The Promise of Listening: Contemporary Art's Karaoke

Anastasia Howe Bukowski

Supervisor: Dr. Christine Ross
Second Reader: Will Straw

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Department of Art History and Communication Studies
McGill University
Montréal, Quebec

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Abstract

This thesis addresses the ways in which karaoke, and amateur singing more broadly, have been taken up within recent contemporary art practices. Offering a broad overview of dominant scholarship on karaoke within the fields of musicology, sociology, and sound studies, it enacts a shift in discussion around karaoke as an aesthetic mode anchored in performance to one oriented around conjoined experiences of listening. Contextualized within the affective field of late capitalism, this analysis is mounted through an examination of Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere's "Another Protest Song: Karaoke with A Message" (2008-ongoing), Phil Collins's "The World Won't Listen" (2004-2008), and Candice Breitz's "King: A Portrait of Michael Jackson" (2005). Altogether, this essay takes these artist's engagement with karaoke on terms both social and aesthetic, noting the ways in which their works primarily facilitate experiences of listening for audiences. Charting the ways in which each artwork differentially responds to a question of the social and the political as spaces of relational lack in our globalized present, this thesis offers three possible modes for understanding the role that listening plays in karaoke: as a means of being-together, of being with the self, and as restoring to the world a sense of enchantment. Incorporating the theories of Jean-Luc Nancy, Brandon LaBelle, and Jane Bennett, it develops a definition of karaoke as a relational mode rooted in the experiences of self and other disclosed through listening.

Résumé

Ce mémoire de maîtrise traite de la façon dont le karaoké, une activité qui se définit des amateurs qui chantent en public, s'est récemment élevé au niveau de la pratique d'art contemporain. En présentant une vue d'ensemble du karaoké traitée d'un angle académique à travers la musicologie, la sociologie et l'étude du son, on identifie un changement dans la manière d'en considérer la pratique d'abord comme un mode de communication performatif vers l'expérience auditive qui en découle. Contextualisée dans le champ affectif du capitalisme tardif, cette analyse s'effectue à travers l'étude des ouvrages d'Angel Nevarez et Valerie Tevere, "Another Protest Song: Karaoke with A Message" (2008-en cours), de Phil Collins's "The World Won't Listen" (2004-2008) et de Candice Breitz's "King: A Portrait of Michael Jackson" (2005). Cet essai considère la contribution de ces artistes au karaoké d'un point de vue social et communicatif, en évaluant comment leur oeuvre favorise l'expérience auditive de leur auditoire. En répertoriant la manière dont chaque oeuvre se positionne différemment sur la question sociale et politique qu'est le manque d'espace relationnel de notre ère mondiale, ce mémoire présente trois approches afin de comprendre le rôle de l'écoute dans la pratique du karaoké: l'esprit communal, le rapport à soi puis la restitution du monde comme un univers enchanteur. En y incorporant les théories avancées par Jean-Luc Nancy, Brandon LaBelle et Jane Bennett, on construit une définition du karaoké qui tient du mode relationnel enraciné dans l'expérience du rapport à soi, qui parallèlement se définit à travers l'expérience auditive.

Acknowledgments

For a long time, it seemed as if my "karaoke thesis" was to remain but a running in-joke among my close friends and yet, here it is. Coming to take one of my significant extra-curricular interests seriously as something worthy of academic study – and, indeed, convincing certain others to take it seriously as well – has not always been simple, but it has been absolutely worth all of the hard work. The countless hours I have spent researching, performing, and hosting karaoke have been a true privilege and a pleasure. It is for this reason that I would first like to acknowledge the energy and enthusiasm of all of the generous individuals who came to sing and support during my tenures as co-host of Liquid Karaoke at Bambi's Bar in Toronto and host of Karaoke Soirée at Bar le Ritz PDB in Montreal; you all helped transform this joke into a reality. This work is dedicated to them.

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Introduction

Since its technological migration to the West in the mid-1980s and its subsequent rise in status as a global phenomenon, karaoke has appreciated a necessarily uneasy existence. For many of its North American and European critics, karaoke inspires a particular form of anxiety spanning multiple cultural concerns.[1] A deep affront to the prized musical values of originality and authenticity, it has been spurned as a crass activity reserved for pop wannabes haplessly grasping at recognition and fame. Seen to perpetuate a post-Fordist model of production in which the objects of a mass culture industry are proliferated through the willful and unquestioned consumption of passive consumers, karaoke has been read as evidence of the unprecedented saturation of a "global culture of commonness and copying" at the expense of notions of authorship and invention.[2] As one Toronto rock club booker infamously put it, karaoke is "so anti-music, […] so anti-life," a sentiment echoed in the fact it nominally operates as pejorative shorthand for the aesthetically debased or uninspired.[3] Shrouded in a "context of booze and humiliation" karaoke is understood to be, in a word, *bad*, only ever enjoyed through the comfort of ironic distance.[4]

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[1] For some major critiques of karaoke and its representative culture please see: Dubravka Ugresic, *Karaoke Culture: Essays*, trans. David Williams (Rochester, NY: Open Letter, 2011).; Jonas Ridderstråle and Kjell A. Nordström, *Karaoke Capitalism: Daring to be Different in a Copycat World* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2005).

[2] Karen Tongson, "Empty Orchestra: The Karaoke Standard and Pop Celebrity," *Public Culture* 27, no. 1 (2015): 90.

[3] Quoted in: Rob Drew, "'Scenes' Dimensions of Karaoke in the United Sates," in *Music Scenes: Local, Translocal, and Virtual*, ed. Andy Bennett and Richard A. Peterson (Nashville: Vanderbilt University Press, 2004), 64.; In the above-cited essay, Tongson makes reference to the ways in which "karaoke provoke[s] negative associations with earnest wannabes who could only copy the performances of vocal powerhouses like Mariah Carey and Celine Dion" (85-86).

[4] Bruce Hainley, "The maenads" in *Phil Collins: the world won't listen*, ed. Suzanne Weaver (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), 34.; There has also been an extensive discussion of the ways in which qualitative readings of karaoke intersect with biased understandings of class, nationality, and taste, however these issues plainly exceed the discussion at hand. For further reading, please see: Kevin Brown, "Liveness Anxiety: Karaoke and the Performance of Class" *Popular Entertainment Studies* 1(2) (2010): 61-77.; Kevin Brown, 'Sometimes A Microphone is Just a Microphone: Karaoke and the Performance of Gender," *Journal of Popular Music Studies* 26(1) (2014):64-81.; Rob Drew, "'Once More, With Irony': Karaoke and Social Class," *Leisure Studies* 24(4)

These criticisms, many of which have underpinned a broader discussion of the merits of popular media and its consumption since Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer negatively termed the "culture industry" in 1944, nevertheless emerge at a moment in which karaoke is experiencing near-global ubiquity.[5] No longer limited to the alcohol-fueled reserve of darkened bars and private rooms, karaoke has become a mass – if not completely *mainstream* – activity in the West.[6] As a nightlife staple, it has witnessed popular proliferation in genre-specific formats, including live band, punk rock, hip-hop, and country western-focused karaoke nights.[7] Televisually, amateur singing competitions such as *The Voice* and the recently-concluded *American Idol* continue to gain massive ratings while segments such as *The Late Late Show With James Corden*'s "Carpool Karaoke" are streamed millions of times post-broadcast.[8] As a participatory medium, it has gained increasing mobility, adapted for use in the form of singing apps for smartphones and tablets, lyric videos played on screens in taxis, channels on YouTube and on-demand cable TV services, and karaoke machines developed for home use. Amateur singing has arguably never been more audible.

Why, then, might a practice understood as being painfully "anti-life" equally inspire such widespread engagement? As these critical and consumptive inconsistencies suggest, there are evidently paradoxical pleasures that drive karaoke as both product and process, ones that I will

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(2005): 371-383.; Anthony Fung, "Consuming Karaoke in China," *Chinese Sociology & Anthroplogy* 42(2) (2009): 39-55.;

[5] Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002). Casey MK Lum, *In Search of a Voice: Karaoke and the Construction of Identity in Chinese America* (Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Eribaum, 1996).

[6] Xun Zhou, "Eat, Drink and Sing, and Be Modern and Global: Food, Karaoke and 'Middle Class' Consumers in China," in *Patterns of Middle Class Consumption in India and China*, ed. Christopher Jaffrelot and Peter van der Veer (Los Angeles: SAGE Books, 2008), 177.; The notion of karaoke as something that is "mass" but not "mainstream" is equally discussed in a conversation between Karen Tongson and Sarah Kessler. See: Karen Tongson and Sarah Kessler, "Karaoke and Ventriloquism: Echoes and Divergences," *Sound Studies Blog*, May 12, 2014, http://soundstudiesblog.com/2014/05/12/karaoke-and-ventriloquism-echoes-and-divergences/.

[7] Jason Lee Oakes, "The Filth and the Fury: An Essay on Punk Rock and Heavy Metal Karaoke," *Current Musicology* 85 (Spring 2008): 73-112.

[8] At the time of writing the segment featuring One Direction had been streamed over 69 million times and the segment with Adele had been streamed over 110 million times.

go on to consider at length over the course of this essay. Karaoke is unique as both an entertainment technology and a mode of performance in that it is necessarily incomplete without the participation of the singer. It differs from other amateur media formats such as video photography, self-publishing, and other DIY music genres in that its content is not entirely user-generated and is rather formed through a collaboration with a pre-existing 'karaoke version' of a song, typically produced for purchase by karaoke track manufacturer.[9] Transliterating from the Japanese as "empty orchestra," karaoke in its ideal form offers, as Johan Förnas puts it, a "void" to be occupied by the singer who simultaneously reads and repeats a song's lyrics, filling in for its missing vocal track.[10] The karaoke version, then, is structured by a certain infinitude, continually being activated (and reactivated *ad infinitum*) through the participation of each amateur performer. As a space granting access to singers regardless of their prior training or talent, karaoke may be experienced, as Stephen Royce Giddens claims, "not as content, not as form driven by any particular content, but as practice, as work, as a way of doing," foregrounding the process-oriented value of amateur performance in and of itself.[11]

It is this understanding of karaoke as a way of *doing* which interests me here. Unlike the aforementioned critics who perceive karaoke as a derivative extension of an aesthetically uninspired mass culture, Giddens instead views it as its antidote. Configuring karaoke in forthrightly political terms, he signals what he understands to be its subversive potential as a space disrupting a mass culture built upon repetition and mimesis and the social relations existing therein. Taking a cue from the post-Marxist musicological writings of Jacques Attali,

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[9] These are licensed for reproduction by record labels and while some hosts produce their own karaoke versions, this is generally not the case. Early karaoke videos typically came on Laserdisc and then CD, however now mostly CDG or MP4 files are used.
[10] Johan Fornäs, "Karaoke: Subjectivity, Play and Interactive Media," *Nordicom Review* 15(1) (1994): 90.
[11] Stephen Royce Giddens, "Singing Otherwise: Karaoke, Representation, and Practice," *Studies in Popular Culture* 28(3) (April 2006): 96.

Giddens locates the primary pleasure of karaoke in its production of difference through the work of qualitatively "bad" singing.[12] Qualifying the bad voice as a kind of noise affirming the right to a differential selfhood, he intones its release is a "necessary precondition for a new social ordering that can acknowledge such social differences."[13] Giddens describes the amateur singer as a "believer in noise," arguing karaoke functions as a means towards "making the dream manifest" of reconfiguring the relations of the "multitude of different voices that inhabit karaoke spaces."[14]

This notion of karaoke's "dream" or its "promise" as others have put it, I will argue, is central in understanding its affective productivity as a site for amateur expression. As Rob Drew describes it, karaoke's promise rests in its affordance of a platform "[t]o have a voice and be heard. To delight [yourself] and thereby delight others. To make a song [your] own and dispense it as a gift."[15] Singing the work of another, he suggests, provides rich territory for the open articulation of the self, identifying in the karaoke singer a "capacity to realize desire, cultivate empathy, and enlarge identity through performance."[16] Such an understanding is similarly espoused by Karen Tongson, who underlines the recuperative dimension of an activity that otherwise operates according to an uneasy paradox of originality and aesthetic value. As she writes in her article "Empty Orchestra: The Karaoke Standard and Pop Celebrity":

> 'Feeling it' and making others respond with feeling to your performance, is the promise of karaoke. This structure offers the everyman or everywoman, every fan, the kernel of hope that singing what he or she feels will reap […] praise.[17]

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[12] See: Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, trans. Brian Massumi (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1985).
[13] Royce Giddens,"Singing Otherwise," 102.
[14] Ibid, 103.
[15] Rob Drew, *Karaoke Nights: An Ethnographic Rhapsody* (Lanham, MD: AltaMira Press, 2001), 7.
[16] Ibid., 63.
[17] Tongson, "Empty Orchestra," 100.

What Giddens, Drew, and Tongson each identify is the relational power of the amateur voice, according to the karaoke space as a promise of a renewed affectivity exacted through performance. However, where these authors overwhelmingly focus on the value of singing in and of itself, this paper will specifically examine the value of *listening* as an integral aspect of karaoke as a "way of doing." To begin to address the instrumentality of listening, I will work through an analysis of contemporary artistic practices that have explicitly taken up karaoke – or amateur singing more broadly – as a critical frame of performance and production. Specifically, I will examine Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere's ongoing participatory multimedia installation *Another Protest Song: Karaoke With A Message*, Phil Collins's 2004-7 video trilogy *the world won't listen*, and Candice Breitz's 2005 video work *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. As I will argue, these artworks each reconfigure the artistic spectator in the guise of listener, facilitating an encounter with the bad voice. To this end, I will focus on the ways in which a particular ethico-aesthetic relation held between singer and audience inheres in each artwork, one anchored through the deliberate offering of attention towards and appreciation of the amateur voice. The promise of karaoke, I ultimately suggest, lies not only in being heard but in the act of actively listening to others.

I. On Participation

Writing on Collins's work in *Artforum*, Helen Molesworth registers a canny similarity between karaoke and works embodying the recent 'relational turn' in contemporary art.[18] As she states:

[18] We may credit the notion of the recent relational turn to Claire Bishop's article "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics." Please see: Claire Bishop, "Antagonism and Relational Aesthetics," *October* 110 (Fall 2004): 51-79. However in her 2010 text *Artificial Hells* Bishop restates that recent relational art might be better seen as a part of a broader social continuum spanning the past century, marking a "*re*turn to the social, part of an ongoing history of attempts to rethink art collectively" (3). See: Claire Bishop, *Artificial Hells: Participatory Art and the Politics of Spectatorship* (London: Verso, 2012).

> [B]oth perfectly encapsulate the DIY ethos that has become so pervasive in the last couple of decades. Karaoke is an analogue of sorts to relational aesthetics, inasmuch as it is a cultural practice predicated upon participation rather than contemplation. And just as the rhetoric of democracy hangs around art's participatory modes, so too is karaoke 'democratic' – although the great equalizer here is that everyone is equally 'talentless,' which helps to generate the communal we're-all-in-this-together-and-anything-is-possible effect of karaoke bars.[19]

Molesworth's casting of karaoke as an analogue to relational aesthetics, while brief, is worth considering. First coined by curator and critic Nicolas Bourriaud in his 1998 text of the same name, "relational aesthetics" functions as a loose referent for the approaches to art making in which people are configured as a primary artistic medium. Bourriaud writes of an art that "takes as its theoretical horizon the sphere of human interactions and its social context," identifying in relational aesthetics a drive to counter the dissolution of community and rise of individualism brought about under the regimes of neoliberal governmentality that define post-capitalist societies.[20] In these terms, relational artworks typically take the form of social functions, installations, performances, and other collective "state[s] of encounter" that frequently necessitate the collaboration of a spectatorial public.[21] The central objective of such works, Bourriaud claims, is to reignite an alienated public sphere, recasting the artist in the guise of producer of interactions or intersubjective relations rather than genius creator of coherent aesthetic forms.

A central manifestation of relational aesthetics, one that directly invokes its aforementioned resemblance to karaoke, consists in practices that center around the facilitation of discursive encounters. Some more prominent examples of these include the works of Tino

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[19] Helen Molesworth, "Man With A Movie Camera: Helen Molesworth on the Art of Phil Collins," *Artforum* 46(5) (January 2008): 235.
[20] Nicolas Bourriaud, *Relational Aesthetics*, trans. Simon Pleasance and Fronza Wood (Dijon: Les Presses du Réel, 2002), 14.
[21] Ibid.,18.

Seghal, which are uniquely oriented around conversational interactions with hired individuals roving the exhibition space, Jeremy Deller's 2009 project *It Is What It Is: Conversations About Iraq*, in which the artist travelled across the US hosting informal discussions with members of the general public on the subject of the Iraq War, and Suzanne Lacy's work *The Roof Is On Fire*, which provided a space for at-risk students in Oakland to openly discuss their experiences before an assembled audience.[22] Art historian Grant Kester has categorized Lacy's project and others under the name of "dialogical aesthetics," yet another format subsisting within the broader participatory mantle.[23] Significant to the development of a dialogical aesthetic, he offers, is Jürgen Habermas's notion of the spatio-discursive 'public sphere' developed in his text *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*. Here Habermas situates the conditions of Western participatory democracy post-Enlightenment, describing how the circulation of discussion and rational-critical debate within a growing coterie of public spaces was instrumental in the articulation of a public 'voice' or opinion to which the state has become increasingly accountable.[24] He speaks to the public sphere as a "domain of common concern" in which social and political issues may be rationally deliberated by everyday citizens with the goal of reaching shared consensus and nourishing a "common good."[25] The forms and conditions of public sociality embedded in Habermas's modeling of the public sphere carry with them an egalitarian

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[22] I specifically mention these artists since Jeremy Deller's work was part of the same programming series and Nevarez and Tevere's work, Creative Time's "Democracy in America: The National Campaign."

[23] See: Grant Kester, *Conversation Pieces: Community and Communication in Contemporary Art* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2004).

[24] We, of course, must always treat the 'public' as a necessarily contingent term – one which implies who may or may not be considered a part of a public at a given time for a host of reasons relating to socioeconomic status, racial profile, gender identity, religious background, and many others. Habermas, while noting the fact that the public he discusses was generally limited to property owners, a merchant class, and a growing field of public intellectuals, nevertheless does not do enough to complicate his own usage of the term 'public.' For a further critique, please see: Nancy Fraser, "Transnationalizing the Public Sphere: On the Legitimacy and Efficacy of Public Opinion in a Post-Westphalian World," *Theory Culture Society* 24(7) (2007): 7-30.; Nancy Fraser, "Rethinking the Public Sphere: A Contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy," *Social Text* 25 (1990): 56-80.

[25] Jürgen Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, trans. Thomas Burger and Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1991), 36.

bent, prefiguring the ability to assert oneself rationally and critically as the sole precondition for participation in socio-politics, the result of which are subjects who are "intimately linked in an inter-subjectively shared form of life."[26]

However, in spite of his insistence on the fundamental importance of such an understanding of public intersubjectivity rooted in discursive interaction, Kester necessarily questions and complicates the universality of Habermas's claims. In a critique echoing much of the work of political philosopher Chantal Mouffe, Kester argues that Habermas does not duly bracket the material and social hegemonies to which his notion of discursive competence stems, nor does his envisioning of an open, communicative public sphere grant rhetorical legitimacy to more emotive, gestural, or nonverbal modes of articulation.[27] He claims that Habermas's emphasis upon the value of consensus achieved through reasoned political dialogue only allows for a "communicative exchange with the goal of representing 'self' through the advancement of already formed opinions."[28] As such, Kester warns that this vision of the public sphere limits itself to a space in which "discursive participants may have their opinions challenged, and even changed, but they enter into, and depart from, discursive interaction as ontologically stable agents."[29] Public dialogue, Kester maintains, cannot be properly valued without equally attending to the identities or positionalities of the speakers it engages.

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[26] Jürgen Habermas, "Justice and Solidarity," *Philosophical Forum* 21 (1989-90): 47.
[27] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 113.; Chantal Mouffe has similarly argued that what is needed in resituating our current political public sphere structured around deliberative consensus is the release of political "passions" – collective identifications that are steeped in emotion and are therefore not typically entertained in the space of 'the political.' As she writes, the release of passions is essential in shifting towards a form of respectful yet adversarial politics she refers to as "agonistic plurality." As Mouffe suggests: the goal is to "'tame' these passions by mobilizing them for democratic ends and by creating collective forms of identification around democratic objectives." (147) See: Chantal Mouffe, "Politics and Passions: The Stakes of Democracy," *Ethical Perspectives* 7(2–3) (2000): 146–50.
[28] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 114.
[29] Ibid., 113.

As a discursive medium, dialogical art practices unfold according to an embodied model of epistemology. In contrast with a Habermasian perspective in which participation is recorded through the exchange of reasoned political opinions, the dialogical aesthetic is established through what Kester, borrowing from Mary Field Belenky's feminist study *Women's Ways of Knowing*, refers to as "procedural" knowledge.[30] Procedural ways of knowing are defined by elements of recognition and empathetic identification. Kester defines recognition as an active "[attempt] to situate a given discursive statement in the specific material conditions of the speaker," underlying the necessity of interpreting their communicative insights in light of associated power structures operant within and outside a given arena of expression.[31] Recognizing our interlocutors as dynamic subjects, he argues, is then what gives way to an interrelated element of empathetic identification. Kester describes procedural knowledge as a model of "connection […] grounded in our ability to identify with other people," meaning that the goal of dialogical art is not simply to mutually arrive at some rhetorical finality, but instead to experience an affective bond with our interlocutor that may necessarily alter our subjectivity. As he states: "[i]t is through empathy that we can learn not simply to suppress self-interest through identification with some putatively universal perspective, or through the irresistible compulsion of logical argument, but literally to redefine self: to both know and feel our connectedness with others."[32] As a key component of the dialogical aesthetic, empathetic identification functions as both a means to an end and an end in itself.

To continue addressing the possibility for procedural knowledge to be established through intersubjective exchange, Kester calls attention to the importance of *listening* as an active component of dialogical art practices. Here he takes a cue from the work of Italian

[30] Ibid.
[31] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 113.
[32] Ibid., 114.

philosopher Gemma Corradi Fiumara, who in her text *The Other Side of Language* attempts to dismantle a Western logocentric tradition that has privileged "the assertive tradition of saying" through an acknowledgment of listening as a primary creative practice.[33] Kester, for his part, is specifically interested in listening as a collaborative position to be taken up in a communicative setting. As he writes, "the process of [listening] that occurs in the [dialogical] works I am discussing (involving both verbal and bodily interaction) can help to generate insight while at the same time allowing for a discursive exchange that can acknowledge, rather than exile, the nonverbal."[34] It is through listening – and specifically through adjusting our listening habits to suit the subjectivity of our interlocutor – that we begin to develop ethical models for intersubjective experience. Following Emmanuel Lévinas's concept of "responsibility," Kester argues that listening within the dialogical aesthetic does not take the form of an obligation or duty but instead amounts to an embodied acknowledgement of one's relationship to another, foregrounding an ethic of communication based in corporeal experience.[35]

While Kester primarily centers his discussion of the dialogical aesthetic around artworks that establish a space for communicative expression taking the form of conversations, his ideas are nonetheless useful in approaching karaoke – and amateur singing more broadly – as aesthetic tropes. Crucially, his focus on dialogic artworks' elaboration of rhetorical forms and relationships may expand our understanding of what constitutes legitimate communicative expression and provide a necessary framework for beginning to analyze karaoke as it is taken up by Nevarez and Tevere, Collins, and Brietz. Indeed, as I will go on to claim in this essay, our rethinking of karaoke's popular casting as an inauthentic, or at least aesthetically fraught, form

[33] Gemma Corradi Fiumara, *The Other Side of Language: A Philosophy of Listening* (London: Routledge Press, 1990), 11.
[34] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 115.
[35] Emmanuel Lévinas, *Totality and Infinity: Essays on Exteriority* (Doredcht: Springer Netherlands, 1979).

of semi-public expression rests here in these works' subjective reconfiguration of the spectator as active listener. Beyond merely granting a 'voice' to the amateur singer, their artworks propose a communicative exercise in which listening is oriented as an active, receptive means of being with both self and other. Like Kester who emphasizes the role of listening in establishing ethical models of experience based upon "corporeal" bonds to our interlocutors and "quotidian practices of human interaction," I want to argue that there is a similar form of intersubjective relation staked in the practice of listening to the sometimes bad and often effusive singers that populate these works.[36] However, unlike Kester, who understands the dialogical according to a model of empathetic recognition, I will assert that the listening encounter unfolding in the karaoke space hinges upon the ultimately unknowable status of the singing other, initiating a form of "procedural knowledge" rooted in the ethico-aesthetic promise of *feeling* rather than knowing.

II. Spatializing Listening

Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere's participatory multimedia installation *Another Protest Song: Karaoke With A Message* offers an ideal site to begin grappling with the possible relations that cohere in the positioned act of listening to the bad voice. As I will address throughout this section, thinking about listening demands that we equally think about its dynamic relationship to space. Following Brandon LaBelle's discussion of the ways in which "the relationality of sound […] announces the promise or problematic of being somewhere," I want to argue that Nevarez and Tevere's work directly responds to a crisis of public space, specifically the public park.[37] Addressing the ways in which the park's previous status as a politicized site for community-based activity and felt proximity has been recently supplanted by experiences of

[36] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 123.
[37] Brandon LaBelle, "Acoustic Spatiality," *[sic] – Journal of Literature, Culture and Literary Translation* 6(2) (2012). Available online at: http://www.sic-journal.org/ArticleView.aspx?aid=123.

isolation and disuse, I will outline how their wielding of karaoke as a dialogic modality made of the conjoined acts of singing and listening attempts to reconfigure shared public space as a dynamic site animated by individuals aurally attuned to one another. Along these lines, my emphasis upon the spatial dimensionality of listening forces us to not only contend with the park as a mere container for relations but as a milieu actively willed into being by these performances and the everyday intimacies they cohere. This is a logic that follows Karen Barad's statement that "[t]he point is not simply to put the observer back *in* the world (as if the world were a container and we needed merely to acknowledge our situatedness in it) but to understand and take account of the fact we too are part of the world's differential becoming."[38] To this end, I want to primarily contend here that *Another Protest Song* signals karaoke's promise as a performative modality of co-presence by which a community emerges as it listens, cohering an experience not simply of being-in-the-world but of being-in-*common*-in-a-world. To illustrate this claim, I will first address the specifically sonic dimensions of the problem of public space that Nevarez and Tevere's karaoke events attempt to counter, operationalizing a definition of listening in the process. This will be followed by an exploration of karaoke as it functions in *Another Protest Song*, centering it as an everyday activity rooted in experiences of listening through which we may affectively sense a momentary, spatialized connection to a performative other and from this feel a commonly occupied public space reactivated anew.

[38] Karen Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway: Quantum Physics and the Entanglement of Matter and Meaning* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2007), 91.

II.I Performing In Public

Ongoing since 2008, *Another Protest Song* may be most simply described as a public karaoke marathon.[39] First commissioned by New York-based arts organization Creative Time, the project comprises unique, site-specific events hosted by Nevarez and Tevere at which participants are invited to stand upon a small mounted stage and sing karaoke versions of a suite of over 5000 English-language pop 'protest songs.' These range from overtly political choices by the likes of The Clash, Bob Dylan, and Bob Marley to more thematically nuanced selections by contemporary artists such as Usher, Robyn, and Adele.[40] Prior to each individual performance, singers are asked to offer a statement of what or whom they might be speaking out for or against in the act of song. Examples have varied from more broad-reaching political issues – for example, the Iraq war, climate change, and the automobile industry – to more precise articulations such as the "disregard of building code laws and allegiance to zoning codes [in New York City]," as one singer so wryly expressed.[41] Such statements function to affix a personalized frame of reference to each song choice and performance, transforming the karaoke version into a determined act of political enunciation that may be critically heard by a publicly assembled audience. Performances shift in their political content and aesthetic cadence over the course of each individual event, some of which have lasted for nearly twelve hours at a time.[42]

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[39] My analysis of Nevarez and Tevere's work is based upon archival footage of its initial performance as part of Creative Time programming in Brooklyn and Queens, an audio recording of its staging at MoMA, photographic documentation of its Creative Time and Nuit Blanche performances, and an interview I conducted with both artists in November 2015. Special thanks to: Creative Time, Sarah Kennedy at MoMA, Mark Rivard at the University of Southern California, and Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere for their help and warmth.

[40] Nevarez and Tevere are constantly adding to their karaoke songbook and, furthermore, they stated to me in interview that they tailor the song list available at each event in order to fit the perceived interests of each potential participant group.

[41] These first three examples were stated by participants in the MoMA staging of *Another Protest Song.* The latter was stated by a participant in the Prospect Park event. To access footage from the Prospect Park and Corona Park-Flushing Meadows events, please see: https://vimeo.com/83551119.

[42] The Nuit Blanche performance went on for twelve hours, the two initial stagings in Brooklyn and Queens lasted six hours each, and the performance at MoMA went for three hours.

A critical dimension of *Another Protest Song* has been the locational variety of its hosting. Recent iterations have generally tended towards staging the work in public art institutions such as New York's MoMA and New Museum (2013 and 2015), New Haven's Artspace (2015), and the Institute of Contemporary Arts in Philadelphia (2016). Collectively, these spaces conform a broadly fixed participatory plane convening a more determined art world audience, reflecting the ways in which a nomadic "event" economy less sensitive to the particularities of place has become a pervasive feature of the contemporary art world.[43] This said, the inaugural performances of the work were hosted over successive days at Brooklyn's Prospect Park and Corona Park-Flushing Meadows in Queens (Fig. 1) in September 2008, deliberately chosen locations whose sociopolitical significance will be expanded upon shortly. In light of the thematic scope of this essay, I will limit my current analysis to the performative and locational conditions cohered by these two original editions.

In terms both social and aesthetic, Nevarez and Tevere's decision to host a karaoke event in public space, outdoors and under the sun, destabilizes its typical performative frame. As I have already noted, there is a generally perceived non-relation between karaoke and publicness. While it has grown in its ubiquity, karaoke has maintained an association with spaces that Drew qualifies as being "neither-here-nor-there": darkened bars, hotel lounges, resorts, cruise ships, private rooms that are typically paid at an hourly rate.[44] Even as karaoke has been described as a relationally-productive medium, able to "expand the social life world" of pre-existing publics and "conjure a group out of a room full of strangers" alike, there is still a prevailing sense of it as

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[43] On biennial culture and the recent "event" economy that has become status quo in the contemporary art world, please see: Jorinde Seijdel, ed., *The Art Biennial As Global Phenomenon: Strategies in Neo-Political Times* (Rotterdam: NAi Publishers, 2009).; Lotte Philipsen, *Globalizing Contemporary Art: the Art World's New Internationalism* (Santa Barbara: Aarhus University Press, 2010).; Jonathan Harris, *Art, money, parties: new institutions in the political economy of contemporary art* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2004).
[44] Drew, "'Scenes' Dimensions," 66.

an activity separate from the public sphere and the everyday lives of communities.[45] For the most part, the broad relations forged within the karaoke space remain spatiotemporally circumscribed, uniting individuals with common interests in singing and listening who may return to a stable space presided by an performative ethic of acceptance and security week after week.[46]

Conversely, the participants animating *Another Protest Song* are for the most part individuals who have collectively happened upon a space, intentionally or not, remaining there for an indeterminate length of time. Its iteration at Corona Park-Flushing Meadows, for example, witnessed the congregation and participation of local families, Creative Time employees, children, pedestrians, cyclists, and a number of women who had recently completed a charity run, racing bibs still pinned to their t-shirts (Fig. 2). These are people who we may assume, by and large, bore no previous relation to one another and may never encounter one another again, yet have nevertheless decided to remain assembled and partake in a common activity. Reviewing the event's documentation, it is clear that in spite of the exceptionally public nature of the setting and the aesthetic vulnerability involved in singing to an audience of strangers in broad daylight, these are scenes cohered through mutual experiences of excitement and pleasure (Fig. 3).

However, before we go on to consider the politico-aesthetic potential of Nevarez and Tevere's recasting of karaoke's social habitus within public space, it is useful to have a better sense of the performative dimension of the work. Clad in baggy cargo shorts, a loose-fitting navy blue polo shirt, a navy blue baseball cap, and a pair of navy blue Crocs sandals, a middle-aged

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[45] Casey M.K. Lum, "Karaoke and the Construction of Identity," in *Technicolor: Race, Technology, and Everyday Life*, ed. Alondra Nelson, Thuy Linh N. Tu, and Alicia Headlam Hines (New York and London: New York University Press, 2001), 130.; Drew, *Karaoke Nights*, 83.

[46] As several have discussed, there exist a series of unwritten "rules" or "social contract" that govern the karaoke space. These are specifically related to responding with enthusiasm with each performer, not abusing one's time on stage, not selecting the same song as a previous participant, and not singing with overt frequency. For a deeper explanation, see: Rob Drew, "'Anyone Can Do It': Forging A Participatory Culture in Karaoke Bars," in *Hop On Pop: The Politics and Pleasures of Popular Culture*, ed. Henry Jenkins, Tara McPherson, and Jane Shattuc (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 254-270.

man takes to a low stage set up alongside a footpath encircling one of Prospect Park's many waterways (Fig. 4). Facing a small television mounted around waist height and angled upwards, he shuffles back and forth before a small audience made up of fellow parkgoers, Creative Time employees, and Nevarez and Tevere themselves, loosely gripping a microphone connected to a small amplifier system. As the backing track for "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?," The Clash's 1982 paean to romantic indecision plays, he begins to sing, following the song's lyrics as they play from a video on-screen. In tune with his casual appearance, his rendition of the song is equally loose. He keeps up steadily with the song's phrasing but his delivery is all over the proverbial sonic map, flatly shouting many of its lyrics. Passersby stop for a moment to take in the rendition, some displaying bemused looks of incredulity, while others continue on their ways, completely unresponsive to the scene. Entering the song's indecisive refrain – "Should I stay or should I go now?/Should I stay or should I go now?" – he begins punching the air with his left hand, grinning broadly while he bobs his head and shimmies to the beat.[47] The crowd cheers.

Performances akin to the one I described above are what largely make up each edition of *Another Protest Song*. While a number of what might be described as 'traditionally talented' individuals take their turn to sing, much like at any karaoke night, the majority of the voices sounded here are delectably amateur in their capacities. When listening to these participants, we are often addressed by the voice that fails to support the original text, deviating from the phrasing, pitch, and tone of a song's initial recording. Speaking technically, we listen here to what we might term *bad* singing. There is, of course, an acknowledged risk involved in the act of revealing the bad voice through song, a form of display that typically does not seep into habitual

[47] The Clash, "Should I Stay Or Should I Go?," by Topper Headon, Mick Jones, Paul Simonon, and Joe Strummer, on *Combat Rock*, Epic Records PE 37689, 1982, $33^{1/3}$ rpm.

milieus of public communication. However, in spite of its spatiotemporal reconfiguration of an activity generally associated with the darker recesses of American nightlife, *Another Protest Song* maintains karaoke's operative function as a space characterized by, as Rob Drew describes, "an enormously flexible aesthetic, receptive to as wide a range of voices as speech itself […]. Vocal ability is ultimately less important in karaoke than the ability to *feel* others out."[48] As Drew's comments imply, there is a certain safety expected or implied in the karaoke space, one in which participants may risk aesthetic exposure in the course of social gain. According a public stage to the bad voice, I want to argue that Nevarez and Tevere's project does not so much alter the performative stakes or aesthetic terms of karaoke but rather engages an experiment in its social possibilities, challenging the dialogical receptivity of its participants and opening them up to an aurally redefined park space.

II.II Public Problems

As I have mentioned already, *Another Protest Song* was first commissioned as part of the Creative Time programming series "Democracy in America: The National Campaign," which sought to query the status of performative democracy in the US leading up to the 2008 election.[49] While there are certainly reasons to be critical of Creative Time's increasingly corporatized identity and the extent to which several of its other projects have been seen to have made a spectacle of participation and public engagement, it is nonetheless important to take seriously the political thrust of its curatorial framing in order to examine Nevarez and Tevere's taking up of

[48] Drew, *Karaoke Nights*, 49. Italics my own.
[49] Hosted in venues across the country, the programming series featured site-specific projects such as Mark Tribe's performance *Port Huron Project* and Steve Powers's *The Waterboard Thrill Ride*, a larger exhibition at New York's Park Avenue Armory, and a sequence of "Town Hall" conversations held in various major cities. For more information please visit: http://creativetime.org/programs/archive/2008/democracy/index.php.

karaoke as a particular performative modality.[50] As project curator Nato Thompson wrote in the press release for "Democracy In America":

> Increasingly, the experience of an activated public space, a space full of political vitriol and community participation, is a rarity. We could point toward moments of political protest or rallies, but whatever happened to the spaces of regular activity? The place where folks are not forced into political positions but instead can participate in forms more casual: BBQing, lounging, strolling, making out. [….] We can point toward the growth of discussion on the Internet as a sign of an emerging virtual public space, and certainly there is some validity to this. But these online moments nonetheless leave us feeling empty. They leave us with a hankering for tangible physical proximity. [….] [A]s the privatization of cities across the country limits what can be done in terms of expression, we find the idealized 'town square' more theoretic than actual.[51]

In approaching the dilemma that Thompson lays out here – that of the public experience of being-in-common as "more theoretic than actual" in the present – we return to the pivotal role that space plays in the dominion of felt sociopolitical relations that I laid out at the beginning of this section. It is important to note that here Thompson accords an equally important status to the kinds of everyday activities that make up our shared lives and the "tangible physical proximity" they provide as he does to properly political speech in activating public space and cohering communities. What he seems to be arguing is that publicness as a sensed being-in-common-in-a-world is neither a simple matter of being outdoors in a common space nor the exclusive concern of explicitly political organization but rather may be initiated through more casual modes of encounter. Reading Nevarez and Tevere's project within this context, karaoke comes to form one of the quotidian avenues of expression Thompson names as essential in recapturing our shared sites of community-building.

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[50] Claire Bishop has openly critiqued Creative Time and the spectacularization of participation. Please see her talk "Participation as Spectacle: Where Are We Now?" delivered as part of Creative Time's "Living As Form" exhibit.
[51] Nato Thompson, "Increasing Public Space with Ice Cream, Karaoke and Magic," *Huffington Post*, September 16, 2008, http://www.nevareztevere.info/includes/docs/2008-huffpost09162008.pdf.

It is politically telling that the kinds of public spaces that Thompson calls on to be reactivated, lest we regain a sense of felt proximity, are those in the model of the "idealized town square," specifically the public park. As cultural anthropologists Setha Low, Dana Taplin, and Suzanne Scheld have written, parks are "urban public realms that attract, support, and express cultural diversity," serving as vital settings nourishing the "social sustainability" of urban communities.[52] In their ideal form, parks function as a supreme manifestation of the local, offering "places where emerging citizens learn about coexistence, cooperation, and tolerance through activism and participation" and the safe engagement in a wide variety of activities in which city dwellers might become present to one another.[53] Specific to the case of New York, a city integrating an extensive system of landscaped commons, parks have served as informal settings for the coming-together – as well as the public contestation – of diverse social and ethnic groups, providing accessible sites for vernacular leisure. While perhaps a mere coincidence in planning, it is not insignificant that *Another Protest Song* was first hosted at Prospect Park and Corona Park-Flushing Meadows, spaces respectively designed by Frederick Law Olmsted and Robert Moses, two urban architects whose visions have had a profound impact upon the social structure of the city.

In their analysis, Low, Taplin, and Scheld opine the current lack of performative encounters taking place in New York's public parks using terms similar to Thompson.[54] They attribute parks' waning status as "vital settings for the fundamental social activity of a democratic society" to their failure to accommodate and support diverse community-oriented

[52] Setha Low, Dana Taplin, and Suzanne Scheld, *Rethinking Urban Parks: Public Space & Cultural Diversity* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2005), 209.
[53] Ibid., 208.
[54] Ibid.

events, specifically ones associated with music and performance.[55] This social hindrance they suggest, is the result of broad-scale legislative and managerial trends that have prioritized private stakeholders over public interest. Examples of these include the aggressive policing tactics introduced during Rudy Giuliani's mayoral tenure, including the questionable charge of "unreasonable noise" that deterred many minority performance groups, such as Puerto Rican *rumbero* troupes that typically met in Central Park, from convening publicly.[56] Low, Taplin, and Scheld equally attribute these socio-acoustic losses to the increased presence of police officers in urban parks from the mid-90s onwards and ramped up public surveillance post-9/11, which have limited the genres of informal gatherings that may be comfortably hosted in public, particularly those involving eating, drinking, playing music, and dancing.

These sociopolitical encroachments have equally had ramifications at the micro-locational scale of Nevarez and Tevere's work. In the particular case of Prospect Park, private conservationist groups have quashed community efforts to diversify the park's landscape to better host cultural and music festivals and other mixed-use activities.[57] Administrative changes have equally afflicted Corona Park-Flushing Meadows, where private management groups have proposed plans to redevelop portions of the park for commercial use. Since both Queens and Brooklyn are racially and economically diverse neighbourhoods, boasting considerable Black and Hispanic populations, such legislation limits the forms of recreation available to park users and has an impact upon which residents feel welcome convening in public. While I do not want to suggest that these spatio-political issues were explicit in Nevarez and Tevere's decision to host *Another Protest Song* in these two specific locales, they nonetheless make up the particular

[55] Ibid., 210.
[56] Arturo J Aldama, Chela Sandoval, and Peter J García, *Performing US Latina and Latino Borderlands* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2012), 457.
[57] Low, Taplin, and Scheld, *Urban Parks,* 37.

sociohistorical backdrop of an artwork seeking to respond to the question of what kinds of socio-acoustic relations may be sought out in public space at our present moment. Foregrounded here is the disappearing of an opportunity to listen through and encounter the individuals and activities that make up an active, local urban life.

Nevarez and Tevere's convening of the typically disassociated fields of karaoke and publicness is thus critical to our understanding of the spatial formatting of the work. Applying the always-already of karaoke as an intimate mode of performance bearing its own modes of encounter belonging to the "neither-here-nor-there" to a public space that Thompson and Low, Taplin, and Scheld characterize according to a relational, acoustic scarcity, *Another Protest Song* necessarily alters and enhances the social and ethico-political conditions of possibility of the latter. Through the invocation of amateur singing, I want to argue that the park may become *more public* in its spatial and acoustic dimensions alike, momentarily thrusting into collective audition what previously may have been unsaid and unheard. Nevarez and Tevere's deliberate situating of their work in the park thus indicates a genuine faith in the capacity to reactivate the urban commons as a physically and affectively shared space through the conjoined acts amateur singing and listening. This desire resonates with Kester's call to develop alternative dialogical models undoing "the effects of cultural or symbolic capital among privileged speakers or of hegemonic models of language and rhetoric," calling forth new means of communicating and listening within a reactivated urban commons.[58] In spite of the dismay in contemporary *politics* articulated in each performance as a personalized statement of protest, the airing of such private grievances in shared outdoor space portrays a hope in reclaiming the public stages of *the political* through the experiences of listening afforded by the participatory medium of karaoke, if

[58] Kester, *Conversation Pieces*, 113.

only for the duration of the work.[59] In sum, I want to argue that these understandings of the ideal status and social possibility of the park function to categorize it as an example of what philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy has termed listening "beyond comprehension," a sensory model of relation I will redefine in light of what theorist and sound artist Brandon LaBelle has termed "acoustic spatiality." Together, these paired concepts help us think through sound as a critical plane through which attachments may emerge, articulating the ways in which everyday activities foregrounding listening help commonly orient us towards and activate our shared surroundings.

II.III Listening Beyond Comprehension

Before moving forward with a deeper analysis of Nevarez and Tevere's work and the particular contribution it makes to our understanding of a spatialized experience of listening, it is essential we lay out an operational definition of listening itself. In his illuminating text *Listening*, philosopher Jean-Luc Nancy makes a case for listening as a primarily ontological rather than epistemological faculty. Distinguishing the act of listening from its functional partner "hearing," he writes of it as a "reopening beyond comprehension (of sense) and beyond agreement or harmony (*harmony* [entente] or *resolution* in the musical sense), that necessarily signifies that listening is listening to something other than sense in its signifying sense."[60] This rendering of listening as something other than a site of knowledge acquisition or signification thus places an

[59] While there is no agreed upon definitional distinction between 'politics' and 'the political' in contemporary humanistic discourse, Chantal Mouffe provides a useful reading of both terms. As she describes, 'politics' is the empirical field that constitutes the practices through which rational political order is reached whereas 'the political' concerns the ways in which such power is symbolically organized. As she writes: "If we wanted to express such a distinction in a philosophical way, we could, borrowing the vocabulary of Heidegger, say that politics refers to the 'ontic' level, while 'the political' has to do with the 'ontological' one. This means that the ontic has to do with the manifold practices of conventional politics, while the ontological concerns the very way in which society is symbolically instituted." (8-9) See: Chantal Mouffe, *On The Political* (London: Routledge, 2005).

[60] Jean-Luc Nancy, *Listening*, trans. Charlotte Mandell (New York: Fordham University Press, 2007), 32.; Some other essential volumes on listening include: Susan Bickford, *The Dissonance of Democracy: Listening, Conflict, and Citizenship* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996).; Kate Lacey, *Listening Publics: The Politics and Experience of Listening in the Media Age* (London: Polity Press, 2013).; Jim Drobnick, ed., *Aural Cultures* (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004).

emphasis on the sensory aspects of sound. For Nancy, listening is nothing short than the means by which we sense our relationship to a world made up of sonorous spaces, structured by an infinite and ever-shifting series of acoustic resonances. Listening is what enables a brushing up to the perceptible edges of the worlds we inhabit. As he writes:

> To be listening is always to be on the edge of meaning, or in an edgy meaning of extremity, and as if sound were precisely nothing other than this edge, this fringe, this margin—at least the sound that is musically listened to, that is gathered and scrutinized for itself, not, however, as an acoustic phenomenon (or not merely as one) but as a resonant meaning, a meaning whose *sense* is supposed to be found in resonance and only in resonance. [….] Meaning consists in a reference [*renvoi*]. In fact, it is made of a totality of referrals: from a sign to a thing, from a state of things to a quality, from subject to another subject or to itself, all simultaneously. Sound is also made of referrals: it spreads in space, where it resounds while still resounding 'in me.'

However, for all of the elegance of Nancy's notion of the dynamic sonority of place, his theory is subject to a kind of material fluidity that never seems to congeal into an experience or understanding of space or relation as substantial, cohesive forms, always existing in the frenetic constancy of rebound and return. Accordingly, I want to argue that his understanding of listening as a spatialized practice may be more usefully put in conversation with Brandon LaBelle's notion of "acoustic spatiality" in order to draw out the greater material potential of Nancy's ideas. For LaBelle, our attunements towards the sonic are what render space lively to us, arguing that the multisensory experience of listening is what "announces the *promise* […] of being somewhere."[61] He goes on to state:

> sound operates as an *emergent community*, stitching together bodies that do not necessarily search for each other, and forcing them into proximity for a moment, or longer. Such movements bring forward a spatiality that is coherent and inhabitable, that opens up spaces for sharing, as well as being immediately divergent and diffuse, that is, temporal and multiple, noise. Acoustic spatiality in other words forces negotiation by being constituted with the feverish energies of so many interruptions.[62]

[61] LaBelle, "Acoustic Spatiality." Italics my own
[62] Ibid.

As he expresses here, it is specifically through listening to sound – something always in motion, flexible, and spherically enveloping us – that we are brought into union with surrounding individuals, events, and non-human things, an experience that sets in motion the places in which we momentarily, materially reside. It is this relational aspect of acoustic spatiality, one which LaBelle notes "opens up for unique forms of inhabitation, of gathering," which is so critical to our understanding of the "special conditions of dwelling" that are maintained through the spatialized acts of listening facilitated by Nevarez and Tevere's work.[63]

Going a step further than Nancy in addressing the role of sound as a socio-spatial "hinge," LaBelle's work helps us to acknowledge the political value of the ways in which sound may not only attach bodies in space through a felt rebounding of sense, but unite them in productive configurations rendering space "coherent and inhabitable."[64] To this end, both theorists' understandings of the unpredictable, world-confirming capacities of listening become helpful in teasing out the role that it plays in the karaoke encounter structuring *Another Protest Song*. Here, I want to argue that the political efficacy of Nevarez and Tevere's artwork must be understood not in terms of the intended content or meaning of the speech acts structuring each karaoke performance, but rather as a function of the sensory apprehensions brought forth in the act of listening to the voices made audible within the work. Listening here to the bad singing voice is, I will wager, what reactivates the acoustic spatiality of the park anew, bringing forth a perceptible experience of being-in-common-the-world in the fluid sonority of each karaoke version. Much like Nancy's description of the "sonorous place" as being always set in motion, "taking place [….] [as] sound resounds there," the karaoke space is similarly characterized by a

[63] LaBelle, "Acoustic Spatiality."
[64] Ibid.; LaBelle has repeatedly referred to sound as a kind of social "hinge." For more see: Brandon LaBelle, "Sound as Hinge," in *Esemplasticism: The Truth is a Compromise*, ed. TAG (Berlin: Club Transmediale: 2010), 40-42.

constant unfolding and opening up of sonic resonances and reverberations that nonetheless materialize into momentary, yet no less significant, experiences of public togetherness.[65]

II. IV Listening Presence

Returning to the case of *Another Protest Song*, Drew's previously noted charge of karaoke's "flexible aesthetic" forms a significant performative rejoinder to this understanding of listening as a spatialized mode of relation. Listening to the sheer number of performances volunteered within *Another Protest Song*, which vary markedly in their quality and tonality, we are placed into a veritable world in motion populated by a vibrant cast of participants, otherwise known and unknown to one another. Chanced with the possibility of occupying the event as both performers and spectators alike, the work comes to be defined by a continual cycling of bodies who become present to one another for indeterminate amounts of time. This sense of proximity is deeply felt in nature, both through the intimacies carried in physical closeness and the cacophonous "co-presence" corporeally sensed in the energetic rebounding of voices who sing and cheer as means of affectively acknowledging the other's engagement in a common activity within a shared space. In its sonorous presence, the work is thus aesthetically inconsistent and materially diffuse, defined not only by the differential qualities of the voices that make it up but also the gaps and silences between each performance in which the broader sonic life world of the park perceptibly rushes back in. In this sense, Nevarez and Tevere's project returns to the park a sense of the divergent sonic forces and interruptions that characterize the acoustic spatiality of public milieus as well as an opportunity to become acquainted with the individuals responsible for differentially contributing to and animating a common sonorous environment in listening.

[65] Nancy, *Listening,* 17.

In light of the porousness of its formal boundaries and the diffuse nature of sound, *Another Protest Song* thus asks of its listeners to preferentially attend to the singers before them, thereby engaging them in a specific spatio-acoustic configuration in which, as LaBelle puts it, "acoustic spatiality may suggest new structures within the built environment specifically for locating zones of sociality within the hyper-movements of contemporary life."[66] This said, in spite of the karaoke space's ability to construct a select network of relations among its participants, as a sonorous event it equally integrates those who do not actively partake in it as singers or intentioned listeners. As the sounds of the karaoke versions indiscriminately waft through the park's acoustic atmosphere, they reach spaces animated by residents engaged in completely different activities, indifferent towards but no less aware of the event as it occurs. For example, documentation of the work reveals many parkgoers walking by without registering any physical or affective acknowledgement of the scenes of amateur performance, keeping on their ways with completely straight faces. Even as they do not respond to *Another Protest Song* in its locational unfolding, they are nevertheless forced into sensory contact with it, a fact echoed in Nancy's reminder that, "sonorous presence *arrives*—it entails an *attack*, as musicians and acousticians say. And animal bodies—the human body, in particular—are not constructed to interrupt at their leisure the sonorous arrival, as has often been noted."[67] Conversely, we may be sure that many who sang over the two days of its initial hosting did not plan in advance to attend Nevarez and Tevere's event, eventually drawn in simply by nature of the enveloping presence and movement of the amplified amateur voice that indiscriminately permeates across public space, the borders and edges of the event being constantly reworked according to its aural

[66] LaBelle, "Acoustic Spatiality."
[67] Nancy, *Listening,* 14.

perceptibility.[68] Nevarez and Tevere's work operates in a constant state of spatial unfolding, situating the karaoke environment as a porous fold within the public milieu of the park, sonically outlining a shared space within a greater space. The promise of listening as it operates in *Another Protest Song* subsists in an opportunity to feel the world that we are already in to its fuller spatio-acoustic texture, rendered differentially active through performance itself.

However, as I gestured at earlier points in this essay, listening as an experience of being-in-the-world begets not only a form of resonant spatial awareness, but is intensely relational in scope. Nancy's definition emphasizes listening as a site of sensory apprehension rather than an explicit conduit towards explicit signification or meaning, foregrounding it as a critical means of orienting ourselves towards the human others. He underlines this position by arguing for the ways in which listening offers access to an experience of "contemporaneity" in which we may sense our resonant attachment to another without ever truly *knowing* them or their particular performative intent.[69] Listening thus conforms a radically unfixed form of being-in-common which is established through the uncertain openness of the ear, always unfolding or "taking place," remaining within a purely felt register of recognition. As he writes:

> All sonorous presence is thus made of a complex of returns [*renvois*] whose binding is the resonance or 'sonance' of sound, [….] one might say there is a *contemporaneity* of the audible. This presence is thus always within return and encounter. It *returns* to *itself*, it *encounters* itself, or, better, occurs against itself, both in opposition to and next to itself. It is co-presence or, again, "presence in presence" if one can say that. But insofar as it does not consist in a being-present-there, in a stable, fixed being, yet is not elsewhere or absent, it is rather in the rebound of 'there' or in its setting in motion, which makes it the sonorous place, a place-of-its-own-self, a place *as* relation to self, as the taking-place of self.[70]

[68] This is not to say that what is perceptible through listening is made meaningful to us, but at least that it commands an awareness of something taking place beyond our given or immediate present.
[69] Nancy, *Listening,* 16.
[70] Ibid.

Nancy's notion of co-presence as a form of resonance, cohering in the perpetual movement or rebounding of sound between the subjects and objects of listening is key in coming to an understanding of the listening publics that are loosely oriented within Nevarez and Tevere's work. As listeners in the karaoke space of *Another Protest Song*, a performance environment ruled by the amateur form, we are publicly treated to the voice in its unrefined, raw expressivity. While these performers are ostensibly filling in for a missing vocal track, re-performing each song in an act of temporary completion, their typically off-key and out of sync renditions tend to stand apart from their musical accompaniment, becoming all the more audible to us in their noticeable aesthetic imperfection. As such, while we listen, it is the voice as sound that reaches us most directly, physically penetrating us through the ear canal and vibrating throughout our bodies, an experience most visibly reflected in the joyful responses to singing offered in the clapping, smiling, and cheering along of the event's audiences. In this sense, listening allows for a corporeal apprehension of a being-in-common-in-a-world staked in the act of *feeling* the singing other, their vocal emissions resounding in and through us.

Nancy's definition of listening as an experiential stage for corporeal interconnectedness, however, still does not fully comprehend the social productivity of *Another Protest Song*, which as an artwork does not merely seek to gather active bodies in space, but to do so in a meaningful way. As made palpable in the work, this "contemporaneity of the audible" does not amount to a simple sharing of space, but serves as felt grounds for apprehending or and sensing one's part of an emergent public or community of sorts.[71] Taking up karaoke as a casual mode of participatory encounter, Nevarez and Tevere's events form a public cadre activated through the joyful meeting of strangers who are correspondingly willing to sing and listen to one another in turn. While as a performative modality karaoke perhaps inheres to Nancy's understanding of sonority as a kind of

[71] Nancy, *Listening,* 16.

relation existing "beyond comprehension," offering no significant means of knowing or affectively relating to other participants in excess of what might be evidenced in their song choice or performance style, these attachments sensed in listening may momentarily materialize into more politically substantial configurations here. Making differentially audible those who commonly access these public events, and from this putting into concert a new set of relations staked in the resonances channelled between the performing and the listening body, *Another Protest Song* recalls the park's possibility as a space activated by a complex of casual encounters. It is through such forms of everyday communication and activity, Low, Taplin, and Scheld maintain, which "parks [become] fertile social spaces where many such associations [can] take place" and functionally succeed in bringing people together.[72] Speaking in aesthetic terms, LaBelle articulates that "[a]coustic spatiality instantiates the making of a new crowd […] dramatically informed by the restless, associative and hinging procedures of the ear."[73] As I want to finally contend, a sense of being-in-common-in-a-world is at work here as we performatively attend to one another, furnishing from listening an experience of access to the potentially unknown others with whom we collectively activate the socio-acoustic texture of public space.

Returning the amateur voice in all of its deficient glory to the crucial political milieus of the past and recapturing a sense of amateur musical performance as "a daily adventure," Nevarez and Tevere's work constitutes a space in which the power and possibility to simply listen is apprehended as a means of sensing our being in a commonly occupied, acoustically-activated world.[74] If, as Nancy suggests, the subjective co-presence of listening is built upon the constancy of a sonic "return," in which the self "identifies itself by resonant from self to self, […] one in the echo of the other," these karaoke events necessarily intensify such a configuration, conjuring

[72] Low, Taplin, and Scheld, *Urban Parks,* 210.
[73] LaBelle, "Acoustic Spatiality."
[74] Attali, *Noise,* 140.

a public or community which emerges while it listens.[75] As a temporally and spatially ongoing work, *Another Protest Song* is defined by a constant sonorous modulation at the hands of both the vocal particularities of each performance that intermingle with the broader sonic life world of the park, returning to public space a palpable sense of encounter and activity. If karaoke is experienced and animated according to an "ongoing temporal or rhythmic pulse," then *Another Protest Song* necessarily draws upon the public promise of this performative channelling of social energy, giving way to an embodied awareness of the being-in-common of a local other whose voice resounds within and through us over time and space.[76]

III. Listening to Our Selves

So far I have proposed an operational definition of karaoke as an aesthetic practice in which a sensed co-presence or being-in-common-in-a-world emerges while we listen. Speaking to the terms specific to *Another Protest Song*, Nevarez and Tevere's work foregrounds the productivity of listening in its *public* dimensionality, signalling how our performative activation of and aural attuning to the acoustic spatiality of our shared milieus of everyday activity may accord us significant material insight into our common, unfolding being-in-the-world. However, as a profoundly social participatory modality, I equally wish to argue that karaoke's promise lies in its fundamentally *private* dynamics. Inasmuch as the conjoined acts of singing and listening animating the karaoke space may operate as means of coming to the other, they may correspondingly offer means of becoming intimate with the self. What I want to primarily contend here is that karaoke, as Johan Förnas has put it, is a mode of performance in which "one can gain some active status by […] listening to oneself," inhering in the experience of listening

[75] Nancy, *Listening,* 9.
[76] Brian Kane, "Jean-Luc Nancy and the Listening Subject," *Contemporary Music Review* 31(5) (October-December 2012): 445.

an embodied sense of one's own subjective embodiment in motion and in making.[77] This claim will be elaborated through an analysis of British-born, Berlin-based artist Phil Collins's 2004-7 video trilogy *the world won't listen*, an artwork that is similarly composed of karaoke performances defined by the bad voice that compels a particular experience of listening. Following a brief introduction to the work, I will first seek to situate Collins's undertaking of the karaoke version as a mediated response to the sensory intensity and alienation characterizing everyday life in metropolises of the Global South. This will be followed by an exploration of karaoke as it functions in *the world won't listen* as a unique space for dialoguing with and becoming present to the self, centering listening as a powerful experience in which we may affectively locate our own resonant subjectivities as they are being worked and re-worked in the act of amateur performance.

III.I Setting A Scene

Prior to addressing these claims, it is crucial we describe Collins's work and the logistical features that trace its production. First exhibited at the Dallas Museum of Art in 2007, the series comprises three individual 56-minute recordings of fans of the 1980s British rock group The Smiths singing karaoke versions of the sixteen songs on their 1987 compilation album *The World Won't Listen* in tracklisted sequence. The video trilogy, made up of *el mundo no escuchará* (2004), *dünya dinlemiyor* (2005), and *dunia tak akan mendengar* (2007), was respectively shot in Bogotá, Istanbul, and Jakarta and Bandung, involving the participation of local curators, production crews, musicians, bar owners, and concert venues, in addition to the volunteer

[77] Fornäs, "Karaoke," 17.

karaoke singers themselves – the "brave ones" as Collins has termed them.[78] As a matter of locational sensitivity, Collins's call for participants was intensive in practice, necessitating a working and diversified knowledge of native media channels and organizations that was facilitated by his active collaboration with local arts institutions.[79] This involved launching citywide poster campaigns (Fig. 5), flyering in bars and social clubs, and making evening radio calls and morning television announcements, all in hopes of attracting "the widest possible draw for the project, and to try at least to offer it to people all over [each] city, every age, every background."[80] In these terms, we may see Collins assuming the role of "producer" as much as artist, immersing himself in the civic spaces in which he worked for months at a time over the course of planning and production.[81]

Those responding to Collins's participatory call were invited to makeshift studios erected in locations including basement bars, rock and roll night clubs, and, perhaps most significantly, the Merdeka Building in Bandung, host of the 1954 Asia-Africa Conference and a critical site of organization for Indonesia's Non-Alignment Movement. Offered a beer as remuneration for their participation, each performer was given the opportunity to sing before Collins and his camera. This voiding of his work of the kinds of audiences that otherwise inspirited the shared sites of performance cohered in *Another Protest Song* exacts a unique dialogical orientation within the karaoke space, one whose significance I will speak to momentarily. However, in spite of the socially ominous portent of performing before an empty room, Collins's participatory call was

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[78] Phil Collins, artist's acknowledgements to *Phil Collins: the world won't listen*, ed. Suzanne Weaver (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008), ii.; each work title translates "the world won't listen" into the local language of each production site.

[79] In each shooting location, these works were facilitated through the collaboration of a number of different groups and institutions. For example, the Bogotá project was first commissioned by the artist-run center La Rebeca, and featured the musical collaboration of the rock band Los Alterciopelados who recorded the backing tracks.

[80] Phil Collins and Suzanne Weaver, "Don't blow your own horn: Phil Collins and Suzanne Weaver in conversation," in *the world won't listen*, 89.

[81] Claire Bishop and Francesco Manacorda, "The Artist as Producer," in *Moving Image*, ed. Omar Kholeif (London: Whitechapel Gallery, 2015), 82.

nonetheless a significant success. This is reflected in the number of singers each multi-day filming stint attracted – upwards of and sometimes over 100 – as well as the wide demographic breadth highlighted in the works themselves.[82] Populating the trilogy's final cuts are small groups of adolescent males (Fig. 6), young mothers (Fig. 7), thirty-something men (Fig. 8), one participant anonymously donning a Mexican *luchador* mask (Fig. 9), and even a young boy who sports a pair of cat-eye sunglasses and a visor detailed with a pair of pointed ears (Fig. 10).

It must be noted that for all of the logistical particularities and networks of relations framing the production of *the world won't listen*, these contextual elements necessarily fall out in its final cut. Unlike the "overtly located subjects of most documentary work," the singers and the spaces they animate here instead conform to karaoke's inscrutable position as "neither-here-nor-there."[83] This locational obscurity is nowhere more present than in the formal properties of the recording environments constructed by Collins. Appropriating the kind of stock imagery that typically serves as a backdrop for the lyrics that flash across the karaoke monitor, singers are documented performing before scenes of palm trees, tropical islands, snow-capped mountains, Mediterranean beaches, and the desert of the American southwest. The alienable *anywhere* of these generic settings is further amplified by the hazy quality of Collins's camerawork and the harshness of the studio lighting, resulting in a visual aesthetic that is resoundingly amateur in scope, defined by low-resolution capture, glare from background lights, and an oversaturated colour palette. For the most part, the performers appearing in each segment wear nondescript, hip Western clothes, seemingly dressed for no occasion in particular. While a few sport The Smiths

[82] For example, 132 people booked appearances in Jakarta and Bandung. When arriving on shooting days, each participant was given 20-30 minutes to sing any songs of their choosing.
[83] Liz Kotz, "Live Through This," in *the world won't listen*, 59.; On the politics and ethics of documentary spectatorship, please see: Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2008).; as well as Jacques Rancière's chapter on the "The Intolerable Image" in *The Emancipated Spectator* (New York: Verso, 2011).

tees or display a distinct 80s rock and roll style – think leather gloves, Mod-ish haircuts, and babydoll dresses – the dominant uniform sported by both genders is the colloquial staple of jeans and a tee shirt.

In short, *the world won't listen* is made up of environments that do not identifiably belong to any particular contemporary time or place, aesthetically invoking Christine Yano's description of karaoke as a "floating world" bearing a complex and often uneasy connection to mainstream sites of sociocultural relation.[84] These are all scenes that are significant in their visual evocation of standard clichés of paradise typical to tropical postcards or 1960s-era B-movies, otherwise posing kitschy foils to the geographical hyper-specificity of their global shooting locations. What's more, the constructed nature of these locales is affirmed through Collins's low-grade shooting style and studio set-up, which draw attention to their flat, two-dimensional presence as mere backdrops. While I will go on to argue that these karaoke spaces are fruitful in their provision of a place for subjective recuperation of the intensities of the everyday, they deliberately fail in their materialization of a concrete elsewhere. The joint promises of paradise and the possibility of escape remain pure imagined here, as *the world won't listen* constantly draws attention to – and, arguably, embraces – its own aesthetic shortcomings.

In performance, we are similarly treated to a sense of these singers in terms of their lack of social or political contingency. Appearing in sequence of the album's original track listing, each unique karaoke version is presented as a single unedited take, separated only by short cuts to black following every performance. Shot from the waist up before the backdrop of a tropical sunset (Fig. 11), the fourth singer appearing in *el mundo no escuchará* quickly fixes his hair as the opening guitar riff of "Bigmouth Strikes Again" starts to play. At this point he breaks into a nervous bounce and begins to air guitar along to the backing track, silently mouthing the

[84] Christine Yano, "The floating world of karaoke in Japan," *Popular Music and Society* 20(2) (1996): 1.

upcoming lyrics – "Sweetness, sweetness I was only joking" – while anxiously darting his eyes from side to side.[85] He wears a red tee shirt and a long beaded necklace that bounces across his chest as he jerks his limbs and bobs his head, a half-beat too slow. Shifting his gaze from Collins's camera, dead in front of him, to the karaoke monitor to his left, he begins to sing. His delivery remains in tune with the original, but is ebulliently off-key, singing in a tone much flatter than Morrissey's haunting falsetto. He pumps his fists while delivering some of the track's more joyfully brutal lyrics, timing them to the downbeat of the intonation that "by right you should be/ bludgeoned in your bed," before closing his eyes and air guitaring once more during the song's bridge. Over the first chorus, he flubs the lyrics, singing of Joan of Arc's "hearing aid" melting rather than her "Walkman," a mistake that he hastily corrects, all the while grinning, eyes lit up expressively. Directed towards the imaginary viewer beyond the camera he whinges a few high "Bigmouth la-la-la-la-las" over the rest of the performance, glancing back at the monitor in order to make sure of his lyrical timing, occasionally launching in too soon and the immediately stopping himself, laughing and swinging his arms all the while. At the song's end he looks down once more, raising his hand to his mouth as if to gasp, beaming out at the makeshift production studio beyond the frame before the shot fades to black.

While his performance is buoyant, expressive, and exhibits a profound and palpable sense of joy, these are ultimately not feelings that stem from Collins's taking up of karaoke as a space of sensed being-in-common. Seeing as the immediate karaoke spaces animated within *the world won't listen* are void of the kind of active listening audiences that make up *Another Protest Song*, this singer's and others' experiences of performative affect are instead the result of an individual union with the self that is sensed through an internally-directed form of attention, something I

[85] The Smiths, "Bigmouth Strikes Again," by Morrissey and Johnny Marr, on *The World Won't Listen*, Rough Trade ROUGH 101, 1987, compact disc.

will discuss below in greater detail. At the start of every performative segment, Collins's lens lingers over each participant for the pre-emptive couple of seconds before they begin to sing. During these brief moments participants awkwardly occupy the center of the frame, sometimes frozen and averting eye contact with the camera, holding their breath as the uncomfortable silence of the sound studio rings out around them before the backing track starts to play. More than a mere revealing of the anticipatory shyness and nerves that often affectively precede the karaoke performance, these are instants that convey and confirm their performative isolation and vulnerability, as they appear almost shocked into their private, partitioned surroundings. As such, these amateur singers as they appear in Collins's trilogy are, in a sense, always already alone. Even in their participatory roles as aesthetic collaborators and the knowledge that their performances may potentially reach a future institutional audience, these amateur singers perform primarily for themselves. Beyond themselves, only Collins and the promise of an imaginary other exist here as possible listeners.

III.II Going Solo

These sites and conditions of production contouring Collins's particular taking up of karaoke are essential in comprehending the aesthetico-political productivity of the documented performances themselves. In fact, what I want to argue matters most in *the world won't listen* is specifically what remains unseen and unheard to its eventual audiences as a finished artwork, upending karaoke as a modality for explicitly public dialogue or articulation and instead invoking its fundamentally private fecundities. Where Nevarez and Tevere's work is activated by the resonant mutuality staked in the act of listening, reanimating public space as a site for a sensed being-in-common, Collins's project instead removes its participants from the shared spaces of the everyday, introducing them to the indistinguishable anywhere of the makeshift

karaoke studio. To this end, his work foregrounds karaoke as an activity in which performing and listening operate as resoundingly private acts initiating a space marked by a necessary lack of relational immediacy. In this sense, the "world not listening" must be taken seriously as a precept for understanding the performances captured in Collins's work. Beyond a nominal invocation of its musical source material, listening – or its lack thereof – becomes a geopolitical basis for the karaoke performance as it functions for the amateur singers documented here.

At first glance, *the world won't listen*, replete with its stock backdrops, garish studio lighting, and socioculturally-specific participants who nevertheless appear in the guise of globally indeterminate citizens, seems to be mounting a "perverse de-amplification of politically charged subjects and situations."[86] However, as Bruce Hainley reminds us, "[s]etting up a situation – anywhere, not just in a war or strife zone – in which people might find relief from the onslaught called 'contemporary life' requires some dynamic political manoeuvring."[87] Following Hainley's remarks I want to maintain that the "floating worlds" animated by these amateur singers cannot be understood as being in some way separate from or indifferent to their productive contexts, but rather must be read as an explicit response to and extension from them. Bogotá, Istanbul, Jakarta, and Bandung, while all subject to their own particular sociopolitical histories and infrastructural developments, are settings we may characterize as beset by certain everyday experiences of disorder that come with dwelling in a metropolis of the Global South. If *Another Protest Song* is responding to the issue of public acoustic spatiality in its scarcity, *the world won't listen* conversely addresses the matter of publicness in terms of a sensory overabundance. Commenting on the process of working in these locations, Collins states:

> Bogotá is a city where paranoia is firmly cemented into basic social relations. Armed guards at Starbucks. The taxi driver gives you a code when he picks

[86] Bishop and Manacorda, "Artist as Producer," 84.
[87] Hainley, "The Maenads," 37.

> you up, and then hilariously (or sensibly; you be the judge) you give him the last four digits of your phone number, so he knows you're not going to kidnap him. And away you go, into this seemingly endless, chaotic metropolis. Istanbul and Jakarta have this same sense of scale and unknowability. [….] Jakarta was completely flooded. There were outbreaks of dengue fever, and around 70 percent of the city was affected by the floodwaters. So there I was […] trying to organize a Smiths karaoke in the middle of a major disaster. In a funny way, it fitted the mood quite well.[88]

While it is critical we question the extent to which Collins's description is representative of a shared experience of place beyond his own, this personal account nevertheless bespeaks certain things about the intensities and anxieties that underwrite the quotidian spaces inhabited by those he documents within the video trilogy. For their part, Bogotá, Istanbul, Jakarta, and Bandung are all incredibly *noisy* cities punctuated by the converging sonic detritus produced by their population densities, intense traffic, curb-side economies, industrial activity, and the cacophonous ring of cultural media including religious loudspeakers and music blaring from homes, vehicles, and storefronts.[89] These dynamic, roaring soundscapes call to mind the status of the city as an environment indexed by a plethora of co-existent and occasionally opposing social groups and forces, each wielding sound in one form or another as a means of announcing a purchase on public space. To encounter such an acoustically saturated spatiality as an aspect of the everyday is to personally inhabit a form of embodiment in which one's own private space is constantly being directly and uncontrollably confronted by the noise of a public world. As Salome Voegelin states, "[s]ound is noisy when it deafens my ears to anything but itself. […]

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[88] Collins and Weaver, "Don't blow your own horn," 89, 94.

[89] On the history of sound in Colombia and the role of noise in urban space please see: Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, *Aurality: Listening and Knowledge in Nineteenth-Century Colombia* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014.; For greater references on urban noise and the development of subjecthood in the developing world please see: Laura Kunreuther, *Voicing Subjects: Public Intimacy and Mediation in Kathmandu* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2014.; Brian Larkin, *Signal and Noise: Media, Infrastructure, and Urban Culture in Nigeria* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).; Emily Thompson, *The Soundscape of Modernity* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2004).

Noise of the everyday […] takes possession of one's ears by one's free will and against it, isolating the listener in the heard."[90]

Writing on the particular case of Cairo, another sonically blistering city, Charles Hirschkind describes how certain media technologies have been adopted as a means of inhering counter-experiences of listening otherwise not afforded by the constancy of the noise pollution defining the urban environments of the Global South. He attributes the increasing popularity of taped religious sermons in the Egyptian city to their provision of more private spaces for listening. Serving as an acoustically mediated response to the amplified chaos of competing Islamic oratorical messages that outline a "public space [that] offers little resonance for the kind of subjectivities predicated on the silent internality of belief," Hirschkind argues that widespread consumption of religious cassettes has activated a counter-public of listeners linked through an embodied, differential experience of the aural assault of the urban soundscape.[91] Similarly, I hope to argue that Collins's taking up of karaoke as a performative modality opens up a "sensory environment from which the subject draws its bearings" according to an alternative experience of listening.[92] In these terms, I want to maintain that the self-reflexive experiences of listening afforded by the karaoke performances in *the world won't listen* yield an opportunity for these participants to regain a sense of their own resonant subjectivities above and beyond the din of public noise punctuating the everyday.

As a final note prior moving on to an analysis of Collins's taking up of karaoke as an exercise in private listening, it is crucial to say a word on the locational significance of his particular decision to stage re-performances of songs by The Smiths. Discussing the band's

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[90] Salome Voegelin, *Listening to Noise and Silence: Towards a Philosophy of Sound Art* (London: Bloomsbury, 2010), 44.
[91] Charles Hirschkind, *The Ethical Soundscape: Cassette Sermons and Islamic Counterpublics* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2006), 126.
[92] Hirschkind, *Ethical Soundscape*, 125.

popularity and frontman Morrissey's iconicity, a number of authors and filmmakers have noted their exceptionally global reach, particularly among the broader *Latinidad* represented in *el mundo no escuchará*.[93] While some have chalked this up to the sonic similarities between Morrissey's quivering tenor and falsetto to voices common to Latino genres such as Mexican *ranchera* music, Karen Tongson has noted for her part the "imaginary" aspects of the band's music that might better explain its international appeal. As she writes, "Morrissey potentially functions as an objective correlative for the sentiments of displacement and incongruity" that might be shared by its fans in milieus defined by a certain sociopolitical remoteness and isolation – those very spaces and individuals to whom the world is indeed not listening.[94] Commenting upon the emotional appeal of their brooding rhythms, Morrissey's yearning delivery, and their lyrical recounting of urban desolation and despondency, she argues that their music affectively evokes the "compulsion to find something else and go someplace else."[95] Speaking to the fans appearing within the trilogy, Collins identifies a similar desire for a renewed anywhere in their collective performances. As he describes, "most people sing in a way well beyond the frame, the songs becoming very explicitly and self-consciously a love letter to elsewhere," recalling the affective intensities of the urban everyday to which the spaces animated by the karaoke version offer momentary relief.[96]

III.III Knowing Me

It remains, of course, impossible to truly know the specific motivations for any of these performers' attachments to The Smiths or their desires to sing, but the experiences of socio-

[93] See, for example: William E. Jones's 2004 documentary *Is It Really So Strange?*, Kerri Koch;s 2008 documentary *Passions Just Like Mine: Morrissey and Fan Culture*, and Chuck Klosterman's article: "Viva Morrissey!" in *Best Music Writing*, ed. Matt Groening and Paul Bresnick (Cambridge, MA: Da Capo Press, 2003), 66-73.
[94] Karen Tongson, *Relocations: Queer Suburban Imaginaries* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), 171.
[95] Ibid.
[96] Collins and Weaver, "Don't blow your own horn," 94.

spatial "displacement and incongruity" that Tongson calls attention to are nonetheless worth taking seriously. To reiterate the hypothesis I have been examining so far, the karaoke version as it operates within *the world won't listen* forms a politico-aesthetic rejoinder to the affective intensities and subjective disorientations endured in navigating the acoustic spatiality of Bogotá, Istanbul, Jakarta, and Bandung. To this end, the work does not offer a remedy to these experiences of sensory disjuncture by cohering new communal attachments through listening, but rather refuses the possibility of a reemergent sociality altogether, activating a site of sonorous respite in which these performers may for a moment be with alone themselves. Faced with the aural excesses and alienations of the everyday, animating a performative space in which these singers may intimately sense and re-occupy their own vibratory embodiments through the coterminous acts of singing and listening. However, while being given a space to be alone, these fans are also singing for a public made up of Collins and his small production crew and an unknown, eventual viewing public who will see their performances as part of a finished artwork. In this sense, while the work necessitates for these performers a move further *inside*, offering them a private moment of sensed personal intimacy in which to freely sing, their participation simultaneously enacts a shift *outside*, allowing them a chance to perform for a public who may listen beyond the immediacy of the live.

The ontology of listening in Collins's work is one that directly flows from what LaBelle describes as an experience of singing as an act that not only resounds *out* from the body, but first and foremost *within* the body. As he writes, singing "draws the energies of the body outward, to fill the chest, to ring the mouth, and to flood the nasal cavity with vibration. The entire body seems to stand up, resounding with tonality."[97] To perform alone in the makeshift karaoke

[97] Brandon LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth: Poetics and Politics of Voice and the Oral Imaginary* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 49.

studio, a space in which these participants may access a rare experience of listening to their own voices amplified back to them as they sing, is to feel the body in its vibrant materiality. *the world won't listen* is thus unique in that it offers what I want to describe as an opportunity for listening in an almost 'doubled' sense: both to sense one's own embodiment within the private recesses of the body as one sings and to re-encounter the voice as it is electro-acoustically amplified and concomitantly rebounded back by the karaoke system. If we are to follow LaBelle's claim that karaoke functions as an "[announcement] of a true or unique self […] that might only come alive there explicitly through a lyrics that enables and frees, at times, a closeted self," then listening serves as the doubled sensory web through which we become more closely acquainted with our own embodiments as they are revealed to us in real time.[98]

Nancy's account of listening offers a perspective similar to LaBelle's. He writes of the self-reflexive listener as possessing a "sonorous body," maintaining that listening as a world-making activity beckons a "turning inward" towards the sensory matrix of the belly.[99] As he describes, the body that comes to itself in listening is a:

> sonorous, sonorized body [that] undertakes a simultaneous listening to a "self" and to a "world" that are both in resonance. It becomes distressed (tightens) and it rejoices (dilates). It listens to itself becoming distressed and rejoicing, it enjoys and is distressed at this very listening where the distant resounds in the closest.
>
> That being the case, that skin stretched over its own sonorous cavity, this belly that listens to itself and strays away in itself while listening to the world and while straying in all directions, that is not a "figure" for rhythmic timbre, but in its very pace, it is my body beaten by its sense of body, what we used to call its soul.

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[98] LaBelle, *Lexicon of the Mouth,* 50.; Other sources on listening as an embodied process include: Stacey Sewell, "Listening Inside Out: Notes on an Embodied Analysis," *Performance Research* 15(3) (2010): 60-65.; Andrea McCartney, "Soundscape Works, Listening, and the Touch of Sound," in *Aural Cultures*, ed. Jim Drobnick (Toronto: YYZ Books, 2004), 179-185.; Gascia Ouzonian, "Embodied Sound: Aural Architectures and the Body," *Contemporary Music Review* 25(1-2): 69-79.
[99] Nancy, *Listening*, 3.

The listening subject for Nancy is one whose sense of "self" is continually being constituted through an attendance to the sonority of the body and the sensory reverberations that emerge from within. It is this "sense of body" as a resonant space in which we listen to ourselves listening and from this gain a sense of embodied selfhood that I want to argue is critical to the performative modality cohered in Collins's work. However, here I equally want to argue that Nancy's definition does not go far enough in capturing the materiality of listening foregrounded in *the world won't listen*. The listening body for Nancy is a "sonorous cavern" without organs, "[needing] a great deal of air space in order to sound," as Adrienne Janus has put it.[100] The form of subjectivity that emerges in listening to and through the body he describes is thus one that never materializes in a substantial sense, refusing to take account of the messiness of corporeality. While Nancy's account of the sonorous body is certainly useful in unpacking these performers' self-reflexive means of coming to the self through listening, this embodied process is ultimately far more complex than his theorization allows, cohering an experience of the body in making defined by a sensory abjectness or intensity.

Returning to our figure in the red shirt singing "Bigmouth Strikes Again," we can be sure that some of the pleasure he displays in performing is linked to the possibility of briefly occupying the imaginary role of the idol and the articulating the emotional content of the song and its lyrics as if it were his own. Being treated to the shifting affective tenor of his rendition, which begins in hesitancy and becomes steadily more ecstatic, sometimes teetering at the brink of control, this is a pleasure that we may equally qualify as stemming from his experience of listening to and sensing the self. Belting the song's chorus, he beams out towards the camera, his eyes comically lit up as if to convey a near-incredulity in face of the exuberance of his rendition.

[100] Adrienne Janus, "Listening: Jean-Luc Nancy and the 'Anti-Ocular' Turn in Continental Philosophy and Critical Theory," *Comparative Literature* 63(2) (2011): 198.

Writing on the relationship between vocality and subjectivization, Adriana Cavavero writes that "the voice belongs to the living; it communicates the presence of an existent in flesh and bone; it signals a throat, a particular body. [….] The voice is always unique, and the ear recognizes it as such."[101] Barring Nancy's description of the sonorous body as an ideal instrumentalization that only really operates for us in resonant abstraction, Cavavero's understanding of the enfleshed nature of vocality and listening gets at something like what I want to argue is at play in the karaoke performances captured here. The pleasure the performer in the red shirt derives in singing and concomitantly listening to his voice played back to him is that of the ability to sense his body frenetically active and in motion in face of the deafening noise and sensory intensity of the everyday. Listening as it is oriented by these karaoke performances offers a renewed acoustic spatiality in which the body may be felt in its uniquely vibratory capacities, cohering a momentary and active sensing of one's own subjectivity in making outside of the chaotic resonances of public space.

The sensory recognition of a sonorous, animate self through listening during the karaoke performance does not uniquely cohere in corporeal experiences of pleasure. As several of the performances documented by Collins demonstrate, amateur singing as a modality of self-reflexive listening also gives way to a more uncomfortable or ambivalent space of self-presence. For example, the male singer captured in facial close-up in *dünya dinlemiyor* who sings "Asleep," one of the album's more melancholy tracks (Fig. 12) evokes a more solemn intensity in his performance. Avoiding eye contact with Collins's camera, he looks off towards the karaoke monitor, closing his eyes during the song's bridge and only occasionally stealing a hesitant glance ahead, suggestively caught in a moment of deep personal introspection as he

[101] Adriana Cavavero, *For More Than One Voice: Towards a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*, trans. Paul Kottman (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 177.

sings along in his tremulous monotone. While it is an undeniably sorrowful song, lamenting feelings of "not [wanting] to wake up on my own anymore" and a distantly wish for "a better world," I want to maintain that the affect channelled in his rendition is also the result of an aural sensing of the performative limitations of his own subjective embodiment.[102] Moving in to one of the song's key changes, he softly winces, audibly unable to match the heights of Morrissey's haunting vocal range; in fact, over his performance he progressively moves the microphone further from his mouth, until the song's final brooding sighs arrive as a muddled hum. While I have argued that karaoke is unique as a space oriented around an appreciation of aesthetic failure, the ways in which "the human body's failure to be properly mechanical" is revealed in amateur singing is nonetheless uncomfortable to behold through the intimacies of listening, causing us to cringe where we may also derive joy. Where the conjoined acts of singing and listening allow these participants to privately come to their own active, momentary, subjective embodiments as they emerge through performance, they equally force an awareness of the slippages of the body as a sonorous cavity, calling to mind listening as a more uneasy sensory union with the self as a noisy entity.

The politico-aesthetic ramifications of *the world won't listen* thus emerge in its taking up of karaoke as a mediated space in which a sonorous self may be listened to in its unfolding, messily embodied subjectivity. Against the noisy cacophony of public space in which the body is subject to and "possessed" by an ongoing aural intensity, the kind of private listening undertaken while performing the karaoke version provides a momentary opportunity for an intimate re-acquaintance with the self. To this end, I want to disagree with Nancy's estimation that the sonorous body as a subject of listening is "perhaps no subject at all, except as the place of

[102] The Smiths, "Asleep," by Morrissey and Johnny Marr, on *The World Won't Listen*, Rough Trade ROUGH 101, 1987, compact disc.

resonance, of its infinite tension and rebound, the amplitude of sonorous deployment and the slightness of its simultaneous redeployment."[103] While Collins's work allows for an intimate co-presence with the self lasting no longer than the length of each song, these are experiences rooted in a kind of listening that transpires in a substantial, fleshly manner. Even as these Smiths fans' performances animate a "floating world" offering relief from the everyday, they nevertheless maintain an explicit connection to a complex world resonating beyond the bounds of the makeshift karaoke studio.

In sum, *the world won't listen* makes use of karaoke not as a consummately private affair but rather as an occasion for the performing and listening subject to affectively and corporeally re-center in relation to a demanding environment. Even as these amateur singers appear to us alone within the intimate enclosure of the makeshift karaoke studio their performances form a direct rejoinder to a broader milieu, a connection born through more than just the earnest hopes for elsewhere disclosed in their singing. Despite the fact that Collins, as a feature of the series' greater productive foundation, goes unseen and unheard in these three works, he is nonetheless present to these performers in the karaoke space as an observant listener. This silent presence ultimately serves to secure the setting as an aesthetic node within a greater collaborative network existing in excess of the visible bounds of the series itself. Thus, as much as performance offers an opportunity for an increased sensing of one's own resonant embodiment and subjectivity, this intimate movement inward equally forms a correlate shift outwards, establishing newfound relations in the participatory bind of trust linking singer and artist who listens even when the world may not be. Altogether, Collins's work acts to foreground the aesthetico-political productivity of karaoke as an act of private dialogue and coherence that may simultaneously enrich our connection to a turbulent everyday, forming a space in which the boundaries between

[103] Nancy, *Listening*, 22.

outside and inside are subject to continual challenge according to the conjoined acts of singing and listening.

IV. Listening In Kind

In developing my claim so far, I have explored the world-confirming productivity of listening to the amateur voice in terms of its primary characterization as sound created within the body. As a result, my descriptive analysis of *Another Protest Song* and *the world won't listen* has tended to privilege karaoke's form over its content, focusing on listening as an embodied union with both self and other staked in the significance of *how* these vocal renditions operate as opposed to *what* is actually being performed. Moving on to a discussion of the third and final artwork that will anchor my study, South African-born, Berlin-based artist Candice Breitz's 2005 video montage *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*, I will seek to enact a shift in register, examining the productivity of karaoke as an embodied mode of consuming the objects of mass culture.[104] Responding to traditional Marxist readings of both Breitz's work and karaoke more generally as a derivative format offering evidence of the culture industry's subjugating grip on everyday life, I want to contend that *King* instead makes a significant case for the aesthetico-political value of repetitive consumption, calling to mind the feelings of wonder and "enchantment" that we may experience in our encounter with the media products of global capitalism. Following a short description of *King* and the different structures of repetition at play within the work, I will focus primarily on what it means to encounter Breitz's work as a part of a listening audience. In this sense, my primary objective here will be to explore how our perceptive encounter with *King* offers us a keener sense of the ways in which the ubiquitous

[104] I have previously written and published on *King* but in the terms of a discussion of the global circulation of media. This present essay does not repeat any significant content from this past work. Please see: Anastasia Howe Bukowski, "*King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson*: or, the Global Image Politics of the Multi-Channel Video Installation" *KAPSULA* 3 (Fall 2015): 45-52.

objects of a globalized Western culture, such as Michael Jackson's *Thriller*, may take on more lively existences outside of the determinations of capital when re-channelled by the amateur, performing body. In relation to the overall intent of my thesis, this investigation of Breitz's work will attempt to situate listening as a means of gaining an affective understanding of the way in which we commonly develop attachments to the objects of mass culture, centering within *King* an opportunity to reimagine our possible connections to others with whom we share a world existing beyond our conscious knowledge.

IV.I Singing For

Prior to discussing *King*'s performative content, it is critical that we denote its presentational form. Logistically speaking, *King* bears a striking similarity to *the world won't listen*. The 42-minute work is comprised of sixteen individual video channels presented in simultaneous playback, each documenting a German fan of Michael Jackson re-performing his 1982 album *Thriller* in its entirety in single, minimally edited takes.[105] Much like Collins, Breitz relied on a wide network of public media channels in making her call for participants, advertising the project in newspapers, public notice boards, German and Austrian music magazines, and Michael Jackson fan sites and web forums. However, where Collins remained open in his participatory call, allowing all interested parties to come sing before his camera and later determining the sequence of performers who appear in the trilogy's final cuts at its editing stages, Breitz remained pre-emptively specific in her chosen participants, inviting a select group to her studio. Responding to her postings, fans were asked to submit short written statements describing their personal attachments to Jackson's music and overall status as a global icon. From these, Breitz recruited participants based upon the perceived depth of their fandom rather

[105] *King* comprises one of a four part micro-series of "portrait" videos Breitz has done on the performativity of fan culture. Others focus on Bob Marley, Madonna, and John Lennon and follow a similar presentational structure.

than their assumed finesse as performers, reviewing their responses according to an entirely affective rather than an aesthetic criterion.[106] As a result, even in its planning stages *King* came together according to a certain participatory spirit unique to karaoke, with the sole collaborative barrier residing in the individual desire to perform, regardless of the eventual quality of each rendition.

Shot in a Berlin recording studio over the course of a single day, the unlikely allowances of this performative ethic built around affective intentionality rather than talent in a traditional sense is reflected in the broad aesthetic and subjective scope constituted by the sixteen performers. Animating the work are eight men and eight women who, as an artificially assembled collective, visibly span gender, racial, and generational profiles, particularly among its female participants (Fig. 13). Nebulously embodying the 'portrait' of Jackson nominally referenced in the work's title, their grouping comes to recall both the fluidity and androgyny of his always-transforming public image as well as the extensive scope of his popularity and the range communities inhabited by his music.[107] The inconsistent nature of this act of uneven personification is further emphasized by the fact that certain participants, especially male ones, perform in the guise of Jackson himself, donning *Thriller*-era red leather jackets and single white gloves (Fig. 14), while others depart from his aesthetic model completely, such as the woman who appears in a Turkish belly dancing costume (Fig. 15). Most, as in the case of Collins's work, simply sport athletic tops and jeans, everyday outfits better suited to the nearly hour-long performances of marathon proportions they undertake here (Fig. 16).[108]

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[106] Louise Neri. "Candice Breitz and Louise Neri: Eternal Returns," in *Candice Breitz*, ed. Louise Neri (London: White Cube, 2005), 7.

[107] *Thriller* is, of course, the highest selling album of all time, having sold over 65 million units worldwide.

[108] The exhaustive temporal aspect of *King* similarly serves to recall Jackson's marathon rehearsal schedule, which he apparently first assumed while he was a child member of the Jackson 5. This work ethic is well documented in the 2009 documentary-concert film *Michael Jackson's This Is It*. For a short overview of his recording and rehearsal

Front-lit and appearing before uniform, chromatically neutral black backdrops, the aesthetic variety represented by these fans brings to mind karaoke's necessarily unstable characterization as a space to both "enable the everyman or everywoman to experience the power that comes with commanding the stage [in the guise of] a star" and a "form of joyful treason in which you quite materially supplant your idol" altogether.[109] In the case of *King*, Jackson as global icon is made present in his complete absence, appearing within the work only as a ubiquitous cultural and aesthetic motif to be activated and consumed – transubstantiated, we may even say – through these common yet variable acts of repetitive re-performance. However, in identifying Breitz's work as a space underwritten by a celebratory ethic of amateurism, it is essential we distinguish it from the models of karaoke animated in *Another Protest Song* and *the world won't listen* for reasons both performative and technical. For one, *King* does away with the instrumental backing track as the formal foundation on which the voice builds, instead presenting these performances of *Thriller* as a-cappella renditions. Additionally, Breitz did not offer a karaoke video monitor as a lyrical guide to these fans who are otherwise able to recite Jackson's lyrics from memory, only providing them with audio headsets playing *Thriller* as a means of helping them maintain their timing. In *King*, the bad voice stands alone and unadorned, punctuated only by the vocal silences contained in each track and the sounds of their costume fabrics swishing against their moving bodies, filling the lyrical void. While perhaps not karaoke in a rigorously traditional sense, Breitz's approach nevertheless engages with the performative lexicon of karaoke as a modality of popular re-performance.

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practice, see also: Arturo E. Hernandez, "Michael Jackson, 10,000 hours, and the roots of creative genius," *The Oxford University Press Blog*, August 8, 2014, http://blog.oup.com/2014/08/michael-jackson-creativity/.

[109] Tongson, "Empty Orchestra," 86.; Collins and Weaver, "Don't blow your own horn," 91.

The aesthetic effects of Breitz's ascetic reinterpretation of karaoke is further intensified through its formatting as a spatial installation.[110] Expanding karaoke's chronological frame from the length of a song to the length of an album, *King* organizes these amateur versions not in temporal sequence but in the form of a simultaneous or "spatial" montage.[111] In the darkened gallery space, each performance is individually presented using metre-high plasma monitors that are horizontally juxtaposed across the expanse of a wall, congregating the sixteen fans into an artificial chorus (Fig. 17). Thus, unlike Collins and Nevarez and Tevere's works which are activated by solo performers whose voices and bodies uniquely occupy the performance space, the spatial logic of the montage at play in Breitz's work denies this individual spotlight, "[forcing] into visibility a collective that is otherwise amorphous, anonymous and dispersed," as Anne Wagner has put it.[112] This spatial montage is enhanced through Breitz's temporal synchronizing of all sixteen performances, so that each track begins and end at roughly the same moment. Save for several visible cuts made in between each song, all of their re-performances take on both a spatial and temporal simultaneity through these effects of installation and edited montage, offering us an impression that these fans are singing and dancing *together*, repeating Jackson's work back to themselves, to one another, and to us as an audience in unison.

This said, in spite of the montage's synchronic presentation of all sixteen performances, an effect otherwise allowing for renditions initially documented in isolation to become coextensive with one another, *King* as a whole lacks formal coherency. Even as all sixteen metre-high plasma screens are lined up, nearly touching, their visible plastic borders and the tight

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[110] Breitz's interpretive interest in karaoke is recalled in her 2001 work entitled "Karaoke."
[111] Lev Manovich discusses the distinction between spatial and temporal montage at length in *The Language of New Media*. See specifically: Lev Manovich, *The Language of New Media* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2001), 322.; Jacques Rancière has similarly addressed the use of montage as a means towards the political conditioning of the contemporary global subject in the *Emancipated Spectator*.
[112] Anne Wagner, "Double Identity, or Sameness and Difference," in *Candice Breitz: Same Same*, ed. Gregory Burke (Toronto: The Power Plant Contemporary Art Gallery, 2009), 14.

cropping of each performer from the knees-up draws attention to their spatial discordance, precluding the complete dissolution of *King*'s repetitive component parts into a singular whole. This effect is compounded by the sheer spatial scope of *King* as an installation, which stretches outwards across the expanse of the gallery wall. Coming to perceive it as a listening audience, its scale denies us an overall apprehension of the work as a unitary object or the chorus as a unified collective, forcing a kind of roving, partial engagement with each life-sized screen presenting each performer in iconic form. Born from the oscillating tension of part and whole, the karaoke chorus composed here is subject to slippages and is ultimately animated by a formal disjuncture, both structural and aesthetic in type. While these sixteen performances are edited and presented in synchronous unison, to address Breitz's work as an installation is to be confronted with the physical impossibility of perceptibly coming to terms with its repetitive spatial structure, its challenging scale only ever rendering it partially perceptible.

The structural indeterminacy of *King* as a montage is amplified through the aesthetic results of Breitz's synchronous editing and sequencing of these sixteen re-performances. The work itself begins in literal concert, with the participants simultaneously belting out "Wanna Be Startin' Something," the opening track of *Thriller*, their flat voices closely following the undulating cadence and vocal trills of Jackson's original. While singing many of them dance, some shimmying their torsos and pulling the groin-grabbing pirouettes made famous by Jackson himself, as others swing their arms and hips, such as an older woman in a gold sequined top who hyperactively moves back and forth in place (Fig. 18). Elsewhere, the woman in traditional Turkish dress belly dances throughout. While performing, many gesture towards the camera, maintaining eye contact with Breitz's lens, while others close their eyes and throw their heads back, completely enrapt by the experience. Altogether, these repetitive re-embodiments of

Jackson's work through the performative frame of karaoke function to draw attention to the motivating, ecstatic hold that *Thriller* as a cultural object has upon its fans, calling to mind what Jane Bennett has described as the "[vital] material powers [of nonhuman or not-quite-human things] which can aid or destroy, enrich or disable, ennoble or degrade us, in any case call for our attentiveness."[113]

However, what Bennett equally draws attention to here is the ways in which the "lively" or "vibrant" nature of cultural matter – basically, the ways in which objects take on a certain animate agency as they circulate around human bodies – may be as subjectively enriching as it is stultifying in scope. For example, the buoyancy and expressivity of the fans I described above is starkly counterbalanced by the performances of two women wearing white and pink tank tops (Fig. 19, 20). Where others belt out *Thriller*'s lyrics, energetically dancing and beaming towards the camera, they anxiously stare ahead, quietly sing, and only cautiously flash brief suggestions of a smile, their bodies completely stiff. Breitz's use of montage works to dramatize these performative distinctions, installing both women directly adjacent to the work's most passionate performers, such as the woman in the white shirt who appears juxtaposed by the belly dancer and one of the male fans singing in the explicit guise of Jackson himself. Through the work of careful editing and installation, Breitz is able to draw out the necessary differences that underline each individual rendition, giving way to a structure of repetition that necessarily undoes itself in collective practice, giving way to both an aesthetic and an affective discordance in their simultaneous, synchronized playback.

Moreover, these visual and structural inconsistencies are further intensified through *King*'s acoustic structure. While, as I have already described, Breitz organizes these sixteen re-performances to correspond with *Thriller*'s original length and sequencing, presenting them as

[113] Jane Bennett, *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), ix.

an artificial chorus bound according to a logic of temporal simultaneity, listening to the work reveals yet another differential structure of repetition. Much like *Another Protest Song* and *the world won't listen*, *King* is ruled by the bad voice. Unable to reach the heights of Jackson's expansive vocal range or capture the cadence of his phrasing, their individual karaoke versions are generally characterized by a resounding flatness, adequately yet inelegantly rising and dropping in pitch at all of the appropriate moments. When played together as a group rendition, their common performances come to be marked by a dissonant imprecision, shifting vocally in and out of tune and temporally out of sync over the course of the work. In spite of their devoted knowledge of and affection for *Thriller*, they invariably begin too early or too late, flub lyrics, ad-lib, and attempt keep up with Jackson's virtuosic delivery in vain. With their love for and desire to consume a cultural object through performative embodiment coming into direct confrontation with the failures imparted by their lack of training and innate musical timing, as well as the physically exhausting nature of their participation, the work progressively threatens to devolve into complete cacophonous disorder. By the final track, "This Lady In My Life," several have descended into a near-whisper, taking evocatively deep breaths and reducing their one-vigorous dancing to a gentle sway.

The chaotic dynamism that emerges in Breitz's practices of editing and installation effectively works to both materialize *Thriller*'s ubiquity as a cultural object but also to briefly defamiliarize it through aesthetic and structural repetition, as Jackson's iconicity comes to be partially obscured by the particularities of each re-performed rendition. In a sense, these fans offer neither exact imitations nor radical reinterpretations of *Thriller* and Jackson's performative demeanour. Rather, they occupy a modality found somewhere messily in-between the two, devotedly wielding Jackson as an aesthetic frame of reference through which their personal

sensibilities are nevertheless exposed, if only for the length of the album. As I will go on to contend for the remainder of this essay, *King* formally works to highlight the affective and subjective variability foregrounded through karaoke as a means of collectively identifying with and consuming mass cultural objects, the differential effect of which we only gain a real sense of in listening to these works as a dissonant whole. For her part, Breitz has claimed that "[o]ne has no choice […] but to consume the cultural produce of global capitalism. But consumption must be followed by digestion, and digestion must be followed by excretion."[114] Even though, as I will soon discuss, the subjective cadre available in re-performing the songs of one's idol necessarily reiterates the conditions of repetition and reproduction that define the global economies of late-capitalism, I want to argue that Breitz's taking up of karaoke as an act of cultural devotion within *King* nevertheless offers a corollary to the digestive metaphor she describes here.[115] As I will go on to contend, the sense of aesthetic disjuncture and disagreement represented by the montage or chorus as an artificial assemblage articulates karaoke's promise as an act through which users of culture may differentially lay claim to the objects of mass culture, the effects of which are most poignantly disclosed in the experience of listening to these collective renditions. While I have previously written of the experiences of self- and co-presence inhered by karaoke in *the world won't listen* and *Another Protest Song*, *King* substantiates an additional relational potential rooted in listening, bringing to bear the ways in which we differentially relate to and consume the objects of mass culture across time and space.

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[114] Neri. "Candice Breitz," 19.

[115] In *Noise*, Jacques Attali defines "Repeating" as the third and most recent stage of our late-capitalist musical economy. The significant musical goal of this period is to record and reproduce music as seamlessly as possible, creating an artistic sequence in which "an aesthetic criteria of repetition – made of rigor and cold calculation" (85) evacuates music of its social or political power. In these terms, music comes to embody a capitalist logic of use and value.

IV.II Sense and Repetition

Recalling the initial critique of karaoke as a derivative format seen to perpetuate a "global culture of commonness and copying" that opened this essay, some of the dominant readings of *King* do not come as a surprise.[116] Curator Okwui Enwezor, for example, has described Breitz's work as emblematic of consumer culture and the "conditions under which the shortened attention span abets an insatiable appetite for public visibility at all costs."[117] Analyzing the work in a manner redolent of Horkheimer and Adorno's famous indicting of the oppressive nature of mass culture, he identifies these performances as evidence of the "individual's utter opacity to the media apparatus, since what is constantly spotlighted is the symptom of celebrity inebriation: the desperation for visibility."[118] This reading is echoed in Beatrice von Bismarck's comments on the uniformly "scripted" nature of these performances, seeing *King* and the other works comprising her "Portrait" series "dramatizing this invitation by mass-media images to conform, [rendering] their authority visible."[119] While Enwezor and von Bismarck may indeed be correct in saying that certain fans appearing in *King* are motivated by the prospect of embodying the fame and visibility of their idols, the narrowness of this traditionally Marxist lens does not account for the affective and relational possibilities rooted in these karaoke-style re-performances. Beyond the significance of the appropriation of American popular media within accounts of cultural utopianism and political survival in postwar Germany, to assume that these fans' relationship to popular culture always already entails a position of subjugation is to defer a

[116] Tongson, "Empty Orchestra," 90.
[117] Okwui Enwezor, "Idolatry of the False: Portraiture and Mass Consciousness in Candice Breitz's Video Portraits," in *Candice Brietz: The Scripted Life* (Bregenz: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2010), 39.
[118] Ibid., 40.; Enwezor's comparison to Horkeimer and Adorno here is explicit, as he even quotes them at length, discussing their work on the ways in which real life has become usurped by the illusionism of popular cinema.
[119] Beatrice von Bismarck, "Performing the Role and Always Becoming," in *Candice Brietz: The Scripted Life* (Bregenz: Kunsthaus Bregenz, 2010), 56.

more complex conversation of the ways in which consumption may lead to a more lively attachment to a world mediated on a mass scale.[120]

To this end, I want to argue that *King* sensuously illustrates the productivity of karaoke as a modality of cultural consumption based upon repetition. In her 2001 book *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* philosopher Jane Bennett similarly indicts the rigidity of a Marxian framework of political economy that does not submit to the possibility of nourishment or pleasure to be drawn from a globalized consumer society. As she writes, the work of Horkheimer and Adorno fails to attend to "the affective energies of consumption," instead "[allowing] their insight into the way commodities manipulate/activate our bodies to drown in a vocabulary of mind."[121] Lacking from the Marxist critique of commodity fetishism, she states, is an account of the ways in which our encounter with consumer objects such as Jackson's *Thriller* or, as she describes, The GAP's "Khakis Swing" campaign, may produce experiences of "enchantment." For Bennett, enchantment is not a mere experience of the small pleasures born through consumption, but instead involves a becoming cognizant of the ways in which commodities may lend us "a mood of lively and intense engagement with the world."[122] Counter to the Weberian narrative of modern society beset by disenchantment at the hand of a stultifying culture of mass production, she locates "the enchantment effect primarily in the aesthetic or theatrical dimension of commodities and in the way that commodities function as tangible and public elaborations of, and experimentations with, personal and collective identities."[123] Bennett's argument does not seek to dispel the normalizing forces of capitalism but

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[120] Nor does this approach account for the variable contexts of their fandom and their personal political subjectivities. For example, Breitz has remarked that one performer appearing in the work became first acquainted with *Thriller* while a political prisoner in an East German prison.
[121] Jane Bennett, *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 124.
[122] Bennett, *Enchantment,* 111.
[123] Ibid., 114.

simply attempts to unlock the ways in which "a zest for commodified art [may] coexist with critical awareness of its manipulative intent," locating in these small moments of enchanted consumption an everyday space for wonder in a world increasingly rid of it.[124]

Enchantment, however, is not rooted in a politics of pure pleasure. Rather, Bennett draws parallels between the experience of enchantment and the "mixed bodily state of joy and disturbance […] dense and intense enough to stop you in your tracks" associated with the Kantian sublime.[125] But unlike Kant, for whom the sublime erupts from the dynamic choreography of one's own mental faculties and individual capacity towards reasoned cognition and aesthetic judgment in face of the boundlessness of natural phenomena, Bennett's enchantment is squarely corporeal, registered in the "the eyes that widen, the stomach that roils, the skin that galvanizes."[126] Recalling several of the central themes that have structured my own claims so far, she appositely draws a strong connection between enchantment, repetition, and sound. Linguistically noting the literal '*chant*' contained within enchantment, she argues that performative acts such as singing musical refrains or repetitive consumption of patterned, mass circulated sounds and images may incite experiences of dissonance and affective unpredictability rather than coercive dullness or subjugation. Following a Deleuzian model of difference born in repetition, Bennett foregrounds the possibility that enchantment may be made through repetitive acts of consumption mobilizing new senses, meanings, or contexts for our commercial items.[127] In this sense, enchantment operates according to a non-teleological structure, not bringing us towards any specific form of experience but instead "can be accidents that give birth to

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[124] Ibid., 116.
[125] Ibid., 111.
[126] Ibid., 125.
[127] Discussing the philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and his text *Difference and Repetition* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994), Bennett draws attention to his notion of "spiral repetition," a repetitive movement in which "that sometimes that which repeats itself *transforms* itself. Because each iteration occurs in an absolutely unique context, each turn of the spiral enters into a new and distinctive assemblage" (Bennett, 40).

wondrous and unsettling—enchanting—new forms" offering us a sense of a possible world that exceeds the immediate bounds of human knowledge.[128]

Returning to *King*, I want to contend that we may come to view the sixteen acts of karaoke-style re-performance it documents as evidence of the enchanted possibilities of commodity consumption. This is conveyed firstly on a structural level, in terms of the ways in which the repetitive, simultaneous organization of its artificial chorus is beset by a chaotic, differential activation of *Thriller* as a material object able to make a lively claim upon its most ardent consumers. Furthermore, we may witness the secondary effects of this repetitive orientation in the collective affect displayed by these fans who re-perform Jackson's songs and commoditized persona to both deeply joyful and more unsettled, ambivalent ends, giving new form to his work in the consumptive embodiments highlighted and compared through montage. While their re-performances do perhaps display a compromised filling of a subjective role or identification for which there is already a predetermined mould, as Enwezor and others have maintained, the correlate result of this process is no less than what Bennett describes as a "sense of vitality, the charged-up feeling often generated in human bodies by the presence or promise of commodity consumption."[129] Inhered in the forceful dissonance of their bad voices, discordant dance moves, and cathartic laughter and smiles shared in between tracks are the compelling possibilities of re-playing Jackson's work through consumption as an enchanted process entailed in the body as an active, sensuous assemblage. Indeed, as Breitz herself has articulated:

> Pop seems to offer opportunities for self-invention – this is what makes it so seductive. The problem with Pop, of course, is that the kinds of selves that it encourages us to invent are usually passive and predetermined, which means that rather than truly being offered a moment of self-invention, we are invited to shape ourselves in moulds which have already been poured. Artists who work inside Pop might want to offer some resistance to this condition, to crack Pop open, to

[128] Bennett, *Enchantment,* 40.
[129] Bennett, *Enchantment,* 114.

> tap into the *promises* that it makes and the desires that it creates, to try and defuse that aspect of Pop which makes it dangerous, the fact that it tends to be mono-logic. Cracking a Pop song open to dialogue means re-presenting that song in such a way that it can be processed and then shat back out again rather than simply digested and held passively within the listener in a constipated form.[130]

IV.III Listening to Other Worlds

The central claim I wish to make concerning the enchanted productivity of karaoke – or sung re-performance more generally – as the mode of popular consumption animating *King* requires a consideration of the work extending beyond the internal dynamics of the fan performances that it documents. Instead, we must critically tend to the external possibility that taking in Breitz's artwork as an audience of listeners may too result in an affectively conjoined experience of enchantment. As I have argued already, listening forms a significant component of the karaoke space, allowing participants to differentially re-sense the immediate worlds to which they are part in both their publicly- and privately-activated dimensions. Expanding this discussion to include Breitz's work, I want to argue that the world-confirming possibilities bound in listening to *King* emerge in a manner altogether different from Nevarez and Tevere and Collins's projects. Where their works substantiate the productivity of listening as a means for renewing attachments to self and other amid the locational specificity of one's time and place, Breitz's project operates on an altogether diffuse scale, grappling with the oppressive reach of an increasingly globalized culture industry and the everyday affect of disenchantment endemic to late-capitalist society. As a result, I hope to finally contend here that listening to these sixteen repetitive acts of re-performance affectively establishes for us a more lively, enchanted orientation towards a world reanimated beyond our immediate knowledge and experiences of the everyday and instead according to its imagined, virtual energies and materialities.

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[130] Raimar Stange, *Zurück in die Kunst* (Hamburg: Rogner & Bernhard bei Zweitausendeins, 2003), 1.; Italics my own.

Essential to Nancy's understanding of the world-making capacities of listening is the notion of sharing.[131] As he writes:

> [c]ommunication is not transmission, but a sharing that becomes subject: sharing as subject of all "subjects." An unfolding, a dance, a resonance. Sound in general is first of all communication in this sense. At first it communicates nothing—except itself. At its weakest and least articulated degree, one would call it noise. [….] But all noise contains timbre. In a body that opens up and closes at the same time, that arranges itself and exposes itself with others, the noise of its sharing (with itself, others) resounds: perhaps the cry in which the child is born, perhaps an even older resonance in the belly and from the belly of a mother.[132]

For Nancy, the noise of communication is what we all share and what fundamentally situates us as listening subjects in the world both as singular beings and a part or constitutive of all other beings – this is the "sharing as subject of all 'subjects'" to which he refers. This sense of sharing, however, prefigures any coherent notion of the social in a stable communitarian frame, always working and unworking itself according to our resonant listening to the return of sense that we commonly partake. In this sense, the kind of worldly subjectivity staked through the sharing of sense that Nancy calls attention to operates instead according to an *ethical* claim or arrangement based upon the sensible, responsible recognition of another that announces itself unpredictably. Sound as a relational matrix draws us together but never holds us tight, inevitably making way for some kind of opening or unfolding.

Following Nancy, the ontology of listening to the sixteen fan performers who cacophonously animate *King* karaoke-style may also be characterized in terms of this ethical, sensual sharing. In listening to their bounding, discordant voices and watching their exuberant, often awkward dance moves we are filled with a correlate feeling of both intense elation and

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[131] For excellent account of semantics of *partage* as both "sharing" and "partitition" in Nancy's work please see the introduction to John Paul Ricco, *The Decision Between Us: Art and Ethics in the Time of Scenes* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2014).
[132] Nancy, *Listening,* 41.

deep unease.[133] As I have already discussed, to perform the karaoke version is to risk a form of aesthetic exposure, putting on display the body that sometimes fails to be aesthetically proficient. Capturing these re-performances against black backgrounds, void of a backing track or other musical support, Breitz's work as montage initiates a space in which we are offered a radical intimacy with amateur bodies that labour to perform with varying degrees of finesse. Paying aural witness to the joyful intensity of the young man dressed in all white who excitedly pirouettes and passionately sings his way through the 42 minutes of *Thriller* alongside the young woman in a pink tank top who spends the entirety of her performance nervously eyeing the camera in near-stillness and silence is to feel simultaneously anxious and compelled (Fig. 21). Indeed, there is something unsettling in watching their impoverished attempts at capturing Jackson's arguably inimitable performative demeanour, an experience which asks us to internally reconcile both the trying quality of their karaoke-style renditions and the excessive depth of their fandom to an uncomfortable end. However, even as we are made disturbingly aware of the aesthetic chasm that separates these performers from their professed idol, there is something tremendously infectious to the overflowing excitement they channel as an artificially assembled group. Listening to their lively, inharmonious voices is to be aurally struck by the affective energy they collectively bring to these expressions of performative tribute. As a result, *King* serves as an occasion for a kind of sensuous sharing or transfer between singer and listener, soliciting a near-sympathetic response from its audiences who take pleasure in their performances in spite of their resounding awkwardness. The ethical nature of this affective relation is extended by the fact that on a general scale these performers are amateurs just like us,

[133] My own experience of the work is limited to rewatching it online on Breitz's Vimeo account. Please find a copy of the work here: http://vimeo.com/74959758. However, my colleague Zoë De Luca, who saw the work at the Queensland Art Gallery & Gallery of Modern Art, Brisbane in 2010, has corroborated the experience of watching it in person.

inhering in listening an additional experience of sympathy in the acknowledgement of a subjective being-in-common shared between performer and audience.

In this regard, Nancy's understanding of listening as a subjective, worldly orientation based upon the sharing of sense that nevertheless does not translate into the creation or maintaining of community lends itself well to the relational nature of Breitz's work in action. However, his insistence on qualifying listening as a mode of resonant communication enacting relations prior to any consideration of meaning or knowledge "that is not immediately accessible" does not adequately capture the form of sensuous sharing that enables our affective connection to *King* and its animating chorus.[134] In fact, what I want to suggest is that while listening to *King* we are not so much drawn into a direct, worldly relation with the fans who are documented performing karaoke-style, but are rather linked through the common material bridge or "third thing" represented by Jackson's work.[135] Significantly, our ability to affectively partake in and appreciate these collective re-performances depends upon our personal acquaintance with *Thriller* as a ubiquitous touchstone of the global culture industry and our appreciation of the extent to which their individual renditions engage with Jackson as a subjective model to embody to differing ends. Listening to and viscerally sharing in the joyful intensities of these enchanted acts of consumption, I equally found myself playing Jackson's originals along in my head, attempting to silently, imaginatively match their re-performances with my own powers of recall.

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[134] Nancy, *Listening,* 6.

[135] Rancière discusses the ethical role of what her terms the "third thing" at length in *The Emancipated Spectator*. As he writes, "[i]n the logic of emancipation there is always a third thing. […] It is the third thing that is owned by no one, whose meaning is owned by no one, but which subsists between [us], excluding any uniform transmission, any identity of cause and effect" (15-16) This "third thing" Rancière writes of is of course the aesthetic object or performance to which we are oriented or engaged as active spectatorial subjects. Thinking in terms of Breitz's work, Jackson's songs feature as a shared cultural "thing" to which we all identify differently, but identify nevertheless, figuring as a common object through which we begin to grasp our cultural subjectivities in relation to one another as a diffuse public of sensory beings.

As such, the world-making possibilities residing in listening to Breitz's work do not depend upon the mere reactivation of self or space through the sensory rebounding of sound, as they did in Collins and Nevarez and Tevere's work, but instead call to mind the ways in which listening may offer us intimate, embodied insight into the ways in which we commonly consume and partake in the shared objects of a global consumer culture. While this material sharing offers evidence of the geo-locational expanse of a globalized late-capitalism able to spread the objects of a dominant Western culture the world over, this should not undermine the gravity or validity of the enchanted pleasures we may derive from consuming them through the acts of performance and listening conjoined by karaoke. Breitz herself has noted this aesthetico-political disjuncture, commenting on the "fact that people from completely different socio-cultural backgrounds often end up having overlapping personal soundtracks is of course a tribute to the economic efficiency of the global culture industry, but it is nevertheless interesting […] to be consuming the same thing at the same time as someone else who is on the opposite end of the globe."[136] To this end, listening offers us a more emboldened sense of the world as a diffuse space affectively enlivened through the sense of fullness that may be derived from the economic non-destination of commercial objects consumed, processed, and shared by the body.

Breitz's taking up of karaoke as a performative and communicative modality certainly does not propose a means of undoing the overpowering cultural effects of capitalism. Nevertheless, *King* provides a small space in which fans and their adjoining audience of listeners may survive and revel in the unexpected material possibilities and enchantments of a global culture industry, inhering, as Bennett puts its, "a feeling of being connected in an affirmative way to existence […] [and] the momentary impression that the natural and cultural world *offer*

[136] Stange, *Zurück.* 1.

gifts [that] remind us it is good to be alive."[137] While these affective senses arrive as the result of re-performances that operating according to an economic logic of repetition, the cacophonous, dissonant structure of *King* illustrates the ways in which the "mobilization of bodily energies by sonorous and other linguistic-affective means" may disrupt the smoothness of these patterns of production and consumption, differentially inspiring experiences of enchantment for the users of culture.[138] The world reimagined through performing and listening in Breitz's work is thus one that coheres subjective relations not through a sensed being-in-common, as I have maintained elsewhere, but rather a kind of *sharing*-in-common. It is this common sense of wonder and enchantment born from consumption that exposes us to material connections beyond the immediacy of our everyday experiences, opening up for us a world that exists beyond the bounds of our conscious knowledge.

Conclusion

Coming to plumb the value of our initial discussion of karaoke's promise, one consisting of the reciprocal hope of "'[f]eeling it' and making others respond with feeling to your performance" has required a simultaneous consideration of its multifarious identity as participatory technology, performance space, aesthetic structure, and form of relation.[139] In these terms, to consider karaoke as an opportunity to primarily listen to both self, other, and the musical objects that unite us beyond the bounds of our conscious experience of the everyday, is to fully grasp its potential as a way of *doing,* being-in-common, or sharing-in-common. In a sense, what *Another Protest Song, the world won't listen,* and *King* all variably bring to bear is the adaptable nature of karaoke as a site that is neither wholly public nor wholly private, bound

[137] Bennett, *Enchantment,* 156.
[138] Ibid., 154.
[139] Tongson, "Empty Orchestra," 100.

by neither the immediacy of time or place, and always moving alongside the affective vicissitudes of the human body. Returning to Kester, who in his work emphasizes the ethical and aesthetic needs to develop art practices that harness listening as a means of establishing models of dialogue based upon "corporeal" bonds to our interlocutors and "quotidian practices of human interaction," these artworks call attention to the ways in which the voice always carries itself towards unexpected or unknown others, bringing to bear momentarily held relations that emerge while we listen.[140] While there is surely enunciative value in singing into the void without the adjoining prospect of an audience, these works push for an understanding of the voice as always already in concert with the world, positioning listening as the means through which we may intimately sense ourselves, others, and the spaces we potentially share as we commonly and actively contribute to their making.

Karaoke is thus not what plucks us out of the political landscape of the everyday, but what opens us up to an enriched sensing of its active possibilities, if only for the length of a song. In light of these arguments, the artworks I have been examining here can be seen as contributing to a discourse on the ways in which karaoke – or amateur singing more broadly – amounts to so much more than a derivative activity entrenched in our common subjugation to a globalized Western culture. In spite of their deliberate playing with structures of repetition, Nevarez and Tevere, Collins, and Breitz's works all make palpable the role that our common objects of cultural consumption and possession play in drawing out intra- and inter-personal connections amid the spatio-relational intensities of contemporary urban life. As such, we may come to reconsider the performative ethic at play in karaoke as one fundamentally rooted in the right to be listened to in conjunction with the right to sing. Indeed, as I have argued, what these works differentially draw attention to is the role that listening, as both a private and a public modality,

[140] Kester, *Conversation Pieces,* 123.

plays within karaoke, enabling a form of encounter both localized and diffuse in which the opportunity to sense our proximity to both self and other becomes a critical force in the making of worlds bound by felt, but not necessarily *known*, relations. Karaoke, as it functions here, does more than merely affirm a collective right to the bad voice. Rather, it bespeaks us to listen.

Image Appendix

Fig. 1 Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere, *Another Protest Song: Karaoke with a Message*. 2008 (ongoing), multimedia performance and installation, length varies. Creative Time, Corona Park-Flushing Meadows, Queens, NY.

Fig. 2 Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere, *Another Protest Song: Karaoke with a Message*. 2008 (ongoing), multimedia performance and installation, length varies. Creative Time, Corona Park-Flushing Meadows, Queens, NY.

Fig. 3 Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere, *Another Protest Song: Karaoke with a Message*. 2008 (ongoing), multimedia performance and installation, length varies. Creative Time, Corona Park-Flushing Meadows, Queens, NY.

Fig. 4 Angel Nevarez and Valerie Tevere, *Another Protest Song: Karaoke with a Message*. 2008 (ongoing), multimedia performance and installation, length varies. Creative Time, Prospect Park, Brooklyn, NY.

Fig. 5 Phil Collins, poster advertising participatory call for *el mundo no escuchará*. 2004, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 6 Phil Collins, still from *dunia tak akan mendengar*. 2007, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 7 Phil Collins, still from *el mundo no escuchará*. 2004, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 8 Phil Collins, still from *dünya dinlemiyor*. 2005, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 9 Phil Collins, still from *el mundo no escuchará*. 2004, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 10 Phil Collins, still from *dunia tak akan mendengar*. 2007, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 11 Phil Collins, still from *el mundo no escuchará*. 2004, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 12 Phil Collins, still from *dünya dinlemiyor*. 2005, video installation, 56 minutes. Dallas Museum of Art. Dallas, Texas.

Fig. 13 Candice Breitz, still from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Fig. 14 Candice Breitz, stills from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Fig. 15 Candice Breitz, stills from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Fig. 16 Candice Breitz, stills from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Fig. 17 Candice Breitz, still from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Fig. 18 Candice Breitz, still from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

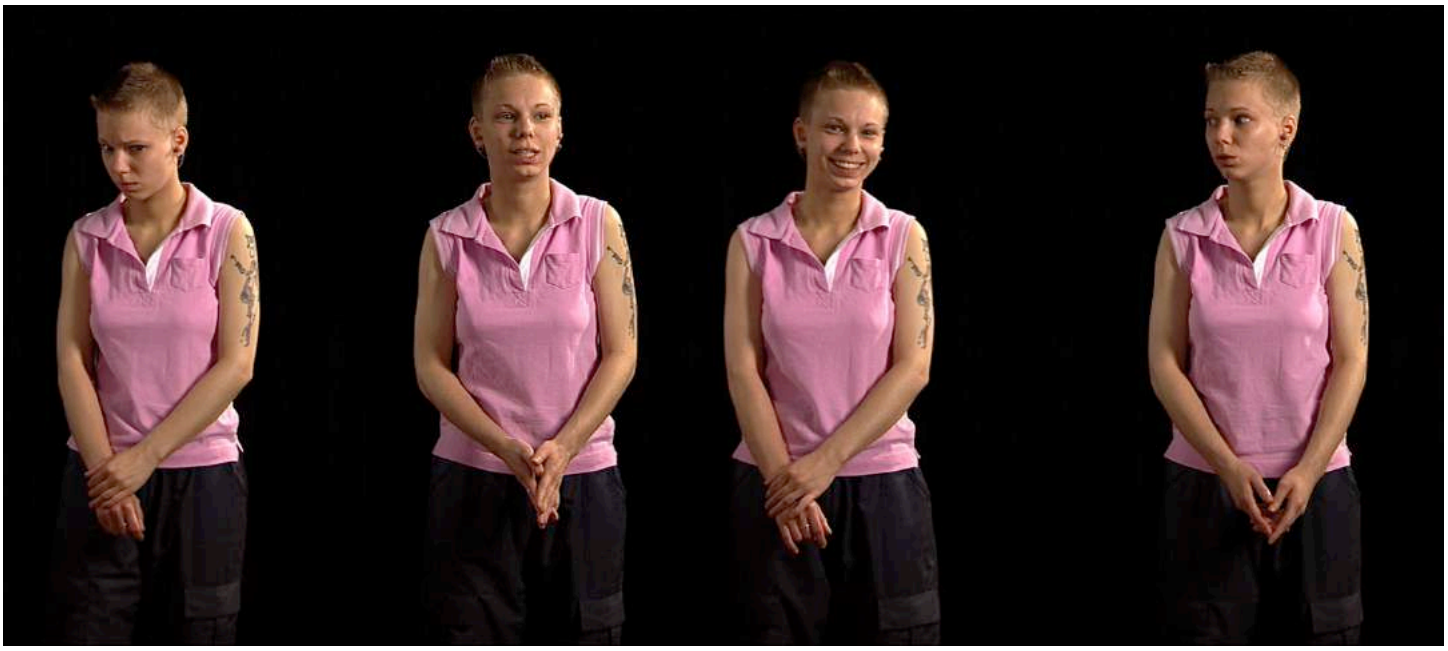

Fig. 19 Candice Breitz, still from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Fig. 20 Candice Breitz, still from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

Fig. 21 Candice Breitz, stills from *King (A Portrait of Michael Jackson)*. 2005, sixteen channel video installation, 42 minutes. Sonnabend Gallery, New York.

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