there can only be so much ingenuity carried out when the timeframe is controlled like a person uses a stopwatch (Adorno 1991:147). The limitation to either half-hour or hour-long segments limits any ability for originality in programming the reality television shows; real stories often do not conform to such stringent criteria (nor make the advertisers happy). There are further invasive rules to be followed both by the producers and the characters: lessons that are then disseminated to the audience. For the astrology column there is the implication that "one believes he has to obey some highly systematized orders without...[and there is] reference to inscrutable and inexorable laws which one somehow has to imitate by one's own rigid behaviour [which] strengthens the compulsive potential within the addressee" (Adorno 1994:64). For uncritical followers of 'The Donald,' the 'inscrutable and inexorable' laws that are alluded to are the laws of the market, which likewise strengthening the compulsive potential within the audience. In communicating market logic as the preferred driving force within the individual, what is communicated is that virtuosity is now more preferable than content. This means "ultimate achievement now consists not in triumphing over difficulty but in a process of subordination" (Adorno 1991:76). In the show, the underlying premise that profit is the highest form of achievement – i.e. when one group lost a challenge by ten dollars the project manager was fired for insisting that such a difference did not matter – is a form of aesthetic and ethical regression in cultural norms.

Adorno says: 'Donald.....you're fired!'

The reality television show *The Apprentice* presents itself as a sometimes friendly, sometimes cutthroat program professing to highlight the bourgeois business ethic. It is only part of the wider culture industry, but like the astrology column for Adorno it can be seen as symptomatic of a wider bankruptcy in the aesthetic of modern culture. It represents part of a dismal failure of modern mass culture to affect any criticisms of the social-structural conflicts that exist today. Adorno was of the opinion that most individuals still had the critical cognitive capability to see through at least part of the mass cultural sheen. But should this outlook be continued? It is not so much now that conflict is overlooked, or even played down within reality television: now the subjects are nonstarters. The 'reality' that is presented is so far removed from reality – how often do most people get access on a personal basis to 'The Donald'? – that even its presentation as a reality should hopefully seem a farce to all. But not all do, so there is definite cause for concern. When 'reality' can be presented as a lifestyle which is denied to the vast majority of the population, when the 'representative' members of the television universe are *all* wealthy and well fed, this should be a cause of cultural shame and not a celebration of excess.

The failure by the dominant mode of reality television production to engage critically with social and cultural issues, indeed, engage with material reality at all, leaves the critical viewer unsatisfied with the portrayed pseudo-conflicts of the characters. In the dominant mode, the potential emancipatory nature of the genre is turned upon its head in content - i.e. constant meaningless personality conflicts between characters rather than an examination of the political and economic problems that underlie their social situation - and in form - i.e. forcing the segment lengths to conform to existing half-hour and hour long standards. An informed and critical viewership of *The Apprentice* exposes the discontinuity between real social-structure and the dominant mode of reality television; the fallacious construction of the later thus becoming an implicit criticism of the former; the nakedly exposed and falsified myth of 'The Donald' stressing the artificial and subjective nature of Donald Trump and the market. While passive reception of reality television continues to engender the same problems in the viewers of mass media as those noted by Adorno, the individual use of critical cognitive capabilities still possesses the possibility of neutering the neuter of culture, 'The Donald'.

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