

CANADIAN JOURNAL OF

# Disability Studies

Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association · Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité

*Canadian Journal of Disability Studies*

**Published by the Canadian Disability Studies Association**

**Association Canadienne des Études sur l'Incapacité**

**Hosted by The University of Waterloo**

[www.cjds.uwaterloo.ca](http://www.cjds.uwaterloo.ca)

**This document has been made accessible and PDF/UA compliant by Accessibil-IT Inc.**

**For more information go to**

<http://www.accessibilit.com>



## **Stuttering from the Anus**

Daniel Martin  
MacEwan University

### **Abstract**

This piece of writing is intended as a plea to people who stutter to embrace psychoanalytic theories of stuttering that relate dysfluent speech to unresolved neuroses stemming from the anal stage of human development. Premising its ideas on early psychoanalytic work by Sigmund Freud and Otto Fenichel, among others, this essay argues that there is much to be gained from pathologizing dysfluent speech as a product of unresolved narcissistic aggression. Rather than articulate a psychoanalytic cure for such aggression, this work of creative scholarly labour suggests that analogies comparing dysfluent speech to excrement have the potential to emancipate stuttering from the limited confines of the person who stutters' mouth.

### **Keywords**

Stuttering; Dysfluency; Speech; Voice; Narcissism; Psychoanalysis; Disability studies; Anus; Feces

## **Stuttering from the Anus**

Daniel Martin  
MacEwan University

When I stuttered as a child, I often imagined that my mouth was full of tiny Lego pieces. I loved Lego; I spent all of my free time building and destroying spaceships and rockets. I also remember my earliest experience of being told by my mom to slow down because I was speaking too quickly for the words to leave my mouth at the appropriate speed for normal articulation. This frustrating experience took place in our kitchen right next to our fridge. The chronology is fuzzy in my memory, but this exact same spot in our kitchen was also where I had my earliest experiences of choking (on a piece of Lego no less) and fainting due to frequent head rushes. Today, this spot is still where I have my most personal conversations with my mom during the few times a year I get a chance to visit. I don't know what it is about this one tiny spot in my childhood home, but it's forged in my memory as a place of private trauma and loss of bodily control, conversation and not being able to speak. It's a place I return to again and again in my family home. There's no direct causation between these memories. I'm quite certain that choking on a piece of Lego didn't cause my speech to become jumbled and chaotic at times like a box full of random pieces of plastic. I'm also hesitant to think of my stutter as an unresolved oral conflict that continually returns in neurotic ways in my adult life, even though a therapist would no doubt have a field day with these connections. Instead, what I find so fascinating about this set of memories is my fixation on those tiny plastic pieces I so often held in my mouth while digging through piles of blocks in search for the perfect piece. These are the memories we need to talk about because they are so rich with insight into the dark, nebulous choreography of stuttered speech. It's not uncommon for people who stutter to imagine their words as external

objects in their own right. In fact, such analogizing is often central to the curative process of speech-language pathology. I still remember the sound of my hands swishing through those almost liquid piles. I also remember the frustration and anger at never being able to find that perfect piece that would match or complement the piece waiting in my mouth. While the ancient Greek rhetorician Demosthenes famously inserted pebbles into his mouth as a technique for curing his own stuttered speech, I have always associated my own speech with Lego pieces in my mouth that did anything but restore my speech to fluency. They have always been tiny objects of melancholic frustration. What place do such memories have in scholarly discourse, outside of the genres of life-writing? I've been feeling lately that my entire academic career has been some cosmic joke leading me incoherently to the great irony of being a person who stutters who does scholarly research and writing on the literary and cultural history of stuttering, yet never seems completely able to spit it all out or organize it in any coherent, fluent, or digestible way. How do I be honest with my own shit while recognizing that someone else might just think it's shit? There's no way out, and this is the trap of the person who stutters. Writing can be an escape from the persistent (and sometimes ghostly) dysfluency of my own bodily rhythms, but it also turns everything that is me into a fluent discourse. There is no dysfluency in discourse, which is why most psychoanalysts have not given a shit about stuttered speech without resorting to formulaic, universalized theories of cause. And it's not just psychoanalysts. Most scholars in the humanities don't give a fuck about dysfluent voices, or they confuse the speech disability of stuttering with all kinds of "stutterances" or privileged stuttering rhythms of (post)modernity.<sup>1</sup> Even disability scholars at times don't seem to give a shit about dysfluency because we still need to rely on persuasiveness, argumentation, and fluent communication to make our claims. Also, people who stutter exist in an uncertain place, neither fully disabled (not always, at least), nor

fully normative in our speech patterns. For those of us in the thick of shitty speech, the dysfluent voice is always in a vague, undefined elsewhere, somewhere in the cracks and crevices between speech and the materiality of our immediate organs of speech. It comes from us, but is not us. It's excretory in the way it affects other people. And this is why autobiographies of stuttered speech are so disappointing; there is simply no way to write effectively about dysfluency without resorting to fluent discourse and understanding—without completely articulating that eerie encounter with the fluent other's response to shitty speech. Fluent discourse of the life-writing variety always leads to weak sympathetic readings. It's time to give a shit (a gift, an offering) about stuttered speech. Shitty speech comes from the mouth like fecal matter—sometimes constipated, sometimes runny, but always a thing in its own right: like a Lego piece or the cacophony of tiny objects. I hope my sense of frustration will be familiar to both Lego fanatics and people who stutter, both of whom have probably spent years searching for the perfect pieces, or the perfect words, that will set everything in place. Most of the time, the missing piece refuses to be found. It's there somewhere, and even when you do find that piece, there's no satisfaction because of the effort put into the search. Analogously, my own stuttered speech is quite similar; I know the words are there somewhere in the jumbled depths, but often I just can't find them, and when I do, the results are seldom comforting. Why do my earliest memories of stuttering circle around and eventually come back to psychic reminders of my childhood intimacy with tiny pieces of plastic? Why does my stutter today still feel like a thing, or a jumble or sludge of things in my mouth? The answers to these questions can be found in the various practices of metaphor and analogy for people who stutter. The discipline of speech-language pathology often ignores the fact that speech blocks, hesitations, and repetitions have an innate *thing-ness* in their relation to the body's housing of speech. In the speech clinic, the *thing* of stuttering is often glossed over

through a range of analogies that help people who stutter rethink their speech in the name of "management." People who stutter are often asked in the clinic to think of their stuttered speech through various object analogies, as if the act of analogizing itself can do powerful work visualizing stutter events and thus easing patients into fluent articulation. These analogies are everywhere in the daily lives of people who stutter. Joseph Sheehan's iceberg is the most well-known of these.<sup>2</sup> Listeners only recognize the symptoms of stuttered speech at the very tip of the iceberg. This is where the blocks, repetitions, hesitations, and physiological tics and tremors exist. Below the surface are all of those other, more pressing, symptoms of dysfluent speech: childhood experiences, nervousness, anxiety, self-doubt, and low self-esteem. It's become common knowledge that we need to take care of our icebergs by recognizing the weight of it all beneath the surface. The iceberg haunts our dreams and therapeutic processes, which are always in a state of becoming. It takes over the rhythms of our lives. I've heard anecdotal stories of children who stutter at various speech clinics drawing pictures of their own particular icebergs as a therapeutic technique for coming to terms with the fundamentally enigmatic and mysterious nature of dysfluency. There are other analogies, too. They can often be as simple as asking children to draw pictures of their speech or encouraging adults who stutter to think of the repetition of consonant sounds at the beginning of a sentence as a ball that needs to be bounced to get going (ba-Bounce). Another technique called the pull-out method asks people who stutter to consider a blocked word as an object that needs to be pulled out of the mouth slowly in order to produce fluent speech. Whether within the context of fluency-shaping or stuttering modification, the two polar opposites of speech-language pathology, or somewhere in between, the speech clinic is a place of words, rhythms, and bodies becoming things all in the name of fluency. The mysterious *thing* that inhabits the place of words must become, in the clinic,

something known and understood, and this is why the “stuttering pride” activism of the blog *Did I Stutter?* insists politically on undoing the damage of the speech clinic and its discursive production of fluency.<sup>3</sup> Analogies can certainly work their magic as intellectual games that visualize the object-oriented nature of words and language systems. This is most certainly the case with stuttering, a speech disorder with no definitive cause or cure that affects over one percent of the world’s population and over three million North American adults in any given year. The speech-language pathologist’s many analogies can be extraordinarily effective for people who stutter, especially for those of us who desire fluency, but there is always something dissatisfying about therapeutic reliance on object analogies in the pursuit of “normal” speech. Analogies serve a purpose; they make us feel like we’re doing rigorous thinking without crossing the line into mystical thinking, where things really do inhabit our bodies and our speech becomes thing-like. Analogies of ingestion and invasion have a long history in the Western world’s thinking about stuttering’s symptomatology. For hundreds of years, stuttering has been associated with *chorea*, or St. Vitus’ Dance. In Victorian Britain, author Charles Kingsley referred to the “dumb devil of stammering” in his writing about the latest treatments for treating stammering, as did virtually all nineteenth-century elocutionary and medical experts on defects of speech.<sup>4</sup> Popular Victorian poet Martin Farquhar Tupper described stuttering in similar terms as an “incubus” that sucks the breath from the person who stutters, reducing the organs of speech to a paralyzed mechanism.<sup>5</sup> In recent years, the Stuttering Therapy Centre in the United Kingdom posted an article entitled “Attempting to Kill My Stuttering Demons” that confirms this almost mythic predilection for thinking about speech through analogies of demonic possession and invasion.<sup>6</sup> These analogies are everywhere on the Web. They fill up our social media feeds, sometimes appearing as inspirational slogans, as self-help “you can do it” babble.

They are premised on weak emancipatory claims about overcoming, coping, or living with personal demons. In a 2006 essay in the *Telegraph*, novelist David Mitchell described his own childhood stammer in similar terms as a "sort of shady homunculus—an anti-matter Golum" living at the base of his tongue.<sup>7</sup> In *Black Swan Green*, Mitchell's narrator Jason refers to his own stutter as a mischievous "Hangman." Describing a particularly visceral early memory of stuttering during a classroom lesson, Jason states, "It must've been around then [...] that my stammer took on the appearance of a hangman. Pike lips, broken nose, rhino cheeks, red eyes 'cause he never sleeps. I imagine him in the baby room at Preston Hospital playing Eeny-meeny-miny-mo. I imagine him tapping my koochy lips, murmuring down at me, Mine. But it's his hands, not his face, that I really feel him by. His snaky fingers that sink inside my tongue and squeeze my windpipe so nothing'll work."<sup>8</sup> Such fictions of causality rely on analogy as a way of communicating some kind of repressed or originary trauma. Or, they are supposed to help us understand the experience of stuttering. Perhaps they can also orient our thinking about speech toward the world of objects and things around us that play a role in our communication with the world out there. Those of us in that one percent of the world's population with adult developmental stuttering have an intimate relationship with this ghostly or monstrous *thing* that always seems to inhabit the spaces of our day-to-day interactions with the world. Some of us will do anything to rid ourselves of the ugliness and sadness of stuttered speech. Some will purchase expensive anti-stuttering technological devices or quick-fix programs purchased cheaply online or in the bargain bins of local bookstores. Or we won't talk at all, preferring to sit in the corners of classrooms and meeting rooms lest we be called to speak and let the demonic thing work its evil. When we do speak, we might adopt the mechanically precise rhythms and techniques learned in the speech clinic. Because there is no definitive cause or cure for developmental



stuttering, we stutterers are often left with analogies that allow us, like Mitchell's narrator, to become creative writers or diagnosticians of dysfluency. Speech becomes a craft: formulaic and performative. Fluency becomes phony. All the while, we see the world in different ways, as if everything surrounding and inhabiting us is a cascading river of risky words, a jumbled cacophony of Lego pieces, or a procession of monstrous objects. Sometimes, those words are just shit—verbal diarrhea. But stutter events are not merely analogous to thingness; they are excremental remains of embodiment, echoes of the inert involuntary thingness of our bodies prior to that abstract concept we call "life." Perhaps Henri Bergson said it best in his provocative essay *On Laughter*, in which he argues that what we find funny is always related to bodily affect. We laugh, Bergson argues, when we notice in others the intrusion of "something mechanical encrusted upon the living."<sup>9</sup> That is, when artificial rhythms—stutters, hesitations, uncertainties, prats, and falls—invade the body, we recognize something in others that seems predatory in its disruption of the supposedly graceful and fluid movements of life itself. Involuntary blocks and repetitions seem funny to others because they make the bodies inhabiting them look inhuman or machine-like, temporarily possessed by non-human rhythms or encrusted by a broken-down thingness. At times, all we may want is a coffee at Starbucks, but instead we look (and feel) like zombie bodies robbed of the fluent rhythms of "normal" speech as we stand on the other side of an economic exchange trying to spit out an order. Psychoanalysts know that metaphors and analogies are never merely just innocent linguistic usages that we assign to common experiences for the sake of communication. Objects are central to our subjective experience of the world. The endless parade of things outside of our own bodies orients and conditions our unstable, precarious sense of self. The analogies we use to describe our experiences with speech are often merely manifest content masking a far more wondrous and troubling latent world of repressed

memories, sensations, and encounters. We all measure our senses of self against our proximity to the objects in the world around us, and those objects often take on the contours of our own desires. We can debate lingering anxieties about abusive parental figures, unsatisfied demands of Father, and the lost object of the Mother's breast seemingly forever, and we might still not make any headway with the appeal of recent neurological and genetic theories of causality that house the origins of stutter events in the safer confines of brain patterning or DNA—both of which we can do nothing about. Regardless of our methodological allegiances, the one thing that grounds all thinking about the enigmatic condition of stuttering is the problem of materiality and thingness it introduces in the experience of language for both people who do and do not stutter. But what might happen to our thoughts about stuttering, or speech in general, if we began to take analogies seriously, and avoid seeing them as merely figurative rhetoric? What if my stutter actually is (or was at some point) this intrusive object-like thing ingested from the outside like a Lego piece? What if my speech is intimately related to excrement? What if stuttering has an intimate relation with the abject? This is mystical thinking at its finest, the stuff of fairy tales and dreams. It's also the work of psychoanalysis. My observation is that people who stutter, like disability studies scholars in general, despise psychoanalytic thought precisely because of its seemingly mythic choreography of objects and partial objects (the phallus, the breast, the anus, the mouth), each articulating some kind of primal trauma at the core of stuttered speech. Perhaps what people who stutter need is not a scientifically oriented cure or system of management, but a radically new way of mythologizing speech. This mythology must begin with recognizing our own narcissism when it comes to speech, which requires that we come to terms with one of the nastier of psychoanalytic objects—the Anus. In psychoanalytic theories of stuttering's etiology, the anal stage is often a locus of intense conflict where the child's primary narcissism collides

with the symbolic demands of the Other. In a letter to Sándor Ferenczi from 26 November 1915, Freud writes in passing that stutterers "have projected shitting onto speaking."<sup>10</sup> In essence, people who stutter have not properly sublimated the narcissistic ego conflicts of the anal stage of childhood development. Those conflicts return in unresolved speech forms later in life. After Freud, psychoanalytic interpretations of stuttering by Coriat and Glauber held onto this idea of unresolved conflicts, but placed them instead as returns of oral conflicts resulting from troubles related to the mother's breast.<sup>11</sup> Otto Fenichel, however, took up the Freudian sentence on stuttering (it was just a sentence, but an important one) and went full anal in his analysis of stuttering. For Fenichel, stuttering symptoms result from unresolved narcissistic aggression stemming initially from the anal stage of development, when the child desires to both withhold shit and spew it all over the place. The former gives the child a sense of much-needed mastery of the external world; the latter provides a sense of excessive pleasure.<sup>12</sup> Spewing words all over the place or withholding them are remainders of conflicted infantile desires. The anal stage, as Freud conceived of it, is not simply a biological stage of development but also what Jacques Lacan calls the "locus of metaphor"—the site of one's inevitably dysfluent and challenging entrance into the symbolic order of speech and language, where one privileged object of desire is substituted by another.<sup>13</sup> No one, in Lacan's estimation, enters the symbolic order unscathed; dysfluency becomes a kind of organizing principle of language. As a biological object and a metaphor, the anus is both one of the seemingly nastiest features of psychoanalytic thought and an emancipatory thing, if only we look at it and listen to it the right way. In *Reading from Behind*, Jonathan Allan argues that the anus has the potential to "deflate" the primacy of the phallus (and all it stands for) in cultural discourse.<sup>14</sup> It has the potential to resolve the gender troubles resulting from dogmatic faith in such Freudian terms as the Oedipus complex and

castration. The anus is repugnant because it evokes the child's earliest desires for both pleasure with and mastery of the symbolic world. For Freud, the anal stage marks the development of an unsettling narcissism and aggressivity of the ego. But, as a privileged object, the anus also compels us to divorce stuttering from the primacy of our mouths. Attention to the anus and its shitty speech forces us to mythologize a little bit and reconsider where we think stuttering comes from. As repressed or buried content, the origins of stuttering compel us to think deeply about the embodiment of dysfluent speech. Steven Connor observes in *Beyond Words* that we often experience sounds from the body that do not originate in the immediate organs of speech as "belonging to a vaguer, more undefined *elsewhere*."<sup>15</sup> As disability scholars, we viscerally despise analogies or metaphors of disability. Challenging the metaphors is perhaps the first bullet point in the job description. But what would happen if we embraced such analogies and saw in them the potential for an emancipatory project? People who stutter are steeped in analogy because we've been thinking about our speech patterns as merely the tips of many icebergs for decades now thanks to Sheehan's infamous analogy. Sometimes we become militant in our demand that others swim up next to the sublime thing below the sound patterns of our ugly speech. That chunk, that icy thing, demands something of us, so we want it to demand something of others. If we can recognize its sublime presence, others better too. Let's be honest about this; our egos sometimes become aggressive and crusty in their expectations. There is narcissism in the demands we direct at others. Yet, we deny wholeheartedly that this aggressivity comes from anywhere but the good intentions of political activism. We aggressively want the world to see and experience language in the same way that we do, or at the very least accept stuttered speech for its asynchronous, repetitive rhythms. This icy chunk (and its corresponding glacial temporality) terrifies me, though. It's *Das Ding*—the tragic, unbearable Real. Why should I

expect others to recognize the glacial depths of "me" when I don't want to swim in those waters? Sheehan didn't fully realize, as far as I can tell, the Freudian implications of this analogy, but they are there. In fact, it informs my entire way of thinking about the phenomenology of stuttered speech. Somewhere in that icy mass lies the source or kernel of my stutter. The more I insist on others recognizing it, the more it takes on a life of its own. My point, though, is that the activist work we do so well emanates from the anus, from a profound narcissistic aggression that demands to be heard. I say this with full admiration. We couch our work in the fluency of scholarly discourse; we deny ourselves when we do this. Maybe the anus is only one of the many analogies we can use to signify the embodiment of dysfluency. It's probably the most uncomfortable and disturbing of analogies I could have suggested. I'm envisioning a choreography of anuses right now. I do know this: the stutter is a symptom of some kind of narcissism, understood in all of that word's Freudian emanations. There will be resistances to this claim because of the cultural connotations of the anus as an abject thing, or because of widespread resistance to psychoanalytic work in general. But any possibility of "crippled speech" or "stuttering pride" must reconcile itself with the narcissism required in any act of speaking dysfluently and demanding that others recognize our own vocal rhythms and temporalities.<sup>16</sup> If we are stuttering activists, we insist on speaking dysfluently rather than within the mechanical rhythms learned in the speech clinic. We must speak our bodies, even if that means we pathologize our speech a little bit. Stuttering is inherent to what Lacan often refers to as *lalangue*, or what Mladen Dolar calls (borrowing from Lacan) the "object voice."<sup>17</sup> Stuttering does not emerge linguistically from the mouth, despite our desires to fuse stuttering with speech. Rather, the voice in general always comes from an elsewhere, whether internal or external to our bodies. Psychoanalysis is not palatable, and never will be. It's a shitty thing to talk and talk and

talk—in therapy or not—about yourself in the name of cure. I certainly don't want to admit that I stutter because of some regression to the anal stage of development. But I can admit that I'm a little narcissistic. I can also admit that it feels good, for once, to write how I actually feel in a scholarly context. Stuttering does give me pleasure. I kind of like being an irritant. I enjoy the ferocity of my own desire to be alone and the façade of my performative fluencies. I also enjoy withholding speech when it serves my purposes. I can hide behind my stutter. To write about stuttering, to reveal publicly to my students and colleagues the stutter that I sometimes can't even find when I'm steeped in performance, is to get into the dirty corners of my mind and the cavernous sinkholes of my nervous system—places I don't actually want to go, and truthfully places that I'm not even qualified to enter. Yet, I must go there (wherever "there" is). Not because to stutter is also to feel a very profound sense that language is in control of me. I cannot write myself into existence because language has always been that which reminds me of the impossibility of being truly me. Language is not mine. I don't own it. I can't have it. And it seems to hate me at times. Yet, I also want so desperately to control it, to master it, and to make it my servant. I may at times want to isolate it to my mouth, even though I have an extremely visceral consciousness of my neck, cheeks, and arms when I stutter. It's not nervousness, anxiety, introversion, or extreme shyness. It's inescapable, and I don't want to eradicate or cure it. Even in my most inauthentic moments, when I feel that my fluency is a thoroughly fraudulent performance because it's just an echo of the Master's voice, I can't escape my desire to be the King of language, and thus the world. I'm not shy. Perhaps I can be quite nervous in my casual speech with intimate loved ones, friends, and colleagues (the auditors of my nastiest bouts of dysfluency). I'm also definitely introverted by nature. But, to insist on these, to build a politics on emancipating the shy, quiet, and introverted, is not an altruistic endeavor. Politics needs

assholes, and ours have the potential to speak as irritants. One of my earliest memories about language involves one of my grandmothers. Once when I was six or seven years old, I asked her for a bag for my toys. She berated me for saying "bag" with a nasty Canadian accent. She felt that it was her duty to teach me how to say "bag" with a proper British accent. I remember saying "bag" over and over again, never getting it right. She refused to give me a bag until I could say the word in "proper" English, which I never could (and still can't). My response: absolute frustration, melancholic resignation, and one big unspoken "fuck you" to my grandmother (and the corresponding guilt for thinking such mean-spirited thoughts). Memories like this make early psychoanalytic theories of the causes of stuttering so compelling. Fenichel writes that stutterers live in an "anal-sadistic universe of wishes"<sup>18</sup> in which spoken words are like excrement that the stutterer either flings violently at the world or withholds in a kind of selfish defensiveness of the ego. At that particular moment when my grandmother refused to give me a bag, I definitely wanted to fling shit in her face and tell her to fuck off. One of the most troubling consequences of the peculiar cocktail of stuttering and narcissistic aggrandizement is the sense of always being too late to the linguistic party. The "fuck you" never arrives on beat. There's something pleasurable about the spondaic intensity of the "fuck you." Even just fantasizing about a perfectly timed, and fluent, utterance makes me feel warm and cozy, more so than any witty comeback. As a technique, wit plays on language, and stuttering can illuminate a whole range of issues about the rhetorical techniques that go into timely speech. But wit and stuttering do not automatically go hand in hand. In fact, I'm about as lacking in wit as one can be. Virtually everyone I know is funnier than me. Or, at the very least, if I am funny, it takes a certain personality to understand my sense of humour. I'm certainly not at all happy to be the butt of jokes. I don't take teasing well. I like puns, and especially bad ones. Any joke with

a set up is particularly problematic, because I always struggle to keep it simple and to the point. Rhythm and timing are problems when stuttering interferes with my ability to socialize casually. Yet, I also find some humour in a set up that does not go well, effectively ruining the punch line. Jokes that undo themselves and unravel before the arrival of a punchline are hysterically funny to me because they remind me of my own inability to arrive on time in the social ritual of witty banter and polite conversation. My mouth doesn't always do what it wants to do. I sometimes despise moments of being “outed” as a stutterer—at parties, social gatherings, in hallways, on the street—when fluency time is not on my side. I know this is a hackneyed cliché for people who stutter, but I remember one very clear moment at a Starbucks in Calgary a few years ago. I like the buzz of activity at coffee shops because it helps me focus on my writing. The white noise functions like a kind of SpeechEasy of the social environment, producing a sense of delayed auditory feedback. This particular Starbucks was like any other. I waited in line, and when my turn to order arrived, I could not even begin to utter the most primitive of sounds. “What can I get started for you?” Silence. Open-mouthed, my neck autonomically raising my head upward, I tried to find any way I possibly could to place my order. Often, others respond to such awkwardly visible silences with some element of politeness, but in this particular instance, I was completely gutted by a pimply nineteen year old who broke the silence with a harsh “WHAT do you want?” I'm not sure how long my speech was blocked, but by the look of the barrista's face, I could tell that she was incredibly irritated by my inability (or refusal, let's be honest) to keep the line behind me moving. This is precisely what Joshua St. Pierre is getting at in his fantastic work on stuttering as a phenomenological counter-hegemonic force.<sup>19</sup> I typically find ways to circumvent such moments by beginning eventually with other words than the ones I intended. Such circumventions, though, merely reinforce the temporal demands of a market economy



premised on efficiency of the line. But here's the point: there's narcissism in the anger and demand to be understood. Insisting on slowing down the line in the name of resistance (or being heard and accepted on my own time) is narcissism at its finest. It's there, and always will be. It fuels the desire to spew verbal shit all over the place, or to withhold that shit in some physiological, almost autonomic, protest. Such moments remind me of how little control I have of such everyday exchanges with others, but there's emancipatory potential in pathologizing stuttering just a little bit. I wish no ill will, but I do want to talk about my own phantom stuttering (it's rarely there, but always present) from the filter of psychoanalysis because "dysfluency studies" needs to come to terms with its own narcissism, not in order to assuage it, but rather to insist upon it, to work with it, and to divorce dysfluency radically from the mouth. In *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, Freud describes the anal stage as a transition from an initial auto-eroticism to the child's first "gift" to others: feces.<sup>20</sup> As a gift of speech, feces reveals the intersubjectivity of the child and other people, listeners and other speakers. Feces is of the body, in all of its self-pleasure, and is a link to others. The anus is a portal to the other. If we let the stutter come from it, we free it from its imprisonment in our own bodies (in our own private worlds), or at the very least we relocate it away from the mouth or the brain where others would prefer it remain. Accepting stuttering's anality is the first step toward undoing the privately dysfluent voice and blasting it into the social. Here's my ultimate thesis for anyone with dysfluent speech: spew your shit. Let your speech stutter from the anus. Don't preach inclusivity, awareness, or acceptance; such weak emancipatory goals are thoroughly infused with pedagogical desires for fluency. A demand for one's voice to be heard is a demand for fluency. Be a constant reminder to anyone who will or won't listen that the voice doesn't just come from the mouth. It's physical, crypt-like, and buried. It's unsettling in its uncanniness. If there is an

emancipatory act for stutterers, let it be the emancipation of the narcissistic anus. Embrace neurosis and its wondrous, haunting rhythms. Narcissism has to be at the core of all that we do, everything that we produce. Perhaps what we need is not some kind of education in how to use analogies as lessons for coming to terms with stuttering, but rather some kind of education in the affective experience of analogy, in seeing stuttering, or speech in general, as a *thing* that mediates our social relations with other people. People who stutter should recognize the narcissism at the heart of all of this. If we can shake ourselves of the intellectual habit of seeing analogies as merely instructive object lessons, as feel-good reminders of how to think and behave, perhaps we can come to terms with that mysterious thing of speech I suspect we all feel. We can let it inhabit our lives a little more, let it do its evil from time to time, let it be mechanical and encrusted, pernicious and destructive. Let it be faecal. Spew it. My speech may not actually come out of my mouth with the plastic contours of little Lego pieces or the slushy stink of poop, but perhaps we should take the mystical leap a little more often and see speech as an object or thing. Fuck the immediate organs of speech; let the anus stutter.

## Notes

<sup>1</sup> For one particular instance of the privileging of the "stutterance," see Christof Migone, *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body* (Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2012), 123.

<sup>2</sup> Joseph G. Sheehan, *Stuttering: Research and Therapy* (New York: Harper and Row, 1970).

<sup>3</sup> Zach Richter, Erin Shick, and Joshua St. Pierre. *Did I Stutter?* last modified August 2016. <http://www.didistutter.org>

<sup>4</sup> Charles Kingsley, "The Irrationale of Speech," *Fraser's Magazine* 60 (1859): 1-14.

<sup>5</sup> Martin Tupper, "The Stammerer's Complaint," (1838), *Nineteenth-Century Disability: Cultures & Contexts*, last modified 2015, <http://www.nineteenthcenturydisability.org/items/show/21>.

<sup>6</sup> See Steve Hill, "Attempting to Kill my Stuttering Demons," *Stuttering Therapy Centre*, last modified January 16, 2013, <http://www.stutteringtherapycentre.co.uk/blog/attempting-to-kill-my-stuttering-demons.html>.

<sup>7</sup> David Mitchell, "Let Me Speak," *The Telegraph*, last modified April 30, 2006. <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3652013/Let-me-speak.htm>.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, *Black Swan Green: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2007), 26.

<sup>9</sup> Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*, trans. Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell (New York: Macmillan, 1913), 37.

<sup>10</sup> Ernst Falzeder and Eva Brabant, eds., *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi*, Vol. 2 (Cambridge: Belknap, 1996), 91-92.

<sup>11</sup> Isador H. Coriat, *Stammering: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation* (New York: Nervous and Mental Diseases, 1927); Peter I. Glauber, *Stuttering: A Psychoanalytic Understanding*, ed. Helen M. Glauber (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1982).

<sup>12</sup> See chapter 15 on stuttering in Otto Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis* (New York: Norton, 1945).

<sup>13</sup> Jacques Lacan, *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*, Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI., trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Norton, 1998), 104.

<sup>14</sup> Jonathan Allan, *Reading From Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus* (Regina: University of Regina Press, 2016), 27.

<sup>15</sup> Steven Connor, *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and other Vocalizations* (London: Reaktion Books, 2014), 119.

<sup>16</sup> Caitlin Marshall, "Crippled Speech," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (2014), <https://muse.jhu.edu/article/589570>;

<sup>17</sup> Lacan, *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge, 1972-73*, Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX, trans. Bruce Fink (New York: Norton, 1999), 138-39; 141-42; Mladen Dolar, *A Voice and Nothing More* (Cambridge: MIT, 2006), 4.

<sup>18</sup> Fenichel, *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*, 312.

<sup>19</sup> See Joshua St. Pierre, "The Construction of the Disabled Speaker: Locating Stuttering in Disability Studies," in *Literature, Speech Disorders, and Disability: Talking Normal*, ed. Christopher Eagle (New York: Routledge): 9-23.

<sup>20</sup> Sigmund Freud, *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* Vol. 7., trans. James Strachey (London: Vintage, 2001), 186.

## References

- Allan, Jonathan. *Reading From Behind: A Cultural Analysis of the Anus*. Regina: University of Regina Press, 2016.
- Bergson, Henri. *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic*. Translated by Cloudesley Brereton and Fred Rothwell. New York: Macmillan, 1913.
- Connor, Steven. *Beyond Words: Sobs, Hums, Stutters and Other Vocalizations*. London: Reaktion Books, 2014.
- Coriat, Isador H. *Stammering: A Psychoanalytic Interpretation*. New York: Nervous and Mental Diseases, 1927.
- Dolar, Mladen. *A Voice and Nothing More*. Cambridge: MIT, 2006.
- Falzedo, Ernst and Eva Brabant, eds. *The Correspondence of Sigmund Freud and Sándor Ferenczi*, Vol. 2. Cambridge: Belknap, 1996.
- Fenichel, Otto. *The Psychoanalytic Theory of Neurosis*. New York: Norton, 1945.
- Freud, Sigmund. *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality, The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. 7. Translated by James Strachey. London: Vintage, 2001.
- Glauber, Peter I. *Stuttering: A Psychoanalytic Understanding*, edited by Helen M. Glauber. New York: Human Sciences Press, 1982.
- Hill, Steve. "Attempting to Kill my Stuttering Demons." *Stuttering Therapy Centre*. Last modified January 16, 2013. <http://www.stutteringtherapycentre.co.uk/blog/attempting-to-kill-my-stuttering-demons.html>
- Kingsley, Charles. "The Irrationale of Speech." *Fraser's Magazine* 60 (1859): 1-14.

- Lacan, Jacques. *On Feminine Sexuality: The Limits of Love and Knowledge*. 1972-73, Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XX. Translated by Bruce Fink. New York: Norton, 1999.
- . *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psychoanalysis*. Seminar of Jacques Lacan Book XI. Translated by Alan Sheridan. New York: Norton, 1998.
- Marshall, Caitlin. "Crippled Speech," *Postmodern Culture* 24, no. 3 (2014).  
<https://muse.jhu.edu/article/589570>;
- Migone, Christof. *Sonic Somatic: Performances of the Unsound Body*. Berlin: Errant Bodies Press, 2012.
- Mitchell, David. *Black Swan Green: A Novel*. New York: Random House, 2007.
- . "Let Me Speak." *The Telegraph*. Last modified April 30, 2006.  
<http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/3652013/Let-me-speak.htm>
- Richter, Zach, Erin Schick, and Joshua St. Pierre. *Did I Stutter*. Last modified August 2016.  
<http://www.didistutter.org>.
- Sheehan, Joseph G. *Stuttering: Research and Therapy*. New York: Harper and Row, 1970.
- St. Pierre, Joshua. "The Construction of the Disabled Speaker: Locating Stuttering in Disability Studies." In *Literature, Speech Disorders, and Disability: Talking Normal*, edited by Christopher Eagle, 9-23. New York: Routledge, 2013.
- Tupper, Martin Farquhar. "The Stammerer's Complaint" (1838). *Nineteenth-Century Disability: Cultures & Contexts*. Last modified 2015.  
<http://www.nineteenthcenturydisability.org/items/show/21>.