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ON THE PROBLEM AND PROMISE OF ALEX CALDIERO'S SONOSOPHY: DOING DIALOGICAL COPERFORMATIVE ETHNOGRAPHY; OR, ENTER THE POETARIUM

by

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Committee Approval

To the Graduate Faculty:

The members of the committee appointed to examine the dissertation of TYLER CHADWICK find it satisfactory and recommend that it be accepted.

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For Alex
"When the apple is ripe, it falls."

For Jess, Sidney, Alex, Hadley, and Jaylee:
my breath and language and life

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Abstract

Utah-based poet, artist, and teacher Alex Caldiero calls his performative mode of language-making "sonosophy," a neologism that can be taken to mean "sound wisdom," "I am/they are wisdom," and "I am/they are sounding the wisdom of sound." Caldiero's mode of *poiesis*, which often manifests as disruptive speech acts, calls upon various cultural figures and performance traditions to explore and practice language as a process of communion and relationship-making. I call this intermingling of figures and traditions Caldiero's performance ecology; it consists of influences that he claims and that can be seen emerging from his lived experience and his personal ideas about sonosophy. These influences include his Sicilian cultural heritage; his mystical experience; his participation in Catholic and Latter-day Saint faith communities and religious rites; the embodied poetics of Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"; the playfulness of Dada plastic, performance, and language arts; and a tradition of seers that contains (among others) the Paleolithic shaman, the premodern bard, and ancient Hebrew prophets. My dissertation seeks to flesh out this ecology by exploring the ways in which Caldiero can be seen enacting the history and character of each figure and tradition as he performs. I do this by using a methodology I call "dialogical coperformative ethnography," a mode of representation and interpretation that begins with ethnopoetic transcriptions of Caldiero in performance and that then uses those descriptions to analyze, contextualize, and interpret patterns across representative work from Caldiero's oeuvre. Applying this methodology to Caldiero's work, I suggest that an understanding of his performance ecology can shed light on his performative persona and provide a lens through which to interpret what he seems to be doing with sonosophy and to evaluate its ethical and pedagogical

implications beyond its function as a mode of poetry-making. Along the way I draw from my personal experiences to respond to, play with, push back against, and elaborate on the influence sonosopher and sonosophy have been on my presence in the world, my relationships with others, and my thinking about the acts of language- and relationship-making.

ForeWord

The Problem and Promise of Sonosophy;

Or, Teasing out and Teasing at the Sonosopher's Definitional Ecology

Licodia Eubea, a small mountain town in southeastern Sicily, has been inhabited since the 6th century BCE. The modern town inhabits space once occupied by an unknown Sicel city whose enduring material and cultural presence manifest in artifacts, ruins, and burial sites ("Licodia"; Leighton 245). Such materialities imbue the place with a sense of its deep history, bridging past and present with an always unfolding performance of cultural memory: the expression of shared values, narratives, and experiences through shared objects, places, and narrative forms. In this way, the abiding presence of the town's past connects its material and immaterial realities. As Licodia Eubea-born poet Alex Caldiero noted in a 2007 conversation with documentary filmmaker Helen Whitney, this sense of connection in his birthplace between the material and the immaterial further emerges in the constant impingement of "the idea of the magical world and the everyday world" ("Why"). I take this to mean that, at least in the town as Caldiero knows it, the inhabitants' experience with and understanding of the mystical bleed into their everyday experience—and vice versa. As such, many inhabitants may grow up sensing no distinction between these modes of experience.

The church is one place where the mystical and the everyday impinge upon each other in Licodia Eubea. In fact, the town's activities, inhabitants, and social rituals are heavily influenced by and intertwined with the presence of its *chiesa madre*, its mother church, a Catholic basilica dedicated to Santa Margherita (Saint Margaret of Antioch)

("*Chiesa*"): a 4th-century virgin who was put to death for rejecting the advances of corrupt Roman officials ("St. Margaret"). Caldiero observed in a 2008 interview with former Utah Valley University (UVU) Behavioral Sciences professor Kathryn French that he spent his first eight years under the formative influence of this church and its ancient town. "I was born across the street from [Licodia Eubea's] main church," he said; and the main church in every Sicilian town, he continued, is known by "the same word as the womb": *Matrici*. As a womb, the church, Caldiero said, "is the center of life as I grew up" (2). It was, he confessed in the same interview, an extension of his home. His participation in this expansive church family—which he served as an altar boy from age five to seventeen, helping the priest recite Mass in Latin—immersed him in its sense of community, its infrastructure, and its artifacts of worship: the candles, "[t]he incense, the music, the images of the saints and certain actions done from the Old Testament and the New Testament" (2–3). The presence of such objects in the church, his home, and the town, along with his participation in Mass, nurtured him into "a deep love of ritual," a passion that informs his everyday interactions with and understanding of others and the world (2). That the church's influence continues to shape Caldiero is evident in the way he constructed his statement about that influence: "the church is the center of life as I grew up." By using the present-tense form of "to be" when speaking about something that happened in the past, he calls that action into the always unfolding "now" of his life narrative. So doing he suggests that while Licodia Eubea's *chiesa madre* was a major presence in the environment of his childhood and was a determining factor in how he grew up, his everyday encounters with the sacred and his experience of religion as a home constructed and maintained by a community of like-minded people and as a

repository of rituals and artifacts of worship continue to influence his life.

Caldiero's deep love for ritual especially motivates and sustains his *poiesis*: his language-making and performance processes, which he calls *sonosophy*. In particular, the functions of ritual inform his definition and application of the concept. This is apparent in the response he made to an email he received in 2010 from a film student named Hiep-Son Nguyen inquiring after the origin of the term "sonosopher." Caldiero begins his return message with the claim that he doesn't recall when he first started calling himself "sonosopher" but that he could share how he "began to use" the term and "from whence [he] derived it": "I was studying the work of Raoul Hausmann," he says, "who referred to himself as the 'dadasopher.' Mr. Housmann [sic] was one of the founding members of DADA," an anti-movement movement in the plastic, performance, and language arts that arose in Zurich, Switzerland in the early twentieth century ("On the Origin"). From its inception, Dada was meant to unsettle ways of thinking that privilege Cartesian logic. That is, to call upon historian John D. Erickson, rather than assuming "an absolute, totalizing set of beliefs" around which to create and to criticize art and society so individuals and institutions could further reduce aesthetic and social operations "to a set of agreed upon tenets," Dada stands at the periphery, decentered. From this position 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, meaning, and function. By calling himself the "dadasopher," Hausmann insinuated that he found wisdom (*sophia*) in and dispensed wisdom from this space of play. In Caldiero's email, he tells Nguyen that he adapted Hausmann's label to

his own concerns with sound and so "became the sonosopher": one who practices sonosophy ("On the Origin").

But what, exactly, is sonosophy? Although Caldiero says that, "generally speaking," he considers it "a mix of sonal practices within the context of language [. . .] not as communication but as communion," he also admits to having never been able to "satisfactorily define" the term ("On the Origin"). He could, of course, just be pulling Nguyen's leg. He could have a completely satisfactory definition in mind but withholds it to keep people wondering over his performance mode and to tease others' meaning-making fantasies, which in general demand that every word be definable. While his confession could be motivated by any—or all—of these possibilities, it could also be sincere. He could be caught up in the slipperiness of language, in the reality that words slide among meanings as they emerge from a dynamic semantic field. Then again, these motivations aren't mutually exclusive. Caldiero's poetics could be self-consciously bound up in the slipperiness of language as a way of playing with his audience and disrupting common notions of how language functions.

In the ethnography that follows—my dialogical, coperformative attempt to represent, explore, and interpret Caldiero's *poiesis*—that's exactly what I assume: that by definition and in practice sonosophy is slippery and that the sonosopher applies this slipperiness to communal ends. To sufficiently examine my second assumption, I need to begin by unraveling my first—I need to explore sonosophy's definitional problem, which is that the term may not have a single, satisfactory definition. This doesn't mean, of course, that it has no definition; rather, that—true to its conception via Dada—it's an elusive concept that plays among values, meanings, and functions. The word's

slipperiness is especially evident in its potential etymologies: one derivation has direct Latin roots with both noun and verb forms, while another is linguistically-mixed. To meet my needs, I'll call the former derivation a, with subsets a.1 and a.2, and the latter derivation b.

Derivation a: Sonosophy's Latin roots are *sonus* (sound) and -*sophy* (wisdom). When sonus is a noun (a.1), the term signifies the wisdom of sound, wisdom being the state of having seen (from Proto-Indo-European *weid*, to see, and Old English -*dom*, state or condition ["Wise"]). In terms of this derivation, I take sonosophy to be the expansive sense of perception available to hearers as they tune in to the world's diverse soundscape, which includes, among other things, sound structures made by humans (such as language, rituals, and music) and sounds that originate in the natural environment. When sonus is a verb (a.2), sonosophy becomes the act of sounding wisdom: of uttering ideas and making verbal gestures (sounds) that are intended to augment the experience, the senses, and the reasoning powers of those listening.

Derivation b: Beyond (or even alongside) the derivation of sonos- from *sonus* and in light of Caldiero's Mediterranean background, *sono*- could also stem from the Italian verb *sono*, the first person singular and third person plural conjugations of *essere*, which translates as "to be." *Sono*, then, means "I am" or "they are" ("Sono"). When combined with the suffix -*sophy*, this construction of sonosophy yields "I am/they are wisdom," suggesting that the sonosopher's field of study is his "I," which always emerges in relation to some "they." The use of the pronoun "I" "reflects [the] self-focus" of its user (Chung and Pennebaker 354). Philosopher and sociologist George Herbert Mead characterizes the "I" as a person's active self, which is always in dialogue with her "me."

And an individual's "me" in turn emerges from the accumulated attitudes that others ("they") take toward her and that she consciously or unconsciously receives; the "me," then, is the individual's self-perception as informed by her interactions with others. The "I," however, consists of the ways in which a person responds to the demands others make on her "me"; as such, the "I" is a mark of a person's subjectivity and agency. Although a person's self-perception is heavily influenced by the stance others take toward and the demands others place on her, in Mead's social psychology—as in Caldiero's sonosophy—the socially-constructed subject retains the ability to respond spontaneously during social interactions, to choose how and who she wants to be in the presence of others (see Mead). As a function of derivation b, sonosophy asks after how this subject is constructed, exploring what it means for the "I" to be in relation with "they" and to be fully present in the world; how a person's sense of being-in-the-world is constituted; and how that sense informs the ways a person approaches and interacts with others and with her environment.

The "to be" verb in "I am wisdom" suggests that the sonosopher's exploration extends across his sense of being in the world as he *is*—as he experiences and expresses this sense of being—at any given moment, in any given place, when acting or being acted upon, and/or under various emotional, physical, social, and environmental conditions. This dynamic sense is expressed in the range of statements that can indicate a person's present state of being and acting, as in: "I am happy. I am sad. I am healthy. I am ill. I am here. I am sitting. I am walking. I am talking. I am with you. I am happy when I am here; I am sad when I am there. I am happy when I am sitting or walking or talking or doing anything, anywhere with you." Across the range of "I am" statements, the expression "I

am" encapsulates the dynamic nature of selfhood: that across the circumstances, conditions, and experiences of a person's life, her sense of being-in-the-world is both ever-present and malleable.

On one hand, this sense is ever-present in that a person's perception of the world is always based on her knowledge, beliefs, and experiences; and the subjectivity of perception is a constant: no matter how hard we try, we'll never be able to be anyone else. On the other hand, this sense is malleable in that a person's self-concept is, as psychologist Robert Jay Lifton observes, "fluid and many-sided." In his exploration of what he calls "the protean self"—a "mode of being" named after shape-shifting Proteus, Greek god of the sea—Lifton suggests that "the restlessness and flux" of the post-World War II world have imposed a sense of restlessness and flux on our lives. "But rather than collapse under these threats and pulls," he says, "the self turns out to be surprisingly resilient. It makes use of bits and pieces [gathered from] here and there" to maintain its being "and [it] somehow keeps going." As a result, he continues, "[w]e find ourselves evolving a self of many possibilities, one that has risks and pitfalls but at the same time holds out considerable promise for the human future" (1–2). Lifton's observations suggest that the promise of developing and maintaining a protean self-concept—of being able to recognize and acknowledge who, what, when, where, why, how, and/or with whom "I am" in the world—emerges from my movement among emotional, physical, social, and environmental conditions. This promise also informs and is informed by the many possibilities available in these conditions for me to learn, learn from, and adapt to different ways of acting and being in the world. Additionally, it suggests (as Mead also asserts) that the self is relational: that the characteristics and possibilities of a person's "I"

are entangled in the person's relationships with others as well as with her surroundings and past, present, and future—or "possible"—selves (see Anderson and Chen; Markus and Nurius).

The expression "I am/they are wisdom" embodies this fluid, many-sided, relational self. In particular it points to the insights and expansive ways of seeing and being that can emerge from deep observation of and engagement with an ever-present, malleable, interpersonal "I" and the others the "I" finds herself in relation with. As someone who can claim this expression and its implications as a defining element of his *poiesis*, the sonosopher not only takes the "I" and its possibilities and relationships as his field of study but also as his mode of making language. As he performs, he actively moves among, compounds, and shares with his audience different aspects of his selfhood. In the process, he brings these aspects into conversation or plays individual aspects off of others to develop an expansive, playful system of thinking, expressing thought, and communing with others. I call this system Caldiero's performance ecology to highlight the interdependence among its parts; each node interacts with and influences the others. The nature of this performance ecology and its translation into practice is mirrored in the character of the term's definitional ecology: in the interplay among potential meanings of sonosophy as a concept. (I explore other definitions of sonosophy throughout my essay.)

Taken together, the term's derivations suggest that the concept signifies in multiple ways at once. For example, reading derivation a.1 against derivation b yields "I am/they are sound wisdom," while reading derivation a.2 against derivation b yields "I am/they are sounding wisdom"; reading all three derivations against each other yields "I am/they are sounding the wisdom of sound." Although each of these compound

definitions means something different, they all resonate from the sonosopher's presence and actions in the world, which further resonate with his audiences and his diverse field of influences. This suggests that sonosophy's functions and value emanate from the ways the sonosopher makes sounds (e.g., with his body itself and its interactions with other bodies and with his surroundings) and the sounds the sonosopher makes (e.g., his language, music, and other verbal gestures). Through this ecology of sonal practices, he reaches both inward and outward, using sound to awaken and engage his whole self as well as the selves of those within range of his speech acts.

My ethnography wanders this range, circling sonosophy's semantic field as I listen to, represent, and interpret Caldiero's *poiesis* via personal and scholarly reflections that reach to meet him on his own moral grounds and, in conjunction with him, to foster in others deeper awareness of and a sense of obligation for the spaces and relationships we make and unmake with our words. I intend two main things with this project. First, because Caldiero has not yet been deeply studied, I hope my efforts to transcribe, contextualize, interpret, and speak back to his work will open the way to further understanding and discussion of his performative *poiesis*. This hope converses with performance theorist Richard Schechner's challenge that humanists and scholars of aesthetics, performance, and culture 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 my second intention for 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 play with and interrogate these processes, their interrelations, and how

they function in human terms. Through my ethnographic consideration of sonosophy, then, I begin to converse with scholars who view performing as a moral act, as ethnographer Dwight Conquergood puts it ("Performing" 1). This ethical focus posits sonosophy as a mode of ethnography through which observers are called to openly, actively, and ethically engage other minds and bodies in the reiterative processes of making, unmaking, and re-making the world. Through its whole-bodied performance of words, sounds, gestures, and images, sonosophy has the potential to communicate profoundly and to influence observers in ways not possible through less dynamic discursive structures. And such communication becomes an invitation for observers to enter into the deep fellowship and peace that can emerge from shared experiences with the making, performance, reception, and representation of oral poetries.

A Word about My "Words"

Because sonosophy attends to sound structures and is constituted in and by acts of utterance, I attempt to address and to represent its multivocal, oral nature by dividing my ethnography not into chapters but into "Words": ForeWord, FirstWord, SecondWord, and so on. I take my cue from oral tradition scholar John Miles Foley, who used the same convention in his book, *How to Read an Oral Poem*, which introduced me to the process of interpreting oral poetries. The terminology emerged from Foley's studies of South Slavic epic singers, who build their oral compositions using utterance units called *reč*, the South Slavic word for "words." As Foley notes, these "identify at minimum a line or metrical part-line," but they could also refer "to whole scenes or even entire song-performances" ("Homer"). For these singers, then, a word isn't "a string of black letters

bounded by white spaces or something enshrined in a dictionary." Rather, it's "a unified utterance," a speech act "never as small and partial as what we mean by a word but large and complete enough to have idiomatic force" (Foley, *How to Read* 17). In this sense, an orally-composed word is a mode of referencing ideas and meanings that are bound up in the singers' discourse communities. By organizing his discussion using these "nontextual units" or "thought-bytes" and not the text-biased "book-idiom" of chapters, he intends to remind readers 1) that oral poetries function differently than written texts and 2) that if we fail "to examine our assumptions" about oral and written texts and to approach each on their own terms, we run the risk of devaluing and silencing traditions that contribute vitality to our cultural and verbal ecologies (20). I share Foley's intent and hope that my Words resonate with and remain accountable to Caldiero's attempts to attend deeply to the world as well as to his experience thereof.

To this same end, I've included several sections—"Conference of the Birds," I call them—in my ThirdWord, FourthWord, and AfterWord that describe various moments of encounter I've had with animals, people, and ideas that have influenced my thinking about language use as well as my language- and relationship-making practices relative to the various topics I take up in each Word. I draw inspiration here from Caldiero, who called the third part of his 2013 poetic memoir *sonosuono* "Conference of the Birds" (127). "Conferences so called 'of the birds,'" he says, "are a Mediterranean tradition going back to Homeric times." Such gatherings are held off and on in Sicily "to address contemporary situations and needs" by exploring "the latest findings of the sciences and the arts regarding identity and culture in the widest and wildest sense" (129). He includes six entries in *sonosuono* that explore this mode of communion and

that describe his experience participating in and being influenced by a Conference of the Birds. My own entries (as my ethnography itself) derive from a similar desire to use my experiences and relationships as a lens for seeing myself and my subject differently and for inquiring after a deeper understanding of Caldiero's *poiesis* and the processes by which humans make poetry, language, and relationships.

Part I:

Sounding Out Sonosophy

FirstWord

Notes on My Relationship with Sonosopher and Sonosophy;

Or, In the Beginning

Memory Fragments and First Encounters

I like Alex Caldiero. I care for the man and his work. The many times we've been together in person he has come across as generous and intelligent, candid, sincere, hard-working, and vulnerable; and I find his work dynamic and inventive, compelling and complex. I didn't come to this affinity in a moment, though. It developed over the course of years, through a series of encounters that began with my exposure to his name then developed into personal and scholarly interest in his work and one-on-one interactions. I was first exposed to his name in early 2009 when I found his 1998 collection, *Various Atmospheres: Poems and Drawings*, on the publisher's website. Because I was gathering names of poets who affiliate with Mormonism and whose work I hoped to include in a poetry anthology I was editing and because *Various Atmospheres* was offered for free in the publisher's online library, I likely spent a few minutes perusing Caldiero's poems, added his name to my list of potential anthology poets, then moved on in my quest.

The next time I encountered his name was later that year at the Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association conference at Snowbird, Utah. He was scheduled to perform during an evening special events session the conference's first day and was billed as "Polyartist, Sonosopher, and Poet/Artist in Residence at Utah Valley University." This reference on the conference program was the first I had heard the term "sonosopher." Only later did I discover that this is a title Caldiero has taken to describe

what he does and that from it he derived the term "sonosophy." At the time, I didn't give Caldiero or the title much thought, save to connect him with the name on my list of poets and to listen more closely at the next night's reading by then-Utah Poet Laureate Katharine Coles when I overheard someone in the audience mention how intense and off-the-wall Caldiero's performance had been.

While I didn't dive into a study of Caldiero's work based off of my initial encounters with his name, because I had taken note of the name I began noticing it more frequently; and as I noticed it more frequently, I began attending more closely to what Caldiero was doing. For instance, in late 2009 I discovered that he was part of Coles' Poet Laureate project, which was titled "Bite Size Poems" and which featured short, online videos of poem performances by prominent Utah poets.[1] From May 2009 to August 2010 new "Bite Size" videos were regularly posted on *YouTube*. Caldiero was the Bite Size Poet of the Month for August 2009. Having not yet experienced him as anything more than a name, his performance caught me off guard. The video begins with a close-up of his mouth. His face so framed, he speaks in a near whisper, enunciating four words that were represented on the Bite Size Poems project page as a three-line lyric:

Beautiful

Idyllic

Isn't it?

As the camera zooms out, he repeats the poem nine more times (for a total of ten reiterations), enunciating as before but growing louder with each repetition until, the camera having settled on a view framing his chest and head, he has reached the other

[1] The video archive for Coles' project can be found as a YouTube playlist curated by Utah Arts & Museums: https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLpoGShDCvoPhnYlCd9TMPKiL8CQIxckYO.

limit of his register and is voicing the words at the top of his lungs. Beyond remembering that his performance set me on my heels, I don't recall exactly how I responded once the video clip had ended. I'm not sure whether I was dazed or bewildered or shocked, put off, or fascinated—or some combination of these emotions—by what I had witnessed. Neither am I sure whether I paused and contemplated the performance for a moment then replayed it or if I replayed it right away or just linked to another video. I am sure, however, that Caldiero made an impression—enough of one, in fact, that soon thereafter I began pursuing a relationship with his work, spending time with and opening myself to be influenced and transformed by his words.

I've described my approach to Caldiero's work as pursuing a relationship rather than as studying a subject because I want to suggest my personal stake in the acts of inquiry I've undertaken in the wake of my encounters with sonosophy. Initially these acts were informed by my desire to get a sense of his oeuvre so I could choose representative poems for inclusion in my anthology, but my desire to inquire after sonosophy extended well beyond my work as anthologist. For instance, during spring semester 2010 I registered for a semester-length graduate seminar in oral poetry that was led by folklorist Jennifer Eastman Attebery. While I'd like to say I registered for the course hoping it would help me better understand sonosophy, the most I can admit is that he may have crossed my mind when I added the seminar to my schedule. It wasn't long, though, before the course focus turned my attention more completely to him.

During the seminar we sampled a range of the poetries that make up the world's oral traditions, from the Iliad and the Odyssey to Beowulf to the epics of South Slavic bards to Native American stories to slam poetry. In the process we explored interpretive

strategies intended to help us understand the structure, principles, and social functions of these poetries. The strategies we addressed included ethnopoetics and performance theory, both of which I discuss in terms of my research methodology in the SecondWord. For now I'll simply say that being introduced to each approach had a vital influence on my relationship with verbal art, especially on how I observe others making poetry and the performed word. Among other things, these strategies invited me to listen to oral poetries on their own terms—as expressive acts fully realized only through performance—and not simply as verbal derivations of written text. In fact, since writing is a fairly recent innovation in terms of human history, appearing only in the last 6,000 years of *Homo sapiens*' roughly 200,000 year presence on Earth, many oral poems weren't and still aren't written down (Foley, *How to Read* 23–4; McDougall, Brown, and Fleagle 733). They were—and many still are—only published, as in made public, by poets who would be considered illiterate in terms of contemporary literacy standards. Because of this, oral poetries demand that we approach them differently than we approach written poetries.

As we began responding to these demands in the seminar and exploring the strategies meant to help us understand how oral poetries function, I recalled Caldiero and took him as a case study to whose work I could apply the principles we were discussing. As a result, I spent a lot of time with his work for the duration of the course. By which I mean that I scoured *YouTube*'s archives for videos of Caldiero-in-performance, which I watched repeatedly. I checked *YouTube* nearly every day for new uploads of Caldiero-in-performance and scheduled a Google alert to notify me when someone posted online about sonosophy. I downloaded a music/spoken word album that Caldiero made with Theta Naught, a Salt Lake based collective of experimental musicians. I started to collect

Caldiero's written work—beginning with *Various Atmospheres*—to get a sense of how his *poiesis* functions on the page. I poured over the things others had written about Caldiero and his work, especially his live performances. I thought and wrote and began to theorize about his work myself.

And through it all I became intimately acquainted with sonosophy.

Reading Fandom

It seems odd to think I was once unfamiliar with sonosopher and sonosophy, although I still can't admit to fully grasping either. Even so, Caldiero's work has become such a part of my life and thinking that it was difficult to pull my early encounters with him from memory. In fact, pinpointing the moment when I first learned his name was like trying to recall the instant a new word ceased being new and became just another part of my vocabulary. It settled into the soil of my consciousness and began spreading its roots. I felt it was important to return to my initial encounters with him, though, and to re-capture the sense of discovery that came with them because when I sat down to introduce my research on Caldiero in this Word, I needed to remind myself where and when and why I had taken up my studies of sonosophy. My research ethics also compels me to be transparent about my stake in the subject and about my relationship with Caldiero.

I realize that, to some people, my attempts to trace the genealogy of my connection to Caldiero may make me sound like I'm a fanboy asserting his connection to some distant object of admiration. I wouldn't label myself his fanboy, though, at least not as the label gets used in fan culture. The consensus among contributors to *Urban Dictionary*'s collection of "fanboy" definitions is that the term applies to someone who

is, in the words of dictionary contributor Lig Na Baste, "an extreme fan or follower of a particular medium or concept." Because of their extreme devotion, Baste continues, fanboys are "[k]nown for a complete lack of objectivity in relation to their preferred focus"; this absolute, unacknowledged impartiality further leads fanboys to spin their admired object's flaws "into semi-virtues" and to blow everything else about the object "to comedic, complimentary proportions." In the fanboy's view, the object can do only good because it is, in the emphatic expressive mode of the social media era and with no hyperbole intended, "The. Best. Thing. Ever."

This usage of the term "fanboy" jibes with the general meaning of "fanaticism," which is an attitude characterized by rabid, uncritical loyalty to a brand, a cause, a person, a product, etc. In their exploration of "consumer fanaticism," market researchers Emily Chung et al. define fanaticism as "extraordinary devotion to an object." For them, the consumer's "object of fascination" could include certain brands, products, people, TV shows, movies, video games, sports, etc., while extraordinary devotion to those things "consists of passion, intimacy, and dedication" that is expressed beyond "ordinary, usual, or average" levels. Taken to the extreme, such devotion borders dysfunction. In fact, Chung and her associates observe that the devotion of fanatical consumers often toes the line between extreme enthusiasm and dysfunctional enthusiasm (333). On the nature of the latter, Chung et al. point to philosopher John Passmore. In his discussion of philosophy's potential to temper the indulgent disposition of fanaticism, Passmore argues that enthusiasm becomes an "intellectual defect" and a source of personal and social dysfunction when it grows excessive and narrows the vision of devotees such that they

become possessed of only "one type of interest, one kind of consideration" at the expense of all others (213).

Possession is a good way to describe fanaticism. The term "fanatic" first appeared in English in the early sixteenth century where it was used to indicate that someone's actions or speech may have resulted "from possession by a deity or demon" ("Fanatic"). Passmore recognizes this older usage of fanaticism as being "god-possessed," an idea that spills over into one of the more recent usages he asserts: fanaticism as "an excessive degree of rapturous intensity" (212). If someone is "rapturous" or "in raptures," he's swept away in fits of "intense delight or enthusiasm" about something ("Rapture [2]."). To be so moved from one state of being to another is central to the meaning and the experience of rapture. Hence the term's appearance in some Christian theologies as the Rapture: the belief, as represented in St. Paul's first letter to the Church at Thessalonica, that at the end of time faithful followers of Jesus will be "caught up together" to meet him in the clouds and to there be initiated forever into God's presence (*NET*, 1 Thess. 4.17). For those who hold this belief, the act of being seized by a more powerful entity is something to anticipate. The original usage of the word rapture, however, didn't bear these emancipatory connotations. As borrowed in the seventeenth century from Middle French, it simply meant the "act of carrying off," although its Latin root—*raptus*, meaning "abduction, snatching away; rape"—makes it clear that the act occurred against the subject's desires, that she or he (most often she) was the victim of someone else's will to power ("Rapture [1]").

In this light, moments of rapture entail an unequal relationship between someone who passively receives and consumes things that someone else does or produces and the

person who does the producing. To have what Passmore calls “an excessive degree of rapturous intensity” about something, then, to be fanatical about it, is ultimately to be carried away and possessed by the actions and desires of the person who made the thing and to promote those actions, creations, and desires with zeal. Communications scholar Joli Jenson calls attention to the inequality inherent in this relationship among fanatic consumers, the objects of their devotion, and the social institutions that perpetuate this devotion—including mass media and celebrity culture—and the fact that this relationship may facilitate pathological behavior in the most obsessive fans. For instance, by giving so much airtime to and weaving so much text around what Jenson calls “the modern celebrity system,” the mass media invite their audience into the intricacies and the supposed glamour of celebrities’ lives. In the process, they attract people’s devotion to the cult of celebrity whose focus on the allures of fame and fashion can warp devotees’ understanding of how to meaningfully participate in and contribute to society; and such attraction can disrupt a person’s ability to build meaningful, real-life relationships. Worshipping at the altars of this cult, seeking to satisfy a ravenous appetite for the most intimate details of their favorite stars’ lives, disciples of this system may resort to fantasizing about, constructing false relationships with, patterning their lives after, stalking (in-person or online), or killing their favorite celebrity figures in an effort to connect with them (10–11).

Jenson points out, however, that these acts are just extreme manifestations of influences, impulses, and passions that many humans regularly enact in their lives, although to less-than-pathological degrees (11). Reflecting on this common disposition to become enthusiastic over, passionate about, and devoted to things we appreciate, Jenson

compares fans with aficionados, a group of specialists in which she includes scholars. Fans, she says, are often "seen as being irrational, out of control, and prey to a number of external forces" that carry them away in the pursuit of certain objects or ideas while aficionados—scholars in particular—are seen as being reputable, rational citizens legitimately pursuing interests that contribute to the well-being and progress of a broader community (13). The legitimacy (or not) of each category is further differentiated by the types of objects pursued: fans obsess over "popular, mass-mediated objects" that are typically considered products and expressions of "low culture," while aficionados desire expressions of "high culture" that confer prestige on the owner because they're expensive and/or rare (19–20). Additionally, while the fan's connection to an object of fascination is based in an emotional response, the scholar's is based in reason—at least that's a common way of conceiving the difference between fans and scholars and of legitimizing intense scholarly interest over fanatic obsession. After all, as Jenson observes, reason has trumped emotion as the favored way of knowing in Western cultures since at least the Enlightenment, although Plato had first asserted the distinction centuries earlier. Informed by this paradigm, many in the West have been conditioned to believe, in Jenson's words, that emotions "lead to a dangerous blurring of the line between fantasy and reality, while rational obsession, apparently, does not" (21). So for a scholar (as I claim to be) to admit to being a fan of his object of study would ultimately be for him to make it known that he has allowed emotion to cloud his intellectual faculties, making him impartial; and this would cast doubt on his ability to assess the favored object and its place in the world.

The adverb Jenson uses in the last statement I quoted from her—"apparently"—calls into question the drive for detachment that often accompanies rational pursuits and that prompts others to question the passionate scholar's powers of inquiry. She makes this critique explicit and applies it directly to the work of scholars when she comments that "[a]nyone in academia, especially those who have written theses or dissertations, can attest to the emotional components of supposedly rational activity" (21). Turning again to an adverb ("supposedly") that expresses uncertainty about the object it modifies, she challenges (as Caldiero challenges) the reason/emotion, mind/body duality that informs many aspects of Western culture, including scholars' intellectual work. She bases her challenge in part on her own experiences in academia, through which she has flirted with fandom, being stirred beyond the composure of an objective observer by an emotional and physiological response to her research subjects and the objects associated with them. For example, she admits to getting chills when she was writing her dissertation "on the commercialization of country music in the 1950s" and had the opportunity to touch the mascara wand American country music singer Patsy Cline had in her possession during her 1963 plane crash. Jenson was also deeply moved, she says, when she held in hand "a coffee cup made by [Pre-Raphaelite artist] William Morris" and she confesses to envying a colleague "who once owned a desk that had been used by [Pragmatist philosopher] John Dewey." What's more, she proudly displays in her office a framed copy of a drawing made by philosopher and psychologist William James (21–2).

But, she asks, does her attraction to these objects make her a fan of the people who once possessed them or of the ideas these people espoused or the social/cultural movements they fostered? She responds that, "[y]es, of course" it does, but only as such

fandom is defined in terms of scholarly activity: not as obsession with particular figures or forms but as "interest in, and attachment to" said figures and forms. Not as writing these figures fan letters but as writing review essays of their work that appreciatively quote from that work. Not as reading fanzines but as spending time with scholarly treatments of the subject, i.e., with "heavily footnoted biographies and eloquent critical appreciations." Not as defending the figures and their ideas via passionate public outbursts but with "the controlled, intellectual aggression" of scholarly exchange. Not as being "'in love' with any of these individuals" or being willing to die for your personal preferences but as admiring certain figures, reading them with interest, and enjoying their work and being drawn to their ideas (22). The latter acts in each pairing I've listed legitimize the practices of fandom by applying less-pejorative language to them, making it possible for Jenson and other scholars to obsess over their particular affinities "without losing face" by confessing to being fans of their subjects. Because, Jenson observes, that's how a scholar's aficionado-hood could technically be characterized: as fandom made legitimate because it's disguised and thereby detached from the dysfunction, pathology, and stigma of fanaticism (23). Despite the ultimate difference between fans and aficionados, the source of their expertise, and their social status (or lack thereof) as collectors, her observation seems sound: both groups are essentially engaged in the tasks of consuming, responding to, building up, and defending objects or ideas for which they feel deep personal affinity.

Negotiating Attachment and Making Connections

I said earlier that I wouldn't label myself a "fan" of Caldiero. Considering the pejorative connotations of the terms "fan" and "fandom" as I've outlined them, I've come to the conclusion—following Jenson—that were I to call myself a fan it would suggest that I was "emotionally engaged with [. . .] cultural figures and forms" that aren't worthy of the investment (24). As devotees of things that are mass-mediated, cheap, and transient and that promote an unequal relationship between consumers and producers, fans are more likely than aficionados to buy into objects and/or movements that won't last and that facilitate economic and emotional imbalances in those so invested. Hence: by claiming fandom I would risk obsession and invite dysfunction. As such, other people might be able pursue their attachments to such "an excessive degree of rapturous intensity" (Passmore 212), but as a scholar I can't afford to gamble with my equilibrium like that. I can't become unstable, fragile, or vulnerable. I can't submit to such disorder and emotion and still expect to make a meaningful contribution to my discipline.

Or so the oversimplification goes. Because that's what the aficionado/fan binary is: an oversimplification of a complex system of emotional and social attachments. On the one hand, not all fans are necessarily swept away to rapturous intensity by their objects of fascination; neither do they all have trouble maintaining the difference between fantasy and reality. More, they don't all just blindly consume what others feed them. Many are discriminating, thoughtful observers of the histories and movements of their fields and they make meaningful contributions to those communities and beyond. Not all aficionados, on the other hand, are so thoughtful, discriminating, or engaged. Alternately, not all scholars approach their subjects from a position of complete detachment. As Jenson's experience suggests—and this may be true for scholars across disciplines, too—

the knowledge work of academia can foster extraordinary devotion among its workers. Spending so much time with their objects of study over the course of a career, scholars can develop deep attachments to their subjects. Some, in fact, may even have begun their studies because they were fans of their subjects or they may have become fans during the course of their studies. Whatever the case, the work of scholarship doesn't seem to preclude personal attachment to the research subject. Rather, it seems more likely that academia may seek to legitimize such attachments by masking them with the guise of dispassion and objectivity.

Speaking to these attachments as he experiences them in his "dual role as fan and academic," media scholar Henry Jenkins argues in *Textual Poachers: Television Fans and Participatory Culture*—an ethnography of pop culture fandom—that his participation in both fan communities and academic communities has opened him to "certain understandings and forms of access impossible through other positionings" (6, 8). On one hand, approaching pop culture as a fan, he's been liberated from what he calls "the narrowly circumscribed categories and assumptions of academic criticism," including the stereotype of fandom as dysfunction and fan materials as objects unworthy of devotion, and he's been allowed to simply "play with textual material" instead of being expected to analyze and interpret it, as a scholar would be inclined to do; his personal investment in fan communities has also given him language with which he might augment his academic discussions of the subject (5). On the other hand, approaching pop culture as a scholar has opened the way for him to view it with the rigor and discipline of academic inquiry and to use the theoretical tools of academia to shed new light on his subject and the communities of practice that arise around it. Working

from the overlap between approaches, he grounds this stance in ethnographic methodologies that call the ethnographer to give up the guise of objectivity and to focus instead on experiencing the contingencies of the culture being observed to the end of representing that culture before others on its own terms. So doing he seeks to speak to, for, about, and from within his interpretive communities in ways that honor his "responsibility and accountability" to fellow fans and scholars (7). As such, when he writes about his subject as an academic and a fan, he can move between "two levels of understanding" and translate his passion for the subject into a multi-vocal narrative that can speak to and incorporate the viewpoints of both audiences.

Jenkins confesses that, even when he isn't writing autobiographically, the "deeply personal" nature of his interest and investment in his subject "color[s] what [he] says about [it]" (6); but making that clear from the outset of his ethnography, he could then, as media scholar Jason Mittell observes in response to Jenkins, weave "both intellectual and emotional cultural engagements" into a more robust discussion than he perhaps could writing as either an academic or a fan. Of course, any of these approaches has "both advantages and limitations," Jenkins points out, opening observers to certain "types of understanding while blinding us" to other types. But the reflexive modes of ethnography that he and others have used to engage with living cultures acknowledge the impossibility of creating "totalizing accounts of social and cultural processes" and find greater value in "partial, particularized, and contingent accounts of specific encounters within and between culture" (4). Working from and seeking to represent the details of lives lived in specific circumstances, ethnographers can explore, be transformed by, and more ethically represent the varieties of human experience.

Sonosophy, as one such mode of ethnograpy, demands that I remove the mask of objectivity and acknowledge that my subjective experience colors my perception of the world even as my experiences offer me insights into my subject and my attachment to it; that I open myself to the world's manifold figures and forms, to the beings, objects, and ideas with which I share space; and that I listen deeply for and to their presence and let myself be moved as they move. I'll explore this position of vulnerable observation more in the SecondWord, but before I do that I'm compelled to illustrate the influence sonosophy has had on me as an observer, a performer, and a human and to thereby introduce the ethnographic methods I'll be using throughout my dissertation to explore Caldiero's work and its functions and implications for language users. I'll do this by relating my experience at two events. My first example seeks to represent Caldiero in the context of a performance he gave at an antiquarian bookstore in Salt Lake City, Utah, while the second depicts me performing one of Caldiero's short poems during a conference presentation at the University of Utah.

Event #1: September 22, 2012. 7:25 P.M. Ken Sanders Rare Books. Salt Lake City, Utah. Caldiero stepped before a crowd of people, some of them seated in metal folding chairs, many more standing, all of whom had gathered to commemorate the release of a documentary that explores his life and work: Torben Bernhard and Travis Low's *The Sonosopher: Alex Caldiero in Life . . . in Sound*. A microphone in one hand and a large hardbound tome in the other, Caldiero stood near the bookstore registers in space that had been cleared of sofas, sofa chairs, and a coffee table and half-filled with folding chairs to accommodate the event. Behind him, low bookcases brimmed over with books; behind

the cases, a long table boasted books in stack after leaning stack; and behind the table, along the store's south wall, decorative-trimmed cases heavy with thick hardback volumes extended just beyond the table's length, butting up on the west against standard shelves that continued down the wall to the back of the store, where they met more wall-length shelves. Atop the trimmed cases sat another row of books, some cultural memorabilia, and a glass-fronted, two-shelf cabinet filled with fat books.

To Caldiero's right the register counters and the display shelves that skirted them swelled with new releases and special features. To his left, beginning at the south wall, long rows of bookcases spanned every several feet through the bosom of the room. With shelves often double-stacked (books lying atop vertically-shelved books) and with an additional row of double-stacked books across the top, these cases housed the store's main collection. But the inventory lived everywhere: on the tables and bookcases that lined the entryway and the alcove just north of the entryway; in the full-length, glass-front cabinets that partially lined the north wall; on the cluster of smaller cases that formed an aisle with the glass cabinets; on cluttered shelves and filing cabinets behind the registers and on the stairway behind that, which led to a second-story office; on the carts crammed into aisles and against larger cases to make room for the crowd.

People filled much of the remaining floor-space. They packed into the folding chairs set in narrow rows from just in front of Caldiero to the cases near the north wall. They stood in the main collection aisle openings, in the north wall aisle, in the alcove and entryway openings, behind the register counters, on the stairway—wherever they could see and hear Caldiero perform. Being in such proximity and in space with limited circulation because the ceiling fans had been shut down to decrease the background

noise, these bodies warmed each other to perspiration. Their ripeness intermingled with the smell of old books, saturating the high-raftered store with the scent of human presence and history.

Taking the stage in this environment so possessed of bodies and the artifacts of language, Caldiero opened the book he held in his open palm, shuffled to a page, and began to read. Despite the store's thick insulation of books and the shifting bodies that absorbed and added to the sounds he made, his voice—amplified by two large speakers raised on poles—projected through the space. A minute or so into his performance, I began recording it. I've included my transcription of the poem[2] excerpt that I recorded below; it's followed by the same excerpt as published by Caldiero in "no mo," which appears as section four in his manuscript titled *nineteenseventyseven*:

the voi-ce-s # fell silen--t

an/d s/poke # o-nly # to the mi-n---d

the silen-t voice—
utters WORds within— your HEARt
an/d t/he HEARt # BEAts

the STIll— VOIce—
SPEAks WOR-ds to the SOIl—
an/d g/rEE-n— spROUts—

[2] A transcription key appears in the last section of the SecondWord.

<u>the VOI/ce s/PEAks</u>

<u>through TWO— # MOU-ths</u>

nO— # mO # ER

sAWn— ng # tUHn— ng # stIH # Ill # hAR # teh

“cAME UH NU MO # re # NEE TUH LES-T #

ING GE GU GUH BO THEH YOU YOU

BE COME COME IN” *eyes* # “OHn nLY”

[vehicle drives past store]

SOUn-d [sirens fade in]

VIbran-t

TO-ne— [sirens more audible]

One

On—

tO—

ITs Own—

its HO-me—

is your BREAthing SPAce—

CURving with YOU— [sirens fade out]

AS you BEn-d

“teh touch” GROUn-d

* * *

the voices

fell silent

and spoke

only to the mind

the silent voice

utters words within yr heart

& the heart beats

the still voice

speaks words to the soil

& green sprouts

the voice speaks

thru two mouths

no mo

re

so

ng

tu

ng

st

il

ha

rt

ca

me

ne

ar

no

mo

re ,

le

tt

bo in
th g
g
yo o
ur
be
ey cme
es co
me

on
ly

sound

vibrant

tone

one

on
to

its

own

its home is your breathing spae*

curving with you as you bend to tuch ground

*pronounced:space (13–14)

Since I was standing at the rear of the crowd, I could see only glimpses of Caldiero through the bodies that filled the space between us. Yet, the sounds of his language-making influenced me no less. Because my vision of the stage area was limited, I closed my eyes for extended moments throughout the performance and focused on his words. I did this, in fact, for much of his opening poem. As he intoned his statements and described the voice in the poem as speaking through two mouths then began to overlap words in a performance of that voice, the conjunction of rhetorical and flesh-and-blood bodies in the room made me hyper-aware of those bodies and my place among them. In the process of sharing this somatic experience, I became increasingly conscious of my own body's processes and rhythms and of my presence in the bookstore and its surrounding city.

This awareness turned my attention to things I might otherwise not have noticed or that I would have likely tuned out: the ornate sweetness of perfume coming from the two twenty-something women—both in formal dresses—who stood just to my right. The intermittent scratch of shoes against concrete floor. The whisper of fabric as bodies, both

seated and standing, adjusted their position and brushed against other bodies, against chairs and bookcases and books. The muffled coughs and throat clearings. The caress of pages coming from the alcove where someone was thumbing quietly through a book. The grassiness, the acidic tang, the hint of vanilla and mustiness that emanate from the breakdown of glue, paper, and ink (Strlič et al, 8617). The friction of air in my mouth and nasal passage and through my airway as I inhaled and exhaled. The relief in my lungs with each breath. The press and release of my heart behind the sternum. The subtle pulse in my neck and folded arms. The internal creaking of vertebrae when I stretched my back and neck. The bead of sweat slipping down my spinal canyon from the mid-back, where my shirt met skin, to the sacrum. The dull ache in my lumbar. A vehicle's rush down 2nd East past the storefront. The slow intrusion of sirens fading in from the east, becoming more audible in the silences after Caldiero spoke "vibrant," then fading out as he concluded the utterance.

After he ended the poem, the crowd's applause pulled me from the trancelike consideration with which I had been attending to my body and its environment and the bodies, objects, and smells with which I shared and co-created that environment. Although the clamor came as an assault on my ears, I added a few claps of my own to the communal acknowledgement of Caldiero's offering and tried to settle back into the mode of somatic attention and awareness his performance had fostered.

Event #2: July 26, 2012. Approximately 3:45 P.M. Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium. University of Utah. Salt Lake City, Utah. Symposium Theme: Mormons and Mormonism as a Political Force. Standing behind a podium set to the left of a long table and before

multiple rows of folding chairs split into equal lengths by a wide aisle, I paused and took a breath before concluding my presentation. During the session I had discussed the ethics of performance ethnography. The main concern of my paper was with how my encounters with Caldiero, with the Māori people I had lived among for nearly two years, and with the culture and theology of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints influenced the way I received and sought to understand performance poetries—like sonosophy—and to share that understanding with others. I had opened my presentation by performing one of Caldiero's poems, which I had seen him perform in a video produced by the Utah Arts Festival to promote the literary arts that were scheduled to appear at the organization's 2012 event. Standing erect with his shoulders pulled back, his arms at his sides, the left hanging straight, the right bent square to cradle a hardbound tome among his hand, his forearm, and his abdomen, he stared into the distance, away from the camera, inhaled, and used that breath to open the poem. He followed the same pattern for the entire performance, drawing in a single breath then expelling it as he articulated each word:

NO

THIng

BUt

WORds

divIDE

Us↑

NO

THIng

BUt

WORds

unITE

Us↓ (“Literary Arts)

In my opening performance, I transposed these statements, reading the last first and the first last as a way to frame the ideas I would be discussing. “If the paradox of this performance holds,” I asked the session attendees, “if words, the stuff of language, both unite us and divide us; if my desire, as manifest in my language-making, to get something across to you ultimately gets tangled in the web of representation between us—then how do we understand one another? How do we communicate? How can language-makers commune?” I concluded by performing the same poem, though I attempted to close the frame by flipping the poem’s statements back to their original positions.

During the pause I took after completing my paper, I scanned the faces in the audience (who filled less than half the small venue’s chairs) then performed the poem, using Caldiero as my guide for the utterance. However, I didn’t stare into the distance as he had in the video. Rather, I made eye contact with several audience members, trying to connect with them visually as well as verbally, to convey my desire to do more than use language just to communicate. In the process, I was overcome by a feeling I can only describe as withness: a deep sense of closeness and connection with the people in the room, one fostered by the somatic sharing and vulnerability that can come via eye-to-eye encounters. For a brief moment I felt my somatic awareness expand to cover the audience and I became sensitive to others’ presence in the room: to their movements, their

breathing, and their humanity. Then I spoke the final "us," took a few breaths, thanked them for attending, and took my seat, changed just a little by what I experienced as a moment of intense encounter.

Composing (to) the Sounds of Sonosophy

Throughout my ethnography I seek to ground my engagement with sonosophy in the concrete particularities of my situatedness by relating my experience of various cultures, spaces, and relationships and using those experiences as a lens for seeing my subject differently and for inquiring after a deeper understanding of performed poetries, generally, and of Caldiero's work, specifically. I take my cues in this effort from the scholars of human expression who have taken what anthropologist Ruth Behar calls "a vulnerable and situated view of the critic's task" (29). I position myself in relation to this approach in my SecondWord, "Sounding (Out) the Body: On Representing the Dialogical Self and the Acts of Close Listening," especially as it has developed amongst performance scholars and ethnographers. In particular I call upon the work of ethnographer Dwight Conquergood, whose observations about ethnographers' moral responsibility to their research subject(s), to their audience, and to the world in general have struck me on a deep human level. While considering Conquergood's claims about the ethics of doing ethnography and bringing various voices together in the process, I explore my own sense of morality and how it has developed out of and informed three vital aspects of my being-in-the-world. These include my lifelong relationship with the theology and culture of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints (Mormonism); my experiences with Māori people and their culture, which began during the time I spent in

New Zealand as an LDS missionary when I was 19 to 21 years old; and my encounters with sonosopher, sonosophy, and other poetries and poetics.

The position I write from and explore in the SecondWord (as in my ethnography as a whole) has prompted me to approach Caldiero on his own terms by listening closely to his work so I might responsibly represent, analyze, and interpret its contexts, influences, and effects. I seek to do this by applying poet Charles Bernstein's notion of "close listening" to Caldiero-in-performance. Close listening entails attending to the performative elements of a poem, which include (among other things) the poem's literary/cultural contexts, the performance venue, how poets speak, move, and interact with venue and audience (*Close Listening* 4–6). My conception of close listening calls upon the philosophies and the techniques of literary, cultural, rhetorical, communication, and religious studies; performance ethnography; ethnopoetics; language evolution; and neuroscience—a disciplinary mash-up that allows me to sound out the body of Caldiero's work: to break sonosophy into its constituent parts, to explore the composition of those parts in contexts validated by Caldiero's lived experience and personal ideas about sonosophy, and to synthesize sonosophy's components in ways that represent and interpret the poet and his poems and poetics in action.

Having established my research agenda and methodology in the SecondWord, I turn in the ThirdWord to the sprawling, immersive process of listening closely to sonosophy, of unfolding Caldiero's dialogical coperformative way of being-in the world and of being-with and being-toward its inhabitants. To begin, I introduce sonosophy as a mode of performative auto/ethnographic *poiesis* in which Caldiero interweaves strands of personal history and knowledge, languages, and cultural performance and figures to

represent ideas and modes of language- and relationship-making that critique assumptions about what makes us human. To do this, I look closely at Caldiero's 2010 "Poetarium" performance at the Utah Arts Festival, a series of speech acts that showed him roaming among his diverse ecology of influences. I use the Poetarium performance to frame my ethnographic engagement with Caldiero's *poiesis*, to introduce his performance repertoire, and to lay down the themes, ideas, and poetic figures that I take up at length in each section of my ThirdWord.

So framing my ethnography, I explore sonosophy as a mode of primitivism that reaches to understand the origins of language and the presence of those origins in contemporary humans and our institutions and relationships. I ground my exploration in language evolutionist claims that language, more than anything else, is what makes us human. Calling on linguist Derek Bickerton's compelling (if incomplete and disputed) evolutionary narrative, I observe how the emergence of language in early hominins could have provided the basis for the development of complex thought in the species. Such cognitive growth likely interacted with hominins' social tendencies to open the way for increasingly complex social and cultural behaviors and artifacts and for development of the species' capacities for self-reflection and metacognition, characteristics that continue to shape the species' brain and ways of engaging with the world. Building on the ground covered in my summary of this relationship among language, the brain, and human evolution, I weave in and out of ethnopoetic representations of Caldiero-in-performance, personal reflections, and interdisciplinary analysis of sonosophy and its communal functions. In the process I attend to specific performances (written, oral, and gestural) that represent broader movements in and concerns of Caldiero's work; in the process, I

tease out and tease at his performance ecology, which draws from and is constituted by a variety of *poietic* figures and traditions with which he seeks to constitute his identity as a performer, to connect with the mythic past, and to comment on and interrogate contemporary modes of being-with and being-toward others that can limit our ways of making language and relationships.

These figures and traditions include, among others, the itinerant Sicilian storyteller, called the *cuntastorie*; the premodern bard, whom Caldiero calls the *makar* (Abbott 1); the Catholic priest; Christianity's vulnerable, laboring deity, a god-concept I elaborate in terms of Mormon theology and the Catholic liturgy; and the *Logos* of Christian scripture and Greek philosophy, a being who is often cited as the Word of God made flesh in Jesus and a concept of linguistic primacy expressed across religions and philosophies as the "eternal word" or the "ground sound," the creative principle by which all things are called into being. Each of these traditions conceives of *poietic* beings whose presence and language shape new material and immaterial worlds. Considering the influence these different figures and traditions have had on Caldiero's *poiesis*, I turn in my FourthWord to examining the ethical and pedagogical components of sonosophy, by which I mean its use as a way to stir people to change—or at least to think more deeply about the acts and institutions through which they express themselves and interact with others and with the world.

Because that, it seems to me, is what sonosophy does. As a dialogical coperformative mode of auto/ethnography, it both calls upon and critiques the processes by which humans come together in and seek to maintain and strengthen our most vital relationships, especially the processes by which we attempt to make and share meaning,

experience, and communal space with each other. Languages, narratives, epistemologies, pedagogies, cultures, theologies, religions: Caldiero brings them together in a collage of sounds and images with which he breaks down, imitates, exaggerates, parodies, remixes, remakes, critiques, and builds upon the ways by which they make meaning and relationships. Through these performative acts of creation, representation, interpretation, and revision, he additionally makes the processes less familiar, something that can prompt others to see, hear, and perform them anew. At the same time, he interrogates and revises his own performance processes according to the processes he performs, engaging with his influences, his audiences, and his environments in a feedback loop that perpetually alters the shape of each node—and with each node, the whole system—in what I've come to call his performance ecology.

SecondWord

Sounding (Out) the Body:

On Representing the Dialogical Self and Acts of Close Listening;

Or, The Vulnerable Observer Takes a Dialogical Stance

i. On Representing the Dialogical Self

We're All Contingent: Positioning (and Re-Positioning) Myself

Encounters like the two I describe in the FirstWord illustrate my efforts to apply my situatedness to expanding others' understanding of sonosophy's potential influence on observers. Working emically as a member of Caldiero's audience, I've opened myself to his presence and seek to observe him from where I stand, then to hold the particularities of my experience up to the experience of other observers and to the performance traditions that shape Caldiero's lived experience and personal ideas about sonosophy and that are cued in his performances. I do so not to the end of embodying the only way sonosophy *should* be received and understood but of offering one possibility for engaging with Caldiero. This doesn't mean, however, that I intend to engage sonosophy on just any terms in my ethnography; rather, I seek to connect with and represent Caldiero on his own terms while at the same time acknowledging and calling upon my personal interest and investment in his work, which I use as one point of contact with him in a multifaceted method of interpretation.

My personal interest and investment in Caldiero's *poiesis* emerge from my developing relationship with and understanding of sonosopher and sonosophy, which have made me mindful of the bodies, objects, and ideas with which I share and co-

construct my physical, intellectual, emotional, rhetorical, and spiritual environments. As such, both sonosopher and sonosophy have encouraged me to listen for and to listen and respond to the demands these bodies, objects, and ideas make on my being. In the process of witnessing these things, I've felt called to join Caldiero as he calls upon his embodied experience of the world to explore the moral grounds of human communication, relationships, and communities. These grounds include our efforts to express ourselves—to compose material and immaterial artifacts that make our desires, ideas, perspectives, and being-in-the-world known—and to use those artifacts, our personal and social influence, and our moral awareness to shape our relationships and surroundings. By so asking that we examine the ways we come together to make social institutions, relationships, meanings, etc., as well as that we explore the reasons for and the implications of our coming together, sonosophy is at its core a moral act. From a position of playfulness and performativity it assumes and advocates for an ethical commitment to mend, renew, renovate, strengthen, and sustain that which makes us human. In particular, as I mention in the ForeWord and consider throughout my ethnography, it asks after the processes through which language—a constitutive factor in the origin and continued development of our species—serves as a form of communion.

In response to the demands sonosophy makes on me as a witness of human experience, a performer, and a human being, I need to be clear about the ethical commitments I bring to the research situation. As I've already confessed, Caldiero's work has been a transformative influence in my life, challenging me to think differently about my responsibilities as a language user linked in deep kinship bonds to other language users, to various communities, and to the earth. Beyond my encounters with sonosopher

and sonosophy, though, my lifelong relationship with the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints has stirred me to expand my thinking about the world and my place in and obligation to it. Mormonism has also put me in touch with modes of cultural performance, theology-making, and fellowship that have informed my approach to performance ethnography and poetics and my understanding of sonosophy. These modes include, among other things, preaching and the ethics of Māori hospitality.

I was born and raised along the Wasatch Front, in the thick of what some call the Mormon Corridor: the highly-LDS-populated stretch of the western United States that radiates outward from Salt Lake City and saturates Utah, western Wyoming, and eastern Idaho. Growing up as an active participant in the LDS Church, which maintains a lay clergy and fills Sunday worship services with sermons delivered and classes taught by lay members of the congregation (called a "ward"), I had numerous opportunities to address members of my faith community from the pulpit and, in the process, to become acquainted with the anxieties and pleasures of performing. Since I was given opportunities to address fellow Mormons from the pulpit on a regular basis, I learned to enjoy public speaking and was captivated by the ability many speakers and teachers had to move an audience to action with their words. My dad especially had a vital influence on my desires and preparation as a public speaker. One wall of his den was filled with bookshelves and I remember walking past the room often and seeing him seated at his desk poring over books, taking notes as he composed the sermons he delivered in various wards in the area. I often overheard people in the community remark that he was one of their favorite speakers and that his sermons were engaging and profound. Because of these experiences I consciously sought to improve my abilities to perform from the pulpit

and in the classroom by listening deeply to and trying to emulate those speakers and teachers—including Dad—whom I considered to be the most influential in my ward.

When I turned nineteen, I decided to serve a mission for the church and was sent to New Zealand. Traveling around the northern-half of the country's north island, I evangelized for nearly two years, teaching people from diverse backgrounds and of diverse ethnicities the basic tenets of Mormonism. The teaching experience I gained in those homes and congregations was formative; in fact, at least two significant things happened because of the time I spent in religious and cultural dialogue with individuals and families whose life experiences spanned the globe. One thing that happened was that I developed a passion for language. My fervor was informed by the rhetorical and pedagogical insights that grew out of preparing to effectively and responsibly communicate my message and to share my convictions with respect. My vocation as a writer and teacher revolves around my belief that words have power—beyond many other aspects of human experience, including violence and threats of violence—to inspire others to moral action. My belief that language acts upon the world and upon our minds in vital ways stirs my sense of obligation to listen deeply to and speak responsibly with and for others.

In addition to the moral obligation I feel for how I listen to and make language, my experience with people from New Zealand's native culture—with Māori cultural performance—has been equally vital. When I say "cultural performance," I'm referring to what communications scholar Norman K. Denzin defines as "encapsulated contingent events that are embedded in the flow of everyday life" (*Performance* loc 196). In other words, acts of cultural performance are behaviors that arise out of and refer back to the

cultural lifeways that inspired them. Richard Schechner calls such referential behavior "restored" or "twice-behaved" because it's just that: performance that has been performed or rehearsed before, even if under different circumstances or in the life of a different performer (*Performance* 28). More than just mere imitation, though, cultural performances "function as vital acts of transfer," to use Diana Taylor's words. Taylor, a performance scholar, explains what this means: through reiterated behavior, performances transmit "social knowledge, memory, and a sense of identity" from and to others both within and beyond the same culture (381). In this way performers inherently, if unconsciously, move to persuade others of the truth of their individual experience. Such was the influence Māori cultural performances exerted on my life and mind as the people I interacted with shared the defining aspects of their lives and identities with me via their habits of being in the world and being-with others.

I could share many anecdotes to illustrate this influence, but one in particular seems apropos to my consideration of the performer's function as a moral agent and the potential for connection and understanding made possible when observers become mindful of and take up that function. When I had been in New Zealand for about six months, I moved to Tauranga, a city in the country's Bay of Plenty region. The first night I was there my missionary companion and I visited a family from the local ward. We dropped our bikes in the front yard and walked down the driveway to meet the father, who was emptying canvas sacks onto a plywood bench near the home's detached garage. As we approached, he looked up and invited us to join him. My companion (who had lived in the area for several months already) introduced me and I extended my hand, which the father—Eddy, he told me—swallowed in his with a vigorous shake. He was a

large man, heavyset and rotund, with a shaved head and brown eyes that sparked with curiosity and compassion. Once he had released my hand, he asked if we were hungry: he had just returned from diving in the Bay, he said, and had some food straight from the sea. Before we could respond, he had reached into a sack, pulled out a sea urchin, cracked the spiny shell, and offered me the first taste. I hesitated because I wasn't sure what to think of the bright orange slush—the roe—that I saw inside the shell. But encouraged by his grin, I slid my finger through the roe and wiped it on my tongue.

I've since come to understand something more of the gift Eddy offered me that day—not just about the sea urchin roe, which I've learned is a traditional Māori food and for which I don't have the palate, but about the ethics of Māori hospitality, which have become entangled with my belief in the power and influence of language responsibly heard and made. In their discussion of gift-giving and philanthropy in Māori society, Tuwhakairiora Williams and David Robinson point out that Māori generosity is rooted in "the concepts of *aroha* (love) and *manaaki* (nurturing)." Yet, Williams and Robinson continue, for the Māori what emerges from this rootedness "does not precisely mirror western generosity, for Māori generosity also incorporates *wairua* (the spiritual dimension) and *pono* (integrity and sincerity)." Love, nurturing, integrity, sincerity, openness to the spiritual dimension of human experience: these are a handful of the things that Eddy, other members of Māori communities, and my experiences as a Mormon missionary in New Zealand held out to me—that they still hold out to me. These are the things I seek to incorporate into my everyday performance as a human being and my work as a writer, teacher, and ethnographer.

Seeking Proximity and Bearing Wit(h)ness

Turning these gifts in my mind many years later, contemplating how the ethics of generosity they shape might lead me to genuine understanding of and communion with others, I think of Caldiero. But, no—*shape*'s not the right word to describe how these characteristics come together. *Weave* seems more appropriate, especially considering the strands of influence with which I've composed my research methodology, including my experience of Māori cultural performance. One of the only material gifts I brought home from New Zealand is a flax bookmark. The art of Māori flax weaving has been integral to Māori culture since their ancestors arrived in New Zealand centuries ago. They used flax to make clothes, shelter, rugs, sleeping mats, ceremonial dress, etc. The bookmark was given to me one Sunday afternoon by a Māori woman (she and her husband both belonged to the local ward) who pulled a flax leaf from her garden and weaved it as my companion and I talked with her and her husband on their back lawn. She offered it to me during the course of our conversation and I used it to keep my place in the books I carried around the country in my shoulder bag. It's now displayed on one of my bookshelves with other artifacts from my personal history.

The memory of watching her weave the bookmark resurfaced years later when I was rereading Dwight Conquergood's essay, "Performing as a Moral Act: Ethical Dimensions of the Ethnography of Performance." In his first paragraph Conquergood cites folklorist Henry Glassie, who Conquergood says "represents the contemporary ethnographer's interest" in exploring the ways "expressive art and daily life, texts, and contexts" breathe life into each other ("Performing" 1). Glassie's concern—a concern Conquergood and I share with him—is essentially with how humans can transform and

be transformed by the expressive art we create and re-create, including our everyday performances. In his studies of this process, Glassie confesses that he begins by considering the "sturdy, fecund totalities created by the people themselves": their "whole statements, whole songs or houses or events." Then he "weave[s] contexts" around these lifeways—these cultural texts—"to make them meaningful, to make life comprehensible" (xvi). Just as happened when the Māori woman wove years of practice and tradition into my bookmark, weaving contexts around texts increases the texts' narrative value. By adding to each text's provenance, this process provides researchers and close observers with means by which they might more effectively engage with, analyze, and interpret those texts. But accounting for context also does more than just expand each text's narrative reach: it takes seriously the people who created these sturdy, fecund totalities, these richly-layered witnesses of human experience; it takes humans with varied and complex life-worlds and approaches them on their own terms. In Conquergood's words, it helps the performance ethnographer "get close to the face of humanity where life is not always pretty" ("Performing" 2), where the tang of last night's meal still lingers on the breath, where the lineaments of anxiety, age, and desire etch experience into the skin.

Which brings me back to Caldiero and the poetics of performative ethnography: although I refer to him as Caldiero throughout my dissertation, because we've spent time together discussing everything from Mormonism to education to poetry to our families, I think of him as Alex. If in my thinking about his work I were to maintain the academic convention of referring to others by their surname, I would be holding him at arm's length even as memories of his presence and the palpability of his performed language and his embrace pull me into the "sensuous immediacy" of his *poiesis*. As someone

seeking to be a vulnerable observer, to open myself to the influence of my subject and his life-story, I want to surrender to the intimacy of this immediacy, to make what Conquergood calls an "empathic leap" into Caldiero's otherness (10). But as an ethnographer I'm compelled (like Jenkins with his composite commitments to his subject) to proceed with caution. Conquergood explains why such caution is vital in "Performing as a Moral Act" when he sketches out "four ethical pitfalls, performative stances towards the other that are *morally problematic*" (4; italics mine). The italics, which I've added, make this sound like serious business. And it is, as is all research dealing directly with human subjects and their cultures and lives. Hence, I move deliberately, keeping these pitfalls in view and seeking to mediate them in my attempts to converse with and represent Caldiero and my composite personal and academic attachments to sonosophy. I do so to avoid getting snared.

The first stance Conquergood explains is "The Custodian's Rip-Off." The "sin" here, Conquergood says, "is selfishness," a moral offense that emerges from a researcher's "detachment" from and lack of commitment to another's culture. This lack of connection leads a researcher to plunder the other culture for artifacts and traditions that might bring a nice return on the researcher's investment once they're sold off at home. The second stance is "The Enthusiast's Infatuation," which is more akin to "singles' bar cruising" for a quick lay than to actual engagement with the Other. Those who flirt with this stance attach themselves to others only superficially, identifying with and committing to them too quickly, such that the Other's distinctiveness gets glossed over in claims to sameness (5–6). In this view, others are worth only as much as they reflect or gratify the researcher's self. The problem with the third stance, "The Curator's

Exhibitionism," is that the researcher acts more like a tourist excited by and committed to the Other's difference even though the researcher refuses to identify with this difference, keeping it mute by staring from a distance. Yet, staring isn't the same thing as observing; although both verbs point to the potential transgressiveness of an ethnographer's gaze, the former implies voyeuristic intrusion while the latter suggests attending to the complete experience of the Other. These first three stances are all morally problematic in their own right, but the most "reprehensible" of the four pitfalls is "The Skeptic's Cop-Out." Conquergood's adjective for this stance ("reprehensible") is so adamant because any researcher who dwells in this nihilistic corner of the moral universe adamantly opposes engaging with the Other on any terms let alone on the Other's. Through the lens of the skeptic's arrogance and nihilism, the Other appears too different, too inaccessible, too not-worth-my-time—and thus not worth engaging at all in dialogue (7–8). So why risk it?

But that's just what I sense needs to happen if I'm to understand and represent others: I need to open myself to the Other's experience and the experience of Otherness; I need to risk being vulnerable to their presence in my life and mind. Anthropologist Ruth Behar uses this same adjective to describe the ethnographer who yields to the moral imperative that accompanies the decision to be-with others and to bear witness of and for their lives. The "vulnerable observer," Behar says, isn't afraid to get attached to or to exercise compassion toward those she studies; nor is she afraid of allowing her attachments or the demands of compassion to inform the relationships and the sense of withness that can emerge from her encounters with research subjects and their diverse material and immaterial ecologies. Rather, she relishes and acknowledges these

relationships—her place in and influence on them as well as their influence on her—and writes in such a way as to invoke a similar degree of withness in readers. One way she does this is by bringing her personal experience to bear on her attempts to represent and responsibly interpret other ways of being-in-the-world. This doesn't mean, though, that she allows autobiography to overshadow ethnography. She knows the ability to make deep connections between her own experience and her research "requires a keen understanding of what aspects" of her selfhood most fully shape her view of the world, especially the subjects she's observing. Only by grasping self-knowledge and opening herself to the possibility of being changed by her subject can she write herself into an ethnography in ways that sustain the argument and aren't simply "a decorative flourish" or "exposure for its own sake" (14). Rather, they acknowledge and seek to represent the contingencies of the research situation as observed and experienced by the ethnographer, whose own situatedness will always play a role in the processes of observation and representation.[1]

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[1]A number of literary scholars have, with ethnographers, taken what Behar calls "a vulnerable and situated view of the critic's task" (29). For instance, Behar cites Jane Tompkins' 1987 essay "Me and My Shadow" as an early—perhaps even the first—example of literary criticism that positions itself against the quest for total scholarly objectivity. In an expanded version of "Me and My Shadow" published in literature scholar Linda S. Kaufman's *Gender and Theory: Dialogues in Feminist Criticism* two years after the essay's initial appearance in *New Literary History*, Tompkins reflects on the original, saying that for her it "constituted a return to the 'rhetoric of presence'" in her writing (121). In the essay, which critiques the foundations of Western rationalism and their relation (or not) to feminist criticism, she recognizes and doesn't shy away from the body's role in a reader's experience of literature. Instead, she embraces that role, slipping off what she calls the "straitjacket" of academic discourse (128), eschewing its "pseudo-objective, impersonal, and adversarial" nature and allowing her physical needs and desires and her emotional state at the time of writing to at once disrupt and support and deepen her commentary on rationalism and its effects on her and other women's being-in-the-world (Freedman, Frey, and Zauhar 1).

Literature scholars Diane P. Freedman, Olivia Frey, and Frances Murphy Zauhar label the mode of criticism that Tompkins and others initiated "intimate critique." They also call it "autobiographical literary criticism" and "personal criticism" (1). In another, related context, Freedman and Frey add "personal scholarship," "self-inclusive scholarship," and "'cross-genre' writing" to this list of descriptors (2). Intimate, autobiographical, personal, self-inclusive: all foreground the necessary presence of some-body in the acts of scholarship, of a thinking and feeling human encountering and exploring, influencing and being influenced by ideas and objects of more-than-passing personal interest and passion. And cross-genre points to the transgressive, interdisciplinary nature of such acts: they move across the borders constructed among

Re-enter Conquergood, who stresses that the only way out of the "moral morass and ethical minefield of performative plunder, superficial silliness, curiosity-seeking, and nihilism" inherent in the stances he describes is not through acts of observation alone or even through participant-observation but through what he calls "dialogical performance." Observation privileges the exclusivity of sight, with the ethnographer's perception imposing on and determining the subject's experience; and while participant-observation invites the ethnographer to share in the subject's performance of culture, it also privileges the ethnographer's position over the subject's. As a mode of vulnerable observation, dialogical performance, on the other hand, struggles, in Conquergood's words, to "bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so they can have a conversation with one another." The aim in so doing, he continues, "is to bring self and other together such that they can question, debate, and challenge one another." The healthy tug-and-pull between Self and Other, identification and differentiation that occurs during this ongoing process of coming together makes dialogical performance "a kind of performance that resists conclusions" (9). It's a stance toward—or rather, beside—others, a mode of being-with them that isn't afraid to engage them in intimate conversations or to listen deeply to and become entangled in their lives and narratives and to respectfully weave them into our own. It entails generosity and reciprocity, acceptance of the Self's and the Other's sensuous immediacy, and making the empathic leap into the Other's otherness, without, of course, losing sight of the Self. And it's about weaving together two or more voices in what Conquergood elsewhere calls "the processes of

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disciplines and between private and public discourse, the subjective and the objective, the personal and the scholarly. Because these acts cross borders, they change the shape of the epistemologies they encounter—or they at least influence how scholars think about, apply, and merge different ways of knowing. In their work, these literary scholars exemplify Behar's figure of the vulnerable observer.

communication that constitute the 'doing' of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together." He names this togetherness "coperformance" and suggests that it's inseparable from our embodied experience of the world and our experience as bodies in the world—meaning that it's rooted in the inherent kinship among individual bodies, their physical and social environments, and the acts and events with which they build or break down connections ("Rethinking" 181).

As a moral and embodied means of representation, dialogical performances of the sort Conquergood calls for manifest what Denzin describes as "an ethical aesthetic that demands that texts be written and read in ways that morally move readers and viewers" (*Interpretive* 39). While this aesthetic asks for performance research that stirs others to moral movement, it should also simply make them move. Speech communication scholar Elyse Lamm Pineau argues in her discussion of liberatory education, which mobilizes the body as a means to help students transcend limitations, that a "poetically crafted narrative can enable a reader to feel into the research situation, to participate kinesthetically as well as intellectually" (49). Kinesis, then, is key to composing successful performance ethnography, the kind that feels its way from the performer's body to the researcher's body to the research body to the reader's body—and among them all at once. And as Conquergood notes, one key to performing such ethnographic kinesis is first moving to meet "people on the ground of their experience by exposing oneself to their expressive performances," something Behar advocates for as well. Drawing from Foley, Schechner, and Conquergood, I wrestle with this call for kinesis in what I've named my dialogical coperformative ethnography,[2] which represents my attempt to listen closely to

[2] Hereafter, I generally refer to dialogical coperformative ethnography as "my ethnography," "my methodology," or "my critical methodology."

sonosophy, to explore and to represent its mode of bearing witness to Life and fostering human withness, and to bring its principles and practices to bear on my life, my relationships, my scholarship, and my teaching. By opening myself to sonosopher and sonosophy, I've tried to take the scholars I've mentioned at their word and to exercise what hospitality I've developed through my engagement with Caldiero, Mormon theology, and Mormon and Māori cultural performance by making "proximity, not objectivity," my "epistemological point of departure and return" (Conquergood, "Performance" 373)—my embodied way of knowing and representing sonosophy and other modes of language-making.

ii. On Acts of Close Listening

Acts of Close Listening: An Interdisciplinary Genealogy

As part of my dialogical coperformative ethnography, I've tried to acknowledge and attend to my position in the research situation—as an engaged, culturally-situated witness seeking to open himself to his subject so I can better connect, engage, and converse with that subject. I do so with hope that I might clarify and bring into dialogue the various strands of personal and cultural influence that have brought me into dialogue with Caldiero, his work, and its various strands of influence. I began this process in the FirstWord by at once tracing and starting to interrogate the reasons why I'm pursuing a relationship with sonosopher and sonosophy, from my first encounter with the name "Alex Caldiero" to my own attempts to respond to and to coperform Caldiero's sonosophic methods (something I continue in this project). Motivated by the moral obligation that has emerged from my experience of Mormon theology and Mormon and

Māori cultural performance, I've woven these strands of influence into the fabric of my ethnography, which opens toward my personal spiritual quest as it opens toward, intersects, and—through our engagement with a shared religious tradition—moves in parallel with Caldiero's spiritual quest; which takes up and interrogates the influence sonosophy has had on me as a scholar, a performer, and a human being; and which seeks to elaborate, through praxis, the ethics of hospitality and representation as they've entered my thinking via Mormon and Māori cultural performance and the work of performance ethnographers. This weaving offers language, experience and ways of seeing, knowing, and being that call me to open myself to the work of empathy and compassion, to remain grounded in the soil of my lived experience and moral values even as I interrogate those things by bringing them into conversation with other lives and epistemologies, and to make room for the ineffable in my thinking and my language- and relationship-making.

My approach also compels me to take a dialogical coperformative stance alongside the sonosopher as I consider his experience using what Schechner calls "a broad spectrum approach" that draws from multiple disciplines in the attempt to better represent and interpret the dynamics of Caldiero-in-performance, as viewed through the various performance traditions cued in his work ("Performance" 7). As advocated by Schechner and others, this approach is a response to the "protean and prolific" nature of performance as a concept[3] and in practice, to borrow words from performance scholar

[3] Theater scholar Marvin Carlson summarizes three ways performance has been conceived in *Performance: A Critical Introduction*. A *theatrical sense of performance*, he says, involves staging a display of skills or talents before an audience, as in a talent show or a play. An *everyday sense of performance* also involves display, but not so much a demonstration of skills or talents as a re-enactment of what he calls "repeated and socially sanctioned modes of behavior" (4), which echoes Schechner's notion of "restored" or "twice-behaved" behavior. We reiterate such behaviors, for example, when we (consciously or not) take on the gender roles sanctioned by our societies. I've labeled Carlson's third performance category a *standards-based sense of performance*. In this category, performance measures how successfully someone or something lives up to—or performs against—certain standards of achievement. As Carlson notes, we call

Shannon Jackson (379). Her adjectives suggest that when performers of all kinds take the stage, they move among and bring together multiple modes of expression, using everything from words to paralinguistic sounds to gestures to facial expressions to entire body movements to musical instruments to costumes or props and so on. These verbal and nonverbal movements and the performers' interactions with, among other things, the audience, their immediate environment, and their cultural traditions constitute a living ecology of relationships that resists easy classification and analysis. As a complex system of complex systems, this ecology asks those who study performance to consider the composition of each node in the performer's expressive network, how these nodes interact with and influence each other, and how they function together during the performance event. But this is easier said than done because the dynamic nature of performance makes it difficult to capture for analysis. In a brief essay on translating oral traditions into print, communications scholar Elizabeth C. Fine draws an analogy between this elusiveness and the nature of Proteus, Greek god of the sea, who could elude would-be captors, she says, by shifting "his form in myriad ways, from bird to horse to crashing ocean waves." Fine continues that the protean nature of performance makes it "no less difficult to capture and preserve [. . .] in print for others to read" and study ("Leading Proteus" 59).

Scholars of performance poetry and poetry in performance have addressed this difficulty in part by taking a dialogical stance toward their subjects. Charles Bernstein

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upon this sense "[w]hen we speak of someone's sexual performance or linguistic performance or when we ask how well a child is performing in school" (5). We also call upon it to describe the performance of certain objects or materials—as in how a vehicle or toothpaste perform in industry-approved tests. The concern in standards-based performance is not whether the person-, object-, or material-in-question is staging skills or enacting socially-sanctioned modes of behavior but with how well we think the person, object, or material holds up to whatever standards are asserted as a benchmark. As Carlson's categories illustrate, the concept of performance is used to describe a range of interrelated activities and practices that constitute performative behavior in humans.

suggests that this is especially necessary for studies of performed poetry because it "is constituted dialogically" through the processes of "recognition and exchange with an audience [. . .], where the poet is not" writing from a desk, "performing to invisible readers or listeners but actively exchanging work [face-to-face] with other performers and participants" (23). This conception of performed poetry as something made through the processes of live, active exchange among bodies and their environments necessarily demands that critics rethink how they approach and seek to represent and analyze poetry shared on the page and from the stage. Such is the case for both modes of poetry because the way a poem sounds or is sounded determines how it's received by readers—who encounter the text visually and may voice its language with the mouth or in the mind—and by listeners—who encounter the poem aurally, straight from the poet's mouth. In response to the demands performed poetry makes on those who receive it, Bernstein offers an approach called "close listening," which he fleshes out in the introduction to his 1998 anthology *Close Listening: Poetry and the Performed Word*. As Bernstein has it, close listening entails attending to the performative elements of a poem, which include (among other things) the poem's literary/cultural contexts, the performance venue, and how poets speak, move, and interact with venue and audience. Such an approach, he continues, allows for "wide-ranging" methodologies, from philosophical exploration of "the contribution of sound to meaning" to critical interpretation of "the performance style of individual poets"—and the "spectrum" of methods between (4). Bernstein's metaphor for describing the acts of inquiry associated with close listening resonates with Schechner's account of performance as a "broad spectrum" of activities that call for an equally broad spectrum of interpretive methods to analyze. This view of performance

may have been appealing to Bernstein, who wrote in his anthology introduction that "[t]he newly emerging field of performance studies and theory provides a useful context" for the collection and the diverse modes of interpretation it mobilizes (5).

Beyond those who contributed work to Bernstein's anthology, many scholars of performed poetry have taken up their task with close listening in mind. In fact, between 1998 (when *Close Listening* released) and 2011 at least eight volumes on poetry in performance were published, each of which mention Bernstein and each of which take a slightly different approach to close listening; my ethnography converses with their work (if only implicitly) and seeks to provide a corrective to its limitations. In her 2003 book, *Sounds of Poetry: Contemporary American Performance Poets*, Martina Pfeiler attempts close listening by taking poetry "back to its roots [. . .] in oral cultures," weaving historical context around her exploration of the poetic features of spoken language (onomatopoeia, rhyme, repetition, rhythm, meter, tone, pitch, etc.), which she uses to analyze specific poems-in-performance (5). Peter Middleton, on the other hand, shows that close listening can also be a productive means of approaching poetry's larger structures and functions, a project he pursues in his 2005 book, *Distant Reading: Performance, Readership, and Consumption in Contemporary Poetry*, which discusses the history and performative aspects of the contemporary poetry reading. Lesley Wheeler's *Voicing American Poetry: Sound and Performance from the 1920s to the Present* (2008) similarly addresses "the range of esthetic, cultural, political, and even spiritual attitudes" that have been associated with the concepts of sound and voice in 20th and 21st century American poetry (2). Tyler Hoffman provides a useful discussion of how this range developed in his 2011 cultural history, *American Poetry in Performance: From*

Walt Whitman to Hip Hop, in which he draws from literary studies, cultural studies, and performance studies in an attempt to listen closely to and to represent the story of performance poetry as it has unfolded in America.

In *The Cultural Politics of Slam Poetry: Race, Identity, and the Performance of Popular Verse in America* (2009), Susan B. A. Somers-Willett offers the first full-length scholarly study of what is perhaps the best-known mode of poetry in performance. Speaking to the idea that slam doesn't just exercise processes of orality and aurality but that it enacts "larger cultural and political dynamics" via performance events, she references Bernstein as one of many "scholars who have focused on [performance] poetry's orality" and neglected its more performative aspects. These include "vocal dynamics, physical dynamics, appearance, setting, hoots and hollers from the audience itself," and the cultural and political commitments mobilized via these processes of reception and exchange (16). Cornelia Gräbner follows a similar course as Somers-Willett in her 2007 dissertation, "Off the Page and Off the Stage: The Performance of Poetry and its Public Function," where she acknowledges the strengths of other scholars' approaches to close listening—that they attempt to hear and to analyze poetry-in-performance in context and on its own terms—but asserts that these approaches fall short in significant ways. Bernstein specifically, she says, "focuses too strictly" on the poem as a "self-contained" textual entity whose written features determine its performative values (58). She hopes to transcend these methodological limitations by developing her own interdisciplinary "analytical and comparative approach" to the field that might enable her

and others to more effectively address performance poetry's complex cultural and political environments (19).[4]

Ethnopoetics as an Act of Close Listening

While the studies I've mentioned all attempt to represent and analyze poetries-in-performance using literary and cultural theories to discuss poems, poets, and poetries in diverse contexts, each representation and analysis is only partial. Granted, *all* attempts to represent the protean nature of performance events in writing alone are partial due to the linearity of written text, which doesn't allow for communication across multiple channels. Nonetheless, it is possible to approximate for readers an experience of live performance. Fine points out that to facilitate this process a writer needs to provide context for the performance and the culture from which it emerges. Beyond describing venues, audiences, performers, and their cultural and political environments, influences, and histories, however, effective analyses can best represent performance poetries by transcribing specific poems from performance into print. Such transcription is an act of re-creation: as Fine observes, performance transcriptions attempt to record—and thus to preserve—"the formal features of the live performance" such that the resulting record

[4] In my review of books that take up the work of close listening, I've addressed only those that attempt at length to interpret performed poetries in cultural contexts. Another book, Marjorie Perloff and Craig Dworkin's interdisciplinary anthology, *The Sound of Poetry/The Poetry of Sound* (2009), gathers analyses of other human-made sound structures, from poetry translations to a cyborg opera to romantic ballads to the sound, concrete, and visual poetries of the contemporary avant-garde. Bernstein does make an appearance among the anthology's contributors with a short essay about the ways performing a poem can "proliferate versions of the poem," with each performance enacting a slightly different version. A poem's performed iterations, he suggests, complicate its semantic field—its ecology of meanings—because they show that its language won't hold still. Hence the challenge of close listening, he says: to recognize "that a [performed] poem is not one but many"—not a singular but a dialogical construction—and to seek ways to best bear witness of that manifold, dialogical nature before the world (148).

maintains the vitality and the style of the original and "produces a similar response" in readers ("Leading Proteus" 68).

Ethnopoetics is one transcription method that seeks to account for as many aspects of a poem in performance as possible and to slow those expressive modes enough to allow for close analysis. Using techniques first developed in the 1960s and '70s by poet Jerome Rothenberg and anthropologists Dennis Tedlock and Dell Hymes, ethnopoetic transcriptions score the dynamics of oral poetries by attending to both the words and the silences of a performance, noting "changes in loudness and tone of voice, the production of sound effects, and the use of gestures and props" (Tedlock). Tedlockian ethnopoetics seeks to integrate these dynamics into the transcription with various typographical cues and comments. For instance, as folklorist 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 ("Ethnopoetics" 126). The performer's 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, "Ethnopoetics" 127–8).

Writing within the field of performance poetry, Julia Novak draws from and expounds upon Tedlockian ethnopoetics, as well as other transcription and interpretive methods, to develop what she calls "an integrated approach to poetry in performance." In

her words, this approach—as explored in her 2011 book, *Live Poetry: An Integrated Approach to Poetry in Performance*—intends to provide an interdisciplinary, "systematic methodology," an "analytical 'toolkit' with which to address the distinctive characteristics of *live* poetry" (12; italics in original). By emphasizing the adjective—live—Novak highlights the fact that her methodology intends to be (as I intend mine to be) a corrective to the work of literary scholars who mute the immediacy and the potential influence—the liveness and the liveliness—of performed poetry by reading or representing it as they would any printed poem. Her research, she says, aims to "close th[e] methodological gap" this presents for those who study performed poetry (12). To that end she calls upon many different disciplines. These include: ethnopoetics, for its sensitivity to the verbal dynamics of oral performance; paralinguistics, for its "ways of classifying and interpreting [the] non-verbal acoustic elements of speech"; musicology, for its ways of "describing and notating" such aspects of performed poetry "as speech melody (pitch) and regular rhythms"; kinesics, for its consideration of the body in action, which can help account for what the performer's body does during performance; folklore studies, performance studies, and theater studies, for their various ways of theorizing the functions and the social dimensions of verbal performance; and literary theory, for its concept of the paratext, which accounts for the materials that accompany and thereby help to contextualize a narrative but that are not part of the narrative-proper (e.g., the author's name, the title, the preface, illustrations, any editorial apparatus, etc. [Genette 261]) (Novak 237–8). As Novak discusses what each discipline contributes to her methodology, she systematically develops an expansive technique for representing performed poetry that can allow for deep description and interpretation of the dynamic

nature and the nuances of a live performance event, that can provide listeners with an experience that approximates and evokes the experience of that event, that can guide others in understanding and interpreting live poetry, and that can serve as a script or score to be used in re-performing poems. While Novak attempts to create a comprehensive methodology for transcribing live poetry, its comprehensiveness seems to lean toward overcrowding, which could result in transcriptions that overwhelm readers with information. Overcrowded transcriptions sit in opposition to interpretive work that ignores or mutes the features of performed texts by attending to only the content of the text (the words alone, as written or spoken) or to just the words as delivered absent any gestures by made the performer or any environmental factors, etc., that interacted with or influenced the performance of the text.[5]

In the process of composing transcriptions that represent the performance without overwhelming readers or ignoring the performed text, ethnopoetic methodologies foreground the essential difference between analyzing printed poetry and analyzing performed poetry. My thesis—like Novak's—is based on this premise, as well as on the

[5] Beyond the transcription methodologies fleshed out by anthropologists and poetry and performance scholars, media studies scholars Jen Curwood and Damiana Gibbons have advanced a transcription technique called "multimodal microanalysis" in which a digital video performance is broken into its constituent parts such that researchers can better analyze how those parts interact and function together. Curwood and Gibbons developed multimodal microanalysis "to trace the presence, absence, and co-occurrence of [expressive] modes" in digital poems produced by high school students ("I, Too"). In their application of the method, they gathered data from a student-made video and collected and coded it in a spreadsheet. The data they gathered represent the multiple expressive modes performed in the video; among other things, this included screen captures taken of the video channel at two second intervals (a long enough time-lapse to show movement in the poem's expressive modes), the amount of time passed in the video, text displayed on the screen, how the text was formatted and how it acted, transitions between textual components, and background music playing as the poem unfolded. By creating performance texts that make room for the many expressive modes apparent in video poems, Curwood and Gibbons foreground the dialogical functions of the poems. Primary among these functions are the way student poets bring together personal histories and diverse cultural traditions to publicly contest oppressive master narratives and to create dialogic space in which listeners can explore their own moral agency and humanity and express their own counterstories in the face of oppressive external structures ("Just Like I Have Felt" 61–2). In this sense, multimodal microanalysis acts like ethnopoetics, highlighting, analyzing, and interpreting the multiple performance modes that constitute performed poetries.

fact that scholars of literature have articulated complex methods for doing the former, but these scholars—and their methods—have largely ignored the latter. Even many of the scholars of performed poetry whose work I review in my previous section neglect the distinctive features of poems-in-performance. Instead, they focus mainly on exploring the cultural contexts out of which poetry performances arise and with which performers and their poems and audiences interact. Somers-Willett, for instance, argues that the influence "of slam poetry is best understood when experienced in the intimate context of live performance" (138). Yet, for all her claims that performed poetry should be considered in context, "on its own terms," as a vital part of "[i]ts native venue" of "live performance" (13); and despite her acknowledgement that slam poets spend "painstaking hours" composing, memorizing, choreographing, and rehearsing the poems they perform (17), in the end she mutes the poems she discusses by misrepresenting the way they sound in performance. She does excerpt and comment on the text of several slam poems, but she excerpts them as printed not as performed. This shortcoming may have something to do with her assertion that "slam poetry is defined less by its formal characteristics" and more by its attempt to build "a more immediate, personal, and authentic engagement with its audience" during any given performance event (19). Hence her focus on the contexts immediately surrounding and impinging upon the poet/audience relationship. It seems to me, though, that any analysis of this relationship as it's mobilized during a poetry performance would be strengthened not just by framing the performance in local and global contexts but also by listening closely to and seeking to represent the language poets use, the way they use it, and what non-verbal cues accompany the words.

Like Somers-Willett, Gräbner uses an interdisciplinary methodology to consider performance poetry in contexts; and like Somers-Willett, she ultimately weakens her observations by failing to represent the dynamic features of poems in performance. She asserts that, "[t]hrough the analysis of poems" by several performance poets, she will "develop tools for the analysis of the *actual performance* of poetry and its cultural significance" (9; italics mine). I've emphasized "actual performance" in her statement because it's significant in terms of how she suggests her methodology will function: as a way to represent and analyze poems in their cultural contexts and as they are actually performed. However, once she begins discussing poems, she favors their printed versions and makes no attempt to adjust the text-as-printed in order to represent the poems-as-performed. She could have used ethnopoetics to inform and support her interpretations and her methodology.

Gräbner's analysis of American poet Gil Scott-Heron's poem "Whitey on the Moon" illustrates the flaws her partiality for a poem's printed text introduces into her argument. She begins by contextualizing the poet and his work. Scott-Heron was involved with the Black Arts Movement, a group of African American artists whose goals, as Somers-Willett outlines them, "were to address black audiences, celebrate the African American cultural tradition [. . .], and take poetry, drama, music, and visual art to the streets." As such, they hoped to empower their communities by calling attention to and seeking to raise the status of "the culture, economic matters, and politics of black America" (58). In *Black Wax*, a 1982 Robert Mugge documentary for which Scott-Heron was the subject, Scott-Heron asserted that "the new poetry that evolved in our society," in part due to the influence of the Black Arts Movement, "concerned the fact that folks

wanted to use both words that people could understand as well as talk about ideas that people could understand." "Whitey on the Moon," he continued, was "[o]ne poem that went in that direction" by speaking in the vernacular about the disparity between the money spent to get humans into space and the poverty many people experienced on Earth. In her discussion of the poem, Gräbner reproduces the text as follows:

> A rat done bit my sister Nell.
>
> (with Whitey on the moon)
>
> Her face and arms began to swell.
>
> (and Whitey's on the moon)
>
> I can't pay no doctor bill.
>
> (but Whitey's on the moon)
>
> Ten years from now I'll be payin' still.
>
> (while Whitey's on the moon)
>
> The man jus' upped my rent las' night.
>
> ('cause Whitey's on the moon)
>
> No hot water, no toilets, no lights.
>
> (but Whitey's on the moon)
>
> I wonder why he's uppin' me?
>
> ('cause Whitey's on the moon?)
>
> I wuz already payin' 'im fifty a week.
>
> (with Whitey on the moon)
>
> Taxes takin' my whole damn check,
>
> Junkies makin' me a nervous wreck,

> The price of food is goin' up,
>
> An' as if all that shit wuzn't enough:
>
> A rat done bit my sister Nell.
>
> (with Whitey on the moon)
>
> Her face an' arm began to swell.
>
> (but Whitey's on the moon)
>
> Was all that money I made las' year
>
> (for Whitey on the moon?)
>
> How come there ain't no money here?
>
> (Hmm! Whitey's on the moon)
>
> Y'know I jus' 'bout had my fill
>
> (of Whitey on the moon)
>
> I think I'll sen' these doctor bills,
>
> Airmail special
>
> (to Whitey on the moon). (qtd. in Gräbner 139–40)

As Gräbner analyzes the poem she comments on the performed version, which was recorded sometime in the early '70s during a live performance at the 125th and Lenox Nightclub in New York City. And while she builds her interpretation from the poem-in-performance, her analysis takes for granted certain features of the printed text that weren't manifest in Scott-Heron's performance. For example, she argues that the poem is spoken by two personas, each of whose voice carries a different tone: Nell's brother, who recounts his family's troubles in rhyming couplets uttered with a "disturbed but somewhat helpless seriousness"; and a "teacher-activist," who comments on the brother's

tale with "sometimes sarcastic, sometimes ironic, and often funny" interjections that Whitey being on the moon has caused the family's problems (141).

I see the potential for these voices to arise from the printed text, especially with the parenthesized statements set apart as they are from the rhymed lines, but I don't hear the differences in tone that Gräbner associates with each persona—nor am I convinced that listeners who have never seen the poem-as-printed would hear them. Gräbner does argue that even though these voices aren't "easily distinguished on the recorded version of the poe[m]," they would be "in a live performance, as the reaction of the audience [in the recording] shows" (140). Yet, the audience's reaction could be a response to factors other than the distinctive interplay between two personas. It could, for example, be a response to the absurdly true-to-life social conditions dramatized by the poem and made more intense in its sharp ironies. When voiced by the performer, these ironies and their absurdity would become unavoidable to observers, who might seek relief from the ridiculousness by laughing and/or verbalizing their support for the speaker's views. This seems to be a more justifiable alternative to Gräbner's dual-personas assertion, which assumes that Scott-Heron would have drastically altered his facial expressions and/or other physical gestures when he swapped personas during the performance, something that didn't appear to be in his repertoire for the poem if his presentation of it in *Black Wax* is any indication of that repertoire. When taken with the audio recording of Scott-Heron's performance, a transcription of the poem-as-performed at the 125th and Lenox Nightclub bears this out, suggesting that the claim Gräbner makes central to her analysis of the poem-in-performance—that it's constituted by different personas speaking with

different tones—may have been imposed on the performance by an over-reliance on the poem-as-written:

[congas began a quick, four-beat, percussive rhythm carried for sixteen beats before Scott-Heron picked up the poem and through his performance]

a RA/T d/one BIT mah SIStuh NE-ll↓
with WHIdey ON theMOO-N

huh FA-CE an AH-MS beGA-N tuh SWE-LL # an
WHIdey's ON d'MOO-N↓

I can'/t P/AY no DOCtuh BI-LLS↓
buh WHIdey's ON d'MOO-N

TEN YEEUHS from NOW AH'LL be PAYin
STILL while WHIdey's ON d'MOO-N↓
yuhNO
d'MAN jus UP mah RENT la-s NI-GHT
cuz WHIdey's ON d'MOO-N↓

NO hawd WAHDer no TOIlets no LIGHTS # buh

WHIdey's ON d'MOO-N↓

AH WONduh WHY he's UPPIN ME↓

cuz WHIdey's ON d'MOO-N↑

well I wuz alREAdy GIVin im FIfty a WEEK an

NOW WHIdey's ON d'MOO-N

TAXes TAkin mah WHO-LE DA-MN CHE-CK

The JUNkies MAKE me a NERvous WRECK

The PRICE uh FOO-D is GOin UP

An as IF all THA/T C/RAP WUH'nt eNOUGH

A RA/T d/one BIT mah SIStuh NE-LL↓

with WHIdey ON d'MOO-N

Huh FA-CE an AH-MS beGAN tuh SWE-LL

an WHIdey's ON d'MOON↓

Wuz AWL-lat MONEH I MADE la-s YE-uh↑

for WHIdey ON d-MOO-N

HAckum I AIN go/t n/o MONEH HE-uh↑

HM—	
WHIdey's ON d-MOO-N↓	[audience laughter]
YOU KNOW I jus about HA-D my FI-LL↓	
of WHIdey ON d'MOO-N	
I THINK ah'll SEN/D th/ese DOCtuh BI-LLS↓	
AY-UH MA-YIL SPEcial	[woman in audience: "to Whitey on the moon"]
	[audience laughter]
	[congas cut off thirteen beats after SH closed "special"]
to WHIdey ON theMOO-N↓	[spoken against silence]

As I've represented the poem-as-performed, the parentheses from the printed text disappear. In fact, my transcription shows that the parenthetical asides Gräbner attributes to a teacher-activist—someone who responds to Nell's brother with sarcastic, ironic, or humorous variations of "Whitey on the moon" phrases—are treated no differently by Scott-Heron than the rhymed couplets Gräbner attributes to the brother. From this perspective, the "asides" don't come across as asides at all: they were each delivered within a beat of—and in several instances in the same breath as—the preceding statement and they sustain the cadence and tone of those statements. This mode of delivery suggests, among other things, that rather than being a dialogue between two voices,

"Whitey on the Moon" represents a single (though fragmented) persona who tells his tale and comments on it at the same time. In this light, "Whitey on the Moon" is, if not a dialogue, inherently dialogical. The performer (Scott-Heron) gives voice to the speaker (Nell's brother) who gives voice to an oppressed self—one held in crisis by compelling external forces—and a Promethean self—one who emerges from and calls attention to human crises and their causes and who acts and stirs others to act in ways that relieve the burdens of the oppressed.

Coming as they do from a single persona, these voices overlap in performance as the speaker (via the performer) relates his family's story then in the same statement, sometimes in the same breath, attributes their difficult conditions to "Whitey," a "stereotyped and depersonalized characterization" of political, economic, and social systems that privilege the interests of White people over non-Whites (Gräbner 141). Because the Space Race had exacerbated the long-extant disparity between these groups, Apollo 11's moon landing—which showcased and lauded the achievements of White astronauts before a national audience—provided fodder for criticism, especially from those most affected by the unequal investments that enabled the ship's lunar journey. More than just being this symbol of inequality and a target for criticism, though, in Scott-Heron's poem the moon landing is also a trigger. As an expression of modernity's complex and fragmented socio-cultural environments, it precipitates the emergence of a complex, fragmented subject: someone who, consciously or not, adapts to and deals with pressing personal and social engagements by developing multiple selves.

When performed, more than when just on the page, "Whitey on the Moon" manifests the multiplicity in its polyphonic speaker, whose tragic narrative, ironic stance

toward his subject, and pointed social critique mobilize the sympathies and the social consciousness of its audience. That the performed poem prompts others to act by seeking communal relief from oppression and raising their voices against inequality is evident in the 125th and Lenox recording. As noted in my transcription of the event audio, after Scott-Heron delivered the poem's penultimate line (where the speaker resolves to unload his doctor bills on his oppressor) then paused as the congos made a final thirteen-beat run, a woman in the audience picked up immediately where the performer left off and spoke the poem's final refrain: "to Whitey on the moon." By speaking into the pause Scott-Heron offered before concluding his performance and by uniting her voice with the language of an oppressed Other, this woman illustrated the potent influence of performed poetry as a mode of human connection and social action: by exposing listeners to the intensified rhythms and movements of poetic language, performance poets can, to borrow phrasing from Gräbner, "[solicit] engagement, response[,] and the disposition to dialogue" from audiences, empowering people to move individually and collectively, to mobilize their bodies—minds and mouths included—in ways that enact personal and social change (142).

Gräbner's claim that performance poetry "solicits [from others] the disposition to dialogue" is compelling. It suggests that listeners, not just performers, play an active, participatory role in how poetry performances play out; that there's a vital give-and-take in the performer-audience relationship; and that the effects of any given poetry performance are determined in the interactions among its parts. Hence, as I illustrate in my critique of Gräbner's argument and in my ethnography, when researching and writing about poetries in performance it's vital for the researcher to listen closely to these

interactions and to seek to represent the dialogue that develops through them on its own terms. To do otherwise would be to mute the performed poem and to neglect the richness and complexity of poetry performance as a mode of deep communication and communion. Ethnopoetics, as an act of close listening that can be taken up in conjunction with other ethnographic methods that prompt observers to attend to a performance's local and global contexts, seeks to account for and responsibly represent and interpret richness and complexity of contingent performance events.

If Gräbner had incorporated ethnopoetics into her discussion of "Whitey on the Moon" (as of performance poetry in general), the expanded critical vocabulary made available in the act could have done at least two things for her. First, it could have helped her to clarify and make more compelling her analysis of the actual performance of poems, their cultural significance and potential influence, and the interactions among their performance, significance, and influence. As it stands, her analyses often impose her interpretations of poems-as-printed on those same poems as performed. Because these interpretations account only for the textual features of a printed narrative and because Gräbner seems reluctant to revise poems-as-printed to reflect the features of the poems as performed, she risks misreading and misrepresenting performance poetries even as she advances a methodology that she claims can account for the many different ways a performed poem means, including linguistic, cultural, social, and political. As such, her methodology fails to deliver fully on its promise to, in her words, "do justice to the many elements of signification that are mobilized by the performance of poetry" (2–3). And this failure underscores the second thing ethnopoetics could have done for her: it could have made her methodology more comprehensive, dynamic, vigorous, and responsive

and responsible toward its subject—all things that I've explored in my discussion of her approach to "Whitey on the Moon" and that I try to incorporate into my own ethnographic engagement with sonosopher and sonosophy.

What Value Transcription?

While I was transcribing Scott-Heron's performance, Novak's thoughts on transcription kept coming to mind. Commenting on Tedlock's efforts to construct a notation system that could guide other scholars in the reperformance of an oral poem, she suggests that the rise of video and audio recording technologies have made ethnopoetic transcription less relevant as a means to enable re-performance or interpretation of a performed poem. As opposed to audio or video recordings, a transcript, she says, is increasingly meant to give readers "a rough impression of the acoustic nature of the [live] performance." In this view, the performance transcript is simply a supplement to audio or video. While it allows scholars and other close listeners to visualize and to analyze in detail any "conspicuous acoustic features" of the performance, the value of the transcribed text may increasingly be offset by the wide accessibility of audio and video recording equipment and the channels through which these media can be shared and discussed with few limitations. For Novak, then, transcription functions as little more than a "means of guiding the reader's attention in a discussion of live poetry that will be primarily based on a video or audio recording" (127). She exemplifies this function by pointing readers of her book to her printed volume's companion website, livepoetry.net, which includes a page of links to recorded performances of the poems she discusses in the book. By pointing to the place where she has curated these digital files, she prompts readers to

listen for themselves and, ultimately, to weigh her (sparse) transcriptions and her analyses against the recordings.

Maybe it's because I've spent hours translating performances from audio and video to text, listening to or watching short clips then recording what I saw and/or heard using word-processing software, then listening to those clips again and adding to or revising what I had written until I was content that my transcription accurately represented that part of the performance, then moving to the next clip and pursuing the same process until I had transcribed an entire performance—maybe it's because I've invested so much time and effort in this process, but I'm reluctant to view an ethnopoetic transcription as simply a "rough impression of the acoustic nature of [a] performance" or just a way to focus readers' attention on certain aspects of an audio/video recording. So while I'm with Novak when she says that recordings of performances are vital for researchers and their audiences and other close observers and that ethnopoetics can produce a script used to focus readers' attention and to facilitate re-performance of poems, I part ways with her when she claims the increasing irrelevance of ethnopoetics. I say this not only because my initial encounter with ethnopoetics during graduate school opened my mind to see and my ears to hear how performed poetries function, or because (as a result) I've invested a lot of time and effort in ethnopoetic analysis of poems, but because (probably also as a result of my training) I see the process of transcribing a performed poem as at least four additional things:

First, ethnopoetics is an act of performance. In his discussion of Jerome Rothenberg's work as ethnopoetic theorist and poet-translator, translation studies scholar Josef Horáček points out that Rothenberg's ethnopoetic translations "enact a performance

of their own" in response to and as an attempt to represent "the moment of performance" unique to each event. To do this, Rothenberg used "a broad spectrum of techniques adopted from concrete, visual and sound poetry" (167). As such, the transcription became a place to re-perform the original performance on "a visual field" in such a way as to approximate the shape of the utterance (173). My transcriptions of Caldiero's work likewise enact a performance of his poems as I perceive them from my position as audience member, poet, and ethnographer. While another observer's transcriptions might look different than mine do, I've attempted to re-perform Caldiero's performances in the visual field of my text by using typography to represent the different features manifest in those performances without overwhelming readers with overcrowded transcriptions.

Second, ethnopoetics is a way of slowing the performance enough to allow for close analysis. As I've noted elsewhere in the SecondWord, because performance events take place in real time and space and because performers communicate using many expressive modes, it can be difficult to analyze those events. By providing methods through which researchers can translate the dynamic nature of such events into more static forms of representation, ethnopoetics attempts to untangle the real-time simultaneity of modes and, by representing them side-by-side in print, to show how they're woven together and how they function in the moment of performance.

Third, ethnopoetics is an act of translation. I've already referred to the process as such, but only ever in passing; the assumption begs to be addressed outright, however. Translation in its strictest sense is the process by which a spoken or written text is turned from one language into another; researchers who render a performance in a language other than its original translate in this sense of the term. Additionally, considering

transcription as translation could also imply that a researcher is turning performed language into written language. Yet, to translate at its root means more than to turn one language into another—it's to carry a thing from one place to another ("Translate"). In these terms, ethnopoetics carries a performance and its immediate and cultural contexts into a new performative space where they can be re-created in the image of the original event.

In the image of, but not, the original: I've appropriated such language from the Hebrew Bible's creation narrative—in which God, the account's *a priori* being, made other beings in his own image—to assert two things about ethnopoetics as an act of translation. First, I've used it to point to the constitutive nature of the performance event (the *a priori* form) in relation to the performance text, meaning that in ethnopoetics (as I've discussed) the vitality of a performance text is bound up in the relationship the transcription shares with the performance it intends to represent. And second, I've used it to borrow from the biblical narrative's claim that things visible (e.g., human existence) have their origin in things invisible (e.g., spoken language) (see *NET*, Hebrews 11.3). Ethnopoetics yields a similar pattern: as a visual inscription of a performance event, an ethnopoetic transcription translates and in the process embodies an experience of something intangible (performance, of course, being by nature elusory).

Fourth, ethnopoetics is an act of interpretation—and re-interpretation. I say that ethnopoetics embodies *an experience of* something intangible and not that it embodies something intangible because when researchers translate a performance event into a performance text, they do so in terms of their own perception of the event. As with any interpretive act, ethnopoetic transcription thus brings into being a particular way of

hearing the performed poem as well as of engaging the demands an Other's language-making makes on specific listeners. Dell Hymes was among the first to explore this notion in depth. In the late 1960s, he revisited an earlier transcription of a Clackamas Chinook myth whose recorder had organized the narrative to highlight what he considered "the psycho-social core of the myth" ("The 'Wife'" 174): its treatment of "psychosexual fears and in-law tensions," as Hymes later described this core ("Discovering" 436). Hymes argued that this first interpretation imposed foreign values on the myth, making the transcription less representative than he felt it should be; that (as such) it neglected the myth's culture-specific aspects, like generic structure and social/cultural function; and that this neglect "overr[o]de and even conceal[ed] the [cultural] import of the myth" ("The 'Wife'" 175, 198). So he reinterpreted the tale in light of the cultural values, practices, and generic features manifest in Clackamas Chinook cultural performance. Doing so, he said, allowed him to "reconsider the form of the myth" and to see "new dimensions of its underlying theme" instead of being influenced by the foreign values imposed on the myth by its recorder (182).

Engaging more deeply with Clackamas Chinook culture and narratives also seems to have compelled Hymes to remain open to further reconsiderations of this particular tale. Several years after he published his reinterpretation, in fact, he returned to the myth, this time to revise his earlier transcription to reflect "the poetic and rhetorical forms" he had since discovered in the narrative ("Discovering" 431). Whereas his initial transcription presents the myth in paragraphed prose, his revision presents it in poetic lines grouped into verses of two or three lines; the verses are further grouped into stanzas, which are then grouped into scenes. This rhetorical move drastically changes the shape

the performance takes on the page as well as the transcription's relationship to Hymes' reading of the myth. In terms of the latter, the revised transcription (as an example of effective ethnopoetics) intends to more accurately portray the generic and syntactic features of Clackamas verbal art so it "strengthens and completes" Hymes' reinterpretation (432). Because of this, the more poetic narrative privileges the conventions of spoken language over the conventions of written discourse. In short, Hymes attempts to let the performance speak for itself, to privilege performance over text even as he attempts to represent that performance in text.

I realize this statement is fraught with difficulty and might seem disingenuous or patronizing toward the performed word in its various iterations. Speaking of my own research (in which, unlike Hymes, I have ready access to audio or video recorded events), I say this because an audio or video recording doesn't need my inherently incomplete textual representations to be heard. I also realize the irony in claiming to privilege performance over text while at the same time translating specific performances into textual representations of those performances. However, I'm convinced that ethnopoetic transcription can lead to deep description of, increased aesthetic engagement with, and a fuller, more nuanced and dynamic analysis and interpretation of performed poems, especially when the method is combined with other modes of critique; I'm so convinced by this, in fact, that I've built my critical methodology on this process: beginning with ethnopoetic transcriptions to describe a performance then using those descriptions for study. My critical methodology intends to foreground this process and, so doing, to provide a corrective to the work of other scholars of performance poetries a) who acknowledge the relevance of discussing performed poems in their contexts yet who

don't represent the poems as performed in their discussions and b) who recognize how vital it is to represent poems as they're performed in discussions of performed poetries but who overlook the value ethnopoetic transcription could add to the scholar's interpretive project. Responding to both modes of scholarship in my ethnography, I extend what Somers-Willet says about slam poetry to all poetries in performance: performed poetries are "best understood when experienced in the intimate context of live performance" (138). Ethnopoetic transcription seeks to honor this context, as well as to honor the "painstaking hours" poets spend preparing to perform (to borrow another phrase from Somers-Willet) (17). It would be irresponsible for a performance researcher or other vulnerable observer to gloss over the context of a performance or to disregard a poet's preparation by relying on static versions of the poems performed and thereby neglecting the ways in which performance poets reinterpret their poems based on the contingencies of different performance events.

Hence, in my analysis and interpretation of Caldiero's work, I use ethnopoetic transcription techniques to translate audio and video recordings of Caldiero-in-performance into dynamic performance texts. So doing, I hope to address the "heard reality" of sonosophy and to compose transcriptions that are better suited for close analysis than the performance events or the recordings themselves and that can add another dimension to the aesthetic function of each performance (Foley 96). Following Hymes in the process, I try to tune out the conventions of written discourse or written poetry when I'm transcribing a performance and to instead let the rhetorical features of the performance dictate the shape of my transcriptions. In terms of the general architecture of the transcribed poem, my line and stanza breaks follow the breath

divisions made by the poet during a performance: shorter pauses (of roughly one beat) signal a line break and longer pauses (of roughly two beats or more) a stanza break. This method of organizing a transcribed poem into breath-units follows Caldiero's focus on breath (which I explore in my ThirdWord) and foregrounds the vital role breathing plays in language-making: among other things, it determines the range, tone, clarity, and length of sounds made when a person vocalizes words. To represent these aspects of articulation in my transcriptions, I borrow from Tedlock and Fine by manipulating the typography to intimate the sounds of a performed poem. These typographical cues include the following:

Transcription Key	
Typographical Cues	**What the cues represent**
ALL CAPS	sounds stressed by the performer
ā	a long vowel.
è	a syllable accented beyond the normal prosody of the utterance.
raised letters	a noticeably higher pitch on the sounds associated with the raised letters.
hyphens between letters	a lengthening of the preceding phoneme. More hyphens indicate that the sound was stretched longer.
—	a "sustained juncture"; the "pitch of the last phoneme" was held (Fine, *Folklore* 183).

↑	a “rising juncture”; the “pitch of the last phoneme [rose] slightly” (183).
↓	a “falling juncture”; the “pitch of the last phoneme falls or fades away” (183).
#	a slight pause (less than half a beat).
line break	a pause of roughly one beat.
stanza break	a pause of two beats or more.
one inch indentation	spillover from the previous line.
half-inch indentation	a pause between statements of around half a beat.
/f v/	the running together of phonemes.
“words/sounds”	“clipped, staccato-like articulation” (183).
<u>Underlined words</u>	an intoned utterance.
Italicized words	an utterance made in a rush of breath.
‹r›	an aleveolar trill.
<word/phoneme>	words or phonemes that were barely audible.
Bold	utterance made with increased intensity.
To represent sounds captured on the recording beyond the poet’s language-making or to otherwise describe or comment on the performance, I include bracketed explanations in the right margin of the transcription.	

While I recognize the potential benefits I could reap by relying more directly on visual media in my ethnography, I've opted to rely on textual representation techniques adapted from Tedlock, Hymes, and Fine. While practicality played a role in my choice, I also wanted to use ethnopoetics to play with the aesthetics of transcription just as Caldiero plays with the aesthetics of sound. Said differently: I wanted to explore the shapes sound can make on the page and to converse deeply with Caldiero by listening to his *poiesis* via acts of ethnopoetic translation. To validate, contextualize, and analyze my translations, I rely on the dialogical-coperformative-ethnographic critical methodology that I've derived from my thinking about the ethics of hospitality and representation as I've encountered and seek to elaborate them via Mormon theology and Mormon and Māori cultural performance and via the work of Foley, Schechner, and Conquergood. This mode of critique demands that I address Caldiero on his own terms; hence, I don't seek to interpret his performances in just any contexts but in those that are most pertinent to his lived experience and his personal ideas about sonosophy. I open the ThirdWord by addressing these contexts as they were cued in his performance at the 2010 Utah Arts Festival in Salt Lake City. These include his Sicilian cultural heritage; his mystical experience; his participation in Catholic and Latter-day Saint faith communities and religious rites; the embodied poetics of the Beat generation, especially as manifest in Allen Ginsberg's "Howl"; the playfulness of Dada plastic, performance, and language arts; and a tradition of seers that contains (among others) the Paleolithic shaman, the premodern bard, and ancient Hebrew prophets.

Having introduced Caldiero's performance ecology in the first section of the ThirdWord, I spend the rest of my essay fleshing out that ecology using my critical methodology. In sections two and three, I use it to explore various cultural figures with whom Caldiero affiliates or can, through careful observation, be seen as enacting; I suggest that the history and character of each figure—and the interactions among them—can both shed light on and provide a lens through which to interpret what Caldiero seems to be doing with sonosophy. While I address the work sonosophy does as I wrestle with these figures and their influence on Caldiero's performative posture and *poiesis,* I consider the potential communal effects of this work in section four of the ThirdWord as well as in the FourthWord, where I attend, respectively, to Caldiero's participation in a coperformative event that probed the interaction of sensory perception and virtual networks and to the ethical and pedagogical implications of Caldiero's *poiesis*. Along the way I respond to, play with, push back against, and elaborate on the influence sonosopher and sonosophy have been on my presence in the world, my relationships with others, and my thinking about the acts of language- and relationship-making.

Part II:

ThirdWord: Performative *Poiesis* and the Un/making of the World

i.

Enter the Poetarium:

Sonosophy as Methodology;

Or, Taking My Cues from Caldiero's Performative Auto/Ethnographic *Poiesis*

On Sonosopher and Sonosophy: A Brief Cultural History

Sonosophy is by nature dialogical. Like all modes of human communication, it consists of semantic ecologies—interconnected networks of texts, meanings, epistemologies, and performance traditions—that deepen the reservoir of what the sonosopher can say and how he can say it; this rhetorical deepening further opens the network of connections through which observers can encounter and begin to unfold (and unfold with) his *poiesis*. Unlike many ways of making language, though, sonosophy is self-consciously dialogical. Caldiero calls upon and brings into conversation diverse performance traditions in a process that I argue is akin to the work of performance ethnography and autoethnography (ethnography performed from within a community). In his exploration of such work, Denzin observes that performance ethnographers seek to at once create and enact "moral texts that move [their audience] from the personal to the political, from the local to the historical and the cultural" (*Performance* loc 53). By weaving strands of personal history and knowledge, languages, and diverse modes of cultural performance into his *poiesis*, Caldiero represents ideas, traditions, and modes of language- and relationship-making that critique—and in the process compel others to rethink—widely-held assumptions about what makes us human, including the systems we use to connect with (and sometimes to harm) each other and the spaces we mutually inhabit.

Born in Licodia Eubea, near Catania, Sicily, in 1949, Caldiero immigrated with his family to the United States when he was nine. 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 (Caldiero, "Who is the Dancer" 93). In 1980, after converting to the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Caldiero and his wife, Setenay, and their children moved to Orem, Utah, where he began performing sonosophy in earnest and where he now serves as the Senior Artist-in-Residence at Utah Valley University (Hardy B1). During his movement from Sicily to New York to Utah and in subsequent years of studying and traveling, Caldiero has published hundreds of poems in print and performance (I engage with a representative sample of his work in my ethnography). With a poetic career spanning from the mid-1970s to today, he has offered many of these poems in fifteen collections printed by regional publishing houses and many, many others in dozens of self-published artist books that reproduce his abundant archive of notebooks (he releases more of these each year). Additionally, although he has published most often in regional presses and performs most often for local events, he has performed in dozens of formal and informal venues across the United States and several in Sicily; many of these performances have been collaborations with other performers, including a dance company, a performing arts company, and a collective of experimental musicians. He continues to perform for Utah audiences at several formal and informal events a year (Caldiero, Curriculum Vitae).

His poetry, both written and performed, has met a range of responses from fellow poets and other members of his audience. For instance, the Association for Mormon

Letters, an organization based in Utah Valley but serving a largely American base of writers and literary critics who affiliate with Mormonism, has recognized Caldiero's written poetry twice: once in 1998 for *Various Atmospheres* and once in 2014 for *sonosuono*. Others, including his students and colleagues, have acknowledged that his written work is "beautiful" and compelling (Bernhard and Low; Richardson). His performed work, however, has received mixed reviews. Speaking in 2009 to the way Caldiero's Bite-Size Poetry performance fits into his repertoire, Katherine Coles called him "a wonderful performer." Former Utah Poet Laureate Ken Brewer said something similar in 2004: as "a performance artist," he observed, Caldiero "does some wonderful things" with his poetry. Other Utah poets and institutions have viewed Caldiero as performer from a different perspective. Salt Lake City-based poet Guy Lebeda, speaking as director of the Literature Program for the Utah Arts Council (now the Utah Department of Heritages and Arts), told Bernhard and Low that he had had "established poets" in the region tell him "that they viewed [Caldiero] as more of a stand-up comic, that his performances were *not* poetry." This idea that Caldiero isn't a poet and that his work therefore isn't poetry—which Caldiero in part perpetuates because he doesn't call himself a "poet" but instead goes by "wordshaker" or "sonosopher," among other titles—has kept him from receiving funds from the Utah Arts Council because, as journalist Scott Carrier has noted, Caldiero's refusal to fit himself into established categories "confuses the [grant] selection committee[s]. They give money to fiction writers, dancers, photographers. But what's a wordshaker?" Such bewilderment at Caldiero's performance style was also manifest in the response he received in 2008 from an emcee at the Bowery Poetry Club in Manhattan. After he had performed during an event dedicated to

experimental poets, she told him that she thought he was "the craziest person" there (Bernhard and Low). Some members in his Utah audiences would apply her statement to Caldiero's performative persona in general (see Bernhard and Low; Richardson).

Amidst this range of responses to his work, Caldiero has developed his distinctive mode of performative *poiesis*, which draws from and builds upon cultural traditions that he claims as being foundational to his life, character, and approach to performance; he may also cue other influences during performance that he doesn't acknowledge outright. 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 somatic space—the supplicant and his community. 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 *poietic* creation and re-creation of the world ("Performance and Ritual").

In addition to his early training in the performance of ritual, Caldiero cites as formative a decades-long engagement with Allen Ginsberg's "Howl." He notes in a 2005 conversation with Salt Lake journalist Peter Rosen 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 ("Fresh Look"). 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 and to thereby 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 folklorist 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 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). By affiliating with the Beats and the *cuntastorie*, Caldiero himself reaches to grasp that prime-itive moment in human history and to thereby connect with the mythic past.

In addition to acknowledging these vital influences, Caldiero says that his conversion to Mormonism was something that "enlarged [him]" as both a human and a performer. He explains that the conversion enlarged him as a human by expanding the network of experiences 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 (Caldiero, "Why"; Caldiero and Howe). Caldiero has called 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 deity, and perform God's mysteries for his followers ("Alex Caldiero's Mormon Experience").

For Mormons, a defining aspect of Smith's performance was 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 (J. Smith 7). The insider (emic) LDS audience can understand Smith's prophetic performance as inquiring after this agency. More, 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 ("Alex Caldiero's Mormon Experience").

The performance process established by Smith includes ritual enactment of the Hebrew Bible's creation drama, a communal performance that Smith facilitated when he initiated Mormon temple rites in the 1830s. These rites function as participatory

storytelling sessions held behind closed doors in Mormon temples. During the ritual sequence as established by Smith—Mormons call it the temple ceremony—initiates are, first, symbolically 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, Earth's creation, and the fall of Adam and Eve and their expulsion from Paradise and redemption through Christ. As the narrative unfolds, participants, each cast in the role of Adam or Eve, receive a series of ordinances at the hands of authorized officiators, who, like the Catholic priest, stand in for God (Buerger 47–8). These ordinances are interpreted in Mormon teachings as instructing supplicants in the means to salvation and ritually binding them to live by these means. The dramatic climax of this ritual instruction comes when participants approach 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. After interacting through the veil with an officiator-as-God who by "clasp[ing] hands [with supplicants] through the veil" tests each participant's grasp of keywords, signs, and tokens they received during the ceremony, individuals are welcomed through the veil into what Mormons call the Celestial Room, a place of light and serenity that symbolizes deep communion with God and a return to his presence (Roberts 37; see also Ehat 29–30; D. Anderson loc 8098–8100; Rozsa; Compton). Here participants can come together 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 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; "Alex Caldiero's Mormon Experience").

In a 1995 conversation with Salt Lake City art critic Frank McEntire, Caldiero said that another overarching influence on his poetics was Dada, an anti-movement movement in the plastic, performance, and language arts that emerged 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 play of value, function, and meaning. As Caldiero has it, he situates himself in this "ambivalent position" of infinite play (McEntire E10). This ultimately alienates him both from the material of his performance and from his audiences. Such is the case because, for Caldiero, arts, languages, performance, and poetries are elusive, Protean, and therefore can't create static spaces of communion and shared meaning (see Carrier; Caldiero, "Momo"). This elusiveness compels him to poke more at the boundaries of each in his efforts to engage spectators and students with the dynamic processes underlying human language, meaning, community, and self- and group-formation.

The Mysterious Alissandru and/in His Place of Making

Caldiero's "Poetarium" performance at the 2010 Utah Arts Festival in Salt Lake City (as recorded and posted on *YouTube* by user C@mer@Oper@tor) cued many of the traditions and figures that constitute his performative persona as Sonosopher. As such, this performance provides abundant material with which I can apply my critical methodology in the work of framing Caldiero's performative auto/ethnographic *poiesis* (as I'm calling it) and its communal functions. During the performance Caldiero stood in a brightly-painted wooden shack behind a curtained window and accepted requests from spectators for personalized poems, which he delivered through the parted curtains. The performance was framed for spectators in two ways: by the Poetarium structure itself and by an explanation that Caldiero's assistant offered the waiting audience. Since the assistant's explanation was intended to direct spectators to the Poetarium-proper, I'll begin my discussion of Caldiero's performance with her introduction to the event. Dressed in a thigh-length black skirt and a large-pattern-paisley halter top accessorized with a gold bead necklace, gold teardrop earrings, and a hemp-colored loose-knit scarf tied into a headband with ends hanging over one shoulder to the waist, she stood before the crowd and called their attention. As she spoke, she moved back and forth in front of the shack while extending her arms at times toward the audience and at times toward the Poetarium as if she were gathering the crowd with her hands and presenting them at the curtained window:

> come CLOser we HA--ve
>
> in FROnt of YOU—
>
> thē FA-bulous—

poeTA-rium

in WHIch↑

is thē mysTE--rious alissA-ndru↓

he will BRIng to you ā POem deVI-sed

preCIsely for YOU—

he will “TAke a Ticket”

an/d d/eLIver to YOU in FROnt of your VEry own EYE--s and EA-Rs—

now PEOple this is HO-w it is DO-ne

you will TAke ā TIckèt

you will CIR-CLE—

HOW you would LIke # the POem delivered

in SiCIlian PROVER-B

in TO—ngue

in SOU—nd

in American English↑

and then you will WAlk up to the poeTA-rium

and thē mysTErious alissAndru will # PLAce his HA-nd and you will HAnd him the TIckèt

and then you will reCEI--ve thē POèm

PEOple this is ā uNI-que eVE-nt

WHO— would LIke ā TIckèt? ("Intro to the Poetarium")

Against the backdrop of the Poetarium structure—which resembled a carnival sideshow or puppet show booth—and with her Mediterranean-flavored accent, gypsyesque costume, and exaggerated gestures, the assistant's prefatory performance established the carnivalesque nature of the event. With her utterance, spoken against the backdrop of the booth, she seemed to be saying, "Look—we have a mystic among us. He has traveled a great distance and during his travels has seen vistas and visions beyond our view. Step forward. Extend your hand. He has come to share his unique gift with you, to excite your senses by transforming your desires into language before your very eyes and ears."

Relying on this subtext—as suggested in the interaction among the booth, her

appearance, and Caldiero's stage name for the event—and calling Caldiero by his Sicilian given name, Alissandru, she positioned the performer as an itinerant story-maker. This positioning cued the *cuntastorie*, affiliating the performer with someone exotic who inhabited the borderlands among cultures and identities and who by virtue of his itinerancy had special visions and powers, an Other moving among many places and labels while belonging fully to none. Hence, he could be understood as being "mysterious" not just because he included the descriptor in his stage name but because, positioned as a carnival performer or traveling bard, he put on the appearance of mobility—and if he was mobile, then elusive, neither this nor that, us nor them. He was someone whose peculiar character and utterance exist somewhere other than in the familiar and that, as such, would need to be decoded for the uninitiated. Granted, the same could be said for all of us: no one's an open book with a static narrative and comprehensive glossary. Rather we're nuanced beings who, because of the mysteries and otherness of our self-stories, deserve a close hearing from those around us. By appearing in the Poetarium as a mystic and a mystery, as someone who could see "Us" differently because he was "Not Us" yet was open and sympathetic to "Us," Caldiero played with the processes of self-fabrication and representation inherent in self-stories. In this way his representation of Otherness confronted audience members with an exaggerated reflection of their own protean nature and peculiarity. He brought their personal difference to light as much by how he appeared as by what he said.

The Poetarium performance enacted these processes not just in the assistant's prefatory comments but also in the Poetarium structure and in the Mysterious Alissandru's responses to audience member requests. The Poetarium-proper was a small

shack painted yellow with red trim and was large enough for a single body to occupy the space comfortably. The front wall framed a red-curtained window and displayed text and an image that further framed the performance. The word "Poetarium"—i.e., "place of making"—was painted in red down the left quarter of the wall; and the space below the window and into the right quarter featured the statement, "LOOK! Nothing up his skin! Watch him pull a poem right out of your heart!" To the right of the window an iconographic face—a simple eye and mouth—faced to the right, the eye unlidded and pupil-wide, looking to the sky, the mouth a wide grin.

Each aspect of the Poetarium-proper cued Alissandru's performative persona, speaking to its constructed nature and mystery. The most prominent feature of the booth—its bold colors—cued the Sicilian flag, a mark of Caldiero's Sicilian cultural heritage. The field of the Sicilian flag splits diagonally from the top left corner to the bottom right; the upper triangle is red and the lower yellow. Each color represents a significant Sicilian city: red represents Palermo, which has historically been Sicily's (and at times, the west Mediterranean's) economic center (Monte Polizzo Project); and yellow represents Corleone, which was historically "an important strategic point" on the road from "Palermo to the island's southern coast" (Follain 9). These cities were the first to unite against Angevin encroachments on the country in the late-thirteenth century. The "alliance and fraternity" forged between them became "the banner under which revolution spread [. . .] through the entire island," leading to the permanent withdrawal of the Angevin house from Sicily (Amari 192). That these vital places are represented on the country's flag signals widespread acknowledgement of their influence on Sicily's history and speaks to the role communal memory and collective action play in sustaining kinship

bonds, particularly among Sicilians, who have given Caldiero a formative model for community building ("Alex Caldiero's Mormon Experience").

Beyond the Poetarium-proper's invocation of Caldiero's Sicilian roots, the shack's imagery pointed to the nature of seeing and communal reflection with its explicit call for observers to "LOOK!" at what Alissandru had to offer them as well as with the unlidded, pupil-wide eye displayed on the structure. The unblinking eye implies the Eye of Providence, or the all-seeing eye, which often figures in religious iconography as an eye "surrounded by a triangle" or emitting rays of light (von Wellnitz 26). It appears, among other places, on pulpits, altars, and temples, which is where Caldiero undoubtedly encountered it. Appearing on religious structures, according to scholar Marcus von Wellnitz, the eye intends to "impress upon" observers and ritual participants the idea that God "is ever-present and observes all things," in particular "the actions and vows [performed] at the altar" (26; see also Roberts). In conjunction with the sense of deity's ongoing presence that the symbol brings to sacred spaces, the all-seeing eye counteracts and neutralizes any evil forces that may seek to encroach on those spaces (Heller 33). From this view, the unbroken, potent gaze of a higher being—or at least a representation thereof—creates a sanctuary for people seeking communion with the divine and refuge from malevolent influences. Granted, the all-seeing eye also invokes the idea that communicants live in a surveillance state, that Someone is watching their every move and can see into their minds and hearts—therefore, they should be mindful not just of how they act but also of what they think, feel, and desire. While this notion of God's watchfulness may prompt paranoia and anxiety in some communicants, it may inspire in others a deep sense of obligation for how their own being and behavior affect others and

act upon the world.

Within the performance frame, the Poetarium's eye may have functioned in each of these ways. Speaking about his efforts to make poetry and performances that elaborate on "spiritual themes that draw upon his European background," Caldiero has observed that, in his work, he occupies both "sideshow and temple," enacting the work of both "jester and priest" (qtd. in Kostelanetz, *Dictionary* 104). So the eye's presence on the Poetarium suggested that it may have been meant to serve as a holy place—like an altar, pulpit, or temple—where supplicants could escape and gain perspective on everyday concerns. It may have also impressed upon observers the Mysterious Alissandru's penetrating gaze as a figure who, like the LDS temple officiator standing behind the temple veil, represented God and intended to welcome supplicants into an expanded sense of fellowship and community. In this sense, as well as when read against the broader function's of the all-seeing eye, the Poetarium's eye can be viewed as reiterating the vision and presence of an ineffable agency that oversaw and made efficacious the performer-supplicant exchange; that asserted the need for each person to bear the burden of being fully in the world; that could see into and "pull a poem right out of" a supplicant's heart, thus revealing the individual's inmost desires; and that offered protection from forces that would mute the performer's and the supplicant's voices and thereby hinder the development of the performer-supplicant relationship.

The Sonosopher as Mystic as Poet-Seer as Ethnographer

When taken with the iconographic eye and its functions, I read the open mouth on the Poetarium facade as an indication that the Mysterious Alissandru was someone who

closely observed others and the world, who saw things others couldn't or wouldn't see (in particular about the Self, the Other, and the relationship between them), and who sought to articulate those mysteries for ritual initiates who were willing to encounter him on his own terms. Approaching the Poetarium with a completed ticket in hand, a supplicant would place the request in Caldiero's open palm as he extended his arm through the curtains. This interaction mirrored the "veil scene" of Latter-day Saint temple rites when initiates approach the temple curtain and interact with an officiator-as-God who extends a hand through the curtain to test each initiate then welcomes initiates into deep communion with deity and their community (von Wellnitz 29). It also cued the confessional act in Catholicism when a supplicant enters a confession booth and presents himself to a priest through a curtain or screen, seeking forgiveness and deeper communion with God through a moment of intense "personal examination" with a divine representative (29). During the Poetarium performance whence Caldiero, acting as both jester and priest, enacted the communal work of both sideshow and temple, he likewise received each supplicant's petition through the structure's curtains; then, after reviewing the request, he would part the curtains with both hands, revealing himself to observers from the abdomen up, and offer the supplicant a poem, which would serve as a verbal token of their moment of fellowship and an invitation to communion.

Looking through the window from the dark shack interior with his red t-shirt, *papakha*, and beard, he may have initially intimidated some observers. The first one to approach the Poetarium, for example, was a girl just tall enough to touch the bottom frame of the window. While she waited for Caldiero to extend his hand, her anxiety was apparent: she glanced from the curtains to the assistant to the curtains to her paper to the

audience (where I assume her parent/guardian was sitting) to the curtains to the assistant. Once Caldiero's hand appeared through the curtains, she reached as high as she could to give him her paper, which he withdrew into the shack and returned seconds later because it was blank—she hadn't chosen how she would like to receive her poem. Explaining the situation, the assistant gave the paper to the child's guardian, who completed the form and gave it back. The child, assistant at her side, approached the Poetarium again and handed her request to Caldiero. This time he accepted it, then parted the curtains and she stared at him, likely taking in the peculiarity of his appearance as she retreated several steps then turned and walked quickly past the camera to what I'm assuming was her parent/guardian. As she turned her back to him, he spoke:

do--n't

be afrai--d

[audience laughter]

there are GREA-ter THIn--gs # in life to FE-ar— #

than **POeTRY**—

there are **GREA-ter THIn--gs in LIfe # to FE-ar**

than WOR-ds made eSPEcially for YOU↑

don'/t b/e aFRAI--d

don'/t b/e afrai--d

<u>HO--ld your COUrage</u>

the way you HO--ld	
your image	
HO--ld your image	
the way you HO--ld your **HAI--R—**	[AC smiled]
DON'/t b/e aFRAI--d	[audience laughter]
	("Poetarium Part 1")

The verbal and gestural offerings he extended to the child during the speech act showed him as a trickster-figure playfully attempting to alleviate her anxiety and to lift her beyond apparent fear of the unknown or the strange and her hesitation at his Otherness.

As I read it, his attempt to alter her perception of him using words and so to reshape the reality of their relationship functioned like magic. In this sense, I received his utterance as an incantation—something suggested by the lengthened vowels, the intonation, the repetition, and the imperative phrasing—with which he moved to call into being the conditions he uttered, to grant the girl courage and understanding via poetry, and to trick her into another frame of mind. The notions that language and reality share such an intimate connection and that language can constitute new realities are assumed in a magical worldview, as suggested in the formulas from magic performance uttered by the assistant and inscribed on the Poetarium. "Words were originally magic," Freud claims in his introduction to psychoanalysis; and even though humans in general may now hold less mystical notions of language than the species maintained early in its history, "the word [still] retains much of its old magical power." With his claims, Freud seems to be suggesting that the magical power of words consists in their constitutive nature, which he argues in this same passage was central to the work of psychotherapy. As a mode of clinical treatment, he says, psychotherapy uses words to move people from

one state of being and frame of mind to another: with language a patient relates "past experiences" and offers impressions, complaints, and confessions to a physician, who in return uses words "to direct [and channel the patient's] thought processes," to remind the patient of things previously discussed, and to offer explanations and observations regarding the patient's circumstances. In this way, words "call forth effects" in another person's thoughts and behavior; as such, Freud concludes, they become "the universal means of influencing human beings" (par. 6). They shape and reshape perceptions, ideas, relationships, and modes of being and acting. As vital means of influencing what and how others think, of introducing others to novel structures for thought and action, words also, per magic scholar Craig Conley, "open passages into the unknown" (45) When brought together in potent verbal structures, they invite us to explore realms of psychological, intellectual, cultural, and relational novelty and mystery and to live with hope and meaning amidst the mystery's attendant newness and uncertainty.

Each of the poems Caldiero offered during his Poetarium performance seemed to play—as sonosophy more broadly plays—with the mysteries of being and togetherness as well as with common conceptions of what poetry is and what poetry does. Within this framework, some of the language he offered supplicants seemed outright playful, like the Sicilian proverb he offered the second girl who approached him just after he closed the curtains on his first performance. Several seconds after he received her request, he pulled back the curtains, stared down at her for a few seconds more, then declared:

dō/n E/ver **SPI-T**

UP AT the **SKY**— [audience laughter]

it MAY come **BA-CK**

upON your **EYE**—	[audience laughter]
nun spuTA‹R›i **nCElu** # ca **nFAcci** ti ‹r›iTO‹R›-na	[audience laugher] [woman in audience: “That was in Italian.”] [applause, laughter] [cat call] (“Poetarium Part 1”)

As noted in my transcription, during his performance of the proverb (in both English and Sicilian), several observers began laughing, like I laughed the first time I watched the recording. Their response may have come, as mine did, from imagining someone spitting upward only to have the spit shower his face. The playfulness of the proverb was also manifest in the simple, nursery rhyme-like nature of Caldiero’s English translation and the way in which he delivered it. The statement’s iambic foot, for instance, called attention to the clause-ending words, which Caldiero spoke loudly and which he further emphasized by pausing for a beat after he stressed the obstruents in “spit” and “back” and after he extended the vowels in “sky” and “eye.” So stressing each clause-ending concept, he punctuated the proverb’s central claim and framed the separate clauses for observers, allowing the statement to build to its “here’s-your-own-spit-in-your-eye-for-cursing-the-heavens” resolution. This sense of karmic irony also contributed to the proverb’s playfulness and suggested that—as proverbs will—the statement works on multiple levels. On the surface I read it as a humorous vignette depicting an impulsive act of spit-making (and spit-receiving). On a deeper level I take it as a morality tale that demonstrates the working of physical laws (i.e., gravity) to speak to the relationship

between a person's actions and consequences, the moral of the story being that whatever contempt a person produces with the mouth and sends into the world will be revisited upon him. More, the reiterated contempt—the contemptible utterance—will, like spit in the eye, obscure the person's vision, hindering his ability to conceive of and to meaningfully participate in the world and its constituent ecologies. In this sense, to spit at the sky is to utter contempt about and into the atmosphere of our relationships, an act that perpetuates scorn of Self and Other.

By reaching out from his own place of making and sharing in his first and second languages knowledge that he had gathered during his life journey, Caldiero pushed back against the attitude of Self- and Other-contempt that the proverb warns against and instead appears to have opened himself to supplicants just as his performance asked them to be open to him and the language he was offering. His reaching out—which served as an act of self-assertion as well as a performance of vulnerability—thereby seemed meant to call supplicants to give way to their own being; it moved to foster a state of mutual openness and reciprocity between Self and Other, one rooted in "an attitude of care and concern that connects us to the world and to each other," to borrow from rhetorician Richard Marback's meditation on vulnerability in rhetoric (1). In my view, every opening of the Poetarium's curtains reiterated this asserting and opening of the Self, which Caldiero enacted more explicitly as he met and held each supplicant's gaze with his own. His long staring at the people who stood before him focused attention (again) on the work of vision represented by the Poetarium—in its call for the audience to "Look!," in its depiction of the all-seeing eye, in its claim that the Mysterious Alissandru would be able to see into and pull a poem out of their hearts. Each visual encounter also seemed to draw

supplicants into an intimate exchange framed by the obligation to return the gaze of and to attend closely to the things a conversation partner is offering. Which is to say that by initiating and maintaining eye contact with supplicants, Caldiero called upon their social graces and demanded that they not look away.

For many people, being held eye-to-eye with another person causes discomfort; the act can make both conversation partners deeply self-conscious because, as anthropologist David B. Givens observes in his dictionary of nonverbal gestures, the eyes "reveal a great deal about our emotions, convictions, and moods"—things we may not always want disclosed ("Eyes"). Seeing such things when we're brought eye-to-eye with another person, we may hurry to look away, to protect ourselves from undesired self-disclosure and threats to our vulnerability by avoiding prolonged eye contact. While this reaction sometimes occurs on the conscious level, it's more deeply an instinctive gesture in that, to borrow from Givens, "being looked at [. . .] arouses the sympathetic nervous system"—the fight or flight response—which may compel us "to glance away" from the other person's gaze. Because this tendency is innate it may be difficult to resist, in particular when we encounter the gaze of someone new or out-of-the-ordinary. However, when we maintain eye contact with someone despite the urge to look away, per Givens, we show our "personal involvement" in them, whether they are a stranger or an old friend; and this show of interest can forge or reinforce an intimate, somatic bond with that person.

While Caldiero initiated sustained visual encounters with each supplicant who approached him during his Poetarium performance and, through his gaze and his offering of personalized poems, appeared to express his personal investment in their presence at

the event and in the world, at least two acts within the overall performance accentuated the relational work being done in those encounters with his gaze and his nonverbal gestures. One act occurred about a third of the way into the event when Caldiero's assistant pushed a wheelchair-bound woman forward; the other took place about halfway through the event when a man stepped up to be "read" by the Mysterious Alissandru. Per the already established pattern of exchange, Caldiero extended his hand to both supplicants through the curtains, the supplicants gave him their tickets, and he withdrew his hand, reviewed their requests, then parted the curtains and offered each person a "poem." In both cases, Caldiero's "poem"—the thing he made—was gestural not verbal. In other words, he didn't speak to either supplicant; rather he responded to their requests with sustained eye contact and a hand performance; both expressive modes can be taken as tokens of his somatic interpretation of and engagement with poetry-making. For the woman, he parted the curtains, gathered her into his gaze, and placed both hands over his eyes; touched his forehead with his right then left palms; held his hands to either side of his face, first with palms down, fingers open, thumbs on his temples, then from the same position with palms toward the woman; and touched his forehead with his right then left palms before closing the curtains ("Poetarium Part 1"). Caldiero opened the same way for the man as he had for each previous supplicant, parting the curtains and gathering the person before him into his gaze; then he brushed his right hand from his forehead up his *papakha* and ran his right-hand fingers along his lips. Resting his hand at the edge of his mouth, he pulled back his right cheek and pinched it between his fingers and his thumb, holding his mouth open, and ran his palm back over his mouth then vertical over his face, pushing his head backward into the shadows before he closed the curtains ("Poetarium

Part 3”).

Although both gestural performances were unique, each exemplified the playfulness and the ritual function of sonosophy in the way they subverted typical notions of what makes a poem and enacted a pattern of interpersonal interaction that spoke to broader patterns of cultural, social, religious, and spiritual meaning-making and relationship-making (e.g., the work of ethnography, the construction and performance of cultural narratives, Catholic and Latter-day Saint liturgical spaces and rituals, the public performance of art, etc.). As each supplicant requested poems and as Caldiero offered each supplicant the fruits and processes of his flesh, these performances also reiterated his embodied acts of self-presentation and his extra-ordinary (as in, beyond-the-ordinary) sense of poetry-making as a playful and disruptive somatic and cultural process that includes more than exceptional verbal dexterity and that invokes the poet’s—and the listener’s—whole body. Each performer-supplicant interaction reiterated these acts and further contributed to Caldiero’s ongoing movement toward deep somatic connection with others via his distinctive exploration and critique of language as a profound means of communion.

So wielding word-power—and beyond—in his Poetarium performance, Caldiero-as-wizard conjured language events that can be seen as exposing the mysteries of human identity, desire, and communication and responding to, conversing with, disrupting, and transforming the nature of things as he saw them. This work situates him as a poet-seer: a wordsmith attuned to worlds, cultures, peoples, ideas, and modes of being beyond those manifest in the immediate context and who attempts to represent those distant things in ways that can enhance and augment the experience and the relationships of those in his

current audience. The presence of this bardic tradition in Caldiero's *poiesis* was cued by the iconographic face painted on the shack; it was also manifest in his beard, which he has linked with the rabbinic beard (Caldiero and Miller). His association with rabbinic culture cues several prominent cultural figures, including the prophets of the Hebrew Bible (e.g., Moses, Isaiah, Jeremiah), Jewish mystics, and Jesus; it also points to other poet-prophet figures with whom he associates, namely Walt Whitman and Allen Ginsberg. Each of these figures had or is portrayed as having had a heavy beard, which symbolizes biological and spiritual virility. Possessed of such potency, the bard—as poet-seer—observes the world and envisions then reaches to call forth new communal realities using what theologian Walter Brueggemann calls "the prophetic imagination": "a countercultural consciousness" that recognizes our individual and communal deficiencies, crises, and desires and that addresses them without turning away or holding back (126). Rather, again and again, the poet-seer possessed of such consciousness opens himself to things and to people as they are and makes language that at once embraces, addresses, and invokes the mysteries of language itself, of human existence, and of being as such.

The poet-seer's rhetorical roaming parallels the work of the ethnographer, who leaves home to visit other cultures, only to return from these host cultures with knowledge, language, and performance traditions that prompt him to question and to move to unsettle his home culture's often silently-accepted assumptions and institutions. Within his performative auto/ethnographic *poiesis*, as I've framed it with his Poetarium performance, Caldiero seems to approach the role of poet-seer via multiple traditions. One is all-seeing eye iconography, which he likely first and consistently encountered in

the Catholic churches he worshipped in during his formative years and would have later encountered on the Salt Lake LDS temple. As he coperformed liturgical rites with priests during his childhood and adolescence, he also would have experienced the poetic virtues of prophetic utterance, including how such utterance feels being produced and received by the body. In the ethnography I unfold in my ThirdWord, I argue that Caldiero's repeated exposure to scriptural and ritual language and gestures during Mass and later in Latter-day Saint temple rites seems to have cultivated his sense of language's constitutive power and communal functions. More, I assay other modes of cultural performance and traditions that seem to contribute to the poet-seer's function as cued in Caldiero's performances. I see this function manifesting, in part, as sonosophy, which among its many other denotations and connotations can be understood as his *poietic* vision for human interaction and relationships. Considering this conception of sonosophy, I wrestle with Caldiero's self-presentation as "sound-word-gesture-image," a performance of all the body's resources—material and immaterial—as they're enacted during the sonosopher's attempts to be-with others and the world via *poietic* acts. I also attend to the way Mormonism's God and the premodern bard are suggested in sonosophy via each performance mode's supposition of creative beings who work to sustain dynamic, expansive communities through processes of *poietic* imagination and revision. And I consider the sonosopher's deep fascination with breathing and the laboring body (both of which provide grounds for potent language-making) and his assumption of poetry's midwifery properties—of its inherent communal, perceptual, and pedagogical commitments and implications. Attending to these ideas in my ethnography, I take my cues from Caldiero, whose Poetarium—his place of making—embodied the range of his

poietic repertoire and pointed to the abundant, constructed, always unfolding nature of his performative auto/ethnographic *poiesis*, with which he seeks to, wizard-like, trick observers into finding themselves.

Conference of the Birds (i): Off To See the Wizard

At the 2012 conference of the Association for Mormon Letters, I presented my research on Caldiero's sonosophy. In my presentation I explored the ecology of cultures and performance traditions out of which sonosophy emerges. This ecology—as I've introduced it in this section and as I'll explore it in the remainder of my ThirdWord—consists of influences claimed by Caldiero, other influences he may not acknowledge but that are signaled in his performances, and arenas within which he performs to audiences. I honed in there (as I have here and in the sections that follow) on how this ecology was cued in his Poetarium performance, which I represented by showing two video excerpts, including the interaction between Caldiero and the girl who backed away from him out of fear. In my discussion, I focused on how the poet's rhetorical roaming parallels the work of the ethnographer.

During the question and answer period that followed my presentation, an attendee asked a question. "The poet-seer behind the curtain," he said, "calls forth for me the moment in *The Wizard of Oz* when the Wizard speaks to Dorothy from behind a curtain." Working from the assumption that this moment in the story represents the efforts of a cantankerous old man to trick a girl into accepting her fate and leaving him alone, the attendee then asked, "Could there be a darker, more subversive aspect to the Poetarium, more than just a performer trying to entertain a crowd?" In my answer I referenced the

trickster figure, “an archetypal performer,” as Conquergood explains it, who steps into an already established world and proceeds “to breach norms, violate taboos, [and] turn everything upside-down” (“Poetics” 83). Then, because Caldiero was in the audience that morning, I asked him what he thought. Shifting in his seat, he turned toward the other attendee, then to me, and said, “But the trickster figure isn’t just being tricky. The Wizard tricked the travelers into finding themselves. That’s what the trickster does.”

I’m not sure how I took his statement then; but looking at it now, I read it as Caldiero’s attempt to claim the trickster’s work as his own. With it I hear him saying, “When I put on my performative posture as sonosopher and perform things that make people uncomfortable, I’m not being tricky just for the sake of being tricky or to shake people up. No, I hope my ways of performing poetry, which some people find absurd, perplexing, or disturbing, will disrupt observers from well-worn pathways of perception, thought, and interaction and awaken them to new ways of conceiving themselves and being with others.” Taken with an exchange that took place after the question and answer period, I also hear in Caldiero’s statement the desire to know that his work matters. Once the conference session had concluded, Caldiero approached me as I was packing my shoulder bag. He extended his arms to embrace me and, as he pulled me into his body, he said, “Thanks, Tyler,” and, stepping back, added, “See, I’m not that scary”; then after a short pause, he asked, “Am I?” I took his expression of gratitude to mean that he had appreciated my presentation and, more broadly, my efforts to understand what and how sonosophy means. And I heard his question as a response to the fleeing girl whose anxiety he had tried to relieve with a poem and a smile and whose departure seemed to provoke an inquiry into his identity and how it was being received by others. Even

though my initial encounters with his work via video recording had baffled and intimidated me and even though I had been nervous for him to attend my presentation—which is where we met for the first time—I assured him that, no, he wasn't that scary. Then I thanked him for attending and stepped back so I could introduce him to my wife, Jess. We talked for a few minutes more before he left and Jess and I made our way into the hall.

ii.

Listening to the Shape Sound Makes:

Sonosophy as a Symptom of Language;

Or, Reading Caldiero's Sound-Word-Gesture-Image:

When the Poet *is* the Poem

The Sonosopher as Poem, *Makar*, Shaman: Making 'It' New

The sensuous immediacy of Caldiero's embrace lingered with me after we parted ways that day. Because he welcomed me into such proximity with his first act in our first face-to-face encounter and because the language he offered in that moment seemed to emerge from a genuine desire to connect with and be understood by another person, I sensed that his *poiesis* included a moral dimension I had not yet considered. As I began attending to this dimension in light of Conquergood's and Schechner's thinking, as well as in relation to the ethics of hospitality as I've encountered them in Mormon theology and Mormon and Māori cultural performance, I felt called to embrace the work of dialogical performance, which I've outlined and elaborated on in terms of my critical methodology in the SecondWord. My engagement with dialogic criticism has further opened me to the dialogical nature of sonosophy, as cued in his Poetarium performance and manifest in the diverse figures whose presence I see Caldiero reaching to reclaim, reiterate, and combine in the many-voicedness of his performative auto/ethnographic *poiesis*. Speaking in my previous section to his lifelong quest for fellowship and communion, I touched on his claimed or enacted connection with the mystic, the wizard, the *cuntastorie*, the priest as god-figure, and the poet-seer; I'll return to each of these in sections to come. In this

section I address the sonosopher's performance of three additional figures: the sonosopher-as-poem, the *makar*, and the shaman. With his reiteration of each figure, he taps into the presence of language in our species' mythic past and in the act comments on and interrogates a range of contemporary modes of making language and relationships to the end of enlivening individuals and communities and propagating what I argue is a model of self-aware, sustainable language use.

In his efforts to keep himself and his *poiesis* potent, and in the process to enliven his own being and communities, Caldiero animates the language he makes on the page by breathing it to life with his body. So doing he doesn't simply recite the poem; rather, as journalist and Caldiero's long-time observer and friend Trent Harris says, he *becomes* the poem (Bernhard and Low). He embodies its rhythms and verbal movements with his voice, his gestures, and his breathing. The sonosopher-as-poem came to life for me for the first time during his September 2012 performance at Ken Sanders Rare Books in Salt Lake City. As I note in my FirstWord, during the event Caldiero stood before a crowded room and enacted a poem titled "no mo," which I've also transcribed in my FirstWord. The most striking demonstration from this speech act of the sonosopher-as-poem took place after he intoned "the voice speaks / through two mouths" then began to overlap words in a performance of that voice. As he embodied the language, the conjunction of rhetorical and flesh-and-blood bodies in the room made me hyper-aware of those bodies and my place among them. Sharing this experience of embodiment with Caldiero and the crowd, I became increasingly conscious of my own body's processes and rhythms and of my presence in the bookstore and its surrounding city. I'll return to the sonosopher-as-poem and explore the figure's implications later in this section.

Another way Caldiero seeks to embody and revitalize the communal functions of poetry is by taking on titles other than "poet" and by, in the process, affiliating himself with more prime-itive moments in human history (Caldiero, "Re: Two Things"): times and places from which the species' present state of being is derived or whose once vital presence in the species' history has been muted by the rise of modernity. Beyond "sonosopher," for instance, he also calls himself a *makar* (Abbott 1; Caldiero, "Who is the Dancer" 93). *Makar* is the Middle English antecedent of *maker,* although *makar* is still active in the Scots language where it's used in reference to a poet or bard, most notably as the official title of Scotland's National Poet: "Scots *Makar*" (Scottish Poetry Library). Caldiero claims the word has Celtic origins (qtd. in Abbott 1), which seems to be a misattribution stemming from the fact that Scots evolved in a geographical region once dominated by Gaelic, a language in the Celtic family of Indo-European languages (Macafee and Aitken). However, it seems more likely to be Caldiero's attempt to establish kinship with a prime-itive culture and its language and poetics. Because while he does seem to misplace the term's origins, his misattribution doesn't necessarily mean that he misrepresents *makar*'s function and its inherent connection with poetry, whose etymon is *poiesis*: the Greek term for the process of making. Which is to say that Caldiero seems to know a *makar* is a maker is a poet (see Abbott 1). But by favoring *makar* over *poet,* he skirts around the sedimental reservoir that constrains the latter term and attempts to work instead from poetry's etymological spring. So doing, he opens himself to being influenced by and performing in conversation with a tradition that stresses poetry as "something crafted" rather than something inspired by an elusive muse ("Maker") and that positions the poet as someone "who fashions, constructs, produces,

[and] prepares" things, like poems, through acts of skilled labor meant to address public concerns and to serve some public good ("*Makar*").

The *makar*'s social orientation is rooted in the public function poets and poetry-making served in the tribes of "early Western European cultures" (Bloomfield and Dunn ix). According to Medieval studies scholars Morton W. Bloomfield and Charles W. Dunn, poets were essential agents in societies of the pre-modern era: their eloquence and otherworldly wisdom contributed to the success of rulers, priests, warriors, and commoners. Interacting with individuals and groups from across the social spectrum, poets made language intended (among other things) to bolster "weak claims to the throne"; to flatter, criticize, and increase the popularity of the ruler; to praise the clan's rulers, hunters, warriors, and ancestors; to curse and satirize the clan's enemies; to maintain the clan's history and laws; to assist in religious rites; to advocate for common folk before the throne; and to entertain the clan and to draw people into celebrations (19–20). In the premodern worldview, a poet's eloquence—his ability to engage a wide-ranging audience by using "the proper words"—was rooted in his grasp of language's magical features: in its ability to "cause or lead to certain miracles of action" (10). Such miracles, as extra-ordinary events whose emergence from the stream of ordinary time defied natural explanation and the powers of human agency alone, seemed to include: revealing, interpreting, and even controlling the future (45); calling blessings upon and "ward[ing] off evil from the clan and the ruler" (19); protecting and bringing good fortune to the clan's hunters and warriors (20); "securing fertility for field, flock, and family" (65); and "heal[ing] by their knowledge of charms, medicines, and herbs" (20).

As skilled craftsmen able to handle "the potency of verbal magic" and to employ

"hypnotically fascinating manipulations of word" to miraculous ends, poets were seen as repositories of deep wisdom (4). Their unique position in tribes gave them access to the minds, lives, and interactions of the full communal body and their unique gifts of extra-ordinary insight and verbal dexterity passed to them, many believed, through visions of and contact with the supernatural realm. This social mobility and mystical vision cast poets as seers, as wise men initiated into "immutable knowledge" whose intent was to advocate for and to elevate each member of their communities and their communities as a whole (112). Lois A. Ebin, Medieval studies scholar, suggests that the premodern poet's visionary wisdom and social role as "fashioner of matter" prompted many observers in fifteenth-century Europe to apply the term "*makar*"—which had in the fourteenth century been used "almost exclusively" in reference to God—to the poet, who like God "both crafts and creates" new worlds from extant materials (198). As bearers of otherworldly expertise, early wordsmiths—like the *makar*—thus wielded word-power to craft language events for communal benefit and development.

Caldiero claims to have drawn the figure of the *makar* from Ezra Pound ("Re: Two Things"). And Pound reiterated the figure in his efforts to instigate cultural change by disrupting and renovating traditional ways of being and knowing. In his exploration of Pound's early verse and the lyric tradition Pound engaged and set out to revise, poet-scholar Robert Stark observes that Pound became "an avid *makar*" in his first published volumes of poetry by "refashioning and redeploying" literary and cultural values that he found elsewhere (2). Taking up the *makar*'s work, Stark argues, Pound was obliged to "return to the anvil and reforge a language whose cutting edge has been worn and eroded by centuries of unthinking usage" (77). He must, to invoke Pound's famous injunction,

"make it new." This dictum has become the embodiment of modernism, which attempted to break with obscure traditions and to rejuvenate a world broken down by decades of conflict and uncertainty. The phrase, as scholar of modernism Michael North observes, embraces "the basic concepts of renewal, regeneration, and rebirth" as they emerge in models of organic, cultural, and historical novelty. As the history behind Pound's phrase and the work of the *makar* reiterate, novel things aren't produced *ex nihilo*. They're led into being, Pound himself says, through processes of arrangement, amalgamation, and recombination (49).

In conjunction with Caldiero's self-affiliation with the *makar* as prime-itive poet-seer, he also adopts the disposition and functions of the Paleolithic shaman, whose modern analogs induce ecstatic mental states through rituals that involve, among other things, "sensory deprivation, over-stimulation, physical or emotional stress," meditation, "rhythmic dancing," and "chanting." This work of altering levels of consciousness intends to invoke individual enlightenment and the formation of "social bonds" within and among groups of ritual participants and observers and to direct otherworldly forces for the health or healing of individuals and communities (Rossano 348–50). It's also often performed to access and interact with spirit guides who, in DuBois' words, "exist as invisible components of the visible world" and who, with their secret knowledge of that world, help the shaman "negotiate the issues that face the human community," such as "the onset of disease or ill luck, the need for hunting success, [and] the desire to know with clarity the realities of the present or the future" (*Introduction*, 55). By exploring mystical realms and returning to the material world possessed of knowledge from those realms that could address real-world concerns and revise material realities, the shaman

(like the ethnographer and the *makar*) plays a vital role in building and sustaining the communities he serves.

Caldiero spoke to the shamanic function of sonosophy during a 2009 conversation with Salt Lake City radio host Doug Fabrizio. Fabrizio asked Caldiero what he made of arguments that he's "a ham" and that his work therefore isn't "legit" or authentic because all he's offering is "a gimmick," "a shtick," "a novelty": a comedic act meant simply to entertain people, to make them laugh, and hence not to be taken seriously or considered too deeply. He responded that the "thing" he does—his body-centered "chanting," noise-making, and playing with words—"is as old as the caves" and thus no novelty. Rather, he said, it's "Paleolithic," which I take to mean that the mode of performing he sees himself enacting as the sonosopher appears to have emerged from what evolutionary psychologist Matt J. Rossano has labeled "the earliest form of religion" that developed among *Homo sapiens* as early as 300,000 years ago (353). More, Caldiero suggested of his prime-tive *poiesis*, aspects of this performance mode are reiterated in the species generation after generation as little children babble, "trying to figure out [. . .] language" by mimicking and playing with the stream of sounds they hear coming from others' mouths. It follows, then, that Caldiero's *poiesis* isn't some gag designed just to catch people's attention—although it certainly does that—but it emerges from, exemplifies, and addresses a formative, evolutionary aspect of the species' being in the world and being-with others. As such, Caldiero can be seen as using that prime-itive act to constitute his identity as a performer, to connect with the mythic past, and to comment on and interrogate contemporary modes of making language and relationships. Which is to say that as a shamanic figure who, like the *makar* and the wizard, uses word-power to mediate

between seen and not-seen realities and to so give shape to material, social, and somatic worlds, the sonosopher seems to acknowledge and to embody in radical and potentially transformative ways the constitutive nature of language, which, "more than anything else, is what makes us human" (Fitch, *Evolution* 1).

On Language Evolution and the Plastic Brain

So cognitive biologist W. Tecumseh Fitch begins his expansive survey of research on language evolution. His claim is compelling, if commonplace. I say "commonplace" because most people would acknowledge that our species' ability to make language—to communicate among ourselves using words—is what separates us from other animals. But Fitch's statement goes beyond this assertion. To begin with, by "language" he means more than the communication system unique to humans. While language is indeed that, it's also a system for structuring thought, for the expression of thought into signals (i.e., for representing mental concepts using verbal and/or visual gestures and images whose performance and meaning we share with others), and for the interpretation of signals into thought (Fitch, "Evolution" ii). More than any other capacity humans possess—more than our penchant to make and use tools, our inclination to form communities based on shared interests and desires, our knack for building and transmitting culture, or our ability to think about abstract concepts—our language-making capacity defines who and what we are as a species and how we live in the world. In fact the evolutionary emergence of language may have provided a catalyst in early hominins for the development of a super-powered brain capable of more complex modes of cognition than the species would ever need for survival and that would over time distinguish humans from other animal species.

Language evolutionists argue that language would have had to emerge among hominins in response to environmental pressures; some argue that it emerged from the demand for increased group cooperation (see Richerson and Boyd), others that it emerged to aid in the transmission of tool-making knowledge (see Morgan, et al.), and others that it emerged from the need—imposed by migration from the savanna to caves—for hominins to communicate in the darker environment using more refined and differentiated auditory calls (Jaynes 131–32). Linguist Derek Bickerton asserts that it emerged from the need for a communication system that supported displacement: the ability to reference events that are "remote in time and/or space" (Bickerton and Szathmáry 4). The details of Bickerton's theory have been disputed; but as linguist James R. Hurford notes in his review of Bickerton's 2014 book, *More than Nature Needs: Language, Mind, and Evolution*, the "broadest outlines" of Bickerton's theory are "worth taking seriously" as a potential model for language evolution (485). These outlines include, in the words of philosopher Serena Nicchiarelli, the interaction among "natural selection, internal development [of neural structures], and culture" (300).

In Bickerton's view, the selective pressure that drove the need for displaced communication and that thereby broke hominins free of thinking grounded in here-and-now concerns—like "[an] aggressive confrontation, [the] search for a sex partner, [the] appearance of a predator, [the] discovery of food, and so forth" (*Adam's Tongue* 21)—was related to the challenge posed to hominin survival by the eastward and upward retreat of woodlands and the rapid spread of grasslands across Pliocene-era Africa. Per Bickerton, the species may have responded to this challenge in at least two ways: first, because they were among the smallest inhabitants of the savanna and didn't yet have their

successors' more advanced tools to help fend off much larger predators and because there were fewer trees for refuge, the best bet hominins had for survival was to cooperate with other group members, "whether in giving warnings or evading pursuit or resisting attacks" (*Adam's Tongue* 115). Since they had to rely on each other for individual survival, hominin social groups became less competitive and more cohesive. Second, whereas they had once subsisted primarily on fruits, nuts, and tubers, as these resources became less abundant hominins added another food source to their diet: using primitive tools they broke open bones—which were plentiful—to get at the marrow. Adding such a nutritious substance to their diets caused their brains to grow, an adaptation that was vital once language began emerging.

While these adaptive strategies may have contributed to hominin survival, Bickerton suggests that the crucial ecological shift that triggered the emergence of language and reinforced cooperative behavior among hominins was "confrontational scavenging" (Bickerton and Szathmáry 1): a subsistence mode that demanded the recruitment of multiple hominin bands to help harvest megafauna carcasses that "lay beyond the sensory range of message recipients" and for control of which the group would have to fend off other carnivores (Bickerton, *Adam's Tongue* 131). The work of gathering members to the cause obligated recruiters to convince others that they would find something beyond the horizon that was vital to their well-being. Bickerton holds that such convincing may have initially been attempted using "sounds, signs, pantomime and any other available mechanism that would carry intention and meaning" and direct listeners away from their immediate concerns; the act then gradually focused on "the vocal mode" alone because it was a more efficient and useful means of communicating

("Language Evolution" 512). However the initial convincing was done, Bickerton argues, the work of displacement—of repeated reference to unseen things, as taken up by groups of hominins elaborating the system together to meet each party's communicative needs—gradually built a vocabulary of utterances (words) directed somewhere other than at here-and-now concerns.

As a catalyzing process set in motion by pressing ecological demands and constituted through the interaction of bodies, mental concepts, and socially- and culturally-mediated representations of concepts, language connects what Bickerton calls "internal-physical" events (happenings that take place *within* the body) and "external-physical" events (happenings that take place *outside* the body). In his words, "What happens in the outside world triggers electrochemical events in the brain—[it] sends messages racing down axons," the nerve fibers that carry impulses away from cell bodies, and transmits "enzymes [. . .] across synapses" to make connections with other neurons (*Adam's Tongue* 81). Strings of neurons firing in succession form networks: neural pathways that embody our innate and learned behaviors as well as the mental concepts we use to understand and organize the world and to place—to identify—ourselves in relation to it. As our concepts cohere into neural networks, each time we encounter the thing associated with the concept—whether the encounter is direct or indirect, via sensory perception of the thing or a vicarious experience of it (e.g., via gesture, image, imagination, narrative, etc.)—we strengthen the neural connections in that network and reinforce its path in the brain. The expansive (albeit limited) process of experience-driven creation and modification of neural pathways speaks to the brain's plasticity: its ability to undergo repeated and sustained structural and functional changes—for better or for

worse—throughout its lifetime within its ultimate anatomical and physiological bounds. Which is to say: to a point determined by factors of (among other things) age, genes, past experience, and mental and physical health, we can alter our brain's architecture and behavior. Bickerton argues that our species' neuroplasticity—from which derives our highly-developed brains—may have developed from the evolutionary emergence of language (5).

Bickerton's narrative of language evolution is, of course, tentative and flawed—as are all explanations of language evolution. He does, however, attend closely to cues from Earth's archaeological record to flesh out a detailed and compelling account of the selective processes and biological and cultural mechanisms that could have produced language and thereby driven the species' cognitive, cultural, and social development. Hence his claim, which anticipates Fitch and resonates with Caldiero's rootedness in the constitutive nature of language, that "language made humans." It's a vital, prime-itive influence on our being as individuals and communities. In Bickerton's words, "[E]verything [we] do that makes [us] human, each one of the countless things [we] can do that other species can't, depends crucially on language" (*Adam's Tongue* 4). This includes our ability to "summon [concepts] at will" and to "manipulate [them] so as to imagine, and thus subsequently produce, novel behaviors" (197). In short, then, our species wouldn't be what it is and our brains wouldn't be what they are without the evolutionary influence of language. By exploring this prime-itive influence, which he claims to do with his *poiesis*, Caldiero exposes observers to a reiteration of our species' mythic past and seeks to remind us, as he has told his students in a course so-labeled, that

language is "a most dangerous possession" (Morris).[1] It gives shape—for good or ill—to our thoughts, our being, our relationships, and our communities and in the process taps into and comments on other modes of inter- and intra-personal exchange (e.g., commodity swapping, performance, sharing food, respiration, ingestion and digestion, etc.). As such, we should attune ourselves more fully to the presence and influence of language in our bodies, relationships, and communities and use it in responsible, sustainable ways. This is one thing Caldiero seems to be saying when he performs as *makar* and shaman and in the act puts on—and often breaks down—the species-making capacities of language.

A Peculiar Symptom of Language

Because language "infiltrates all aspects of human cognition, behavior, and culture" (Fitch, *Evolution* 2), one symptom of its influence on the species is our capacity for self-reflection and metacognition—for thinking about our being and presence in the world as well as about the processes by which we understand and revise our being and presence in the world. Caldiero engages and explores this capacity with his *poiesis*. He claims as much in "Conference of the Birds 1: An Ensign," the first in a series of six prose meditations included in *sonosuono* that describe his experience at a 2008 gathering dedicated to exploring "Sicilian identity and the creation of a new economy" in Sicily. "The problems of language generally and of the Sicilian language in particular," he says, "are a constant in these discussions." This consistent focus on exploring the implications

[1] As Morris notes, Caldiero has team-taught a humanities course at UVU with Scott Abbott, his colleague in the school's Department of Integrated Studies, Humanities, and Philosophy. A recording of one of Caldiero's performative lectures from the course is available on *YouTube* in four parts via the following link: www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyYehXoqRglKFtGujMtKngX1zgXrBJ_nJ.

of language use within human communities acknowledges the vital role language plays in human development, experience, and relationships. Caldiero was invited to this particular conference so he could, in his words, "present my findings on a peculiar symptom of language I call 'sonosophy'" (129). A symptom, in general, is of course a sign or indication that something else—a principal cause—is present or taking place in a situation. In this sense, sonosophy—as a process of self- and world-examination in which the sonosopher uses sound to explore his environment and to awaken and engage his whole self as well as the selves of those within range of his speech acts—co-occurs with and is made possible by language. As such it's a characteristic peculiar (as in belonging) to language users.

In light of the attention paid at a Mediterranean Conference of the Birds to problems of language, however, Caldiero might in another sense be using "symptom" as a pathological term—meaning that he may see some uses of language as diseased or disordered attempts to communicate with others or to express thought and that sonosophy attempts to shed light on these breakdowns in the system. Caldiero can be seen as doing this when he stages his own deconstruction of words and their relationships. A video-recorded excerpt from a 2009 performance at UVU shows him in the act of deconstruction. The clip is brief; just twenty-six seconds long, it includes a free-standing, twenty-three second utterance recorded during a longer performance. The speech act concluded with three words, uttered with the intensity of someone who has encountered something for the first time:

flA-OWers **are aMA-zing** ("Alex Calidero – Flowers")

The words took Caldiero less than two seconds to annunciate. Yet, the first twenty-one

seconds of the speech act gave shape to that less-than-two-second climax. In the moments leading up to the statement, he broke the word "flowers" into its component sounds then performed acoustic variations on each phonemic theme. He spent most of this time playing with the relationship between "fl" and "ow," modulating the vowel with each iteration until the sounds cohered in a phonetically complex language unit:

flA-OWers

Having labeled the object of his attention, he reiterated its name and described his experience of and wonder over it:

flA-OWers **are AMA-zing**

The improvisational fragmentation that played out in the first twenty seconds of the speech act and that led to the sonosopher's sense of wonder over "flowers" functioned on at least two levels: first, it pointed to a more prime-itive historical moment. I read this particular speech act as a communal, shamanic display of the evolutionary development of language from iconic symbols. In this reading the initial fluttering of Caldiero's vocal apparatus could have been an imitation of petals and leaves fluttering in a breeze. Bickerton notes that the first acts of hominin displacement may have been such imitative signals. Used as means of persuading others to join the speaker on a scavenging venture, these signals "drew attention to the nature of the animal" whose nutrient-rich corpse lay beyond the horizon (*Adam's Tongue* 218). While Caldiero wasn't imitating animal life to the end of recruitment scavenging, the mimetic nature of his fluttering and its resolution in shared lexical objects can be interpreted as foregrounding the evolutionarily significant human capacity to make and share mental concepts that reflect, reflect upon, and inform our experience of the external-physical world and that, in the sharing, call others to

greater awareness of and sensitivity to that capacity and to apply that awareness with greater intention in the communal acts of constructing meaning and shaping sustainable, fulfilling interactions and relationships among humans and between humans and our environments.

Caldiero's fluttering buildup to "flowers" also pointed to the sense of dis-ease aroused in social situations when someone stutters. His imitation, though, doesn't seem to have been mockery. Rather, by staging a communicative disfluency, he appears to have been more concerned with appropriating its social effects as a way to disrupt and critique conventional notions of sense-making via free-flowing, economical uses of language. Because he held and appeared to read from a large, black, hardbound tome during the performance, listeners might have expected him to recite verbatim from a written text. Yet, that wasn't what he gave them. Instead, he delivered something many might have considered messy and incomprehensible, a failure of elocution, charisma, and verbal economy—and, as such, a failure of communication, or at least of a certain idea of communication. In a context where observers may have been expecting him to enact a written text in speech, as happens at the standard poetry reading, and, more broadly, in an era when the language of a capitalist economy—which follows us everywhere—is streamlined to divert attention toward products and services and to bolster organizational productivity and self-interest, many people become annoyed when something isn't said efficiently but is instead filled with interruptions and circumlocutions. Within these contexts, to hear someone stutter toward a mere three-word declaration of amazement over something so commonplace as flowers might have provoked anxiety, uneasiness, and/or bewilderment in listeners attuned to more economical uses of language. That the

peculiarity of Caldiero's language-making might have strained the emotions of some listeners is suggested by the way the audience laughed when he terminated his utterance. I'm not claiming that all the laughter was induced by anxiety, uneasiness, and/or bewilderment, but some in the crowd likely laughed to ease discomfort invoked by not knowing what to make of the performance and/or because they thought the display was ridiculous or funny. In this sense Caldiero's utterance initiated a communal release of emotion, which—as catharsis does—extended from and may have put listeners in touch with their own bodies and the collective body of the audience.

Whatever audience members' varied reasons for laughing, though, whether to ease discomfort or express amusement and/or bewilderment, the performance presented them with a disruptive mode of making language. By playing with the composition of "flowers," Caldiero made both the word and the communication process less familiar for listeners. During his improvisational fragmentation, his speech act (as a mode of expression that approximated shamanic utterance) seemed to be less about communicating information and creating shared meaning than about initiating a shared, restorative, as-if-for-the-first-time encounter with language. By first defamiliarizing the words he made during the speech act, Caldiero (consciously or not) placed distance between listeners and those words, listeners and the communication process, and listeners and himself. Yet, in this instance, he didn't leave the gap his utterance had introduced into the performer/audience relationship. After his deconstructive utterance had broken down the relationships among the bodies involved in the speech act—sounds, listeners, performer, words—his movement toward sense-making could welcome listeners back into the process of remaking those interpersonal, sonal, syntactic, and semantic

relationships. In the process, he approached the reconstituted words with an observable degree of invigoration, pleasure, and wonder that experienced language users don't often have for the language we make. Rather, I see him acting like a child who had learned the name for a favorite thing and couldn't resist taking the word (like an object) to mouth.

Watching the recording of his performance, I'm reminded of my youngest daughter, Jaylee, whose emergence into language I observed closely because of my professional and personal investment in Caldiero's work and because of the influence sonosophy has had on my thinking about language and relationships. As soon as she could stand and walk, Jaylee liked to perform for the family from my in-laws' flatstone hearth: standing where she had seen her older sisters stand to stage their impromptu recitals—where her mother and aunts and uncle had also performed as kids—she made sounds, babbling like children do in the phase just before language. I say "before," but this sounding is part of the language-making process. Being part of a species with an evolved proclivity for language use and having heard the spoken word since her ear bones developed during gestation, she instinctively learned to create the stream she heard coming from others' mouths, babbling as if she were making words. As she developed from an infant into a toddler, she began plucking words like pebbles from this stream and, as infants and toddlers do when they handle new objects, playing with them in her mouth until her mind and her tongue learned the poses needed to intelligibly articulate those words and she had learned to connect the tactile sensation of assembling a word on the tongue with the object or objects that sensation represents.

As she made more connections—her first was among the word "Mom" and her mother *and* me; in fact, she often called me "Mom" in the months after she started

talking—I noticed the pleasure she took both in connecting lingual sensations with objects and in knowing she had been understood by others, in knowing she had brought us pleasure through her language-making. The day she first married "bird" with the robins and starlings that frequented our backyard, she stood at the back window and pointed at each animal, repeating "Buhrt! Buhrt! Buhrt!" with the urgency and excitement of a breakthrough. And it was a breakthrough: she was making language, which we celebrated with clapping and smiles and phone calls to grandparents and which her older sisters celebrated for months (though less frequently as her vocabulary grew) by asking her, "Where are the birds?" and watching her run to the window where she asked, "Buhrt? Buhrt?" and looked and pointed and waited for the robins and starlings to return, her brain primed for another encounter and the pleasure that would accompany it.

Conference of the Birds (ii): Dove Song

While I was running one summer morning along Ogden's east bench, twenty or so yards in front of me a dove landed in the middle of the road, followed shortly thereafter by a companion. Intrigued by the birds' arrival but not enough to break the rhythm of my run, I kept going. But twenty yards further down the street from where the birds had landed, I gave way to serendipity and the potential symbolism of the moment and turned back to watch the birds, to record the occurrence by taking some pictures with my phone.

As the doves crossed lanes, making for a nearby driveway, a Jeep passed. Its engine was heavy even against my ears and I thought it would startle the birds to flight; but they continued undisturbed. Their contentment called me after them and I followed to the driveway, lagging behind and watching from a distance as they stopped to pick at a

pile of bird seed that had spilled near the lawn's edge. Squatting on the sidewalk easement six or so feet from the feeding birds, I looked on and took some pictures with my phone as they each stooped to gather seed then stood to regard me, then stooped again.

At one point, the dove farthest from me skirted behind its companion and resumed its feeding ritual from the edge of the spill nearest me. I'm not sure what prompted the move, neither am I certain what significance to assign our brief encounter nor even that it need be assigned special significance. Isn't it enough, I ask myself, to have crossed paths with these doves, to have been allowed by what seemed their obvious socialization with humans to regard them—and to be regarded by them—from a distance that may have threatened more skittish birds? Wasn't it enough to have been present with them, to hold them in my mind as they may have held me in theirs? Why should our convergence need to have meaning? Couldn't our coming together have been meaning enough?

Seeing-Hearing the Sonosopher's Body

My encounter with the doves and my desire to record and make sense of the encounter, to give it symbolic meaning as it unfolded instead of simply being mindful of the interaction and taking pleasure in the birds' unexpected presence in my day, manifest the notion that our experiences and relationships—acts of exchange—don't have value unless they're driving toward deeper meaning. Because our encounters with others and our efforts to communicate with them are often based in this desire—if not the demand—to make sense, our verbal intercourse in most situations tends to be informed by what words mean. So occupied with semantic exchange, we may become less attuned to the pleasures

of lanuage-making (as exhibited in Jaylee's excitement over "buhrt" and its referent and Caldiero's "flowers" performance) and to the intra- and interpersonal function of an utterance—how it influences our somatic and psychological processes and our relationships, making shapes in the world and in our worldview. Voice scholar and practitioner Liz Mills calls this shape the "acoustic geography" of human utterance (401). By "acoustic geography" she seems to mean the dynamic sound-space roughed out in our minds and cultural environments when we mutually experience performed words, when we allow those words and their sounds to wash over the imagination, and when we attend to the physical sensation produced by the performer's language. Within this space, the more potent an utterance is, the more potential it has to forge connections between/among disparate bodies and to invite self- and community-revision. When as individuals, for instance, we give the performer's language and its associated sensations full consideration, we invite them into our consciousness and allow them to influence our neural processes; being so receptive to others' utterances can inform our self-perceptions and self-representations, prompting conscious and/or unconscious revision to the ways we see and express our selfhood and interact with others. And when as an audience we give the performer's language and its associated sensations full consideration, we collectively acknowledge and sustain the performer's presence in the community, open ourselves to the relational demands that presence makes on the assembled body (i.e., how the performer's presence asks an audience to relate and respond to the performer and within its own ranks), and act upon any social trust and bonds established in the environment of communal experience and reciprocity.

When we step back from our need to make sense with words and begin to

individually and collectively explore our shared acoustic geographies, which I argue is what sonosophy invites and incites us to do, we may become better able to understand how language functions in human relationships and communities. In particular we may become more attuned to language as a material, embodied process that shapes and is shaped by the hominin emergence from, presence in, and relationship with the world's diverse ecologies. Whether this is Caldiero's full intention with sonosophy or not, his *poiesis* enacts a mode of exchange that can tune bodies and minds into these somatic, communal processes via performative displays that emphasize the restorative materiality of words and their sonal making, unmaking, and remaking through the vocal apparatus—the lungs, the throat, the palate, the tongue, the teeth, the lips. Caldiero's "flowers" performance revealed this function of sonosophy. The way he defamiliarized the word divorced it from its referent and its meaning for a time and this disjuncture could have invited observers to look beyond the word's referent and meaning and to feel how and where the word's sounds took shape in and flowed out of—then into—the body and its acoustic, social, and somatic ecologies. In this light, when he concluded by saying, "Flowers. Flowers are amazing," he can be seen as calling attention to the idea that the verbal sign itself (the word "flowers") and its component sounds were just as worthy of listeners' wonder and sustained consideration as the thing the sign and its component sounds signify (the petaled plant). Because the things we attend to, the ways they're presented to us, and the ways we receive and attend to them all influence our emotional response to objects, people, ideas, etc., sonosophy's call to give language our sustained attention is also a call to sustained emotional engagement with the products and processes of language-making as well as with the other processes of exchange that language taps

into, emerges from, and interrogates. With this call, sonosophy asks audiences to listen closely to the shape sound makes in their bodies and minds, their desires and relationships, their communities and cultures, and our species and its diverse ecologies, and to bring all their capacities to bear in the work of occupying and elaborating that sound-space for the species' local and global benefit.

The sonosopher's body both occupies and serves as a verbal-visual token of this culturally- and somatically-enabled and -enacted space. He displays this token for listeners to see-hear whenever he enters and performs from his place of making. I've used the combined verb "see-hear" to describe the process by which this token is received because the term points to the demands sonosophy makes on obervers' predominant senses—sight and hearing—as it opens the way to increased consciousness of our dynamic, always unfolding sensory experience of the world and those with whom we share it. Many public poetry performances center primarily on the act of hearing: listeners gather to hear a poet recite verbatim from a written text. (Hence the event title: the poetry *reading*.) While the poet's body is on display during such events, its presence and actions seem intended to highlight the text on the page; in these circumstances the poet's voice and utterance may be justified and determined by a focus on her written work more than any apparent attempt at a whole-bodied performance of language. When Caldiero performs, however, he becomes the poem and takes a cue from the *cuntastorie*, who he says marshals the body with "all its resources"—material and non-material, verbal and nonverbal, cognitive, cultural, emotional, physical, and spiritual—to compose what he has called a "sound-word-gesture-image" (qtd. in Kostelanetz, *Text-Sound Texts* 434): a performative posture that calls observers to likewise marshal all the resources of their

bodies to help them see-hear not only *what* the sonosopher is saying but *how* he is saying it and, by extension, to develop and augment their perceptual witness of the world and to more fully be in that world and with others.

Caldiero claims to put this posture on whenever he performs, but its presence is more apparent in some performances than others. His Poetarium performance, for instance, clearly made the scope of his sound-word-gesture-image visible. The Poetarium-proper especially embodied the range of resources that constitute his diverse performance ecology: his cultural heritage, his deep commitment to religious and social ritual, his Catholic and Mormon sensibilities, his affiliation with an expansive poet-seer tradition, and the disruptive poetics of dada performance and visual arts. Inhabiting this ecology—this place of making—during the event, he can be seen as having "read" supplicants with his dynamic vision, responding to their presence before him, to their offering of Otherness, with poems composed of the accumulated stuff of his life. In this light, the utterance he offered the first girl who approached him could have been meant to address and alleviate the anxieties he may have been feeling as he began offering his Self to supplicants as much as the poem seems to have been intended to address and alleviate her obvious anxieties about encountering him. As such, his reiterated incantation of "don't be afraid / there are greater things in life to fear" can be read as a self-affirmation emerging from years of working through pre-performance jitters, a subject we once took up in conversation. Talking with each other after I had presented on his work at another conference, I told him I had been anxious to present. He told me to embrace the nerves. In his experience, he said, they meant that he still had his edge, that he was brushing up against the unknown and remained willing to take the risks necessary to disrupt the

established nature of things, to make them new as a performer and a poet (Personal interview).

While the Poetarium offered a colorful display of Caldiero's performance ecology, the verbal-visual shape of his utterance was subtler in his "flowers" performance. During the latter speech act, he exhibited a body-bent stance, visually interacted with the tome in his hand, and exaggerated the movements of his mouth and tongue. The accumulated effect of his display—whether that display was intentional or the result of natural or conditioned somatic tendencies—was a sound-word-gesture-image whose language may have been patterned after ordinary speech but functioned in a way that could compel observers into a new experience of the word "flowers" and into renewed pleasure with the processes of language-making. This effect may have been magnified if the camera had concentrated on just Caldiero's mouth as he played with the syntactic ebbs and flows of his statement. Yet, when viewing the speech-act from a wide frame, observers could attend to the cumulative work Caldiero's body was doing during the performance—to the nuanced ways it inhabited the utterance and offered cues for reconceiving and reinvigorating individual and communal language use by attending to it in more prime-itive terms. Through the entire performance he stood at the microphone with his back slightly bent, shoulders slightly forward, right arm hanging at his side, palm open to his body, thumb flexed, left arm squared in front of his torso, hand holding his large book. Just over halfway into his improvisational fragmentation, he turned to the left and leaned into his production of the phonetically complex unit *flæʊɚs*, which grew out of his lingual tinkering with *flə* and *flæ* and which he repeated three times amidst more lingual tinkering before he produced *flaʊrs* and progressed to his grammatically complex

conclusion: “Flowers are amazing.”

The body-bent stance seems to be a cardinal posture across Caldiero’s performances. I read it as an “affiliative cue” (Souza, et al 237): an expression of vulnerability and the desire to connect with those he was facing and to elicit a similar response in return. This expressive mode has neural roots in the aquatic brain and spinal cord, which together constitute the modern human brain’s “oldest neural division,” as David B. Givens notes in his discussion of “the nonverbal brain”: the “circuits, centers, and modules of the central nervous system [that] are involved in sending, receiving, and processing speechless signs” (“Nonverbal”). Having developed circa 500 million years ago when our evolutionary precursors inhabited the “ancient oceans” (“Aquatic”), this division remains “virtually intact” in the human nervous system, although as cognitive neuroscientist Merlin W. Donald notes while defining what it means to be human in evolutionary and genetic terms, it’s now embedded in a “complex web of other [neural] structures” that emerged after our sea-dwelling ancestors took to land and they had to adapt to the new demands placed on them by a different form of mobility (39–40). The division consists of networks of motor neurons and interneurons that function beyond conscious action and thought to regulate “[m]any of our most basic gestures, postures, and bodily responses” (D. Givens, “Aquatic”), including “the oscillating, rhythmic movements of walking” (“Paleocircuit”) and the mechanisms that drive our fight-or-flight response, moving us away from harm and “toward food and mates” (“Body-Bend”). In this sense the brain’s deep structures compel us to instinctively turn toward those things we associate with physical and emotional sustenance and security, including attachment to individuals and communities. Exploring the integral relationship between the human

body and brain, neuroscientist Guy Claxton points out that babies begin to practice and develop this neural tendency from the womb as they tune themselves to the rhythms and habits of their mothers (loc 2929). Whether Caldiero is conscious or not of the neural origins of or the evolutionary history inscribed in his body bent toward an audience or an individual, his stance, his open palm, his emphatic leaning, and his head movements demonstrated this inborn inclination.

More, his nonverbal cues and his language-making in the "flowers" performance likely stirred similar types and locations of activity in observers' brains as those that were firing in his brain, an unconscious synchronization that may have forged connections between himself and his audience. Even the presence of his book, which he holds in many performances, may have sparked a relevant neural response in observers. While the book was filled with poems and performance scripts and could be seen as a material representation of and self-conscious reference to the heft and presence of language in human relationships, it also potentially activated the "widespread loops of interconnected neurons" affiliated with perceiving the object and calling forth its personal associations and with evaluating its heft, texture, desirability, and possible uses (Claxton loc 2023). A growing body of research in neuroscience shows that humans by nature resonate physically and neurologically with our surroundings and the objects that occupy them and that our ability to move through and understand the world depends on our somatic perception of and relationship with our surroundings. Beyond showing how vital our resonance with things is, though, this research also demonstrates that we by nature resonate emotionally, physically, socially, and neurologically with other humans,

especially those we encounter on a regular, intimate basis.[2] Among individuals who share experiences and who interact in a shared environment, for instance—like people who watch a movie together, listen to a story together, or converse while rocking in side-by-side rocking chairs—brain function and movement synchronize (Hasson, et al.; Wilson, Molnar-Szakacs, and Iacoboni; Richardson, et al.). Effective verbal communication, in fact, depends on such neural coupling (Claxton loc 2880). When a speaker and listener are connecting, the listener's neural activity will sync with the speaker's, though with a slight delay; at times, the synchronization in the listener's brain will even precede the same activity in the speaker's, indicating that the listener's brain is anticipating what the speaker will say next. Synthesizing their observations in this area of human connection, neuroscientists Greg J. Stephens, Lauren J. Silbert, and Uri Hasson note that "more extensive speaker-listener neural couplings result in more successful communication" (4). So the depth of our verbal connections is a function of shared neural activity.

If more extensive speaker-listener neural couplings determine acts of good communication, it follows that communication will break down when these neural couplings fail, as can happen when a speaker or listener has suffered brain damage or has a neurological disorder or when a speaker is just plain talking past a listener or the listener isn't listening. It also follows that when communication breaks down, speaker-listener neural couplings will fail. By breaking language down during his "flowers" performance, by deconstructing the word with his improvisational fragmentation, Caldiero could have decoupled observers' neural activity from his. I'm not saying, of course, that his utterance halted what was happening in observers' brains. On the

[2] See Claxton loc 2629–2979 for an insightful discussion of environmental and social resonance among humans and its biological origins.

contrary, his sound-word-gesture-image may have sparked observers' neurons to fire in extra-ordinary or novel circuits as their brains tried to process the extra-ordinary sensory experience he offered them. Without being able to access this activity, however, say, via functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans, I can only infer what his observers' neurological response to the performance was based on my reading in the field of neuroscience and my subjective experience with sonosopher and sonosophy. So, again: Caldiero's deconstructive utterance may have inhibited the process of speaker-listener neural coupling. But as I observed earlier, his performance didn't leave the gap it had imposed. Rather, if we view Caldiero as shaman, *makar*, and poet-seer invested in exploring and enacting the constitutive power of language, we can interpret his movement toward a sentence in the "flowers" performance as him participating with listeners in the restorative process of remaking interpersonal, sonal, syntactic, semantic, and neural relationships by making a statement that made sense to all parties involved in the interaction. The communal release of tension and bewilderment apparent in the audience's after-utterance laughter suggested that the co-performative sense-making that was (re)enabled as Caldiero returned to shared linguistic and neural structures resolved the disruption between speaker and listener and restored those present to the somatic familiarity and pleasures of being neurally coupled with others.

Tracing the Sonosopher's Somatic Imprint

When Caldiero presented himself as sound-word-gesture-image in his "flowers" performance and so doing became the poem, I argue that he invited observers to explore with him the acoustic geography of his repertoire of utterances, i.e., his place of making.

When he coupled with observers during his act of self-presentation, he may have also left a somatic imprint the shape of his sound-word-gesture-image in their neural pathways—which is to say that his "flowers" performance (as his performative posture in general) may have formed or begun forming what Claxton calls a "neural model" of the Sonosopher in observers' brains, or it may have reinforced or augmented the model already constructed in the brains of those who were familiar with sonosophy. As implied by the label, neural models are mental representations, hard-wired in our brain's circuits, of the significant others we encounter in our walk through the world. Constituted by the "traits and habits" we discern through our interactions with these individuals, our neural models become the "web of expectations" we hold for others' behavior. The more I interact with a person—Caldiero, for instance—or the more memorable or striking my interaction with a person is, the more resonant and affective my mental representation of him will be. My brain uses this model to predict how he will act, think, and feel in "a whole variety of circumstances." As I accumulate diverse representations through my interactions with new people or with characters I meet in movies and books, to borrow from Claxton, "I become increasingly able to detach myself from my default, egocentric constellation of habits and concerns" and to place myself in others' skin, to imagine how they perceive and experience the world. When on a neural level I detach from my Self and reach to engage with an Other on his own terms, I augment my subjective sense of being-in-the-world and ground myself in an ecology of experience that extends far beyond my limited experiential field. My "I" becomes an emergent assemblage of "Me" and "You" and "You" and "You" and "You" and so on, where "Me" (as I observe in the ForeWord) is my self-conception as informed by my interactions with others and where

the perpetual series of "You's" represents my network of neural models as constituted by what I've discerned of others' character and being in the course of our shared experiences (loc 2944–55).

As we learn to recognize and attend to our mental models and their relational ecology—the dynamic network of neural, cognitive, emotional, physical, social, and cultural connections and environments they help shape and are shaped by—those models grow more nuanced. In addition to opening the way for us to anticipate others' behavior, to see the world how others see it, and to augment our being-in and experience of the world, these more nuanced representations allow us "to imagine how [others] see [us], and what [others] think of [us]." In this way they function as mirrors into our own traits and habits and how our presence affects others. As such they become vital aspects of our own places of making and they serve as means by which we can examine and revise our actions, our character, and our being. They also offer our self-organizing, pattern-sensitive brains streams of data with which to derive (in the abstract) general types of people—people who scare us, who cause us guilt or shame, who challenge our thinking, who encourage us, who know how to help us out of a rough spot, and so on. It seems to me that the presence of such figures in our neural pathways is one thing that may help compose our personal sense of morality (loc 2965–79). Since they represent individuals who have had a significant impact on our being and whose words and actions inhabit our brains and reverberate through our minds, these figures prompt us through the "still, small voice" of somatic preoccupations and desires to align our thoughts and actions with deeply-held values and beliefs and to forge meaningful bonds with others (loc 3371).

The work of sonosophy—as I've framed it (in part) via the defining expression "I

am/they are wisdom"—mirrors (again, in part) the functions of neural models. Like a neural model, sonosophy has the potential to enable observers to inhabit an Other's skin—to put on what I've called a fluid, many-sided, relational "I"—and in so doing to attend to the contours of the Self and the way our subjective sense of being-in-the-world reverberates through our relationships and our environments, then, expanded, feeds back into and influences our conception of self and others. The somatic markers that could develop in observers in response to Caldiero's sound-word-gesture-image would in general be internal-physical: footprints—or perhaps more accurately, body-prints—in observers' neurons that are present in each observer's body. While his somatic imprint might be most often manifest in observers' neural pathways, his performances do sometimes exhibit the material presence of his performance ecology (e.g., his Poetarium performance) and leave marks on the world: external-physical imprints that mirror any internal-physical somatic influence his sound-word-gesture-image exerts on observers.

Along these lines, I consider his October 24, 2009 "Seeing a Body" performance on Library Square in downtown Salt Lake City. A group of roughly 800 environmental activists gathered that day as part of a worldwide call for climate justice. The event was sponsored by 350.org, an organization dedicated to raising awareness about Earth's present climate crisis and "building a global grassroots climate movement that can hold our leaders accountable to the realities of science and the principles of justice" ("How"). As a means of promoting their message and rallying communities around their cause, the campaign's local organizers "plan[ned] a day of music, poetry, and speeches" (Moulton)—entertainment and exposition offered by local activists, artists, and orators and centered on the theme of climate awareness and reform. Caldiero was one of these

performers. The recording of his performance posted on *YouTube* shows that rain misted the gathering. After a brief introduction by the event emcee, Caldiero took the microphone, stepped before the crowd, and laid down on the concrete. Holding his tome over his face, he put the microphone to mouth, exhaled heavily three times, and uttered this short poem:

> sEE-ing ā BOdy—
>
> from the VANtage POInt of the SO-les of the FEEt↓
>
> imMEdiately TURns it INto ā CORpse
>
> IT IS so DIfficult to THInk # that PERson aLI-ve
>
> even SEEing the CHEst RIsing and F$_{\text{All}}$ing
>
> OAWFFers no SURety of their BREAthing—
>
> <u>from the VANtage POI-nt of the SO-les of the FEE-t</u>
>
> it is thē EA-Rth
>
> that has A-ll the WO-Rk of HOLding and KEEping↓
>
> from the EA-Rth's POI-n/t o//f V/IE-w↑
>
> the FEE-t # A-RE the WHO-LE BODY— ("Poetry: Alex Caldiero")

After terminating the extended /i/ in "body," he finished the performance with a three-part sequence of guttural rumblings—drawn-out growls—then stood up, thanked the crowd, and replaced the microphone. After his performance was completed and he had

left the stage area, his presence lingered in a serendipitous reminder of his self-presentation as sound-word-gesture-image, through which he becomes a poem, and the impact and meaning of his utterance and his *poiesis*: because he laid down on somewhat dry concrete just as it began to rain harder, when he stood to leave, the silhouette of his body remained on the ground.

This geographical marker of the sonosopher's presence resonated with and pointed to the acoustic geography consistently mapped by his performative *poiesis*. By tracing his sound-word-gesture-image on the ground as well as in observers' brains, however unwittingly, his performance asked those gathered for the climate change event to see their bodies from a different perspective—"from the earth's point-of-view," to be specific. Hence one possible reason he performed lying down: to give observers a glimpse at what the body looks like "from the vantage point of the soles of the feet." The soles of the feet are the things we most often touch to the earth in our movements through life; they're also the things the earth touches back, supporting us in our movements. In this light when Caldiero performed from the ground and showed observers the soles of his feet during his performance, his speech act transgressed the expectations set by standard poetry readings (as is his tendency across performances), reiterated his dynamic place of making, and called observers to attend to the earth, which not only supports our movement but from whose vital material we emerged and by whose agency—whose movements, demands, and givenness—we live and are held in somatic relation to one another and to the principles of life: sustainability, relation, and grace. Lying down as he did, he also took on the appearance of a corpse: a symbol of our shared fate and deep union with Earth, death being the body's return whence it came. Because his voice could

thus be heard as coming from the grave, as it were, his speech act seemed to be saying that the relationships he performed keep us vital. Even when death returns us to dust—our primal state—the somatic imprint of our utterances and our presence will remain with those we encountered in life, especially those we encountered most often and engaged with most deeply. The neural models we forged in others' brains may carry our influence and continue to nurture and sustain those with whom we shared our being long after we're gone.

In the next section, I take up the neural model I maintain of my paternal grandfather, whose abiding influence on me, even after his death, has informed my spiritual quest, my relationships, and my efforts to live fully in the world. Exploring a manifestation of his habits of being as it has come to me via the marginalia he left in one of his books, I use my conception of Grandpa and our shared faith tradition, which we share with Caldiero, as points of contact for wrestling with the notion of *poiesis* and additional *poietic* figures—including the treasure seer, the benevolent Other, and the laboring poet—as cued by and elaborated through Caldiero's work.

iii.

Assuming the Makers' Disposition:

Sonosophy as *Poietic* Consciousness and Radical Intersubjectivity;

Or, The Treasure Seer, the Benevolent Other, and the Laboring Poet

a. The Treasure Seer

Of Questions, Question Marks, and *Poietic* Events

Grandpa Chadwick comes to my mind often. Since his death in 2008, the neural model I maintain of him, which consists of experiences we shared, stories I've been told about him, and my perception of his habits of being, has continued to nurture and sustain my own sense of being in the world and my efforts to be with others and my environments. For instance, after listening many years ago to my oldest sister, Taryn, talk about how Grandpa used to hold some of his college classes in his and Grandma's backyard gardens and how he would on occasion ask students about the difference between soil and dirt, his answer (as I recall it and imagine him delivering it) has informed my interactions with the earth. "Soil," he would say, bending to run his fingers through a freshly-turned flower bed, "is a nutrient-rich ecology for seeds. Dirt is just soil without the soul." And these words evoke another image: Grandpa and Grandma kneeling in their flower gardens, infusing dirt with nutrients, breath, and sweat as they prepared the ground and tended to their plants. I didn't inherit my grandparents' green thumb, but their shared passion for plants and for making things grow has raised my awareness of the fundamental connection between humans and the places we inhabit. They showed me, as others have showed me, that our presence and the products thereof have an undeniable impact on the

earth, just as the earth's state of being has an undeniable impact on us. From the places we construct to the language we make to the waste we pass from our bodies, we leave marks wherever we go, signifying that we've been here and that we've had to rely on the earth's generosity to support our movements.

My connection with Grandpa reiterated itself through the artifacts of his somatic presence in late-November 2011 when, after Grandma had been moved into the memory-care ward of an assisted living center, Dad called my siblings and me to Grandpa and Grandma's house so we could take something tangible from the estate to remember them by. Sifting for nuggets in the mote- and memory-dense basement of their longtime home, I found Grandpa's old Latter-day Saint scriptures boxed away with a stack of LDS devotional books. His pocket-sized Armed Forces edition of *The Book of Mormon* (1943), inscribed "Property of Don L. Chadwick ~ Acquired at LDS soldier's [sic] meetings in Tokyo, Japan, January 6, 1946," was among them. The book is well-worn: its bent and frayed cover is heavily taped to the binding strip on the outside and, inside, to the book's first and last pages; its leaves are amber with age and the oil from Grandpa's repeated touch; and the index concludes with the references for "War," the final pages having been lost sometime during Grandpa's life.

Thumbing through the book, raising the mustiness and rot of decaying paper and glue, straining to make out the few notes Grandpa had scribbled in pencil in the margins, I tried to inhabit the language as maybe he had done during that post-war soldiers' meeting in Tokyo or during a homesick night on his bunk while he waited to return home to his young wife or years later when he maybe pulled the book from a drawer, opened it to a random page, and mulled over the image of God he found in the narrative, which

claims to be the record of an offshoot group of Israelites who migrated from Jerusalem to the ancient Americas around 600 BCE. Beside a verse in the volume's opening narrative, The First Book of Nephi, Grandpa penciled a question mark in the margin. The question, it seems, is about an image in the verse, which reiterates something found in the Hebrew Bible's book of Isaiah, with which the narrative's eponymous character claims to be well-acquainted: the text describes a God reaching toward his people, who, as his robe sleeve pulls back at the movement, exposes his wrist and palm before humanity. "Wherefore," Nephi says, "the Lord God will proceed to make bare his arm in the eyes of all the nations" (*Book of Mormon*, 1 Nephi 22.11). This exposed flesh seems meant to reveal God's corporeality, which is central to Mormon theology. Latter-day Saint teachings posit that God the Father—along with God the Son—"has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as" human bodies (*Doctrine & Covenants*, 130.22). Their bodies place them in intimate, somatic relation with the cosmos.

The Book of Mormon narrative's use of Isaiah speaks to the depth of this relationality. Earlier in his discourse, Nephi quotes extensively from the book of Isaiah's consolatory narrative, which was directed to the Israelites in their Babylonian exile and was intended to suggest to them that their God had not forsaken them even if they had forsaken their God. Isaiah's speaker presents his audience with images of a fully-present God who can't forget his people because he has, in the speaker's thus-saith-the-Lord utterance, "graven thee on the palms of my hands" (*KJV*, Isaiah 49.16; see also *Book of Mormon*, 1 Nephi 21.16). In light of this figure, which anticipates the centuries-later crucifixion of Jesus, Christianity's incarnate God, Isaiah-cum-Nephi's image of God's bare arm reveals this god as a vulnerable being, a wounded deity. I imagine Grandpa re-

visiting this image, wondering at its meaning and potential relevance, reaching for some answer to a question that he carried like the book. And in response? Another question, another point of uncertainty—and granted, of possibility—in a post-World War II world defined by restlessness and flux. So he lifted his pencil and touched a question mark in the margin: a token that he had been there, inhabiting that verse, that language; that he had weighed himself against its meaning, its implications, and found himself and his knowledge wanting.

As I've sat with Grandpa's question mark, trying to unravel its mystery, a short lyric from Caldiero's collection of drawings and poems, *I Am Not Only*: *Only Bruce Conner Did Not Say This*, has imposed on my thinking:

> it occurs to me as I gaze on the splendid work that the maker too
> stood in the very space I stand in unfolding for all time (1)

This two-line epiphany is representative of Caldiero's work as a shaman, *makar*, and poet-seer. It accompanies a drawing of a wide-eyed being with large lips, large ears, and a large nose, who glares at readers from the page. The being's gaping sense organs suggest that the poet-seer's epiphanic moment emerges from his practice of a gaze that functions by more than just sight. Rather, it's a mode of intense observation (as reflected in Behar's figure of the ethnographer as vulnerable observer) through which he opens his entire body to take in the world, using all his perceptual and somatic resources to attend deeply to "the splendid work" before him. I read "work" in this phrase as both noun and verb. As a noun it refers to something associated with or completed or produced by somatic exertion, like coursework, housework, yardwork, a place of work, a work of art, a literary work, etc. After Jess and I devoted long weeks preparing the backyard of our

new home to receive sod, we stood together on the back deck overlooking the finished lawn. “Look at our good work,” she may have said, satisfied with the results of our labor. That’s “work” as noun. As a verb the term refers to the process of exertion. A farmer works the land, for instance. A sculptor works with clay. A musician works with sound. A poet works with language. We often use the verb “work” in the present progressive tense: “I’m working on a poem. She’s working in the garden.” The action doesn’t even need to be directed toward an object, as in the question, “Are you working?” The present progressive verb, with or without a direct object, addresses a body’s perpetual motion as it interacts with material and immaterial things and seeks to reveal itself to other bodies. Such is the nature of somatic work, of the body’s generative products and processes.

The splendor of a created work or of the work of creating derives from the way the product or the process unveil a sense of aesthetic and ethical abundance, from the luster the object or activity maintain and the light they cast on the human condition. To name somatic work “splendid,” then, as Caldiero does in his short lyric, is to comment on the richness of its form and function, which constitute events “striving toward realization” in the relationship between the thing made and the processes by which it was made and by which it continues to come into being for its maker and its witnesses (Whitehead). In philosophical terms, an event is an “immanently transcendent” happening: like all aspects of human experience it’s bound to a certain time and place—it “belongs to a situation,” as philosopher Adam Miller puts it. Yet, as contingent, as immanent as an event is, as much as it’s shaped by the “infinite number of material elements” that compose the situation to which it belongs, the event, Miller notes, transcends the situation—it resists the pull to full belonging—in that it can never be

"entirely *represented* by the situation to itself" (loc 1549–68; italics in original). Because any act of representation is partial, every situation must necessarily exclude some of its constitutive elements from its self-performance—meaning that any given situation will call attention to certain aspects of its composition while ignoring others. An event, as a happening constituted by yet not fully represented in the situation from which it emerges, ruptures the seams of self-performance and breaks open the situation's established order by calling attention to these gaps in representation. So doing, it escapes, interrogates, and reconfigures the horizons of its situation (Miller loc 1550; Feltham xxvi).

Three constituent threads in my ethnography present themselves as immanent events:

First: Sonosophy itself, for instance, appears in the form of a standard poetry reading as Caldiero stands before an audience, most often with tome in hand, and intends to present a text to those gathered (the situation). However, it ruptures that form and disrupts audience expectations when he doesn't simply recite a text verbatim but offers an utterance using all of his somatic resources and so becomes the poem (an event). The evental function of sonosophy, as I see it, emerges across his performance repertoire as he consistently pushes back against and ruptures the generic conventions of the standard poetry reading. His "flowers" and "seeing a body" performances provide very clear, representative examples of this disruptive *poietic* mode. In the former utterance, he assumed the role of the typical poet in the standard reading, addressing an audience from a microphone while referring to his text. Yet, he broke with this role and its functions by offering a speech act that subverted the generally somber and exultatory tone of a poetry recitation and that seems to have reveled in the somatic pleasures of breaking down and

remaking that language. In the latter utterance, he presented what some might consider a typical poem while referring to his book, but he enacted the poem's content and somatic rootedness in a way that distinguished his lyric meditation from similar expressions that get delivered after the manner of a more conventional reading style.

Second: Grandpa's penciled-in question mark also serves as a rupture (an event) with the sacred text I inherited from his book collection (the situation). Emerging from Grandpa's interaction with the *Book of Mormon* narrative and inhabiting the same page as that narrative, the mark is bound up in the text and depends on its context for significance. However, as a marginal reference to and comment on the text, it also transcends the situation. It points toward an infinite number of possible scenarios from which the mark could have emerged and manifold questions with which it could have been associated, each of which is unrepresented by the marked page, the marginal reference to the text, my knowledge of Grandpa's life narrative, and my reading of the relationship among these constituent elements. As such, the question mark is, like all immanent events, something striving toward realization. Even the shape of the mark, which reiterates the figure of a seedling unfurling from its husk and pressing through soil, points to the at once self-constitutive and self-disruptive nature of an event. Pulling inward as it reaches outward, the perpetual movement—the *kinesis*—of the question mark's coil speaks to the way good questions can take root in our experience while exposing gaps in our models of Self, Other, and world, prompting introspection in the service of self- and world-revision.

Third: The acts of close listening likewise comprise a critical event that at once takes root in a certain somatic and cultural situation and ruptures that situation, prompting

new ways of perceiving and composing its constituent relationships. Close listening is specifically concerned with the poetics of performed language. While the contours of its work are determined by the performance being observed, it seeks to account for aspects of the performance situation that get overlooked by other modes of attention and that hence go unrepresented in most critical discussions. Opening themselves to whatever the given performance has to offer, close listeners give place in their critical understanding and practice for the striving and the disruptive abundance of poetry and the performed word.

Such striving toward realization and abundance is the work of *poiesis*, the ancient Greek term for "making." The present-progressive construction of the translated verb points to the notion that *poietic* events are always in process, always pro-ducing: they're always leading stuff into being ("Produce"). Coaxing things "from concealment" in the routine and raw materials of life, such events present unrepresented aspects of the human situation, bringing them into what artist and philosopher Derek H. Whitehead calls "the full light and radiation of a created work," giving them (to borrow from Caldiero's epiphanic lyric) the splendor of *poietic* attention and form. Whitehead's reading of *poiesis* unfolds around a series of questions. He presents one of the most vital in the abstract for his argument: "What is the relation between *poiesis* and the sensory embodiments of art making?" How, in other words, does the *poietic* event engage the agency of the raw mental, emotional, social, rhetorical, physical, and spiritual stuff from which our material and immaterial worlds are made? How does it engage the agency of the maker, the thing made, and the thing's audience? How does the *poietic* event embody things and break open the perceptual world for makers and their audience? How does it

unveil and call attention to somatic experiences that are striving toward realization amidst the noise of life-as-usual? I've taken the participle phrase in my last sentence ("striving toward realization") from Whitehead's discussion, where he posits that created objects and creative activity—which he calls "*poietic* act[s]" and which I'm calling *poietic* events—are always "in process." The phrase suggests that a created work is being realized—as in made real, made palpable—not simply as the artist brings its elements together, but also as the artist and other viewers gaze upon it (to borrow from Caldiero's use of the term) and as they open themselves to it. Attending to the *poietic* event with all their perceptual resources (as I'm seeking to do in my ethnography), vulnerable observers participate in the event's unfolding, playing a role in what it brings forth and how those effects affect the world and how the event disrupts and reconfigures the human situation.

Seeking Mystical Union: "Could You Gaze into Heaven Five Minutes"

As a *makar* immersed in the ongoing, primal work of exploring and exercising the "potent magic" of language (Bloomfield and Dunn 116), of enacting its constitutive nature, and doing so for communal benefit, Caldiero taps into a seeric tradition that collapses the distance between natural and supernatural realms and conceives of *poietic* consciousness as a gateway to higher modes of thought, being, and community. He has framed this process as an ontological imperative: a necessary aspect of his spiritual life and being that leads him into communion with otherworldly realms. Discussing his work in 1995, he said that as he has pushed the boundaries of artistic genres, he's felt liberated "from art and (as a bonus) from life. And in these moments of freedom, I've been alone with my making and, by extension, with my 'maker'" (qtd. in Abbott 1). In this view, his

art-making—his *poiesis*—becomes a means of transcending the stuff of life and unveiling its source and unseen influences. And "anyone," he's said elsewhere, "can be privy to this connection"; "every one of us can be a conduit for that occurrence" ("Why I Am"). That realization enlightened him when, in 1979, he and Setenay encountered Mormonism via two young LDS missionaries, and he heard the story of Joseph Smith.

A "village seer" who used magical artifacts like a "visionary stone" to seek treasure in early 19th-century western New York, Smith was caught up in the "religious revival" that swept through the region during the second great awakening (Quinn, *Early Mormonism* loc 11182). In the spring of 1820, when he was fourteen, he claimed to have experienced a theophany that, in the words of historian D. Michael Quinn, "distanced him [. . .] from the organized clergy," who denounced the widespread culture of treasure seeking and its grounding in a broader "magic world view," practices and perspectives the Smith family espoused and out of which the young man's "first vision" emerged (loc 11216, 4240). According to the narrative of Smith's spiritual awakening that Caldiero certainly heard during his initial encounters with the missionaries—an account written in 1838 and canonized by the LDS Church in 1880—the young man became troubled by the "scene of great confusion and bad feeling" that was developing as the ministers and converts of different sects brushed up against each other. Compelled by the melee into a period of "serious reflection and great uneasiness" during which, as he wrote, "I often said to myself: What is to be done? Who of all these parties are right; or, are they all wrong together? If any one of them be right, which is it, and how shall I know it?," he determined to seek answers to his questions via prayer. So he "retired to the woods" near his home, where he could pray in solitude and where, in the act of praying, he claimed

that God the Father and God the Son came to him in a vision. Per the canonized account, the "personages" descended in "a pillar of light" and, in response to Smith's questions, told him that he mustn't join any of the churches that were vying for his affections (*Pearl of Great Price,* Joseph Smith–History 1.8–20). As a result of the instruction he was given, the theophany altered his thinking about his life's mission and renewed his commitments as a seeker of spiritual knowledge, opening a long series of mystical experiences—divine revelations, as Latter-day Saints call them—that unfolded across his lifetime into a new religion.

Another of Smith's visionary experiences that Caldiero undoubtedly encountered in his initial exploration of Mormonism was an angelic visitation the young seer claimed to have had in September 1823. Contained in the same canonical narrative in which Smith describes his theophany, the account of this later visitation recollects Smith's quest for a "divine manifestation" of his "state and standing before [God]," which he prayed to receive in "full confidence" because, in his words, "I previously had one"—so why wouldn't he be given another? Per the narrative, as he petitioned God a light "appear[ed] in [his] room," growing brighter and brighter until it shone like the "noonday" sun and "a personage appeared at [his] bedside, standing in the air." The visitor announced himself as Moroni, the steward of an ancient record. He told Smith "that God had a work for [the boy] to do" and that, in time, this would entail using seer stones to translate the record, which was deposited in a nearby hill and "written upon gold plates" that contained "an account of the former inhabitants" of the American continent. Smith notes that as Moroni conversed with him "about the plates, the vision was opened to my mind that I could see the place where the plates were deposited." As the manifestation dissipated, the light

gathered around Moroni, leaving the room dark; and "a conduit open[ed] right up to heaven," which the angel then ascended. Smith recalls that Moroni visited him three times that night with the same message. The narrative notes that four years later, after the young man had been instructed many more times by this "same heavenly messenger," he was given "charge" of the plates and began the work of translation (Joseph Smith–History 1:29–59). Because of his early and consistent encounters with the divine, Smith maintained near the end of his life in a sermon reflecting on the death of fellow Mormon James Adams that people could learn more about what he called their "true condition and relation" to God by "gaz[ing] into heaven [for] five minutes" than by "reading all that ever was written on the subject" (Smith, *History* 50). In this view, a somatic, experiential encounter with divine mystery, as initiated and sustained via the poet-seer's gaze (as I'm calling it), will expand the observer's being and consciousness more than the ascetic pursuit of knowledge can.

Just as Smith's theophany, and the oracular narrative that unfolded in its wake, expanded his reservoir of esoteric knowledge and (from his perspective) brought him into deeper fellowship and communion with a divine community, these events likewise "enlarged" and enlightened Caldiero, who says that Smith's "whole story"—which I take to mean Mormonism's founding mythos—has made him (Caldiero) "more than [he] was" before he encountered it. In particular, he suggests, it became one more channel through which he could approach his own exploration of life's mysteries: a quest for spiritual knowledge he felt called to pursue from an early age. Born into a culture "where the idea of the magical world and the everyday world constantly impinged on each other," where the mystical infused the material and the material embodied the mystical, Caldiero was

susceptible to the workings of mystery and visionary experience ("Why I Am"). This familiarity may have also in part emerged from his early and consistent encounters with Catholicism, whose historical narrative includes the extra-ordinary lives and miracles of saints and the rich presence of a mystical theology: a systematic exploration of the "acts and experiences or states of the soul"—the unseen, animating element of human being—that appear to have no physical or mental correlates or otherwise quantifiable demonstrations. As outlined in Catholic mysticism, such states are channeled via prayer and deep contemplation, which invoke "private revelations" and "visions" intended to strengthen the union "between God and the soul," the human and the divine ("Mystical Theology").

Caldiero claims that he began enacting this mystical union from a young age; such visionary experience, he says, has been for him a very "natural" and "needed" aspect of life (Bernhard and Low). During his 2008 conversation with Kathryn French, for example, he recalled a long ago Christmas Eve encounter that took place on the streets of Sicily as he walked to midnight Mass. As he was approaching the church, he said, he looked down the road and saw "a black man with a turban and in full regalia riding down the street" on a camel. The unexpected sight froze young Caldiero in place and he stared at the stranger and his animal, taking in their Otherness as they moved "closer and closer to [him]." Drawing nearer Caldiero, the man shouted for the boy "to get out of the way." As Caldiero complied, he said, "it was like I woke up." The call disrupted the boy's vision, which, dissipating, revealed "an old farmer on his mule" in place of the black man on his camel. "And so," Caldiero observed, pointing to his recollection as evidence of his claim, "the nature of reality for me was always very fluid"

(3). Like shape-shifting Proteus and after the manner of a trickster, he seems to have been primed while young to slip among modes of seeing and being, an act through which he can be seen as teasing at the boundaries of things seen and things not seen and perpetually revising his perceptual witness of the world and its established order. This "playful impulse," per Conquergood, "promotes a radical self-questioning critique" in both the trickster and those for whom the trickster performs; and this critique "yields a deeper self-knowledge," which is "the first step toward transformation" on both personal and communal levels ("Poetics" 83).

When Caldiero encountered Smith's story, which manifests the first Mormon prophet's trickster-like willingness to play with "the [established] social order" and to "unsettl[e] certainties" that individuals, communities, and institutions may hold without question (to borrow language from Conquergood [83]), the encounter—as event—ruptured a real-world visit he and Setenay had with the missionaries. He says the rupture opened into a visionary experience. Four months after they had begun taking lessons from the missionaries, the Caldieros welcomed the young men into their home for another discussion. "We had a little prayer," Caldiero told Helen Whitney during their mid-2000s interview, and the missionaries "began to go through a little chit-chat." While he didn't specify what the discussion entailed, he said that "in the middle of that chit-chat[, . . .] all of a sudden I felt very far away." Physically present with yet spiritually "removed" from the others in the room, as he described it, he was enveloped in silence and light, which "kept getting brighter and brighter" and began burning at his "solar plexus," which is named in Sicilian "the mouth of the soul." As this mouth opened, the light began spreading through his body. He described the process like so: "Hot, heat,

burning all over, coming up, and the light keeps getting brighter." He said the light, the burning, and the silence were accompanied by a sense of "certainty and a point of peace," which he understood as a witness of the reality of God and the authenticity of Smith's oracular narrative, including his first vision and the subsequent extra-ordinary "coming about" of the *Book of Mormon* via angelic visitation and seer stone-inspired translation. The moment Caldiero acknowledged that sense, he recounts, the light and the burning began to recede until, in his words, "everything was back to quote normal." While he had before been reluctant to join the LDS Church, even though Setenay had expressed her interest in being baptized, after his ecstatic experience that day his mind was changed. By his accounting, "shortly thereafter" he and Setenay were baptized.

Joseph Smith's Divine Anthropology and the Maker's Disposition

Although Caldiero parted ways with the institutional Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints several years after he and his family moved to Utah, he remains converted to the mystical aspects of Mormonism, which were profoundly manifest in Smith's story and which, he bears witness, have expanded his consciousness (Bernhard and Low). They make him "wonder more" and believe bigger, a notion of inner transformation that jibes with a Sicilian proverb he offered in his conversation with Whitney: "the world is big, but we believe so little." This proverb further jibes with the work of the seer, the trickster, and the *makar*, figures who harrow the grounds of established beliefs and social order, who sow new ideas in that soil via extra-ordinary performative acts, and who thereby call individuals and communities to reach out and reap new understandings of the world and to experience its always unfolding bigness.

A specific aspect of Smith's Mormonism that Caldiero says has enlarged his sense of wonder at the world's bigness and that carries implications for sonosophy is the Mormon prophet's teachings that humans have the potential to become gods and that multiple gods inhabit the universe (Bernhardt and Low). Writing about early Mormons' pursuit of personal and communal immortality via esoteric knowledge and ritual practices, as enacted (in part) in Mormon temples, cultural historian Samuel Brown shows that Smith's teachings about apotheosis and godhood were part of the prophet's "ambitious" renovation of the Great Chain of Being: "a philosophical/theological construct that arranged all of creation, from stones to humans to angels to God, in exact hierarchical relations" and that thereby posited the proper and improper modes of interaction among entities in the chain. In this renovation, the prophet conceived of angels, who occupied "the upper echelons of the chain," as "sanctified [i.e., resurrected and glorified] humans" who were heirs of God (Brown 3–4). And he conceived of God as an exalted human who had once inhabited an earth and learned the principles of exaltation through the tutelage of his God, who had also once inhabited an earth and learned the principles of exaltation from his God, and so on in an infinite regress of gods, a "suprahuman chain" with no beginning and no end (28). Smith's reconception thus broke down the barrier between humans and the divine as assumed in the traditional hierarchy. This rupture in the chain opened on what Brown calls Smith's "divine anthropology," which asserted "the ontological equivalence" of gods, angels, and humans—which is to say that in Smith's theology, each being belongs to the same species and shares a familial inheritance, even if they may at present inhabit different nodes in that kinship network and be at different stages of divine development, from

humans as gods-in-embryo to angels as gods-in-waiting to gods as exalted humans (4). Hence, as Mormons are taught from birth, humans aren't just conspecific with God; they are God's children and therefore have the potential to become like God—to be exalted, which in Mormon terms means that humans can become gods themselves and perpetuate their kinship bonds and procreate beyond the grave.

A necessary corollary of Smith's divine anthropology is the notion that multiple gods inhabit the universe and that each is bound to each in an expansive "kinship network whose ties [are] invulnerable to death" (Brown 37). This network constitutes an ecology of sanctified beings who participate together in the always unfolding work of building and sustaining the constituent parts, inhabitants, and relationships of an expansive creative community; such work demands the collaboration of human and divine agents. Smith embodied this concept of the gods as a coterie of creative beings—of Makers—in his 1835 midrashic account of the Hebrew prophet Abraham, who, Smith's narrative insists, "possessed great knowledge" of the heavens (*Pearl of Great Price*, Abraham 1.2). As the narrative unfolds, Abraham gains this esoteric understanding by way of seer stones through which he gazes into the heavens and observes the workings of the divine community, which include the Makers' active, coperformative planning and producing of worlds and the preparation of spirit offspring to inhabit those worlds (3.1–2, 4.1).

As also with the God of the Hebrew Bible's creation narratives, Smith frames these gods-as-Makers as beings who rely on the constitutive nature of language to call things into being and to arrange their collaborative *poietic* work of producing new things from extant materials. "[A]t the beginning," the midrashic narrative goes, "the Gods took counsel among themselves to form the heavens and the earth," considering together the

character of the raw materials before them and deciding how they could organize those materials for the greatest communal benefit; then they "came down and formed" things "[a]ccording to all that which they had said" (4.1, 26; 5.4–5). From this account it follows that, in Smith's conception of life on an eternal scale, the nature of creative work is communal, collaborative, discursive, distributed, and performative. It emerges from the deep somatic interactions shared among the exalted bodies that constitute and sustain an expansive community of Makers who are entangled in an ancient, reiterative dialogue with the stuff of life, regarding the stuff of life, which it seeks to reclaim from a state of decomposition by (re)composing it via acts of language.

In her discussion of Smith's revisionary theological project, scholar of Mormonism Fiona Givens observes that these notions of cosmoplastic "collaboration" and "reclamation" through acts of dialogue and communion were "[c]entral to [Smith's] creative energies." And like the gods he envisioned, he exerted those energies to explore the mysteries of being; to bind individuals and communities to the primal, constitutive forces in the universe; and to unite individuals in expansive, transformational kinship networks (1–2). With his obvious affection for Smith—whom he's called "a sweetheart" ("Alex Caldiero's Mormon Experience")—as well as for Smith's theology-making, Caldiero can be seen as weaving aspects of the prophet's divine anthropology into sonosophy, where it comes into conversation with the other *poietic* traditions and figures that constitute his performative posture and his disposition as a maker. In particular, Caldiero has, like Smith, exerted his creative energies throughout his career to pursue mystical union with the divine, to reclaim prime-itive modes of being to the end of revising contemporary realities, and to initiate and sustain meaningful kinship bonds with

others (Bernhard and Low).

I interpret his Poetarium performance, in which he can be understood as having assumed the posture of a God-figure reaching to shape worlds from his place of making, as one expression of *poietic* consciousness that has taken shape after the manner of Smith's pursuit of esoteric knowledge. As I read it, the general structure of each interaction during the event resonated with Mormonism's mystical theology, which includes apotheosis as initiation into an ecology of Makers through esoteric communal rites. I've sketched these rites out in terms of the Mormon temple ritual in my discussion of the Poetarium, but I'll touch on them again in light of my present concern with Caldiero's reiteration of an expansive seeric tradition that has in part been informed by Smith's theology-making. During the event, seekers initiated an encounter with the maker and his knowledge of life's mysteries by approaching the maker's dwelling place while holding in hand an artifact that had been prepared to invoke and to focus the hoped-for interaction, a process that I see as being akin to the use of seer stones in Smith's oracular narrative and the story of Abraham. Extending his hand through the partition that separated him and the seekers, the maker rewarded the seekers' focused seeking by temporarily opening the partition and delivering a message meant to address each seeker's desires. Once the message was offered, the maker closed the partition, leaving seekers and close observers to contemplate and interpret their encounter with this mysterious Other.

While each encounter at the Poetarium window was unique, each followed this general pattern, which offered supplicants a model for what was to come as they approached the Mysterious Alissandru and which also seemed to invite seekers and

observers alike to consider some fundamental questions regarding the nature of being as such. Beginning with his interaction with the first seeker, the Mysterious Alissandru made it clear that his language was nothing to fear. On the contrary, his self-presentation as a mystic standing in the oracular framing of the Poetarium-proper invited them to give way to the workings of his *poietic* gaze, which intended, as claimed in the assistant's prefatory statement and the writing on the shack, to open them—via discursive acts—to visions of their deepest selves and their relational hopes, as borne in each heart. In another interaction, he offered the seeker—a boy—a catechistic litany that seemed meant to expand the boy's consciousness and sense of self. The boy, ticket in right hand, slingshot in left, approached the Poetarium about a third of the way into the event. As he extended his ticket toward the window, Caldiero's hand appeared through the curtains to receive the boy's request, then it withdrew. During the roughly eight seconds that passed after he handed Caldiero the ticket, the boy danced in place in front of the window, swinging his arms, hips, and shoulders in a show of childhood energy and anxiety. When he saw the curtains rustle as Caldiero reached to part them, the boy stopped dancing and took several small steps back, and, as Caldiero began speaking, raised his slingshot and brushed his left shoulder with it while shifting his weight from one foot to the other. I read his movements away from the Poetarium and his placement of the slingshot between his body and Caldiero's as a response of his sympathetic nervous system to an encounter with someone strange and imposing, a meeting whose outcome was uncertain. Many people may respond in similar ways when they're first exposed to Caldiero's mode of language-making because his *poiesis* can be wild, disruptive, and threatening.

But that wildness isn't without reason. Rather, it seems to be a part of his

performance as trickster, intending to unsettle widely-accepted certainties and to revise and/or expand the social order for individual and communal benefit. Hence, the catechistic litany he offered the slingshot-holding boy while holding the boy with his wide-eyed gaze:

> "*WHO* do you" THInk you A--RE↑
>
> WHO— do you THInk you A--RE↑ [Boy looked to the right, smiling]
>
> **whE-RE** do you THInk you A--RE↑
>
> **WHE-N** do you THInk you A--RE↑
>
> WHY↓ # AnyOne—
>
> WHY↓ AnywhERE—
>
> **THAt's whO**—
>
> **THAt's whERE**—
>
> an/d d/on'/t y/ou Ever # Ever let AnyBOdy TEll
>
> you OtherwI—se ("Poetarium Part 3")

By stressing the question words in his series of reiterative questions and pausing two beats between each utterance, Caldiero opened the way for observers to consider the interrogative nature of poetry, in particular, and *poietic* consciousness, in general—of reaching out via discursive acts to connect profoundly with others (per the functions of poetry and *poietic* consciousness). And by emphasizing "think"—the main verb in each reiterated utterance—and extending each "are," he seemed to ask the seeker and observers to consider their conceptions of identity (who-ness) and contingency (where-

and when-ness) as well as how those conceptions of self and circumstance may have translated into their individual and communal being (withness). More, when he answered his questions directly after he terminated his final "are," claiming that those he was addressing could be "anyone" or "anywhere," his language pointed to an expansive conception of being. Caldiero's declaratives could be taken as a reiteration of the well-worn claim, "You can be anything or go anywhere you want with your life if you put your mind to it." However, I read his emphatic statements regarding seekers' potential who-ness and where-ness as embodiments of what I see as his broader concern with developing *poietic* consciousness in himself and his audiences. This more expansive mode of seeing and being isn't invested primarily in individual development as an end in itself. Because while sonosophy as *poietic* consciousness does appear to invite people to develop toward their fullest selves, it does so (I argue) by drawing them into deep encounters with the mysteries of Otherness; by advocating for, enacting, and fostering the work of vulnerable observation and consideration for the unseen aspects of our existence; and by in the process reminding close observers that they're always in relationship with other people and places and can find deep fulfillment and joy by attending to those relationships with radical openness, hope, and grace. I turn now to elaborating on these functions in terms of two figures, which I call the Benevolent Other and the laboring poet.

b. The Benevolent Other

Being-Toward Others: The Wounded God, the Bodhisattva, and the Burning House

With the ideas I've taken up in my meditation on Grandpa's question mark, Caldiero's

epiphanic lyric, the event of *poiesis*, and sonosophy's connection with Joseph Smith's divine anthropology, I've probably made more of the mark's presence in Grandpa's book than he ever intended. It is, after all, a very light squiggle and dot on the page, something I might have overlooked if I hadn't been attending to the margins of the text. Nonetheless, it's a question mark, a token of uncertainty and disruption, of curiosity and desire, of possibility; and I've returned often in my mind to the one Grandpa drew and tried to flesh out its associations. It first drew me in because it seemed out of place in a book millions of people turn to for answers. Maybe that's why it was so faint in the margin, though. As a scientist—Grandpa earned a Ph.D. in plant physiology and taught botany, chemistry, and soil classes at the college-level for 22 years—he had an inquisitive mind; he was a tinkerer and enjoyed trying to get at why and how things worked. As such he was fascinated by the processes of life. I suspect his innate and academically-disciplined curiosity informed and augmented the way he perceived and engaged with his inherited system of religious beliefs, making him curious about aspects of Mormonism's sacred narratives and theology, including the ways Mormon scripture portrays God and conceives of the human-deity relationship as well as the relationship among humans and between humans and Earth. But as a devout member of his faith community, he may have been hesitant to wear his questions on his sleeve or to let any uncertainties in his beliefs overwhelm the things that kept him grounded in the faith.

Even so, he seems to have had at least one pressing question; and as I read the mark he left in his scriptures, that question regarded the meaning and the personal, social, and theological implications of a recurring *poietic* event: the image of God—a divine Other—exposing the flesh of his arm, an act that exposes his body, which bears witness

to his intimate somatic relation with humans and his passions, vulnerability, and susceptibility to suffering. This notion of a vulnerable deity runs counter to more general conceptions of God as a perfect, immutable being, which have been prevalent in Christian thought since at least Plato (see 380e–381c). In these conceptions, God is an untouchable Other who remains undefiled and unmoved by the fallible subjects who worship him, as well as by any vulnerability or emotional attachments (and the associated pain and suffering) that could be coupled with observing and serving those subjects. Wounded god imagery ruptures with this situation. It destabilizes the deity-human binary, making the immortal being who displays his own susceptibility to pain and suffering, and thus to external events and conditions, appear less Other and more accessible to humans and placing empathic understanding of the mortal condition within reach of the god.

For Caldiero, as in Joseph Smith's theology-making, to put on immortality is not to ascend beyond the mortal condition but to embrace susceptibility as a vital aspect of existence. Speaking in the late 2000's with Torben Bernhard and Travis Low about his mother's dying request that he remember her, Caldiero said, "That's the real meaning of immortality." He took her request to mean not that he must never forget her but that he must keep her alive in his mind and pass her on to others. Speaking in *sonosuono* to the Catholic practice of remembering the dead on All Soul's Day, he reiterates this idea in different terms: "to live in the mind of a child is to live forever" (25). In light of his thinking about keeping his mother alive in his mind, I read "child" in this statement not as "very young person" but in the broader sense as "progenitor." Living in another's mind, he continued in his conversation with Bernhard and Low, is "how we feed each other," which I take to mean that we offer our bodies—all of our somatic resources—to

those we encounter on a regular, intimate basis; and this substance sustains our being and our relationships. In this sense, when we re-member someone we're bringing their bodies back together in our minds; we're embodying their substance in our attitudes and actions and, in turn, sharing that substance with others. But this immortality—this perpetual extension of the self into others—doesn't "happen in heaven," he said; it unfolds here-and-now, "in the human mind and human soul." As such, it demands that, after the manner of the vulnerable deity, we accept others' bodies and lives as they're extended to us in all their humanness, deep flaws and limitations included, then that we extend the always unfolding influence of those bodies through our own lives and relationships (Bernhard and Low). When Joseph Smith renovated the Great Chain of Being into an expansive suprahuman community constituted by exalted kinship networks, he opened a similar vision of immortality, which for him meant that our intimate relationships—tokens of our deepest vulnerabilities and desires—could abide beyond the grave. Caldiero can be seen as enacting this vision of godhood as benevolent Otherness during his Poetarium performance. Extending his open palm to supplicants through the booth's curtains and receiving what supplicants had to offer through their presence at the booth, he seems to have been reiterating the posture of both the LDS temple officiator and the Catholic priest: God-figures who embody the humanness of deity and thereby offer supplicants the invitation to deep fellowship and communion.

The connections forged during communal moments between sonosopher (as priest) and supplicant can be interpreted as staging an "intimate union" between God (as benevolent Other) and human (Murphy 3), an abiding relationality that has potential to entangle each figure in what theologian Charles Hartshorne calls the "concrete

particularit[ies]" of human life (44). Such particularities include our woundedness, which, to cite theologian Erika H. Murphy, serves as a discursive mark of "our ontological and epistemological instabilities": gaps in our sense of what it means to be in the world and in relationship with others, in the ways we develop and critique those modes of being, and in what we know about ourselves and the world, how we know it, and how we construct and model what we know and how we know it. As individuals and communities we consistently "guard [ourselves] against" these gaps because—like wounds—they split open our fragile sense of existence, identity, knowledge, and relationality (1). And we don't want to be reminded of our essential inadequacies.

Yet, we're all vulnerable. Wounded God narratives remind us of this tragic reality, as can the sonosopher offering himself again and again to his audiences as he extends his open palm and bends his body (consciously or not) toward their presence. The claim that Caldiero is a vulnerable figure seeking communion with others seems to conflict with his appearance as a burly man with a heavy beard and with his imposing mode of making language. He recognizes this tension and the difficulty some observers may have breaking through his Otherness to experience his desire to connect with people. When he asked me after my presentation at the 2012 AML Conference whether or not he was scary, his question seemed to reflect (as I've noted) a longing for understanding and validation and to know that his *poietic* offerings were being heard despite their peculiarity—and more, perhaps, that they were being heard on their own terms. He further acknowledged his susceptibilities during the conversation he had with Bernhard and Low regarding his mother. Speaking with Fabrizio about the encounter, Bernhard said the dialogue unfolded late at night around a series of "direct questions" that invoked

"honest and direct answers" from Caldiero. The shared moment of vulnerability stirred Caldiero to tears, which evoked the same response in Low (Bernhard, Caldiero, and Low). The encounter manifest Caldiero's clear devotion to his mother and pointed to his deep familial love, something that has extended into and been nurtured by his cultural heritage and his faith communities and which has again and again turned him outward to others.

While such openness, he suggests, has given him health, happiness, and fulfillment, it has also been a source of great pain. He acknowledged the aching that has come through his "yearn[ing] for community" in another conversation with Bernhard and Low. Asked if he missed his Mormon faith community after he parted ways with the LDS Church, he sat taller in his seat and punctuated his response with widened eyes and sweeping arm gestures: "Oh yeah," he said. "You kiddin'? To worship as a group of people. To sing together." Then he raised his eyebrows, released a puff of air, and said, "Of course I miss it. Yeah, I miss that." But, he lamented, contemporary Mormonism had outgrown him. His sustained connection to the religion's mystical theology didn't jibe with the globalizing church's adoption of the pragmatic values and practices of corporate America.[3] As such, he felt squeezed out of the community; and the separation left a wound (Bernhard and Low).

In addition to being wounded by his split with the Mormon faith community, as precipitated by his abiding conversion to Mormonism's mystical aspects over its pragmatic functionalism and intensified by his yearning to participate in expansive kinship networks, Caldiero has further confessed that his tendency to dwell in hyperbole was another source of suffering. "I am so baroque," he said to Bernhard and Low during

[3] On the LDS Church's increasing corporatization, see Mauss 29--31.

their late night conversation, his voice weary and, at times, cracking with emotion. “I’m so baroque about everything I do. [. . .] I exaggerate. [. . .] I twist everything.” His performative inclination to go over-the-top seems to manifest, in part, in his radical departures from the conventions of standard poetry performance as well as in his commitment to unsettling established ways of seeing and thinking. And these radical departures can often put observers off and place him at odds with the broader poetry community. As I mentioned in the first section of my ThirdWord, Guy Lebeda said that in his work as director of the Literature Program for the Utah Arts Council, he had had “established poets” in the region tell him “that they viewed [Caldiero] as more of a stand-up comic, that his performances were *not* poetry.” In this light, the sonosopher’s baroqueness is a cause of separation from other poetry-makers; it’s a perpetual source of brokenness, a self-inflicted wound that keeps him isolated from his peers (Bernhard and Low).

Yet, as Lebeda also observed, even though people might think Caldiero is “out there” and “totally crazy,” “if you stick with him, then you realize he knows exactly what he’s doing” (Bernhard and Low). Strange as Caldiero’s baroqueness and brokenness, convolutions and vulnerabilities may be to the uninitiated, his *poiesis*—which can be seen as reiterating the vulnerability and benevolent Otherness of a wounded god—seems intended to expose observers to their always incomplete, always unfolding natures. The redeeming value of such exposure may flow from the personal and communal merits of radical self-awareness and open acknowledgement of our flaws. Caldiero has considered these merits in terms of the bodhisattva, a figure in Mahayana Buddhism who stands on the verge of liberation from time and suffering but who, in Caldiero’s words, “keeps

himself just imperfect enough to [. . .] come and save humanity" (Bernhard and Low, "Deleted Scenes"). As Lebanese poet and philosopher Jad Hatem notes in his discussion of spiritual figures who consciously postpone their ascension to heaven, "[t]he bodhisattva slows his own liberation indefinitely by not severing the lines of transmigration" (loc 491). Rather, even though he has lifted the curtain on heaven, he defers his own salvation, remaining open to it while "purposefully keep[ing] himself flawed" and vulnerable (to borrow from Caldiero) so as to remain susceptible to and grounded in the flow and impermanence of the human situation (Bernhard and Low, "Deleted Scenes"). Through this decision he embraces the "virtue of universal compassion" and offers his body to others in hopes of being-with them through their "ordeals" and "sooth[ing] their hurts" via instruction in "the merits he has accumulated" during his long experience on the earth. In the process he shows that he's motivated not by hope for his own deliverance but by a desire for the liberation of those he serves (Hatem, loc 492).

For Caldiero "there's something beautiful and Dadaistic" about this unrestrained self-offering and its communal functions (Bernhard and Low, "Deleted Scenes"). Its beauty could derive from the sense of fairness it conveys. Per philosopher Elaine Scarry's exploration of the relationship between beauty and justice, I use the term "fairness" to refer to the "loveliness" and splendor of the bodhisattva narrative—of the figure's yearning to embrace the "pure and simple calamity" of life on the earth (Hatem loc 499)—and to the attribute of equitable ("fair") distribution of resources (Scarry 62). Each use of the term as regards the beauty of the bodhisattva's vow speaks to the narrative's sense of aesthetic and ethical abundance, which illuminate the figure's compassion for

flawed beings and his reaching to raise those beings from the injustices that emerge from life in a flawed and impermanent earth system. Engaging with disparate bodies in such deep interactions that seek to raise people from the ordeals associated with living beneath oppressive moral structures and to extend power to people beyond what's offered by established institutions and epistemologies, the bodhisattva also exhibits the characteristics of Dada. His efforts are radically decentered and disruptive to "absolute, totalizing set[s] of beliefs" regarding meaning, relationships, and salvation as he would find them in the contingencies of human life and suffering (Erickson Preface). As such he consciously seeks to explode established categories, mediating between heaven and earth and offering his body in its awakened state "to the good pleasure of all beings" that they might use it to their own advantage. In this sense he makes of himself "a toy," a trickster figure: a site where others can play with and play out their desires and enact their "derision and amusement" to the end of purging themselves of inadequacies and putting on a higher state of being. The bodhisattva (like a vulnerable deity) thus becomes a model of "being-toward" others that ruptures widespread practices of "being-for-self," which privilege the egocentric performance of hope and desire (Hatem loc 475–82).

As I said earlier, the sonosopher, as a figure who can be seen as reiterating the vulnerability assumed by the bodhisattva and the wounded god in his performative posture, can expose close observers to their always unfolding nature as individuals and communities. So exposed to and by these vulnerable figures, we can react as wounded animals do by taking a defensive stance and withdrawing from the hazards of deep engagement with Self, Other, and world; or we can learn to respond with grace, to acknowledge and to address, as best we can, the givenness of vulnerability: how every

being and thing we experience, as well as how our experience of other beings and things, is always already at risk of injury and/or dissolution, a risk that comes to us unbidden. Change and decay are, after all, critical events in the universe. As Mahayana Buddhism tells it, we inhabit a burning house. Even so, the Buddhist parable goes, we're distracted from "the fires of birth, aging, sickness, [. . .] death, care, suffering, foolishness, [and] misunderstanding" by the "games" we make of "greed and attachment." Not content just to observe as we're "seared and consumed" by our delusions, though, benevolent Others—like the bodhisattva and the wounded god—offer themselves as prototypes of salvation: "playthings" meant to "lure" us from the house into a new state of being in the world and being-toward others ("Simile and Parable"). Said differently: such beings seem intent on tricking us into finding ourselves.

"Opening and opening and opening"

Narratives that depict benevolent beings who maintain an intimate relationship with and radical obligation to humanity—like those offered in the bodhisattva story, the extended hand of deity presented in Isaiah and 1 Nephi, Joseph Smith's divine anthropology, and the sonosopher's reiteration of this posture—seem intended to draw observers of those narratives into more empathic ways of being in the world, of responding to our species' shared situation, and of more fully being-with and being-toward others. Such stories—acts of *poietic* consciousness—can be read as calling observers not to turn their backs on human cruelty, injustice, sorrow, or suffering but to face our shared crises together and to work with others to alleviate them. In this sense, these figures challenge observers to take up what theologian David F. Ford calls the "endless process of learning to live with each

other" in the midst of "messy, complicated" realities that emerge from our existence in a universe in which nothing is invulnerable, including concepts of immortality (35). As I've spent time considering the narrative and/or lived presence of benevolent Others and considered their implications for human interaction and my thinking about the acts of *poiesis*, especially of sonosophy, where I see such vulnerability reiterated in Caldiero's sound-word-gesture-image, I've been drawn to something theologian Walter Brueggemann has said regarding the cultural work of poetic language and metaphors.

Brueggemann spoke with radio host Krista Tippett in 2011 about his concept of the prophetic imagination, which I see as a mode of *poietic* consciousness that was at play in Joseph Smith's theology-making and that is at play in sonosophy, both of which represent the effort (to borrow from Tippett) "to translate between the world as it is and the world as it might be" and to thereby stir within observers visions of a world that could exist beyond unquestioning acceptance of and participation in oppressive power structures. During their conversation, Brueggeman said that poetry is "so important" to the development of healthy spiritual lives and communities because it "just keeps opening and opening and opening." Instead of trying—as creeds and dogma do—to pin down and flatten out ideas, to limit a text's or a community's interpretive possibilities, or to narrow the "conceptual frame[s]" through which people view the world, poetry and metaphor participate in and draw vitality from the polysemic nature of language. They remain susceptible to diverse conceptual ecologies, they sustain the hermeneutic richness of texts and communities, and they expand and augment observers' conceptual frames, bringing new life and the grace of difference into individual and communal bodies. As a poet extends a hand to others (literally or figuratively), unfolding herself and her vision

of the world before an audience, she can be seen as inviting them to open themselves in return, to share her experience and concerns, and to recognize and sustain the reciprocal connections that make our species, our communities, and our environments vital.

The view that poetry, per Brueggemann, keeps opening and opening and opening concepts and relationships and that it fosters a hermeneutics of vulnerability among bodies is manifest in sonosophy. For instance, Caldiero shows how readily poetry can rupture with and augment ordinary relationships and the stream of everyday speech on the occasions he interacts with others and, putting on what I read as the maker's disposition as trickster figure, begins to decompose sentences into single words, words into what some might consider gibberish, and gibberish into a chant—or vice versa. He embodied the former pattern in his response offered to a student during a 2008 visit to an alternative high school in Delta, Utah. Caldiero was there, as he had been many times before, to lead a poetry workshop for students. After he concluded the workshop, a student raised his hand to ask a question. Caldiero acknowledged the raised hand and the student said, "When we walked in, you asked us all what was poetry to us. Well," he continued, "I wanna know what's poetry to *you*?" Amid assenting calls and laughter from several other students, Caldiero rejoined, "You really wanna know?" To which the student responded, "I really would like to know." "Alright," Caldiero said, looking at the student and nodding his head just enough for the nod to be noticeable. The classroom went silent as he squared his eyes with the back wall and took a few breaths before giving his answer, during which he kept his eyes wide and fast on the wall.

His response began in the cadence of ordinary speech, but in the third line of the poem (as I've represented it here) he slipped into a two-beat per line rhythm, with the

first beat stressed and the second unstressed. Not every beat necessarily corresponded with the syllables in a line, however. For instance, when Caldiero spoke “open” (in line eight below), /o/ fell on the stressed beat while /pen/ fell between beats. The utterance didn’t proceed, then, based on the tongue’s movement from syllable to syllable but on its movement among cadences: from the cadence of ordinary speech to a two-count time signature to the irregular rhythms of a chant:

POetry

to ME—

I-S

WHE-N—

I—

SEE—

A-nd

Open—

AOW-N—

TI-ME

EE-istu

AH-nay

MO-nay

EE-nee

AOWnoo-**HOO**nay-**AH**nrrrrrr— “uhm”

Breaking quickly from the /uhm/, with which he departed his two-beat rhythm, Caldiero took a deep breath and released it with force into the next breath-length line of his chant,

dropping his chest and shoulders and driving his head forward and lower jaw up into the first stressed beat of the line:

HEEEENAHRRRRROOORRRREEEOOORRRREEEEENAYOOO

RRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRRROOM

His utterance punctuated by student laughter, he repeated this process with slight variations and an increase in volume twice more, weaving his vowels around a drawn-out guttural /r/ (an extended groan), his head tilting back and his unblinking expression becoming more trancelike with each repetition. As he completed the chant, he looked back to the student who had asked the question and, with a nod, settled into his normal posture as he said, "And it relaxes me" ("What is Poetry").

Much like meditation or prayer can release a person from anxieties, Caldiero's response suggests that poetry can release those who make it from the tension and stress of everyday living, of the demands made on our faculties by our rootedness in "time": by the temporal events that constitute our lives. He can be seen as enacting this shamanic, *poietic* opening of the self and human temporality when he voiced the verbal unit between "open" and "time," an utterance with no clear referent. To my hearing, it approximated the form and function of *Om*, a "sacred syllable" found in Indian scriptures that represents "the primordial sound from which all other sounds and creation emerge" (Kumar et al). Caldiero echoed this syllable and suggested that it may have a place in his *poiesis* in a 1999 interaction with television producer Nyk Fry, as featured on Fry's show *FluiD Television*. "I'm a maker," Caldiero said.

my FAvorite LEtter Is

A-*h*— (Bernhard and Low)

Elsewhere he's connected this letter with its Indian roots. Talking with friend and journalist Scott Carrier in the late 2000s about a painting that features a figure with an open mouth from which emanates a blue stream that contains three large lowercase a's, Caldiero said, "The word [in the painting] is 'Ram' [<r>AH-m—], which is the great name of God. [. . .] It starts 'Rama, Rama, Ramakrishna." Then he intoned each letter of "Ram," a speech act during which he drifted into a chant weaving /r/ and /m/ around the open vowel ("Words").

Nineteenth-century mystic and yogi Ramakrishna Paramahamsa says in his eponymous gospel, that this sound—"Om"—"is Brahman," meaning that the sacred syllable embodies "in the form of sound" the Brahman, the Supreme Being, the Ultimate Reality from which all things emerge (Klostermaier 56). This "eternal Word," as Ramakrishna calls it, mediates between that atemporal reality and the bounded material world, extending beyond the shape of any single speech act into the ontological field of all utterance across time and space. By this conception it's the creative principle—the *poietic* agency—by which things are called into being. Uttered by practitioners of Indian religions (particularly Hinduism) in their meditative quest to transcend the demands of temporality, this "primeval mantra" is constituted by the union of three letters: *a*, *u*, and *m*, which respectively signify wakefulness, dreaming, and "deep sleep." Taken together, the Word signifies "the transcendent state" during which a person can rise above the transience of workaday concerns and open their being to the demands of more vital entanglements (Klostermaier 56–7).

As an expressive unit, Om reflects such reaching for transcendence and

wholeness—for mystical union—in that it involves "the whole process of articulation" (Kumar et al). The utterance vibrates in the chest as air passes through and gets shaped by the verbal apparatus: from the lungs through the throat and mouth held open during the speech act to the rounded lips closing around the oral cavity, channeling sound into the nasal fossa where it circulates in the head. Filling the chest through the head with the mantra's vibrational energy, the verbal gesture spans, holds together, and emanates outward from the body's grounds of phonetic production. So doing, it has potential to focus attention inward, on the vital organs (especially the heart, lungs, and brain), on the field of individual consciousness, and on the body's relational base, its language-making system. Strains of neuro-cognitive and neurophysiological research suggest that the inward focus brought about by producing—or even to a degree listening to—repetitions of the Om sound can re-center, steady, and clarify a person's cognitive, emotional, and perceptual awareness, increasing "physiological alertness" and "sensitivity to sensory transmission" (Kumar et al) as well as "recruit[ing] neural systems implicated in emotional empathy" (Kumar, Guleria, and Khetrapal 432). More, the "rhythmic formulas" of making or hearing yoga mantras (like Om or the other chanting Caldiero often does) and certain prayers (like those associated with the rosary), tend to slow the breathing and enhance and synchronize cardiovascular rhythms, such as heart rate and blood pressure; this tendency contributes to the mental, emotional, and physical fitness of the person (see Bernardi et al). In this light, when someone practices or is exposed to Om meditation—or to the rhythmic acts of chanting or poetry-making—she could become more aware of and attuned to her somatic rhythms; and because other bodies associated with these *poietic* events potentially experience the same external rhythms, she may

somatically couple with those who share the events with her.

From here it follows that communal language-making events, like shared moments of prayer and the public performance of mantras and poetry, have potential to contribute to the overall health of individual bodies as well as to the health of communal bodies. For Caldiero (as poet-seer, *makar*, shaman, and sonosopher), it appears that poetry flows from and through the somatic openness invoked by these collective experiences. The utterance he offered the Delta students suggests that, for him, poetry may come into being as he contemplates and makes himself vulnerable to the temporal events—the "time"—that he shares and shapes with others and for which he thus shares responsibility. During his Delta performance, he could be seen as bearing the communal burden of language-making in the generous, self-revealing response—the figurative extended hand—he offered to the student's query, which was itself a response to the question Caldiero asked when he first presented himself to the group. By invoking a question that invited students to consider with him the personal and social functions of poetry then by yielding to the effects of his own language, as manifest in the question inspired by his question, he approached language-making as an ethical act. His performance showed students that words do real work in the world: that they act upon and influence our own and other bodies. As such, it can be seen as an embodiment of the notion that language users are entangled in complex webs of personal and communal agency that shape and are shaped by our interactions, our relationships, and the posture we take toward our interactions and relationships and the demands they make on our being. Which is to say that our ways of making language—of reaching out to others with words—are constituted (in part) by our approach to being in the world and being-with

and being-toward others, and vice versa.

Caldiero's concern with the ethical aspects of human behavior and interactions was echoed in the Delta classroom by a banner hung at eye level on the wall before him. It read: "I am responsible for my . . ." It could be that, with the breaths he took before offering the students his impromptu *ars poetica*, he was taking in that language, considering the many obligations he carried as a human being: as husband, father, sonosopher, artist, scholar, teacher. And it could be that his poem, offered in the context of his service to the students and to their school, was his way of filling out the ellipsis: "I am responsible for my language and its presence in the world and influence on others." Or even: "I am responsible for my presence in this room and in this world and for how that presence affects others." Whatever the case, it's clear that those high school students made demands on Caldiero's being and that he took it upon himself to respond to those demands by giving his presence and his language to them in hopes of being a positive influence in their lives and fostering an experience through which they might open themselves to other views of the world. Hence his reply to the student's question, which was ultimately just his own question fed back into the workshop discourse by the student. But by taking responsibility for those words, by considering them as seriously as he may have expected the students to consider them, and by allowing himself (it seems) to be as vulnerable to his own language as he may have wanted them to be vulnerable to it, Caldiero, intentionally or not, epitomized the writing on the wall and enacted the somatic relationships that spin us both inward and outward, into deeper introspection as well as into deeper kinship with others and the places we construct and inhabit together.

Conference of the Birds (iii): Considering the *Koru*

Spirals, in nature as in art, suggest the accumulation and dissipation of energy. For instance, the young, tightly-coiled fern frond accumulates vital resources from soil via roots and stem as the plant emerges from the ground. As it unfurls, dancing in open air, it translates these resources into movement and growth. Māori art often references the unfurling fern frond, called the *koru*, meaning "loop" or "coil" ("Koru"). As a symbol the koru represents "latent and potential energy, the life principle, light, and enlightenment" (Henry and Pene 235). It also "conveys the idea of perpetual movement" in the interactions among its embedded circles, while the "inward coil suggests a return to the point of origin" (Charles Royal). As such the koru speaks to the unfolding of time, memory, relationships, and life in its manifold forms and situations.

I've held the koru in mind since I returned home from New Zealand. Maybe it's the spiral's divine proportion that holds my curiosity. Maybe it's the symbolism Māori culture attributes to the coil. Maybe it's my desire to connect with Grandpa, the botanist, by opening myself to this image of plant life. Whatever the case, the koru represents for me a point of meditation and *poiesis*. I feel my intellectual, emotional, physical, and spiritual tugs and pulls in the way the young frond holds its leaves in the inner coil even as the plant's unfolding loosens that coil, pulling everything outward into open air, into light. The kinesis of the coil pulls me toward my center, toward that space where the cosmos gather, where my pulse settles into the pulse of the earth and the universe, where I envision myself standing where the Makers stand, unfolding for all time.

That's what I'll say happens on my more mystical days, anyway. Most days my center consists of mundane spaces—like the kitchen table, where I worked when I had no

home office. Where I listened to my young daughters in the living room playing and fighting and learning their way through a new piano piece or a book that was just beyond their vocabulary. Where they spread their homework and we worked through their questions together. Where they passed as they left the house to play in the backyard and where they returned with handfuls of rocks and dandelions, laughter and tears and muffled complaints about some sibling indiscretion or other. Where our family gathers in the midst of each day's chaos to eat together and be renewed and sustained by our daily communion. Where I sit with a constant ear toward their presence.

<water and>: "maker[s] too stood in the very space I stand in"

The koru-like unfurling of my encounters with Grandpa's question mark; with Mormonism's *poietic* narratives, including Joseph Smith's quest for mystical union and his renovated concept of God; with the bodhisattva; and with Caldiero's epiphanic lyric, classroom *ars poetica*, and accumulative wor(l)d making has pulled me inward while propelling me outward. It has opened my *poietic* consciousness and attuned me to the at once generative and disruptive work of *poietic* events—work I see taking place in Caldiero's performances, in particular when he coperforms with other makers or is understood as assuming the Maker's disposition. His 2014 collaborative performance at Robert Smithson's earthwork, *Spiral Jetty*, in Utah's Great Salt Lake can be seen as one instance where he enacted the generative, disuptive nature of *poietic* processes. *Spiral Jetty* was produced in 1970 by a construction crew under Smithson's direction. The crew moved 6,500 tons of basalt boulders from the Rozel Peninsula on the lake's northeastern shore into a 1,500-foot long counter-clockwise coil in the shallows. Smithson's intention

with his earthworks, including *Spiral Jetty*, was, he says, "to take on the persona of a geologic agent" (298): something that could act upon and in concert with the landscape in ways that highlight the work "of accumulation and displacement" done by natural change processes instead of trying to overcome or to mitigate those processes (*Spiral Jetty* 3). In what I interpret as an attempt to meet Smithson on these grounds, Caldiero and his coperformers—a couple dozen or so students and faculty members from UVU's Department of Philosophy and Humanities—walked the coil, reciting a text titled "<water and>," which Caldiero had composed. The recorded performance, as presented in an excerpt posted to *YouTube* by UVU student Jordan Goodrich, begins with a single male voice repeating the word "time" at roughly two-second intervals against a background of indistinct chattering:

tI-me

tI-me

tI-me

tI-me

tI-me

<tI-me>

Between the second and third repetitions, another male voice becomes audible.

Performing at a different cadence than the first voice, the second speaks in the gaps between and overlaps the words made by the first:

tI-me	
tI-me	
	wAW<der>
tI-me	wAWder
	and wAW
tI-me	der
	and then wAW
tI-me	der
	in wAWder
<tI-me>	
	wAWder

As the second voice utters the last syllable in “in water,” other voices emerge on the recording, drowning out the first speaker’s sixth “time,” which is barely audible. This chorus of intermingling speakers swells for several seconds as its many voices repeat “water,” interspersed with “and,” “in,” and an occasional “circles,” at different cadences and intervals and with different tones; then it recedes. With the chorus ebbing, the first speaker becomes audible again—still repeating “time” at two-second intervals—until the other voices re-emerge and their reiterative utterance accumulates, swallowing the first voice and growing in intensity until the recording ends.

The video paired with the audio in the recorded performance shows that this

second swell was captured from the jetty's inner coil, where the performers had all gathered after walking the spiral in a diffuse single-file line. To my hearing, their concentrated language-making invoked the vibrational energy of water meeting earth, from its lapping at the shore to shearing continental shelves with long-cycle waves. Even though I wasn't present during the event, the intensity of the group's accumulative utterance struck me as I was preparing to represent the performance here. Listening to the recording through earbuds, my breathing settled into the first speaker's repetition of "time" (especially after I had listened to the recording multiple times): I exhaled when he spoke and inhaled between words. This slowed my heart rate and put me more in touch with my somatic rhythms. Yet, as more speakers became audible, as voice overlaid voice overlaid voice, and as the recording audio moved between ears, making me feel like I was moving among the performers, the murmuring unsettled me. I grew anxious as my heart rate increased at the circling and collision of sounds. My somatic response intensified during the second swell of voices, which was longer and louder than the first. The vibrations working in stereo within, through, and upon my skull resonated in my sinus cavities and seemed to converge just behind my eyes; and the sustained circling and collision of vibrations in my head caused moments of vertigo.

Based on my experience with the recording, I suspect that some participants may have encountered similar effects while performing that day on the jetty's inner coil. Granted, whereas my encounter with the event was confined to a single representation of part of the performance filtered through a recording device then through my hearing apparatus as I listened in the relative quiet of my living room or car, for the performers the encounter would have been distributed across the senses as they made and received

sounds mediated by the actions of rock, sand, water, wind, and flesh. Occupying the instability of the inner coil's rock-peppered sand; mingling with other bodies' heat, movements, tones, and smells; exposed to brine-heavy winds and water lapping at rock and sand, they were exposed to the complete performance in its native context while I encountered it only in part and stripped of context. It seems possible, though, that the concentration of voices circling around and colliding with each other, the surroundings, and people's bodies could have converged on the performers as individuals and as a group, perhaps augmenting and enhancing for them the sensory richness of the event and the biological, geological, cultural, and performance ecologies they inhabited and coperformed that day. Such perceptual enhancement could have further stirred some to concentrate on their shared role as stewards responsible for sustaining the earth's agency and receiving and reciprocating its unconditional givenness. By so centering attention on and at the inner coil, the thing Caldiero et al made seemed meant to mirror and converse with the thing Smithson et al made, which mirrored and conversed with the things the earth had made and was making and the complex web of relationships by which it was made, being made, and sustained.

I read this collaborative effort as a group of language-makers coperforming the creative act with an artwork and its maker as the coperformers occupied and reiterated the somatic space inhabited by Smithson and company during the acts of making. In this light, as they were brought together by the workings of Caldiero's *poietic* consciousness, they stood at the site of an ongoing *poietic* event. More, during this event they produced an original response to the jetty. By "original response" I mean two things: one, a personal or artistic reaction never before experienced or performed as the group may

have experienced or coperformed it; and two, a personal or artistic reaction grounded in the species' prime-itive situation, in its deep biological, cultural, and spiritual histories. The former notion speaks to the nature of originality and innovation, creative events during which a maker gathers raw materials—like basalt rock, words, or bodies—into some new thing: an idea, an artwork, a story, a poem, a song, a performance, a tool, a constructed environment. Original work never emerges *ex nihilo*: something can't be produced out of nothing. Rather, as documentary filmmaker Kirby Ferguson argues in his short film on creativity, "Everything is a remix." Elaborating on his claim, he observes, "Creation requires influence. Everything we make is a remix of existing creations, our lives, and the lives of others." Like the *makar*, we imitate, transform, and combine extant materials to make new things or to make old things new. To be original, then, to be creative, is to open ourselves to the possibilities of the stuff that surrounds us and that constitutes our lives and relationships and to appropriate, tinker with, and subvert that stuff as we build with and build upon it.

Through his reiteration of an expansive seeric tradition—as suggested by his affiliation with the *makar* and shaman—Caldiero seems to exemplify this *poietic* process and to thereby bear witness of the human drive to make things, which runs deep. In fact, it's "in our blood," Claxton says, encoded in our DNA. Over millennia we've been "crafted by evolution" into "inveterate makers," he continues, into a species of "natural-born engineers" who manufacture tools and compulsively shape and reshape our surroundings to meet our immediate and abiding desires and needs. The species' biological conception as makers (whom Claxton labels *Homo fabricans*) is bound up in our conception as thinkers (*Homo sapiens*) (loc 146–50). While Claxton asserts that "the

sapiens grew out of the *fabricans*, and still relies deeply upon it" (loc 151), others, like rhetorician Kenneth Burke in his influential essay, "Definition of Man," argue the opposite: that the human capacity for "symbol-making" and "symbol-using"—for abstract thinking—developed prior to the species' knack for "mechanical invention" and "toolmaking"—for concrete doing (6, 14). It may be, however, that the species' intellectual faculties and manual expertise developed together. Both are, after all, modes of somatic action and intelligence and are inseparable in modern humans. Our ability to manipulate "real material," to configure and reconfigure it through "skillful, muscular involvement," is of-a-piece with our intellectual capacities, without which we wouldn't be able to conceive new uses for or new ways of composing that material or of considering our relationship with the world (Claxton 3010). In this light, human innovation derives from the always unfolding encounter between the species' highly-advanced modes of cognition and material-manipulation; and, per Bickerton-cum-Darwin, human cognition may have derived from early hominins' "continued use of a highly-developed language" (Darwin 105), which likely evolved over millennia in response to pressing environmental demands and in conjunction with, among other things, environmental change, advanced cognitive behavior, social intelligence, and toolmaking (Bickerton, *More than Nature* 62, 96, 102).

I interpret sonosophy as an effort to explore, embody, and elaborate on these human capacities for language, imagination, and material-manipulation, which contribute to the species' "cosmoplastic" tendencies: to our proclivity for world-making. Oral literature scholar John D. Niles asserts that, through our "world-making ability," as manifest in the many layers of narrative and culture we embed ourselves in, "an

otherwise unexceptional biological species has become a much more interesting thing, *Homo narrans*" (3): the story-made and story-making animal, or as philosopher Charles Taylor names us, "the language animal." Through the acts of language-making—which would include *poietic* events and the workings of *poietic* consciousness—we "create [our]selves as human beings," calling material and immaterial realities into existence and "thereby transform[ing] the world of nature into shapes not known before" (Niles 3). From this perspective language isn't simply a tool for leveraging meaning into or out of a situation or for sharing information or accomplishing pre-established goals; neither is it just a technology whereby we simplify our lives and make more efficient and productive use of the stuff that surrounds us. It is, rather, a constitutive force shaping and reshaping our being, our surroundings, and our ways of knowing even at it's being shaped and reshaped itself. Like Caldiero and the expansive ecology of makers he can be seen as reiterating and unfolding with his performative posture as sonosopher (including the treasure seer and the benevolent Other), all language-makers may stand at the crux of this perpetual unfolding, made susceptible to the *poietic* influence of language and other language-users by virtue of our deep biological and cultural heritage. But as sonosophy seems to maintain, we may not be able to fully inhabit this space unless we learn to recognize the nature of this influence and the demands it makes on our bodies, our lives, and our relationships, then to give way—as the vulnerable deity and the bodhisattva can be understood as giving way—to the disruptive, generative force of that influence, to make a place in our being, our consciousness, and our relationships for *poietic* work: for the work of *poiesis*, of making, of poetry.

c. The Laboring Poet

"I Wanna Speak for the House": Enacting a *Poietic* Document of Deep Earth

Breath, for Caldiero, is tantamount to *poiesis*. As breathing does for all of us, it sustains and invigorates his body, grounding his language-making in an expansive somatic ecology. More, it seems to call him again and again to the disruptive and infinitely generative work of being in relationship with the earth and its inhabitants. He traces his intellectual fascination with breathing to his birth, which, he says in *sonosuono*, "nearly ended up being [his] death" (30). Because he was a large baby, weighing "five and a half kilos" (just over twelve pounds), and because his mother was small, his delivery would have placed tremendous stress on both bodies. In a short prose meditation on his birth and breathing, he recalls once overhearing his father talking about the experience: the women sent Dad from the house because baby Alissandru "wasnt [sic] going to survive"; so the father went to his workshop and began making his infant son a coffin, channeling his grief into his craft. "Then," Caldiero says, "they called him. The midwife had worked with me and I started to breathe." This statement invokes the image of a woman massaging an infant, trying to stimulate his respiratory reflex, using her knowledge and experienced hands to persuade the new body to do its work. Years after the midwife's hands performed their craft on Caldiero's flesh, drawing him from the womb and coaxing him to breathe, they began their symbolic work on his being as emblems of her fidelity to life and his initiation into the tonic potential of kinship bonds. He points to the abiding influence of her touch in a short lyric also included in *sonosuono*:

> As an old woman, the midwife who delivered me came
> to Brooklyn to spend her remaining years with her son.

When I met her

as an adult,

I couldnt [sic] stop looking

at her hands. (62)

The midwife's work on Caldiero—again, characterized by her hands and his fascination with them—seems to have begun unfolding to him the moment he first overheard his birth story and learned about the midwife's vital role in helping him breathe. "I've wondered a lot about that," he says in his prose meditation, pointing to the birth narrative's grasp on his mind, an influence that abides, he maintains, "because breathing has been important to me"—in the same sense that it's important to all bodies, of course, but more because "it's the focus" of his life's work. In fact, he observes, "that first experience with that first breath" may have in part inspired his *poietic* focus on breathing (30).

His conception of the event, anyway, as mediated by his father's retelling of it, appears to reconnect him with his point of origin and to give shape to what I call his performance ecology, which can be interpreted as his always expanding place of making: an open-ended network of performance traditions and communal practices that he seems to inhabit and critique with his work. In the same manner as he claims his *poietic* focus on breath gives voice to the event that brought him to being, he can be seen as attempting

to "speak for the house" whose being derives from that event, to verbally construct and flesh out the space—language, in general; poetry, in particular—made possible and vital for him by his initial struggle to breathe. "I wanna speak for the house," he writes elsewhere in *sonosuono,* for the somatic and verbal habitation

> whose heart is a room with
>
> me coming out onto the bed
>
> from my mother's womb deep
>
> blue almost dying for that
>
> first breath so hard to take
>
> in and the pain helped me to
>
> remember (33)

Recalling the pain of his first breath as that pain comes to him through narrative means, through his clear desire to make language, and through somatic memory, he offers in this poem what I interpret as the heart—the crux—of sonosophy: the sound-word-gesture-image of him emerging into the world "deep / blue," starved for breath. In the world of this narrative, baby Alissandru is always on the verge of dying; and Caldiero's wondering over that scene—that *poietic* event—seems to expose him to the relationships that keep

him vital, in particular with his mother and the midwife who persuaded his body to breathe. In this interpretation of sonosophy, language is both laboring mother and midwife, bringing Alissandru into being and tending to his life processes and urging him to breathe, to be with his body and its needs and surroundings. In this view, language can also be read as his dwelling place: an abundant ecosystem that's bound up in the biological processes and relationships through which the natural world comes into being and that constitutes, nurtures, and sustains his somatic presence in and engagement with that world. More, Caldiero's *poiesis* and performance repertoire make it clear that language is the always unfolding product of laboring bodies.

Caldiero seems to model the work of laboring bodies every time he performs, but that labor becomes most apparent when he chants, groans, and breathes during a speech act. In his "Seeing a body" performance, for instance, he pointed to and enacted the idea that the "surety of [a body's] breathing" is a sign that the body is still bound to this earth and its inhabitants. I take his performance as, in part, an expression concerned with breathing because of the way he framed the poem-proper with acts of deliberate respiration—he opened by taking three audible breaths into the microphone and closed with three groans—and because of the way his breath was manifest in his rising and falling abdomen during his declamation. Watching his recorded performance, I hear how he drew breath and see how he held it in his body to support his utterance and I feel the urge to mimic his breathing, to inhale to fullness then to release. As I inhale, I take pleasure in the friction between trachea and air, in lungs expressed against ribs, in my chest settled against full expansion, and in my heart accelerating to boost its output in response to blood rushing to lungs. I take similar pleasure as I exhale—in lungs

expressing breath, ribs and shoulders relaxing against released pressure, my heart rate slowing as the lungs' blood reserve moves to the heart. Caldiero's breathing would have done the same work in his body; and this work may have resonated with observers, inducing those who were observing closely toward increased awareness of the body's perpetual giving and receiving. With him projecting his voice from a foundation of deep breathing, as manifest by his rising and falling abdomen, his language-making was grounded—as all language-making is grounded—in this notion of somatic givenness.

His performance may have further enacted the reciprocal relationships within and among bodies and between bodies and their environment with the sequence of guttural rumblings he made at the end. After closing the /i/ in his final "body," he produced three drawn-out growls; he held the second longer than the first and the third longer than the second. They rose from deep in his throat and rolled around the lower limit of his register. As I hear his groans, they approximated the function of elephant rumblings: low frequency vocalizations called "infrasounds" that vibrate below the range of human hearing, travel farther than high frequency sounds, and reverberate through solid material. Because elephant species inhabit large and varied territories, from dense forests to the savanna, they've developed the capacity to communicate with each other across great distances and through vegetation using infrasonic vocalizations. Because infrasounds "couple with" and "propagate in the ground," where they maintain intensity longer than their airborne counterparts, rumblings produced by one elephant or herd can be heard *and* felt (via the feet, trunk, and ears) by other elephants (O'Connell-Rodwell 287–8). While Caldiero's groaning wasn't infrasonic, it could be that in its electronically-amplified state it coupled with and spread through the ground—at least for a short distance—so

observers may have at once heard it and felt it from head to feet. In this way his whole-bodied speech act can be understood as an invitation into a whole-bodied response to the earth's givenness as it's offered, coming into being through active *poietic* processes that shape our bodies, minds, communities, environments, etc., on micro- and macro-levels.

With the ground at his back vibrating with movement and life, his body can be interpreted as a medium for channeling and expressing Earth's voice. When his body is conceived as such a medium, Caldiero's *poiesis* comes into conversation with scientists and artists. Astronomers and astrophysicists have channeled Earth's voice from space using equipment included on NASA's two Voyager spacecraft, which returned recordings of the electromagnetic vibrations given off by Earth. Although these aren't acoustic vibrations, because they oscillate at the same frequencies as acoustic waves, scientists have been able to translate the data into audio files and to hear what Earth "sounds" like from space. The recordings feature cycles of glassy ringing against shorter sequences of varying-pitched clicks and strings of medium-high pitched decrescendos against a droning lull, a combination of sounds that recalls whale song and the movement of water (NASA). While such recordings have offered an extraterrestrial sense of Earth's voice, geologists and other terrestrial-focused scientists have tuned in to a constant hum that plays in the "global background" of our earthly soundscape (Kurrle and Widmer-Schnidrig 1). They attribute this hum to too-far-away-to-see transportation hubs or industrial plants, tinnitus, electromagnetic waves (as can emanate from power lines or radio towers), synesthetic cross-talk between the brain's sensory pathways, the effects of sleep paralysis, phantom humming instigated through repeated exposure to low-frequency noises, "long-period surface waves in the oceans" that propagate through the

water and pound the ocean floor, and "atmospheric pressure variations" that act on Earth's surface and all that occupies it (Leventhall, Pelmear, and Benton 17–23; Kurrle and Widmer-Schnidrig 1).

Artists have also tuned in to Earth's hum. In 2013 Amsterdam-based multimedia artist Lotte Geeven collaborated with a team of scientists and engineers to send a geophone (a device that translates ground movement into voltage, which can then be translated into acoustic frequencies) and an ultrasonic microphone (which records frequencies beyond the range of human hearing) down one of the world's deepest holes (Stinson): the nearly 30,000 foot deep Kontinentales Tiefbohrprogramm der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (KTB) Borehole in Windischeschenbach, Germany (Bram et al 10). Her intention with the venture, she says in her artist's statement on the project, was to pursue "a question of an existential and poetic nature: 'What does the earth sound like?'" (Geeven). The question's existential nature arises from what it assumes about sound: that it plays a vital role in the development of our being-in and being-with the world. As neuroscientist Seth Horowitz observes in *The Universal Sense: How Hearing Shapes the Mind*, "The world we live in is full of energy acting on matter," and this interaction between energy and matter causes vibrations, which "can transfer energy and information to a receiver who is listening." Because "sound is everywhere"—no place on Earth is silent, even deep below its surface—and because we are thus "surrounded by" and "embedded in" a dynamic auditory environment, we (like all living things, including our evolutionary ancestors) have been biologically "tuned to pick up information of interest and use" to us. Within the biological constraints that limit our hearing apparatus, we attend to what sounds grab us at any given moment and dismiss the rest as noise (2–

5). Hence the poetic nature of Geeven's question and Caldiero's project. Just as poetry and poetic language disrupt ordinary streams of thinking and speaking and seek to tune readers and listeners to their own somatic rhythms, an explicit encounter with the earth's "vibrational energy" (to borrow a term from Horowitz [20]) has potential to influence how we perceive and interact with the planetary system we inhabit and how we acknowledge its influence on our being.

Listening to the "poetic document of deep earth" that her venture produced, Geeven seems to have been moved to awe by what she heard on the recording: a low, steady rumble that caused the hair on her arms to stand up and that brought her both comfort and discomfort ("Deep Earth"). The tension between these states of being, along with the somatic response the sound evoked from her, suggest an encounter with the sublime—something whose workings impress upon the observer a sense of what philosopher Edmund Burke calls "delightful horror" or "tranquility tinged with terror." In his well-known treatise on the sublime and the beautiful, Burke ascribes the arousal of these unsettled emotions to "astonishment" at having encountered a thing that has power both to consume us and to move us beyond indifference toward our surroundings (129, 130). Geeven's expression of awe at the "immanence" and "mystery" of deep earth—which is always there, always influencing us despite our inability to enter, inhabit, or even see it—seems intended to evoke similar emotions in those who encounter her existential, poetic project. By bringing listeners to the mouth of Earth and trying to speak for the house we mutually inhabit, she can be seen as drawing us into communion with and contemplation of its mystery and its movements.

Caldiero may have had a similar hope with his "Seeing a body" performance, as

with his collaborative "<water and>" performance at *Spiral Jetty*—and for that matter with sonosophy in general, which, as I've argued, self-consciously speaks from the biological and environmental grounds of the hominin presence on Earth. In this sense, sonosophy seems to be concerned, on one hand, with constructing, inhabiting, and advocating for the earth as an expansive place of making and as a thing being made, and on the other, with mirroring those processes in performance. Caldiero can be understood as taking up this work from his own place of making when he performs speech acts that appear as reiterations of the earth system's agency and constituent ecologies and that in the process bear witness to their withness: to the fact that we can't escape our essential relationship with them and that their health is vital to our well-being. In this regard, I think especially of his "<water and>" performance where he and his small community of language-makers walked *Spiral Jetty*, uttering Caldiero's poem in way that can be heard echoing the earth's vibrational energy, which resonates with our bodies and their processes of interaction and exchange. I also think of his "seeing a body" performance, where with his back to the ground he could be seen reiterating Earth's hum with each groan he expressed and thereby foregrounding the system's vibrational energy, which flows from and through the complex web of relationships the earth enables and in which the earth itself is embedded: an expansive ecology that gives the planet its unique voice. Caldiero's *poiesis* never seems far from this acoustic ecology. He can't, of course, escape it; none of us can. It is, to cite Horowitz, "as basic as life itself" (2). Yet, because sound is everywhere, playing a defining though often unnoticed role in our being and experience, we may tune its ubiquity and influence out as white noise to the real work of living. As such we sometimes, as Horowitz says, need to be reminded of "the sensory richness in

which we are embedded." We sometimes "need to be quiet" and to "just listen" to the places we inhabit and the people we inhabit them with (23). With its focus on elaborating "sonal practices in the context of language [. . .] as communion," I read sonosophy as a self-conscious attempt to hear, to come together and resonate with, and to bear witness of these people and places and the richness of shared sensory experience (Caldiero, "On the Origin").

Seeing-Hearing the Laboring Body

As I read Caldiero's *poiesis*, when he performed on and from and through the ground at the 350.org event, as well as during his "<water and>" performance and (though in less conspicuous ways) during each sonosophic event he has put on, he can be seen as having propagated the somatic connections we cultivate within our own bodies as we interact with other bodies and our environments as well as the somatic connections—the intersubjectivity—we cultivate with those bodies and our environments simply by virtue of being here. So doing he seems to have represented with his sound-word-gesture-image the somatic imprints we make in our daily walk and talk. As I've just argued, his own somatic imprint converses with the earth system's vibrational energies via his accumulative utterances, chanting, and groans, all of which sound as if they were emerging from a body at work or in distress. To my ears, his groans approach, in form and function, the groans of a laboring woman.

Addressing the effect vocalization can have on a woman's body during childbirth, theologian Lauren F. Winner suggests that groaning is a mode of pain relief as well as a means to "relax the woman's entire body" (loc 1863). Some midwives tell laboring

women, she relates, to "make a sound pitched low enough to vibrate your chest." One mother says that "[m]ooing was the only sort of deep moaning noise" that could ease her laboring body and another says her labor evoked "[d]eep guttural, almost animal-noises" that propagated as she produced them until she "soon had no control" over their coming (loc 1792–94). As the experience of these laboring mothers suggests, "animal breathing" releases somatic tension and this release in part relaxes the birth canal to ease the infant's passage from the womb (loc 1794). Groaning also expresses the mother's "need for assistance"; in this sense, vocalization is one way she reaches out to her companions (e.g., the baby, nurses, the doctor, a spouse, a birthing partner, etc.), seeking comfort and a sustaining presence in her distress (loc 1868). As such, it's a performance of her vulnerability. It exposes the emotional and mental rawness produced by the *poietic* event of pregnancy, labor, and delivery, during which her body ruptures with its autonomic status as an individual, becomes the host of another body, and in the process brings new life into being.

Considering the laboring mother as motif and my use of that image as means for interpreting Caldiero's animal breathing, I think of two related images from the Hebrew Bible, both of which speak to the mythic functions of breath as assumed by the sonosopher; one image appears in the second creation narrative presented in Genesis and the other appears in Deutero-Isaiah. In the second creation account, God forms the *adam*—Hebrew for "human" or "earthling"—"from the soil," then breathes life into the body, making the creature "a living being" (*NET*, Gen. 2.7; Hayes, "Lecture 3"). Religion scholar Christine Hayes points out that this narrative labels human beings as a "paradoxical mix of [. . .] earthly and divine elements." Human *poietic* acts, such as

childbirth and sonosophy, are likewise enlivened by paradox. As makers, we animate—we give breath and purpose to—our work when we manipulate materials, taking them in hand (as it were) and shaping them via *poietic* consciousness to communal ends. Bound to Earth through our somatic involvement in *poietic* work, the things we make often move us beyond here-and-now interests and concerns into extra-ordinary, ecstatic states of being where we can experience the sublime aspects of our existence and become attuned to otherwise unrepresented or neglected realities. This isn't to say that God is necessarily an unrepresented or neglected reality that humans must come to know and be in relation with or that the highest ends of creative work is to bring us into relation with the divine. Rather, the work of the maker—as of the laboring woman, the Creator-God depicted in Genesis, and the sonosopher—is to be an "agent of life" (Winner loc 1802). It's to bring discrete elements into intimate relation with one another (to embody them) and to lead the resulting relational networks (the bodies) into "the full light and radiation" of personal and communal awareness via somatically-emergent acts, like artworks, breathing, childbirth, and language (Whitehead). As a mythic figure, the creation narrative's Maker—who through the lens of Joseph Smith's theology-making collaborates with an expansive community of Makers in the ongoing work of creation—represents a being capable of using this *poietic* agency to produce and to people entire worlds through processes of arrangement, amalgamation, and recombination.

Lying on the ground during his "seeing a body" performance, breathing like a laboring mother and a Creator-God (as I interpret the act), Caldiero seems to have (intentionally or not) invoked the function of the mother's and the Maker's groans. His presence at the 350.org climate change event and his guttural performance can be

understood as expressions of distress at the realities of the anthropocene: "the [current] period of Earth's history during which humans have a decisive influence on the state, dynamics and future of the Earth system." As noted by the working group of scientists convened under the International Commission on Stratigraphy to study this influence, the collective activity of humans since perhaps the agricultural revolution, but at least since the industrial revolution, have "profoundly [and permanently] altered" "many geologically significant conditions and processes" (Zalasiewicz et al). Summarizing the situation, science writer Elizabeth Kolbert observes that these human-invoked changes include: "habitat destruction"; the introduction of invasive species into new environments, which disrupts the established ecosystem and can lead to widespread extinction of native species; "ocean acidification, which is changing the chemical makeup of the seas; and urbanization, which is vastly increasing rates of sedimentation and erosion." Speaking in his performance "from the earth's point of view," whence "the feet" (which mark our presence on and movements across the earth) represent "the whole body" (the expansive somatic ecology that constitutes our species' existence in and influence on the earth), Caldiero seemed to lament the earth's anthropocenic situation for himself. But he also seems to have been groaning for the Earth system, too, giving voice to the maternal planet that bore and has sustained him as well as to its unrepresented and threatened inhabitants and environments. So doing, he seemed to draw attention to the earth's situation and to call observers to support its *poietic* work—to live and to make language in ways that perpetually revise, augment, and sustain the communal bonds and the biological and cultural ecologies that revise, augment, and sustain our personal and mutual being-in the world.

"Into Deeper Aching": Breath and the Boast, the Howl, the Barbaric Yawp

The image of the laboring poet that I see reiterated in Caldiero's performative posture positions the work of making at the crux of human life and community. The figure invokes for me the poet's communal function, in particular as this function has developed in the context of primarily oral cultures, such as those out of which our epic poems emerged. In terms of literary form, an epic is a long poem that narrates the heroic journeys and deeds of a protagonist whose life and character exemplify the values of the poem's originating society. Epic poems were traditionally composed orally before a live audience who had gathered to experience or to re-experience the hero's adventures (I say re-experience because many listeners would have been familiar with the legends and story cycles around which the poet wove his particular narrative). Giving the event varying degrees of attention and receptivity and moving with the community vicariously through the hero's adventures, listeners could participate with the poet in the story's creation and elaboration. In the process, depending on how much attention listeners gave and how receptive they were, they could also likely feel the poet's language deeply, viscerally, as his voice washed over the crowd and resounded with their flesh, exciting the passions and evoking the senses' response. In these cultural circumstances, poetry and the processes by which it was made were shared by the community, grew out of the poet's breathing, and rooted in the connection among poets' and listeners' bodies. During poetry's communal moments, which enacted the essential kinship among poets and listeners, each party in the transaction may have had their individual and communal values and desires validated, overturned, and kept in check as, through the performance

event, they mutually recognized and committed to emulate the epic hero's strengths and learned how not to be via the hero's shortcomings. In this way poetry traditionally functioned as a physically offered and physically received means by which community members might gain shared experience and might confirm and maintain individual and communal values and desires.

While the traditional function of epic poets and poems in the primarily oral cultures of early modern societies has been muted in the emergence of literate cultures, which largely privilege the poet's individual genius as a writer of singular poems, poetry's communal function remains vital in the work of many poets. Caldiero, for instance, calls upon this function with his performative *poiesis* and he brings himself into conversation with other poets whose writing can be read as taking up similar work or at least as contributing to his own participation in it. As a public performer, for instance, he has offered entire programs[4] dedicated to putting on (he might call this "sonosophizing") the works of: William Blake, who sought "the mystical union of poet and reader" by infusing his poetry with the "thrill" of beautiful language that opens onto a "revelation" of something beyond the words (Damon xxv); Edgar Allan Poe, who didn't "discriminate between music and poetry," both of which flow from and seek to invoke the body's rhythms, and whose somatically-grounded poetry explores "poetic beauty, spirituality, and the quest for an ideal of love" (M. Anderson 493); Ezra Pound, whose invocation of the *makar* grounded his work in the pre-modern bard's function as community word-hoard and wielder of word-power (Stark 2); Dr. Seuss, "unacknowledged U.S. laureate of nonsense poetry," whose playful narratives, rhythmic verse structures, and experimentation with the sound of words have captured the imagination of children and

[4] Caldiero lists these public performances in his Curriculum Vitae.

adults alike (Nel 16); and the Futurist Poets of early 20th century Italy, who intended to bring about social and cultural revolution via "extreme artistic innovation and experimentation" ("A Brief Guide").[5] While the work of these makers spans two centuries and multiple countries and ranges wide in style and approach, it can all be seen as language made with communal ends in mind: of enacting, disrupting, and/or revising the dominant values and beliefs of those who received it with the possible objective of expanding individual and community awareness of and engagement in vital identity- and relationship-making processes.

Beyond this diverse group of makers with whom Caldiero has placed himself in conversation, I hear his work resonating with other contemporary sound-focused poets, two of whom have been associated with the title "sonosopher," though neither usage is connected to Caldiero's performative *poiesis*. These include experimental poet and composer Sten Hanson, sound poet Penn Kemp, ethnopoet Jerome Rothenberg, and hip hop/sound poet Tracie Morris. In 1998, Hanson released an album titled *The Sonosopher Retrospective*, which includes performances from across his career as an artist invested in exploring the wisdom of sound (hence his application of the term "sonosopher"). Much of Hanson's work explores the interplay between spoken text and sound, which he layered into polyphonic compositions that consisted of overlapping recordings of him speaking or making sounds and/or synthesized sound effects (which were often digitally altered); the recordings on his retrospective album exemplify this process. Kemp has likewise been labeled a "sonosopher," which poet-critic Conrad DiDiodato seems to apply to her in an effort to highlight his sense that she's a philosopher whose medium is

[5] In 2009, Caldiero collaborated with his students for a performance of Futurist texts. That performance is available as a *YouTube* playlist via the following link: www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLyYehXoqRglLCyvEUsroeiTMNNb9xwnff.

sound. He also calls her a "poet-shaman" who turns the textual/oral binary on its head with her poems as she reaches to enact a performative return to a pre-literate, "Neolithic" aurality (DiDiodato). She can be seen enacting this process in a 2011 performance in St. Paul's Cathedral, London, Ontario, Canada. During the performance she said she wanted to translate the cathedral into sound; so she stepped from the stage, picked a window, and, after telling the audience she wanted them to join her, began sounding what the window felt like to her. The result was an over two minute cycle of tonal singing in which Kemp and her coperformers combined high-pitches, low-pitches, and sibilants into what could be interpreted—per Kemp's stated intention for the performance—as a sonal representation of the space they were sharing.

Rothenberg, one of the pioneering figures in the field of ethnopoetics, has come at the process of sound-focused performance and experimentation via "indigenous oral literatures and the poetic inheritance of the early avant-gardes," like the Dadaists (Horáček 166). As Caldiero does, when Rothenberg performs he often sings and chants, breaking words down in the act to the potential end of defamiliarizing language before observers so they might see words and the system itself in a new light. He can be seen enacting this process in a 2004 performance of a poem titled "The First Horse Song" in which he chants, stressing each word and intermixing the language with occasional neighing and equine-like grunts. Such Dadaistic playfulness likewise inflects Morris' performance style, which fuses the tones, cadences, attitudes, and content of hip hop culture with a poetics of fragmentation, dissociation, and sonal. Her 2009 performance of "Project Princess" at the Louis K. Meisel Gallery in New York illustrated these influences. At the event, Morris performed the poem twice. Her first performance was, by

her own telling, in hip hop mode; she articulated the language in a way that seemed to approximate the rhythms and smoothness of a rap. Her second performance was, again by her own telling, in sound experiment mode; to my ear, the tonal base of this performance sounded like the up-tempo of a jump blues song around which she wove repetition of phonemes, words, and phrases.

As art-makers with an explicit interest in experimenting with the structures of the human soundscape, Morris, Rothenberg, Kemp, Hanson, and Caldiero each seem deeply invested in performing and probing the somatic processes by which humans experience the world and give and receive desires and intentions. This investment brings them into conversation with other poets whose work may not be primarily concerned with sound or its function in and influence on the communal body but whose focus on the acts and implications of embodiment is clear in their poetry. Of the many poets working in this vein, I see three as being relevant to my current discussion of Caldiero's focus on the laboring body and the *poietic* work of breathing: Sharon Olds, Walt Whitman, and Allen Ginsberg. I've chosen to read Caldiero against these three poets over others because their work seems to be "preoccupied with the body," a designation that could likewise apply to Caldiero's performative *poiesis* (Raskin 128; see Flint 39 and Killingsworth).

Olds calls upon the figure of the laboring poet in her poem "The Language of the Brag" to assert the body's primacy in what I call *poietic* acts. "I have wanted excellence in the knife-throw," she begins, "I have wanted to use my exceptionally strong and accurate arms / and my straight posture and quick electric muscles / to achieve something at the centre of a crowd" (44). Rooting her imagery in acts of masculine strength, she undercuts the primacy of the male body by exulting in the exceptionality and heroism of

childbirth. So doing, she bares her flesh and the acts and products of her flesh, exposing herself to readers and to the poem's addressees as if to a delivery room full of strangers whom she has gathered to witness her feat of endurance and strength: to watch her sweat and shake and pass "blood and feces and water" before she passes "the new person out" (44). Imposing her blood-washed newborn on this audience, she presents this "new person" as the exceptional fruit of her "exceptional heroic body," holding up the acts that produced this fruit as being "epic" and, as such, worthy of sustained attention (44–45).

Her use of the word "epic" seems to draw from the term's communal function, especially as it was adapted and used by Whitman and Ginsberg, both of whom embody the seeric tradition that Caldiero taps into and both of whom Olds directly addresses in her poem. In the mid-nineteenth century, Whitman set out to establish as epic everyday Americans performing everyday deeds. He did so by creating a new verse form that was bound up in his breath and in the rhythms of his body and of the changing American landscape and that asserted his experience and desires as the pantheon of American selfhood. Hence the opening line of his long poem "Song of Myself," where he asserts, "I celebrate myself, and sing myself." That he intends readers to experience the poem's narrative journey to increased self-understanding with him is apparent in the next two lines, whose additive structure binds them directly to the opening statement: "And what I assume you shall assume, / For every atom belonging to me as good belongs to you" (188). I take this to mean that he believes readers should want to take on—to assume—whatever characteristics, personae, or expressive forms he takes on in his lyric journey because these atoms, these building blocks of American being, belong to whoever—like Whitman—can perceive, claim, bear witness to, and embody them.

One such expressive form is the "barbaric yawp," as Whitman calls it (247), or as Olds names it, the "proud American boast" (45): an unrestrained voicing of pride in individual accomplishment and desire. Adopting this form in their writing, Whitman boasts about a self-concept that encompasses America—the land and its people—and Olds about the fruits of her self-described exceptional body. Ginsberg, in a similarly expressive act, titled his best-known yawp "Howl," a sprawling poem whose breath-length lines fill the page with visions of individual desire and the pursuit thereof as manifest in the social turmoil of mid-twentieth century America. "I saw the best minds of my generation," Ginsberg famously begins, "destroyed by madness, starving hysterical naked, / dragging themselves through the negro streets at dawn looking for an angry fix" (2865). The poem brims with such images of exceptional passions pent up by repressive social structures to the point of hysteria and seeking release. Hence Ginsberg's rant, which names and seeks to counteract the effects of repression. The poem's counteractive agency becomes most apparent when its potent language is voiced, an act that can be seen as purging the emotions embodied in the poem and in the reader and listeners and that, long line after long line, repeatedly empties the reader's lungs, which in turn decreases the heartrate. Among other things, the additive effect of these performance processes has potential to relieve the psyche, relax the body, clarify the mind-body connection in the reader and in listeners, and by so doing call the physical desires into the conscious mind where those desires can more readily influence and be influenced by language.

"Howl" is, for Caldiero, "a living presence" meant to be encountered anew by each generation (Weist). It shouldn't just be passively encountered, though; rather, per Ginsberg's notes that "each line of 'Howl' is a single breath unit" ("Notes" 416) and that

he wanted to leave the poem behind as "an emotional time bomb that would continue exploding in U.S. consciousness" ("Author's Preface" xii), "Howl" should be experienced in the flesh as produced and received by disparate bodies breath unit after breath unit. Hence Caldiero's efforts to "breath[e] his way through" the poem in public performances offered every five years since 1995 (Weist; see also Caldiero, Curriculum Vitae). A video recording posted to *YouTube* in 2007 presents an excerpt from one such event: Caldiero's performance of "Howl," section two, in which Ginsberg uses the Biblical idol Moloch (a Canaanite god associated with child-sacrifice) to depict "the monster of mental consciousness that preys on" America's "lamb-like youth" (Ginsberg, "Notes" 416). Elsewhere Ginsberg labels America's Moloch the "military-industrial-nationalist complex" ("Author's Preface" xii). As the product of a Peyote-invoked, shamanic vision that placed him "deep in the hellish vale," his Moloch section seems intended to invoke a similar experience for those who receive the poem: to expand their consciousness of the monster's influence on individual and communal lives and thereby to alter their relationship with the monster-mythos he saw underlying the country's established social order ("Notes" 416).

During Caldiero's Moloch performance, he stood behind a microphone stand at the front of a large public meeting space (perhaps at a library) where a seated crowd had gathered to watch him perform. Behind him, a portable projection screen showed black and white video of George W. Bush speaking to Congress; the video had been slowed down, an act that emphasized Bush's facial expressions, lip movements, and head swivel as well as the audience's occasional applause. As he performed, Caldiero held one of his black hardbound tomes, which he referenced during the speech act; when he began, his

left hand was pinching the edge of the book between fingers and the thumb-side palm to keep the pages open, and his right was cradling the book spine. Swaying side-to-side and looking from his book to the audience to his book to the audience, he voiced Ginsberg's vision:

[AC looked from book to audience to book to audience throughout performance, though less as utterance became more intense]

WhAT
sPHInx
of ceMEn-t
an aLUmiNU-m—
BAshed Open their sKU-lls # an ATE up their
BRAI-ns # A-nd # iMAgiNAtion↓

[from here, line breaks in the transcription represent breaths]

MO-LO-CH
SOliTU-de
FI-LTH
UGliNEss
AshCA--NS # AN UNobTAINable DOllars
<u>CHI--ldre--n sCREA--ming U--nde-r the sTAI-</u>

[tilted head back and forth to rhythm of line]

rwa-ys↓

BO-Ys # SObbing in AR-mie-s↓

O-L/D M/EN WEEping i/n t/he PAr-ks

MO-LO-CH

MO-LO-CH

NIghtMA---RE of MO-LO-CH

MO-LO----CH the LOveLEss↓

MENtal MOLOCH

MO-LO----CH the HEAvy **JUDG**er of ME-n—

MOLOCH th/ē i/nCOMpreHENsible PRIson

MOLOCH the CROssBO-ne—

SOU-lless # JAI-lHOUse and CO-ngress of SOrro-

ws↓

MOLOCH whose BUI-ldings are JUdgment↓

MOLOCH the VA/st st/ONE of WA-R

MOLOCH the STUn—e/d "G/OVERNMEnts"

MOLOCH whose MInd is PURE maCHI-nery↓

MOLOCH whose BLOOD is RUnning MOney

MOLOCH whose FI-ngers are TE/N A/Rmies↓

MOLOCH whose BREAST # IS a CAnnibal

DYnamo—

MOLOCH whose EA--R↓

IS A SMO-king TO--mb—

[camera panned to projector screen]

[audible stomp]

[audible stomp]

[camera to AC bouncing, swaying to rhythm]

MOLOCH whose **EYE--S**↓	[audible stomping]
are a THOUsand BLIN/D W/IN**DO-WS**	[camera zoomed out to
MO-LO-CH	include AC's upper torso
WHO/SE S/KYscRApers # **STA-nd** "in the" LO-ng STREE-ts # **LIKE** ENDless Je**HO**-VA-Hs	and head and the screen in viewing pane] [audible stomping]
MO-LO-CH # whose **FAC**tories DREA--m # and **GROA**-n "in the" FO-g	[camera began zooming in
MO-LO-CH # whose SMOKESTA-CKS # and anTENNAE— # **CRO-WN** the CIties↓	to close up of AC's upper shoulders and head]
MOLOCH whose LO-ve # is **END**less **OI-L** # **and STO-NE**	
MO-LO-CH # whose SOU-l # is elecTRIcit/y and **B/A-NKS**	
MO-LO-CH # whose POverty— # is the SPEcter of GEnius	
MOLOCH whose FA-te # is a CLOUd of SEXless **HYDROGE-N**	[camera panned to screen]
MO-LO-CH # whose NA-me is the **MI—nd**	
MO-LO--CH in WHO--m # I SIT LO--NELY↓	
MOLOCH in WHO--m # **I DREAM** A-ngels↓	
CRAzy in MO-LOCH	
COCK SU-CKER IN MO-LO-CH	[camera zoomed out to view

LACKLOVE an MANLESS in MO-LOCH	of AC from mid-thigh up, the full screen behind him]
MO-LO-CH # **who EN**tered MY SOU--l # EAR-ly—	
MO-LO-CH # in WHO--m # I AM a CO-NSCIOUS-NESS # WITHOUT a BO-dy↓	[heavy stomping, body bent toward audience; pushed up glasses with left hand]
MO-LO-CH # **who FRIGH-tene/d M/E—** # **OUT of my NATural ECStaSY—**	
MO-LO---CH	
whom I a # **BA-nDON**ed	[moved left hand from book, forearm over side of abdomen bouncing up and down]
WA-KE up in **MO-LO-CH**	
LIGH-T	
STREA-ming↓	
OUT "of the" **SKY**—	
MO-LO--CH	[took book by spine with left hand; released book with right hand, raised from side to chest level at elbow with each breath unit]
MO-LO--CH	
RObot aPARtments↓	
inVISible SUbu-rbs↓	
SKEleton— TREAsuries↓	
BLI-n/d **C/AP**itals↓	[stopped bouncing, swaying] [raised arm to shoulder level, fingers curled; then square above head, finger pointed,
deMOnic INdustries↓	
SPEctra-l NAtions↓	
inVISible MADHOUses ↓	
GRAnite **CO-CKS**	

MONstrous **BO**--mbs↓	wagging to rhythm]
"THEY BROKE THEIR BA-CKS" # LIfting MOloch to "**HEAVEN**"	[arm back to side, raised and lowered as before]
PAvements↓	
TREEs↓	
RAdios↓	
TOn-s↓	
LIfting the CIty to HEAven—	[grasped book with right hand]
which exI-sts—	
an is EVeryWHEre abOU/t u/s	
VIsions↓	[wagging head to rhythm]
Omens↓	
haLLUciNAtions↓	
MIracles↓	
ECstasies↓	
GO-ne DOW--n thē aMERica-n RIver↓	[wagging head to rhythm]
DREA-ms↓	
adoRAtions↓	
illumiNAtions↓	[wagging head to rhythm]
reLIgions↓	[camera to view of AC's head amd the screen]
THE WHO--le BOATLOAD of SENsitive **BULL**shit↓	
BREAkTHROUGH---s # Over the RIver↓	

FLIPs AN--/d c/ruciFIXion-s↓ [raised right hand, finger pointed to punctuate words]

GOne DOW--n the FLOOD

HIGH-s

ePIPHanie-s↓

desPAI-rs

TEN YEA--RS' ANimal SCREA-ms an/d S/UiCIdes [camera panned back to AC, hand back on book]

MI-nds

NEW LO-ves [released book with right hand; moved as before]

MAD "GENERATION"—

DOW-/n o/n "the ROcks of TI-me"↓

REA-l HO-ly "LAUGHter in the RIver"↓

they SAW/r i/t ALL↓

the WIld EYE-s

the HOly YE-lls

they BAde fareWE-ll

they JUmped off the ROO-f

to SOliTU-de↓

WAving↓

CARRying FLOwers↓

DOw-n to the RIver

INto the STREEt↓ ("Alex Caldiero Reads Ginsberg's Moloch")

The demands this litany made on Caldiero's body are clear from the recorded performance. While he started off swaying slightly side-to-side, his feet planted in one spot, as he moved through the middle of the speech act—where the poem's images unwind with great force from its central conceit (the "monster of mental consciousness") and the rapid-fire list of "exclamatory units" accumulate around the "base repetition, Moloch" (Ginsberg, "Notes" 416)—he stepped side-to-side behind the microphone, stomping his feet, bending at the knee so he could (as I read the act) spring into each interjection, and releasing the tome with his left hand so he could pull his arm into his body as if priming a pump then (returning that hand to the book) releasing the tome with his right hand so he could punctuate a series of exclamations with the rotational thrust of his elbow throwing his supine hand toward observers. By so altering his posture, he seems to have drawn energy and breath from his somatic resources, including his essential connection with the earth—an act that may have supported him when his lungs and throat began to waver and he needed to call upon additional means to sustain his sound-word-gesture-image. That his vocal apparatus wearied because of the poem's exclamatory litany is evident in his cracking voice, which strained several times during the performance, especially when he was screaming "Moloch" at the top of his lungs. In this light, Caldiero's weariness can be read as a function of his body and mind being purged of the Moloch-concept via acts of potent language. And such a release may flow out of Ginsberg's shaman-like efforts to shape his ecstatic experience into an emotional time bomb of a poem that, when enacted, could contravene the life-consuming influence of a repressive social order and stir within observers visions of a holier community and a healthier world. By regularly performing "Howl," Caldiero seems intent on reiterating

Ginsberg's efforts by enacting the poem's explosive nature in response to social structures that continue to repress individuals and communities.

Such is the epic function of the poet's accumulated howl, yawp, boast, and animal breathing—a function that grows out of sustained *poietic* intercourse among poets, readers, listeners, and language: an exchange given and received via the body. For Caldiero, Olds, Ginsberg, and Whitman, as well as for Hanson, Kemp, Rothenberg, and Morris, there doesn't seem to be much more worth giving sustained attention than the potency of individual bodies and their potential to come together and produce new bodies, new stories, new social circumstances, and new worlds. Each of these makers can be understood as assuming the workings of this relationship in the way their poems are performed and composed—with language, sounds, imagery, and rhythms rooted in and flowing from the body and meant (it seems) to call forth and influence readers'/listeners' desires. Olds even depicts the interaction directly in "The Language of the Brag" when she places her speaker—the laboring poet—at the center of a crowd whom she addresses and makes demands on with an expression of her body. And though most of these poets' poems are far shorter than either Whitman's or Ginsberg's and can't be considered epic in terms of literary form, each expressive act—the bodies each maker has created with, pressed from, and boasts about via their own somatic processes—demands attention because their creation and introduction into the world was undoubtedly a communal, *poietic* event and their journeys through the world, where they may perform or participate in similar acts, seem intended to be just as communal and *poietic*. In this light, the processes by which bodies propagate and commune demand consideration as both physical acts and as metaphors for acts of human kinship. Hence the laboring poet, whose

somatically-embedded and -emergent language have potential, to borrow from Caldiero, to "make / breathing / less mechanical" and more natural, more organic, more in keeping with the body's rhythms and processes; and whose offering of Otherness, whose *poietic* ways of seeing, and whose invocation of desire and the senses can "take us / into deeper / aching"—into deeper *poietic* consciousness and intersubjectivity (*Some Love* 45). Such acts can be read as invitations for us to open ourselves to our own and other bodies and to the influence other bodies have on our presence in the world. In my next section, I inquire after and elaborate on this influence as I see it enacted in sonosophy via Caldiero's participation in a 2003 collaborative event sponsored by a Salt Lake City-based performance arts company.

iv.

"O [Tongue] of Too Much Giving"[6]:

Sonosophy as Communal Agency and Somatic Intelligence;

Or, Reading (from) the Open Palm

a. Sonosophy as Communal Agency

Beautiful. Idyllic. Disruptive. Isn't It?

Circling back now to my performance at the 2012 Salt Lake Sunstone Symposium as I described it in the FirstWord, I think of something Charles Taylor says in his book *The Language Animal: The Full Shape of the Human Linguistic Capacity*: "Language comes to us through exchange" (58). It's rooted in the "rituals of sharing" we begin coperforming with others from the moment we're born and that we participate in every day. During such intersubjective rituals, infants make their needs and desires known and have them fulfilled in return, and they participate in what Taylor and others call "protoconversations," which take place when a child and a caregiver trade smiles or noises and when a caregiver tickles a child, playfully takes a child's hands or feet to mouth, soothes a child in distress, or rocks a child to sleep while singing a lullaby (53–4). As Taylor suggests, these grounds of intensely shared intentions—of early and sustained emotional bonding when we're turned together toward building and fulfilling mutual desires—maintain, transform, and renew our linguistic capacity. They shape our need and

[6] The title of this section is adapted from the opening line of a poem by American poet and Carmelite nun Jessica Powers. She opens her 1951 sonnet "But Not With Wine" with the following question: "O God of too much giving, whence is this / inebriation that possesses me [. . .]?" (17). Powers' poem addresses the abundant God she worships: a being whose generosity, she claims, at once overwhelms her ability to receive and awakens her to the givenness of life. I see Caldiero working this same vein with sonosophy, which seeks to represent the abundance of language and, so doing, to awaken observers to the abundance of life and its constituent relationships.

efforts to connect with other bodies via somatic action; so doing, they seem to start us on the pathway toward fully being-with others via what I call *poietic* acts and *poietic* consciousness. Language, in this sense, is more than a tool we pick up to leverage meaning into or out of a communicative interaction or to catapult meaning to others across the gaps among bodies. It is, more expansively, a product and process of communion; it's constructed and sustained as bodies come together in conversations regarding ideas or objects of "common attention" (57–8). As such, language-making can't be separated from relationship-making. In fact, language-making *is* relationship-making. Constituted by and constitutive of dynamic verbal, neural, social, cultural, and conceptual ecologies, language brings disparate material and immaterial bodies into dialogue just as it's brought together through that dialogue—by which I mean that language is a dialogic ecology where literal and conceptual bodies can be seen coming together and putting on, playing with, and fleshing out our species' communal nature through shared *poietic* events.

When Caldiero explores, by performing, a range of sonal practices within the context of language as communion, his *poiesis* participates in this ecology, which enables the connective and, by extension, the divisive possibilities of words; he commented on this enabling influence in his performance captured in the promotional video for the 2012 Utah Arts Festival where he declaimed that "no thing but words divides us" and "unites us." As things produced of and through the interactions among bodies—a process of exchange that, per philosopher Adam Miller, constitutes the stuff of life: "[b]reath, rest, words, food, excrement, handiwork, sensations, ideas, bodies, and intentions" (*Rube Goldberg* loc 193–202)—words can sustain or impede the development of our being and

relationships. They do so as much by what they're used to say as by how they're used to say it as by the ways they address or neglect a body's intentions for reaching out in conversation. When we turn away from or otherwise fail to attend to a conversation partner's communicative intentions, which would not of necessity include her intended meaning but more so her reasons for speaking, her mode of speaking, and the objects toward which she hopes to direct shared attention, we may fail to see the person and the message on their own terms and thereby run the risk of minimizing and/or misreading them. This isn't to say, of course, that we have to agree with or assent to the other person's desires or ideas. But we ought to recognize that the Other may have complex reasons for reaching out and by virtue of that reaching can be seen as asking that we at least open ourselves to a conversation, to the inherent give and take of dialogue, and to full participation in the rituals of sharing that contribute shape and richness to human social life.

This isn't always easy to do, especially when a potential conversation partner seems defiantly disruptive and Other. When I first came upon Caldiero-in-performance, for instance, I was put off by what I saw and heard. I had been aware of a working poet named "Alex Caldiero" but had never encountered him as anything more than a name on paper or screen. Then (as I note in my FirstWord) I watched his contribution to Katharine Coles' 2009 Bite Size Poems project. Caldiero's reiterative performance of "beautiful idyllic isn't it"—which seemed too in-your-face and absurd for my liking—set me on my heels. Former UVU student Chelsey Richardson recorded a similar, though more explicit, reaction to the performance. Describing the video in a post on her Tumblr blog from November 17, 2009, Richardson "[r]echristened" Caldiero's performance "WTF [what

the fuck] or Possible Internet Terrorism" ("Bite-Sized Poem"). Her acronym expresses the shock she seems to have experienced at Caldiero's performance, which she labels an act of rhetorical violence: an attempt to terrorize and intimidate unsuspecting web surfers—though it's not clear toward what specific end she sees the act being directed.

Richardson's response to Caldiero's bite-sized poem jibes with her take on his *poiesis* in general. Speaking to what she sees as the drastic difference between Caldiero's written poems and his performed poems, Richardson says, "On paper he's really lovely" ("Alex Caldiero"). I agree with her on that point. Take as an example the title poem from Caldiero's *Various Atmospheres*:

> various atmospheres
> can make you & me wholesome
> more than the luminous
> clouds that never bring rain. (1)

With the near-symmetrical morphemic structure of the opening line—*phere* and *-mos-* mirror *var-* and *-ous*—and the alliterative interweaving of lines (notice the r's, s's, n's, m's, and l's), the poet introduces interconnecting networks of sounds and ideas into a verbal ecology composed around the interaction between the speaker and the subject of his musings—perhaps a lover, the reader, nature, or words. The wholesomeness and the wholeness of these juxtaposed and interdependent textual bodies—the images evoking heaven and earth, darkness and light, totality and desolation, as well as the affective fullness of the poet's words as they pass through the mind, the mouth, and the aural cavity—point to a world, and with that world a series of new or renewed relationships, always connected and on the verge of re/creation.

Richardson's acknowledgment that Caldiero is lovely "on paper" notwithstanding, her commentary suggests something more about her extra-textual experience with the poet-as-performer. In essence, she wishes he would stay "on paper." That is, in her words, she would be more comfortable if he would stick to "live readings of his actual traditional poetry," fixing himself within the textually-bound tradition of the poetry reading as the oral staging of written words. Such a desire is evident in the suspicion and dismissiveness she exhibits in her musings about Caldiero. Writing about the "interesting privilege" she had of watching a press copy of Torben Bernhard and Travis Low's experimental documentary, *The Sonosopher: Alex Caldiero in Life . . . in Sound*, she observes that "Caldiero is a poet, but by a pretty far stretch of the word. He calls himself a 'sonosopher' and a 'wordshaker,' because the word 'poet' doesn't begin to describe what he does. And what he does," she continues, giving an on-the-nose assessment of Caldiero's language-making, "is make noises." I say her assessment is on-the-nose because all any of us do when we speak is "make noises." In this light Caldiero's performative "noises" are no different than those made by someone who's speaking to us in a language we don't understand. Yet, for Richardson, sonosophy-associated noise-making moves beyond the noise of ordinary language-making because it disrupts the relationship between words and meaning and performer and audience as well as between language as-written and that same language as-performed, and because it's simply disruptive—it transgresses, too much, the social order.

She validates her discomfort with Caldiero, whom she calls "a controversial figure," by referring to what "[s]ome people" have said of him (I've given a sampling of the mixed audience response to Caldiero, which Richardson seems to exemplify, in

section one of the ThirdWord): that he's "a stand-up comedian," "three-quarters mad," "incredibly eccentric," "an aged hippie," someone "distracted by himself"—overall, a person whose ideas and presence can be dismissed as frivolous. She even defers to a UVU biology professor who "thinks half of Caldiero's work is profound and the other half is bullshit" (see Berhard and Low). Then she observes: "Watching [Caldiero] perform is like watching a man possessed by some primitive spirit, zoomed off onto some other plane." His total commitment to sonosophy "is amazing because it" takes his performances "beyond the bizarre and into the uncomfortable, and you wonder if it really is bullshit or if you *just don't get him and you are the stupid one*" ("Alex Caldiero"; italics in original). Having wondered something similar when I first encountered sonosophy, I won't call Richardson stupid for being unsure of how to receive Caldiero's work; neither will I blame other audience members for the uncertainty they may feel when encountering sonosophy. However, as I argue with my ethnography, I will suggest that by giving way to instead of turning away from sonosophy's disruptive nature and by listening closely to its peculiarity for long enough to hear *what* Caldiero's transgressive tongue is saying as well as *how* and *why* he seems to be saying it, observers can become radically open to our personal and shared histories, desires, vocabularies, narratives, and being-in and influence on the world.

To this point in my ThirdWord, I've argued that sonosophy and its functions can be interpreted in terms of several *poietic* figures whose histories and character Caldiero has called upon or can be understood as enacting when he performs; these include, among others, the poet-seer, the shaman, the *makar*, the ethnographer, the priest-as-god-figure, the benevolent Other, and the laboring poet. Another figure with a clear influence

on sonosophy is the "dadasopher," whose history and character Caldiero drew from when he derived "sonosopher" from the title via its originator, Raoul Haussman ("On the Origin"). In this light, the nature of Dada and its potential communal functions as a mode of being that privileges play provide another lens for interpreting sonosophy. Philosopher Phillip Prager addresses the playfulness of the anti-movement movement in an essay that explores the notion of play as a vital human activity; his title is telling in this regard: "Play and the Avant-Garde: Aren't We All a Little Dada?" By suggesting that all of us are touched by the avant-garde inclination to tease at the boundaries of things, which manifests in Dadaistic art as a "love of improvisation, curiosity, novelty and an unselfconscious exploration of the phenomenal world," Prager points to the significance of "play as a fundamental expression of humanity" (239). He also observes that this significance has often been overlooked in terms of adult play, especially so in terms of Dada, which art historians have disparaged as "the enfant terrible of their discipline": an annoyance that emerged in response to the widespread "trauma, nihilism, [and] political disillusionment" of the post-World War I world and that simply reiterated that trauma, nihilism, and disillusionment (239–40). As a merely irritating and chaotic artistic phase in the West, some might say, we have to acknowledge Dada's historical moment but shouldn't expect to find much of lasting value in its artworks or poetics.

Yet, Prager argues that Dada demands continued attention because it has something "of real and concrete importance" to say about what it means to be human: play is vital to our individual and communal well-being and development. While at play, we free ourselves to explore "ideas, objects, materials, and people without considering sense, purpose, or function"—we tinker for amusement and pleasure. In the process we

may combine the elements we're manipulating into novel formulations, broaden our base of experience in the world, and develop new skills and a deeper sense of our individual agency and its limits. Taken together, these effects may contribute to enhanced "cognitive and behavioral flexibility," which increase our chances of adapting well to changes in our environments and of capably interacting with a wide range of people and materials (241). In light of play as something vital and therapeutic in its own right, when Dadaists did their thing, Prager argues, they weren't just subverting the art establishment or seeking to disrupt the traditional social order, although they were doing that. Instead, when Dada founder Hugo Ball performed his sound poems before a crowd wearing a cardboard costume and doctor's hat, when poet and artist Baroness Elsa von Freytag-Loringhoven traipsed down the street wearing a dress decorated with found objects and a "headpiece fashioned of sardine cans," when artist Jean Arp tossed "colored scraps of paper into the air" over a sheet of paper then pasted them where they fell, and when artist Marcel Duchamp hung a urinal from a gallery wall and titled it *Fashion*, they were "express[ing] play in its raw state" (240–43). Yielding to the "play-drive," they seem to have detached themselves from the stigma and shame associated with "look[ing] silly, undignified, or dumb" and to have given themselves and, by extension, their observers permission to act and live creatively, beyond the stifling influence of widespread trauma, nihilism, and disillusionment (242, 251).

While some people may view the sonosopher's verbal and somatic playfulness with uncertainty and say that Caldiero is nothing more than a clown disconnected from reality in his absurd experimenting with language, his *poiesis* is Dadaistic. With it, he can be seen putting the play-drive on display when he improvises with all his somatic

resources; composing himself as sound-word-gesture-image, he seems to push back against oppressive social structures, to embody the primal pleasures of language-making, and to create communal space where observers might join him in the "therapeutic endeavor" of embracing "the novel, the wonderful, and the amusing," to borrow phrasing from Prager (250). Stepping into this space with Caldiero, we may become more open to the diverse possibilities for living well and with hope in our beautifully impermanent world and be made better able to make things as individuals and communities that we can share on the common table of humanity. So sharing, we can commune with others and our environments in ways that have potential to lead us to fuller and fuller expressions of humanness, which derives from the givenness of the human situation and from our response to that givenness—to the way our bodies and breath, language and consciousness, family and kin come to us unbidden in the midst of life's delightful commotion and shape who we are and how we live as individuals and communities.

Conference of the Birds (iv): The Family Table

I recognize aspects of this givenness in my own life as I reflect on experiences I've had with Grandma Chadwick and her commitment to nurturing her kin. Nearly every Holy Saturday during my childhood and adolescence, she and Grandpa gathered their family for an egg hunt and breakfast. I loved exploring their large backyard with my siblings and cousins as we hunted eggs, but some of my strongest memories of those mornings include Grandma's cinnamon rolls. They tasted no different than others I've eaten—they were just as warm, fluffy, sweet. Grandma's rolls were different, though, because they were Grandma's. She had risen early to make the dough, mixing, kneading, letting rise,

kneading and letting rise in the soft green-curtained tint of her basement kitchen so the rolls would be ready for the family table. I always appreciated her offering but didn't consider until years later how much of herself she invested in making the family Easter tradition happen, in making space for us to gather and meal together.

The vital influence her offering of self and sustenance has had on my being dawned on me after she had become unable to care for herself after Grandpa died and, due to the onset of Alzheimer's, had been taken to live in the memory care ward of an assisted living center. One day, after she had been there for several years, Jess and I were in town so we took our four daughters to visit. Gathered around her on the dining room couch, we caught her up on our lives: Sidney, Alex, and Hadley loving school, piano, and dance; Jaylee learning to walk; Jess taking time away from work to be Mom full-time; me writing, finishing graduate school, and teaching writing.

With a smile and occasional, "Oh, how nice," she followed our updates and watched the girls taking turns twirling across the matted floral-patterned rug. But her eyes confessed confusion. Like our erstwhile infant who buried her face in my shoulder when confronted by someone new, Grandma's eyes sought refuge in familiarity. Unable to find it in us—family members blurred at memory's fading edges—her body retreated into the comfort of well-worn movements, and she ran her forefingers and thumbs along her shirt's bottom seam, telling the stitches like I had seen her do so many times on handkerchiefs, napkins, tablecloths, and blouses in her own sitting and dining rooms.

"Are you tired?" Jess asked when Grandma shifted in her seat. "Do you want to go back to your room?"

Grandma looked up, nodded, said, "Yes, I think I would." I stood, handed Jaylee

to Jess, and bent to help Grandma stand. As I grasped her upper arm, the flesh—once firm from a lifetime spent working in her gardens—gave way against my hand like dough. The unexpected sensation invoked her bread recipe, which she had given Jess and me for our wedding over a decade earlier. Now when I pull that well-worn notecard from my cupboard, I remember not only Grandma's cinnamon rolls but the way her arm felt supple in my hand when I helped her from the couch and down the hall to her room, then again when I touched her one last time at her funeral.

"It's Good to Eat": The Generosity of Bread

Reflecting on the somatic offerings I received from Grandma when, year after year, she presented her cinnamon rolls on the family table, when she gave Jess and me her bread recipe, and when she trusted me enough (despite being unsure of our relationship) to allow me to bear some of the burden of her failing body, I consider the generosity of bread and its physical and cultural functions. While bread has been a staple in the human diet for millennia, as traditional foodways expert William Rubel observes (and as I experienced in my interactions with Grandma), it "has always meant more than just something to eat" (38). During the Neolithic Revolution it fueled urbanization and intellectual and cultural advancement and has developed into a symbol of "good fortune, plenty and prosperity" (24). This symbolism emerges as much from its material nature as its cultural ubiquity. Loaf dough, for instance, expands to fill the vessel it occupies and dough starters, like sourdough cultures, multiply enough from a single portion that they're used to leaven loaf after loaf (17).

Caldiero's Mediterranean heritage and early participation in the Catholic Mass—

cultural traditions that are embedded in a rich history of sharing bread via communal meals—seem to have over a lifetime showed him the generosity of bread and its sustaining influence in human communities. He considers this influence in a short, unpunctuated meditation in *sonosuono*:

> Plain and simple solitary loaf of bread on the table and we come in after a whole day outdoors and grandma [sic] cuts it just right and it's still warm and the olive oil seeps into the soft part which has a name in the Sicilian language that is proper to this inner portion the crust protects and holds dear and which we construe as something wonderful because it's good to eat just as it is. (42)

Speaking in the present tense—an act that invokes the continued immediacy of his grandmother's offering of self and sustenance—he accumulates clauses, adding the communal "we" to olive oil to Grandma to bread. Doing so, he can be understood as reveling in what New Testament scholar Dennis E. Smith calls the "the festive joy" of table fellowship: in having been given "something wonderful," "warm," "soft," and "good" to eat and in having someone to eat it with (loc 190). As I read it, his joy and its expression resonate with the Eden narrative when Eve realizes fruit from the tree of knowledge of good and evil is "good for food," so she plucks, eats, and shares with Adam. Recognizing the fruit's ripeness and partaking, the couple awakens to the inadequacy of their nakedness and they begin clothing in experience, adjusting their lives to the always unfolding demands of self-realization and its implications for their relationship with each other, God, and the world (*NET*, Genesis 3.6–7). Caldiero's recognition that his grandma's bread is ready to eat seems to likewise awaken him to its

wonders and its role in sustaining relationships. More, it clearly invokes for him the joy of taking to tongue the Sicilian name for the substance, especially because that name, he says, suits the thing's nature—it's also "good to eat." As a word suitable for addressing the loaf's "inner portion," the name, as suggested in Caldiero's meditation, manifests and becomes part of the loaf's essence. The name, as an experience of bread, can be understood as entangling the poet and his companions in the suppleness, generosity, and goodness of bread as both food and concept. As such, that name is no less part of the thing than the thing becomes part of the bodies who consume it.

For readers—like me—who are unfamiliar with Sicilian, this name is a mystery. Like the deepest reality claimed by the Eucharist in Catholicism—Christ's abiding presence and his sacrificial devotion to the world—it seems to shape and give life to the poet's table community and their communal meal. When brought into conversation with the Eucharist, the name Caldiero speaks to but doesn't speak invokes the mystery of the Word, the *Logos*, the "Divine Expression" manifest in Jesus, whom the Johannine gospel describes as having been present with the world and its inhabitants "in the beginning" and ever after ("Logos"; *NET*, John 1.1). The gospel writer's use of "in the beginning" is a clear allusion to the opening of the Bible's creation narratives, which assert God's creative agency (Genesis 1.1); the allusion suggests that the Word was a vital aspect of God's agency as described in Genesis and that it remains vital to the ongoing work of creation and relationship-making. In this theology, language can be read as something more than metaphor, more than words as vessels for meaning; rather, as Caldiero's meditation seems to insist, word is to substance is to goodness, life, and grace. From this perspective, to share words is to share the substance and experience bound up in those

words is to share the abundance of our lives and relationships is to enter communal space. When framed in these terms, sonosophy can be understood as an attempt to enact in human relationships and communities the modes of being, being-with, and being-toward others that may be imagined by such a theology. Through his performance of sonosophic speech acts and other sonal practices, Caldiero assumes that language is one such mode of communion, that it embodies patterns of giving and receiving, of creation, and of individual and communal memory that seem intended to bring health and wholeness to individuals and communities. Taken in this context, Caldiero's meditation opens the way to consider that the mystery of *logos*—which could also be translated as speech, discourse, discussion, counsel, reason, or dialogue—may unfold in the ritualized giving and receiving of utterance among bodies and that such unfolding may be intended to open the sonosopher and his audiences to their personal and communal potential.

Caldiero's "yearn[ing] for community," his longing to gather with others and to connect with them through ritual performance—and so, it seems, to be stirred from and to stir others from chronic and crippling habits of thinking and being—stems from communal moments he experienced at home and at church (Bernhard and Low). As I observe in the ForeWord, his emergence from and development in communal spaces in fact occurred both at church and at home. His mother church, called *matrici* (womb) in Sicilian, was an extension of his home was an extension of the church (Caldiero, Interview by French 2). For example, Caldiero's grandmother can be seen as approximating the form and function of the Eucharist when she offered bread and olive oil to her kin at the family table. In *sonosuono*, Caldiero himself confesses to having moved across—to having transgressed—the boundary between church and home in acts

of "secret communion." His short prose-poem titled "Mystery" begins "I was the little boy who took communion and didnt [sic] swallow the blessed wafer." Instead of consuming the host, he confesses, "[I] took it out of my mouth and kept it hidden in a box, a makeshift ciborium." With his illicit holy vessel and its contents kept in secret at home, he took the wafer in hand "from time to time," hoping that, so doing, he could "glimpse the body & blood of Christ" made real in the substance through the language used to bless it. Such a glimpse, he seemed to assume, would welcome him into mystical union more than would simply ingesting the wafer. Whether or not he ever saw what he hoped to see, "one day," the poet says, "in secret communion, I placed the wafer in my mouth and swallowed it" (119). While it may seem counterintuitive for the boy to seek communion in secret, away from his community, the boy (or at least his self-consciously reflective older counterpart) was focused more on testing the Eucharist's claims for himself and on what those claims might mean in terms of his ability to really commune with God, to envision and be present with Jesus by holding the mystery of the sacramental Word-made-flesh in the wafer.

However long the boy abstained from eating and fed his curiosity by attending to the wafer in his open palm, he seems to have been intent on extending his communal experience, solving the Eucharistic mystery for himself, and being present with Jesus by sustaining the life of the ritual elements. The act of reflecting on the wafer as Word-made-flesh eventually wasn't enough, though, and he had to take it to tongue, first by consuming the wafer, the object and absolution of his transgression; and, second, years later, by reshaping his childhood experience into words and sharing his lyric reflection with others. Both lingual acts are transgressive. The first plays with the limits of proper

ritual behavior as the boy removes the wafer from its ritual context and appropriates the object for unsanctioned purposes before, in the end, eating it from his own aspiring-for-authority-but-as-yet-still-unsanctioned hand. The second disrupts the boundaries of memory and experience as it translates the event as remembered decades later into language that touches (but will never fully grasp) vital aspects of that event-as-remembered and holds them out for others to experience. In this way the prose-poem—like all attempts to communicate experience and to commune with others—also disrupts the boundaries among bodies. Its givenness on the page has potential to evoke an emotional response in readers/listeners and to spark similar patterns of activity in readers'/listeners' brains as those sparked in the sonosopher's brain when he composed/performs the poem. So acting on observers' neural processes, the transgressive tongue can disrupt bodies and brains from well-worn processes of thinking and acting and thereby stir listeners to at least recognize if not to revise their habits of being in the world and being with others.

Sonosophy's disruptive influence doesn't automatically lead observers to self-reflection or self-revision, however, especially when observers, for whatever reason, can't get past its transgressive, Dadaistic nature and the emotions potentially evoked by that nature. Torben Bernhard, for instance, admits to having experienced "the whole gamut of emotions" while watching Caldiero perform. He told Doug Fabrizio that, watching Caldiero perform, "I've been scared at times. I've been invigorated. I've been elated." Then, speaking to the bewilderment people can feel—himself included—when they first encounter Caldiero, he observed, "[O]ne of the most common things for people to do" is to offer "nervous laughter" because they don't know "how to respond to

something that they've never seen before"—like a sonosophic utterance. He continued: "I think people are confused and a lot of times have a really difficult time knowing how to respond to Alex's performance because it is so different and because it is so, so, so new to their experience" (Bernhard, Caldiero, and Low). Richardson seems to have been mired in this difficulty when she watched Caldiero perform in Bernhard and Low's documentary and when she came across his reiterative Bite-Size Poem performance and her discomfort prompted her to label him a terrorist, positioning him as violently Other. Even if this act of labeling was done in jest and as much as it reflects a biological tendency to distance ourselves from things that we find threatening to our own well-being or to the well-being of our kinship groups, it still pigeonholes Caldiero—as others have pigeonholed him—as someone whose language-making isn't worth considering in depth.

Such discomfort may be a reasonable response to someone whose work seems "out there" to many people, to quote again from Lebeda, a tendency that was evident in a reaction that Caldiero received from a May 2008 performance he gave at the Bowery Poetry Club in Manhattan. The whole day at the club was dedicated to experimental, avant-garde poets—who, like Caldiero, might also be considered "out there"—and Caldiero offered a 20 minute speech act during which he enacted a score from one of his books, babbling, chanting, and repeating phonemes to create a sound-composition that he presented against oboe and saxophone improvisations by musician Tom Abbott (Grabloid; Bernhard, Caldiero, and Low). When he concluded the performance, he closed his book and stepped back from the microphone; after several seconds of what seemed to be awkward silence, he stepped to the microphone and said, "Thank you," after which the audience applauded and the event emcee came to the stage. As she approached, she

thanked Caldiero for his performance and addressed him: “I can’t believe you were reading that, though” she said. “I want to see that. I don’t believe you were reading it.” Caldiero responded, “WOr--d FOr— WOr—d.” Then, trying, it seems, to get him from the stage, she said, while patting him on the back, “You know what, we’ve got the raffle now. This is big. Thank you so much. You were . . . amazing. And I can’t believe you wrote all that.” Stepping to the microphone and music stand, she addressed the audience with a bewildered look on her face as she searched for a place to set down the plastic bowls she was carrying: “How could he write that?” she said. “That’s not writing.” As she turned back to Caldiero, who was trying to show her what he had written, and she moved around still searching for someplace to set down her bowls, she said, “I don’t get that. I mean I liked it, I thought it was interesting, but I don’t understand how it’s words. But you know what, we’ve got the raffle. This is big. This is big. We can’t get in the way of the raffle. Let’s see what you wrote.” Caldiero opened his book and showed her the score. Looking at the page, she scrunched her face and said, “Oh my God. I think you are the craziest person here” (Bernhard and Low).

Commenting on this interaction, Doug Fabrizio said that it appeared to be “a moment of vulnerability” for Caldiero, who, the radio host observed, looked “confused [. . .] by [the emcee’s] reaction,” so much so, he continued, that when he watched that scene he wanted to give Caldiero a hug. In response to this, Travis Low suggested that Caldiero may have been “playing with [the emcee] a little bit,” extending his performance as sonosopher beyond that specific speech act’s terminal moment (Bernhard, Caldiero, and Low). So framed as a trickster whose performance of vulnerability on the Bowery Club stage showed him playing at social, ritual, and somatic boundaries, Caldiero can be

understood as using his transgressive tongue to expose observers to uncertainty as well as to his secrets and desires and to in the act invite them to share in and reciprocate a degree of intra- and inter-personal openness—to join him in the work of communion.

Intransitive Senses: Sharing the Perceptual World

Within the context of sonosophy as an exploration of language as communion, of Caldiero's lifelong yearning for community, and of his clear desire for others to join him in moments of deep fellowship, I interpret Caldiero's contribution to Coles' Bite Size Poem project as a verbal morsel offered on the common table of humanity and meant to nourish in those who receive it a sense of the human soundscape's lingual abundance. His participation in Coles' project didn't mark the first time he had offered the lyric on the internet's virtual table, though. Just over six years before his Bite Size Poetry performance went live on *YouTube*, he shared the same reiterative three-line cycle during a collaborative, simultaneous performance hosted by Another Language Performing Arts Company of Salt Lake City. As part of the company's series of performances presented under the title *InterPlay*, the 2003 event—subtitled *Intransitive Senses*—incorporated "four simultaneous performances in three separate locations by [. . .] five artists" into a single video stream that was transmitted live online to distant audiences. During the event Caldiero joined performance artists Elizabeth and Hanelle Miklavcic, violinist and performance artist Flavia Cervino-Wood, and bassist and poet Harold Carr (Miklavcic and Miklavcic 34).

The coperformance began with a quartered black screen displaying the event title in each quadrant. Before the video channels from the performers' locations started

streaming, the audio channel of Caldiero plucking a mouth harp and chanting played in the background. About three seconds into his performance, the video stream from the Miklavcics' location opened in quadrant one, fading in behind the title text; the video featured a tea set on a table. Several seconds later the same stream opened in quadrant two just before it opened in quadrant three; then after several more seconds it opened in quadrant four. Once the tea set was showing in all four quadrants, the camera moved to a basket on the table and showed a woman lifting a floral carpet bag from the floor; just behind her a wooden chair sat against the wall, on which was painted variously-styled sets of eyes—some with spectacles, some with lashes, some beady, some circle, some oval, some tear-shaped, and some square. As the woman moved offscreen, her shadow played across basket, table, chair, and wall; and the quadrant two channel cut to the video stream from Caldiero's location, the viewing field cropped to show just his head and hands. Eyes closed in what seems to have been an act of concentration, he continued to chant and pluck the mouth harp as he had been doing since the performance began. In the other quadrants—still streaming the tea party—the camera moved back to show the woman touching a closed parasol to bags hung from the ceiling. After she had touched all the bags, making them swing in a kinetic display of objects and shadows, she moved her carpet bag from a chair to the floor, sat at the table, and bent to her bag, from which she pulled plates, tea cups, saucers, silverware, and serviettes—enough for her and a yet-unseen companion. As she unpacked, the video in quadrant three faded to translucent black and the event title reappeared for several seconds, superimposed over the tea party; several seconds later the tea party stream in that quadrant faded to Carr playing his bass, then quadrant four faded to Cervino-Wood, who was playing sleep on a red cushion,

hands nestled under her cheek, face veiled with a white mask that replicated the features of a smiling face.

The introductory moments of the performance (I've described only its first two minutes twenty-five seconds) suggest at least three things about the collaboration. First, the title—*Intransitive Senses*—suggests that the performers (like Dadaists) were concerned with exploring the senses as directed toward no particular object or purpose but rather as experiences worthy of attention in and of themselves. Caldiero, for example, appeared to be tuned in to his mouth harp—to the sensation it made in his mouth, on his teeth, his tongue, his hand, the air, and his ears; also to its taste—and to making his chant, which consisted mainly of open vowels, sounds that open the airway, the vocal apparatus and, by metonymic extension, the speaker's entire being. So expanded by the chant, he may have increased his awareness of and become better able to attend to the sensory input his body was receiving. The multiple performance streams channeled into the video as broadcast to audiences, as well as the interplay among those streams, addressed audiences with overlapping sonal and visual stimuli: Caldiero's persistent twang and hum feeding into the obvious somatic intensity of his concentration, into Miklavcic's kinetic and visually-rich tea party preparations, into Carr's rhythmic bass plucking and unbroken stage-right stare, and into the sensuality of Cervino-Wood's slow waking. Weaving these sensory acts into a display of accumulative perception—sensory experience interacting with and adding to sensory experience interacting with and adding to sensory experience and so on—the performance can be seen as enacting the collaborative unfolding of somatic events (the senses), an act of perceptual disclosure that has potential to position observers in and toward the world and that, so doing, can give shape to individual and

communal consciousness.

In its clear attempt to bear witness of the senses, to channel performers' perceptual awareness, and to entangle audience members in the same sensory work, the performance's opening moments suggest, second, that the collaborative experience and expression of the senses is a mode of communion, of withness. As I've observed already in my ThirdWord, when individuals share experiences and interact in a shared environment—as when they watch a movie or listen to a story together or converse while rocking in side-by-side rocking chairs—their brain function and movement tend to synchronize. So coupled through shared somatic awareness of the physical and rhetorical spaces they inhabit, individuals may be drawn into an encounter with the Other's humanness and vulnerability to the perceptual world, particularly as these characteristics manifest in the other person's facial expressions, posture, and movements. When we observe how another person acts in response to sensory stimuli—whether the stimuli are physical or rhetorical—our own brains have been biologically primed to activate "the same neural circuitry required to *perform* that action" (Théoret and Pascual-Leone R736, italics in original). As neuroscientist Marco Iacoboni observes in his discussion of mirror neurons—collections of special neurons that fire both when we perform an action and when we see that action performed—our capacity to imitate others on the neural level allows us recognize and to "understand [others'] actions because we have a template in our brains" for those actions "based on our own movements" (5). Mirror neurons don't just help us read what others are doing, though. Iacoboni points out that they "also help us to recognize and understand the deepest motives behind those actions"; as such, they draw us into the Other's intentions. The work of such neurons provides a biological basis

for empathy and, perhaps, of morality, both of which turn us outward toward being-with others (5–6). In this light, the Other's humanness thus becomes bound up in my humanness becomes bound up in the Other's humanness.

These observations provide a lens for considering what may have taken place in observers during the *Intransitive Senses* coperformance. Viewers were in the beginning introduced to each performer's embodied offerings, first to Caldiero's twang and hum, then to Miklavcic's tea party, Caldiero's deep concentration, Carr's plucking and off-stage stare, and Cervino-Wood's sensual waking. The gradual emergence of all four perceptual events may have engaged different networks in viewers' "mirror-neuron systems" (Rizzolatti and Craighero 176), calling forth—as each event was displayed—the sensation of grasping the items in a tea set, swinging a parasol, plucking a mouth harp and upright bass, waking from sleep, and so on. Since the performers were elsewhere and hence unaware of how viewers were responding to the event, however, a somatic connection couldn't have been made from performers to viewers, only from viewers to performers. From this perspective, the communal function of the event could have emerged within the different groups of viewers who were experiencing the perceptual event at the same location and whose neural circuitry may have fired in-kind in response to the performers' verbal and physical gestures and the objects performers manipulated on-screen. The Miklavcics' tea party can be understood as implying this communal work through the extended shot of the tea set with which the performance opened and closed. Since it was the first and last thing viewers were offered during the event, the tea set may have been meant to invoke the act of gathering with intimate associates to share physical, social, and emotional sustenance. In this reading of the performance, the tea set becomes

a metonymy for the tea party, which is one manifestation of a communal meal. The event hosts could have invoked this tradition and, with it, the neural response associated with sharing a meal, in order to extend the performance to viewers as a coperformative reflection on and of the perceptual world and as a celebration of the interplay among bodies, art forms, ideas, technologies, institutions, communities, etc., out of which the performance emerged and that made the performance vital.

The interplay among material and immaterial bodies during the event manifested as a surge of activity coming at once from all four performance streams. While this surge likely led viewers to begin filtering which audio and visual stimuli they wanted to attend to—a process complicated throughout the performance as video streams were played over other video streams and the once discrete channels bled into each other—it also served as a potential means for establishing and maintaining the complex ecologies that constitute each person's being in the world. I interpret this as a performance of what Claxton calls "the perceptual world of sights, sounds and so on, which we interpret as a 360-degree wraparound backdrop to all our actions" (loc 2514), by which I mean that the *Intransitive Senses* collaboration can be seen as simulating the perceptual ecologies mapped in our brains as we experience that world of sights, sounds, and so on, and thereby enacting the fact that at every moment our bodies encounter overlapping streams of sensory data from our surroundings. It's possible to be overwhelmed by our encounters with "the earthly sensuous," as philosopher David Abram calls the rich phenomena manifest in the world (loc 99); and since humans have mastered the art of selective attention, it's also possible to ignore these phenomena. For most humans the latter is the more likely condition. Yet, as my reading of *Intransitive Senses*, as well as of *poietic*

consciousness, especially as I see it manifest in sonosophy, argues, as we open ourselves to the richness around us and learn to attend closely to the world with all the senses, we seem to increase our chances of receiving nourishment from the world's givenness, mysteries, and otherness and to be drawn into an always emerging, transformative relationship with the world and with each other that, in Abram's words, is "fed with curiosity and spiced with danger" (loc 99). So sustained by our coming together and mutually confirmed in our relationships as we each risk being vulnerable before and with others, we have potential to become enlivening and sustaining agents to and within our communities.

Rereading the Poetry Reading

As the *Intransitive Senses* performance suggests, such enlivening and sustaining may be possible through transgressive speech acts more than through standard poetry readings, which often take place within legitimizing institutions and can function as means of institutional review. As events that can be seen as an outgrowth of fund- and prestige-granting bodies, such readings can perpetuate the reading values of those institutions and their sometimes cloistered communities. These values are embodied in and informed by the range of postures taken toward live poetry by the poets working within and from institutional cloisters. This spectrum includes, among others, poets who dislike and resist giving readings altogether and who may be critical of *any* attempts to take poetry beyond the cloister, poets ambivalent toward or indifferent about giving readings or making poetry public, and poets who actively give and promote readings and other public poetry events. As varied as these postures may be and as much as the variation suggests that

live, public poetry may have uncertain worth for some poets and their legitimizing institutions, at least two values span the spectrum. The first is that poetry matters—else why spend time writing and reading poems, even if you intend to keep them to yourself and resist performing them for a live audience? And the second is that, when voiced—if voiced at all—poetry should be read in a certain way within certain space and have a certain sound.

American poet Donald Hall calls the venue in which this second value is realized and through which it has spread to similar venues "the standard college reading" (66). The "college" in the title clarifies the venue's origins, which actually, Lesley Wheeler observes, aren't all that difficult "to divine." As Wheeler points out, the standard, contemporary poetry reading developed beginning in the 1950s in part out of lecturing practices modeled in the academy: a humanist professor leaning on a lectern, at times holding it with both hands, at others waving them through the air to emphasize a point as he declaims the intricacies of a text in front of a captive student audience (128). Yet, as literary scholar Frederick C. Stern suggests, while "the formal poetry reading" is like a lecture, it isn't quite a lecture (74). It is, rather, a variation on the theme and as such has developed conventions—and a sound—of its own. Peter Middleton describes these conventions as staged in a hypothetical setting: "A person stands alone in front of an audience, holding a text and speaking in an odd voice, too regular to be conversation, too intimate and too lacking in orotundity to be a speech or a lecture, too rough and personal to be theater. The speaker is making no attempt to conceal the text" (25). In this scene, which I admit is an over-generalization, the constituent element is the unconcealed text.

Its presence, in fact, both justifies and regulates the occasion. The text *justifies* the

occasion of a poetry reading in that the poet's written work—especially her publication history—is likely significant enough to warrant the event having been organized in the first place. For instance, maybe the poet has just published a first, or for that matter an nth book and is using the reading to promote her book(s) as well as to share more recent poems that are bound for print publication. Or maybe the poet has won a notable poetry prize for her work and the reading is in honor of that prize. Or maybe the poet is just emerging as a writer of note and the reading is a way of spreading the word. Whatever the case, in each instance described here, as in myriad others, the text-made-public becomes more significant via its author's embodied presence. Standing alone before an audience, the poet is displayed, in Stern's words, as "the living voice and body of the creator of the text." Because it emanates from the lone body of the poetry's creator, the poet's reading of the text "affirms that the poem is a real utterance made by [a] real human being" (78). In this way, a poet's public reading of a poem can confirm that, contrary to what some may believe, the poem, as poetry in general, is not simply a sign devoid of significance: all eloquence and no content. Poetry means something and the authenticity—the realness—of this meaning may be validated for some via the poetry reading.

With the authenticity and significance of poetry at stake, the public poet's unconcealed text becomes a means by which the poetry reading is *regulated* in at least two ways: first, during the event, as noted earlier, the poet—the text-bearer—is placed center stage and her voice, body, and texts are privileged over the voices and bodies of the audience, who have no significant text to speak of or from in the venue. Of course, the crowd may resemble written or printed text when event attendees are seated in rows.

And of course, listeners may offer what poet David Groff describes as "mmmmmm's" at the conclusion of poems that contain "a linguistic or emotional zinger." At times, even, as Middleton observes, these "signs of auditory effort in the audience are momentarily lost in occasional laughter, tense silences, sighs, even cries of encouragement" (25). But beyond the crowd's potential resemblance of text; beyond murmurs of assent, the occasional laughter, sighs, and cries of encouragement, the audience doesn't say anything to or read for the person at the front of the room. Rather, just as the format of lecture-style college classes encourages students to simply receive what the teacher professes, the audience at a poetry reading may be expected to passively sit and listen while the poet reads from or recites a text.

This unspoken expectation foregrounds the second way in which the unconcealed text regulates the poetry reading: during the event, the text of each poem is often read or recited directly from the page. Hence the event title, which highlights the text-centered activity presented on the occasion. As many observers suggest, however, the conventions of text-based reading and/or recitation can lend an odd register to the standard poetry reading voice. For many poets who stand to read or recite, the tone turns contemplative and somber, the pitch rising to accentuate caesuras and line breaks, the voice holding the syllable spoken just before the break for an extra beat or two into the pause. The marked cadence, the rising and falling pitch, and the extended syllables often create a sing-song effect that some note as a hallmark of this reading style, which is also often manifest in the way poets reading their work aloud terminate the performed text. As the end of the poem approaches, the poet's voice may soften and take on what slam poet Taylor Mali describes as a "hauntingly tender" tone that, despite its apparent vulnerability,

nonetheless seems to preserve the requisite irony—the unexpected insight into the poem's subject—given in the poem's final lines. Having offered this ironic insight, the poet leaves it fresh in listeners' minds and ideally leaves them wanting by "ending abruptly as if there is more" to come.

This reading style may be a caricature that neglects the spectrum of performance styles enacted by poets during live poetry events. However, I present it because it's bound-up in practices of oral interpretation (e.g., classroom lectures, classroom poetry reading, and other text-privileging modes of presentation) to which many people have been exposed in their educational journeys and because, as a result, it may be viewed as a dominant mode of poetry performance. As such, when an audience is confronted by a performance style that departs from the standard poetry reading mode and its text-based corollaries, the act can make observers uncomfortable, especially when that departure is radical. And when such departures are radical enough to rupture that familiar voice, the deviant poets may be viewed with suspicion (recall the Bowery Club event emcee who didn't believe Caldiero could have "written" the poem he delivered) and dismissed as crazy or violent characters whose work isn't worth considering in depth. Yet, as I've suggested throughout my ethnography, such diversions from the established social order—wherever they come from, including from more traditional poets whose performance style breaks less drastically with the standard mode of verbalizing poetry—have the potential to rupture the fabric of an observer's consciousness, relationships, and communities and to open before the observer new possibilities for living and acting toward individual and communal benefit. As examples of more disruptive performance modes, sonosophy and the coperformances offered during the *Intransitive Senses* event

can be seen holding out these possibilities to observers. The repeatable (because archived), multi-channeled nature of *Intransitive Senses* seems primed to open the way for observers to reenact and interrogate the communal agency of its actors, whose combined tinkering with somatic resources provides a stark contrast to the typical poetry reading, music performance, or art installation and seems to function to the end of producing and sharing an extra-ordinary perceptual experience.

b. Sonosophy as Somatic Intelligence

Deconstructing the Clenched Hand

As I interpret Caldiero's contribution to *Intransitive Senses*, I see him enacting encounters with the perceptual world, reaching to draw others into the experience, and, in the process, grappling with his communal agency as a performer. Three segments of his performance interest me in this regard: the two bookend poems and his rendition of "Beautiful. Idyllic. Isn't it?" I turn now to the bookend poems, then I'll take up the recursive poem. The first words Caldiero offered during the performance referred to his clenched hand, which he raised slowly from his side until his elbow was square against his torso. As he began raising the fist, he turned his head down to the right to observe the movement and rotated his forearm until his hand was palm-up, extended toward viewers. The camera, having settled on a view of his head and torso after he had lain the mouth harp aside, mirrored his downward glance and zoomed in on his hand as he started to raise it. With the movement he spoke:

HOw↑ LOng

HAs this HAnd

been CLENched	[arm square against torso, clenched hand palm up] [ten second pause, during which AC slowly open the fist to form a cupped palm]
it DOEsn't MAtter	[five second pause, during which the camera zoomed out and panned to a view of AC's head and chest, both now square with the camera]
IT is GEtting WAR--m	[eleven second pause, during which the camera zoomed out to a view of AC's head and torso and AC lowered his hand back to his side]

Watching Caldiero look down at his clenched hand as if he had just noticed it was clenched, then watching him present it to the audience with his question, I hear Caldiero asking viewers to consider with him the wonders of "somatic intelligence": how our bodies know and do things beyond our conscious understanding (Claxton loc 131). In what Claxton calls a "maelstrom of physio-electro-chemical activity," our somatic systems communicate within themselves and to each other about what's happening in the body's external-physical and internal-physical environments; the systems adjust their

response based on this perpetual feedback loop to maintain optimal somatic performance (loc 1200). While we may be conscious of some of this activity, what we're aware of constitutes "[o]nly a tiny fraction" of what the body is doing from moment to moment (loc 1145). We have some awareness of and control over our breathing, for instance, but most of the time the lungs expand and contract without us giving them conscious thought. We often only recognize them at work when something calls attention to, disrupts, or exaggerates their involuntary functioning, as can happen with illness, exercise, anxiety, or even a yawn or the physician's imperative to "take a deep breath." Claxton observes that the body's subconscious activities, like the work of involuntary muscles and the body's regulatory systems, provide the "substrate of our thoughts and desires" and being in the world: the givenness of the body's expertise—of its knowing, means of knowing, and doing—fosters and sustains consciousness (loc 122).

When Caldiero suggested with his question that he hadn't noticed the exact moment his hand had clenched, he seemed to address to the interplay between conscious and unconscious knowing and doing. The way our bodies translate repeated conscious actions into habitual movements is illustrated in Grandma Chadwick's tendency of tracing a fabric seam when she became anxious or had been sitting for too long and in the way this habit still manifested late in her life even though Alzheimer's had degenerated many of her cognitive functions. The movement's continued presence in her behavior marked her long practice of it as well as its continued presence in her neural circuitry. Her body, it seems, remembered the act and may have retreated to it when stressed because of its deep somatic familiarity. In the same manner, Caldiero's clenched hand can be understood as a reiteration of the gesture's deep presence in his body and his

cultural heritage. I see him enacting these things when he claimed sudden awareness of the gesture, attending to it first with his gaze, then with language that interrogated its arrival in his posture before he deconstructed and transformed the gesture by opening his fingers and palm to form a cup and stating, "It doesn't matter." This performative transformation seemed to matter more to him than did the original gesture's emergence and potential duration. The unfolding sequence of the poem, like the unfolding of his hand, showed less concern with the exact moment he began holding the gesture or how long he had been holding it and more concern, as I interpret it, over what he could make happen with the gesture's somatic givenness: with the movements, physical structure, and cultural accumulations that constitute the gesture's semantic ecology.

Whereas the clenched hand held at the gesture-maker's side suggests that the gesture-maker may be withholding something from others—including an emotion, a desire, an idea, an object, or part of the self—the supine palm, extended away from the body toward others, seems to convey the gesture-maker's vulnerability and intent to give or to receive something, be that thing "a material or a mental object" (Müller 234). As linguist Cornelia Müller notes in her extensive discussion of palm-up displays, the gesture appears across a wide range of discourse modes and cultures (234). She observes that Quintilian was one of the first to explore the gesture's rhetorical functions. In his first-century treatise on rhetoric, he discusses its use in Roman oratory: drawing the hand away from the chin or breast and exposing the palm to observers as the arm swept outward, an orator would "spread [himself] open" before an audience. So exposed, per Quintilian, he demonstrated a "modest and submissive" attitude toward both the audience and the content of his speech. With the gesture he also figuratively spread his words,

handling and sowing them like a farmer does seed (366–67). That it makes sense to consider the acts of *sowing* words and *handling* speech as if we were considering the process of manipulating "concrete object[s]" points to the open palm gesture's rootedness in what Müller calls "ubiquitous everyday activities of the hand," which include "giving, taking, presenting, showing, pushing, throwing, holding, cutting" and so on (236). In this view the open palm functions metonymically; as "a contingent part of the action of [giving and] receiving something," the symbolic gesture—with which a speaker or performer can be interpreted as offering an abstract object to others—emerges from the common practice of exchanging things with others hand-to-hand (237).

The relationship between the open palm as symbolic gesture and the open palm's role in exchanging concrete objects between bodies illustrates one way our discursive acts emerge from our somatic acts, which have in turn emerged from our deep biological history. As we perform the gesture, whether for giving or receiving concrete or abstract objects, we make use of neural structures that David B. Givens observes developed early in our species' evolution to reflexively bend the body away from danger. For our quadruped ancestors this could have looked like a dog crouching in submission, its head turned upward, its limbs bent and spine flexed forward, pressing the legs and torso to the ground. As Givens argues, in humans it manifests as head-tilts, shoulder-shrugs, bows, hugs; as an adult squatting—arms extended—to come face-to-face with and to lift a child; and as someone leaning in and holding out a hand to offer or to accept food, language, or a touch ("Reading"). When read in terms of these biological roots, the gesture has potential to manifest more than the gesture-maker's emotional or rhetorical openness. Its performance also seems to open the gesture-maker's body to the world

beyond that body. Exploring the "hard-wired connection" between the brain and the hands in terms of mindfulness practices, occupational therapist Erin Phillips describes how making the open palm gesture can affect the maker on a somatic level: when we turn our palms upward, our "shoulders rotate outward and the chest opens. The cervical spine, in response, raises upward and the eyes are directed forward." With our bodies and sensory organs so positioned, she continues, we open ourselves to give increased attention and mindfulness to our surroundings and "to receive information" from them (24).

When Caldiero cupped his palm and presented it to viewers, the act was rooted in this gestural ecology, which consists of the gesture and its biological, emotional, cultural, theological and rhetorical functions. And when he accompanied the gesture with words, claiming that "[i]t is getting warm," he addressed the potential work it performed within his utterance, and, based on his concern with the acts of fellowship and community building, within the purview of *Intransitive Senses* and human communities in general. The present progressive construction of his statement spoke to what his hand was doing at that moment: being presented to viewers as an open palm and, in the process, "getting warm." The hand would have of course been warm after being clenched in a fist; but once Caldiero opened his palm, the appendage's temperature would have begun dropping. So his statement must have addressed something other than the hand's physical temperature. Based on this apparent reference to something other than temperature, the phrase "getting warm" can be heard resonating with the idiom "You're getting warm," which is used by an object-hider in the party game "Hot or Cold" to tell seekers they're moving closer to the hidden object or by a questioner during guessing games to tell

guessers they're getting close to the answer. In this reading, Caldiero's claim that his open palm was getting warm could have suggested that the gesture was moving him toward something he was seeking. The gesture's functions and the general work of sonosophy suggest that he may have been reaching toward radical openness and vulnerability, toward willingness to give himself to others and to receive what others offered, and toward moments of communion and deep, abiding relationships. Hence one potential reason his clenched palm and the length of time he had held it didn't matter: who he was and what his body may have been saying at the moment he extended his palm seem to have interested him more than who he was and what his body may have saying when his body—perhaps out of habits of being and holding itself in response to the world—maintained a clenched hand.

Handling Relation, Performing the Book: A Liturgy of the Word

That the open palm gesture potentially showed the ways Caldiero was moving closer to sharing his desires, his being in the world, and his communal agency with others—and to likewise receiving what others were offering him—is further suggested in the sequence of his *Intransitive Senses* performance. After lowering his hand to his side, cuing the conclusion of his "clenched hand" poem, he reached to the podium at his left, turned a page in the large, black, hardbound tome laid there, then picked up the book. Holding it in his supine palm, he began reciting another poem. For my present purposes, what he said in that moment doesn't matter. Rather I'm more interested in how the open-palm-holding-a-book gesture—a posture Caldiero has taken across many performances—might function in his *poiesis* (as opposed to how the book functions in a standard poetry

reading). While his hand does serve a pragmatic purpose, supporting his book during performances in lieu of a podium or other stand, it also speaks, as I read it, to the givenness of sonosophy—by which I mean that with his open palm the sonosopher seems to offer language as he might receive it: in open, intimate relation with his self, with others, and with his physical, social, and cultural environments. And the givenness of sonosophy, I argue, amplifies the givenness of language—by which I mean that, as a system we take as a granted aspect of human nature, language comes to us unbidden, as a given, and influences our being as and through dynamic processes of interaction, exchange, and communion. I interpret the book in Caldiero's hand as an expression of these processes: as a channel for giving and receiving language. As such it may matter less what the book says or means than what it does—or rather what Caldiero appears to do with it. For instance, during his "flowers" performance, his "seeing a body" performance, and his "no thing but words" performance (to name only a few manifestations of a common performance posture), he displayed and referred to his book, which (as I mentioned earlier) contains poems and performance scripts but from which he didn't necessarily read verbatim. By interacting with the book as he did in the "flowers" performance, glancing down several times during the speech act to consider, it seems, whatever was written on the page but appearing to focus more attention on what he was doing with his vocal apparatus, he can be understood as infusing the book's text with his being, breathing the utterance to life with his dynamic mode of sounding the self, its inherent sense of withness, and its idiosyncratic relationship with the world.

To be fair, all readers enact a similar process when we encounter texts, though we most often do so in less dynamic, less self-conscious, less conspicuous ways. Each of us

inflects every text we read with the characteristics of our unique being: as we read we inevitably translate texts into the language of our understanding and experience. We perform them—whether in silence or aloud, in solitude or in company—in our own tongue, against the overtones of our own concerns and biases. Because of this, the things we attend to and the ways we attend to them may be a function of who we are, as constituted by the interactions among our agency and the diverse social, cultural, and biological ecologies in which we're embedded. As such, none of us relate to or perform texts in the same way. In fact as we and our ecologies change across a lifetime, no one among us may ever relate to or perform the same text in the same way. Our reception of and relationship with what the writer has offered will change and/or expand as we change. As I interpret Caldiero in performance, he seems to make the performativity of language-giving and language-receiving more explicitly performative by displaying his very conspicuous book as a referent for its contents and its functions in the performance event.

And what might the book's functions in a sonosophic utterance be? I suggest four:

First: the book seems to assert the text as a starting point for a reader's own thinking, acting, and making. As a reader enacts the words on a page, those words spark neural processes in the reader's brain, many of which take place beneath the level of conscious awareness. The brain, for instance, recognizes words and groups of words and connects them with concepts stored in long-term memory or forms new concepts from them, all in the time it takes for the eyes to perceive the marks on the page. The brain so enlivened simultaneously primes the body to act in response to the words read. For instance, when we read about an action, the brain's "motor circuits [. . .] prime

themselves to carry out the action described"; Claxton observes that even "[s]imply reading or hearing a word primes its habitual use." So the word *give* readies the hand to reach out and offer an object to someone and the word *pencil* readies the hand to grasp and make marks on something with a wood-and-lead writing utensil. More, sensory language activates the brain regions associated with each sense. "If you know the smell of cinnamon," Claxton says, "just hearing the word (or reading it [. . .]) is sufficient to activate olfactory areas of the brain." As well, "[r]eading the word 'telephone' automatically rings bells in the auditory processing region of the temporal lobe" in those acquainted with ringing phones (loc 2092). Reading, then, engages the brain and invokes the whole body, which calls upon all somatic resources to position itself in relation to the text and the microcosm presented therein and, potentially, to imagine fruitful ways of integrating concepts from and desirable aspects of that world into our lived experience and relationships. When Caldiero performs the book, like he did during his "flowers," "seeing a body," and "no thing but words" performances and throughout *Intransitive Senses*, his language making has potential to enact, react to, elaborate on, and push back against the printed text as he can be seen exploring the shape sound makes in and with his body, his communities, and the world.

Second: the book has potential to reveal the presence and heft of language in the species' biological and cultural history. Language has played a vital role in human evolution. As I observed earlier in the ThirdWord, our language-making capacity defines who and what we are as a species and how we live in the world. In fact the evolutionary emergence of language likely played a critical role in hominin brain development, providing a catalyst for the development of a super-powered brain capable of more

complex modes of cognition than the species would ever need for survival and that would over time distinguish humans from other animal species. As such, it also fostered the emergence and development of a rich material society and cultural lifeways that contribute to our proclivity for adapting to almost every environment on Earth and that thereby constitute our relationships and our being in the world (see Bickerton; Fitch; MacWhinney). Additionally, language plays a vital role in our individual development. Neurobiologist Dale Purves and his colleagues note that exposure to spoken language during infancy and childhood determines our ability to interact with others and to act in the world, while "language deprivation" during childhood, even with "intense subsequent training," can have "devastating effects" on a person's cognitive, emotional, and social development (559–60). By holding out his tome and self-consciously referring to it during performances, Caldiero can be seen drawing attention to the defining presence of language in human life and experience.

Third: as I interpret Caldiero's use of the tome, it calls into question the primacy of the book—and the written word—as a repository of language, knowledge, experience, and memory. His black volumes are filled with dated entries that consist of drawings, poems, and performance scripts. That these entries are dated speaks to their connection with specific moments in his history, meaning that they're bound up in his personal understanding, experience, and memories. Even so, his books only *represent* the reservoir of his being, they don't necessarily *store* it. Rather, they're just one iteration of the language, knowledge, experience, and memories that are present in his body and that he seems to call upon and embody in performance. I'm not saying that the written word is an ineffective vessel for storing or conveying information, knowledge, and experience. As a

verbal technology, written text provides its users with a means of distributed cognition, making it possible for us "to augment our on-board, physiological intelligence" through the use of "smart materials" like books, sticky notes, mobile phones, etc (Claxton 2752). But the written word didn't come onto the scene first. Writing and print technologies are recent innovations on the long-scale of human evolution, appearing only in the last 6,000 years of the species' nearly 200,000 year presence on Earth (Foley 23–4; McDougall, Brown, and Fleagle 733). Before that, human communication would have been primarily oral; human knowledge would have been distributed among community members; and each member's understanding, experience, and memory would have been augmented via relationships with other group members, not necessarily through the use of smart objects. In fact, even now, to call upon Foley, "the majority of the planet's inhabitants use oral traditions as their primary communicative medium," something "obscured by modern Western egocentrism," which assumes the primacy of the written word and prizes the "letter-based species of verbal art" we call literature (24–5). This skewed worldview seems to forget, however, that written language depends on and has emerged from spoken language. Exploring the connections and departures between orality and literacy, cultural historian and philosopher Walter Ong argues that "[w]ritten texts all have to be related somehow, directly or indirectly, to the world of sound, the natural habitat of language, to yield their meanings. 'Reading' a text means converting it to sound, aloud or in the imagination" (8). With his book held in an open palm as he performs and with his idiosyncratic sounding of the texts in the book, Caldiero breathes life into the written words, translating them into his sound-word-gesture-image.

Fourth: in terms of Caldiero's Catholic experience, when he holds the book in his

open palm during a performance—a gesture that could be inflected by the posture of a priest reading from the lectionary during Mass—his posture can be interpreted as him offering language as a communal element to listeners gathered to share in his sonosophic rituals. Having participated in Catholic liturgical rites as an altar boy during his childhood and adolescence, Caldiero became attuned to the communal work of language and ritual. In the Catholic liturgical tradition, the Mass begins with initiatory rites intended to gather and prepare the community for ritual fellowship—to invoke the fullness of each communicant's presence through the priest's and his ministers' entrance and procession to the altar, a call for silent reflection, and the making of individual and communal prayers. So initiated into ritual space, the priest leads communicants in the Liturgy of the Word—proclaiming scripture and preaching a homily based on one of the proclaimed texts—then in the Liturgy of the Eucharist. During the Liturgy of the Eucharist, the ministers prepare the altar to receive the eucharistic gifts and the priest blesses and gives thanks for those gifts before calling communicants forward to partake and, once all have received the bread and wine, blessing and dismissing the assembly (see *General Instruction* II.72–89).

While Caldiero has said that his participation in the Mass "gave him a deep love for ritual," he doesn't point to one aspect being more influential on him than another (Interview with French 2). Notwithstanding the lack of a definite claim to influence, however, the Liturgy of the Word seems germane to Caldiero's performance of the open-palm-holding-a-book gesture. In their 1963 elaboration of liturgical theology and practice in the *Sacrosanctum Concilium* (the Constitution on the Sacred Liturgy), the Second Vatican Council revised the rite to make its practices and symbols more "perceptible by

the senses," more visible and palpable to communicants (sec. 7). The reform, in part, promoted the function of language in the liturgy. Biblical texts were given greater prominence in the Liturgy of the Word, for instance, during which the Council directs that "[t]he treasures of the bible are to be opened up more lavishly" to the community, providing them "richer fare" to consume "at the table of God's word," as signified by the open book from which the liturgist reads (sec. 51). Proclaiming (perhaps singing) and elaborating on biblical narratives using a "lavish" style—a mode of performance rooted in the abundant resources available via oral language—the liturgist calls the people gathered into a collective encounter with their shared sacred texts. By so doing the liturgist invites them to sit with the communal silence and to consider how the abundance of these texts can manifest in and influence their lives and their communities. In light of and response to this encounter with shared language and narratives, the congregation, under the priest's direction, offers the Universal Prayer: a petition during which communicants stand and give "a common response" to each statement voiced by the celebrant. Acting together in this communal offering, the congregation seeks the benefit of the Church, the community, and the world, asking particularly that those in their number who were "oppressed by any burden" may be given relief ("Chapter II," sec. 30–31). In addition, the prayer, like the Liturgy of the Word, nourishes the communal body, feeding it in anticipation of the Eucharist-proper.

Caldiero's open-palm-holding-a-book display can be read as an invocation of the form and function of the Liturgy of the Word. As I interpret the display, when he stands (or lies down) before an audience with his open tome in an open hand, he presents a communal table embellished by lavish speech acts that break down and elaborate on the

printed text and that, in the process, engage all of his somatic resources to compose a sound-word-gesture-image. Presented with this performative posture, observers are invited, I argue, to see-hear Caldiero's body as something more than a means of discomfort and disruption, to receive the somatic imprint he makes on the world and in other bodies, and to respond to his language-making in kind. So doing, they may begin to open their senses to and allow themselves to be nourished and stirred to communal action by the abundance of the perceptual world; of shared language, space, place, and experience; and of the bodies gathered with them. They may begin to step outside the everydayness or the conventionality of the species' language-making processes and to see anew those processes and their active influence on individuals and communities. They may begin to use language less as a tool for storing or conveying knowledge and meaning and more as a means of being-toward others, of deeply engaging with another person's being, and sharing somatic intelligence among bodies.

"I Speak to Have Your Company"

In the context of his love of ritual, through which he appears to have been called to the work of *poiesis* as communion, Caldiero speaks "not to say something" but "to have [others'] company." Or so he claimed in the concluding poem of his *Intransitive Senses* performance. During his penultimate speech act, he held his book open in his left hand and uttered a poem while placing the fingers from his right hand in and out of his mouth at irregular intervals, imposing on the tongue's space and hindering his ability to form intelligible words. So holding his tongue, he can be understood as having playfully enacted the imperative sometimes used to silence people whose words have violated

norms of propriety: “Hold your tongue!” I interpret his literal display of the idiom on at least two levels. I read it, on one level, as representing the tongue as a transgressive organ that crosses—or whose products cross—the boundaries among bodies. Psychologist Maureen O’Sullivan observes, for example, that the protruding tongue—extended from one body toward another—“can be an act of rudeness, disgust, playfulness or outright sexual provocation”; depending on social or cultural context, it can also be a way to greet or intimidate others (qtd. in St. John; see also Seltzer). In addition to its gestural use, the tongue plays a vital role in producing speech and (as such) serves as a metonym for language; both verbal artifacts—speech and language itself—further breach somatic boundaries, circulating among and shaping bodies. To hold one’s tongue in this regard is to limit the organ’s transgressive nature. It’s to hinder a person or a language from reaching the fullness of their expressive potential and hence their power to act toward communal development and change.

In a similar regard, but on another level, I read Caldiero’s performative tongue-holding as demonstrating his persistent exploration of language as a mode of communal agency whose acts extend beyond mere communication. His utterance seemed to function as such by anticipating—advertently or not—two common activities. In one sense, it reiterated the act of eating with the fingers, which, while generally looked down upon in Western cultures, places people more in touch with what they consume and represents a more sensual, prime-itive mode of taking food to mouth. With the relationship between consumer and consumed unmediated by utensils, as some hand-eating practitioners suggest, people seem to “eat with [greater] conviction and passion.” This may be in part because they feel less constrained by “the rules we have regarding etiquette” and, thus

freed from social constraints, empowered to "let their guard down" and more fully experience the meal, its communal setting and carnal necessity, and the bodies with whom they share it (DiGregorio). In a second sense, Caldiero's tongue-holding performance reiterated the tendency of children to take objects to mouth, only in reverse. While infants or toddlers will grasp things with the hands and draw them to the mouth so they can learn them with the tongue, Caldiero manipulated his mouth with his fingers, interacting with his tongue while he uttered language as if he were learning by touch the lingual poses of spoken words. Rather: since Caldiero, as an experienced language user, could surely already feel in his mouth the sensations made when mouth and tongue interacted, his embellishment and externalization of the process may have functioned, in part, to make it visible to observers. His performative exploration of the organ's speech-making thus had potential to make the act communal even as it obscured his words and divorced their unique sound shapes from their meanings and possible intentions. Although the intermittent disruptions of intelligibility limited observers' chances of understanding all the words he was sharing, more vitally it could be understood as inviting observers to make sense of what he was doing with the speech act, especially in terms of its interaction with the performance streams that were overlaid on his event channel and over which his stream was laid as well as with the event and performance community in which the act was embedded.

As a constitutive element of *Intransitive Senses*, Caldiero's language-making exerted a potent influence on the performance. My experience of the archived video, for instance, was heavily influenced by Caldiero's speech acts, which seemed ubiquitous. I don't attribute this perception only to my personal biases and concerns, although I do

acknowledge their influence on what and how I perceive things; I grant it also to the fact that I'm a languaged being and, to such beings, language is ubiquitous. We see and hear it everywhere. Although we often learn to block out as noise words that entangle us with their everywhereness and to take their presence and their influence for granted, a person's language-making becomes more conspicuous as it's isolated or differentiated from other sounds or more familiar modes of language-making. From this perspective, Caldiero's *Intransitive Senses* contribution may have called attention to itself over and above the other contributions because it was the main language channel streaming during the event (Carr did present a poem early in the performance and the Miklavcics' tea party provided background chatter throughout) and because his mode of making language is deliberately transgressive.

As I hear it, his concluding poem acted within and elaborated on this ecology of somatic knowledge and relations. After he closed his penultimate utterance by pulling his hand from his mouth and speaking the phrase "away the empty mouth," he stared in silence at the camera while the other performance streams continued: the Miklavcics chatting at the tea party and Carr and Cervino-Wood tapping a rhythm on their instruments and plucking or stroking the strings. During the twenty seconds in which Caldiero's stillness was swallowed up in the sound and movement flowing from the other channels, the camera zoomed out slowly until the viewing frame had settled again on a display of his head, torso, and hips. He broke his silence and cued the beginning of a discrete utterance by turning a page in the book he still held open in his hand. As he spoke, his voice flowed into the clamor:

IF I SPEA-k

it's NOt to SAY SOMEthing	[camera pans left, placing AC in right third of viewing pane and zooms in to a view from AC's mid-torso to head]
I SPEAk to HAve your COMpany↓	
IF I LOO/k i/n the MIRror	
it's NO/t t/o SHA-ve	
I LOO/k t/o SEE aNOther FA-ce—	
I EA-t	
I SLEE-p	[camera pans right, placing AC in left third of viewing pane and zooms in to a view of ACs's upper-torso and head]
I LO-ve—	
BUT deSIre COmes to ME # DREssed in BLA-ck	
I exPERience SLEEp with EYES OPEN—	
The BREAd I EA-t	
has SEven CRUsTS—	

I read the utterance as an embodiment of his philosophy of language as communion and its grounding in somatic experience. Filling the mouth emptied of flesh and words during the extended moment of stillness he put on after closing his tongue-holding performance, his opening sentence addressed the conditions under which this philosophy functions. With it he seemed to say, "Given any encounter during which I open my body, my self, and my experience to you and offer you a product of my tongue, the offering isn't

intended to share information or to spell out an idea or opinion. Rather, the language I make and the way I make language intend to draw us into companionship, into being and becoming with each other." Etymologically speaking, to be someone's companion (from Latin *com-* [with] + *panis* [bread]), to have someone as company, is to break bread with that person. It's to set a place for another at your table with hope of fostering and sustaining the communal body.

When he spoke from within the coperformative clamor made by the community of makers gathered for the *Intransitive Senses* collaboration, and doing so, it seems, with the intention of forming and maintaining relationships—of holding them in hand—and not simply of representing concepts, Caldiero's communicative acts could be taken as dynamic moments of somatic communion: as a manifestation of bodies moving to connect, be, and create with other bodies. His second sentence demonstrated his participation in this work. Like Paul speaking within the context of first century Christianity, Caldiero appeared to address hope for a time of communal fullness using the imagery of a mirror, which can only give us indirect access to and knowledge of our bodies; for Paul, the mirror will someday, "when what is perfect comes"—i.e., when a resurrected Christ and his kingdom are manifest—be replaced with direct knowledge of Self and Other (*NET*, 1 Cor. 13.10–12). Unlike Paul, however, Caldiero's hope seems to have been grounded in the here-and-now of human relationships. "Given any encounter during which I cast my being and my desires onto the world via language," he seemed to say, "the act isn't intended to reflect my performance back on myself, to show me how I might present myself in more socially appropriate ways, or to enhance my image in your mind. Rather, I put my Self on display hoping that you'll look back long enough so we

can meet face-to-face and see eye-to-eye, so we can connect Self-to-Self and turn to encounter and address the world together." From this perspective, when he's offering language to others he could be inviting them to recognize, open up to, participate fully in, and revise the somatic ecologies that shape, sustain, and unsettle us. He could be calling us to open up to the workings of *poietic* consciousness and to come together in the ongoing, collaborative, and revisionary work of *poiesis*: of making new social, cultural, and material realities by reclaiming and renovating the long extant stuff of life. Circling around, brushing up against, and crashing into each other, these realities break through what Conquergood calls the "sedimented meanings and normative traditions" that constitute the status quo. So deconstructing established modes of knowledge and experience, they have potential to further plunge us "into the vortices" of our shared hopes and uncertainties, our shared desires and vulnerability ("Beyond" 32). In this way, sonosophy's call for language-making and language-makers that move individuals and communities beyond established social and somatic boundaries seems to ask that observers allow themselves to be moved—to be disrupted and decentered—by the demands other bodies make on our being and to act for the benefit and renewal of the communal body.

As *poiesis* spurs *kinesis*—as maker and the process of making inspire individual and communal movement toward "intervention, transformation, struggle, and change"; toward personal and cultural outreach and generosity; and toward deeper withness (Conquergood, "Ethnography" 84)—the personal and communal bodies and their appetites can become sites of resistance, lamentation, and empathy. In this state, when we "eat," when we "sleep," when we "love," "desire" may come to us, as Caldiero said it

comes to him, “dressed in black”—which I take to mean that it arrives in secret, under cover of darkness; and that it comes unbidden and in mourning for the many bodies around us whose basic needs regularly go unfulfilled. I feel such empathic sorrow and longing burdening Caldiero’s poem, which he uttered in somber, deliberate strokes, pausing for two beats after delivering the first six phrases, which gave listeners time to absorb his words; extending the /s/ in “face” as if he didn’t want to let the word go; and emphasizing and holding the vowels in “eat,” “sleep,” and “love” such that each “I [verb]” statement gradually increased in intensity, a force and passion that extended through the remainder of the utterance. The intensity of desire’s movement into and through his utterance (where I perceive it in his language and deliver) and, perhaps more broadly, into and through his experience as a member of many communities, seem to have opened him to views of his subterranean self and his deepest concerns and to the inner realities that emerge during sleep or other moments of dream-like, ecstatic experience. Such extra-ordinary realities break through the accumulated crust of day-to-day living and conventional modes of language use—which often keep us from receiving the knowledge and experience our bodies have to offer—and can present us with the wonder and goodness of the body’s “inner portion,” the expansive bread of consciousness (*sonosuono* 42). This appears to be the substance Caldiero shared with his collaborators and observers during the *Intransitive Senses* event and that I claim he shares in his always unfolding *poietic* project.

Such substance could have also constituted the communal meal on which he invoked a parting blessing during the event. Once he had finished speaking his terminal poem, he put down his book (off-camera) and, roughly nine seconds after closing

"loaves," raised his hands quickly above his head and took an audible breath with his mouth wide, his tongue touching the inside of his bottom lip, his cheeks pulled up and out (which made his nostrils flare), his eyes wide, and his head cocked slightly back. He relaxed his face while slowly lowering his arms back to his sides. Then, with four to five second intervals between the beginning and end of his gesture-making, he repeated the display three more times; about ten seconds after the fourth repetition, he made the gesture a fifth time. His facial expression and rapid head cock reiterated the movements some people make when they feel a sneeze coming; he also appeared to be on the verge of a scream. Whatever ends his expression and arm-raising gesture could have led to, his recursive display resonated with the ancient practice of praying with raised hands, a context suggested by Caldiero's persistent affiliation with spiritual traditions and meditative practices. This posture appears in the Hebrew Bible and the early Christian prayer circle and Joseph Smith incorporated it into the LDS prayer circle, which is bound up in Mormon temple rites.

Part of the ritual instruction supplicants are given during the LDS temple ceremony before being presented to the officiator-as-God during the veil scene includes what Mormons call "the true order of prayer," during which a small group gathers around the temple altar in a prayer circle (Quinn, "Latter-day Saint" 80). As represented in the Hebrew Bible, these prayer practices included raising the arms above the head; this posture is illustrated in the account of Ezra, a fifth century BCE Jewish scribe and priest. In the narrative, Ezra reads "the book of God's law" to a group of men, women, and children who had gathered in the public square for that purpose. After opening the book before the people, they stand and Ezra invokes God's blessing on the congregation, to

which the people add "Amen! Amen!" as they lift their hands (*NET*, Nehemiah 8.1–8). Hugh Nibley, a scholar of ancient languages and texts, has traced this prayer posture and its appearance and function in early Christian prayer circles through other ancient records. Two of the narratives Nibley shares provide useful material for interpreting Caldiero's arm-raising performance. One, from the apocryphal Gospel of Bartholomew, narrates the story of Mary, mother of Jesus, leading a small group of men in a prayer circle. They approach her after Jesus has died, seeking knowledge about the mystery of his conception, which she agrees to share once they've prayed together. Standing before them with her hands raised, Nibley relates, she "began to call upon [God] the Father in an unknown language," after which she sits with the men and addresses their question (45). The other narrative describes Adam and Eve standing before a sacrificial altar "with arms upraised" in a recursive petition for understanding and aid. Leading the prayer, Adam utters this plea three times: "May the words of my mouth be heard!" In response, angels descend "with a book" and offer the couple comfort and instruction (55).

As part of his theology-making, which was informed by his primitivist tendencies and his desire for mystical union, Joseph Smith reiterated this communal practice of praying in a circle in the years after he established the LDS Church. According to the record of early Mormon Zebedee Coltrin, during a January 1833 meeting with a group of men who had gathered to receive instruction regarding their ministry, Smith directed the group to "prepare their minds" for the instruction by "kneel[ing]" in a circle "and pray[ing] with uplifted hands." As each person prayed, Coltrin writes, "no one whispered above his breath." He further claims that, in response to their collective petitioning, the men received a heavenly vision ("Remarks"). D. Michael Quinn observes that as Latter-

day Saints moved forward from its founding moments, prayer circle ceremonies became a constituent part of LDS temple worship (see "Latter-day Saint").

In each of these narratives, the petition-with-uplifted-hands serves as an initiatory rite, preparing petitioners to access hidden reservoirs of knowledge. As I experience it, Caldiero's gesture-making during his final *Intransitive Senses* performance resonated with this ritual act, which he would have performed while serving as an officiator in the LDS temple. He raised his arms in the prayer-posture multiple times; and although he didn't speak, his breathing produced what he has elsewhere called a "ground sound": a foundational utterance from which spoken language sprouts (*sonosuono* 139). He refers to this specifically as a "*sphota*" (139), a Sanskrit term used within a strain of Indian grammar and linguistics that means "breaking forth, splitting open, bursting," and "[d]isclosure." In relation to language use, it refers to an "idea" or "impression" that "bursts out or flashes on the mind" when someone utters or hears a word ("Sphota"). As a constitutive ground for spoken language, the *sphota* has also been called an "eternal sound without parts" (Rao 134). I take this to mean that, in terms of its constituent philosophy of language, the presence and influence of the *sphota* extend beyond the shape of any single speech act into the ontological field of all utterance across time and space—which is to say that the *sphota* has been positioned as the creative principle that calls things into being, or rather by which things are called into being. "It is," philosopher V.N. Sheshagiri Rao says, "the cause of the world" (134). In this sense it correlates with the Hindu *Om*-syllable and the Greek and Christian conceptions of *logos*. Each philosophy posits an originary expression from which the dialogue that's vital to life emerged and to which that ongoing dialogue responds as it elaborates on the stuff of life.

From this mystical perspective on life's origins, the processes of exchange that constitute our bodies, our being, and our relationships flow from and converse with this expression as it moves to shape and sustain our being and the vitality of the world we inhabit.

When Caldiero raised his arms and primed his vocal apparatus but didn't speak as his final act during the *Intransitive Senses* event, his performance can be seen as a reiteration of this influence as translated into the perceptual field via his sound-word-gesture-image. That he could have been using his somatic resources to translate the ground sound into something comprehensible to observers and to thereby call attention to the sound's givenness as he might experience it flowing from a Creative Presence beyond human perception—from a wellspring of benevolent Otherness—seems to correspond with his work as poet-seer, *makar*, shaman, and priest. From this view, his benedictory act could have intended to invoke the grace of this unseen influence over the event and its coperformers and observers and to foreground its always active presence in their lives and relationships. Possibly experiencing this perceptual encounter as its own end during the event, an experience that would have corresponded with the titular intention of the coperformance, each observer might have become attuned to what Rao calls the "supersensuous" field giving shape to our limited (yet still dynamic and vital) sensual ecologies (134). So attuned, some might have also begun elaborating on this field via their own acts of *poietic* consciousness and communal agency.

Conference of the Birds (v): *Prelude to Bach's Cello Suite No. 1*

I've experienced what I consider the pull toward supersensuous experience during other events. For instance, one Sunday evening in November 2011 (the same day I inherited

Grandpa's books), Dad and I took my oldest daughter, Sidney, to visit Grandma in the assisted living center. As we passed the commons area, we saw a sprawling LDS family putting on a variety show. To bring some needed change to Grandma's daily routine, we wheeled her to the show and listened together as the family's many kids—from toddler to teenagers—played the piano, the violin, and the guitar, and sang several ballads to the residents and several visitors. Besides remembering that Sidney, then eight, was getting antsy and kept asking when the program would be over, one of the things that has stuck with me about the family's collective performance was the father's cello solo. When his time came to perform, he sat on one of the room's high-backed wooden chairs, his cello between his legs, and announced that he would play the *Prelude to Bach's Cello Suite No. 1*.

The oscillations of the bow against the strings of his cello and the melody's resonance through the instrument and outward through the room were answered in my body, which had already been made susceptible to deep emotion via my exploration of artifacts from Grandpa and Grandma's lived experience. Once or twice during the performance, I closed my eyes and let the music fill the cathedral of my flesh, let the rise and fall of the staff rub my emotions thin. During this movement, it struck me how melancholy an instrument the cello is—how its heavy tones stirred me to longing, to introspection, to meditation. How the performance excavated my mood and backfilled it with nostalgia, compassion, and grief. How even the instrument's design—the scroll, the bridge, the f-holes, and the resonant curve of the body—turned me inward, like the koru does, invoking the desire to deepen my kinship bonds and to open myself to the bodies with whom I was sharing the experience: to Dad, to Sidney, and to Grandma, who sat

beside me, age and inactivity hanging heavy on her being.

Beautiful. Idyllic. Isn't it? (Redux)

The work of *poietic* consciousness and performative *poiesis* and *kinesis* manifest in that Sunday evening cello performance and, more, in the benedictory act Caldiero performed during *Intransitive Senses* have invoked for me the mystery of Being in itself as well as the mystery of being-with, being-toward, and becoming-with others. As I've reflected on my experience with each performance, I see in them the attempt to connect with and to enact the world that moves beyond the self yet that constitutes the self. Sitting with Caldiero's performance in particular, I hear the call to be with him in the work of communion. Earlier in the *Intransitive Senses* event he seemed to directly entangle observers in this work by asking a question that, in terms of its content and delivery, enacted the aesthetic and ethical functions of sonosophy. Roughly eleven-and-a-half minutes after he opened the communal event with his mouth harp performance, he closed an utterance, glanced quickly at his (offscreen) book, then looked into the camera with a somber expression, his brow pursed and eyes narrowed, the viewing field framing his face from mid-chin to eyebrow ridge. He kept his gaze steady and, while the camera zoomed out, placing him in the screen's left compositional third, he began voicing his short, recursive poem:

BEAUti*FUL*—	[~3.5s pause after word]
	[midway through pause, camera stopped zooming out, began panning left]

iDYllI # C	[~3s pause] [AC lifted chin; camera stopped panning with AC in right third of pane, began zooming in to view of AC's upper torso and head]
ISn'/t I/ # T	[~3.5s pause] [~14s cycle]
BEAUtiFUL—	[~2s pause] [AC lifted chin; camera placed AC center frame, zoomed to view of upper shoulders and head]
iDYll**I**	[slightly widened eyes and raised eyebrows]
C	[during slight pause, held mouth as if speaking /c/]
ISn'/t I/	[~2s pause]
T	[widened eyes, raised eyebrows; camera zoomed to view of AC's head; during slight pause, held mouth as if speaking /t/]
BEAUTI*FUL*—	[~2s pause] [~12s iteration]

	[as he spoke /b/, blinked, raised eyebrows; then eyes wide for the duration of the utterance] [~2s pause]
IDYLLI	[eyes wider as speaking; eyebrows raised with /dyl/]
c	[during slight pause, held mouth as if speaking /c/]
ISN'/T I/	[~1s pause]
t	[eyes wider as speaking; eyebrows raised with /is/]
	[during slight pause, held mouth as if speaking /t/]
BEAUIFUL	[~1s pause] [10s cycle]
	[as he spoke /b/ and /f/, blinked, pursed eyebrows, raised cheeks] [~1s pause]
IDYLLIC	[as he spoke /idyll/, pursed eyebrows, raised cheeks; raised eyebrows as spoke /ic/] [~1s pause]
ISN'/T I/	[as he spoke /isn/, pursed eyebrows, raised cheeks;
T	

raised eyebrows as spoke /i/;

pursued eyebrows as spoke

/t/] [~9s cycle]

By incorporating the body, the entire viewing screen, the range of his vocal register, and the camera's ability to direct viewers' attention in predetermined ways, Caldiero's performance seemed to invite observers to question, among other things, the creation of beauty as a cultural category, the aesthetics of language use across a range of human performance, and the limits of performance and poetry, especially as they're widely conceived. With the lack of a clear antecedent for "it," the speech act, as a discrete element—a node—in an extended coperformative event—which was itself a node in expansive digital, aesthetic, and biological ecologies—also may have been commenting on itself as well as on the broader ecologies in which it was embedded. As I interpret the act, its inter- and intra-utterance referentiality provided the basis for its broader commentary.

In the utterance just before his recursive poem, Caldiero played with the verbal postures of speech-making by voicing words with his mouth closed, concentrating the sounds he was making at the front of his mouth; then he opened his mouth wide and, varying the shape of his lips, sputtered a series of glottal fricatives combined with low vowels. This latter act approximated primate vocalizations or a human laughing or coughing and concentrated the sounds he was making at the back of his mouth. His mouth-closed/mouth-open display can be understood as suggesting the range of human speech-making postures and phonemic activity and their origin in and relationship to other modes of hominin vocalization. Potentially grounded in this lingual ecology, when

he performed his recursive lyric, the "it" could have been referring to the primal wonder and mystery of human language, which maintains a deep presence in and vital influence on the species. In conjunction with the work it does as a system for transmitting information, for forming and expressing mental concepts, and for connecting material and immaterial bodies, language delights, augments, and embodies the senses. In this view, it's "beautiful," something that contributes to and perhaps even defines the pleasures of perception. Further, as a reiteration and elaboration of neural, cognitive, perceptual, and social processes developed early in as well as throughout the species' history, language inherently represents an "idyllic," pastoral, prime-itive mode of being: a process of exchange that, in David Abram's words, is "rooted in the sensual dimension of experience" and that's "born of the body's native capacity to resonate with other bodies and with the landscape as a whole" (72). Becoming conscious of the ways in which language is grounded in humans' shared experience of each other and of our "local ecologies" (92) and of the ways it manifests and influences the work of bodies "in the heat of meeting, encounter, [and] participation" (72), we can take up and elaborate on discursive acts that hope to bear witness to, address, and sustain the well-being of individuals and communities and their local ecologies and language-making practices.

From this perspective, the processes and practices of language-making are beautiful; they're idyllic. They entangle us in a sensual experience of the perceptual world—in its pleasures and the struggle to fully grasp and represent them. Language processes and practices also reiterate and foster the deep biological and cultural relationships that have made—and continue to make—the species vital. The camera work in *Intransitive Senses* highlighted for me Caldiero's efforts to enact and to question these

things as the viewing screen alternately concentrated on his upper body and his verbal gesticulations. I've addressed the gestural work he's done with his hands during other speech acts when his torso and arms were in view, so I won't explore that further in relation to his mouth-open/mouth-closed utterance and his recursive poem, save to mention that the camera featured his upper body and head for less than a quarter of the latter utterance. Otherwise during the speech acts, the camera stuck to a close-up view of his face and mouth. With the viewing field so focused and with the way he extended and embellished the words as he performed them, holding vowels and emphasizing consonants, his recursive poem called direct attention to the acts of speech production. It demonstrated the movements of face, mouth, lips, and tongue that shape spoken language. My transcription of the performance underscores the cumulative nature of the display: each recursion built upon previous recursions, at once increasing the speech act's semantic and vocal intensity and possibly releasing the poet's somatic tension. Whether it was intended or not, the recursive buildup exemplified the idea that speech emerges from the accumulated effects of somatic processes and that it produces relationships within and among those bodies. Each verbal unit was constituted by the coming together of cultural, biological, linguistic, neural, conceptual, and anatomical bodies, all of which intermingled to produce mutually coherent lexical categories. And these lexical categories, as bite-sized portions of broader ecologies, produce and sustain communal bodies.

My transcription further points to the connections among Caldiero's verbal recursions, his paralinguistic play, and the rhythms of his body. The latter becomes apparent in the length of each voice cycle (from /b/ to /b/)—14 seconds at the beginning

of the performance to around 9 seconds at the end, the speed mounting as he involved more of his body in the act of voicing the words—and the way Caldiero widened his eyes at key moments during the performance. His self-consciously embodied performance mode, which includes using his eyes, resonated in this speech act (as in many others) with the acts of the Sicilian *cuntastorie*. Through his explicit appeal to this figure from his cultural heritage, Caldiero's body becomes coded with multiple layers of poetic training and oral tradition. His poetic training, in fact, ties directly to the Sicilian oral tradition. Although he emigrated with his family from Sicily to the United States when he was nine, the Sicilian culture and language remained (and still remain) an integral part of his experience. Caldiero was so invested in maintaining a connection to his verbal roots that, later in life, he returned to Sicily where he apprenticed himself to Sicilian poet-bard Ignaziu Buttitta, who wrote explicitly about a people's need to connect with their language and to connect with others through that language (Caldiero, "Who is the Dancer" 93).

Take, for instance, Buttitta's poem "*Lingua e dialettu* [Language and Dialect]," the first two stanzas of which follow (in both Sicilian and English):

Un populu

mittitilu a catina

spugghiatilu

attuppatici a vucca,

è ancora libiru.

Livatici u travagghiu

u passaportu

a tavula unni mancia

u letti unni dormi

è ancora riccu.

Take a people

put it in chains

strip it raw

bung its mouth

it's still free.

Deny it work

a passport

a place to eat

a bed to sleep in

it's still rich.

In the first stanza, the poet argues that "a people" can be imprisoned, stripped, and gagged and "still [be] free," and in the second that "a people" can be denied work, "a passport," and "a place to eat" and "sleep" and "still [be] rich." But if a people is robbed of its mother tongue, he continues in the third stanza, the communal body becomes subservient, poor, and infertile—the assumption being that, without a language of its own, a community can't sustain or propagate its identity or its distinctive cultural presence in the world. Rather, it's forced to mingle with other cultural bodies, becomes

"sterile," and is lost forever.

Elaborating on the intimate relationship between a people and its language, Buttitta compares his native tongue to a mother who nurtures her children into fullness of life and health and who is always at risk of fading or being removed from her position of influence as her offspring move into the world. "Once we had a mother," he says, "but she's been kidnapped." He laments her disappearance and the associated loss of her milk, which nurtured individual and communal lives; with her gone, the children have no sustenance to keep them vital, so they "just spit." Their language-making becomes mere noise-making, the spurting of infertile sounds. Without the mother, children can thus suffer neglect, fail to properly develop, and lose vitality; and without children to renew and pass on her biological, cultural, and verbal heritage, the mother languishes. The intimacy of Buttitta's imagery and its implications suggest the deep relation between mother, as language, and children, as speakers of that language; each depends on and is sustained by the other. The imagery also speaks to the closeness of the children: a communal body nurtured on the mother's life-sustaining milk. This relationship is such that the mother's "voice" remains with the collective as her intonations, her "cadence," and her "deep low note[s]"—her laments taking shape in and shaping the children's bodies—become a vital part of their individual and communal experience of the world. They abide in the "resemblance and / the gestures, / the flash in the eyes" of a figure whose nurturing presence sustains and elaborates on the life of the communal body.

Buttitta's reference to a life- and language-sustaining cultural presence cues the *cuntastorie*, a critical figure in Sicilian verbal culture. As someone invested in maintaining the Sicilian culture and language, Buttitta was undoubtedly aware of these

itinerant singers of epic lore, who maintained a presence in Sicily, as folklorist Antonio Scuderi notes, "up until the early part of the twentieth century" (68). Traveling to different cities, the *cuntastorie* captivated audiences with his "hypnotic theatrical performance" of epic tales native to the region. Staged "on a small wooden platform" in the midst of spectators, "the performer would alternately narrate the tale and enact the parts of the various characters" (72). A performer to the core, the teller became a medium (to borrow Caldiero's term) through which the audience could more completely experience the tale being told. To punctuate the *cuntastorie*'s influence, Scuderi turns to the work of Sicilian folklorist Giuseppe Pitrè, who describes the "gestures and mimes [that] were essential to the [*cuntastorie*'s] performance." According to Pitrè's present-tense description of the *cuntastorie*, the performer's "[h]ead, arms, legs, everything must take part in the telling" because "mime is an essential part of the narrator's work." It allows him to bring the stories to life as he "declaims" them before an audience, "agitating his hands violently and stomping his feet" to exemplify the narrative tension and conflict. As the "excitement grows," Pitrè continues, "the orator's eyes widen, his nostrils dilate with his increased breathing, which, evermore agitated," expands the shape of and intensifies his language, drawing spectators' bodies into the story, increasing their heart rate and holding them "in suspense" as the narrative unfolds (qtd. in Scuderi 72–3).

Pitrè's observations about the cadence and tone of the *cuntastorie*'s voice, the gestures involving the whole body, and the widening of the performer's eyes resonate with Buttitta's poet-figure and with Caldiero's bite-size poem performance (as with Caldiero's contribution to *Intransitive Senses* and his *poietic* acts in general). Each poet seems to call upon the *cuntastorie*'s somatic commitments—his performative

engagement with all the body's resources, from waving arms to flashing eyes to viscerally-made and shared language. The flash in the eyes of Buttitta's poet-figure points to the figure's deep engagement with, investment in, and passion for the stories of his people, as well as to his potential anger at their languishing language—all things that would emerge from what I'm calling his *poietic* consciousness. During Caldiero's recursive performance, his eyes flashed in moments of intense expression for what could be similar reasons: the growing tension of the performance exemplified how deeply he attends to the products and processes of language-making and how deeply invested he seems to be in developing *poietic* consciousness, the ethics of language use, and the process of constructing *poietic* events that seem intended to move individual and communal bodies (per Conquergood) toward "intervention, transformation, struggle, and change," toward personal and collective vulnerability, disruption, renovation, outreach, generosity, and communion ("Ethnography" 84).

Tuning my senses to the sonosopher's rituals of sharing, I see-hear in his sound-word-gesture-image this invitation to be enlarged—mentally, emotionally, spiritually, and communally—by the performative ecology he reiterates and inhabits with his *poietic* offerings. Because that seems to be what sonosophy is reaching for: to enact ritual spaces in which observers can, as individuals and communities, experience what he calls "a sound mind, in every sense of that word," pun included. That's what he's after with his *poietic* practice, anyway—or so he claimed in his introduction to a December 2008 performance at the Italian Center of the West in Salt Lake City. After briefly describing the way he "speak[s] and think[s]" via sonosophy about and in conjunction with the sounds he encounters in the world, he added that "it is through this kind of approach to

poetry that we really know what sanity [. . .] is" ("Italian"). His statement suggests that healthy patterns of thought are grounded in deep awareness of and engagement with the earth's soundscape, which offers diverse human and non-human voices that can stir up, augment, and sustain the being and relationships of those who listen closely to them. More, with Caldiero's use of the pronoun "we," the statement suggests that healthy communities may be rooted in these sound-shaped thought patterns. As such, we may be able to better sense our way through the vagaries and varieties of human experience and relationships and to navigate a world in crisis by becoming more aware of what language is and what language does. And we can develop this awareness, I argue in my interpretation of sonosophy, by opening ourselves to the workings of *poietic* consciousness via *poietic* events: happenings that can attune us to the deep presence of language in our bodies and our biological and cultural histories and to its communal function as a measure of and means to and through the mysteries of human knowledge, kinship, and somatic engagement with the world.

Part III:

Sonosophy is Wanted Here!

FourthWord

"[*Poiesis*] is Wanted Here!":

Sonosophy as Critical Performative Pedagogy;

Or, What the Sonosopher has Taught Me about Teaching and Affirming Peace

i. "I'm gonna poetize / to realize"

On Loss and Language-Making

I'd like to say the happenings of September 11, 2001 changed me, that my grappling with the tragedy and its aftermath awakened my social consciousness and brought me to a greater understanding of my place in the world and my obligation to others. The most I can admit, though, is that the day's events unsettled me. I was early-on in my college career that fall and I woke up that Tuesday morning to radio news coverage of the event, to reports of a second plane headed for the second tower, to reporters faltering in their attempts to make language that could represent the intensity and horror of what was taking place. Most of my professors cancelled classes because how could anyone focus on anything that day but the national crisis, how could we be expected to carry on with business-as-usual? One exception was my honors integrated science professor who felt it would be thoughtless to take the day off from learning, that skipping class would do a disservice to those directly affected by the attacks. He seemed to reason that if, in our part of the world, we failed to live up to our obligations to each other as human beings, we would be insulting the victims who had elsewhere that day been stripped of vitality and robbed of their right to life.

Wishing I could have had the whole day off, I didn't appreciate his reasoning nor

was I yet able to make the connection between what was happening to people in New York and my relationships with people in Logan, Utah. I lived very much inside myself and was consumed with the way my own life was unfolding. Foremost on my mind were thoughts about exactly what I wanted to be—I had planned to become an artist since childhood and was a declared art major, but my heart was wandering—as well as of the woman I would marry the following May and the life we were planning together. So preoccupied with personal concerns and desires, I must not have felt compelled to make space in my mind for what I thought was a tragic-though-distant crisis. The one thing that brought the tragedy briefly close to home was my older sister, Tiffany, who lived nearby with her husband. Rattled and hemmed in by the immediacy that news media gave to the unfolding devastation, she felt increasingly exposed. Made vulnerable, she grew anxious that the local university—Utah State—would somehow attract terrorists to the intermountain west and spur more attacks.

Over a decade later Tiffany came to mind when I was reading for the nth time Caldiero's *ars poetica*, "Poetry is Wanted Here!" (from his eponymous 2010 collection).[7] The poem's inscription—"to Bob Heman, in New York, Oct. 2011 re: 9/11"—evoked the felt-sense of a long-ago interaction and my own weak attempt to address my sister's response to 9/11. I remembered Mom calling, telling me Tiffany was shaken up, asking me to stop by and visit her if I could. And I probably did go visit that evening, although I can't recall anything beyond that possibility. I have no artifact but hazy memories from which to reconstruct the experience—hazy memories and an unsettling notion that my immediate response to the event's call to compassion was deeply inadequate. I can't remember what I might have said or what we might have done together during the visit.

[7] I've included a copy of the poem as it appears in Caldiero's book in Appendix 1.

Did I say something to address and sit with her anxiety or did we leave that matter unspoken and stick with more banal, less raw topics? For that matter, could I have said anything to address her anxiety or to comfort her and offer hope? Or was my being there enough? The more I run my mind over these questions and consider Tiffany's concern (which at the time made no sense to me), the less sure I am that my response would have acknowledged or validated her uncertainty; and my perceived failure as a brother—among many other times I've missed the mark—stirs me to be more aware of and compassionate toward those stunned by their encounters with erasure, loss, and despair. It stirs me to open myself to individual and communal bodies in crisis and to seek ways of listening closely to and being-with them that don't ignore, minimize, or gloss over their experiences.

Sitting now with Tiffany's sense of vulnerability at the terrorist attacks, I connect my being unable to comprehend her anxieties to a conversation we had just over a year later. I had called to let her know that Jess and I, then six months married, were expecting a child. Tiffany took the news hard. After a brief pause, she offered her congratulations, but I sensed grief in her voice. She and her husband, Jeff, had been married for several years and had been trying for some time, without success, to get pregnant. I knew our news would be difficult for her to process; it seemed so unfair: she was the older sister and had been married longer and wanted a child so badly, while Jess and I were still newlywed and had had no problems conceiving in the few months we hadn't been actively preventing pregnancy. Her disappointment slipped through the line before the call had terminated. "That makes me so mad," she said to Taryn, our older sister, with whom she had been shopping; then I heard the dial tone. I kept the phone to my ear for a

moment or two after the call ended, Tiffany's statement ringing in my ears. It had shocked me, despite my realization that it probably didn't come from angst but that it manifest the deep emptiness she was likely experiencing at being yet unable to have kids and feeling stigmatized as a member of the LDS Church living along the Mormon Corridor where the religious culture seems to compel people to marry young and have kids early.

Despite recognizing the clear sense of loss out of which Tiffany's statement emerged, despite sensing that she meant Jess and me no ill will with it, and despite the fact that it wasn't even intended for our ears, I couldn't let it go. It began shaping my understanding of Tiffany in a way that my failure to grasp her anxieties over 9/11 probably never did, at least until I began rethinking those anxieties while writing this section. I wonder now if my inability to let her statement go was rooted in my perceived failures as a brother and my desire to make up for those failures by alleviating any harm—however unintended—my presence in her life may have been causing her. When it came to my announcement that Jess and I were expecting, I knew the promise of our child would accentuate Tiffany's emptiness, but I also knew I had to let her sit with that and come to terms with it in her own time. Because even though I couldn't let her statement go—by which I don't mean that I fumed over her words or held them against her—I also couldn't open up to her about the way her words had called me to the work of compassion, about my perception of her struggle, or about my desire to ease her burden however I could. That opening didn't come until seven years later after she called with an announcement of her own: they were adopting a baby boy. I leapt at her words and said, likely with tears in my eyes, that I was so excited for them, that this had been a long time

coming. She said she was excited and nervous and didn't know where to start preparing their apartment for the change. I probably told her that, for what it was worth, I was confident she would figure it out and would be a great mom. About a month after their announcement, she and Jeff welcomed Zackary into their family.

We had never lost contact during the years between my phone call announcement and hers and, though I know it wasn't easy for her, she had made efforts to build a relationship with Sidney by, among other things, coming to visit us in our basement apartment when we brought Sidney home from the hospital and designing and decorating the nursery when Jess and I moved into our first home. And though Jess and I did our best to acknowledge, in word and deed, that we recognized the physical and cultural burdens Tiffany was carrying and, so doing, to alleviate any tension she may have felt around us, it wasn't until I saw her cradling Zackary for the first time that I felt it would be meaningful to open up to her about the way her years-earlier post-conversation declarative had stirred me. So I began writing to her.

It took time to find language that would fit the experience, though. That didn't come until I encountered an image of Madonna and child painted by Utah Valley-based artist J. Kirk Richards. Part of a series titled *Mother and Child*, the painting I resonated with was subtitled *(Yellow)*. In it, Mary and Jesus, painted as gestural figures in yellows and browns, emerge from and fill out a geometrical pattern; the mother is completely taken with the child, who sleeps swaddled in her arms and whose torso she touches with the fingers of one hand. As I attended to the composition, a poem began unfolding in my mind:

A matter of geometry, these two:

mother and son bisecting desire,
trilling between syllables of miracle
on the insatiate tip of God's tongue,
plotting points of spirit-cum-body-cum-
solitude across the palate of this
Cartesian life.

In light of my present consideration of Caldiero's *poiesis* as a response to individual and shared crises, the full content of the poem matters less than the fact that my response to Tiffany's statement, to the desire it seemed to disclose, and to the subsequent fulfillment of that desire—a response mediated through the way she cradled Zackary and my interpretation of her posture via Richards' Madonna—ultimately came into being as poetry. Arising from my desire to listen closely to and to converse with Tiffany's experience, my language-making—as I conceive of the process now via my engagement with sonosophy—was rooted in my somatic intelligence and my expanding *poietic* consciousness. As such, it embodied my somatic rhythms and intentions. It enacted my communal agency as a member of an intimate kinship network held together (in this instance) by familial bonds and a mutual commitment to sustaining those bonds. And it disclosed my "bodily feelings, values and concerns," which Tiffany's years-earlier statement had stirred up and which had percolated in my conscious and subconscious minds until I saw her holding Zackary that first time and the act ruptured my perception of her, opening a seam through which my body's "still, small voice" could whisper into my consciousness and I could begin shaping that voice into language meant to speak to something inside Tiffany's being (Claxton loc 3371). While I don't recall how she

responded when I gave her and Jeff a copy of the poem (which I sent to them with a print of Richards' painting), the experience has reinforced for me the validity—and the difficulty—of making language that seeks to address, bear witness of, and find hope and grace in moments of crisis, erasure, and loss without evading or negating the individual and collective struggles that accompany such moments and often strip us of words.

"You Don't Sound So Good": At a Loss for Words

Re-enter Caldiero, whose defense of poetry begins, "You don' sound / so good," an observation that addresses the personal crisis provoked by the national crisis: when confronted with erasure on a massive scale, it seems that Heman lost some expressive ability, that his language-making capacity suffered in the face of gross violence. He wasn't alone. Catherine Morley, Senior Lecturer in American Literature at the University of Leicester, suggests that the loss of words in the wake of 9/11 was widespread. In her research on fictional responses to the events of September 11 (as reported in the Spring 2009 issue of *LE1: The Magazine of the University of Leicester*), she observes that 9/11 made many writers feel impotent, stripped of the ability to make language. She adds that a possible cause for such powerlessness is the idea that "[w]ords alone cannot untie the knot of grief nor can they adequately compete with images of mass devastation" (10). Potentially overwhelmed and made vulnerable—as Tiffany was—by what Morley calls the "unending televisual loop" in which news media outlets played and replayed footage of the unfolding event, viewers may have been uncertain how to respond. Language itself, in fact, may have been stripped of agency and vitality by the attacks, being jarred into inaction, deemed unproductive and inadequate, and subsumed in suffering bodies

and scenes of violence reiterated on screen upon screen upon screen upon screen.

The two-page introductory spread from the *LE1* article about Morley's research, "9/11. . . at a loss for words," vividly illustrates the apparent insufficiencies of language in the presence of deep erasures: the left third of the layout features a thin column of copy and half the headline ("9/11. . . at a") in black text against a light gray background. The layout's right two-thirds is a full-color image of the Twin Towers billowing with smoke and flame. The second half of the headline ("loss for words") hangs in stark white against the backdrop of the dark cloud rising to the top left of the image. Two things stand out to me about the use of language in the spread: 1) the thin column of black text is a pale shadow of the buildings aflame in the picture, pointing to the ultimate inadequacy of language as a mode of representing objects or lived events, especially those marked by strong emotions; and 2) the way the headline imposes on the moment of erasure represented in the image, potentially drawing attention away from the focal point of devastation and loss and directing it elsewhere, toward the dual function of the thin words that run—undeterred—from a blank background onto the image's dark clouds.

"At a loss for words." The phrase is idiomatic for the condition of not being able to think of something to say, most often, it seems, as a result of being caught off guard. This condition may be considered a deficit because language is such a vital part of who we are as a species; as languaged beings, many humans might assume that we have or need words for every situation we encounter. From this perspective, to be without words is to be less-than-human. Rather than suggest this about ourselves, though, some of us might make language just to fill the void, saying, "I'm at a loss for words." Naming the condition, we may feel better about inhabiting it. While the phrase works idiomatically in

this sense, putting a label on a human response to unexpected happenings, in another sense it points to a condition of language. In this version, "loss" could be rendered "defeat." "A defeat for words" connotes any moment when language breaks down during an encounter with another system or force, whether the system or force is cultural, emotional, social, physical, etc. During such moments, language is defeated. It's overcome. It languishes. If I add the preposition to the statement—"*at* a loss for words"—I position the moment of defeat; I give it a place and place myself in relation to it. So: "I'm at a loss for words" implies that I'm surveying a scene or attending to a moment where language was overcome.

Turning this analysis of the phrase to my reading of "Poetry is Wanted Here!," I take Caldiero's second statement in the poem as a response to his friend's sense of being overcome: "Please / take care," the poet says. I interpret this statement in three different ways, each with my own claim to poetic license as I put words in Caldiero's mouth and speak from his perspective, and each incorporating cues given by the context and the title and first lines of the poem, as well as by Caldiero's broader *poietic* project as I've interpreted it in my ethnography:

1) *Please take care of yourself.* Your presence in the world matters a great deal to me, else why would I address this language to you? Why would I spend time and effort to express my thoughts via poetry? Nurture and sustain your Self by attending with care to the needs of your entire being. I can sense in your voice and your words that you're wavering; but don't yield to the violence and devastation that so suddenly and directly threaten you with erasure.

2) *Please take care of your language-making capacity: your ability to reach out*

to and commune with others by expressing your being. Your voice is wavering and your language languishing in response to the sudden erasure of life as we've been living it. "Most o' this is mental," by which I mean that the breakdown is happening in your head—literally (3). Your perception of things (objects, events, images, people, experiences, etc.) is constituted by the way your brain processes the information your body receives through the senses. These processes—including your ability to make and comprehend language—coalesce in and emerge from networks of neural pathways that inform your habitual response to stimuli. The attacks on your city—your home—disrupted your neural pathways and threatened your life. Such disruptions are unsettling, in part because they reveal our emotional, mental, and physical vulnerabilities and make us susceptible to change, for better or for worse. This is one reason acts of terror are such potent weapons: through violence and threats of violence, they're "meant to / disconcert" you, to confuse your habits of being, to force you from established (path)ways of thinking and living and to in the process "make you revert / to blind fear"—fear of the future, fear of uncertainty, and fear of erasure (3). By instilling in victims such "where-do-I-go-from-here" thinking, terrorists blind others to their possibilities for productive action and so bind them to inaction.

The loss of words in the wake of 9/11 was one manifestation of terror's potency. But as much as the attacks may have disrupted people's language-making capacities, the rupture also opened avenues for new modes of language use to enter our individual and collective interactions and to invite personal and cultural reconsideration of our individual and collective ways of being in the world and being with others and of meaningfully communicating and communing with those who share the places we

inhabit. By attending to these mental and cultural pathways as represented in the shapes language makes on the page and in the body and as they constitute renewed modes of being and thinking, communicating and communing with others; and by actively engaging in language- and culture-making activities, you can revise and rebuild the sense of self that was crippled by the violence and devastation. Enter poetry: *poiesis*: the process of making. In the moments I'm faced with erasure, poetry is one vital thing I call upon to renew my place in, my understanding of, my relationship with, and my expressions about the world. Hence: "poetry is wanted *here*," in our moment of personal and collective crisis.

3) *Please take care with words.* As you regain your ability to make language after being at a loss for words, practice the work of *poiesis* with greater care and concern for how your language acts upon others and the world. You should attend to the influence your language has in our social and cultural "atmosphere" because, contrary to conventional wisdom, our words matter every bit as much as our actions. In fact, our words *are* actions: they perform real work in the world. Among other things, language activates neurons, forges neural pathways, expands consciousness, shapes relationships among people, and informs our species' continued evolution and the impact and quality of our presence on Earth. When you call upon and give yourself to poetry—to *poiesis*—it will call you to such increased concern for your language-making capacity and turn you outward, toward increased ethical engagement with others.

Emergent Ritual as *Poietic* Event as Liberatory Pedagogy

Caldiero's clear sense of obligation for his friend, his defense of poetry as a vital

response to violence and threats of violence, and my attempt to rethink my response to Tiffany's anxiety over 9/11 have all compelled me to revisit my experience of the event and its aftermath. In May 2002 Jess and I were honeymooning in New York. Being so near Ground Zero, we wanted to see what was left behind and to pay our respects; so, from our hotel near Central Park, we made our way downtown, hand-in-hand, thrown off-balance by the city's speed, our noses and lungs stung by exhaust, buildings peering over our shoulders, into our new life as a married couple. We hailed a cab a few blocks into our uneasy trek across the city; and, after a jarring ride, the driver dropped us as close to the site as he could. Impromptu memorials lined the streets, crowding stairways and intersections and exterior building walls. The collections gathered crisp photographs layered over faded and curled photos; crosses; flower bouquets (fresh, wilted, and silk); handwritten notes, ink running and faded from exposure to the elements; objects that belonged to those lost (stuffed animals, eyeglasses, cassette tapes, musical instruments, etc.); American flags; and candles melted or burning in remembrance of the dead and through the city's continued vigil for peace. Immersed in the collective grief and mourning performed by these memorials as ritual acts toward healing, I was drawn into the city's still unfolding narrative: its emergent response to the tragedy.

I wasn't alone. Jess and I joined hundreds of other tourists who had come to witness the tragedy's aftermath and to stand in the place where just eight months earlier terrorists had destroyed a New York icon and symbol of the United States' global economic virility, killing thousands of people in the process. We pressed to get a glimpse of what was left behind, but every vantage around Ground Zero was veiled: the high rise windows around the block were blacked out, the construction walkways and chain link

partitions were covered with plywood and heavy canvas, and police officers walked the perimeter to keep people from crowding around gaps in the blockades. Looking back, I recognize that the barriers were necessary measures to keep people from crowding the site and causing problems for workers clearing the rubble, which likely still included human remains; but they also seemed to be an attempt to be circumspect by covering the city's fresh wound. At the time, however, Jess and I thought they were just in the way. Disappointed that we weren't being permitted to see what was happening behind the barriers, Jess took advantage of a gap in the officers' attention, slipped across the street, and snapped a photo of the site through a gap between partitions. I'm not certain what's happened to that photo since, but my memory tells me it showed a typical commercial construction area: men in hard hats moving dirt and concrete and oversized earth movers churning the ground with trailers and portable toilets around the perimeter. It wasn't just any construction site, though. The acts of erasure that took place there, the impromptu memorials, the masses of people making language and pilgrimage to honor the victims, and the selfless acts of rescue workers who risked their state of being to sustain someone else's—these events gave the place greater significance. They set it apart from other public places, raising it from a business-as-usual thoroughfare to a place of communal mourning and remembrance.

The impromptu memorials played a key role in sacralizing the space. Emerging in the area around Ground Zero in the weeks and months following the attacks and made visible by their widespread appearance in news media coverage, these "spontaneous shrines," as folklorist Jack Santino has named this commemorative genre (363), combined "ritual, pilgrimage, performance art, popular culture, and traditional material

culture" to make what folklorist Sylvia Grider calls "a tactile and visual expression of our connectedness to one another." As folk assemblages that appear to give form to the shared grief experienced by individual and communal bodies, Grider suggests that spontaneous shrines "reduce the overwhelming enormity of the catastrophe" they accompany "to a more manageable human scale." In the process of embodying grief in more palatable fragments, they bring the event closer to comprehension. This can be especially helpful to people "when the emotions evoked [by a tragic event] are new and raw" because the act of placing mementos at a shrine may give mourners "a sense of purpose" and empowerment in the wake of happenings that are incomprehensible, oppressive, and senseless. In fact, Grider observes, the act of memento-placing is akin to "lighting a candle at a church altar": both rituals can bring comfort, hope, and grace to the performer through a connection forged with something sacred, something beyond erasure and workaday realities. In this way spontaneous shrines become thresholds through which people can approach "the end of numbness" and renew their "ability to take action." They become focal points for individual and communal grief and attempts to extend grace across cultural and somatic boundaries. They become, as emergent rituals of sharing, *poietic* events that arise from, put on display, converse with, and disrupt the flow of individual and collective crises—and that thus have potential to bring individuals and communities from despair to a place of hope and healing, to liberate them from the dehumanizing influence of tragedy.

Caldiero's *ars poetica*—a verbal memorial addressing 9/11 and its aftermath—seems to have been made to serve a similar function. Extending the open palm of his words toward his "dear friend" (and potentially toward everyone affected by the tragedy),

he acknowledged and validated the intense grief and fear provoked in Heman by the sudden erasure of life, stability, and security. More, through the act of offering his language to another human, he offered his presence—his incarnate word—as a mode of resisting and revising the crisis: "i'm [sic] gonna poetize," he says, "gonna" make language potent enough to confront the "blind fear," anxiety, hopelessness, and gloom produced in individuals and communities by those peddling terror. So doing, he adds, he intends to "realize"—to make real—the obligation we each have not to withdraw from life and its givenness or to retreat into ourselves "when worlds collide" but to keep breathing, keep reaching out, and keep unveiling the self to others and in the process inviting others to do the same (3). In an act that seems intended to invoke the reality of humanity's shared obligation for Life, Caldiero offers his friend the grace of *poiesis*: of language that appears to open new possibilities for living, for being in the world and being-with others, and that sustains principles of Life and brings forth "hope" and the "joy"—the deep, abiding, challenging pleasure—of kinship bonds. These bonds, he acknowledges in his poem, leave us "vulnerable" to each other and the strength to be found in community; but they also expose us to loss, disappointment, and pain (4). Yet, that vulnerability can be generative—it can lead new material and immaterial worlds into being. As I explore in my ThirdWord, the fecund nature of such radical openness may emerge from the evolutionary development of our linguistic, neural, cognitive, emotional, and social capacities, which inform our instinctive and learned responses to other bodies and our environments; from the ontological narratives—religious convictions, philosophical theories, God-concepts, stories of world-creation, etc.—that define our aesthetic and ethical approaches to relationship-building and the products and processes

of art-making; from our deep-rooted somatic engagement with other bodies, which has potential to bring us together in intimate relation; from our mutual participation in religious and social rituals, which can feed the communal body, invoke the perceptual world, and engage the senses; and from our agency as beings somatically primed to respond to life's givenness. As I read them, these varied processes of embodiment call us to give way to the "concrete particularities" of being human by taking on the personal and social entanglements inherent in fully being-with others (Hartshorne 44).

As I've explored sonosophy via my critical methodology and listened closely to what I've taken as its summons to Life, wisdom, and individual and communal well-being via the work of emergent ritual, I've been drawn into such entanglements. I find it increasingly difficult, in fact, to avoid them, especially as I've consciously tried to incorporate the dialogical nature of performative *poiesis* into my work as scholar and teacher. As I discuss in my SecondWord, dialogical performance is a mode of vulnerable observation—akin to sonosophy—that struggles, in Conquergood's words, to "bring together different voices, world views, value systems, and beliefs so they can have a conversation with one another" and can coperform "the processes of communication that constitute the 'doing' of ethnography: speaking, listening, and acting together" ("Rethinking" 181). Acts of liberatory education—a pedagogical mode that moves students and teachers toward "authentic, humanist [. . .] generosity" and inquiry (Freire 54)—enact such a coperformative critical *poiesis*. They engage bodies and minds in what educator and philosopher Paulo Freire calls "the problem of humanization": the *poietic* work of unfolding what it means to be human and of revising individual and communal realities and social systems to better sustain that work and the people those realities and

systems sustain (43).

Embodying these processes, a critical performative pedagogy welcomes many voices and the work of disruption into the classroom. Within this pedagogical paradigm, as performance scholar Arthur J. Sabatini suggests, "[e]ach class meeting" is "comprised of the many individuals, many *languagedness*, or *heteroglossic* voices of the texts and students" (199; italics in original). This conception of the classroom as polyphonic space—as a many-voiced place of making—is grounded in Mikhail Bakhtin's concept of the "utterance." In Bakhtin's words, "Each utterance is filled with echoes and reverberations of other utterances to which it is related by the communality of the sphere of speech communication" (91)—which is to say that every text resounds with other texts, every speech act with other speech acts, and every performance with other performances (a principle I've demonstrated throughout my ethnography). Per Schechner, our communication, as our behavior, is always "twice-behaved," reiterative, and citational (*Performance* 28). It's framed within and in relation to previous communicative acts that we "restore" or reiterate at the moment of utterance. In this way, each text, each utterance, each relationship, each performance, and each speech community becomes a rhetorical carnival filled with the fecund chatter—the many voicedness—that constitutes and sustains all human communication.

Through the interplay of these voices and the insistent tug-and-pull among teacher, student, text, experience, and disciplinary and institutional structures, the critical performative pedagogy I've begun asking after in light of sonosophy is continually re-created and renewed. It adapts to students' interests and desires even as it pushes back against those desires and recognizes and invites students to engage disciplinary and

institutional knowledge. In these ways, it also has the potential to re-create and renew the teachers and students gathered beneath its purview. Such is the case because the oppositional tension between centripetal and centrifugal classroom forces—between the classroom order and everyday structures and realities, curricular structure and adaptability, and a teacher's authority and student agency and voice—"open[s] a hole 'in the fabric of things, through which life-giving power flows into the world'" (Ward 64). This is minister and performance scholar Richard F. Ward citing pastor and professor Gordon W. Lathrop's liturgical theology. Ward uses Lathrop to reiterate the rhetorical, pedagogical power of "liturgical performances," which create tension between "an order of worship" and "the structures of everyday life," placing those parishioners poised on the threshold during ritual performance at the ongoing moment of transformation (Ward 64). Though not a place of worship, the classroom—a place of *poiesis*, like Caldiero's Poetarium or spontaneous shrines that emerge after shared crises—is another such threshold where students are separated from and can be prompted to reflect on the structures of everyday life during a communal course of study. Through classroom interactions and rituals of sharing, students and teachers are offered the chance to enter into ways of thinking, being, and being-with each other that can transform how they interact with others and with the world once they walk out the classroom door.

ii. Critical Co/Performances: Pedagogy and *Poiesis*

Conference of the Birds (vi): "This Class Gives Me Hope"

The statement cut through the end-of-class clamor. As students loaded their bags, stood to leave, started chatting with friends, and piled their assignments for me on the desk

closest to the door, a student turned to his friend as they walked from the classroom and made the comment: "This class gives me hope." His words caught me off guard, disrupting me from my after-class routine. Hearing them, I turned from erasing the whiteboard, which we had peppered with notes during the day's discussion, and watched the last students trickle out the door and the first students from the next class trickle in. I'm not sure what I expected to find when I turned. This student—one of the many thoughtful, engaged people in that class—wasn't offering me accolades or cheering my efforts, so I wouldn't have seen a smiling crowd giving me applause (not that I was expecting such a response) or even someone waiting to give me thanks or to flatter me before asking for a favor. Rather, he likely said what he said in passing then moved on with his day, never intending his language to reach me or to last beyond the moment in which he had made it. Yet, his words stuck with me. I mulled them over as I finished wiping the whiteboard, left the classroom for the next teacher, walked to my car, and drove home. And I've returned to them often since, asking myself, "What were we doing together that gave him hope? What was happening in our learning community to move its pedagogical climate beyond the potential hopelessness or tedium he was experiencing elsewhere in his life and to make our classroom a space where he could open up to and experience the promise of something more? What possibilities and/or relationships were we holding out to each other during our interactions that made the community, for him—and if I'm being honest, for me—so vital?"

Doing Poetry as Pedagogy as Peacemaking

Sitting with this student's comment, with the questions it has called to mind, with the

disruptive nature of individual and collective crises, and with the always unfolding problem and promise of sonosophy, I've considered and reconsidered the pedagogical commitments that have emerged from my personal and professional relationship with Caldiero, whose mode of critical performative *poiesis* is, as I see it, by nature pedagogical, seeking to educate people in the root sense of the term: to lead them out of one mode of being into another ("Educate"). Caldiero spoke to this function of his *poiesis* in his 2008 conversation with Kathryn French. During the interview, which addressed Caldiero's personal history as an immigrant and a conscientious objector to the Vietnam War, French asked him how he became a peace activist and how his poetic commitments contributed to his work as a teacher. Speaking to the first question from moral grounds that privilege Life to such an extent that he couldn't "imagine" any reason—even "a real spectacular reason"—to "kill someone," to impose his will on another human with lethal violence (5), he said, "Well, I believe in declaring peace." So rooted in this conviction, which he claimed as a moral imperative, he wondered why more people couldn't affirm that mode of being by using language made public with "the same energy and the same aggressiveness" that people use to "declare war." This doesn't of necessity mean "protesting war" through acts of organized resistance, he continued; rather, a more "viable way of getting things done" and of "affirming peace" is by leading "one human being at a time" to the "conclusion that they would prefer peace rather than war" and that they should declare their preference in everything they are and everything they do (7).

Hence his pedagogical commitments, which he claimed in the interview (as I interpret his observations) are rooted in the work of fostering others' communal agency: of stirring observers to recognize and listen closely to the wisdom of their own somatic

intelligence—the "'still, small voice' of our bodily feelings, values and concerns," as Claxton describes it (loc 3371)—and to ply that wisdom in the relational processes of making, which emerge from and participate in the interconnected networks of things that constitute the stuff of life. As I've explored throughout my ethnography, such *poietic* work invites us to recognize, first, the pleasures of language making as mode of expression rooted in the body, even if many people see it working only from the mind; then, via this openness to the embodied nature of language, it demands radical openness to the Self, the Other, and the material and immaterial environments we mutually inhabit. It asks us to take the risk of vulnerability, to offer our being to others on the common table of humanity, and so doing to come together in intimate relation with disparate others by making the effort to listen closely and speak authentically to our own and to each others' most "personal," "subjective," and "heartfelt values" and experiences in acts of ritual sharing that honor the essential humanness of each person (Caldiero, Interview with French 8). Caldiero commented in his interview that such acts make teaching vital. More, they make it poetry. By engaging teachers and learners in the coperformative work of *poiesis*, acts of critical pedagogy (like sonosophy and other critical modes of language-making) intend to draw people into the heightened awareness of self and human temporality that, for Caldiero, seem to constitute poetry as an act of what I call *poietic* consciousness. "[P]oetry can change people from the inside out," he said. From this perspective, a teacher-as-poet has "to be able to speak to something inside of a person," but not "inside their head, [or] inside their heart." Rather, he has to be able to address the person's being—"who they are"—by offering language from within his own being, by "do[ing] poetry": an act that transcends just writing or thinking or feeling poetry and that

instead positions *poiesis* as a mode of being in the world and being-with others (8).

The verb phrase "doing poetry" resonates with the sociological concept of "doing gender," which suggests that our gender—as opposed to our biological/categorical sex: the one we're assigned at birth based on our sex organs—is constructed and reiterated in everyday interactions as we put on the behavioral norms labeled feminine or masculine by our cultures of influence. As sociologist Judith Lorber notes in her discussion of the social construction of gender, "everyone 'does gender' without thinking about it." Based on the norms we receive and respond to from birth, we learn to "carefully construct [our] gender status by dressing, speaking, walking, gesturing in the ways prescribed for women or men—whichever [we] want to be taken for" (276–77). In this way, gender becomes a posture we take toward the world; it shapes our bodies, identities, relationships, and desires. Poetry, at least as Caldiero seems to conceive of it, may likewise emerge from, express, and construct the self as it unfolds breath after breath, in perpetual relation with the stuff of life. In this view, his performative *poiesis* is something he puts on. It's a disposition: a network of somatic tendencies constituted via the actions and interactions among diverse biological and cultural influences that prompt him to both turn inward—in acts of self-exploration and self-communion—and outward—in acts of relationship-making and communal development. Hence (as I interpret it) his reiterative declamation, which appears seven times in his 9/11 *ars poetica*: "Poetry is wanted *here*!"—in individual and communal bodies primed to coperform the work of deep somatic connection assumed by *poietic* consciousness, *poietic* structures, and *poietic* events.

Near the end of his conversation with French, Caldiero performed "Poetry is Wanted Here!" in an effort to represent what he means by doing poetry. He framed the

performance by describing its conception and development (something he rarely does when performing in more public spaces):

> this is, uh, a letter that I wrote to my friend Bob in New York
>
> in October 2001
>
>
>
> and I was writing a letter to him because
>
> he ha— he was on his way to work
>
> when the train stopped
>
> and, and everybody was told to get out
>
> and so they walked across the tracks
>
> and out on top
>
> and as they go out on top
>
> the second plane
>
> hit
>
> the World Trade Center
>
> and he was totally really very freaked out by all of this
>
>
>
> <oh> we're talking and this is
>
> maybe, uh
>
> uh, almost a month later
>
> y'know and I wrote, I started writing a letter
>
> and as I'm writing the letter
>
> it turned into this

which was not just a letter, it was a poem

because of what I say poetry is

y'know, I started out with a part of me

but as I'm writing

this letter, more and more parts of me

were being engaged

y'know, so it wasn't just

y'know, so at that point

it became poetry

Providing context for the act with his explanatory utterance, Caldiero moved from a general introduction to the poem as letter to a friend into retelling the friend's experience of and emotional reaction to the attacks into the way a long distance conversation with the friend turned into letter writing, which unfolded Caldiero's being always unfolding as poetry. In this way, the general movements of his commentary seemed to embody the relationship between his friend's somatic response to 9/11, his own sense of obligation for declaring peace, and how that obligation manifested in a specific *poietic* act intended to lead another person into deeper awareness of Self, Other, and world—and thus into an expanded state of being.

During his performance of the poem, Caldiero offered short, percussive phrases bounded by sharp breaths, which I've represented in my transcription as short phraes bounded by line breaks or octothorpes. These breath units accumulated into thought-units, or "words," as Foley might call them, which I've translated into various textual divisions: on the broadest level, I've divided the utterance into stanzas, which represent

general movements within the performance, as bounded (in general) by pauses of over one beat. I've also divided each stanza into shorter "words" using line breaks, indentation, and octothorpes: line breaks (per my transcription key) represent pauses of around one beat, while lines indented a full inch represent spillover from the previous line and lines indented half an inch represent statements that were separated from previous statements by pauses of around a half-beat; line-break-bound statements divided using octothorpes represent an utterance constituted by a series of rapid, short phrases. The curtness of each phrase conveyed the sense of urgency and necessity with which I heard the poem being made:

YOU DŌn— SOUn—/d s/o GOOd

PLEAse # TA/ke C/A-re—

MOst uh THI/s i/s MEN-tal↓
that's WHY it's TERRorIsm— # MEAN/t t/o # DISconCE-RT
MAKE you reVE-RT
to BLINd FEA-r—
POetry is WANted HE-re
AN/d t/o BOOT↑
our HOme-GROWn NUts
    are STARting t'TAke ROO-t
YE/t i/n MOst Parts
    THIngs are CALm

an/d G/Enerally subDUED↓

but THERe've been HOAXes↓ # and FOLK/s i/s GEtting ANxious # and REAdy TO conCLU-DE # that it's HOPEless an/d D/REA-r↓

POeTRY is WANted HE-re↓

so I'm GOnna POeTI-ze # to REaLI-ze # that you CAnnot HI-de # when WOR-lds colLI-de # no GOing inSI-de # no TAking a BREAther EIther↓

i/t A/LL comes IN— on YOU— at ON-CE # "AN/D y/ou GOtta HAve at" LEAst an OU-N-ce of HOPE an/d J/OY # to dePLOY # into the ATmosPHERE # o/f F/EA-R

to imPLO--de # the LOA--d # of GRIE--f that's DRAwing NEA-r POetry is WAnted HE-re↓

cuz ALL PEOples ARE— # JUS/t L/Ike YOU are↓

and I are↓

CLOSE or FA-r A-re↓

just PEOple with NOwhere to RUN—

LEt'/s s/tick a FLOwer into EVery GUN—

like BAY

like WAY back WHEN— # or WA/S I/t # or was THAt a DREA-m↓

can'/t S/AY now↓

FEEling so LO-W # SEEing so BLEA-k # THINking so DREA-r—

SON--gs are WANted HE-re↓

RHYming an/d T/Iming # a REbirth of CHEE-r↓

POetry is WAnted HE-re—

BA--M

WE are YUman # AFter A-LL

aMErica # VEnerable↓ # YET # VUhnerable↓ # AND # YUMan # AFter A-LL

THAt's our TRUE STREngth # and the REAl MEAning of this HAppenSTAnce

that we can FA-LL↓ # an/d S/CRO-LL↓ # an/d R/I-SE # an/d b/e surPRIsed # an/d N/O/t t/ake for GRAnted # the MORning SUN # so BEAUtiful an/d D/EAr↓

POetry is WAnted HE-re↓

forGIVE me for RA-Nting for PA-Nting for CHA-Nting "out of" TU-ne

THAt's the FOO-/L i/n me # SEEking a TU-/ne i/n me # WAnting to STAY light an/d F/REE— # from WHA/t w/ould opPREss dePREss reGREss obSEss # an/d i/n GENeral make a MESS of my SOU-l↓ # I WAnna be WHO-le↓ # in conTRO-l↓ # on a RO-ll↓ # withOUT the SLIGHtest HInt of FEAr↓

POetry is WAnted HE-re↓

SO my FRIEN-d

HAn/g i/n

HAn/g o/n

HAn/g T/IGHt

we GOtta SEE this TO thē EN--d

we GOtta BE conCERN-ed # AN/d d/iSCER-n # the REAl ENemy THA/t w/e FIGHT

for the VEIl between TRUTH an/d L/IE↓ # HAS beCOME SO THIN an/d S/HEE-r↓

POetry # is WANted HE-re

The percussive effect of Caldiero's phrasing mirrored (intentionally or not) the persistence of a heart working to sustain its body; it further stressed the life-sustaining give-and-take of breathing. Both processes are of course fundamental to life, but they also play a vital role in language- and relationship-making; they're the somatic grounds from which we reach to connect with others and from which words (and "words") are produced and with which they're framed. The rhythms and reiterative demands of these processes will inevitably flow into and impose upon the rhythms and the demands of our *poietic* work, especially the language we make and the kinship bonds we forge—which is to say that our material bodies shape our verbal bodies shape our communal bodies shape our material and verbal bodies, and so on in a perpetual feedback relationship among all the parts of the system.

With a style that seemed to represent the vital functions a pulsing, breathing body has in the work of human communion, Caldiero's performance can be read as resisting

the heart-rending, breath-taking processes and effects of violence and thereby as affirming peace and calling his friend (as well as any others within range of his utterance) to tune in to the pulse and the sounds of being as they're manifest in cycles of respiration and blood circulation and to make space for that givenness—that grace—in the "we" of the species' expansive, manifold communal body. As this description of Caldiero's potential summons to Life suggests, the interwoven functions of our body's somatic processes give us the ability to be in the world—to speak the litany of a persistent, sustaining presence on the planet with our being (who we are) and our actions (what we do)—and to draw others into relationships and communities that can feed our deepest individual and communal desires and needs. Likewise, the performed poem's breath-bound pulsing (as I hear it) held its reiterated petition—its litany—together even as the accumulated effect of each short utterance built up to, amplified, and rippled outward from the repeated eponymous line, demanding—pleading, praying—that listeners would attend to the processes and places of making as a vital response to violence and dissolution and as a means to living together with hope and peace. In my understanding of sonosophy, the works of *poiesis* seek to summon this deeper truth and to translate the mysteries of being, kinship, and *poietic* consciousness into rituals of sharing—*poietic* events—that acknowledge the diversity of the dynamic human soundscape and that move to embody, infuse, disrupt, and reconfigure human communal life. So doing, I see it responding to, challenging, and critiquing less socially-oriented modes of poetry-making; asking observers to rethink common conceptions of what poetry is, what poetry does, whence poetry emerges, and where poetry must happen; and actively resisting characteristics and conceptions of *poiesis* and language-making that limit the varieties

and voices of poetry and that in the process render the poet impotent and of little value to a world in crisis.

By performing in a way that seems to refuse to yield vitality to such conceptions, Caldiero has instead chosen to play in a slippery definitional and performative ecology. Rather than calling himself *poet*, for instance, he opts for the less Latinate, more coarse and earthbound term, *makar*: a wordsmith grounded in the primacy of orality, which by nature emerges from the interactions among individual and communal bodies acting within specific circumstances. In contrast, he also calls himself a *sonosopher*: a polysemous Latinate title whose verbal loftiness speaks to the essential intangibility and mysteries of sound, wisdom, and the self, and Caldiero's explorations therein. In addition, he self-affiliates with the *cuntastorie*, the shaman, the poet-seer, the jester, and the priest, and can be understood as assuming the disposition of a god-figure and benevolent Other by acknowledging the presence of the extra-ordinary in the everyday, the mystical in the material, and the divine in the human—and vice versa. Moving among these labels and performance traditions and their inherent limitations and promises as he does poetry-as-pedagogy-as-peacemaking, he seeks to establish and to propagate kinship with prime-itive traditions that stress poetry as an ongoing event that emerges from the body's deep somatic engagement with the world rather than something inspired by an elusive muse and that position the poet as someone who produces things—who brings verbal, emotional, social, cultural, and political relationships and realities into being—through acts of word-power meant to address public concerns and to serve some public good. In the act, I suggest, he asks others to join him in the always unfolding work of *poiesis*, to bear with him (and the many makers with whom he clearly seeks communion

and can be seen as conversing) the obligation for affirming peace via mutual care and consideration for the places we inhabit and the beings and things with whom we share them.

"And there you have it"

I hear this summons to seek peace via compassion in what I consider the most profound and telling moment of his Poetarium performance, which took place at the end. After offering a steady stream of supplicants poems "devised precisely" for them, he accepted a ticket from one more person: a young man who had neglected to complete the ticket. Extending his hand back through the curtain, holding the ticket out to the supplicant, Caldiero asked, "Which one?" The young man stepped forward, said something through the curtain, then stepped back grinning as Caldiero again withdrew his hand. Several seconds later, the Mysterious Alissandru parted the curtains, looked the young man eye-to-eye, and spoke:

> beCAUse you GUEss-ed
>
> an WAnt CLAriTY
>
> beCAUse you WIsh
>
> to UNderSTA-nd
>
> MO-re— # THAn to STAnd Under—
>
> in ENGlish it IS
>
>
> an/d T/Here you HAve it ("Poetarium Part 4")

Terminating his utterance, he closed the curtains one final time as the audience laughed

and applauded and the young man—who seemed to expect more after Caldiero said, "in English it is"—turned to leave with a small grin and a slight nod of his head, an expression that seemed to say, "I see what you did there. I deserved that." Although the young man's response to Caldiero's question is inaudible in the video, the first statement in Caldiero's utterance suggests that the young man may have said, "English, I guess." In a performance that can be seen as elaborating on such uncertainty and ribbing the supplicant in the process, Caldiero—as wizard and trickster—seemed to grant his "wish" and, in the act of fleshing out the desire, to turn the supplicant's apparent supposition on its head.

The reasoning behind Caldiero's utterance seems clear: the supplicant's "I guess" would have implied a lack of clarity regarding what he wanted from the Mysterious Alissandru, yet a request for the poem to be delivered in English would have implied that he wished to be given a statement in a language he understood. Caldiero seems to have interpreted this desire for understanding through both denotative and connotative lenses. On one hand, the verb "understand" means "comprehend, grasp the idea of"; as such, it denotes the act of pairing a thing with a meaning, a sign with a signified. On the other hand, it connotes the act of standing under something, where under means not beneath but derives from the Proto-Indo European root *nter-, meaning between or among; so to understand, in this sense, is to stand between or among things ("Understand"). In light of the word's lexical roots and Caldiero's obvious dwelling in and unfolding of mystery, when he said the young man wished "to understand more than to stand under," he appeared to be addressing and playing with this distinction. It was as if he were saying, "Because you seem more attuned to the work of pairing things with meanings than to

standing amidst things and experiencing them as they are, I'm giving you a poem whose words you can comprehend but that are meant to hold you in relation with me for their duration and to stir you to reflect on your desires and your presence here." I've taken poetic license, of course, in my rendition of Caldiero's utterance; yet, whether or not he intended to offer this specific critique when he spoke, his speech act did seem to push back against and rupture with the denotative fabric of words, a *poietic* event that could have opened vulnerable observers to language's communal agency.

After Caldiero terminated his utterance, leaving it in the minds of the supplicant and other observers, he closed the curtains one final time and his assistant stepped forward, raised her right hand with a grand sweep, and thanked the crowd for "participating with the Mysterious Alissandru and his fabulous Poetarium." Her statement spoke to the coperformative nature of the event: that it only became what it became because of the willing somatic exchange that took place among the specific bodies gathered that day to experience this thing called the "Poetarium." The shape of the event was determined by (among other things) the supplicants who presented themselves at the Poetarium-proper, the crowd members who laughed and clapped and who jeered the supplicants and the performer, and the performer's response to the presence and actions of each supplicant and of the audience in general. Whether the assistant was aware or not that she had framed the Poetarium as a coperformance, her statement pointed to (and emerged from) the essentially heteroglossic nature of language as well as to the responsibility everyone gathered at the event shared for the thing they made together. While some participants certainly bore greater responsibility for this than did others, each person's presence in the event's cast of actors would have accumulated into

something that neither performer nor supplicants or observers could have predicted but that was informed by their mutual attention and interactions.

So closing the event frame, the assistant called the performance to an end: facing the audience but gesturing toward the curtains with her hand, she said, "We will now conclude the readings" and turned to look at the curtains, where Caldiero's hand was extended, palm supine. He held the gesture for several seconds before he rotated his wrist and, repeatedly bending his fingers into his forward-facing palm, waved to the audience. Then he withdrew his hand once more and left the Poetarium; as he appeared at the side of the structure, his assistant gestured toward him with her hand and announced, "Alissandru!" Presenting himself to the crowd absent the structure's frame, standing before them in light blue jeans, orange t-shirt, and papakha, he thanked them amidst applause and some cheering, gave a slight bow, and raised his right arm to them, palm once again supine. With his gestures, gratitude, and outside-the-mystery-box appearance, he seemed to offer the audience one final thing: a glimpse of his always unfolding ordinariness, his ongoing performance as a human being. With the assistant's announcement of his name, it became clear that he was now no longer the "Mysterious Alissandru" but simply "Alissandru," a Sicilian immigrant whose life and vocation have been deeply informed and transformed by the *poietic* figures and traditions—the makers and the processes of making—that he has encountered in his movements through the world and his interactions with disparate Others. Further, with his movement from the Poetarium yet his continued performance as sonosopher, it seems that his Poetarium included more than the singular structure he had occupied during that day's event; more broadly, as I argue in my ethnography, his place of making consists of any environment

that offers him stuff with which he can augment, deepen, and sustain the sound-word-gesture-image he produces with his *poiesis*.

I say this sequence of performance-ending encounters was, in terms of the way I've framed the Poetarium performance (and sonosophy in general), the most profound and telling moment during the event because I see the encounters illustrating Caldiero's commitment to the ethics of *poiesis*. They can be seen as suggesting that his poetry-making isn't just a bizarre sleight-of-hand act meant to distract an audience from more vital matters or to cover some deeper work of deception. Rather, the sonosopher seems to reach into human contingencies and desires, to gather the stuff of life he discovers there, and, with an open palm, to offer that often ineffable stuff to observers at the common table of humanity. As appeared to happen with the young man who approached the Poetarium with an empty ticket and a supposition, this process of gathering and offering may entail calling us to account for how we respond to life's givenness, for the things we make with what's given, and for how we share that stuff with others. Pushing back against the young man's supposition and unfolding its entanglements "before [his] very own eyes and ears," Caldiero, yes, seems to have given the young man a little ribbing; but in the process he also seems to have produced a *poietic* event that ruptured the young man's words and expectations and thereby opened vulnerable observers to the communal functions of language and our communal agency as languaged creatures. Hence the open palm Caldiero extended through the curtains at the conclusion of the performance and hence his movement from the Poetarium-proper: with both his departure and his parting gesture I hear him saying, "Look! Here's this thing we just made together from our shared abundance and desires. For a moment, let's come together in this place and bear

witness to what this thing and this place say about our withness: our capacity to be with each other via the deep somatic sharing that accompanies eye-to-eye encounters and via the act of gazing together on the splendid work of the heart's mysteries. I'll leave my sideshow booth, my temple, so we can meet on common ground and celebrate these things together as they unfold into new material and immaterial realities."

iii. Seeking Hope in a Post-truth World

". . . the veil between truth and lie / is become so thin and sheer . . ."

Poiesis, for Caldiero, may be the crux of human being in the world. It may be the critical matter of our individual and communal lives, turning us (like the koru) at once inward and outward: inward in acts of self-reflection and deep attention to the body's interdependent processes—to breathing, the heart's beating, neurons connecting—and outward in deep somatic relation with the world and its inhabitants. More than anything else (per Bickerton and Fitch) this *poietic* work—enabled by our linguistic capacity—is what makes us human; it infiltrates and gives shape to "all aspects of human cognition, behavior, and culture" (Fitch, *Evolution* 2). As such, language-making is at the core of the species' communal nature, which, fully-realized, may keep us humane. It binds us to the earth in kinship bonds forged by our species' evolutionary emergence from the planet's emergent systems; and, in my view, these bonds invoke our inborn obligation to care for, be faithful to, and bear witness of the dynamic system that brought us into being and that sustains us as well as to care for, be faithful to, and bear witness of the beings, creatures, and things with whom we share it. In my theorizing, I connect the fully-engaged mode of being in the world and being-with others that has potential to unfold

with this obligation to the ethics of Māori hospitality, which (as I note early in my ThirdWord) are rooted in the concepts of love, nurturing, integrity, sincerity, and openness to the spiritual dimension of human experience (Williams and Robinson). I've addressed these characteristics of cultural performance directly or indirectly in my exploration of sonosophy, which emerges from my ethnography as a commitment and a summons to the cosmoplastic agency of *poiesis*: to its ability to lead new material and immaterial worlds into being via deep, honest exploration and presentation of the Self, of our individual desires, needs, environments, and histories (integrity); via shared concern for, vulnerable observation of, and commitment to the Other and acts of mutual, unrestrained somatic exchange (love, nurturing, and sincerity); and via sensitivity to the presence of the mystical in the material and the material in the mystical (openness to unseen realities).

When I began composing my ethnography, I never could have anticipated the way these concepts would change me. Yet, the way of being in the world and being-with others that the sonosopher's mode of hospitality seems to advocate, its *poietic* sound-word-gesture-image, has been woven into my consciousness. I trace the beginning of this process back to my initial encounters with Māori cultural performance; and I attribute its continued unfolding to the attention I've often clumsily given to my family relationships and other kinship bonds, to Mormon culture and theology, and to my personal and scholarly engagement with Caldiero, which has itself brought me into contact with diverse cultural traditions and which I've heard calling me to commit and recommit myself to the work of sustaining my personal relationships and my own cultural traditions. Considering the messiness and complexity of my own relational ecology, I'm

stirred to reflection on the ethics of *poiesis*, to consider and reconsider my responsibilities as a language user, especially in face of the unsettled and unsettling epistemological climate I see prevailing in the public sphere that my daughters are inheriting and that brushes against the dialogic, coperformative, life-sustaining learning communities I seek to foster with my students and my family.

I write this only months after the Oxford Dictionary declared "post-truth" its Word of the Year for 2016 after a 2,000 percent increase in the term's usage that year, as compared to 2015 (Flood). The adjective is used to describe any situation where "objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief" ("Post-truth"). If I accept the premises of a post-truth world, I can reject verifiable information or social realities if those things aren't useful to me, if they make me uncomfortable, if they don't jibe with my subjective experience or my worldview, or if they demand that I revise my worldview or my habits of being in the world and being-with others. I can spin self-serving narratives using "alternative facts" ("Kellyanne") and "truthful hyperbole," "innocent form[s] of exaggeration" and revisionism that, to borrow language from businessman Donald Trump, "play to people's fantasies" about the size and magnificence of the things I'm peddling: an act that makes others susceptible to my "bravado"-inspired genius, intentions, and desires (58). And through it all, I can be free of the need to speak the truth because, in a world where the truth of things is irrelevant, the only thing that matters to me is getting others to believe what I say—its veracity notwithstanding—and to act in my self-interest.

While these possibilities seem to have always been available to individuals and communities in Western societies especially, the current epistemic crisis in America (as

many observers see it) has been reflected in and exacerbated by the very public, repeated, and verifiable profession of "alternative facts" and "truthful hyperbole" by Trump and his advisors in his run-up to and early service as President of the United States (Tallis). For example, the former phrase ("alternative facts") comes from Kellyanne Conway, Counselor to President Trump, who used it to defend White House Press Secretary Sean Spicer's false claims, which he presented his first day as official White House spokesman in response to what he called unfair reporting from news media, that Trump's inauguration had drawn the largest crowd "to ever witness an inauguration—period!—both in person and around the globe" ("Spicer"). In the days following Spicer's statement, fact-checkers argued that it hadn't, although it's not clear why the size of the crowd really mattered (Wallace, Yourish, and Griggs). When Conway was presented with these facts and asked by Chuck Todd of NBC's *Meet the Press* to justify Spicer's "provable falsehood," she said Spicer was just presenting "alternative facts" ("Kellyanne"). Whether Conway meant to say "other facts" or "alternative interpretations of facts," her phrasing reflects the fluid relationship with truth that Trump professed in his 1987 book of memoirs/business advice, *Trump: The Art of the Deal*: "I play to people's fantasies," he wrote, speaking to his strategies as a salesman. "People may not always think big themselves, but they can still get very excited by those who do. That's why a little hyperbole never hurts. People want to believe that something is the biggest and the greatest and the most spectacular." Then he continued: "I call it truthful hyperbole" (58). Both Trump's and Conway's contradictions-in-terms manifest an apparent willingness to alter the truth in the name of promoting and sustaining fantastic beliefs about our shared history, hopes, needs, and desires. They also demonstrate the

need certain people have—like snake-oil peddlers—to maintain larger-than-life narratives about what they represent, i.e., the ideas, products, and personae some individuals need to maintain in service to the fantasy (think Wizard of Oz) or the bottom line.

Offering half-truths and alternate realities to cure what ails an audience unsettled by the restlessness and flux of life in a post-9/11 world, those who hold to (and are held by) a post-truth worldview assume, in part, that magical thinking (the belief that "If I say it, it's reality") will alleviate deep individual and communal anxieties about the state of the world, which some would have us believe is on the cusp of collapsing. So doing, as philosopher Adam Levinovitz argues, post-truthers foster "epistemic uncertainty," "existential panic," and deep mistrust. They "collapse epistemologies" and propagate epistemic uncertainty, to borrow again from Levinovitz, by asserting the existence of alternative facts that abrogate verifiable happenings—which is to say that they utter emotionally-charged falsehoods aimed at casting doubt on and subverting traditional ways of constructing knowledge (@AlanLevinovitz). Epistemologies, of course, need to be interrogated and revised again and again so they can incorporate more accurate and nuanced views of the human situation; Caldiero, as Dadaist and trickster, seems to takes up this work with sonosophy. But to outright reject established and fecund ways of knowing in favor of more appealing, exciting, or flattering notions of reality-construction is to peddle delusion. It's to elevate the world as a person or community wants it to be in lieu of leaving that fantasy behind to co-construct and sustain an expansive relational ecology that could benefit many people and communities. This demonstration of tribalism and emotion-dominant reasoning, to borrow again from Levinovitz, "undermines rational evaluation" and invokes "existential panic" and a culture of

mistrust. It suggests to an audience that nothing is really knowable and that any idea, person, or group that we encounter from outside of our tribe is an immediate threat to our being. As such, the Other can't be trusted; by virtue of her Otherness and its obvious opposition to our Self-narrative, she must be disregarded—if deemed necessary, by violence.

Considering the uncertain status of epistemologies and epistemic processes in a post-truth world, I return to Caldiero's "Poetry is Wanted Here!" The poem has given me hope in the face of uncertainty. In fact, as I've thought more and more about the premises of a post-truth economy of ideas and social relations, I've turned several times to "Poetry is Wanted Here!" to realign myself with the life-sustaining acts of *poietic* consciousness. As a potent verbal memorial constructed to confront the aftermath of 9/11, the poem—as I read it—gazes on the heart of terrorism and seeks to open possibilities for productively responding to terrorism's manipulation of reality. This isn't to say that the poem shows the poet rubbernecking at the site of erasure as he drives slowly by on his way to more vital places, or that he stands at the site of erasure, paralyzed into inaction by what he sees—or doesn't see—while staring into the void. No, the poem seems to invite observers to acknowledge and to sit with the delusion, deceit, anxiety, hopelessness, fear, grief, and depression that terrorist acts provoke; to part the veil of despair and inaction that these effects can draw over the mind; and by so doing, to "discern" and expose "the real enemy that we fight" (5). In terms of sonosophy, which I observe is grounded in the dialogical worldview encapsulated in the defining expression, "I am/they are wisdom," this enemy may not be a specific person or group of people—some indeterminate "Them." Rather, as the poet can be understood suggesting when he points out at poem's end that "the veil

between truth and lie / is [sic] become so thin and sheer," the antithesis of *poietic* consciousness consists of modes of seeing and being in the world that conflate truth and lies, that in theory and/or practice equate truth-telling with lying and lying with truth-telling (5). As I've noted, any mode of being that seeks to collapse epistemologies in this way and to dissolve the boundaries between the work of truth and the work of lies, can invoke epistemic uncertainty, existential panic, and mistrust. Read against Caldiero's poem, acts that intend to so forcefully unseat the foundations of knowledge and its dialogical construction are at their root acts of terror "meant to disconcert" people, unnerving us so much that we "revert" to a place of "blind fear" (3). So repressed, we may become more susceptible to the affected and ultimately constrictive fantasies peddled by the false healers who arise in the aftermath of tragedy and make use of our individual and communal vulnerability for their own benefit. Hence, poetry is wanted *here*: in places of making that position themselves against the premises and practices of a post-truth world.

Hope-in Human Community: The Work of *Poietic* Wit(h)ness

These premises and practices have weighed heavily on my mind as I've approached the end of this project, so much so that they've manifest in my dreams. While writing this section, for instance, I dreamed that I was thinking about Caldiero's *poiesis* and its potential for critiquing other ways of knowing and being in the world. Wandering through the dreamscape (I don't recall what it looked like), I ran an idea through my mind over and over, trying to refine it and to remember it until I could write it down. I had gone to sleep that night pondering the influence our unsettled and unsettling

epistemological climate has had on my teaching; and my pondering took place in the broader context of the thinking—and if I'm being honest, the praying—I had been doing for several weeks about how best to discuss the ways sonosophy has informed my pedagogical commitments and practices. When I awoke the next morning, I opened the word processor app on my smartphone and typed the following: "speaking to—and against—the notion of 'truth-telling' in contemporary public discourse." Looking now at the thought, which came to my consciousness as a fragment extended through the veil of sleep, I see it as an always unfolding statement on the pedagogical functions of sonosophy as a mode of bearing witness to the depth and richness of the human situation (after the manner of critical coperformative ethnography); of seeking in the process to counteract post-truth modes of seeing, being, and speaking; and of thereby reaching for the deep fellowship—the withness—made available to us through acts of communion and critical performative pedagogy.

I also see the statement as a lens through which to view my own pedagogical work, which is likewise always unfolding in my mind and my relationships with my students, my family, and my peers (like Caldiero), in our mutual striving toward realization of life's fullness and a deeper witness of our shared encounters with life's mysteries. I'm using pedagogy in terms offered by rhetorician Dale Jacobs in his meditation on the concept of hope in education. Jacobs notes that critical, liberatory "pedagogy is shared inquiry 'constituted by reflection and action' [. . .], regardless of where that inquiry happens." So it's, at root, "a communal endeavor" (786). It doesn't take place in the echo-chamber of the teacher's mind, divorced from the expansive ecology of relations that develop among specific bodies gathered in shared spaces for a

shared purpose. Rather, it emerges from and opens on those relations as they emerge in the course of mutual reflection on shared material and/or immaterial contingencies, which could consist of the texts, objects, beliefs, values, epistemologies, social systems and institutions, etc., that the community members encounter in their coming together. As emergent, dialogical processes of inquiry and knowledge construction coperformed with disparate Others, critical pedagogies—which sonosophy seems to resonate with—thus reach to critique and to enact communal desires for individual and collective benefit. They orient the person and the community, in Jacobs' words, "toward the possibility of a better, changed future through collective, pedagogical action" (784). So oriented toward possibility and mutual transformation, critical pedagogies are grounded in hope; and this hope is constituted not by the individual or collective *desire for something* (Jacobs calls this "hope-for") but by the always unfolding relational ecology *in which we dwell and develop with each other* (Jacobs calls this "hope-in") (786).

Ever since I started thinking seriously about the acts of teaching and language when I was 19, 20, 21, my pedagogical desires and commitments have been shaped by notions of hope and community. When I was a missionary and teaching meant evangelizing, I hoped my efforts would result in conversion, that people would join the church whose name I wore on my badge. When I returned home and for nearly a decade teaching meant preaching an occasional sermon or leading an occasional discussion in LDS Sunday school, I hoped my efforts would stir in congregants lasting commitment to that same faith community. And when I was a graduate student and began working as an online adjunct instructor and teaching meant performing an online persona for students in a first-year writing course—meant posting weekly screencasts in which I walked them

through the coming week's work and elaborated some thoughts on writing and language use, meant leading asynchronous discussion forums intended to provoke critical thinking on the course material, meant commenting on student work via audio or video recordings—I hoped my efforts would give students the foundational knowledge they would need to communicate effectively in their academic communities. In the years since I accepted my first adjunct teaching contract, I've accepted many more for multiple universities and held a graduate teaching assistantship in Idaho State's Department of English and Philosophy; and I've taught classes both in-person and online—all with the same hope: to connect with students in some small way and give them a foundational knowledge of academic writing. But it wasn't until Jess and I moved our family home to Ogden, Utah after I had finished my doctoral coursework; until I joined the adjunct pool and started teaching writing at Weber State—my undergraduate alma mater, Dad's alma mater, and the school where Grandpa taught botany for over two decades; and until I started to really sit with and write about and interpret how sonosophy works and to wrestle with my communal agency as a teacher, scholar, husband, father, and person of faith, that the hope-for's I've outlined above began yielding to deep hope-in the *poietic* problem and promise of situated human communities.

I can trace this shift in the ground of my being—and with it the emergence of a deeper sense of communal agency and hope-in human relationships—to a narrative encounter I had with Mormonism's vulnerable God not long before we moved back to Ogden after six years in Idaho. Unable to sleep one night because Jess was, for whatever reason, not home, I rolled over in bed and pulled my scriptures from the nightstand. I opened to the Book of Moses, which Joseph Smith produced in mid-1830 while revising

the Bible. The narrative contains what religion scholar Terryl L. Givens calls "an ascension narrative in which the [Old Testament] prophet Enoch is taken into heaven" (86). Standing beside God, watching generations of human civilization unfold, Enoch sees patterns of misery, suffering, and injustice emerge in human interactions; he turns to observe God's response and finds that God has begun weeping (*Pearl of Great Price*, Moses 7.37, 28). Surprised by God's reaction, Enoch asks three times, "How can you weep?" That Enoch asks *how* God can weep and not *why* he weeps suggests that Enoch may have been less concerned with the reasons compelling God's tears than with the idea that God—a "holy" being whom Enoch assumed was far removed from human passions (7.29–30)—could "be moved to the point of distress" by human misery and suffering. As Givens notes, "The answer [. . .] is that [Enoch's] God is not exempt from emotional pain" (T. Givens 87). Rather, Givens continues, this weeping God, per Joseph Smith's divine anthropology, is immersed in "a web of human relationships"; as such, he "participates in rather than transcends the ebb and flow of human history, human tragedy, and human grief" (87). Through his encounter with this deeply-engaged, vulnerable deity, Enoch learns that the God he worships refuses to turn his back on human weakness, suffering, and misery, and that he mourns, weeps, and reaches to embrace humans when he sees them behaving destructively, rejecting each other and dissolving communal bonds. This God's compassion and empathy compel him to be-toward others and to sustain the principles of Life in his relationship with them no matter the cost. Stirred by the disruptive response of this benevolent Other, Enoch is moved in kind: he weeps and extends his arms to embrace and lift all creation. His being expands to make room for God's suffering and he longs to reach out to others with greater mercy and compassion

(*Pearl of Great Price*, Moses 7.41).

I turned to this narrative that night because it was on my mind as it had often been for several years—at least since the question mark Grandpa had penciled in the margin of his *Book of Mormon* called my attention to the image of deity with an extended hand. That night as I read the narrative again, for the nth time, I encountered anew its depiction of God as a being who refuses to withhold love or to withdraw his extended hand. Sitting with the image, I considered this God's capacity for empathy and his deep respect for the agency of the things he encounters in his always unfolding *poietic* work. He could, Enoch suggests, reach down and resolve every crisis. Instead, he offers his vulnerability, allowing himself to be moved with his children and to participate with them in the flow of human history, such that they're moved to receive his extended hand and to reiterate that posture in their own being and relationships. As I imagined the depth of suffering such a radically-vulnerable being would experience at the injustices humans perpetuate against each other, I wept—at the species' capacity for physical and rhetorical conflict and violence; at our tragic failures to fully care for each other, or often to even care about each other, on individual and communal levels; and at my own limited capacity to love, to reach out, or to seek understanding of other people's situations and to alleviate suffering.

I had been moved before by this depiction of God-as-tragic-being, but never to such sorrow in the human situation, never to tears. Thinking about the encounter now, I read it as an outgrowth of my extended personal and scholarly engagement with sonosophy as a mode of dialogical performance and critical pedagogy, both of which—as I read them through the terms I've given in my ethnography—seek to stir an expanded

sense of *poietic* consciousness and communal agency in individuals and communities, to rouse them to hope-in expansive relational ecologies. In this sense, my sorrow-in the human situation may have been flowing, in part, from the workings of my imagination as it brooded over my deepening sense of individual and communal deficiency, crisis, and desire and began opening my mind toward new possibilities for addressing those things from where I stood within my own place of making. So my weeping was turning me both inward and outward, working my empathy. As such it signaled an always emerging somatic need for connecting with others, for deep belonging and attachment, and for strengthening and expanding my kinship network by seeking out and/or creating spaces where I could foster meaningful, life-sustaining relationships with and among others (Hasson 363).

"This Class Gives Me Hope" (Reprise)

My deeply felt emotions and the physiological change they evoked (e.g., my crying) marked my narrative encounter with Mormonism's vulnerable God as something potentially vital—as a somatic resource I could call upon in my efforts to cultivate a meaningful, sustainable life from the ground of meaningful, sustainable relationships. This emotionally-marked encounter has come to my consciousness again and again since we moved back to Utah. Its resurfacing has been invoked by my thinking about Caldiero's persistent open palm display and the vulnerable posture I see reflected in sonosophy, both of which resonate with the hermeneutics of vulnerability invoked by narratives of radically benevolent beings, like Mormonism's weeping God and the bodhisattva. Meditating on the disposition assumed in this reiterated sound-word-gesture-

image and its reaching for withness and a deeper witness of life's mysteries and the promise of human communities, I'm drawn back to the comment I once overheard coming from a student—"This class gives me hope"—and the list of questions it evoked, which I've listed in the Conference of the Birds interword in this section.

I taught that class—a section of the second course in Weber State's first-year composition sequence—the second semester I worked for the university. I had been teaching only online courses for several years before I joined Weber's adjunct faculty; and even though I only had a single course, I was revitalized by my return to the brick-and-mortar classroom. I felt like I was coming home, not just because of my history with the school or the Ogden area, although that did play a role in my sense of belonging. Being away for as long as we had (save for occasional short visits to family), I hadn't realized how discontent I had become in Idaho until we moved home and had settled again in Ogden. The first time I went running after we returned, my being resonated with the trail: "This is the place," I said to myself. "This is where my soul belongs." My sense of belonging, of being joyfully tethered to this place, emerges from the connection I feel with its mountains. It also comes from the fact that this is where our family is; and in my experience, *who* we share the *where* with makes the where matter more because—through our ritualized social interactions and shared experiences—we learn to be-with and be-toward each other in shared contingencies and spaces, a process that makes those spaces vital, even sacred, and that gives shape to and sustains abiding kinship bonds.

I think that's another reason being with that class felt like it does to come home: over the course of our discussions that semester, we took up this "endless process of learning to live with each other" in the midst of "messy, complicated" realities (Ford 35).

We explicitly explored what it means to be-with and hope-in disparate others in a divided and divisive world where notions of truth and truth-telling, integrity and authenticity, concern and care for the Other and an openness to mystery, are swallowed up more and more in violently skewed notions of the truth and pervasive attempts to manipulate people into the course of actions determined by those false representations. Sure, as a learning community constituted by individuals who had different backgrounds and desires, my students and I all had different ways of perceiving and framing reality; we were, in the beginning, an institutionally-framed group of Others who had been thrown together in the name of the university's general education requirements. But from the outset, I tried to foster space in the classroom where each student could feel safe voicing their differences and where they felt empowered to be themselves even though they were, at first (at least for most of them), sitting among strangers.

Working after the manner I see the sonosopher working (as trickster and *makar*), I encouraged students to take up the *poietic* work of learning by reaching to meet them where they were and addressing their desires for the class (to get an 'A,' fulfill a general education requirement, become a better writer, etc.) while at the same time pushing back against and rupturing those desires to open a communal encounter with the question: What does it mean to be human? I initiated such an encounter the first week of class by engaging students with a game (I called it "a playful language-making exercise" on the course schedule) and a text that positions language as a life-sustaining mode of communion and exchange. The game was called *Time's Up!*, a charades-based party game in which players separate into teams and take turns trying to get their team members to guess the names of historical or fictional characters featured on game cards.

Before they begin playing, each player picks cards from the game deck and combines those cards into a smaller deck to be used by all teams during three rounds of play. During round one, clue-givers must offer clues on every card they draw from the collective deck; they have no passes in this round, but they can say or do anything to get their teammates to guess the names on the cards before the game timer runs out. Working from the same deck during round two, clue-givers can pass on any cards whose characters they don't know, but they can offer only a single word as a clue for each card; despite only being able to say one word in this round, clue-givers can make any noise or gesture they would like. In round three, clue-givers have unlimited passes (like in round two), but they can't speak at all; clues in this round can only consist of noises or gestures.

When we began playing the game, students were noticeably hesitant about giving and receiving clues, especially for the names of characters they didn't know. But as round one progressed, the teams became more familiar with and open to the ways of playing the game. Emboldened by the risks each preceding clue-giver was taking to get their teammates to guess the correct answer, they referred to what they hoped were shared cultural trends associated with the characters on the cards; they broke the names they didn't know into parts and offered clues about each part, then encouraged their teammates to combine each part back into the whole; and they began pairing verbal clues with gestures if they thought the combination would spark something in their teammates' minds. Moving into rounds two and three, many students expressed their anxiety over the restrictions that were being imposed on their clue-giving; but as practiced language users do without even thinking about it, they built their exchange of ideas in each subsequent round on the grounds of shared knowledge they had previously constructed.

Over the course of the game, I noticed two things happening with the students; we discussed these things as a class in our rundown of the activity. The first thing I observed was the emergence of group cohesion. Even though some students already had friends in the class, the demands of the game called each individual to reach beyond themselves and to begin forging new relationships with others in the emergent classroom community. In this sense, the game was a playful way of breaking the ice. I also observed that, in conjunction with its tension-easing function, the game modeled the acts of language-making, as I've begun framing them in the wake of my engagement with sonosophy. I didn't use this exact terminology with the class, but I did discuss the process as I've come to understand it via my research. Presented with the challenge of coming to mutual understanding of the game's mysteries, students had to rely on their ecology of somatic resources to produce and to decode a series of word-sound-gesture-images that would unveil each card's character for the community. In the process, the group developed a shared vocabulary whose repository of verbal-visual cues would—even after game play had ended—signal special knowledge to group members. By calling students to experience and to consider this process as it emerged in the community during a single, playful class session, I invited them—tricked them, really—into finding their communal identity, which we developed, expanded, and revised together via the community interactions we coperformed over the course of the semester.

To prepare them for the next class session, as well as our semester-length consideration of what makes us human, I had students read and annotate Toni Morrison's Nobel lecture, which, I must confess, I had never read. When I outlined the reading for our first unit—the topic was language and rhetoric—I had simply scanned the essays

included in the "Language and Rhetoric" section of the textbook I chose from the department's list of approved materials (Michael Austin's *Reading the World: Ideas that Matter*) and picked several that I thought would invoke good discussions. I was drawn to Morrison's lecture, in particular, because I could tell, even after just a quick scan, that its language was poetic and I wanted to invite my students into an encounter with potent words. Morrison didn't let me down. Her narrative knocked the breath from me when I first read it after class the day we played the game; and it knocked the breath from me when I read it again the next day. Before I returned for the next class session, I had read—pored over—the lecture at least twice and listened to the Nobel ceremony recording of Morrison reading it at least twice. More, over the following weekend I read it again and have since turned to it frequently to be reminded of the vitality of the work I've felt called to pursue. Morrison calls this "word-work" (221); in her opening remarks to the Swedish Academy, she offered a statement about her abiding commitment to such work: "I believe that one of the principal ways in which we acquire, hold, and digest information is via narrative," she said. Then: "So I hope you will understand when the remarks I make begin with what I believe to be the first sentence of our childhood that we all remember, the phrase, 'Once upon a time'" ("Nobel Lecture by Toni Morrison"). Reading her statement through the lens of Caldiero's concluding utterance from the Poetarium—his *poietic* critique of the young man's apparent desire "to understand" things more than "to stand under" them—I hear her summoning listeners to stand with her in the midst of the narrative she planned to unfold in their company.

When my students and I discussed Morrison's lecture during the next class session, we spent time thinking together about the narrative function of that "first

sentence of our childhood": "Once upon a time." "What does the phrase do?" I likely asked them. "Where does it take us?"

"Into a fairy tale," they may have responded. "Into a story."

"And why is that significant here?" I probably asked. "Why is Morrison framing her narrative with a fairy tale opening?"

"Because she's going to tell a story."

"Sure, but why use the phrase, 'Once upon a time'? Why not just tell the story?"

Silence.

To open their thinking, I hoped, I wrote a ubiquitous phrase on the board: "A long time ago in a galaxy far, far away. . ." After we snickered together at the *Star Wars* reference, I asked, "When this starts scrolling across the screen during the movies, where does the phrase place you?"

"In a galaxy far, far away."

The class laughed, then someone said, "Somewhere other than this reality."

With this comment (or some approximation thereof), the discussion began unfolding around the cosmoplastic nature of language: the way it brings new material and immaterial worlds into being, the way it has made our species what it is, and the way it shapes the human mind and human relationships and communities. And this led us back to Morrison's text, in particular to her claim that "[n]arrative is radical, creating us at the very moment it is being created" (222). Her statement comes in the midst of a narrative that explores the messy, complicated, *poietic* problem and promise of language use. "Once upon a time," she begins the story, "there was an old woman. Blind but wise." The woman lives on the outskirts of town; inhabiting the threshold—a fertile place of

making—between Us and Them, she is neither Us nor Them. As such, among her people she represents, in true trickster fashion, "both the law and its transgression" (217). Like the sonosopher, she takes what she's offered by her community and enacts it in her being even as she turns it back on itself with hopes of augmenting communal knowledge and experience. One day "some young people" visit the woman; one of them asks her a question: "Is the bird I am holding living or dead?" After sitting with the question for an extended moment, leaving her visitors in uncomfortable silence, she responds: "'I don't know,' she says. 'I don't know whether the bird you are holding is dead or alive, but what I do know is that it is in your hands. It is in your hands'" (218).

Stepping into the narrative as interpreter, Morrison "read[s] the bird as language." Her interpretive act positions those who hold the bird—the young people in the story, specifically, and language users, in general—as parties responsible for its survival. With the act, she can be seen holding language users to account for the ways we use, misuse, or abuse this "system," which she characterizes as part "living thing over which one has control" but also "mostly as agency—as an act with consequences" (218). As she unfolds her hermeneutic encounter with the story, she speaks to what I call our *poietic* agency, exploring, first, properties of "unyielding language" (218), then properties of "life sustaining" language (220). The former, Morrison says, is "statist," "censored and censoring," "[r]uthless," "policing," dominating, "dumb," and "predatory," while the latter is "nuanced, complex," "exhilarating," "interrogative," elusive, "sublime," and "generative" (218–21). Attending to these properties with my students that semester, we considered what these descriptors suggest about language use. We defined unyielding language as word-work that forecloses possibilities, closing people off from their

potential and denying the processes of exchange that keep our being, our relationships, and our communities vital; and we defined life-sustaining language as word-work that opens possibilities, stirring the imagination and nurturing the processes of exchange that are central to life.

The thinking we did together during those initial class sessions—spurred by our playful language-making exercise and Morrison's generative words—rooted our subsequent interactions in a pedagogical mode that positions learning as a dialogical, coperformative process. This process, like the one I see manifest in sonosophy, takes the stuff we're given, attends to it with openness and integrity, and makes it into something new and communal and vital. It makes space for a more Protean, situated, dynamic, and fecund view of human existence, identity, knowledge, and relationality. So doing, it also unsettles me. It undoes me. In the class I taught for Weber State during the semester I was working through this section, my students and I thought together about these same ideas as framed (again) by *Time's Up!* and Morrison's Nobel lecture. In fact, I begin every class I teach now with the same sequence of activities and the same hope-in the problem and promise of dialogical learning communities. Every semester Morrison teaches me something new and my students teach me something new about Morrison, and I feed what I've learned into my thinking about *poiesis* and pedagogy. That semester felt different, though. We played the game our first week together; we discussed Morrison; and during our time together we developed and reflected together on our communal identity as a class. But the premises of a post-truth world weighed heavily on my mind and my students' minds and often became a point of discussion. Some days I left class wondering exactly what I was offering students when I stepped into our learning

community and invited them to attend with me to questions that have no easy answers, like "What makes us human?" or "How can I be a more responsible language user?" This felt especially futile when post-truth uncertainties brushed up against and called into question the ethics of *poiesis* as we were exploring them. Why care about being a responsible language user or exploring principles of responsible language use with students when prominent modes of public discourse seem to be positioned squarely against those acts and to be actively opposing them?

When I encounter such uncertainties, I remember my student's comment, "This class gives me hope," which I've begun elaborating in my own words: "I have hope-in this small community of makers that seeks, however clumsily, to privilege and propagate life-sustaining language and the communal processes of learning." And I remember Caldiero: "Poetry is wanted here!" This language stirs my resolve—again and again—to approach others, including my students, with the posture of openness that seems to be demonstrated in sonosophy, in Māori hospitality, in depictions of benevolent Otherness, and in Grandpa's question mark; to invite them to participate with me in the work of critiquing ideas and interrogating what makes us human; and to convey my love of language and learning and my hope-in the promise of life-sustaining communities. Then, as they reach back and together we assume the work of co-constructing a shared place of making, I feel like we can begin striving together toward realization of our communal promise as learners encountering the stuff of life together and seeking to hold space for life's givenness as it unfolds in our shared situation.

AfterWord

Seeking Communion at the End of the World:

Three Vignettes and a Conclusion

a. Three Vignettes

Two Views of December 2012

1. Conference of the Birds (vii): After Sandy Hook

Driving my family through a snowstorm to a Christmas dinner at our church, I listened to my then-six-year-old daughter, Alex, explain the water cycle. "I know how water works," she said. "It goes from the ground to the sky and gets fluffy and turns into a cloud and then the cloud gets big and drops the water to Earth and it starts all over again and it's called the water cycle." As I heard her relate what she had learned in school that day and considered how the water cycle sustains and renews the earth, I nearly wept, as I had earlier that day, for the people of Newtown, Connecticut. In lieu of tears, I prayed silently for my daughters and their futures and for Newtown, a community in need of grace and renewal after Adam Lanza stormed Sandy Hook Elementary, took 27 lives (including his own), and in the process thrust the community's children into a tragedy mine could hardly comprehend—scratch that: into a tragedy hardly anyone could comprehend. Being itself balks at such violence, weeping blood from wounds before the ruptured tissue heals or life yields to death. Whatever the case, whether the end of violence is healed wounds or death, an erasure remains that both demands to be addressed and resists our attempts to address it.

Caught in this double-bind and unsure how best to continue bearing witness of the

human situation, many of people go silent. Others respond to violence in kind or become cynical and subsume grief in biting expressions of despair. The day of the Sandy Hook shooting, *The Onion*, satirical online news site, ran an article titled "Fuck Everything, Nation Reports." The article is short—it contains only 456 words—but as the title suggests, its language is potent: of the many obscenities included, 16 are the f-word. It begins: "Following the fatal shooting this morning at a Connecticut elementary school that left at least 27 dead, including 20 small children, sources across the nation shook their heads, stifled a sob in their voices, and reported fuck everything. Just fuck it all to hell." Besides giving voice to the shock, horror, hopelessness, and fear many Americans may have experienced that day, the article's use of profanity illustrates how humans can turn to rancor and forceful language when confronted with things we may otherwise be unable to address: the pain of stubbing a toe, slicing a finger, or smashing a thumb with a hammer. Frustration at not getting our way or not having been heard. The terror of staring into a void ripped open in the world through violent events and not knowing how to respond to or to address the erasure.

Because such things often affect us in ways we can't describe, we may become angry or bitter due to a perceived loss of control or we may try to impose our will on the world with more forceful uses of the tongue. Consider, for instance, how the word "fuck" functions: at its root, the verb means to copulate with, to thrust, to strike, to push. In line with its meaning, the word's verbal expression is forceful: a fricative followed by a schwa closed abruptly—violently—with an obstruent. This means of expression, when combined with the word's definition, makes the term an easy representation of a speaker's perceived potency: the way he understands the ability to influence things with

the tongue. But to rely on obscenities as our full response to things we can't control or otherwise address won't work if we, as human beings—as *homo fabricans*—hope to counteract acts of erasure with acts of verbal intercourse. That work of renewal requires more sustainable, more productive, and more Self- and Other-aware acts of lingual power and influence. Hence: Caldiero's sonosophy, which I've positioned in my ethnography as a mode of critical *poiesis* and *poietic* consciousness. To do sonosophy, I've argued, is to sound wisdom, translating the human soundscape into rituals of sharing that move to embody, infuse, disrupt, and reconfigure human communal life—and that move others to do the same. It's to reach for something potent with the organs of speech. A new world, perhaps. A moment of hope and grace. Maybe deepened relationships with others and with the world. Maybe a taste of a more abiding peace.

Confronted with news of Sandy Hook, Jess and I tried to ease the clear anxiety it caused our daughters by gathering them into our bedroom, expressing our grief at the tragedy, and immersing them in language of love and possibility. They crowded around us on our bed and we told them each how their presence enlivened our home. We asked them what they were learning at school and listened as they each narrated their experiences. And I read to them. Then, as evening approached, we prepared for the church Christmas dinner, where we shared a meal and conversation with members of our faith community, where we listened to a rendition of the Nativity story, and where the girls sat on Santa's lap, shared their Christmas wishes with him, then made a circuit around the cultural hall[8] with their friends. The time we spent with our faith community that evening, reaffirming bonds of fellowship that we had forged during acts of shared

[8] "The *cultural hall* is a large multi-purpose room in the center of a Church meetinghouse, usually consisting of a basketball court and a stage" ("Cultural Hall," *MormonWiki*, 21 Nov. 2008, www.mormonwiki.com/Cultural_Hall).

service and through encounters with shared narratives of belief (both religious and secular), was, for me, a salve for the day's dire news. It didn't in any measurable sense mitigate the real-world effects of a tragedy that had occurred across the country, that the nation was grieving for, and that had caused our daughters distress. But our presence at the dinner was a result of conscious efforts Jess and I have made to nurture our daughters with the influence of what I now call life-sustaining communities—which are filled with people from disparate backgrounds and with wide-ranging personalities and ideas—and to thereby counteract the anxiety of living in a world that sometimes doesn't make sense and that can impose fear on our well-being by perpetuating acts of physical and rhetorical violence. Our abiding commitment to our faith community, which consists of people from our neighborhood we may not associate with if we weren't drawn together in a geographically-bounded congregation, contributes to our efforts to raise the girls with such hope-in humanity by exposing them, at home and beyond, to modes of language- and community-making that refuse to turn away from human crises or human difference and that embrace the entanglements and complexities of human relationships.

2. Caldiero on the Apocalypse (from an Interview with Scott Carrier)

Yeah, I kinda have a more

old Mediterranean

view of it

y'know that um

that there is no end because there's no beginning

and that things simply # are

pretty much the same

eh # with variations like the seasons

y'know

I truly believe that this idea of an apocalyptic # ending of

ending of time of days etcetera

is a uh # is a false one

superimposed on peoples

to instill fear

******

fear is a good thing for the powers that be

for the pow for the people in charge

you want people under you to be fearful

this is the the the desired way as a way of life

y'know terrorism keep em constantly in fear

y'know and so that means control

but the the the Mediterranean # old religion

believed that there is no beginning # that there is no end

that things are

******

it's a it's a and it's not even cyclical it's actually spiral

so for instance # on December 21

coming right up this month

you know where we're gonna be as a as a galaxy?

right in the very center

of the Milky Way

and we've approached it # by this beautiful spiral # isn't that

wonderful?

see so I'm gonna celebrate

by having my family gather together

and we're going to clear a whole room

and walk in a spiral

round the room always getting into the center and then in the center

gather all together # and hug each other

Sonosophy as Conference of the Birds

These two narratives of familial communion via shared engagement with the material and immaterial stuff of our lives—the image of Jess and me nurturing our daughters into what I hope is a meaningful and productive conversation with a world in crisis and the image of Caldiero and his family circling a room in their home, tracing a spiral path toward a shared embrace at the center—recall for me the reiterative pattern of a Mediterranean Conference of the Birds. As Caldiero describes such a gathering in *sonosuono*, thinkers from different fields come together to "discuss Sicily and its economic and cultural future." While the thinkers at such an event each approach the topic from a different

angle, the process of exchange among them always unwinds from and reaches toward the community's shared discursive concern in hopes not simply of creating "a new economy" in the country but more broadly for the purpose of forging "a new consciousness" in their shared culture (132). The coming together takes its name from the title of a twelfth-century CE poem by Sufi mystic Farid-ud-Din Attār. Attār's narrative opens on a meeting of the world's birds, who have gathered to consider their need for a leader. Hearing the assembly's reiterated desire for a king to protect them, the Hoopoe steps forward. She bears the crest of spiritual knowledge on her chest and the crown of faith on her head. Standing before the assembly, she declares that, by virtue of her esoteric knowledge, her experience with the mystical realm, and her unique gift for "divining underground sources of water" and for therefore sustaining life, she has "obtained an indication" of their rightful King's residence. *Who,* she ultimately asks, *will join me in a quest for the Sovereign Bird?* (49–50).

With a host of anxious birds in tow, the Hoopoe leads them on a "long and fearful" journey toward their King, telling stories along the way to inspire their hope and focus their attention (51). Yet, as the quest exposes them again and again to environmental extremity and brings them again and again into encounters with their individual weaknesses and communal crises, many birds falter and leave the company or die. Only thirty of the millions who began the journey make it—travel-weary and impoverished—to the royal court, where they petition to "be admitted to the Royal Presence" but get shunned instead by the court steward (116). Placed again *in extremis* so near their journey's end, they weep and wail at the loss. Their longing works the steward's pity; he grants their request, pulling back the curtain to the Sovereign.

However, the demands of the King's presence force the birds once again to confront their inadequacies; as the birds are presented with the flaws contained in their life narratives, they're bewildered: the Sovereign can't protect them from their Selves, they realize; and in their flawed condition, they can't abide the potency of his being. Recognizing that they've failed to grasp this truth, each bird gives up ambition and gives way to the self-dissolution imposed by an encounter with an overwhelming Other. So doing, the poet says, they're "reduced to dust" at the Sovereign's feet (117).

But self-loss is only the beginning of self-revelation, *poietic* consciousness, and *poietic* agency. After the birds, per Hoopoe, have traced their circuitous path to the King and been "purged and purified from all earthly elements, their souls [are] resuscitated by the light of His Majesty" (117). His expansive being opens before them and its givenness draws them into individual and communal health and intimate relation with each other and with the world they mutually inhabit. Reaching to embrace and be embraced by this stuff of life in its radical openness, the birds—as Hoopoe, as the sonosopher, as those invested in bearing together and bearing witness of the burden of vulnerability, dialogue, and exchange—become traveler, guide, and path. As a result, they may become better able to translate the sounds of being into their daily walk and talk and to foster ritual spaces and rituals of sharing that welcome diverse Others into moments of deep fellowship sustained by the *poietic* problem and promise of the Word, to which I now turn in conclusion.

b. A Conclusion

Tickling the Underbelly of the Sacred:

Sonosophy as/and Dialogical Coperformative Ethnography;

Or, "Alex Caldiero is an Idiot*"

*Read: a self-professed know-nothing, a fool, a screwball—a *momo* (Caldiero, "Momo"). The Sicilian word derives from Greek, *momos*, meaning "blame, ridicule, disgrace" ("Momus"). The Greeks embodied the term in *Momus*, god of mocking laughter and sarcasm, which in light of its etymology (*sarkázein*, to tear the flesh) is the work of rending a body, exposing its underlying system with cutting language ("Sarcasm"). By his own admission, Caldiero sees the *momo* embodied in Dadaistic artists whose work moves in the "subterranean" channels of human social life; who tease at the things we may sense but hesitate to speak, things that shape our ideas, social systems, and relationships but that we—as individuals and communities—for whatever reason keep veiled in silence and shadow; and who goad those things through the veil into the light of sayability and disclosure—or alternately, who coax *us* to the veil where, peering through, we can encounter unseen realities and, so exposed to their presence, begin to grasp the ways they might shape our experience of and being in the world. Because the *momo*'s work plays at the boundaries of what we claim to know, cherish, and hold sacred—and in the process can be seen lifting the curtain on and ribbing the ineffable—it pushes back against and sheds new light on the social order. As such, the *momo* lays our hidden nature bare and prompts observers to see themselves and the systems they inhabit anew and to revise their self-understanding, their habits of seeing and being, and their relationship to those systems (Caldiero, "Momo").

In a 2009 meditation on his idiocy (which he also seems to acknowledge through his work as a Dadaist, *makar*, shaman, and sonosopher), Caldiero confesses and plays at

the limits of his own knowledge. So doing, he can be understood as keeping in touch with the unknown and embracing the wisdom of foolishness and the *poietic* nature of self-critique. "[M]y lack of intel- / ligence has wised me up to a / very sad fact," he says:

> that I am an idiot
> thru & thru with no hope or
> remedy & no desire to change.
> And as such I've found my true
> calling in life and my real
> purpose in society. (1)

Settling into his own unsettling nature as a fool and his vocation as a screwball, he may open himself to derision from people in his community: he's been called, for instance, "a weird cat," "a stand-up comedian," "three-quarters mad," "incredibly eccentric," "an aged hippie," someone "distracted by himself," and a "bullshit" maker (C. Richardson, "Alex Caldiero"). But self-recognition seems to have also opened him to Self-revelation, transformation, and a sense of his moral responsibility as a human being. As he tells it in the poem, his meditations on how fitting "idiot" is as a description of his character, how (in his words) it "hits / the nail right on the head," have been a gateway to *poietic* consciousness (as I call it). After the manner of a shamanic talisman, the word has sent him, he says, into "a / deep dream of [his] life." Here he plays "every character" and assumes responsibility for "every / action done" by those characters instead of deflecting blame for communal shortcomings as he "was wont to do in / [his] more awake state." In this carnival of a dream-state, things are topsy-turvy: the Self assumes the Other, the Other is a parade of possible selves, and the poet is awakened to the redemptive power of

his role as patsy for "the crimes [others] perpetrate / against their fellow humans & / other living creatures" (2). So embodying his community's transgressive nature and hidden desires, he can be seen making the invisible visible, speaking the unspeakable, and disclosing the undisclosed, "pull[ing] a poem right out of [the communal body's] heart" and delivering it "in front of [our] very own eyes and ears" ("Intro to the Poetarium"). In the process, I see him step into his identity as the "Mysterious Alissandru," who I interpret as a holy fool, a wild man, a wizard, an ethnographer, a *makar*, and a mystic, whose Poetarium—his always unfolding place of making—could serve as both sideshow and temple: "the between" where he, as jester and priest, appears to gather and deconstruct *poietic* figures, knowledge, and prime-itive performance traditions then to reassemble them into an expansive *poietic* ecology whose diversity and vibrancy offer a vital corrective to a stagnant world ("Momo").

As I interpret his performative posture as sonosopher, he stands at the inner coil of this ecology as it unfolds via the splendid, disruptive work of *poietic* consciousness, "mak[ing] things that sometimes appear as language or pictures or music—and then again, as the shape of your own mind" (Caldiero, "Who is the Dancer" 93). This is one way he's characterized his work, anyhow, professing what I've labeled the problem and promise of sonosophy: above all, it's a mode of making things, of *poiesis*. But those things, he admits, are tricky; like Proteus, they shift shapes. His sound-word-gesture-image—his somatic imprint—seems to slip among performative genres, figures, and traditions, and among cultural heritages, while belonging fully to none and reaching to grasp the ineffable prime-itive mythos of all. Playing with this posture, he seeks to represent the dynamic shape of the mind, which I understand as an agential system at the

core of human personality, identity, and knowledge that emerges from neural networks formed and re-formed in the brain as a person experiences the world (Greenfield 91). As what seems to be an emergent neural ecology, the mind mirrors our broader somatic ecologies, which consist of the material and immaterial environments we construct and inhabit; the people, creatures, and things we construct and inhabit them with; and the relationships we maintain with those environments and their inhabitants and constituent connections.

In performances that can be understood as attempts to represent this range of somatic ecologies—from the mind to material and immaterial worlds—the sonosopher, I suggest, approximates the ethnographer. He moves among peoples, ideas, cultures, and modes of being and seeing and presents observers with the Other knowledge, language, and experience he encounters in his movements; hence, his sound-word-gesture-image, to borrow from anthropologist Clifford Geertz, can be interpreted as setting "the world off balance," as "pulling out rugs, upsetting tea tables, setting off firecrackers" (275). In the process, his knowledge, language, and experience rupture established premises and social realities and may open new ways of seeing and assembling conventional notions of epistemology, language, pedagogy, performance, and poetry. In my understanding of Caldiero's performative *poiesis*, he extends his hand into the world and, with his transgressive tongue and "the laughter and ruckus" he makes as "a prayer and a song," invites observers to reach back and to enter with him into expansive places of making and exchange: the dynamic and multivalent systems of systems through which we share the mysteries, frustrations, pleasures, and hopes of human communion ("Momo"). Viewed in this light, sonosophy can be seen as a mode of knowing and being in the world and being-

with and being-toward others through which the sonosopher seems to hope that communal bodies can invoke and experience the "viscera, blood, slime, the unsullied land and infant joy" that make our relationships vital and through which we bind ourselves—after the manner of religious art—via hope-in deep fellowship and peace as they emerge from the perpetual, co-performative work of *poiesis*.

By framing language as a mode of communion that—in my formulation of his work—springs sphota-like from and unfolds in relation to the stuff of life and that remains rooted in and in constant dialogue with and about that stuff, and by invoking the trickster figure—the *momo*—as a seer and a dispenser of wisdom, Caldiero's sonosophy further anticipates (intentionally or not) the work of dialogical coperformative ethnography. As I've explored and performed this critical ethnographic methodology in terms of sonosophy and in response to Bernstein, Foley, Schechner, and Conquergood, it seeks to breathe life into specific acts of human expression (like performed poems) by asking that observers expose themselves to these acts via the work of close listening, which demands attending to an utterance as it's performed, on its own terms, and not as we would like it to be performed; that we honor the provenance of expressive acts, giving them validation via responsibly-constructed and responsibly-contextualized representations; that we open ourselves to be moved by and to learn from expressive acts; and that we ethically integrate expressive acts into broader cultural ecologies, such as epistemologies, ontologies, pedagogies, etc., using these acts not simply to bolster or embody our ways of thinking and being but also to critique them. This mode of ethnography thus moves observers to flesh out and to enliven the "sturdy, fecund totalities" that humans make in our daily walk and talk and so doing to acknowledge,

address, and be transformed by the fecund diversity of human life and lifeways (Glassie xvi). As such, it demands humility. By bringing observers into contact with disparate Others, it asks us—as I argue sonosophy asks us—to remain open to what we don't know about life, to keep probing what we do know in the always unfolding work of self-critique, and to hold fast to those things that sustain principles of life and grace while letting go of everything else.

Close observers of human expression—like scholars of performance poetries and poetics—may do their subject a disservice when they neglect this mode of engagement, which seeks to bear witness of the performative richness of texts as things woven from human experience and culture. Stripping expressive acts of their human contexts—as can happen when a scholar analyzes a performed poem via its written counterpart or neglects their own embodied experience of a performance—we strip these acts of vitality and grace; to a degree, we mute their voices. Some muting is, of course, inevitable because (as I've observed) we can't possibly know or represent every aspect of a text's provenance; but this muting becomes "morally problematic" and "reprehensible," to borrow from Conquergood, when someone "refus[es] to risk [an] encounter" with a text's richly-layered witness of human experience. So "detached and estranged, with no sense of the other" as could come via intimate textual engagement, the "skeptic," to use Conquergood's term, "sits alone in an echo-chamber of his own making, with only the sound of his own scoffing laughter ringing in his ears" ("Performing" 8–9). Such nihilistic, culturally-insensitive, self-aggrandizing dismissal of other voices can be harmful not just to the work of scholars concerned with the academic study of human expression but also, more broadly, to the work of the humanities and to social discourse.

It skirts the complex entanglements of human intra- and inter-personal ecologies and dialogue in favor of univocal, uncontested solipsism: a transcendent Self to which all other selves should concede and aspire. So doing, it reiterates a view of human selfhood as self-contained, invariable, and irreducible, and a view of social discourse as space for asserting, on one hand, the primacy of a singular voice and its narrative or, on the other hand, the validity of every voice and every idea, even if those voices or ideas are unsound or unfounded and thus grounded in post-truth ways of knowing and being.

Dialogical coperformative ethnography honors the assumption underlying the latter view that to sustain the health of individuals and communities we must allow many voices to speak by making space in our communal lives for the presence of many narratives. However, notwithstanding the methodology's insistence that the always unfolding narrative of humanity is polyphonic and, therefore, carnivalesque, it rejects the premises of a post-truth economy wherein individuals or groups disperse doubt against things that don't jibe with their worldview, manipulate or ignore data and present alternative facts to justify that worldview, and thereby subvert traditional ways of constructing knowledge in favor of self-affirming fantasies and epistemologies. Rather, this mode of ethnography seeks to bring voices into the fertile space of dialogue where—sitting, speaking, and listening together—they can experience and co-construct new material and immaterial realities as they brush up and push back against each other; as they hold to and interrogate common frames of reference and experience while responsibly attending to sites of difference; as they selectively undermine their own authority by confessing their biases and susceptibilities and acknowledging the foolishness of their own positions; and as they, in the process, open themselves to intense

encounters with Otherness as well as to the possibility of being influenced and enlarged by those encounters. Caldiero's sonosophy can be seen enacting this process in the way his performative posture—his sound-word-gesture-image—draws from all his somatic resources and seems to bring multiple *poietic* figures and performance traditions into conversation. My critical engagement with sonosophy and sonosopher has called me to take off the mask of egotism and to give myself to the possibilities of this dialogue as it can be seen playing out in Caldiero's performances and beyond. Until we learn to recognize, open ourselves to, and validate in our lived experience and relationships the broad spectrum of humanness and human expression that sonosophy and critical coperformative ethnography reach to address, we may deprive ourselves as individuals and groups of the liberatory promise of hope-in life-sustaining language and communities.

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Appendix 1: "Poetry is Wanted Here!"

You don'

sound so good.

Please

take care.

Most o' this is mental

That's why it's terrorism: meant to

disconcert

make you revert

to blind fear—

Poetry is wanted here!

And to boot,

our home-grown nuts

are starting to take root.

Yet in most parts

things are calm and generally subdued.

But there've been hoaxes

and folks is

getting anxious

and ready to conclude

that it's hopeless and drear—

Poetry is wanted here!

So i'm gonna poetize

to realize

that you

cannot hide

when worlds

collide,

no going

inside

no taking a

breather

either;

It all comes in on you at once

& you gotta have at least an ounce

of hope and joy

to deploy

into the atmosphere

of fear

to implode

the load

of grief that's drawing near—

Poetry is wanted here!

‘Cause all peoples are

just like you are

and I are

close or far are

just people with nowhere to run:

Let’s stick a flower into every gun

like way back when,

or was that a dream?

Cant say now

feeling so low

seeing so bleak

thinking so drear—

Songs are wanted here!

Rhyming

& timing,

a rebirth of cheer—

Poetry is wanted here!

BAM!

We are human

after all.

America

venerable

yet

vulnerable

and

human

after all:

That's our true strength

& the real meaning

of this happenstance:

That we can fall

and scroll

and rise

and be surprised

and not take for granted

the morning sun so beautiful and dear—

Poetry is wanted here!

Forgive me for ranting

for panting

for chanting

out of tune:

That's the fool in me

seeking a tune in me

wanting

to stay light and free

from what would

oppress

depress

regress

obsess

and in general make a

mess

o' my soul;

I wanna be whole

in control

on a roll

without the slightest hint of fear—

Poetry is wanted here!

So my dear friend,

hang in,

hang on,

hang tight:

We gotta see this to the end;

We gotta be concern'd

and discern

the real enemy that we fight,

for the veil between truth and lie

is become so thin and sheer—

Poetry is wanted here! (3–5)