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Radikal Karaoke by Belén Gache

Radikal Karaoke by Argentine-Spanish artist Belen Gache, was originally made in 2011. This work presents a criticism of political speech by transforming it into a karaoke, consequently providing a critical view of stereotypes to current political practices. A karaoke is a popular form of entertainment, offered typically by bars and clubs, in which people take turns to sing popular songs into a microphone over pre-recorded backing tracks. In addition, Gache expanded the functions of regular karaoke -a vintage technology that had its heyday in the entertainment industry in the 70s, although it is still reverting as a practice-, using other tools of present times such as the computer itself.

This interactive online device displays a video in loop while the user/reader speaks/shouts using a microphone and randomly pressing the keyboard. Specifically, the video shows people applauding, explosions, spectators watching a show, aliens, slaves, etc., and at the same time, the user/reader is pressing the keyboard following some instructions and reading a written text passing along the bottom of the screen. Depending on the volume of the voice and the use of the keyboard, the video will produce different images, colors and sounds.

Gache proposes three transcriptions -in Spanish or in English- we could perform to shake off drowsiness. With these speeches Gache's work searches to denaturalize clichés and stereotyped phrases that circulate as meaningless slogans, while being uncritically received. The material of the poem (orality, writing, drawing), the performance of readers/users, the interaction, the generativity, the listening, the form acquired by the discourse point to a deconstruction of the entertainment industry used by politics. The author clearly marks a position related to the need of intervention of those who consume these speeches without playing any role but that of listeners. Karaoke forces you to say something with your own voice, using the same device you used before, when you were just a receptor. As a consequence, poetic language restores the possibility of political action through the same machinery that causes the rhetorical emptiness denounced before. In the repetition of those three discourses of the contemporary highly urbanized society, Gache recovers an organic form of language that allows the appearance of new senses and provides a place for a rebellious poetics. These speeches are pirated, showing how, once given, the giver of information loses control of the way it can be used by the performer.

As part of an artistic program, Gache restores its specific place for political action in a world overrun by automated discourses that function mechanically as machines. Gache's work poses the question about the indiscriminate consumption of nonsensical political speeches and aims to involve us as part of this parody. Gache focuses on the rhetorical emptiness of hegemonic discourses renewing the debate about the connection between demagogic politics and automated society. There is a strategic use of this device to make people take on an active role in the execution of poetry through karaoke and to denounce the political use of propaganda through an excess of linguistic nonsense and over-saturation of media space.