

## MIOON Exhibition

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The artists Min Kim and Moon Choi work together under the name, MIOON. "Karaoke Project #1" is an interactive visual installation exhibition that shows an image projected to a wall. This image on the wall responds as a person singing into the Karaoke microphone—the western opera audience is filled or emptied accordingly. The audiences in the visual image are like clones, all dressed in same clothes with same facial expressions, and depending on the atmosphere, they cheer or exit. Through these meetings and partings of a crowd, MIOON attempted to show "fertile soil for mass mobilization mechanism," and "to express totalitarian phenomenon of uncritical masses."

MIOON points out the passivism of the masses through this leisure activity of the masses. The cultural passivism can be seen in the majority of the audiences who only watch—even though it is an interactive exhibition—other few audiences singing with the microphone. Through Karaoke machine, MIOON play with the idea of uniformity of the identity defined by consumption culture and mass entertainment. The idea of using the corner of the exhibition hall to project visual image of the opera house, making it seem three-dimensional, was a bright idea. The image of the smaller opera house across it seems rather flat.

"Karaoke Project" deals with the cultural phenomenon of the mass society. Sociologist Edward Shields defined mass society as social realization of the masses, for the first time in history, who live freely on expanded territories. Today's mass society is formed through industrial socialization, meaning technology and complicated mechanisms replacing simple tools. And it is interesting to note that through this process, a unified culture emerged.

Karaoke was created for easier mass consumption of the singing culture. And this "Karaoke" culture has regulated the way we spend our leisure time. Furthermore, the emergence of this machine has led to a decline of minor musicians, and lyrics are no longer memorized and gathering and singing in circles have gone out of fashion. Karaoke consumers choose their songs from a menu and sing at, not the audience, but the screen with images and lyrics scrolling, and bury themselves into an audio-visual atmosphere of the machine.

As we can see in this exhibition, even an interaction with a media is not enough to make us active. Only, choice options have increased. As seen in internet board reply numbers, it is another type of passive consumption. Leisure is measured by "how much per hour" and it is given a set price. If we were given an opportunity to see many Karaoke (and Game rooms, and PC-rooms) all at once, we could probably find uniformity in our play culture.

Audiences reflect themselves on mechanical culture as they sing along to the slow music inside a darkened Karaoke shaded with chicken feather curtains. And through this action anonymous mass is expressed. If culture is to be consumed as commercial mass production, it must be transformed to fit the masses. The sentimental culture that has expanded alongside the development of mass society requires the uniformity and passivism of the masses. And the structures as well as the actions of the audiences of the visual image are clones moving mechanically like equalizers moving to the audio sound (MIOON has experimented this in their 2002 single channel video "Oscilloscope").

This plainly shows spectacularized culture industry mechanism and theater idols. Adorno and Horkheimer have severely criticized culture industry of the mass society in their "Dialects of Enlightenment." According to them, although the modern society has seen technological development, social differentiation, and specialization, the mass culture has become homogenized. Behind this mass culture lays capitalism, a profit generating machine. The strength of capitalism is its ability to subordinate individuals with sweetened culture. Today's technological rationality is the rationality of domination. Thus, even though various qualities of products are offered to the masses, they are pawns for satisfying quantifying rule.

The leisure time of the masses is filled with uniform products of culture industry, but there is nothing for the consumers to actually branch from. Adorno and Horkheimer points out that culture, as a common denominator, inherently possesses tendency to branch out and comprehend itself in order to include itself as an administrative subject. The progress of medium comes from general rule of capitalism. Min Kim and Moon Choi especially emphasize mass culture mechanism of signs through Karaoke machine. The audio cloning technology resembling an orchestra, magnificent visuals, and point evaluation system are all products of signs. And these signs cause automatic response from the consumers. It is possible that this sign, causing immediate conditioned reflex, is the most successful product.

In today's mass culture, the improvement of mass cloning technology is fierce to the point of life and death of the related businesses. However, although entertainment contents seem diverse, in reality they are repetitions of the similar content. And in order to maintain this type of frame,

they become a part of the whole frame. Min Kim and Moon Choi focuses on the identity of the masses which is the end product of the culture industry. The culture industry invites people to innocent uniformity and makes all them to be replaceable by any others. The people in the artwork are replaceable clones that are consumer masses. The culture industry seeks to reproduce people like factory-made standardized goods. And as MIOON shows us, the visual images of good looking men are a part of a culture selling "individuality" to the non-individual masses like street photograph shops that airbrushes people to look like stars.

According to Adorno and Horkheimer, culture industry is an amusement industry. People that seek amusement are the people who seek to escape from their mechanical labor so that they can go back to their laboring work again. However, the production of amusement products and the happiness of the people trying to enjoy them have become mechanical. The culture of the industrial society plays the role of exercising people, barely hanging on to the terms of brutal life. We work to death and we play to death. However, although culture industry seems to present the realization of consumers' desires, these desires are set by the culture industry themselves. Thus, it is the principle of the system that the object of the culture industry to make masses the eternal consumers. However, as seen in this Karaoke Project, despite the fact that the masses do know how out dated this culture is, they still conform to it. And this is the power of the system.