Contemporary resistance to the hybrid of low and high art: the case study of criticisms on operatic pop

Introduction

In this era of postmodernism, the distinction between “low” and “high” cultures and art has become increasingly blurred. Beginning with the pop art movement of the 1950s, artists such as Andy Warhol began the process of breaking down the barriers between high and low art. These artists pioneered the use of popular imagery in artwork; artists used comic book images, Campbell’s Soup cans, Spam, fast food, gas stations, celebrities, mass media, etc. Today, many artists continue to draw upon popular culture as a source for their imagery and artistic ideas. For example, Jeff Koons has been criticized for making art that is often described as “kitschy,” a contradiction in terms for modernists. Takasi Murakami, a Japanese postmodernist, is also well-known for combining low and high art together to create anime images, manga, high couture, and 19th century Japanese Nihon-ga paintings. Such a mixture of “low” and “high” cultures is not exceptional in the world of music. It has become more common and accepted that many classical and pop musicians cross over from their own musical genres to each other’s, often giving rise to a new hybrid genre during the process. However, although the hybrid of culture and art is now everywhere, not everyone welcomes or celebrates the hybridity of low and high art and culture. Much of the crossover or hybrid art or music still tends to be devalued and described only as “unconventional,” “experimental” or “exotic.” Further, this art often faces harsh criticism. This paper is to examine such conservative and traditional viewpoints toward hybrid art in contemporary culture using a specific case regarding the criticism of opera pop singers. I will delve into the specific case of the controversy over the popularity of Katherine Jenkins and Il Divo, musicians of a new hybrid genre of operatic pop – the mix of the musical and stylistic elements of pop music and classical opera.

Background

Operatic pop

Operatic pop, or popera, is a specific sub-genre of classical crossover, a hybrid genre that hovers between classical and popular music, targeted at fans of both types of music. It refers to both classically trained opera singers who sing popular songs, show tunes, or holiday songs as well as pop stars who sing pop songs in an operatic singing style. This new genre was first developed by Kimera, a South Korean-born singer trained in classical opera singing, via her debut single “The Lost Opera” (1985), which consisted of a medley of opera arias set to a mid-80’s form of disco and High N-R-G beats (Wikipedia). Since then, operatic pop, as well as other types of classical crossover genres, has become very popular. Following the success of Sarah Brightman and Andrea Bocelli’s “Time To Say Goodbye,” pop singers who were not originally trained in classical opera singing, including Charlotte Church and Russell Watson, started flooding the classical charts and official classical awards ceremonies.
Katherine Jenkins

Katherine Jenkins is a popular Welsh operatic pop singer who performs across a spectrum of operatic arias, popular songs, musical theatre, and hymns. She was educated and began her singing career in choirs and TV show programs, rather than in the field of classical opera. Six out of seven of her albums reached number one on the UK classical charts between 2004 and 2008, and she sold more than 4 million albums (Wikipedia). After her first album, Premiere, she became the first British classical crossover artist to have two number-one albums in the same year (Wikipedia).

Habanera from Carmen by Jenkins: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d04XDEXoqnk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=d04XDEXoqnk)

Habanera from Carmen by a Classical opera singer, Elina Garanca: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGFUKsv1epk](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jGFUKsv1epk)

Bruno Mars’ Talking to the Moon by Jenkins: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1c3qIXWJo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=T1c3qIXWJo)

Il Divo

Il Divo is an English multinational operatic pop vocal group created by music manager Simon Cowell. The group consists of French pop singer Sébastien Izambard, Spanish baritone Carlos Marín, American tenor David Miller, and Swiss tenor Urs Bühler. To date, they have sold more than 26 million albums worldwide (Wikipedia).

My Way by Il Divo: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9oA_zJafRo](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=s9oA_zJafRo)

Essentialism and elitism in the genre of classical opera singing

One of Jenkins’ most commonly heard criticisms has to do with her lack of “authenticity,” or operatic quality in her voice (Muldowney, 2011). According to a number of critics, without operatic authenticity, operatic pop cannot be considered operatic or called a hybrid with opera (Muldowney, 2011). Indeed, the issue of inauthenticity in art has been addressed in almost every discussion or criticism on any postmodern hybrid genre of art; this undeniably reflects essentialist notions of artistic value of art and music. As in philosophy, politics, sociology, and other types of art, essentialism in music refers to the idea that anything has a certain quality to it, or an essence that exists (Swonson, 2010). It is by this very essence – or by having these certain qualities – that a piece of music can be classified as being part of a specific genre of music. In other words, if a certain piece of music does not possess these qualities, then it cannot be considered a part of that specific genre. Surely, this is one of the traditional, conservative views on art that postmodern artists have argued against as they believe that no artwork or genre of art has a fixed, essential, or permanent identity (Hall, 1996; 598).

The notion of ‘authenticity’ in the world of classical music, particularly with regard to vocal music, does not necessarily mean innate, fixed characteristics or essential quality of the genre that can be identified from an objective standard. The singing style referred to as operatic or classical singing is characterized by a greatly extended range, especially at the top of the voice, and increased volume and projection; since a voice’s capacity of projection, amplification, natural vibration, and volume is usually evaluated from the points of view of individual audience members, it is a very subjective and relative thing to determine if a voice has such capacity, operatic quality (Arizona Opera). Jenkins is often criticized for just mimicking “operatic voice” with a lack of natural vibration and comparatively short breaths compared to “real” classical singers (Hunter, 2010). According to James Hunter, a music critic, her voice “lacks depth of sound, technique and range; [she] is really just a jumped-up pop singer; she has a ‘small voice’, which means there is no power or dynamic range in the voice” (Hunter, 2010). Another critic, Steve Silverman asserts that “[she] hasn’t got the voice or
Operatic pop as hyberreal simulacrum of classical opera

Stylistic elements as "putting a mini-skirt on the Mona Lisa" (Amorosi, 2009). All the added voices amplify and vibrate enough to sound like powerful operatic voices similar to that of "real" classical singers. This is achieved through the hybridization of classical opera's elements with those from popular music. The way this is done is through a formula. First, each song begins with a singer taking a couple lines on his own with choreographed facial expressions full of melancholy; this definitely comes from the intro part of popular boy band music. Then, all the singers sing together in the elevated chorus and reach to a grand operatic climax. Moreover, "operatic sound" in the music itself is produced by the strategically crafted structure employed in each of the songs. In fact, it is more like a formula. First, each song begins with a singer taking a couple lines on his own with choreographed facial expressions full of melancholy; this definitely comes from the intro part of popular boy band music. Then, all the singers sing together in the elevated chorus and reach to a grand operatic climax. In the world of music, pop music is generally recognized as commercially-oriented as compared to classical music; it is primarily designed to entertain the masses and generate profits at the same time rather than to elicit musical appreciation. In between such commercial pop music and "pure" classical music, operatic pop, the hybrid of the two, is also fundamentally commercial in its nature as it is basically attempts to tailor opera music or the elements of operatic pop music (Ginsberg, 2006).

Authenticity or value in art from the elitist perspective does not only mean the essential quality of a certain genre of art but also "purity" of the art; high art with high value should be only for the sake of the art alone, and it should not serve other utilities or functions. This is surely another way of making a distinction between high art, "fine art," and low art, "craft." The "pure" aesthetic value of fine art has been devalued by many contemporary postmodern artists through commercializing not only their artwork but also existing works of "high art." As largely driven by the goal of achieving fame and increasing profits, for example, Salvador Dali presented his work via advertisements and product displays, and Andy Warhol reproduced classical paintings as mass-produced poster prints. Basically, they tried to make art accessible to ordinary people. As Andy Warhol said, "If you look at a thing long enough, it loses all of its meaning." Such attempts to commodify and thus popularize art ultimately intend to deconstruct the art elitist or purist notion of authenticity, essential quality of art. Indeed, in this era of postmodernism, capitalism and consumerism, the distinction between fine art and commercial art is increasingly disappearing. Frederic Jameson has noted, "aesthetic production today has become integrated into commodity production generally" (Jameson, 1991).

In the world of music, pop music is generally recognized as commercially-oriented as compared to classical music; it is primarily designed to entertain the masses and generate profits at the same time rather than to elicit musical appreciation. In between such commercial pop music and "pure" classical music, operatic pop, the hybrid of the two, is also fundamentally commercial in its nature as it is basically attempts to tailor opera music or the elements of operatic pop music (Ginsberg, 2006). In the world of music, pop music is generally recognized as commercially-oriented as compared to classical music; it is primarily designed to entertain the masses and generate profits at the same time rather than to elicit musical appreciation. In between such commercial pop music and "pure" classical music, operatic pop, the hybrid of the two, is also fundamentally commercial in its nature as it is basically attempts to tailor opera music or the elements of operatic pop music (Ginsberg, 2006).

II Divo, an English operatic pop vocal group, is among the operatic pop musicians often recognized by critics as "commercial," with a "corporate product [whose] music originates in the corporate boardroom" (Hunter, 2006). Indeed, they are a true hybrid form of entertainment product fused with sea appeal, stage persona of the good-looking singers in tuxedos, acting (choreographed smiles and poses), film (in music videos), and publicity. As all these are "designed and manufactured" by Simon Cowell, a music producer, some harsh critics even call them "Cowell's Muppet" (Ginsberg, 2006). Moreover, "operatic sound" in the music itself is produced by the strategically crafted structure employed in each of the songs. In fact, it is more like a formula. First, each song begins with a singer taking a couple lines on his own with choreographed facial expressions full of melancholy; this definitely comes from the intro part of popular boy band music. Then, all the singers sing together in the elevated chorus and reach to a grand operatic climax. The chorus section usually starts off with the lead of David Miller, who is acknowledged by many classical critics as the only member of the group who can project an operatic voice similar to that of "real" classical singers. All the added voices amplify and vibrate enough to sound like powerful operatic voices. Some serious critics call such mechanized production of operatic sound "canned music" and refer to this mix of pop and classical musical and stylistic elements as "putting a mini-skirt on the Mona Lisa" (Amorosi, 2009).
Many classical purists’ arguments regarding the lack of authenticity and purity of operatic pop and resistance to the popularity of operatic pop ultimately reflect the concern for the prevalence of simulacra and simulation, a pessimistic view on postmodernism art, culture and society. The idea of simulacra and simulation was first proposed by Jean Baudrillard and has been further discussed and developed by many other theorists on postmodernism. In his Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism, Frederic Jameson asserts that postmodernity has transformed the historical past into a series of emptied-out stylizations, pastiche, which can then be commodified and consumed. People will lose “the past as ‘referent’ finds itself gradually bracketed, and then effaced altogether, leaving us with nothing but texts” (Jameson, 1991); they can no longer understand the art of past except as a repository of genres, styles, and codes ready for commodification. Based on Jameson's perspective, simulacra is the cultural artifacts, signs, or artworks detached from the history and original meaning, or it is the copies of originals that have just been created only for the purpose of becoming mass-produced. As simulacra have become more prevalent in our culture and society, many people have become concerned that they will threaten the differences that have existed between the ‘true’ and the ‘false’, the ‘real’ and the ‘imaginary’.

Many classical music purists insistence on a clear distinctions between classical opera and operatic pop – higher and lower forms of music – implies that they, in fact, perceive operatic pop not only as another new hybrid genre derived from classical opera but also as its simulacrum, which might displace it in the end. These days, not only pop musicians but also many classical opera singers, such as Renee Fleming or Su mi Cho, have become interested in the new genre, moving back and forth in both their own classical field and the pop field; they are often interchangeably called opera or popera singers. Due to the higher profitability in and growing audience preference for operatic pop, today, operatic pop can indeed be seen and heard everywhere from opera houses and concert halls to TV shows. With regard to such increasing popularity of operatic pop, the much deeper, more troubling problem for many classical purists is that operatic pop – the hybrid of pop and classical opera without the essence of the classical opera, “fake version of opera” (Ginsberg, 2006) – might eventually supersed the higher, purer classical opera, the original. According to some serious classical purist critics on Il Divo, Il Divo “highlights the dangers of the whole idea of crossover music” as they attract “more young audiences to the lite, fake version of opera,” which confuses them about what real opera is or causes them to perhaps ignore the opera (Ginsberg, 2006). This perspective regards operatic pop as a depthless, superficial simulacrum of classical opera that has the possibility of becoming truth in its own right: the hyperreal.

Conclusion

Although hybridity has become an increasingly widely acknowledged aesthetic and ethical standard in our culture, art, and society, some people reject it because they fear that something is lost in the blending of previously distinct traditions. In the case of the hybrid of the ‘high’ culture from traditional, classical, and privileged groups of people and popular, mainstream ‘low’ culture, many people still try to secure the alleged prestigious status and esteem of the high culture. As demonstrated in my analysis on the current resistance toward operatic pop, such efforts are presented as the residual distinctions between ‘authentic’ and ‘non-authentic’ art, fine art and entertainment or commercial art, and the real and the non-real or simulacrum. This illustrates how diverse or even opposing values, ideologies, and interests are shaping and constituting our art and cultural movements and discourses, with none of them being the absolute dominant cultural force.

References


This entry was posted in Final Projects on December 9, 2013 by Aena Cho.

Superheroins in Japanese animations – Superhuman and sexual objects

Aena Cho

In her essay "A Cyborg Manifesto", Donna Haraway sees the cyborg – transgressive combination of the organic and the mechanical – as capable of challenging the dichotomy between nature/culture, reality/virtual, organic/mechanic, etc. Particularly, as a feminist, she hopes that the cyborg will liberate the self from the gender categories and gender norms which she explains as an attempt of separation created by the authority in society. At the same time, the cyborg – either humanized machines or mechanized bodies – can be used for further accentuating gender identities, gender performances, sexual desires, and sexual objectification, rather than eroding them.

Many characters in Japanese animations or manga are good examples; particularly, I think that the characters from ‘magical genre’ animations, such as Sailor Moon, particularly represent well the mixed characteristics or identities of cyborgs – which are stronger than normal human beings and sexually objectified at the same time. Sailor Moon is a Japanese manga series written and illustrated by Naoko Takeuchi. The main characters are teenage girls who can transform into heroines named for the Moon and planets; they frequently change themselves from normal and naïve girls to magical warriors who “are supposed to save the earth” from evil forces with an enhanced physical body and supernatural power. The anime has been credited as empowering women and feminism by featuring independent, supernatural females who fight against masculine powers for the first time in the magical genre animations. Meanwhile, it is also criticized in that it still features sexual objectification of female characters, which is typical in many other Japanese animations. All the main characters are ideally feminized through their transformation to the magical superwomen which heavily emphasizes jewelry, make-up, and their highly-sexualized outfits (cleavage, short skirt, and accentuated waist). Also, there are lots of scenes in which they are sexually assaulted or physically damaged by their male enemies.
Such mixed identities of cybernetic or superhuman characters in Japanese animations – as both super heroines who fight against male evils and sexual objects for men with hyper feminine features – might be seen as one of the ways that “sex is put into discourse” (Foucault, 1990) in public and society. In this sense, people who do ‘cosplay’ for such characters might be also seen in the similar way. Cosplay is short for costume play – a subculture of Japanese anime and manga fandom. By dressing up as the characters with such mixed identities, they attempt literally to embody the characters, as way to realize their sexual fantasy.

<References>

This entry was posted in Week13 on November 25, 2013 by Aena Cho.

Hick Hop: Southern sound with an urban beat

Aena Cho

Country music has been a huge influence of hip hop or dance music since the 70s. Particularly, many country music artists have incorporated some elements of hip hop/dance music, mostly rap, to their music. One of the best examples would be “Dirt Road Anthem” (2011) by Jason Aldean, an American country singer. It is definitely a country song with little bit of rapping included.

Since the 90s, a new musical genre, country rap, began to form as a subgenre blending country music with many different elements of hip hop music-style rapping, also known as hick-hop. “Honky Tonk Badonkadonk” (2005) by Trace Adkins, an American country musician, is a great example of transgressing the genre boundaries between the southern country music and urban hip hop. Unlike “Dirt Road Anthem”, it is indeed well-balanced blurring of the two genres; it surely cannot be recognized only as either one of country or hip hop/dance music. A fast up beat of hip hop dance music is placed under the vocal and twangy electric guitar lines, which are definitely country style. In the middle, you can hear sounds of a loud synthesizer and a brief interlude of distorted vocal samples which also allude to hip hop dance music. Actually, the song incorporates not only hip hop dance music but also a variety of sounds including techno and funk. Meanwhile, the lyrics are much closer to those of hip hop songs with various sexual puns. Each element of the songs, vocals, rhythms, lyrics, instruments, and techniques comes from each different genre; once they are combined together; they create a very different, unique genre of music, with new sounds and meanings.

Actually, to me, the song’s music video which also conjoins country music and hip hop cultures was more interesting. It sets in a bar and features men with cowboy style jeans and hats, including Adkins with lots of bedizened female dancers who look like those in hip hop dance music videos. Lights flash around the men and dancers who mingle and dance together. These overtly sexualized scenes definitely refer to hip hop “club” videos.

Music Video: [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNVguvNE7qc](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vNVguvNE7qc)

<citations>
Reworking of old classical rock with postmodern Dubstep

Aena Cho

Zeds Dead is a Canadian electronic music duo from Toronto, Ontario composed of two members: Dylan Mamid, or DC, and Zach Rapp-Rovan, or Hooks (Wikipedia). They explore a diverse variety of genres that amalgamate aspects of electro house, hip-hop, glitch, and drum and bass into their largely dubstep platform.

In “Gimmie Shelter”, they take The Rolling Stones’s music and deconstruct and fragment it, almost beyond recognition. This mix of the two completely different genres of music, the classical rock and roll of the 60s and the complete anarchy of dubstep, is definitely unique, and a very post-modernistic way of reworking the past from a historical perspective. Zeds Dead both captures the original eeriness and seriousness of the original Rolling Stones’s music and multiplies and distorts it by incorporating the echoic, repetitive sounds of their unique Dubstep beats into it. Many aspects of the original are kept, but the guitar, which was formerly viewed as the most important instrument to rock music, has been eliminated and replaced with computerized/digitalized basslines. The end result is Zeds Dead’s own new, unique musical expression. This indeed represents musical dialogic process in which a new musical expression or genre emerges from re-interpretation of old music.

Zeds Dead’s “White Satin” which is based on Moody Blues’s “Night in white satin” is another good example of such musical dialogic process. In this piece, we first come to recognize “the basic grammar” of the piece – which is the original melody of “Night in white satin”. But as it is combined with Zeds Dead’s dubstep beats and sounds, we come to perceive/appreciate it in the new musical context of dubstep.

Dubstep, which Zeds Dead music is based on, is a new, hybrid music genre of the postmodernism era which came out of the modern electronic dance music in the late 90s. The style does not favor four-to-the-floor beats, instead relying on spaced, syncopated percussion that the listener typically adds their own mental metronome to (Wikipedia). It is obviously dependent upon computer technology, particularly digital sampling and distortion. It makes heavy use of other people’s work, deconstructing the traditional concept of “author” as an original creator (Less than 3). Original works obviously are influenced by previous works, and the fact that Zeds Dead does something so unique with a piece that someone else created, speaks to the possibilities of quotation as creation.

<Citations>


Zeds Dead. Gimmie Shelter (The Rolling Stone remixed)

Zeds Dead. White Satin. San City High, 2010
Following the contemporary movement in photography to establish photography as a form of art rather than the mere reflection of reality, many photographers in the fashion industry also have tried to shed the overly commercial image of fashion photography and shifted that towards art. Pictorialism and impressionism has inspired many of them in the early 20th century; and then other more contemporary artistic approaches such as modernism and surrealism also influenced them.

Guy Bourdin was one of those who incorporated surrealism into fashion photography as a way to oppose dream-like fashion photographs which create visual fantasy to which women could aspire. The French photographer who represents the 70s of fashion photography is known as the first to create a complex narrative in fashion photographs which is strange and mysterious; sometimes full of violence and sexuality and simply associate it with a fashion item and model. One of his surrealist and artistic approaches is the use of the double-page spread of a magazine as a structure for displaying his photographs. He aligned models and the human body in accordance to the fixed forms of the double-paged magazine spread. The pictures below are some of the best examples in which the model’s legs are positioned in each side of the fold. This creates a surrealistic and artistic combination of the abstract human form and the rigid and precise geometric form of the magazine. Each image is like a story or a set up of something; a dramatic event, or a dark narrative.
In the 90s, documentary photography, a new style of photography also has begun influencing fashion photography. This style of realism rejected constructed, highly stylized image for “the artless, the unstaged, the semi-conscious”. Juergen Teller is one of those who take such a natural approach. Like Corrine Day and Nan Goldin and the likes who represent art documentation, he also tried to depict a fashion model as an ordinary fashionable person. He particularly emphasizes an intimate relationship with his subjects which is shown well in pictures above. All of the models look very intimate, as if they were at a private unstaged moment.

<Works cited>


Pedestrian street art of Peter Gibson

Aena Cho

I first came know about the Canadian artist, Peter Gibson, aka ‘Roadworth’, from a photo that a friend of mine took during her trip to Montreal. I only considered his work – simple symbols that just aims to surprise the viewers and add unanticipated fun to the spaces where it is drawn on. However, after learning about street art from this week’s readings, I began wondering if the work, which looks nothing like sophisticated graffiti and murals of well-known contemporary street artists, can be also perceived as the ‘street art’ I have learned from the readings – not just a new innovative genre of
visual art but also a form of statement or even subversion, the act of “getting up” and contest for visibility (Irvine, 5) against traditional institutional art and sometimes even the regime of government and law.

Gibson, who is known as a “pedestrian street artist”, first began using the city of Montreal as his canvas in 2001. Hoping to encourage the city to build more bike lanes, he began to paint bicycle symbols with stencils around the streets; mimicking those that are used to designate the city’s official bike paths. He has expanded his work to all the streets, sidewalks, and parking lots in the city; transforming the streets into “giant playgrounds”. Some of the works include road lines with a plug drawn in at the end, a fish skeleton at a crosswalk, tight rope walkers drawn walking on shadows, and even gigantic shoe prints in the middle of the road.

Like many pop artists and street artists who have been influenced through his work, Gibson challenges the conventional notion on the nature, definition, or aesthetic of art – in a way that goes further from pop artists who often incorporate mundane objects into their works and other street artists who incorporate their works into public spaces. Being placed in almost every location all over the city, his works can be seen virtually everywhere and anytime; they are accessible by everyone in the city. Definitely, any form of art would not be more “public” than the “pedestrian art”. Furthermore, as the humorous, open-ended and non-preachy work can be interpreted in many different ways such as on a political or comical level or everything in between that is entirely public in the nature: it is indeed art in public for the public.

Also, Gibson’s work “competes for visibility” which is one of the characteristics of street art as identified by Professor Irvine. Particularly, it is somewhat parallel to “Ron English, Shepard Fairey, Banksy and many others [who] have made explicit subversions of advertising space” (Irvine, 22). As Gibson asserts in many interviews, his extremely ubiquitous, public work is a statement against corporate monopoly on public spaces. Like most other street art, it is also a kind of political or social activism which opposes the hypocrisy implicit in the notion that public space is democratic when in fact it is allowed more to corporations for use than it does to everyday citizens.

<Works cited>


This entry was posted in Week9 on October 28, 2013 by Aena Cho.

Warholian Paradox in Mao's

Although most of Warhol’s art presents extreme repetition and mundane objects, they are never perceived by us in simple ways. In his Death in America, Hal Foster describes Warhol’s art as being full of oxymorons—"referential and simularcral, connected and disconnected, affective and affectless" (Foster, 39). Such so-called “Warholian paradox” is particularly shown well in many of Warhol’s portraits of celebrities. I would like to talk about one of the portraits, Mao (1972).

In 1972, Warhol produced a series of differently-sized silkscreens, all based on the massive portrait of China’s then Chairman, Mao Zedong, which still
hangs at Tiananmen Square. However, rather than reproducing the portrait exactly, he painted abstract or arbitrary colors on blank canvases before running a black-ink silkscreen over this painting. In this way, no two paintings are exactly the same (Cornita, 2011).

As in many of his other portraits, although he used the photographic print as the base, he never utilized all of the “photographic information.” He totally ignored the symbolic conception of the original portrait, Mao’s political power and in China and identity as a communist authority. Instead, by the use of highly contrasting colors and “feminizing” effect – which makes Mao look if he were wearing lipstick and eye shadow – he transformed the macho leader’s propaganda image to a portrait of a foppish middle-aged man. Surely, these paintings, produced without any understanding of the symbolic meaning and identity, the original portrait just seems as a pure commercial product which makes fun of the notorious political celebrity in order to please the consumers, us who are in the opposite side of communists.

Of course, they might be more than just that. According to Foster, Warhol’s use of compulsive repetition suggests “obsessive fixation of the object in melancholy” (Foster, 42). As for Warhol’s series of repetitive pictures portraying traumatic events, disasters, Foster sees that the repetition plays a role to “reproduce the traumatic effect” (Foster, 42). Likewise, the series of Mao’s portraits might be seen as emphasizing the political persona of Mao rather than deconstructing it, or, as Foster puts it, they “wards [the audience] away of the [political identity, meaning of Mao] and opens [them] out to it” (Foster, 42).

Also, the diversity in colors and sizes in the portraits might reflect the idea that our symbolic conceptions of Mao cannot be generalized, which contradicted to what the original portrait was intended – the universalization of Mao’s image as politically authoritative. In the end, we might interpret Warhol’s portraits of Mao as observing, reflecting, questioning, challenging, and ignoring the socially constructed meaning of “Mao” at the same time.

<Work cited>


This entry was posted in Uncategorized, Week8 on October 21, 2013 by Aena Cho.
birdsong while passing under a tree— and the whole composition of all the figures are undeniably those of the famous Kim’s painting.

Plum blossoms around a cottage  a 19th century painting

Listen without Prejudice  a 19th century painting

However, in both of the pictures, what the audience came to focus on and also what Kwon is intended to emphasize are not the original famous paintings but Dongguri, which is featured as the main character in the pictures. According to Kwon, Dongguri’s bright and simple smile represents what people likes to achieve most but find most difficult to have in this harsh, complex modern society; his (or her) highly patterned and simple shape symbolizes the mechanized and simplified aspects of modern society (Liz, 2010). In this sense, he (or she) can be seen as an emblem of the inner world of contemporary ordinary individuals (Liz, 2010). Then, the very absurd, strange combinations of Dongguri and the old paintings inserted in the two pictures can be seen as Kwon’s attempt to connect contemporary individuals to old traditions or history, or “the Real to the Historical” (Kramar, 1962). An important point here, is that Kwon’s emphasis on Dongguri implies that he is mostly concerned with how contemporary ordinary audience perceive and relate themselves to history with their own modern sensitivity and perspectives but not how the history or historical artifacts have been valued and appreciated in art history by authorities. Also, in lots of other Kwon’s works, Dogguri is described as playing or mediating in a bamboo forest or flowers, which was considered as recreation or enjoyment only appropriate for elite people or upper social classes in many old Asian societies, including those of China and Korea. By allowing Dongguri – who represents just ordinary us – to enjoy such an “elegant” leisure, Kwon seems to attempt to bridge our mundane life to high art which is considered to be sophisticated and thus not easily accessible. Indeed, such hybrid and interdisciplinary approach and perspective of Kwon shown in all his works can be seen as parallel to those of lots of well-known pop artists, particularly Rauschenberg who said that “painting relates to both art and life. I try to act in that gap between the two” (Brucker, 2013).

To see more of Kwon’s works:

http://slowalker.net/130048182601

<Works cited>

Simulacra, Hyperreality, and Photoshop works

Aena Cho

According to Baudrillard's writings on simulacra and simulation, simulacrum refers to a representation of something that creates a hyper-reality, becoming more real than the actual object itself. To many of us, it is not an abstract, irrelevant philosophical concept anymore not only because of the popular movie, *The Matrix* but also because of the increase and ubiquity of simulacra in this modern digital world, particularly in form of visual imageries. Indeed, lots of visual representation of these days including photographs and films are not mere reflection or duplication of something. As most of them are digitally – produced, altered, distributed, and consumed with a variety of different technologies, they become distant from their origins. Eventually, these digitally mediated imageries stop being projections of something and grow into their own realities which bear no resemblance to their original, becoming in themselves. They are indeed what Baudrillard calls as ‘simulacra’ which exist regardless of reality.

The most typical example of such simulacra today is photoshopped pictures of celebrities including actors, actresses, and models for advertisements, magazine covers, movie posters, etc. As we all know, many of them are not “raw” but at least somewhat digitally- reprocessed usually by the use of the Photoshop program. The end results are usually “perfect” appearances of individuals with flawless skin and body – which never exists in reality – simulacra. Then, how do these celebrities’ simulacra become ‘hyperreal’, overwhelm, or even replace the reality even if we all know that those simulacra are just made-up imageries?

In these pictures, although we all know that the left one, unphotoshopped Madonna, is the true representation of Madonna, it looks unfamiliar, surreal or even wrong to us. On the other hand, even though we know that the right one is airbrushed and an altered image, simulacrum, it is certainly more identifiable. The enhanced Madonna is what the public recognizes and accepts as the iconic Madonna: it is the real Madonna; the simulacrum overtakes the physical reality. As long as Madonna is always presented to the public as such an enhanced simulacrum, in the eyes of that public, the simulacrum is always her true self.

<References>

Are We All Criminals?

Aena Cho

Given the advent of the Internet and increasingly participatory media culture, remixing and collaboration have become an integral part of our culture. If there is one concept that has suffered more damage than just about anything else as a result of the ongoing explosion of digital postproduction works, it's copyright: the idea that a content creator should have virtually unlimited control over his or her creation. Under current copyright law, nearly every cover song on YouTube, every fan-made music video, every mashup album, every supercut, and every fanfic story is technically illegal (Baio, 2011). In the age of digital remix culture, indeed, intellectual property rights are messy and often lead to complex legal disputes.

According to a digital journalist, Andy Baio, there are almost a million videos on YouTube that contain phrases like “no copyright infringement intended” or invoke the “fair use” clause in U.S. copyright legislation. In the vast majority of cases, these videos are most likely illegal under the current copyright law (Baio, 2011). Whether fair-use principles would apply to these kinds of creations is a more difficult question to answer, since the definition of fair use is notoriously complex (Baio, 2011). Nonetheless, no matter how strict and complex the copyright related laws are, it is now a fact that remixing is now the norm in our contemporary digital culture. Although many of the YouTube uploaders should be regarded as criminals, under the copyright law, what they are doing is still considered as normal in our culture.

Thus, so far, it seems that there is no smart, clear-cut solution yet to solve the legal issue with the user-generated, remixed digital contents. There would always be people and corporations who are only concerned with their economic benefits, no matter if this will eventually prevent the innovative remix culture to grow. However, there have been many approaches to encourage the remix culture to further flourish; one of them is to form and grow a community of the remix culture in order to advocate the culture and works and help the artists to protect themselves from lawsuits or legal threats involving copyright issues.

The best example of that approach is Total Recut. Total Recut is a social networking, video sharing and resources website for fans and creators of video remixes, recuts and mash-ups, where users can submit, view, share, rate and comment on user generated remixed video clips (Wikipedia). It was created in June 2007 as a result of the Masters Degree project of an Irish graduate student, Owen Gallagher (Wikipedia). According to the creator, Gallagher, it is actually intended to find a middle ground between two extremists on both sides of the protection of copyright and the freedom of expression (Jenkins, 2008). Therefore, it encourages the users to not only be innovative but also “appropriate” remixed artworks which respect the authorship of the original source materials that their works are derived from. For example, it provides a tutorials section, ‘Remix Academy’, to teach the users everything they need to know to produce a video remix in appropriate ways. It provides them information and links to literature and websites about remix culture and intellectual property issues. Such a group or community approach will definitely help the remix artists better exercise their right of freedom of expression and continue to produce new work, despite the threats by overzealous copyright owners. Most importantly, as such a website functions as a showcase for remix artists to present their works in public, it promotes the remix culture and will hopefully change the perception of many people that remixes are not creative and interfere with the economic profits of the authors of the original sources – that “the remix culture is all illegal” as Baio put it.

Work cited


This entry was posted in Week5 on September 30, 2013 by Aena Cho.
Semantic Scholar profile for Aena Yi, with fewer than 50 highly influential citations. We don't have enough information about this author to calculate their statistics. If you think this is an error let us know.


Author Archive: Aena Hanson. Fear of Love. Aena Hanson September 7, 2015 Dating. Love is a very complex and complicated thing. Love doesn't have just one meaning, to everyone in this world it has a whole lot of meanings. But to sum up the meaning of Love in little words it's unconditional, understanding,… Read more. Break up Hurt your self Esteem. Aena Hanson May 31, 2014 Dating.