

Pete Crowley
Karaoke Culture

A karaoke culture has fallen upon us. We have inherited the earth and its innumerable technological components; through this we have sublimated our instincts in a way in which they can be satiated through communication and displays of purported individuality onto a screen. In this way we feel whole. In this way our endless hours at the office or of physical toil make everything worthwhile.

A karaoke bar is comprised of a crestfallen bunch. There are college students with Budweisers in hand wearing eternally gluttonous smiles, obese people who have come to prove to their friends that they can sing and old alcoholics who delight in singing a song from their younger years. They are all aiming to achieve the most mundane of accomplishments: taking someone else's song and temporally giving themselves the illusion that they're making it their own. In this decade of individuation, the individual can create his very own space in the universe. He can broadcast himself across the universe. The most sawing-the-brain-slowly dullard, who is devoid of personality, now becomes a true individual simply because he can post on Facebook that he is now drinking coffee! And if he likes chess, he can join one of the many chess groups of the Internet, play chess online, discuss various moves, gloat about his victories or whine about his defeats.

Communication between individuals in the West has interlocked people more tightly than ever – or this an illusion because it is only through the screen that they're so tightly bound? It seems people have become hyper-social in a way that has deteriorated individual personalities on a broad level. It almost seems as if one does something only so they can write what they are actually doing on a social network website. Such comfort level one must derive from letting everyone know what they are doing at all times. It's as if they were back in the womb; but the womb is the delusional idea that the world has one vast warm tribal soup and sociality is the God to whom everyone must pay tribute. It is an illusion of grandeur to think that in the Age of the Internet, individuality is ripe and thriving when in fact we are amidst a karaoke culture.

One of the first music acts to play karaoke so flagrantly with another music group's recordings and then go platinum with it was Run DMC's "Walk This Way". Vanilla Ice robbed Queen's "Under Pressure". More recently and more subtly Kate Perry purloined The Pointer Sister's "I'm So Excited" with her "I Kissed a Girl". There also is talk of having books online – classics – which a reader can manipulate the novel to their own ends...For instance, Anna Karina chooses not to throw herself under a train and lives a long and happy life thereafter. Or the main character in "Nausea" is saved by Jesus and becomes an evangelical preacher.

One can do what they want today. And why not? Is there anything better one can do? Can one create anymore? With the clutter from ceaseless advertisements, unhinged after the Cold War, and the cyclones of information being vomited at one everyday, one no longer has a stomach for digestion. Therefore one becomes a reflexive being, a mere knee that the doctor hits. Instead of writing a real song after digesting a century of

Wilderness House Literary Review 5/1

modern music, one hears Niko Case and rewrites his song in a slightly varied form or else goes to a karaoke bar to sing it...in this way it becomes one's own.

In truth, there are very few individuals anymore. So many people wear their soul on their sleeve; their soul is an outer layer facade. I had someone tell me a week ago after talking to me for less than a half minute that he was a fan of Aleister Crowley and that he was a Satanist. Is it possible his brain chemistry was altered to such a degree that communication via a social website has taken over social situations in actual living space. Did he see me as someone viewing his Facebook or Myspace profile and therefore feel obliged to tell me of his beliefs? It seems one has turned oneself into the most banal of all legends; the only problem is no one else really cares about anyone else's.

Again, picture the singer at a karaoke bar: she walks up to the microphone, alcohol has deluged the brain enough for decent inebriation, she gets closer, takes a deep breath, and now her minute of fame. Meanwhile, elsewhere around the bar people are talking, drinking and will hardly pay much attention to this girl; many of them are eagerly awaiting for their name to be called so they can sing and have a minute in the spotlight. Everyone is reduced to being temporally famous; the outlet is an immediacy that is available (just as capitalism's results have found an immediate outlet for one's material needs, the Internet does this for the soul). The immediacy of the availability, not for mere physical needs but social as well, deters introspection, rumination, and loneliness which are the precursors to real creativity. A karaoke culture has fallen upon us. All one can do is sing karaoke, pretend the song is theirs or more likely not care, and wait for death.