

Echo Chamber

August 17th, 2013 Comments Off

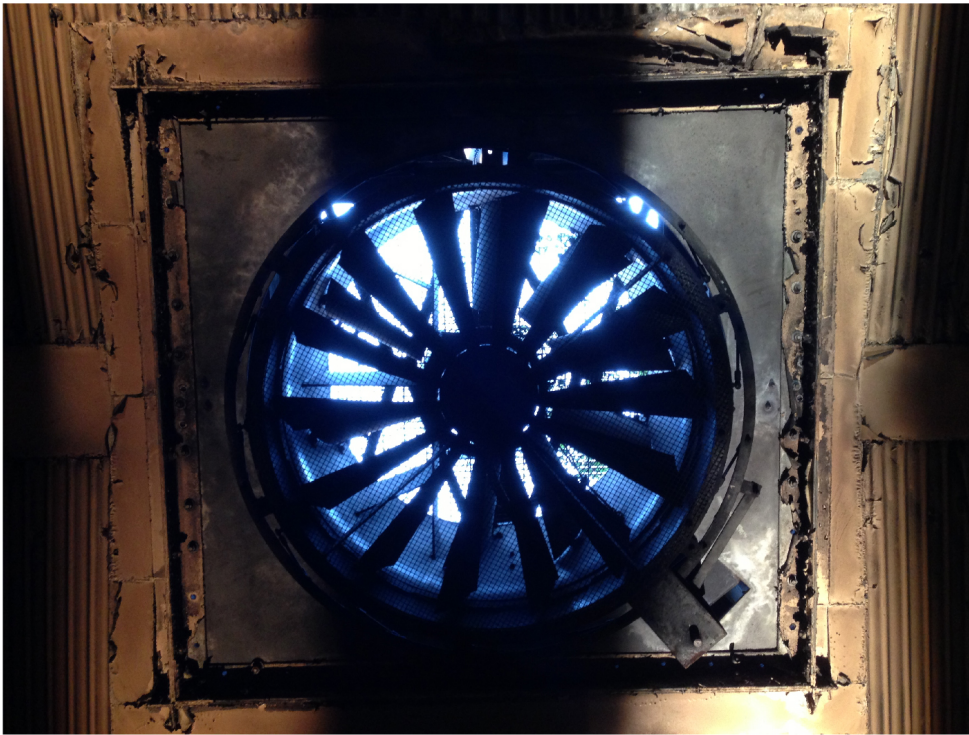
I visited Rafael Lozano-Hemmer's *Voice Tunnel*, a site-specific installation created as part of the NYC DOT's annual [Summer Streets](#) program, which closes off Lafayette Street and Park Avenue to vehicular traffic from the Brooklyn Bridge up to 72nd Street for three consecutive Saturday mornings each August.



Voice Tunnel consists of 300 theatrical profile lights and 150 loudspeakers, set up in the Park Avenue Tunnel each morning and broken down every afternoon before it can be reopened to traffic. There is one microphone in the center of the 7-block-long tunnel, where visitors can record brief greetings, which then get replayed in a loop via the individual loudspeakers. Each loudspeaker plays a different voice recording, and each profile light displays in brightness that's proportional to the loudness of the recording. Every 30 seconds or so the lights go dark and the recordings fall silent, and then the sound

loops move down the tunnel by one loudspeaker, until they are gone.

Voice Tunnel, an extension of Lozano-Hemmer's earlier [Pulse Park](#) in Madison Square Park, has been extremely popular. At 8:35am, I stood in a line that went from Park Ave and 32nd St all the way to Lexington and 34th. The fast-moving line vibrated with excitement.



What dawned on me only later (around, probably, 36th Street, underground) is that I was already part of the installation. From the moment we were allowed into the tunnel, visitors started snapping portraits and excitedly chatting with their friends as they slowly ambled through the tunnel. As the lights and recordings fell dark and quiet at regular intervals, I realized how hard it was to distinguish the voices of the crowds from the voices in the recordings. As I walked past each loudspeaker I could isolate the sounds (“I need a pie”, “My love to Lauren”, “New York is super incredible”), but they quickly faded into the din.

As we walked back into the open air and my fellow visitors continued yammering about their days, about Citi Bike, about Starbucks, I remembered, with a grimace, that unlike the recordings in *Voice Tunnel*, our cicada's song is never hushed.

