Transcript

(References included below)

Joshua St.Pierre [JSP]: Right, like, stuttering can't happen without the l-listener there, right? When they try and d-disavow themselves of the responsibility it's always an act of power in that way.

[Music: Ascending, bright, twinkly, uplifting, electronic]

Emilia Nielsen [EN]: This is *On Being Ill,* a show about creativity, disability and identity. I'm your host, Emilia Nielsen.

[Music rises then fades]

Today I'm excited to share a conversation I had with writer, professor, and Canada Research Chair in Critical Disability Studies, Dr. Joshua St. Pierre. Josh and I talked about his role in the burgeoning field of Dysfluency Studies; about how a new approach to speech language pathology might just help us all better embrace our vocal differences; and about how he works to deconstruct, unsettle, and bend fluency privilege through a new interactive knowledge platform called "*The Stuttering Commons*."

And just a quick note before we get started: I had the privilege of sitting down with Josh in person, so you may find that the sound quality of this episode is a bit different from our other episodes. This is the beauty and limitations of handheld recorders and those differences are indeed audible. Alright, let's get into it. We'll pick up our conversation with Joshua introducing himself in his own words.

JSP: Well, hi, I'm Josh. My pronouns are he or him. I grew up in Alberta – rural Alberta – and then I went to S-Saskatchewan, and then I'm back in Alberta, so I guess I've spent my l-life on the prairies, which is kind of weird to think about. I am a prairie boy, so I…what do I do? I mean, I really l-love gardening, which is a challenge in Edmonton for half of the year, but I find ways to make it work still.

EN: That's great. Oh, it is such a real challenge: zone three. There are folks that say there's patches of zone four in Edmonton, I have never experienced that. This is a gardening for those that like a challenge.

JSP: Oh, yeah, and I take that challenge seriously, so…I mean partly I just like, start my p-plants way earlier in my growing c-closet than I have to.

EN: Oh.

JSP: I buy seeds compulsively, so… because they're just like, th-three dollars a pack, you know, just throw one in.

EN: What could go wrong?

JSP: What could go wrong?

EN: In minus 25.

JSP: Yeah.

EN: … when you get snow in May, June, July, August, sometimes…

JSP: Exactly.

EN: Um, I was thinking before we just, you know, briefly said hello to each other a few moments ago…I hadn't seen you since many years ago, when you were very generous in accepting my invitation…Is that really even how it works for graduate students? No, you agreed to come lecture in my in my Disability Studies class at U of A.

JSP: I got experience, and you can't put a price tag on that so [laughing].

EN: [Laughing] That's true, that's true. But I know what a dynamic teacher you are in terms of your presence in the classroom. And I know it was one thing to assign…What did I assign in that class? Probably "The Construction of the Disabled Speaker."

JSP: Probably.

EN: Yes. And students, you know, they read your scholarly essay before you come in, and then you come in and you bring to life this piece of, you know, theoretical writing. I'm not just saying it's just theory, but theoretically-charged writing with vivid examples. And then there you are in the classroom. But that was a long time ago. You are certainly no longer a PhD student. I hear you're embracing another transition from assistant professor to soon-to-be associate professor.

JSP: This is true.

EN: How has that transition been all these years…because it's at the same institution, at the University of Alberta…from student to professor?

JSP: Yeah, that was pretty wild, actually, to go from…well, I mean, to give a little bit of context: I did my undergrad in Christian College in S-Saskatchewan, and then I…we came to the U of A because it was the only place that accepted three years of credit for a f-four year degree. So it just wasn't r-recognized. So there's a whole other story there. But um, so the U of A I did a qualifying year there first just to prove that I could work at a graduate l-level, and then they admitted me based upon that. So according to their records, I actually don't even have an undergrad.

EN: [Laughing] Ok.

JSP: Like a BA. So it's funny to go from like all that just yeah, just to show up on campus after being at a Bible school, on like the planes of Saskatchewan in like a tiny village, just to, like, show up in Edmonton as, like, a little student, I felt. And then I met you. So, like, like, like…only a few years after that, probably. And everything kind of like happened. And then went through the ringer of doing a PhD.

EN: Yep, accurate description [laughing].

JSP: Woo, yeah. There are some other metaphors that I've developed [laughing]...those later…

EN: Ringer, washer, right?

JSP: Yeah, yeah. And then yeah, and then you get wrung out at the end…

EN: Yes! Very, very flat.

JSP: Yeah, very very flat. You assume, like a very aerod-dynamic f-form. And then you have to just like throw yourself against w-walls, as fast as you can, over…like, as many times you can, until, hopefully, you stick against a wall once, and that's called getting a job.

EN: And then you just fluff up out of this without being dried through a tumble dryer, and you have this amazing poise and depth of knowledge. It's…yeah. It is a strange process.

JSP: It really is, yeah. And then also, you're expected to be an expert.

EN: Yes.

JSP: And that was like, I think doubly true for me, because I was hired, like, I think, like, two months after I walked across the stage, I was hired to be Canada Research Chair in Critical Disability Studies.

EN: Which is amazing. Congrats.

JSP: Thank you.

EN: Hopefully it's sunk in a little bit now these years later, but…

JSP: Yeah. I'm now actually doing my…I'm up for renewal of my CRC now so…

EN: It never goes away, the ringer.

JSP: The ringer and, like, the worry about, like, waiting for other people to decide things, but…

EN: I think you're the first Canada Research Chair in Critical Disability Studies. I know other people are doing disability-related work across Canada, but I think that you might be one of the only…with that particular title.

JSP: I mean, I think with that particular title. I think that's just like a branding thing…

EN: Okay.

JSP: Like as far, I mean…I would be interested to hear what my…what some of the other CRCs who are working in the space, like, how they s-self-id-dentify, because I even know so, like, for example, Katie Aubrecht…

EN: Yes, I was thinking, yeah...

JSP: And Katie was CRC, like, a few years before I was, and so I d-definitely would locate her work in…

EN: Yes, absolutely…

JSP: …Critical Disability Studies, and I assume she would identify as working w-within that methodology too, even though that is not in the job title per se, you know.

EN: Yeah, exactly. If you were to rename your CRC, which you might be able to do, what…is there something more specific or more…would you add to that, with your expertise, obviously, in Dysfluency Studies. Is that a word and a concept, a way of being that we need in the…in the lexicon, obviously, but in that title?

JSP: That's an interesting question. I haven't thought about that. I think…And one of the things I'm thinking about is that there actually now are a couple CRCs in like disability and communication of X, Y, and so I feel like there, there are people who have stepped into these kind of spaces. So, I mean, it could have a colon and then a s-subtitle to it, as we are p-prone to

do, but I actually think there's something I like about it being a CRC in Critical Disability Studies, because th-this is a field that is not just a fringe or like a niche concern, but it is actually far more c-centrally important to like thinking through how our world is org-ganized. And so there's a way in which like, like splintering that, I think, isn't the most isn't the most ef-ffective. And at the same time, I think there's something interesting about saying Dysfluency Studies can be part of Critical D-Disability Studies or, like, is like, full stop, and we don't have to, like, have a separate thing if we want to talk about Dysf-fluency Studies.

EN: That makes sense to me. I mean, especially when you're thinking about others that are working at this intersection of disability and communication, which can go in all different ways. We would never parse out disability and communication from Critical Disability Studies, we would understand it as being inclusive to the field, as I think you most forcefully – that's a compliment to have made – in terms of the inclusion of thinking about not just disability and communication, but dysfluency within this context of disability. And to go back to something I was thinking or saying earlier in terms of teaching your article. And I mean, now, you have written so much and you published widely. You have a book out with the University of Michigan Press, just from a couple of years ago: *Cheap Talk: Disability in the Politics of Communication*. But you know, thinking about my experience of teaching "The Construction of the Disabled Speaker" and watching what happens with students in the classroom and how you know in that article and throughout your work, you're really unsettling norms that people have grown up to believe are just this natural way of doing things. I would imagine it's one thing for me to be saying this – I'm wondering about in the classroom, when you…Would you identify as a dysfluent speaker or a stutterer?

JSP: I mean, I would identify with either.

EN: Yeah.

JSP: I think that they do have different lineages. But part of the fun, I mean, part of the social project, in a way, is to like de-...is to rewrite terms and to r-rewrite and like overwrite, in some ways, like, who has the authority to, um, define what this means, right?

EN: Yes.

JSP: So anyway, so all to say I would…so I do call myself a stutterer, and I also will fervently reject when biomedicine tries to fix what that means for me. But there's but…but you know, I'm also a member of the d-dysfluency c-community as well, right? So there's l-lots of, well, that's the kind of the…I think that's one of the joys of crip culture, there's always multiple ways in at the same time.

[Music: Upbeat fast-paced keyboard sounds ascending and descending, slow melodic wind instrument, resolves in a calming tone]

EN: I love the project you've been working with, *Stuttering Commons*, which is an experience. It's not just a website, I would say. It is like a hub, a meeting place, a…

JSP: Knowledge platform.

EN: Knowledge platform, absolutely. What was the genesis of that project, *Stuttering Commons*?

JSP: Well, *Stuttering Commons* goes back a few years to 2018 to a project that was run by a m-member of *Stuttering Commons*, Maria Stewart. And she is a professor of literature at University College D-Dublin, and she got a welcome grant to bring together three strands of people who work on stuttering. And so there's a clinical strand, a cultural strand, or c-critical th-theory, basically, and then, and then a..and then a c-creative strand.

EN: Oh, awesome.

JSP: So it was called "The Stammering Collective." Stammering is what they call stuttering over there, so…

EN: The UK, right, okay, yeah, makes sense.

JSP: Yeah, and so at the end of…that was, like, a really cool project. And, like, there wasn't really, like, any aim besides, like, what happens if we b-bring these strands which have historically been held apart, you know, like, um, t-together, what would emerge? You know, and it was, like, really cool. So there's a website that was done by the people who did the website, and like all the visual design for *Stuttering Commons*, they are Connor and Bart, and they are, well, they're just fantastic, but Connor stutters as well. And so having like this dysfluent stuttering aesth-thetic being like, part of it has, like, always been, like, an important value, anyways. All to say that Connor did that w-work too, for the w-website for the Stammering Col-llective, and it's r-really cool to ch-check out. But at the end of that, myself and two others, were starting to meet just like, by our s-selves, like, just like we had this idea of like, well, this, this project is coming to an end, and what do we…what do we want to do next? You know? And so, this idea of like, so the *St-Stuttering Commons* was originally called, and on the grant online, still called The Stuttering Curriculum, and this idea of like, well, what if we had like…because there's, there's, there's just like, this deep sense that over the past, like now, 15 years, there's been, like, a really powerful body of knowledge that's been built up that's been really transformative for the people who who it is, t-touched, I guess, or engaged. At a certain point, I started to feel like I've been like, hoarding, just like, how transformative this is. Even, I mean, even if, like, even if you want to, like, play by the r-rules of fl-fluency sh-shaping and like, like, all those games like, like, I've never been more fluent, I guess, than when I stopped caring, you know?

EN: Amazing.

JSP: And so, like, how's that for, like, a therapy goal, you know?

EN: Yeah [laughing].

JSP: So anyways, all that to say sorry, I got off track.

EN: No, no, *Stuttering Commons*.

JSP: Oh right right, sorry, sorry. So the Stuttering Curriculum, which is now the *Stuttering Commons* with this idea is that, like these are really transformative ideas that have been, are being, like, held, kind of gate-kept by academic n-norms of c-communication. Which there is some irony in that for stuttering. And so…so it was based on this idea of like, well, What if we are trying to really make social change in like…in like, a way that is going to create d-dysfluent culture, and enable like, like…or help facilitate this like g-groundswell of dysfluent and stuttering culture and art that is starting to emerge. And also, and also just like to offer, like, some depth of kn-knowledge about these important things. And like be able to, like translate important ideas. And I've always felt like if, if an idea is truly good enough, or like is, is a good idea, it can be explained s-simply.

EN: Yes, that's the challenge.

JSP: And so that's, um, the challenge, we're taking on for ourselves, I guess.

EN: Which is amazing, I mean…but this…and we'll share with our listeners the URL, etc, in our show notes, to make sure you don't have to try to figure out where this is, and you could probably Google *Stuttering Commons*, but it's a really immersive experience, in the sense that the website itself, as a kind of a hub or a knowledge platform, is moving. It's not static, and things are happening. Words are appearing and they're being crossed out, and there's that kind of interactive element. And then you can see the different places to go, the research articles, the artistic creation, etc, and different performances that have been captured there, which is, which is great. Which means you can do a lot of clicking into…into different places and and start to sort of not just kind of take in the theory, but the culture. It seems like *Stuttering Commons* is creating and sharing with the rest of us, this rich culture, which is a culture made for and by stutterers. And I think that the mission statement, which is right on the…on the beginning of the website, is "We are a collective aiming to deconstruct, unsettle and bend fluency privilege." So here we're being asked – if you are viewing the website or taking in the knowledge as someone that doesn't stutter – that there is a kind of privilege attached to that, one that may not be unpacked or really thought about. I'm wondering why that mandate was important to write like that?

JSP: Yeah, one of the fun things about being involved in this project – I mean, I'm, like, the Principal Investigator for this project – but there's, it's like, a…it's an incredible team of like, like some of the very best, if not the best people…not like, there are, there are, like, a lot of people doing really good work, but I think these are some of the very best. In academic fields…so it

was important that th-this work brings together, again, creative elements of dysfluency, and that's emb-bedded in how we t-teach and tell about dysfluency and and then to engage speech language p-pathologists and then academics as well. And the speech l-language p-pathology element is important because, because that, I think, can affect social change even f-further upstream. As well as a way in which, like, of course, speech language pathology isn't going anywhere. I mean, for all kinds of structural reasons – of insurance and all kinds of things. And just like the b-biomedical industrial complex as it's setup is, like, pretty well established, right? But also because parents – especially – want speech therapy, right?

EN: Yeah.

JSP: And there's gonna be speech therapy as long as we want it. And so the question is, like, well, if it's gonna be there, perhaps it could be done in a different, critical modality, right?

EN: Yeah, yeah. I mean, it makes me think of a little person in my life and just relishing the way that they spoke, which might not be considered normative ways of speaking and thinking, "Oh, this is just so you and I understand you," like anyone, we we adjust to people's ways of speaking. The more time we spend with someone, the easier it is for us to understand. That goes across many different ways that we speak, accents, pace, all different neurotypicality or neuroatypicality. But I remember this…the parents of this little person had said "We never brought up speech pathology, but they came to us and said that they might like to because they were getting frustrated with not being understood outside the family." And so there seems to be something that happens when there's a greater pressure for this kind of rapid, immediate understanding. And so I agree with you that in that instance, all I can hope is that there is some rad speech pathologist out there that is not crossing into a kind of line towards normative speech, and instead, working with this young, this little person towards, where are the places you're frustrated with not being understood, or something like that, like, taking the lead from the child.

JSP: I actually, I have a lot of hope.

EN: Great!

JSP: I mean, like, just like in general, and also for the l-little person in your life. Yeah, I think that's because I've been so encouraged to be in this project, and like to do this work alongside SLPs, and to realize, oh, there, there are already people working with a different question. Instead of the question, "How can we help you speak in a n-normative, fluent way" like, "How can we help you stutter better? How can we help you stutter more easily? – If that's what you want – How can we help you c-communicate in the way you want to? How do we…how do I s-support you to advocate for yourself, right?" So like it, it becomes like, there, there, there, there is still speech work that can be done, but it becomes…as the awareness that stuttering is not just about th-this internal indiv-vidual speaking, but that both stuttering and communication involves a much larger ecology, if you will, then those other things c-can also be brought into the therapy room as valid things to work through as part of stuttering, right? So…

EN: Yeah, I love that. I love the questions you pose, this reorientation, like, "How can I help you stutter better? Where are the places that you might wish to communicate differently or in the way that you wish to?" I'm...I, for a moment have this peace that you have hope because you work with, you know, with this generation of speech…speech pathologists. So *Stuttering Commons* already is this rich resource.

JSP: Yes.

EN: It's going to, perhaps in its next iteration or phase include more things. Did I hear a rumour about a podcast that perhaps is in the works?

JSP: Yes. I mean, if you now go to *Stuttering Commons*, they've updated it so the drop-down menu has all, like, the projects that you can't actually click on, but they're like…

EN: Placeholders?

JSP: Yeah, placeholders of like "h-here's all the awesome stuff we're going to be doing next."

EN: That's exciting.

JSP: Yeah, so *Stuttering Commons* is coming up to the end of stage one, I guess, of the project. Um, the project, the funding, is a Partnership Development Grant that goes…ends in April, 2026. And so I'm currently – I'm not currently – but in the Spring, I'll be applying for the next r-round of funding that will hopefully take us to like, like 2032 or something.

EN: When we're flying around to spaceships, because it has to be so far from now.

JSP: No, I mean, in my imagination, we're gonna have, like, grounded all airplanes by that time.

EN: Exactly, that's a better aspiration than mine.

JSP: But stage one is, like, there's still, like, a lot of things we're p-planning on doing. So, so far, we've done well, well, the website itself has taken lots of time and the manif-festo, is out now; we have it now translated into three…four, different languages. So those are coming online pretty soon. And then the library – we are trying to make as many things open access as possible, but that takes time and resources in all kinds of ways as I'm sure, you know.

EN: Yeah, absolutely.

JSP: And then…but then on top of that, there's a podcast, yes, that's called *Disorderly Voices*, that will be coming out...the first episode – which I'm on the first two episodes, actually…

EN: Awesome.

JSP:...in the new year. And then…so those are all the projects we have currently, or like we have been doing. But then the two other projects that we want to do in stage one is, well, first to do a glossary. I have this idea that having, like, a really cheeky glossary would be really fun, but I don't know…

EN: It could be quite helpful. I don't know how cheeky it will be, but ah…

JSP: But I want to do cheeky, is the problem.

EN: Like you would write one definition for stuttering or fluency, and you would have a specific audience in mind that would get your in-jokes or...

JSP: Yeah, I guess so.

EN: I like that idea of playing with the glossary.

JSP: Yeah, I think that'd be fun too.

EN: Well because often these glossaries, you know, I understand they're supposed to be helpful, but they take this position as if they're neutral. I mean, they're not! No glossary or even a dictionary…it's only the presumption of neutrality that supports its neutrality. It's completely written by someone using specific threads of knowledge to make a specific point about certain words, so…

JSP: And you asked why that l-landing page was important, f-for us. And I think that's the reason, is that we want people to join us, and the first thing we want them to understand is that n-naming these invisible n-norms is what we're…what we're going to be d-doing here, and transgressing them is what we're also going to be there doing, right?

EN: Yes, not just naming them, but also transgressing expectations of what they are. Which brings me back to – I don't think I finished my thought when I was talking about teaching one of your articles, "The Construction of the Disabled Speaker" – is the role of the listener, right? The idea that only the speaker's responsible for having a message or meaning understood. But like, what about the responsibility of the listener in this…in this conversation, to hear differently, to hear at a different pace, to accept that we adjust our listening, depending on who we're speaking to. That is so undervalued, but so necessary. And if I go back to, you know, thinking about speaking to people that are younger than myself, well, we do adjust our listening when we're speaking to little people usually, right? We're like, "Oh, okay." And yet we somehow think that when we're dealing with other adults, that if we don't understand immediately what is being said, it's the fault of the speaker, not that our listening might need some tuning. So I'd love the listener to be in that glossary to get some…some intervention.

JSP: Well, that is the whole trick, though, is that there's not much you can do with indifference, right? And an indifferent listener is the most difficult one to figure out – what do we do with that? You know, you can't force someone to want to listen or to care what you have to say. But when you realize that, like there's a social choreography happening here all the time, and these rules that we have for communication are inherited, but they're not inflexible, right? And there's a way in which the refusal to understand them as flexible and the d-demand that these things just are natural, right, if I am disquieted by by stuttering, well, that must just be some deep biol-logical aversion to a maladaptive behavior, blah, blah, blah, right? And instead of like...so it's actually a flexible system, and it's actually one that's deeply invested with power. So indifference is a form of power in that way, right? Of saying,"Oh, I don't have to change my expectations as a l-listener; I can come in with a certain right to expect fluency, and if my ears – if my fluent ears – do not get it, then, then there will be consequences, right? And there's a kind of way in that… in which that works when there's social power involved. Like, so there's this really great book called *Sounding Bodies* by Ann Cahill, and, urgh, I forget the co-author, but it's a f-feminist philosopher, and s-sound studies scholar. So like, it's really interesting. And there's this one really interesting point that that I, that I think about, is the example of quote, unquote, shrillness in female voices. And they parse out shrillness as created in the gendered expectation that female voices will sound in a certain compliant, docile way, and the anger and all the stuff that comes up when those expectations are transgressed. And shrillness, so-called, is created in the ear of the listener, right? And so there's, like, a very similar way in which, like the expectation and the demand that expectation is met, that the d-dominant, fluent ear be p-pleased in an uninterrupted way. I think that is like a lot of what drives these things. And so being able to, like, fold in the role of the listener in, like, even creating what this communication, a- moment, right? Like stuttering can't happen without the l-listener there, right? But when they, when they try and d-disavow themselves of responsibility it's always an act of power in that way.

[Music: Quick, light, percussion, descending keyboard, minor tones, chill]

JSP: So *Stuttering Commons's* project that we're working on is what we're calling "the primer." So we want to make a Dysfluency Studies primer that will both be an accessible and open access book. So it'll be like available to download from…but and but and then written…So we kind of want to have our cake and eat it too, because I like cake. But the idea is like, again, like, how do we reach as many people as we can with really transformative ideas, like with ideas that are based in ideas of Disability Justice, right? And so, well, part of that is really a strong mandate to have knowledge accessible and available in, like, lots of different formats.

EN: Yes.

JSP: And so our plan is to do this, and we're gonna see how it works. But this is like…we have until…we have, like, a year and a half to get this stage of the project done…is to write an open-access book that, in the body of the book is written for an intelligent, but not like, you know, like a university audience. And then there'll be, like, a dysfluent subconscious of our footnotes that just like, pack the whole thing all the way through.

EN: Oh, cool!

JSP: And then it's gonna be broken up into what we're calling – in a cheeky way – b-blocks. So in stuttering, a b-block is when you like…if I was to b-block, for example, which I was doing on that word, that's a b-block, but it's also a u-unit that can be arranged in different ways for things – for world building, if you will. So we're going to build out these various b-blocks and publish as that, but we also, for the most exciting part of this specific project is translating. We're gonna start with translating three of the blocks online, and so to write them A) even more accessibly for a general audience, but then also to have all kinds of different media. Basically, our concern is that a book is way too f-fluent for us, and so we're trying to find ways to make the text stutter.

EN: Yeah, oh, this sounds so cool!

JSP: Yeah, this is going to be so fun. And so there's all kinds of things we're thinking about doing. So the blocks are, first, that we're doing: What is D-Dysfluency Studies, and why does it m-matter? And then two is, what is Dysfluency Studies, and why does it matter to SLPs? And then the third is going to be a block on l-literary, cultural and aesthetic representations of stuttering. And so within these we have a series of short animated videos that we are currently working on. The first one, the script is done, and it's going…it's gone to the animator just a week ago. So it's really fun.

EN: That's great.

JSP: And it's called – again, cheeky – *How Many People Does it Take to Stutter*? Which was this conversation we're having, right? And so it's the idea of like How do we translate the idea that voice is an inherently dialogical and social thing and that stuttering can't be separated into like, into individual parts without just collapsing, you know? And like, how do we translate that into a n-ninety second visual narrative, you know, which has been, like, like, such an incredibly fun challenge. And also, like, hard, as you can imagine, you know?

EN: Yeah. The constraint you placed on yourself for time, so you have the distillation, but also the sort of mandate that this is for a general audience, and so you're speaking to an imaginary collective, right? Not just to a scholarly audience. But I love the idea that the book is too fluent; the book is too normative. I feel that way often at this point when I'm trying to work on the page, and even sometimes poetry – for me as a genre – feels like there's too many constraints. Even though there's not rules, there might be norms, but not rules. And then I go to prose and I think, Oh, not this again, you know? But we have this time, where we can work with hypertext, interactive text, digital…all of those realms can break out of some of the kind of canonical monograph…which does, like sort of closes itself off, right, from audiences in certain ways, even when it's open access. So this is exciting to think about and to see how it comes into the world and in the new year and its next phase.

JSP: And there is a place for a book, still, right?

EN: Sure.

JSP: And that's like the b-begrudging truth, you know, like we had to, like, agree about, you know? Is that, like, having a book to help define an emerging field is, like, ughh, but also, like, sorry, I mean ughh, because, like, it is a thing, like, you *have* to do in a way. But it also, like, there is s-something important, but, like, you know, like, being able to, like, point to a book, or, like, have something that's really easily teachable, or really easy, you know…And there's something about a book that does have closure to it, that has a beginning and an end, and you can, like, get the whole idea in it. And so even though that, like, there's so many l-limitations to this form, like, just like, having it as, like, one option, among many, if it can be thoroughly decentered, you know? And that was key for us, I think.

EN: Well, it sounds like too, like the book as this place, as you're saying, has this place. I mean, gosh, both of us, we would be, in some ways, out of jobs if we didn't believe in the life of the book. But there is a nervousness about solidifying and then codifying knowledge, as if this book is the book on Dysfluency Studies, as much as an introduction to Dysfluency Studies might be of service, right? Not only to the field of Critical Disability Studies, but well beyond it. But it's almost like, as soon as it gets published, if you're an author like me, you're like, Well, wait a second, I actually want to revise that. And I'm actually thinking about this, and actually, I want to add that in. It's not interactive, like other types of flexible texts might be, in terms of actually being able to edit or interject on the page. And I know poetry, you know, I'm looking at my bookshelf, poetry can sometimes try to insert the places, the gaps, the revision process, but it's an approximation of that kind of go dipping into the text and back out again.

JSP: Is there something you find, like, relieving about the closure of a text that gets just like to have its own life? And you can say this was created at this certain t-time in my own experiences. And it's its own thing now, you know?

EN: That's the only way I could publish books, especially because, you know, it's a funny thing that often, by the time it comes out into the world – maybe five years have passed or something – and you're thinking about other things. But you might want that record. The thing I found really interesting, and this especially happened with my second book of poetry, *Body Work*, which was that it was an approximation of me wanting to speak back to, you know, biomedicine and the way that, you know, symptoms are codified and maligned and pathologized, and wanting to be a bit playful with this, and wanting to define things on my own terms. And yes, maybe there's things I'd change in this book now, but you put it out into the world, and what's come back to me is people saying, "Hey, could I translate this into another language?" So an amazing feminist poetry collect...translation collective approached me, and I said, "Yeah, of course." Like, you know…so then it becomes something different when it's translated from English into Polish, which was just a complete gift. And so if you don't let it out into the world, these places of collaboration exchange can't really happen if they're just…if it's just sitting in your own computer, you know what I mean? Like "I can't release this until it's perfect." Then it's not finding an audience or readership, a community and a place for it to change, you know, and take on a life

of its own. So I'm maybe a bit foolhardy in this way that I don't get too precious about anything, because perfectionism has never served me very well in my life.

JSP: Yeah, I get that.

EN: Um, so what are you working on these days, then? You have published one well-received critical book, *Cheap Talk*. I would love to ask about what that means.

JSP: I'm happy to talk about that as well.

EN: Yeah, why *Cheap Talk*? I mean, there's a second part of it, *Disability in the Politics of Communication*, but, why *Cheap Talk*?

JSP: Well, so cheap talk in the book refers to both, like the c-colloquial s-sense of the word like "talk is cheap" in the sense that action and talk aren't the same thing, and talk is a lot easier. But the other instance, well, the other meaning of cheap talk is a way in which I try and trace out these patterns and the ways in which communication has been made, a low-cost r-resource stream within information societies and economies. So…and I argue that these are kind of two sides of the same coin, and that the way in which talk has been made…has been rendered cheap in the s-sense of being a stable and p-predictable stream of inform-mation flow that has also…has contributed to its cheapening politically, too. So, yeah, I think it's, I mean, one thing that I tried to do with the book is to ground it in cultural vignettes that, like, showed, "Hey, this is actually s-salient like right now, this isn't just abstract," you know?

EN: Well, exactly, and I was thinking about one of the vignettes that you talk about is Erin Schick's poem "Honest Speech." And that's something that I've also shown in conjunction with teaching your work, which is for those that haven't seen this viral performance, Erin is a performance poet, a slam poet, and one of the lines I think that I know my students kind of repeat back is "My stutter is the most honest thing about me."

[Sounds of an audience clapping]

Erin Schick: The stuttering is the most honest part of me/It is the only thing that never lies/It is how I know I still have a voice/I am still being heard/I am still here/When I stutter I am speaking my own language fluently…

EN: It really reclaims and reorients for the listener, how you think about who's telling the truth or not, how they're presenting themselves as being the reliable speaker or not, and why would we mistrust someone that doesn't sound slick, that doesn't sound fluent in the worst way. I mean, the slippery kind of qualities.

JSP: Like the s-smooth talker.

EN: Yes.

JSP: And it's weird that we don't trust the s-smooth talker, and we also don't trust the one who just like…is just like stuttering over and over again, because, because stuttering is also a sign of, like, hiding a dishonesty, you know, like and being shifty in some kind of w-way too, right? And so there…it's like two ends of...that'll end up in this s-same place. Sorry, it's not the same place, but they're familiar in an interesting way.

EN: Yes. They're familiar in a way that kind of disorients us for a moment where we're trying to, I think, as listeners, ascertain who is telling the truth. I mean, I think Erin's poem just disrupts all that and says, "I'm not asking you to judge me, I am telling you who I am" right? And not kind of allowing for that misunderstanding, using poetic metaphor, etc. So how does…does *Cheap Talk* and the different places you're going in that book, which, of course, would have been a project before it was this, you know, discrete, tidy book, does that connect to the projects you're working on now outside of *Stuttering Commons*, or where's your thinking right now, at the intersection of disability and communication?

JSP: Yeah, so my…oh…so there's a, oh…

EN:..or is there a rupture? Are you going in a different direction?

JSP: There actually is a bit of a rupture.

EN: Yeah, that's alright.

JSP: I mean s-so there are still l-lines of contin-nuity that I'm following, of course, but um, I started thinking a lot about bel-longing. Um, there are, like, traces of it, actually, in *Cheap Talk*, but in…especially in work that c-came out of that. So partly, I'm interested in questions of belonging for disability communities, and that's been like a thing that I've been working…but the main kind of rupture that I've experienced…I've started working on religious ableism and thinking, um, through some of…some religious concerns from cripistemol-logical p-perspective. So that's been very different than *Cheap Talk*.

EN: Yeah, so an example of religious ableism. How would you connect those two things? Some people go, how do those fit together? I'm…my brain's going, "okay.."

JSP: So yeah, so there's a lot there. So…so the specific thing…the specific thing I'm focusing on right now is the question of what I'm…what I'm calling…calling c-curative eschatology. So eschatology, in theological terms, is the study of end times, right? And so…and so, the idea of curative eschatology is, what I argued – I have a paper that finally got accepted, is coming out this fall on curative eschatology – and the idea is that a lot of the Christian hope is built around the expected cure of disability in the after life. So the hope is that, yes, there's pain and suffering now, but one day we will get our just r-reward and just r-reward includes, by defin-nition, like within the Christian faith, this promise of a world without s-suffering or pain or crying or mourning or d-death or d-disability or illness or any of these kinds of things that would quote,

unquote, afflict the h-human condition. And so I'm interested in how these kinds of attachments rebound back in the present, in like, really deeply visceral and effective ways. And I'm really interested in the project especially because I mean, growing up in rural Alberta and now teaching here, I'm just convinced that rel-ligion r-remains one of the first and most important ways in which people encounter d-disability and especially can, like, put it within, like, some bigger context and meaning, you know? And so being able to, like, step up into that space as c-crips is really, I think, ooh, I think there's a lot of value in doing this work. I also know that…I think a lot of reason it's not done is because of the trauma that a lot of us have experienced in this space and so…but for me, at least, like, I think, like entering back into this discourse that I was trained in, and then, you know, left, and then, and now I am returning to as, like, an ex-evangelical crip and, like, trying to, like, think, what would an ex-evangelical c-crip even mean? There's like, some, there's like, important work of, like, you know, like reclaiming space there too.

EN: Wow, yeah, no kidding. I can only imagine, I think that you're right, this, this…entering into this space that is fraught, right? And I'm sure, uncomfortable, but that doesn't mean it's not really meaningful work to do. You know, I'm just getting little resonances of thinking about Alison Kafer's work in *Feminist, Queer, Crip* when she's talking about imagined futures and saying, you know, the future that we imagine, if we imagine this future in which disability is eradicated, that influences how we act right now, but if we if we believe there is this future for disability, that disability is political and generative and creative, then the decisions we're making and the kind of proclamations we're supporting in the here and now are going to be quite different. So this is like, you know, I see these kind of different resonances from very different kind of perspectives, but, but asking us to think, to think more deeply and more compassionately, actually, not in a kind of false, ugh, I mean, like a deep compassion – not a flippant, sort of superficial compassion, which there's no disability, there's no pain, there's no mourning…what?! I don't want that world, actually,

JSP: Yeah, I don't. And one of the things that is, like, interesting to draw out in all this discussion is that these aren't, these aren't beliefs we hold at the very s-surface of our existence, like these are deep gut level attachments we have, right?

EN: Yes!

JSP: And so like th-thinking about disability and disability f-futurity, in terms of, like, attachment to an idealized world, or attachment to a crip world, you know? There's like, something really, oh, that's like, it just is really…it's a very live question for me. Because there's a form of, I mean – again – to come back to ind-difference, like there can be a form of ind-difference that grows out of the idea that everything we're doing here is, is, is imp-permanent, right? That it's just going to be wiped away by a completely new and perfect and lasting order, you know? And so even these like, to get back to l-listening, then there's a way in which we l-listen, not just as individuals, but as collective s-subjects, and what we're able to hear is formed by these, like, deeply v-viscerally affect-imbued bel-liefs that we sh-share. So for…for even so, like, the ability to, like, only hear a voice through a cultural stereo-type, you know, is of the same kind of thing.

And so getting at these, these attachments that we have at, like, a deeper level, um, yeah, that…I…that seems like there's something there, you know?

[Music: Ascending, bright, twinkly, uplifting, electronic]

EN: Our guest today was Dr. Joshua St. Pierre. You can find Joshua's work at JoshuaStPierre.com and you can check out the *Stuttering Commons* at StutteringCommons.org, please do, it's great.

On Being Ill is researched, recorded, and produced by a team of White Settlers on the traditional, unceded and treaty lands of Indigenous Peoples across North America, specifically in Canada and the United States. We recognize that this land acknowledgement is limited in what it can accomplish, and yet still feel it's important to name the violent ongoing colonial context in which we do this work—on lands historically and presently caretaken and stewarded by Indigenous Peoples. Here at OBI, we aim to unsettle deeply rooted beliefs around ability and disability that have entwined origins and implications in colonial thinking and actions—we invite you to join us on that journey, and if this connection is new for you, we invite you to learn more on our website.

This show is produced by Emily Blyth and Coco Nielsen, and executive produced by me – Emilia Nielsen.

Prince Shima creates all of the music you hear on our show. You can find him on bandcamp at @PrinceShima.

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And if you'd like to get in touch with us, please write to OnBeingIllPodcast@gmail.com. We'd love to hear from you.

Until next time, let's create, converse, and crip the system together!

[Music rises in crescendo then fades out]

[End of transcript]

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