

The SAYING and the SAID

Photographs and Poems
by Jon Lynn McCallum

A Master of Fine Arts Culminating Exhibition
California State University, Chico

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The POEMS

*The Saying and the Said:
Photographs and Poems by Jon Lynn McCallum*

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NOTE: While some poems were created with specific photographs in mind, and vice versa, readers are invited to discover their own connections between the works.

STATEMENT

Physical containers full of intangible wonder, we are ever held in realms of contradiction: feeling versus intellect, imagination versus reality, past versus present versus future... Fascinated by these frail liminalities of human being, I long to more fully understand myself, others, and the world surrounding me. The aim of my work is to thus empathize with the human spirit and to affirm its being in spite of, and in awe of, its many inconsistencies, misgivings, and glories.

The theme of my current practice is the human voice. As a child I experienced difficulty in speaking and in being understood by others, and this informed my sense of self and my perceived ability to navigate through the world. A strong and mysterious force, the human voice has thus become a lifelong curiosity and is seen as both transmitter and metaphor of our human essence.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jon Lynn McCallum', with a stylized, sweeping flourish at the end.

Jon Lynn McCallum
Spring, 2014

FORWARD

The title of this exhibition, *The Saying and the Said*, comes from the philosopher Emmanuel Lévinas as quoted in *For More Than One Voice* by Adriana Cavarero. Cavarero’s main argument regards our history of emphasizing *what* is said rather than *who* is saying it. We have misunderstood the voice as being a mere carrier of words, rather than something significant itself—the essence of a person.

Cavarero describes “the Saying and the Said” as having far-reaching implications into such issues as identity, politics, and spirituality. She elaborates the concept with other contrasting pairs (listed below), which suits the “realms of contradiction” I explore in my own work. These contrasts appear in my images and poems in many ways—even the exhibition functions through both visual and verbal media.

In *Left to Right: the Cultural Shift from Words to Pictures*, David Crow speaks of how our culture has increasingly valued visual over verbal ways of experiencing the world. My work counters this notion, calling us into balance, that we would know not only the visible *what* but also the invisible *who* hidden beneath the surfaces—here symbolized by that which hovers between the tangible and intangible: the human voice.

SAYING	SAID
present	past
spontaneous	structured
mother	father
heart	head
experiential	conceptual
relational	distant
verb	noun
verbal	visual

Adriana Cavarero. *For More Than One Voice: Toward a Philosophy of Vocal Expression*.
Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press, 2005.

David Crow. *Left to Right: The Cultural Shift from Words to Pictures*.
Lausanne, Switzerland: AVA Academia, 2006.

POEMS

body break open, break, diffuse
bring forth your mystery, break, infuse
the blind expanse before you—waken
the bulwarked realms by you—shaken
booming your boon, they move, they move

thrumming your throat, they move, they move
twirling your tongue, they move, they move
singing your say, shifting the shaken
body break open

from fulness of heart the mouth moves
from figments of faith mountains move
earthquakes to make the world awaken
bittiest bones of ears be now shaken
bidding your boon, we move, we move
body break open

The “twirling your tongue” phrase is adapted from Walt Whitman’s *Song of Myself*, part 25—“My voice goes after what my eyes cannot reach,/With the twirl of my tongue I encompass worlds and volumes of worlds.”

“The mouth speaks from the overflow of the heart.”—Matthew 12:33-37.

Small faith moves mountains through the act of saying.—Matthew 17:20, Luke 17:6.

The stapes is the smallest bone in the human body; it is found in the ear.

in the sweet, salt-water womb of Saying
Said sank deep his stony word of science
which Saying received with soft-sea singing
shushing alive the seed, flush from silence

her heart-breath cadence was the first music
the archetypal sound, first felt, then heard
the first mystery and arithmetic
shushing to shore this nascent crying word

the pre-semantic presence squirmed and screamed
calling for sea songs sweetened with Saying
the la-la language between them streamed
shushing all sands from significating

the Saying and Said form something other
a voice is first a voice, nothing other

throbbing throat
fluctuant frame:
timbre of a being

inimitable, bodiless
radiant in air:
parallel of a person

intangible touch
of sculptured sound:
living presence

a voice

This poem was inspired by Italo Calvino's *A King Listens*, from *Under the Jaguar Sun*.

the volume of voice
in proportion to space
may be wholly inadequate
yet

a single flame
upon wax and string
defies darkness
illuminates substance
of unseen things

the meekness of mouth
in relation to content
may be utterly contradicted
yet

conflagration
needs no introduction
waits for no applause
runs where it will
unbounded

though wavelengths waver
from crest to trough

though vowels and consonants
fall indiscernibly to the floor

fire kindles

light and heat release

tongue and lips
are burning

somewhere between heart and lips
deep calls to deep and deeper water
a rudder resides for steering ships

directing desire from dangerous slips
hold hard the helm against the marauder
somewhere between heart and lips

fathoming failure and screwtaped scripts
pray through the passage where foolhardy falter
a rudder resides for steering ships

ticktocking tenets through turbulent trips
silence sings wisdom in storm or still water
somewhere between heart and lips

forgiveness for crazes and careless clips
may grace flood the voice of the vessel's lauder
a rudder resides for steering ships

O Saying! O Said! preclude our eclipse
deep calls to deep and deeper water
somewhere between heart and lips
a rudder resides for steering ships

“Deep calls to deep”—Psalm 42:7.

The word “screwtaped” comes from the name of a fictional devil in *The Screwtape Letters* by C. S. Lewis.

“Silence sings wisdom”—Proverbs 17:28.

The *O Saying! O Said!* phrase rings with *O Captain, My Captain*—a poem by Walt Whitman which also tells of a troubled ship.

James 3 compares the tongue to a ship's rudder, among other things.

in ages before isms
before deadly divisions
thought was not thought in the head
we thought with our lungs instead

before deadly divisions
we counted all cognitions
we thought with our lungs instead
Saying commingled with Said

we counted all cognitions
we made tactful transmissions
Saying commingled with Said
our voices with words were wed

we made tactful transmissions
x slipped in suspicions
our voices with words *were* wed
x slid right in to Said's head

x slipped in suspicions
x supported seditions
x slid right in to Said's head
sadly Saying went un-Said

x supported seditions
voices! words! collisions!
sadly Saying went un-Said
she sang without words instead

voices! words! collisions!
x fractured their fruitions
she sang without words instead
thoughts were then thought in the head

x fractured their fruitions
brought deadly divisions
thoughts were then thought in the head
a word without voice is dead

"...the beliefs that thoughts are words and words are breath [...] would lead to the belief that the organs of breath, the lungs, are the organs of mind." – R. B. Onians, *The Origins of European Thought*.

my unsounded self
does wait for me
where patience
(no longer virtue)
has cracked the door
has clicked the key

a hum-hollow room
does echo me
where kindness
(no longer silent)
now lays her bed
now lies with me

now rise with me
let's fracture the room
with concerted crescendoes
of sonic perfume

language clicks, shutters
captures nouns mechanically
naming them *subjects*
framing their systems

two dimensions seem three
mere reflections on a surface

Narcissus gazed, was lost

Locke's lossless language: lost

Funes' photo-real phrasing: lost

Jacob conned Isaac
confused the Saying and Said

Aesop's braying donkey
donned a lion's skin

the Sheeted Figure wearing a cone
resounded a singular voice

Barthes shut his eyes
when the image spoke
it punctured him
in silence

Narcissus—a figure of Greek myth who fell in love with his own reflection.

John Locke (philosopher) and Ireneo Funes (fictional character)—both
discussed in *Funes the Memorious*, a short story by Jorge Luis Borges.

Aesop—a storyteller of ancient Greece.

Sheeted Figure—shown in photographs created by the author.

Roland Barthes—a philosopher whose book on photography,
Camera Lucida, discusses ideas of *punctum* and *studium*.

our eyes have scratched mere surfaces
scraping skins as if they were deep
pricking to pieces the forms of faces

seeing wolves, naming them sheep
duped by the slew of their untrue voices
saying we wake while yet we sleep

making for us our unknown choices
blind leading deaf to the muting clench
we wonder where the noise is

flaring nostrils we follow our stench
what can we learn from these tenuous traces?
what coal black pupil can fire so quench?

what will break our bleak observances?
our eyes have scratched mere surfaces

sticks and stones
breaking our bones
beating drum rumbles
of rubbled saids
subverted sayings

x-es on tongues
silence the sung
naming not-knowns
by nixing
by naying

what are we saying?
what are we saying?

stones and sticks
bolster like bricks
building plumb structures
with sagacious saids
sedulous sayings

mortar on tongues
labor from lungs
names which affix
by singing
by saying

vibrations of voices adjoin them
although their forms refrain
although distance is physical, scientific
so, too, are waveforms of sound

although their forms refrain
although their harmonics differ
so, too, are waveforms of sound
longitudinal, mechanical, and pressure

although their harmonics differ
they fluctuate to the selfsame frequency
longitudinal, mechanical, and pressure
they receive singing within them

they fluctuate to the selfsame frequency
modulating through space and time
they receive singing within them
a series of compressions and rarefactions

modulating through space and time
their point and counter punctuating
a series of compressions and rarefactions
vibrations of voices adjoin them

speak
 into a balloon

 with your breath
 create pressure inside

 more pressure in
 than out

 pressure seeks release
 pushes back against you

 repeat once, twice
 three or four times

 don't let go

 tie it shut
 hold it

 feel the tautness—its skin
 continuously curving smoothness

 then let go

 projecting
 into atmosphere

 let it rise, fall
 wherever it will

 maybe another
 will receive it

 understand all

 you intended

 to say

the body broke open
audible perfume
sweet sonic rising
from the once silent room

who will interpret
the language released,
discern the fragrance
of this broken speech?