

2013

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### Recommended Citation

Ross, Sheryl Tuttle (2013) "The Propaganda Power of Protest Songs: the Case of Madison's Solidarity Sing-Along," *Contemporary Aesthetics (Journal Archive)*: Vol. 11 , Article 21.

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## The Propaganda Power of Protest Songs: the Case of Madison's Solidarity Sing-Along

*Sheryl Tuttle Ross*

### Abstract

The aim of this paper is to examine the propaganda power of Madison's Solidarity Sing-Along. To do so, I will modify the Epistemic Merit Model of propaganda so that it can account for a broader spectrum of propaganda. I will show how this is consistent with other accounts of musical pragmatics and the potential political function of songs and music. This will provide the ground for a robust interpretation of the political meanings of the Solidarity Sing-Along. I will assume the Madison protests and the Solidarity Sing-Along can be considered a paradigm case of peaceful protest as it has been claimed that the Madison protest and the role of art within those protests set the stage for the Occupy Movement protests later in the same year.

### Key Words

Madison Protests, political art, propaganda, protest songs, Solidarity Sing-Along

### 1. Introduction

Peaceful protests have been the cornerstone of social change in this century as well as the last one. From sister suffragettes to civil rights marchers, those organizing protests have recognized the power of a group of people lifting their voices in song.<sup>[1]</sup> Singing has played a pivotal role in those protests. Songs such as "We Shall Overcome" and "Solidarity Forever" educate and unite a mass of people with a vision toward a more just future, often fueled by nostalgia for a past that is remembered to be more perfect than it was. Protests themselves are often sparked by a galvanizing moment of perceived injustice.

One such moment occurred in February 2011 when the Governor Scott Walker of Wisconsin, announced a [budget repair bill](#), and while he claimed that this bill was modest and simply entailed having state employees pay a little more in health insurance and retirement, in fact it proposed radical changes to collective bargaining laws, drastic cuts to education, and the no-bid sale of some of the state's assets.<sup>[2]</sup> He introduced this so-called budget repair bill on a Friday afternoon with the intention that this bill would be signed into law by the following Thursday, less than a week from the bill's introduction. Walker and his administration were unprepared for the massive, peaceful protests this proposed legislation engendered in Madison and across the state. Police estimates put the protesting crowds around the Capitol at fifty thousand on some days and near one hundred thousand on the weekend days following Walker's announcement, with thousands of the protesters camping inside the Capitol.<sup>[3]</sup> Record-breaking protest crowds continued for weeks afterwards. Their spirits were buoyed by the fleeing of fourteen state senators, who denied the State House the quorum needed to pass the bill.<sup>[4]</sup>

These protests attracted local, national, and even international media coverage from CNN, Fox News, MSNBC as well as the BBC<sup>[5]</sup>, Al Jazeera,<sup>[6]</sup> and Russia Today.<sup>[7]</sup> Just what did those crowds do for hours on end? They marched with placards, chanted slogans, sang protest songs, and danced as popular music broadcast over a sound system flooded the streets. Just after the enormous general protests, an open-ended protest arose, one that is still going more than a year and half later. This group of protesters, the "Solidarity Singers," continually welcome newcomers to the Capitol and sing

traditional and newly composed protest songs during lunch hour in the rotunda or, when that is otherwise occupied, on the Capitol steps.[8] The media are no longer interested in Madison as the larger protests have come to an end, and the results of the historic recall election are yesterday's news.

However, with over 500 performances under their belts, the Solidarity Singers plan to continue their weekday protests until, as one banner they display during their Capitol performances reads, "things get better."

The aim of this paper is to examine the propaganda power of Madison's Solidarity Sing-Along. To do so, I will modify the Epistemic Merit Model of propaganda so that it can account for a broader spectrum of propaganda. I will show how this is consistent with other accounts of musical pragmatics and the potential political function of songs and music. That is, not only can an informed inquiry deepen our understanding of how music can function in the social and political spheres, it demonstrates that musical meaning can involve much more than mere musical or aesthetic meaning. This will provide the ground for a robust interpretation of the political meanings of the Solidarity Sing-Along. Moreover, such an analysis gives us a broader sense of how art can inform political experiences and the political process. I will assume the Madison protests and the Solidarity Sing-Along are a paradigm case of peaceful protest, as it has been claimed that the Madison protest and the role of art within those protests set the stage for the Occupy Movement protests later in the same year.[9]

## **2. What is propaganda? Neutral and pejorative senses and the Epistemic Merit Model**

Military band music and popular songs played before a politician's stump speech are examples of the longstanding tradition of marshaling the propaganda power of songs and music. However, in order to argue that protest songs have propaganda power, the notion of propaganda must be clarified. In contemporary English usage, there are two senses of the term 'propaganda,' a neutral and pejorative one. The term was coined by Pope Gregory the XV in 1622 to refer to the *congregio de propaganda*, an organization of the Roman curia that had jurisdiction over missionary territories.[10] The aim of the congregation was to convert those in missionary territories to Catholicism. Propaganda in this sense is an act of political discourse, or, an act of political persuasion. This would mean that a politician's stump speech or a citizen's letter to the editor might be called propaganda. Some have argued that any act of political persuasion is propaganda, and thus, the neutral sense of propaganda equates propaganda with *mere* political persuasion.[11] Ministries of Propaganda are so-called because they aim at persuading populations to embrace national policy. We might add the caveat that those involved in this persuasion are not interested in dialogue, but instead are focused on a specific message, messages, or agenda. One test to distinguish propaganda from sincere public discourse is to see whether the person advancing the message would change her position publicly in the face of evidence.

However, propaganda has come to mean more than mere political persuasion and as such the term is often one of derision. That is, if a politician labels an opponent's commercials as propaganda, the politician is not simply saying that the opponent is engaging in political persuasion, but insinuating that the opponent is lying or trying to manipulate public opinion. There is an epistemic component in this accusation that those who advance propaganda are tinkering with the proper formation of beliefs.

The Epistemic Merit Model (EMM) has been proposed in order to deal with the pejorative sense propaganda has come to have, and the fact that works of art, such as *Guernica*, have been used propagandistically.[12] Although this model is intended to capture the pejorative sense of propaganda, the model contains insights into the general phenomenon and, with slight revisions,

could describe both the pejorative and neutral senses of propaganda as well as its application to a broad range of works of art and other cultural artifacts.

The EMM captures the pejorative sense of propaganda with the following definition:

Propaganda = an epistemically defective message used with the intention to persuade a socially significant group of people on behalf of a political institution, organization or cause.[\[13\]](#)

The term "epistemically defective message" can be identified as:

An epistemically defective message = a message that is false, misleading, inappropriate or connected to other beliefs in ways that are inapt, misleading or unwarranted.[\[14\]](#)

Each condition above is sufficient for a message to be epistemically defective. It is not necessary for the message itself to be false for it to be defective. To illustrate, we can consider the slogan "no other aspirin is proven more effective." The sentence itself is a true sentence; however, the message is epistemically defective. It is intended to lead its audience to believe that Bayer aspirin is the best aspirin, whereas we are only warranted in believing that given the same chemical component it is no better or worse than other brands, including generic ones. The defectiveness of this message captures the pejorative sense that propaganda has come to have.[\[15\]](#) Propaganda need not be lies, but instead relies upon the connection between the message and the beliefs, desires, emotions, or other mental content that the audience is likely to have.

Propaganda as a species of political persuasion is a specific complex action, which is to say that it is goal-directed, and an interpretation of this complex action may require identifying how the immediate action is tied to some further ends. The purpose of propaganda is to influence the beliefs, desires, imagination, or other mental content of its audience in order to accomplish a political feat. There are four parts to EMM that are necessary and jointly sufficient: 1) epistemically defective message 2) used with the intention to persuade 3) a socially significant group of people 4) on behalf of a political institution, organization, or cause. All four components work in concert to form a specific kind of speech act.

I agree that, as currently formulated, the epistemic merit model captures the pejorative sense of propaganda, precisely because it identifies propaganda as a speech act with an epistemically defective message. Since it is the defectiveness of the message that accounts for the term's pejorative valence, a neutral definition of propaganda might still invoke the insights of speech act theory while not being committed to the message's being epistemically defective. A neutral definition of propaganda could likewise admit the following four necessary and jointly sufficient conditions: 1) a charged, epistemically merited message 2) used with the intention to persuade, 3) a socially significant group of people, 4) on behalf of a political institution, organization, or cause. That is, the conditions are identical with the exception of the first. There are two parts to the message in the neutral sense: the first is that it is epistemically merited and the second is that it is charged where charged could be read as meaning roughly the same as J.L. Austin's "total speech act."[\[16\]](#) This contrasts with the first condition of the pejorative sense in which the message is epistemically defective.

The difference between a charged, epistemically merited message and an epistemically defective message, apart from the message's relation to knowledge (broadly construed), is that a "charged message" would involve all three acts of Austin's speech act theory: locutionary act, illocutionary act, and perlocutionary act. In short, each charged message would have signs or symbols that are intended to express meaningful content (locutionary act). It

is intended to do something further by means of the charged message (illocutionary act), and the message would have some sort of uptake whereby the audience recognizes the locutionary and illocutionary acts (perlocutionary act). We should be clear that the uptake does not necessarily involve the audience *believing* the message but instead the audience recognizing the intent of the speaker in conveying a specific message. A charged message is overt about its being propaganda.

One might object that epistemic merit or defectiveness is one of degree and hardly the sort of sortal property necessary to separate different kinds of propaganda. I would respond that all propaganda is of the same species; that is, it is all a species of political persuasion. What serves to differentiate all propaganda from other forms of persuasion are the conditions 2-4. There may be some overlap between the epistemically merited messages and the epistemically defective messages, but this is what one would expect of a category that admits of degrees. If there were a blue-yellow spectrum for shades of green, one might expect that a particular shade might appear either more bluish or yellowish depending on other features within the context. However, the existence of such a spectrum does not mean that there is not a meaningful distinction made between blue and yellow.

One might similarly state that the EMM does not adequately deal with the moral dimensions of propaganda, as not all cases of epistemic defectiveness are moral failings. However, it is not clear that all cases of propaganda in the pejorative (or even neutral) sense must be labeled with the same moral property. Since the EMM demands an interpretation of the work's message and how the message is connected to other beliefs likely to be held by its intended audience, the interpretative work in sorting out the morality of the message will depend on the contents and contexts of the propaganda's use, and hence not all propaganda, whether pejorative or neutral, will be able to be painted with the same moral color.

An example of how we can apply speech act theory to songs may make things clearer. Theodore Gracyk applies Austin's theory to the band, U2. He offers a clear explanation of locution, illocution, and perlocution, so I will quote him at length here:

The power to perform actions with words and other sounds depends on the total act in the total speech situation. The point of stressing the "total speech act" is that each utterance typically performs three different acts: a locutionary act, an illocutionary act, and a perlocutionary act. The locutionary act is the production of meaningful sounds or other signs, such as Bono's ability to articulate the three sounds that form the two words "walk away" during the chorus of "I Will Follow." The illocutionary act is to express his feelings about his mother. The perlocutionary act is the production of consequences by means of the successful illocutionary act, such as getting the listeners to pay attention to the theme of mothers and sons. Many of U2's overtly political songs seem to be offered with the perlocutionary intention of getting the audience to think about politics such as getting listeners to think about American Imperialism by means of the words and music of "Bullet of the Blue Sky."... *Rattle and Hum* documents Bono lecturing the audience about apartheid during "Silver and Gold" concluding, "Am I buggin' ya? I don't mean to bug ya." Bono wants to inspire the crowd to think about apartheid, but he knows that the illocutionary act of preaching may commit the perlocutionary act that he did not intend, such as alienating the mass audience.<sup>[17]</sup>

One advantage of couching propaganda analysis in speech act theory is that this theory has been used to explain other uses of art, those which go beyond the contemplation of art for art's sake. Since art has played a central role in the dissemination of propaganda, any adequate theory of propaganda should be sufficient to the task of analyzing art propaganda, including the uses of

songs. In the next section, we turn to extensions of speech act theory to songs and music as developed by Justin London. In addition, we will sample from the catalog of the moral functions of music by Phillip Alperson and Noel Carroll in order to show how the epistemic merit model of propaganda is coherent with current strains of aesthetic research. In the penultimate section we will apply the revised epistemic merit model to the Solidarity Sing-Along of the Madison Protests.

### 3. Propaganda, speech acts, and third-party uses of music or songs

Alperson and Carroll describe some ways that music can be used to influence the body politic. They write, "Music can also play an explicit role in the promotion of social and political action, and this can take several guises.

Music may discharge a cognitive function by marking or bringing to attention conditions that call for political action."[\[18\]](#) The presumption within their essay is that such calls for action are generally moral or the moral part of a political life. This may be because all the examples of such calls to political action that are used as examples in the article are reactions against perceived injustices, such as "Sweet Honey in the Rock" and "Lullabies from the Axis of Evil." That is, if they were to count this function as propaganda, they would be doing so in what the EMM calls the neutral sense. They write, "[M]usic is explicitly composed or performed to raise awareness of oppressive conditions....The meanings may be subtly encoded as in the case of slave songs of the American South. Or the messages can be overt, as in the case of protest songs that highlight conditions of oppression and injustice. This use of protest songs is also well established."[\[19\]](#)

We might extend their analysis to include uses of music that fall under the pejorative sense of propaganda, such as the songs involved in the Rwandan Genocide, "Twansezereye," "Nanga Abahutu" and, "Bene Sebahizi," which were considered as evidence against singer-songwriter Simon Bikindi. The charge he was found guilty of was "direct and public incitement to commit genocide" during the International Rwandan War Tribunal in Arusha, Tanzania.[\[20\]](#) Bikinda's actions are depicted in the opening scene of the fictional film *Hotel Rwanda*.[\[21\]](#) While Alperson and Carroll do not specifically call for speech act-inspired propaganda analysis of music, the purpose of their article was to catalog or survey different moral uses of music, and their account is consistent with EMM-inspired propaganda analysis.

In comparison, Justin London's essay, "Third Party Uses of Music and Musical Pragmatics," uses speech act theory to explain how music might be used as lullabies, valentines, or even to keep kids from loitering in parking lots.

London writes, "A third-party use of a piece of music or musical performance occurs when someone takes a piece written or performed by another person or group and presents it to a listener (or listeners) for their own communicative purposes....More precisely, a third-party use of music involves the presentation of a work in a nonnormative musical context and with a discernible intention separate from simply that of listening to music for its own sake."[\[22\]](#)

It is worth repeating that both the pejorative and neutral senses of propaganda in the EMM are what Austin would call a "total speech act." The speech act theory of linguistic analysis is sometimes referred to as a pragmatic theory: that language does more than refer to the world is a key insight of speech act theory. London extends speech act theory to account for pragmatic uses of music, including songs. For each specific kind of total speech act, locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary, London offers analogous musical counterparts: tonary act, intonary act, and pertonary act.

Hence, a tonary act is a "musical performance P with some expressive property P." An intonary act is "an agent's use of P for some pragmatic function (to annoy, to calm, to inform, to provide an aesthetic experience) by virtue of P having EP in the particular musical-discursive content, C, from

which the listener may infer the performer's intonary intent." Finally a per-tonary act "occurs when the agent's intentions in affecting the listener's feelings, beliefs, or behavior are realized."[\[23\]](#)

London claims that "an examination of third-party uses can clarify the expressive potential of a piece of music by embedding it in a relatively thick discursive context."[\[24\]](#) Likewise, the EMM seeks to clarify the propaganda power of works of art generally, including music and songs, by placing them in a relatively thick discursive context. The descriptions of such discursive contexts are enumerated by the necessary and jointly sufficient conditions set out by the model: 1) an epistemically defective (or charged, epistemically merited) message 2) used with the intention to persuade 3) a socially significant group of people 4) on behalf of a political institution, organization, or cause. These conditions constrain how one describes the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts (or their musical equivalents) as acts of propaganda. However, I suspect that the intonary act will be the richest construction for propaganda analysis. In the next section, we will use the EMM to describe the propaganda power of protest songs, the act of singing, and Solidarity Sing-Along's playlist in their ongoing protest of the Budget Repair Bill and other actions by Wisconsin's governor.

#### **4. Applying the revised Epistemic Merit Model to Madison Solidarity Sing-Along protests**

The protests to the Budget Repair Bill in Madison lasted for roughly three weeks. They began when the Teaching Assistants' Association (the University of Wisconsin-Madison graduate student union) delivered valentines to Governor Scott Walker, urging him to have a heart, to save the university from drastic budget cuts, and not to abolish collective bargaining rights for all state employees.[\[25\]](#) The State Assembly held public hearings and floor debates for 61 hours, which ended in a surprise call to vote that lasted only seconds, leaving many members of the assembly unable to cast their votes.[\[26\]](#) The measure passed the Assembly and awaited the return of fourteen state senators for final passage. Meanwhile, hundreds of thousands of protesters marched outside, and hundreds more occupied the Capitol, sleeping for sixteen nights on the marble floors as sympathizers from all over the world paid to have pizza delivered to the crowds.[\[27\]](#) The State Senate rewrote a portion of the bill so that only a simple majority, instead of two-thirds of the senators, would comprise a quorum for the vote. On March 10th, the State Senate followed the Assembly and hastily passed the bill while the fourteen state senators were out of state. The very next day, Governor Walker signed his bill into law.[\[28\]](#)

The day of the signing, "Steve Burns printed up some song books and led the first Solidarity Sing-Along in the Capitol. The idea was very simple. Stand in a circle. Sing for an hour. Leave. Come back the next day and do it again."[\[29\]](#) The Solidarity Sing-Along has been held every week day since then. The singers released a CD entitled, "This is What Democracy Sounds Like," and have created several editions of their songbook, adding new songs and lyrics to their repertoire. "After the large rallies ended, many people were looking for a way to continue the spirit of the occupation, to keep the energy alive as we began to work toward stopping the extreme agenda being foisted upon our beloved state."[\[30\]](#)

Clearly, Steve Burns and those who gathered with him day after day were harnessing the propaganda power of protest songs. The EMM identifies four conditions that help identify and interpret art propaganda. 1) An epistemically defective/charged epistemic merited message 2) used with the intent to persuade 3) a socially significant audience 4) on behalf of an institution, organization, or cause. One might wonder, given this model, how to individuate the specific acts of propaganda when the protest is ongoing: Is it the individual songs? Is each day a different act? Does it matter if the

singers change? What if the nature of the political organization or cause changes? Could one in the same protest have propaganda in both senses of the word?

I think a broadly Davidsonian approach would be useful here, without putting too much weight on specific metaphysical issues.<sup>[31]</sup> I suggest that we can describe art propaganda by filling in each of the blanks of the conditions specified, while recognizing that there may be instances of propaganda, artistic or otherwise, that are intended to advance a particular political organization, institution, or cause and that the cause may change as events unfold. This is figuratively analogous to the Russian matryoshka dolls, whose smaller dolls nest within incrementally larger ones. This leaves open the possibility that some of the propaganda would give rise to propaganda in the pejorative sense of the word, whereas other instances would be propaganda considered positively or neutrally, the difference lying in the merit of the message.

The Solidarity Singers' membership consists of all who have participated in a sing-along. The individuals who participate may vary day by day, but a commitment to keeping the spotlight on the "extreme agenda" of a Tea Party-dominated state government is shared by all. The Solidarity Singers retain the same commitment to their protest practices even though the group has changed leaders and the content of their cause shifts as further political events unfold. For example, there were many elements of the Budget Repair Bill that were objectionable to the singers: the \$1.2 billion cut to public school aid; a plan to drop 30,000 people (including many children) from Badger-care, a state-run health insurance for the poor, as well as the dismantling of collective bargaining rights for state employees. Moreover, the Budget Repair Bill is not the Republican-dominated state government's only legislative achievement. Republican lawmakers have passed bills that require photo identification to vote, proposed a mining bill that eliminates public hearings, reduces pollution controls, and fast-tracked permits for Northern Wisconsin mines. The Solidarity Singers as individuals may not all find the same things objectionable about the current administration, but they all find the "extreme agenda" enough to begin a protest practice whose purpose is to petition the government.<sup>[32]</sup> Hence, we have identified the fourth condition of EMM: the Solidarity Singers are a political organization.

The intention to persuade, or the second condition of EMM, is expressed by the Solidarity Singers with their recitation of Article 1, Section 4, of the Wisconsin State Constitution at the beginning of every sing-along. "The right of the people peaceably to assemble, to consult for the common good, and to petition the government, or any department thereof, shall never be abridged."<sup>[33]</sup> They petition the government to reconsider some of its policies. They also believe that this sort of petition is worth the effort.

Reeder writes, "a secondary purpose had developed. The sing-along was strengthening us. The power of singing together was unmistakable. We left stronger than we arrived. We might arrive in despair, shocked at some new atrocity the Walker administration was attempting to foist upon our state, but we could leave strengthened and ready to get back to the important work of participatory democracy."<sup>[34]</sup>

They have a socially significant audience in the stated purpose as expressed by Chris Reeder, an organizer and song leader: "[T]he main purpose of the sing-along was...petitioning of our government." Of course, there can be more than one audience and even more than one intended audience. There are many appropriate descriptions that would meet the third condition of EMM, a socially significant audience, and there is no contradiction in having those singing also being the audience for the performance. The audience is also broader than the walls of the Capitol building. The singers' protest practice has garnered media notice from the local papers and national



magazines.[35] Also, it has caught the attention of prominent singers such as Jackson Browne, Tom Morello, and Billy Bragg, who have on occasion joined the Sing-Along. Billy Bragg, the British musician who penned "There is Power in a Union," added an international scope to the audience because his role in the British Labour Union protest of the 1980s connects that struggle with the events in Madison. Tom Morello has participated in the Sing-Along, as well.

The whole experience of the Madison Protests and the Solidarity Sing-Along inspired a bonus track on his album *Worldwide Rebel Songs*. Thus, Morello and Bragg are the audience, the participants, and the composers of some of the protest songs. Moreover, Morello has described his Madison experiences when interviewed by CNN or as a panel participant on television shows such as *Real Time with Bill Maher*. This gives the protest a wider audience than a simple gathering in the Capitol would have attracted.

The meat of the EMM model and its first condition is an analysis of the epistemic merit of the message. The sheer act of singing in a circle for an hour every day for days on end has its own message. The messages of the Sing-Along are conveyed by the lyrics of the songs as much as by the persistence of the gatherings. The songs that comprise any given Sing-Along vary every day of the protest. As mentioned above, the meetings always start with a recitation from the Wisconsin State Constitution.[36] After newcomers and regulars have been given song books, the song leader asks if there are any requests. We can consider the epistemic merit of the message that is generally conveyed by the existence of the sing-along, and then consider the epistemic merit of the song lyrics in the context of the Madison Capitol.

To use London's terminology, the tonary, the intonary, and pertonary or the total musical pragmatics of a message should be considered in order to evaluate a message's epistemic merit. The tonary act is the expression of protest to the state of political affairs. The intonary act may be described as "moral deference." Jeanette Bicknell suggests "to practice moral deference is to acquire a new set of sensibilities about what it is to live as an oppressed person in an unjust world." [37] Moral deference is a term she borrowed from Laurence Thomas, who claims that "the persistence of memory is what makes moral deference necessary and what makes it possible. The memory of past injustice shapes individual's responses in the present...Since a community's memories are so often captured and transmitted through its music, it seems especially appropriate to practice moral deference with regard to that music." [38] The use of songs, such as "We Shall Overcome," "There is Power in a Union," and "Solidarity Forever," is intended to express historical commonality with other protests, to speak to the powers that be in the present historical condition, and to form a community as ballast against the storms of injustice.

Some may argue that to call the intonary act of the Solidarity Sing-Along moral deference is to insinuate a false equivalence between the dictates of the Budget Repair Bill and the oppressions of slavery and patriarchy. I would suggest that in rural areas where more than half the population lives in poverty, taking away many farmers' access to health care by making them ineligible for BadgerCare, and weakening the strongest public institution in many country towns, the public schools, frays the very fabric of small town life at the edges, which is indeed oppressive.

The intonary act is amplified by the juxtapositions of familiar tunes with new, regionally inspired lyrics. The Woody Guthrie song, "This Land is your Land," is sung with the lyrics, "This House is your House, this House is my House. From the rotunda, to the Governor's office! Scott Walker will never push us out. This House was made for you and me." [39] The Raging Grannies (a protest group of women aged fifty years or older) penned, "Oh, Scott Walker," to the tune of "Oh Susana." It proclaims, "Oh, Scott Walker, now don't you

mess with me. I come from Wisconsin, with a sign for you to see.”<sup>[40]</sup> The use of the familiar tunes makes participation in the protest easier, particularly for those who cannot read music. Further, the use of these songs serves to mark a historical moment and to activate more participation in the political process.

The summer after the passage of Walker’s Budget Repair Bill, five state senators faced recall elections: two Republican senators and three Democrat Senators.<sup>[41]</sup> There are song lyrics that specifically mention the recall to the tune of the University of Wisconsin’s fight song, “On Wisconsin!” “On Wisconsin! On Wisconsin! Union, through and through! Recall the senate union busters, their boss Walker, too. Rah, rah, rah!”<sup>[42]</sup> In January 2012, more than one million signatures were filed to recall Governor Walker and Lt. Governor Kleefisch. This marks only the third time in United States history that a state governor has been forced to stand a recall election. The songs that feature recall lyrics set to familiar tunes have, as their intonary act, moral support for the recall effort.

The epistemic merit of the messages inherent in the protest song lyrics often turn on a highly contextualized interpretation. There are times when the lyrics clearly appear hyperbolic and even histrionic. For example, the lyric of “The Fiddler” (“to recall a puppet governor the Tea Party enshrines”) is not particularly fair to a governor who sees himself as a deeply principled conservative.<sup>[43]</sup> The phrase, “Walker ain’t gonna govern here no more,” when sung before the recall election, reflects an aspiration. After the recall election, it is plainly false.<sup>[44]</sup> Though these over-the-top lyrics are part of what gives propaganda its pejorative sense, we should be clear that an epistemic defect does not entail a moral deficit. A further argument needs to be made in order to show that a specific epistemically defective message may be morally problematic. This lies beyond the scope of this project and would be a topic for a different paper. As a whole, I think the Solidarity Sing-Along is epistemically merited, as the lyrics wear their literary tropes openly and enables an audience to separate hyperbole from truth, or caricature from fact.

The pertonary act of the Solidarity Sing-Along reveals the uptake of the audience to the tonary and intonary acts. Those who sympathize with the cause and participate or watch are witness to a range of feelings from righteous indignation to amusement in response to clever lyrics. The pertonary act is partially responsible for the success of the recall movement in gathering signatures and it prompted the Wisconsin Department of Administration to pass a policy requiring groups of four or more persons of non-related members to purchase a protest permit in order to congregate in the Capitol.<sup>[45]</sup> The ACLU complained that such a policy violates the First Amendment, and in response the policy was changed so that there were no consequences to violating it, and it has never been enforced. Given that Scott Walker is the first governor to survive a recall election, the pertonary act of continuing to sing in the midst of obstacles is an affirmation of the long arc of justice and a testament to a belief in the virtues of participatory democracy.

## 5. Conclusion

So what does Madison’s Solidarity Sing-Along show us about the propaganda power of protest songs and protest singing? It demonstrates that the very act of singing can serve to petition a government for redress, to coalesce a community, to attract attention from multinational media sources, to make injustices known, and to record the events for history while placing them in the broader context of a historical narrative. This propaganda power of protest songs does not have the power of a gun or a vote in a ballot box. Its power is best summed up by Madison songwriter and performer Lou Berryman: “I can’t tell whether music changes the world, but I know it changes people, one person at a time.”<sup>[46]</sup> The political implication of such

change should not be underestimated.[47] Finally, it shows that in a democratic state, it is not simply rational arguments that articulate political viewpoints, but the expressive power of songs have the power to represent the voices of the people, as well.

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Published on April 1, 2013.

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### Endnotes

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[2] *Senate Bill 11*, State of Wisconsin 2011-2012 Legislature, January 2011. Special Session, February 14, 2011.

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[8] Solidarity Sing Along's Facebook page at <http://www.facebook.com/SolidaritySingAlong>. Video link <http://youtu.be/YP14IBUzLUM>

[9] Tom Morello on *Real Time with Bill Maher* (HBO) has made this claim as well as Michael Moore in *Tavis Smiley's Public Forum on Poverty* (C-Span).

[10] Robert Jackall, "Introduction," *Propaganda*, ed. Robert Jackall (New York: University Press, 1995), p. 1

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[12] Sheryl Tuttle Ross "Understanding Propaganda: The Epistemic Merit Model and its Application to Art," *The Journal of Aesthetic Education*, 36, 1 (2002).

- [13] *Ibid.*
- [14] *Ibid.*
- [15] *Ibid.*
- [16] J.L Austin, *How to Do Things With Words* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1975).
- [17] Theodore Gracyk, "To Find a Song that I Can Sing: What Philosophy of Language Can Tell Us about Popular Success," *U2 and Philosophy*, ed. by Mark Wrathall (Blackwell Wiley, 2006).
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- [19] *Ibid.*, p. 7.
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- [21] *Hotel Rwanda* (2004), directed by Terry George.
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- [29] Chris Reeder, "This is What Democracy Sounds like," *Solidarity Sing Along CD* (February 2012).
- [30] *Ibid.*
- [31] Donald Davidson, "The Individuation of Events," *Essays on Actions and Events* (Oxford, 1980).
- [32] Chris Reeder, *Solidarity Sing Along CD*.
- [33] Wisconsin State Constitution Article 1, Section 4.
- [34] Chris Reeder, *Solidarity Sing Along CD*.
- [35] *The Progressive*, *The Nation* and *Daily Kos* have all had articles about Solidarity Sing-Along.
- [36] Video Link: <http://youtu.be/3SlqeunfXNU>
- [37] Jeanette Bicknell "Reflections on 'John Henry': Ethical Issues in Singing Performance," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, 67, 2 (Spring 2009).
- [38] *Ibid.*, p. 178.

[39] Peter Leidy and Woody Guthrie, "This Land is Your Land," *Solidarity Sing Along Songbook* (March 2011).

[40] Stephen Foster, "Oh Susana!," with new lyrics by Kathy Miner for the Raging Grannies *Solidarity Sing Along Songbook* (March 2011).

[41] Those who signed the recall petitions for the Democratic Senators contend that fleeing the state to avoid a contentious vote was a breach of duties. The *Solidarity Sing Along* strongly favored the recall of the Republican Senators and Governor Scott Walker because of their extreme agenda, especially the contents of the Budget Repair Bill.

[42] William T Purdy, Charles Rosa and J.S. Hubbard, "On Wisconsin" Fight Song with additional lyrics by Berry Craig, Steve Burns and Theodora Winston Youmans, *Solidarity Sing Along Songbook* (March 2011).

[43] Greg Gordon, "Down at the Sing Along," *Solidarity Sing Along Songbook* (March 2011).

[44] Doleta Chapru, "The Fiddler," *Solidarity Sing Along Songbook* (March 2011).

[45] Clay Barbour, "Protest singers' numbers grow in wake of Capitol chief's comments," *The State Journal* (August 29, 2012).

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[46] *Solidarity Sing Along CD*.

[47] I would like to express my gratitude to the anonymous reviewers for *Contemporary Aesthetics* who provided helpful criticisms, to Eva Dadlez, James W. Mock, and Jeanette Bicknell for their supportive comments, and to Luke Konkol for technical help.

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