SPECTACLE OF THE MASSES: CHARACTERISTICS OF THE MASSES IN MIOON’S WORKS

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Abstract
The characteristics of masses have been researched widely in many fields, from the social sciences to economics. With the authors’ early work, they focused on the characteristics of “the mass” and its organic characteristics and tried to visualize its spectacular aspect.

Anonymity and Uniformity
Collective tourists, clapping masses, and theater audiences are the main characters and core of our artwork [1]. Masses float and expand collectively, and then at a climax they disappear. We asked ourselves why we continue to work with the “mass” theme. The answer was that “I” am “me” and others are also the masses. So our concerns for the masses/others became a starting point. Our early single-channel video works (oscilloscope, uri, piazza della signoria), or the later video installation works Tourist Project (2003), Collectivism Project (2004) and Human Stream (2005) and our recent work Holoaudience (2005-2006) and Aside of Audience (2008) all seem to speak of relationships between modern day masses and individuals within them. However, within all our works we also inquire into modern society’s “characteristics of the masses.”

In the work Tourist Project we speak of anonymity and collectivism of tourists who move in mass forms within our modern tourist industry. And in Wedding Project we show the abnormalities of wedding culture that mass produce every weekend. To explain further, we make inquiries into the powers that the “industry” possesses manifested in “standardization,” “uniformity,” and “extreme efficiency” of the “masses,” both physically and mentally. We tried also to show how masses move uniformly within the society in which we belong, which has already become socially industrialized; and within that structure, the masses have become “standardized” and “uniform” and move with “extreme efficiency.” So far, we have used mediums such as video and installation. Videos gave “movement” to “pictures” showing our themes, and the installations gave “space” to the “movements.” However, in trying to express a theme, the characteristics of the spectacle of the “masses” and/or “mass movements,” we used video installation. In addition, in our work Holoaudience we used movements of holograms (kinetic movement hologram image) [2].

Holoaudience
The audiences of the “Image Theater” exhibition at Coreana Art Museum [3] were structured like in a traditional Western arena (ca. Hemisphere form, 2.5m Diameter, and 2m Height). Twenty motors behind the structure gave movements to 400 holograms. The visitor faced 400 clapping audience members in the arena as if standing on a stage. The clapping people looked like motion picture characters because they were produced as holograms. In this work, the “others” present in the theater audience smile and clap collectively. However, as subjects receiving the applause, the exhibition viewers experience embarrassment, not knowing why they are receiving it. It is as in modern society where the subject of and the reasons for acclamations are obscure.

Here, the main character is not the person onstage (the exhibition viewer), but the audience presenting ourselves constantly clapping in reality in our modern society. The projected audience members clap continuously without having a show onstage and without knowing reasons for their clapping, and the viewers are unable to identify themselves with this audience (the others) who go on clapping regardless of the viewers’ actions. Thus, “others” are people who are distant beings who can’t be understood or understand us. Ironically, the feeling of discord at their clapping for an unknown cause and the feeling of an old portrait from the holograms results in a feeling of tragedy, not humor. For whom and what do they clap?

Human Stream
In 2008 from September to November, at the 5th Seoul International Media Art Biennale at Seoul Museum of Art, we presented Human Stream. Originally it was shown in 2005 at our solo exhibition in Kunstmuseum Bonn in Germany [4] and was produced by museum curator Sabina Lessmann who had seen our Tourist Project in the February 2004 exhibition at Kunstakademie Düsseldorf in Germany. After a year’s preparation with the museum, the exhibition took place. This exhibition, Human Stream, with 3-dimensional 3.5m feather torso, is an expansion of Tourist Project.
Here, in video, the masses move collectively toward a human icon representing a human being that had controlled the world and still controls the world today; the masses expand until they cover that icon. In the end the feather structure, consisting of the human icon, is blown away and the crowd disappears [5]. The first impression of this work is of power and the way it is revered. The sounds of the people’s heart beats, clapping and electric friction sound maximize the images. In other words, the constant movement of people together with heart beat sounds suggests a busy ant colony that is our society, and the audience is no longer a collection of individuals, but is revived as another auto-generated organism. This organism explodes and collapses like an expanding balloon after rushing towards an end. And then, a new audience is formed again. This work reminds us of Elias Canetti’s “Die Masse und Macht” published in 1960 [6]. The literature from this Jewish author describes characteristics of the “masses” seen in the early 20th century, during countless revolutions and social reforms, including the German Nazi era. Especially in the work Human Stream, an individual can visually read the characteristics of the “open crowd” that Canetti speaks of: "From the point of its formation, a crowd wishes for more people to join them. The desire for growth is the most important characteristic of the crowd. There are no limitations for its growth. An open crowd exists as long as it expands. The moment it stops expanding is the point of its collapse. That is why it accepts everyone possible through its rapid growth. And this is the reason it ultimately falls to pieces” [7].

The stylized form, 3.5 meters high, robs the figures of any individuality. They appear as wire-net outlines, as faces held up by metal frameworks. A plastic webbing that covers them gives the goose feathers a hold by being evenly sewn onto strips. These lend the rigid figures unusual luster and airiness. The surface thus enclosed looks precious, mysterious and animated. While this white magnificence extends across the front, the back remains unclothed. Naked truths in the form of constructions, technical equipment, and cables are set against the beautiful illusion of the feather façade. The white pearly surface serves as a projection screen for a "Human Stream": Women and men, the young and the old – they all are set into motion, and roving. But all the people in this multitude do not only wander, they also line up. Onto the faces of the sculptures new faces continue to appear, made up of many people in miniature.

References and Notes

1. “MIOON” is the artist duo consisting of Moonsun Choi and Minsun Kim, <www.mioon.net>.
4. <www.bonn.de/kunstmuseum>.
7. Canetti [6].

"Human Stream": the English title associates the crowd of people with movement and the flow of water. The comparable Korean term comes from the Chinese and means “Human Mountain” and “Human Sea.” These we associate with massive resources and with stored power. Whether seen with Eastern eyes or Western, the “Human Stream” is comprised of enormous energy that is charged and discharged, setting off a flood of images to which we surrender in wonder.