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Dissertation Proposal

Performative Poesis and the (Un)Making of the World:

Alex Caldiero's Sonosophy as Ethnography

Introduction

Contemporary Utah poet Alex Caldiero's performative mode of poetry and poetics, which he calls sonosophy, critiques conventional notions of epistemology, ethnography, language, pedagogy, performance, and poetry. It does so by maintaining what Caldiero calls a "twin presence" between holiness and farce, the magical and the mundane, the performance of the jester and the acts of the priest (qtd. in Kostelanetz, *Dictionary* 104). Through this dynamic presence Caldiero aims to pivot the poet and his audience between sideshow and temple, clearing space in which to enact and to catechize the "rites" of language. In this space, performer and spectator at once share and disrupt "simple open speech"¹ as sacrament, a subversive process that stresses the materiality of language and its origin in the physical and social relations among human bodies and communities. Caldiero consciously situates himself in this "precarious position" between reverence and irreverence (qtd. in Kostelanetz, *Dictionary* 104). From this position he seeks to forge "a relationship between the ridiculous and the sacred" in his performances and in the minds and lives of his audience. However, because "[he] would have jester and priest be the same person or close associates," because he claims "the trickster as [a] dispenser of wisdom," and because he seeks to give voice to and to embody each of these characters at once, his work is often viewed with derision by many in his audience, the deeply reserved and religious Utah community (Caldiero, "Momo").

¹This term comes from poet Cid Corman. Corman uses the term in his blurb for Caldiero's *Various*, back cover.

My purpose in this dissertation is to examine not just the reception of performance poetry like Caldiero's, but also how performance poetry, and in particular Caldiero's sonosophy, can make us realize the limitations we place on what language, performance, and poetry are *supposed* to be by pushing against, deconstructing, and reconstructing these arbitrary boundaries. In this sense, sonosophy serves an auto-ethnographic function (ethnography performed from within a community). It presents spectators with language and experience drawn from outside conventional modes of thought aimed at disrupting what performance theorist Dwight Conquergood calls "[well-]established premises" and to "play with [widely-accepted notions] of reality" ("Ethnography" 81).

In order to represent sonosophy as such a performative mode of ethnography, my intention is to use ethnopoetic transcription techniques to analyze Caldiero in performance. By ethnographically situating the sonospher within the network of cultures and traditions that resonate with and in his work, I will further interpret his performative poetics as a site from which to interrogate the interrelated processes of poetry making, poetry performance, and performance ethnography and how these processes function in human terms. In so doing, I will suggest that, through its whole-bodied performance of words, sounds, gestures, and images, sonosophy has the potential to communicate profoundly and to influence spectators in ways not possible through less dynamic discursive structures. While I take Caldiero as a prime example of these sonosophic processes, my project has further implications for the analysis and interpretation of the work of other contemporary performance poets, such as Amiri Baraka, Bill Bissett, F'loom (Robert Kulik, Bess Phillips, and Rick Scott), Jean Howard, Penn Kemp, Shane Koyczan, Taylor Mali, Tracie Morris, Alix Olson, Lynne Procope, Jerome Rothenberg, Patricia Smith, Susan B. Anthony Somers-Willett, John Trudell, and Saul Williams.

Background and Review of Literature

I. Biographical Details

Alex (Alissandru) Caldiero was born in Licodia Eubea, near Catania, Sicily, in 1949. His family immigrated to the United States when he was nine, and he was raised in Manhattan and Brooklyn and educated at Queens College in Flushing, New York, and later as an apprentice to American sculptor Michael Lekakis and Italian poet-bard Ignazio Buttitta. In 1980, after converting to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism), Caldiero moved to Utah with his wife and children, where he now serves as the Poet/Artist-in-Residence at Utah Valley University, a position in the school's Integrated Studies Department ("Bite Size"; Hardy B1).

Throughout this journey west—from Sicily to New York to Utah—and in subsequent years, Caldiero has developed a distinctive mode of performative poetics that he calls "sonosophy" (Secrist). Sonosophy as *a neologism* marries sound (*sonus*) and wisdom (*-sophy*) in a semiotic union that signifies the wisdom that can be gained by attending to the sonic structures of the world, especially as these underlie and find expression in and through the body, human language, and religious and social rituals. For Caldiero, sonosophy as *a system of thought* interrogates the assumptions often made about these embodiment, language, and ritual by asking after the processes by which they are sustained and perpetuated across time and space. And in a way suggestive of performance ethnography, as *praxis* sonosophy explores, deconstructs, reconstructs, and performs these processes through animated, often disruptive speech-acts.

One such example of Caldiero in performance is a four-word poem, "Beautiful, idyllic, isn't it," a speech-act that was produced to be experienced and *reproduced* online. Caldiero's

performance incorporates the body, the entire viewing screen, the range of the poet's vocal register, and the camera's ability to direct viewers' attention in predetermined ways. The performance begins with a close-up of Caldiero's mouth. Framed thus, he speaks the poem in a near whisper, enunciating each syllable in order to highlight the mechanism and the physical production of his words. As the camera moves slowly backward, Caldiero repeats the poem, enunciating as before but growing louder with each repetition until, the camera having settled on a view framing the poet's chest and head, he has reached the other limit of his register and is voicing the words at the top of his lungs. I argue that the spectators experiencing this poem are invited, through Caldiero's performance, to question, among other things, the creation of beauty as a cultural category (ethnography), the aesthetics of language use across a range of human performance, and the limits of performance and poetry.

As illustrated in this brief analysis, Caldiero intends these performances to shake an audience out of a possibly untested acceptance of the relationship between sound and the body, word and meaning, sign and signified by making the mechanics of language palpable as an embodied practice. In this way, sonosophy encourages listeners to seek to better understand and to more carefully engage the means we use to interpret the world and to communicate and commune with others. Based upon Caldiero's description of a sonosopic performance, we can specify these means as including sounds, words, gestures, rituals, images, poetry, and performance (qtd. in Hopkinson). Caldiero's sonosophy can thus persuade us to become not only more effective, responsible communicators and interpreters of the world, but also improved listeners to and interpreters of the sounds and silences of our own bodies, cultures, and histories, and the sounds, silences, and performances of others. In this light, it can further offer an avenue

into understanding and explaining other poets' work and the dynamic processes of poetry in performance.

This poetics draws from and builds upon each of the traditions Caldiero claims as foundational to his life, character, and approach to performance. From his childhood in Sicily, during which he was trained as a Catholic altar boy, he recalls an emergent passion for performance, an obsession for the “total [sensual] experience” available in the liturgical rite’s marriage of physical space—the church proper—with bodily space. As he observes, this ritualized confluence of “architectural structure” with bodies, images, movement, smells, and sounds still “affects [him] today.” In fact, he says, the phenomenal richness of ritual is “what [he] keep[s] striving for” in his own poetic creation and re-creation of the world (“Performance and Ritual”).

In addition to his early training in the performance of ritual, Caldiero cites a decades-long engagement with Allen Ginsberg’s “Howl.” Caldiero notes that “Howl” both “scared” and “liberat[ed]” him when he first discovered it in the 1960s as a teenager in Brooklyn, a Sicilian immigrant confronted with the same irruptions in the social order that had instigated the poem and the Beat Generation of writers and artists it so aptly represents (Rosen; Lipton). The poem’s evocation of such universal themes as the terrors of war, gender in society, drug use and abuse, and the treatment of the mentally ill, as deployed through Ginsberg’s incantatory and breath-length lines, scared Caldiero, as he puts it, into a change of consciousness centered on his place as an embodied being in the world (Fulton). This realization liberated him to more personally and actively engage his cultures and his histories, to ground himself in the traditions that inform and sustain his presence, activity, and agency both on and off the stage (Rosen).

Another sustaining influence cited by Caldiero as significant in his development as a performer is the *cuntastorie*, an itinerant singer of epic poems who maintained a presence in Sicily, as Antonio Scuderi notes, “up until the early part of the twentieth century” (68). Caldiero affiliates himself with “[this] folk tradition of the story teller [...], who as a medium,” he further observes, “utilizes the body itself with all its resources for sound-word-gesture-image” (qtd. in Kostelanetz, *Text-Sound* 434). He connects the *cuntastorie*’s embodiment of sound, word, gesture, and image as culturally embedded means to communication and knowledge with the Beats’ reappraisal and use of the elements of oral performance in their writing (Rosen; Lee; Lipton 226-31). Both traditions, he suggests, reach back in performance toward “the nature and origin of language” (qtd. in Kostelanetz, *Text-Sound Texts* 434).

Additionally, Caldiero points to his conversion to Mormonism, which “enlarged [him]” as both a human and a performer. He explains that the conversion enlarged him as a human by expanding the network of experience within which he could connect with himself and others, including God. And it enlarged him as a performer by connecting him with historical figures and an additional set of rituals from which he could draw inspiration for his work and through which he could interrogate his experience in the world and his relationships with individuals, institutions, cultures, and histories that are especially relevant to many in his Utah audiences. Especially prominent among the Latter-day Saint influences claimed by Caldiero are Joseph Smith—founder and first president of the LDS Church—and the Mormon temple ritual (“Why”; Caldiero and Howe). Caldiero calls Smith “a seer and a revelator, [...] a prophet and a charlatan of God,” a man of deep convictions, contradictions, and controversy who could look into Heaven, put on the mask of omnipotence, and perform God’s mysteries for his followers (“Caldiero’s Mormon Experience”).

For the Mormons among Caldiero's audience, a defining aspect of Smith's performance is his representation of God as an exalted Man called Heavenly Father, a being who advanced from manhood to godhood by obedience to laws that exist independent of his agency (Smith 7). The insider (emic) LDS audience understands Smith's prophetic performance as inquiring after this agency. Furthermore, because Smith sought to account for and to encompass all aspects of God's mysteries—including both the darkness and the light—and because Smith's staging of God's development was intended to rouse people out of intellectual and spiritual complacency, Caldiero considers Smith "a coyote figure," a trickster who dispensed wisdom to those discerning and playful enough to join the masquerade ("Caldiero's Mormon Experience"). This analogy indirectly equates Caldiero with Smith, since Caldiero also explicitly styles himself as a trickster.

The performance process established by Smith includes ritual enactment of the creation drama, a communal performance Smith facilitated when he initiated the Mormon temple rites in the 1830s. We can see these rites as essentially participatory storytelling sessions held behind closed doors in Mormon temples wherein authorized individuals are, first, literally washed of sin and anointed to fulfill their potential as children of God, after which they take part in scripted retellings of humanity's pre-mortal existence in God's presence, of Earth's creation, and of the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Paradise and redemption through Christ. As the story unfolds, participants, each cast in the role of Adam (for the men) and Eve (for the women), receive a series of ordinances at the hands of authorized officiators. These ordinances are interpreted by the LDS as instructing supplicants in the means to salvation and ritually binding them to live by these means. The dramatic climax of this instruction comes when participants pass through the temple veil, a long curtain that hangs across the front of the ceremony room as a

representation of Christ's flesh and his ritualized mediation between humanity and deity. They pass through this veil into what Mormons call the Celestial Room, a place of light and serenity that symbolizes a return to God's presence. Here participants can commune with "like-dedicated" and "like-experienced" individuals in moments of "deep fellowship" that arise out of the shared performance of ritual (Rozsa). Caldiero served as an officiator of these rites in the Salt Lake City Temple for eight years in the 1980s after he and his family moved to Utah (Hardy B1). He claims that they continue to inform his performance processes and that they are a driving motivation behind his continued quest for communion and community (Caldiero and Howe; "Caldiero's Mormon Experience").

In an interview with Salt Lake City art critic, Frank McEntire, Caldiero says that an overarching influence on his poetics is Dada, an anti-movement movement in the plastic, performance, and language arts that surfaced in Zurich, Switzerland, in the early twentieth century (E10). From its inception, Dada was meant to unsettle ways of thinking that privilege Cartesian logic. That is, rather than assuming "an absolute, totalizing set of beliefs" around which to create and to criticize art and society in order to further reduce their operations "to a set of agreed upon tenets," Dada stands at the periphery, decentered. Here it resists the efforts of those who seek to assign it "value, defined function, or meaning" (Erickson Preface). And by refusing to be reduced to predefined categories, Dada, in all of its manifestations—including in the plastic, performance, and language arts—exists in the infinite play of value, function, and meaning. As Caldiero has it, he situates himself in this "ambivalent position" of infinite play (qtd. in McEntire E10). This ultimately alienates him both from the material of his performance and from his audience. Indeed, for Caldiero, art, languages, performance, and poetics cannot create static spaces of communion and shared meaning. Yet this only compels him to poke at the

boundaries more in his efforts to engage spectators and students with the dynamic processes underlying human language, meaning, and community.

II. Trends and Priorities in Performance Studies: A Review of Literature

As a means 1) to analyze and to interpret the workings of these performance heritages claimed by Caldiero as informing his sonosophy and its praxis and 2) to explore how sonosophy can expand our understanding of ethnography, performance poetry, and pedagogy, I turn now to performance studies. Performance studies emerged as an academic field in the 1970s, arising out of what ethnographer and rhetorician Dwight Conquergood calls the “overlapping space” between the social sciences and the humanities. Though Conquergood specifically conceives the field as “the borderlands terrain” between ethnography and rhetoric, its interdisciplinary constitution extends, on the one hand, into anthropology, linguistics, and sociology and, on the other, into folklore, history, literature, and philosophy (“Ethnography” 80). Thus expanding to explore these interdisciplinary grounds, performance studies draws theoretical paradigms and motivations from the range of disciplines listed above in order to treat performance in its various manifestations as a subject for serious scholarly study. In this way, it pulls what Richard Schechner calls “the broad spectrum” of human performance beneath its interpretive tent, facilitating the analysis of everything from the performing and verbal arts to cultural performance to rituals to popular entertainments to performative behavior in everyday life (“Performance” 7-8). This inclusiveness recognizes the inherently composite and dynamic nature of performance, which is, as Mary S. Strine, Beverly Whitaker Long, and Mary Frances HopKins observe, “historically emergent and variable.” Performance studies itself, then, must also be composite and dynamic in order to actively, creatively, and effectively respond “to the

[variable] cultural climates [...] that generate and foster performance activities” across time and space (181).

This inherent variability makes performance “an essentially contested concept,” according to Strine, Long, and HopKins (183). In their agenda-mapping article published in 1990, “Research in Interpretation and Performance Studies: Trends, Issues, Priorities,” they define such a contested concept as a discursive site, like art and democracy, whose “very existence is bound up in disagreement about what it is” (183). Disagreements among performance scholars, practitioners, and theorists over exactly what activities, agencies, and elements constitute performance make performance and its study a rich space for scholarly discussion. In this model, the dynamic state of play inherent in performance events, along with the disparate uses and definitions of performance as a concept, become examples of what Walter Bryce Gallie calls the “permanent potential critical value” of each use or interpretation of the term (qtd. in Strine, Long, and HopKins 183). The contest over the essence of performance is not so much a winner-takes-all battle, then, in which each scholar/practitioner seeks to best his or her rivals by asserting the preeminence of one definition over another. Rather, it becomes a gateway into a sustained and continually evolving critical discussion of “performance as process, activity, achievement, and [...] object of study” (Strine, Long, and HopKins 183).

As Strine, Long, and HopKins have it, a major part of the interpretive process that flows from understanding the “conceptual richness of performance” entails viewing performance as a text: “a tissue or weave of always potential meanings and values” (183-4). This observation comes in the wake of poststructuralism’s theoretical shift from viewing objects of study as *works* to viewing them as *texts*. The *work paradigm* suggests self-contained structures whose value is limited to that which has been placed within the structure by some exterior agency; the *text*

paradigm suggests a conceptual and methodological field in which the meaning and value of each text arises out of its relationship with other texts and contexts. Within performance studies, this move set the stage for much of the theorizing undertaken since the discipline's emergence roughly four decades ago. For example, between the mid-1970s and mid-1980s, folklorist and sociolinguist Richard Bauman developed his thinking on "verbal art as performance," an idea based, in his words, "upon an understanding of performance as a mode of speaking" (3). This performative mode of language, however, exists beyond self-contained linguistic structures; it tends more toward the extra-ordinary usage and/or patterning of speech as deployed across a range of texts and contexts (7). In this sense, Bauman suggests "that performance sets up, or represents, an interpretive frame within which the messages communicated [through performance events] are to be understood" beyond what the words spoken or the gestures performed literally mean (9). That is, in order to get increased meaning and value from the text-as-performed, the audience needs to think less about *what* exactly the performer's words and gestures mean and more about *how* these words and gestures might relate and respond to the performance's cultural, historical, and social contexts.

Informed by these (or similar) perspectives on performance as a broad spectrum of texts and activities grounded in and arising out of the contingencies of human experience, contemporary performance scholars and theorists work to question and expand their disciplinary boundaries and its dynamic object of study. And yet, *play* might be the more apt verb to use when describing what performance scholars and theorists are up to when they work. For instance, in his discussion of the intersections of ethnography, rhetoric, and performance, Dwight Conquergood compares ethnographers to "trickster performers and wily sophists": as an observer of human experience in its range of contexts, the ethnographer, in Conquergood's words,

“return[s] from foreign worlds with Other knowledge and use[s] it to disconcert established premises and [to] play with reality at home” (“Ethnography” 81). By so hoping to disrupt conventional modes of thought, the ethnographer, as witness to and interpreter of diverse performance events, might persuade others to see from and to accept new perspectives on human experience. He or she encourages us to play with and to understand others on their own terms. In this sense, performance and its study serve an epistemological function: they become ways of interrogating and of knowing the world and its inhabitants (85).

This knowledge, however, is not total; neither does it reflect nor totalize the entire range of human experience. Rather, as Schechner asserts in his commentary on “the fundamentals of performance studies,” its dynamic nature blurs the boundaries between self and other—as between disciplines, texts, contexts, cultures, and modes of inquiry—to the end of humanizing its subject and its subjects (ix-xii). Indeed, performance theories don’t consider these agencies as static structures to be interpreted independently of their cultural, historical, or social contexts. Rather, they invite inquiry into and engagement with the human meaning of texts and the processes 1) that set performance in motion and 2) through which performers engage and actively seek to influence the world. And activity is key to performance studies’ mode of epistemology: as an observer of performance events and processes, the performance researcher is necessarily drawn into those events and processes, becoming part of the performer’s relational field and embodied practice with his/her presence in the performance arena. Such implication in the observed event is both necessary and desirable: in order to understand and to responsibly represent each performative agency on its own terms, the researcher must situate him/herself as closely to the act of performance as possible.

Charles Bernstein parallels this idea with his notion of “close listening.” He discusses this concept in his editorial introduction to *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*, an anthology of essays published in 1998 and centered on exploring the sound and performance of contemporary poetry. As Bernstein has it, “close listening” entails attending closely to the performative elements of a poem, especially to how it sounds coming from the poet’s mouth. He situates this critical act in terms of performance studies and theory, acknowledging how the field’s consideration of performance as a situated event has reoriented discussions of the relationships among performer, audience, and text. Sensing how this reorientation opens the way to discuss the range of human experience in terms of how it is performed and what textual and contextual associations it maps or resists, Bernstein encourages us to consider the implications performance theory has for poetry performance. He points especially to the modern poetry reading and poetry recordings as discursive sites from which to begin tuning into the value of poetry as performance (4-6).

More recently, Lesley Wheeler has followed this train of thought. In *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present* (2008), she acknowledges her debt to Bernstein in this regard, suggesting that “[t]he title of [...] *Close Listening* provides a resonant phrase for the scholarly activity of attending to poetry performance” (189). In her book, Wheeler resonates with Bernstein, pursuing the concepts of sound and poetic voice—as both a metaphor and an embodied act—from Edna St. Vincent Millay’s performances through the blues-infused poetry of Langston Hughes to contemporary academic poetry readings and slam poetry. She concludes, among other things, that voice, sound, and performance in American poetry are—and will remain—fertile sites for sustained critical discussion. And though she doesn’t explicitly cite the idea of performance as an essentially contested concept as the reason

for this, she does argue that voice, sound, and performance occupy contested critical space. In so doing, she suggests that their diverse uses, along with the range of poetic performance manifest in twentieth century America, evoke “powerful questions” about the dynamic functions 1) of contemporary poetry in performance and 2) of the contemporary poet as performer (167).

Methodology

My primary method in this project is ethnographic representation of Caldiero in performance. By situating the sonosopher within the network of cultures and traditions that resonate with and in his work, I will interpret his performative poetics and explore sonosophy as a performative mode of auto-ethnography that interrogates established conventions of language, performance, and poetry. To do this, I intend, first, to transcribe several of the poet’s performances (available in both audio and video formats) using ethnopoetic transcription techniques first developed in the 1960s and ‘70s by anthropologists Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes. As Tedlock has it, “Ethnopoetics is [. . .] an attempt to *hear* and *read* the poetics of distant others,” to listen to and to record the primarily oral poetics of cultures and traditions that exist outside of the Western canon and its privileging of print culture and the logics of the written word (“Ethnopoetics,” italics mine). Ethnopoetic transcriptions score the dynamics of oral poetics in performance by textually “tak[ing] account of [both] the words [and . . .] silences” of performance, tracking “changes in loudness and tone of voice, the production of sound effects, and the use of gestures and props” (“Ethnopoetics”). Tedlockian ethnopoetics seeks to integrate these dynamics into the transcription with various typographical cues and comments. For instance, as Thomas DuBois explains, “[l]oud words can be capitalized, whispered words reduced to fine print. Pauses in speech can be represented by line breaks.

Expressive tone and length of pronunciation can find demarcation on the printed page” by raising words above or dropping them below the normal line of type and through such typographical representations as long dashes (126). Gestures or movements can also be included in (and set apart from) the poem proper with their placement in brackets. Hymesian ethnopoetics, on the other hand, takes a broader view, attending more to “verbal patterns, parallelism, and rhetorical structure” than to “the poetic nature of tone, pause, [. . .] tempo,” gesture, and movement (DuBois 127-8). In either case, the ethnopoetic transcription can serve not simply as a guide to aid listeners in understanding and interpreting the performance’s re-presentation, but also as a script or score to be used in re-performing the poem.

Drawing from my ethnopoetic transcriptions of Caldiero in performance and in conjunction with his written poems, I intend to interpret his poetics in its contexts—both the influences claimed by Caldiero himself and the Utah performance arenas within which his audiences react positively and negatively to his experiments. To do this, I will draw from multiple disciplines in order to better analyze, represent, and explain the nuances of Caldiero’s sonosophy. These disciplines include ethnography, folklore, and contemporary poetry and poetics. This approach is necessarily composite because of the composite nature of performance and, by extension, of performance studies (as outlined in the “Background” section).

To organize this broad spectrum methodology (see the chapter outline below), I rely upon Conquergood’s 1989 article, “Poetics, Play, Process, and Power: The Performative Turn in Anthropology.” Here he offers four keywords to unlock the study of performance and the “discursive network”—the distinctive vocabulary—associated with it: *poetics*, *play*, *process*, and *power*. Conquergood acknowledges that each term is simply an access point through which researchers can engage “a chain of related terms, [...] a cluster of issues and [a] set of interests

that collectively define” the interdisciplinary study of performance (82). *Poetics* suggests the “constructed nature” of human realities, cultures, and selves (83). *Play* taps into the improvisatory, carnivalesque features of this creativity and its deconstruction and reconstruction of human institutions and communities. *Process* invokes the dynamic interactions among the physical, historical, social, and spiritual elements involved in the continual unfolding of human culture. *Power* summons the idea that performance is “a site of struggle where competing interests intersect, and different viewpoints and voices get articulated” (84). And I’ve added *pedagogy* to this list in order to discuss the discursive network’s implications for teaching as a performative process. By exploiting Conquergood’s terminology in this way, I’m better able to tap into the research program it typifies in my interdisciplinary interpretation of sonosophy and its epistemological, ethnographic, and pedagogical implications.

Qualifications

This project emerged from a seminar on oral performance that was led by Dr. Jennifer Attebery in the spring of 2010. The seminar centered on engaging a range of oral poetics on their own terms using the interpretive paradigms outlined by John Miles Foley in *How to Read an Oral Poem: performance theory, ethnopoetics, and immanent art*. Performance theory and ethnopoetics jibed with an interest I was developing in Caldiero and that I pursued in my seminar paper titled, “Alex Caldiero and/as the *Cuntastorie*’s Vestigial Voice: ‘Just Barely Recognizable.’” My primary aim in this paper was to situate Caldiero within his Sicilian cultural heritage as a means to better understand and to interpret his work. I accomplished this by transcribing two of Caldiero’s poems-in-performance and by using these ethnopoetic representations to discuss how Caldiero keys the tradition of Sicilian poet-bards as he performs

by, among other things, agitating his hands, stomping his feet, widening his eyes, and dilating his nostrils. For this project, I will expand upon that interpretive process.

In order to do so, I will further draw upon my background as a student of poetry and poetics, as illustrated in the seminars I've participated in that focused on major literary figures, including poet-bards Shakespeare and Whitman; major literary genres, including poetic forms and oral performance; critical theory; and rhetorical theory. Additionally, I draw from experience gained while writing my master's thesis, which was an extended consideration of Sharon Olds, a contemporary poet, and the contextual network out of which emerges her second collection of poems, *The Dead and the Living*. My reading of Olds in that monograph centers upon her textual deconstruction and reconstruction of the Garden of Eden and upon her visceral poetic engagement with and performance of the body. I bring this interest in and understanding of the relationship between Christianity, poetry, and the body to the present study.

Chapter Outline

1. Introduction: "Expectations and Associations: Alex Caldiero in Life and Sound"
 - a. Summary: The introduction will explore my personal experience with Caldiero and his work, focusing especially on what led to my investigation of sonosophy and my sense of its significance.
2. Chapter One: "(On Methodology) Sounding Out the Body: The Ethnography and Poetics of Performance"
 - a. Summary: Chapter one will discuss my methodology, first by reviewing the trends and priorities of performance studies; second, by outlining and rationalizing the spectrum of disciplines and theories through which I've chosen to approach

- sonosophy; then by defining the discursive network around which I've organized that approach: poetics, play, process, power, and pedagogy.
3. Chapter Two: "POETICS: Situating Sonosophy: De/constructing Caldiero's Poetarium"
 - a. Summary: In chapter two, I will construct the relational network in which Caldiero is embedded, consisting both of influences claimed by Caldiero and arenas within which he performs to audiences (as outlined in the first part of my "Background" section). I will focus specifically on how this network is cued in Caldiero's 2010 "Poetarium" performance at the Utah Arts Festival and on where Caldiero fits within contemporary performance poetry more nationally.
 4. Chapter Three: "PLAY: Holy Buffoonery: Tickling the Underbelly of the Sacred"
 - a. Summary: In chapter three, I will explore the notion of the holy fool in relation to the Caldiero's self-conscious claim of a "precarious position" between jester and priest and to sonosophy as the staging of both sideshow and temple, focusing specifically on how Caldiero employs this holy buffoonery across a range of performances.
 5. Chapter Four: "PROCESS: 'Dada, Put It Together': Caldiero's Processual (Meta)Poetics"
 - a. Summary: Chapter four will discuss how Caldiero uses sonosophy in the manner of Dada performance art and poetics, including his simultaneous embodiment and performance of disparate traditions.
 6. Chapter Five: "POWER: 'A Soul Too Big for Clairvoyance': The Sonosopher as Seer, Priest, Epistemologist"
 - a. Summary: Chapter five will engage such questions as: What auto-ethnographic effects flow from Caldiero's performance of sonosophy? What does it critique and move to unsettle, to reveal, and to heal? What relation does sonosophy have to the

- Catholic liturgy and the Mormon temple rites and how might tuning into these ritual performances key discussion of the human meaning of Caldiero's work?
7. Chapter Six: "PEDAGOGY: The Sonosopher as Pedagogue: Caldiero in the Classroom"
 - a. Summary: Chapter six will situate Caldiero in the classroom, discussing how he incorporates sonosophy into his performance as an educator and taking up the implications of sonosophy and performance studies for teaching across the humanities.
 8. Conclusion: "Theorizing the Tongue: Sound Body, Sound Mind, Sound Philosophy"
 - a. Summary: The conclusion will synthesize and expand upon each aspect of sonosophy as discussed in the previous seven essays, theorizing about Caldiero's performative poetics and its implications for the study and teaching of epistemology, ethnography, language, literature, performance, and poetry.

Timeline

December 2010	Proposal and exam lists approved.
December 2010–May 2011	Read for exams.
Late May 2011	Written exam completed.
Early June 2011	Oral exam completed.
Mid-July 2011	Draft of chapter one.
Mid-August 2011	Draft of chapter two.
Mid-September 2011	Draft of chapter three.
Mid-October 2011	Draft of chapter four.
Mid-November 2011	Draft of chapter five.

Mid-December 2011	Draft of chapter six.
Mid-January 2011	Draft of conclusion.
Mid-January 2011–Early April 2012	Revisions and introduction.
Early April 2012	Dissertation approved.
Mid-April 2012	Dissertation defense.
Late April 2012	Dissertation colloquium.

Significance

The implications of my project are two-fold. First, because Caldiero has not yet been deeply studied, I hope my efforts to collect, to transcribe, and to interpret his work will open the way to further understanding and discussion of his performative poetics. This answers Schechner’s challenge that, as humanists and scholars of human aesthetics, performance, and culture, we ought to view performance as a key paradigm for analyzing and interpreting cultural, historical, and social processes (“Performance” 9). And my response to Schechner’s challenge gives rise to the second implication of this project: because sonosophy assumes an interdependent relationship among the processes of poetry making, poetry performance, and performance ethnography, it becomes a fertile site from which to interrogate these processes, their interrelations, and how they function in human terms. Through my extended consideration of sonosophy, then, I will begin to speak back to those scholars—including Conquergood, Schechner, Strine, Long, and HopKins—who view “performing as a moral act,” as Conquergood puts it (1). This ethical focus posits sonosophy—as a performative mode of ethnography—as praxis through which performers and performance ethnographers can actively and ethically engage other minds and bodies in the reiterative processes of making, unmaking, and re-making

the world. Indeed, through its whole-bodied performance of words, sounds, gestures, and images, sonosophy has the potential to communicate profoundly and to influence spectators in ways not possible through less dynamic discursive structures. And such communication becomes an invitation for spectators to enter into the deep fellowship and the peace that can arise out of a shared experience with the making, the performance, the reception, and the representation of oral poeties.

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Exam List One: Putting Caldiero in Context: Contemporary North American Performance Poetries and Poetics

Rationale: The purpose of this list is to provide context for my analysis of Caldiero. It incorporates a range of performance poetries from contemporary poets living in the United States and Canada, including hip hop, jazz poetry, slam poetry, and sound poetry. The anthologies section includes works that provide a general overview of the field, while the single poets section looks more deeply at representative poems from a sampling of noteworthy performance poets. This list also provides secondary texts that are useful for understanding and interpreting the contexts and social functions of contemporary performance poetries and poetics.

I. Primary Works

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Pow, Whit, ed. *TextSound: An Online Audio Publication* 8 (2010): n. pag. Web. 9 Dec. 2010. (12 poems)

Cotner, Jon, and Andy Fitch. *Improvisations 2006–2010: Jon Cotner and Andy Fitch*. Spec. issue of *TextSound: An Online Audio Publication* 9 (2010): n. pag. Web. 9 Dec. 2010. (15 poems)

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Theta Naught and Alex Caldiero. "How We Sound Together." *Sound Weave*. Salt Lake City, UT: Differential Records, 2006. MP3.

Theta Naught and Alex Caldiero. "In the Wee Hours." *Sound Weave*. Salt Lake City, UT: Differential Records, 2006. MP3.

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Schmid, Julie. "Spreading the Word: A History of the Poetry Slam." *Talisman: A Journal of Contemporary Poetry and Poetics* 23-26 (2001-2002): 636-45. Print.

List Two: Performance Studies and the Ethnography of Performance

Rationale: In order to more effectively explore and theorize about the study and representation of performance poetry and poetics (including Caldiero's sonosophy), this list includes texts that discuss ethnography and the poetics and phenomenology of sound, ritual, and performance.

I. Books

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Madison, D. Soyini, and Judith Hamera. *The SAGE Handbook of Performance Studies*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: SAGE, 2006. Print.

McKenzie, Jon. *Perform or Else: From Discipline to Performance*. New York: Routledge, 2001.

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Exam List Three: Sound Pedagogy: Teaching Poetry in Performance and the Acts of Listening

Rationale: This list includes texts that engage the shared rhetorical space created by the interaction between performer and audience, teacher and student, the space wherein close listening to the sounds that begin in and emanate from our own and other bodies can result in increased understanding of ourselves and others. Also included are primary texts that could be used in an introductory course on oral poetics and the performance and oral interpretation of literary texts.

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