

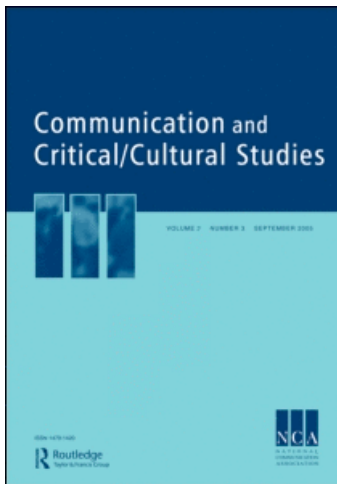
This article was downloaded by: [Gunn, Joshua]

On: 13 May 2009

Access details: Access Details: [subscription number 911175454]

Publisher Routledge

Informa Ltd Registered in England and Wales Registered Number: 1072954 Registered office: Mortimer House, 37-41 Mortimer Street, London W1T 3JH, UK



Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies

Publication details, including instructions for authors and subscription information:

<http://www.informaworld.com/smpp/title~content=t713684641>

About Face/Stuttering Discipline

Joshua Gunn; Jenny Edbauer Rice

Online Publication Date: 01 June 2009

To cite this Article Gunn, Joshua and Rice, Jenny Edbauer(2009)'About Face/Stuttering Discipline',Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies,6:2,215 – 219

To link to this Article: DOI: 10.1080/14791420902868029

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/14791420902868029>

PLEASE SCROLL DOWN FOR ARTICLE

Full terms and conditions of use: <http://www.informaworld.com/terms-and-conditions-of-access.pdf>

This article may be used for research, teaching and private study purposes. Any substantial or systematic reproduction, re-distribution, re-selling, loan or sub-licensing, systematic supply or distribution in any form to anyone is expressly forbidden.

The publisher does not give any warranty express or implied or make any representation that the contents will be complete or accurate or up to date. The accuracy of any instructions, formulae and drug doses should be independently verified with primary sources. The publisher shall not be liable for any loss, actions, claims, proceedings, demand or costs or damages whatsoever or howsoever caused arising directly or indirectly in connection with or arising out of the use of this material.

About Face/Stuttering Discipline

Joshua Gunn & Jenny Edbauer Rice

Creative stuttering is what makes language grow from the middle, like grass; it is what makes language a rhizome instead of a tree, what puts language in a state of perpetual disequilibrium. . . .

—Gilles Deleuze, “He Stuttered”¹

Deleuze explains the genesis of great writing as the ability of a writer to “make the language system stutter,” to stretch human expression to the limit, to “make language itself cry, to make it . . . mumble, or whisper.”² Just how one does this escapes description, but one is assured she *feels* it when she *reads* it—or as we would have it, when she *hears* it. Stuttering signifies the limits of language, but with feeling (so to speak).³ Although Deleuze’s use of the metaphor of stuttering figures as “an affect of language instead of an affection of speech”—that is, as a poetics—there is a sense in which stuttering can signify creativity in any system, particularly if we widen our understanding of language to the symbolic as such, and “speech” to the meeting place of the symbolic and affect.⁴ Consider disciplinarity, for example: in what sense does grappling with the object of affect represent a form of scholarly stuttering, an attempt to capture and understand states of being that are not sewed-up in advance, states that elude representation?

In this brief provocation we answer affirmatively and advance the example of the field formerly known as “Speech Communication.” We argue that this field was founded in the early twentieth century on the meeting place of affect and the signifier, but that it stuttered in the face of a progressive modernism. Uncomfortable with the instability of its object and desirous of institutional approbation, the stuttering discipline gradually muffled the voice of feeling, renaming itself “Communication Studies” and turning its back on the understanding of affect betokened by the object of speech. Consequently, any discussion of an “affective turn” in communication studies is more properly described as (an) “about face.”⁵

Communication and Critical/Cultural Studies and its sponsor, the National Communication Association, represent almost a century of scholarly face work.⁶ The ubiquity of the ambiguous term “communication” today designates a seri(nomin)al

Joshua Gunn is an Assistant Professor of Communication Studies at the University of Texas at Austin. Jenny Rice is an Assistant Professor of Rhetoric and Composition at the University of Missouri, Columbia. The authors would like to thank David Beard, Diane Davis, and Bill Keith for their sage advice. Correspondence to: Joshua Gunn, University of Texas at Austin, Department of Communication Studies, One University Station, Mailcode: A1105, Austin, TX 78712, USA. E-mail: slewfoot@mail.utexas.edu

murder of a number of titular objects, not only “speech” and “speaking,” but “public,” “teaching,” and “education” as well.⁷ The National Communication Association was originally formed in 1914 by a number of public speaking teachers housed in English departments. Tasked with teaching “the sons of farmers and mechanics” reading, writing, and speaking skills instead of instructing elites in the lofty lessons of literature,⁸ the founders of the new field sought resources and academic respectability by fleeing English, forming their own departments, and assembling under the banner of the National Association of Academic Teachers of Public Speaking.

Shortly after the formation of the professional organization, James Albert Winans and others called for researching a “scientific foundation for our special work” to put an end to academic “prejudice and unjust discrimination,”⁹ while others like Everett Lee Hunt opposed such calls as a threat to the then dominant focus on student empowerment through speaking.¹⁰ Regardless of where teachers stood on the issue, however, they seemed united by J. P. Ryan’s argument that teachers should rename their respective programs departments of *Speech* in 1918.¹¹ By 1930, most Departments of Elocution, Oratory, and Public Speaking became Departments of Speech. At the field’s inception, then, we can easily locate the beginning of two distinct academic traditions, one seated in the social sciences and the other in the humanities, but *united by a common object*.

Reading the early scholarship it is clear many thought the meaning of “speech” was *prima facie* obvious; however, its usage was far from consistent: for some speech concerned the act of speaking, while for others it included the whole of human expression, including gesture. Some scholars treated speech as a synonym for oratory, while others used the term as a reference to the physical voice. What early communication scholars seemed to share in common, however, is the assumption that speech is a meeting place of the human body and language, of *both* affect and the word, of *both* feeling and meaning. And the affective component of speech was once considered an important domain of study for budding social scientists as well as scholars of oratory and rhetoric.¹²

Something happened, however, with the entry of Speech into the academic sheepfold: feelings got dirty. Or more precisely, efforts to understand affect were increasingly incompatible with the field’s continuous and conflicting self-definitions. First, affect as such is ineffable and difficult to represent or quantify. Insofar as the only component of speech that yields (academic) knowledge is its symbolic aspect, any push toward science was destined to squeeze out affect.¹³ Although affect has always been important to the study of rhetoric, poetry, and literature, in high modernity feelings were disciplined in one of two ways: either they were delivered to the signifier through name or quantity (e.g., defining “horror” in behavioral terms for scientific study), or they were simply ignored—and not necessarily deliberately.

Second, the incentive to abandon or discipline affect was overdetermined: in the century prior to the formation of Speech Communication, the study of speech was associated with the elocutionists, especially Delsarte (and by extension, Swedenborg).¹⁴ The study and teaching of elocution was obsessed with the proper communication of human emotions and the channeling of affect into their appropriate, bodily

presentation.¹⁵ To help create the new discipline, speech scholars forcefully defined themselves *against* the elocutionists as histrionic, “effeminate aesthetes” whose “scholastic deficiencies” were insufferable.¹⁶ Furthermore, as wartime propaganda techniques became more widespread and demagogues rose to prominence in the United States and Germany, scholarly attention began to focus on combating *negative* emotions and controlling unruly affect (e.g., “mental hygiene”). Unlike the contemporary celebration of affect in the theoretical humanities today, then, feelings were increasingly regarded as feminine and potentially dangerous.¹⁷

In the 1950s and 1960s, “communication” began to supplant “speech” and the affect associated with it. In 1968 leaders in the field coined the term “Speech Communication” to signify the humanities and the social sciences respectively.¹⁸ Arguments to jettison or retain the term “speech” continued for almost thirty years, even though it steadily dropped from journal titles and departmental nameplates until, in 1996, the death of speech was finally pronounced: the Speech Communication Association became the National Communication Association. The official rationale for the murder of speech was that the field was no longer solely committed to the study of oral communication.

We’ve rehearsed the disciplinary struggle over speech to underscore the historical discomfort associated with affect as an object. In a sense, all new disciplines are bound to stutter, mumble, and cry as they grapple with and define their objects of study. Speech Communication is conspicuous, however, because the early founders embraced an inherently unstable, affective object: speech can be crafted, but it also betrays elements of the soul—feelings and judgments—that we would rather repress. Speech can coordinate behaviors, but it can also erupt from us uncontrollably, as with laughter or hiccups or crying. Early speech scholars thus developed a focus of study that seemed *prima facie* stable but turns out to be rather wobbly. The human voice is something that speaks language but upends its meaning in the affect of tone; our experience with the human voice has as much to do with the *saying* as it does with what is *said*. The movement between the two, between the subject of the signifier and the subject of *jouissance*, is a kind of stuttering or stammering, an inability to settle on one side or the other. The murder of speech muffled the saying, thereby deadening a focus on feeling.

What can the stuttering of speech tell us about the “affective turn?” Does it portend a coming resistance, a future disciplining, and then a death? Perhaps, but only if we fail to confront the feeling that drives our (re)turning and the affect that resists it, only if we suppress the impulse toward the final word—indeed, only if we resist *the* word . . . *the* number, *the* picture, *the* answer; only if we resist saving face.

Speakers who stutter describe the difficulty of interacting with people who respond with embarrassment. It is common for listeners to experience a kind of pain, turning away from the stutterer in discomfort.¹⁹ Public education campaigns have taught listeners to avoid finishing sentences for people who stutter. Yet, as a stutterer might tell you, the space between those sounds create a gap of signification that many listeners find intolerable. Far too often the interlocutor simply tosses out words and phrases in an effort to end the stutter. This discomfort does not necessarily come

from a lack of “communication” in the event of stuttering. Rather, the stutter can be heard as an over-exposure of speech. It is an entanglement between body and language. For us, such an entanglement implicates the stutterer with a face altogether different from the one Goffman advanced, “the face” as described by Emmanuel Levinas:

The presence of the face . . . signifies an irrecusable order, a command, which puts a stop to the availability of consciousness. Consciousness is called into question by the face. Being called into question is not the same as being aware of this being called into question. The “absolutely other” is not reflected in consciousness. It resists it to the extent that even its resistance is not convertible into a content of consciousness. Visitation consists in overwhelming the very egoism of the I which supports this conversation. A face confounds the intentionality that aims at it.²⁰

By “face” Levinas does not mean the literal visage of a person, but rather, the irreducible uniqueness of an-Other, some-thing (or rather, *this being*) apprehensible in the Saying, not the Said. The face betokens a “nonappropriative relation” and affectivity prior to the signifier that stuttering causes us to feel.²¹

The desire to turn speech into communication is not unlike the desire to hand the stutterer a pen and paper. The consequence is knowledge and an accrual of the number, perhaps even the ever-elusive good of academic prestige. Unfortunately, the cost has been a certain closed-ness, a hardening of disciplinarity marked by a decline in creativity,²² an increase in specialization, and a repression of something that the stutterer better helps us to hear: speech harbors an affective and effective ethic. The stutter itself does not forestall communication, but communes-with the bare life of embodied speech, something Real, beyond signification, something that speakers share. The stutter discloses something familiar to every act of speaking but which we tend to forget or repress: our response-ability.

Notes

- [1] Gilles Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” trans. Constantin V. Boundas, *Gilles Deleuze and the Theater of Philosophy*, ed. Constantin V. Boundas and Dorteia Olkowski (New York: Routledge, 1994), 27.
- [2] Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” 24–25.
- [3] In general, “stuttering” refers to the involuntary repetition of sounds and silences (“blocks”) in speech. We do not mean to refer to the clinical condition.
- [4] Deleuze, “He Stuttered,” 26.
- [5] We mean many senses of “face” here, including Erving Goffman, “On Face-Work: An Analysis of Ritual Elements in Social Interaction,” *Psychiatry: Journal for the Study of Interpersonal Processes* 3 (1955): 213–31. For an account of the “affective turn,” see Jenny Edbauer Rice, “The New ‘New’: Making a Case for Critical Affect Studies,” *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 200–12.
- [6] See Herman Cohen, *The History of Speech Communication: The Emergence of a Discipline, 1914–1945* (Annandale, VA: Speech Communication Association, 1994); and William M. Keith, *Democracy as Discussion: Civic Education and the American Forum Movement* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007).

- [7] Gerry Philipsen, "The Early Career Rise of 'Speech' in Some Disciplinary Discourse, 1914–1946," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 93 (2007): 352–54.
- [8] Cohen, *History*, 14.
- [9] J. A. Winans, "The Need for Research," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1 (1915): 17–23.
- [10] Everett Lee Hunt, "The Scientific Spirit in Public Speaking," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1 (1915): 185–93.
- [11] J.P. Ryan, "Terminology: The Department of Speech," *The Quarterly Journal of Speech Education* 4 (1918): 1–11.
- [12] For example, see Smiley Blanton, "The Voice and the Emotions," *Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 1 (1915): 154–73; and F.H. Lane, "Action and Emotion in Speaking," *The Quarterly Journal of Public Speaking* 2 (1916): 221–28.
- [13] For a good, psychoanalytic account of how this happened in the academy to the social sciences, see Bruce Fink, *Lacan to the Letter: Reading Écrits Closely* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 141–66.
- [14] Cohen, *The History*; Keith, *Democracy*, 29–30. Delsarte's understanding of "expression" can be traced to Swedenborg's theology. See Genevieve Stebbins, *Delsarte System of Expression* (New York: Edger S. Werner, 1887), esp. 33–38.
- [15] For example, see Gilbert Austin, *Chironomia, or, A Treatise on Rhetorical Delivery*, ed. Mary Margaret Rob and Lester Thonssen (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1966).
- [16] Hunt, "Scientific," 192, 185.
- [17] Elocution was also considered a private practice. Although space prevents discussion, the centuries-long association of speech with the body, the private, the feminine, and affect is at work here. See Joshua Gunn, "Speech is Dead; Long Live Speech," *Quarterly Journal of Speech* 94 (2008): 343–64.
- [18] David Zarefsky, "On Defining the Communication Discipline," in *Toward the 21st Century: The Future of Speech Communication*, ed. Julia T. Wood and Richard B. Gregg (Cresskill, NJ: Hampton Press, 1995), 106.
- [19] Jonathan Rowe, "'Your Response is Your Character' (Response to Stuttering)," *Washington Monthly* 20 (December 1988): 18–22.
- [20] Emmanuel Levinas, "Meaning and Sense," trans. Simon Critchley and Adriaan Peperzak, in *Basic Philosophical Writings*, ed. Adriaan Peperzak, Simon Critchley, and Robert Bernasconi (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1996), 54.
- [21] Diane Davis, "Addressing Alterity: Rhetoric, Hermeneutics, and the Nonappropriate Relation," *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 38 (2005): 191–212.
- [22] We underscore performance studies as a very important exception.