THE STUTTER OF FORM / CRAIG DWORKIN

Beginning again and again is a natural thing even when there is a series.

GERTRUDE STEIN

Often my writing is nothing but "stuttering."

LUDWIG WITTGENSTEIN

Everyone stutters. Statistically, between 7 and 10 percent of all speech is dysfluent, with phonemes repeated, prolonged, distorted, suspended — or even, at times, not audibly produced at all. The ideology of transparent and referentially communicative language is so strong, however, that we tend to automatically overlook those dysfluencies or not consciously register them in the first place. Indeed, communicative transparency has such symbolic force that we tend to forget the extent to which a range of corporeal opacities are in fact a perfectly normal part of speech production. The intake and exhalation of air, the pool and swallow of saliva, disadhesions of moist flesh within the mouth, all the small percussive taps and clicks from the articulatory structures of the glottis, tongue, teeth, and lips: such sounds are all necessary accompaniments to the normal operation of the gross physiological components of speech production (pulmonary, tracheal, laryngeal, pharyngeal, nasal, buccal). In the same way, instances of stuttering accompany the psychological and neurological coordination of all speech. The stutter, as Herman Melville wrote of it, is a thoroughly "organic hesitancy."[1]

Stuttering, in other words, is less a condition that does or does not exist than a rate at which one aspect of the normal mechanism of speech can

no longer be overlooked or ignored. Language, in this way, operates like a machine. As Ludwig Wittgenstein recognized, the symbolic force of the machine — the machine as idea and ideal — abets an ideology in which the machine becomes the exemplary model of smooth, efficient, perfectly regular operation. For that idea of the machine to function smoothly and efficiently in turn it must distract our attention from the friction and entropy of real machines. When we talk about machines in the symbolic sense, Wittgenstein observes,

> we talk as if these parts could only move in this [perfectly smooth] way, as if they could not do anything else. How is this — do we forget the possibility of their bending, breaking off, melting, and so on? Yes; in many cases we don't think of that at all.[2]

Wittgenstein is primarily concerned in this passage with questions of rule following and the problems of private language, but we might push his insight even further in the direction of his example itself and recognize that what is conventionally understood as "malfunction" is not an exception to the operation of machines but one of their fundamental aspects.

Keeping this perspective of the necessary malfunction in mind, one can begin to recognize moments at which the stutter does not merely register itself in language, as the palpable end result of a physiological process but at which language itself stutters. Merely registered *in* language, the literary stutter has tended to be either a qualification of characters' speech ("'Listen,' she stuttered") or a graphically approximated marker of idiolect ("L-l-l-listen"). Registered *as* language, the stutter becomes a structural principle, so that, in Gilles Deleuze's terms, "it is no longer the character who stutters in speech; it is the writer who becomes *a stutterer in language.*"[3] In this essay, accordingly, I want to listen carefully to the mechanics of the stutter in order to recognize moments at which the stutter moves from being merely descriptive to becoming an integral part of the formal structure of a text. In some sense, this essay will thus focus on the sound of the text in order to apprehend its silence. As Deleuze goes on to explain: "*When a language is so strained* that it starts to stutter, or to murmur or stammer . . . *then language in its entirety* reaches the limit that marks its outside and makes it confront silence."[4] Strained to its limits, the communicative sounds of any particular speech (*la parole*) are silenced, but even at that inaudible limit language (*la langue*) continues to tell us something. All language is referential, but it need not reflect concepts; when language instead refers back to the material

circumstances of its own production, we can hear the murmur of its materials. When speech continues without communicating anything, when speech intransitively reaches the limit at which its communication becomes silent, we can hear the body speak. This essay will try to listen to what the body says, over and over, again and again.

The audible silencing of language, the move from the interior to the exterior of language in Deleuze's terms, from a stutter in language to the stutter of language, can be clearly heard in the work of Alvin Lucier. One of the key figures in late twentieth-century experimental music, and a member of the Sonic Arts Union (along with Robert Ashley, Gordon Mumma, and David Behrman), Lucier pioneered a wide range of musical activities. Part of that groundbreaking work investigated the physics of acoustics: patterns of wave motion; ionospheric disturbances; the inframince harmonics of near pitches; and the resonant or propagatory properties of various media. Lucier's now-classic *Music on a Long Thin Wire* (1977 / rec. 1980), for instance, reimagines the college acoustics laboratory as a concert hall. To conduct the piece (in all senses of the word), Lucier passed a fixed fifty-foot wire through a magnetic field; the wire was then driven by a sine-wave oscillator while contact microphones registered its amplified vibrations and converted changes in the frequency and magnitude of its oscillations into an audible quiver of chords in sheer spherelike oneiric celestiations. Lucier's other primary contribution to post-Cagean experimental music comes from his focus on phenomenology and the body's potential to both produce and perceive periodic patterns. In *Music for Solo Performer* (1965 / rec. 1982), for example, electrodes from an electroencephalogram register the brain's alpha waves, which are then amplified and routed to drive a series of percussion instruments in a performance that is both literally and figuratively cerebral in its origins and at the same time quite viscerally physical in its percussive results. Although entirely controlled by the performer's concentration, the specific effects of the music are all unpredictably beyond the performer's intention. With a similar use of physiological data to generate music, *Clocker* (1978 / rec. 1994) measures the body's electrical resistance with a galvanic skin response sensor. But rather than using the electrodermal data for a polygraph test or New Age psychotherapy, Lucier routs the output voltage through a delay that regulates the rate of tocks from an amplified clock. The music of time — the steady familiar beat we associate with the regular counting of each second — is thus warped, a chronographic percussion sped and distended with the uncanny illusion that the performer's body has contracted and expanded time itself.

Lucier's 1970 composition *I Am Sitting in a Room* combines his investigations into the physics of acoustic waves with his interest in how the everyday activities of the body — its idiosyncratic and uncontrollable fluctuations — can be transformed into music. Lucier describes the piece in a text that also serves as its score:

> I am sitting in a room different from the one you are in now. I am recording the sound of my speaking voice and I am going to play it back into the room again and again until the resonant frequencies of the room reinforce themselves so that any semblance of my speech, with perhaps the exception of rhythm, is destroyed. What you will hear, then, are the natural resonant frequencies of the room articulated by speech. I regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have.[5]

To perform the piece, Lucier's "speaking voice" — the sound source for his musical composition — reads the paragraph above with evidence of its noticeable "irregularities," his marked stutter, on display. Lucier's recording of his voice is then simultaneously played back and rerecorded "again and again," with the astonishing result that one can hear his body's resonant cavities projected onto the architectural space of the room in which he first spoke. This prosthetic transfer occurs because the procedure of repeated recording and playback ensures that some aspects of Lucier's original reading are incrementally diminished as the recording device fails to register in full fidelity and, moreover, as the echoic interference of the room causes certain frequencies to be damped, faded, and ultimately eliminated. At the same time, the procedure correspondingly emphasizes other aspects of his reading, as the particular dimensions of the room and the physical properties of its space happen to reinforce certain of the source sound's wave patterns. So while some frequencies in Lucier's speech cancel, others amplify, interfering with one another in a series of resonant harmonies until — in their exchange of sympathetic vibrations — the mouth implies the room, and the room mimics the mouth. Faced with its own reflection, "language itself will begin to vibrate and stutter."[6]

First performed at the Guggenheim Museum (New York) in 1970, and recorded for the audio supplement to the magazine *Source: Music of the Avant-Garde*, *I Am Sitting in a Room* also exists in a more recent recording that cycles Lucier's speech through thirty-two generations over forty-five minutes, a full half hour longer than the *Source* recording.[7] *I Am Sitting in a Room*

begins as documentation, with the unmarked and unmanipulated recording of Lucier reading his source text. The timbre of the second reading changes almost imperceptibly, though already by the third iteration the increased depth of echo is immediately noticeable. With further repetitions that echo gives way to a metallic distortion around the dynamics of the higher pitches and sibilants, the very phonemes emphasized by Lucier's slight lisp and one of the triggers of his stutter ("semblance," "smooth").[8] As the voice recedes and abstracts, it suggests a public address system heard through a subway tunnel, a hypnotist's instructions as one slips from consciousness, the alien speech of science fiction robots. After about a quarter of an hour, the articulation has been blurred beyond the point of recognition, the markers of human speech receding as the electronic aspect of the rerecorded sound moves to the fore. Although the work is performed with electromagnetic tape, its tones begin to evoke the relay of samplers and delay effects. By this point, even without knowledge of Lucier's source speech, the work gives the sense of sound heard at the wrong scale. Not just out of sync, but unequalized, too loud, too slow, simultaneously too much and not enough — the listener is left with waves washing beyond the capacity of the electronic meshes meant to capture them.

By the recording's midpoint, the chambered spaces of Lucier's room and mouth have traded places, sounding the nodes of standing waves oscillating within a resonant cavity. Replaced by the surge and shudder of sound without any sense of etiology, speech passes into music, its words and phonemes drowned in a resounding cathedral of echoes and harmonics. The recursive feedback loop of one chamber within another, from mouth to room to microphone to tape to speaker to tape to room and back again, transforms that inscriptive relay — what Friedrich Kittler would call an *Aufschreibesystem* — into an instrument capable of timbres somewhere between a sophisticated glass harmonica and a primitive synthesizer.[9] In another ten minutes the spacemusic pulses have smoothed to organ tones played against a constant low thrum, and they then flatten further toward the drones of long wires, evoking electrical lines stretched across deserts into the invisible alkali distance, humming in a miraculous mix of electricity and solar wind. At some point toward the end of the recording those drones narrow to whines, their pitches rising and peaking with the pierce of feedback, which then in turn again begin to stretch and mellow into more melodic and tonal passages. Sympathy, the work insists, leads to harmony. With a final witty turn the last movements of the piece suggest the repetitive pulses of minimalist music — something

like Steve Reich doing the soundtrack for *A Space Odyssey* — reminding the listener that the whole piece was built from the elaborations of discrepancy and margin measured over thirty-two repetitions of the same paragraph.

Those repetitions, of course, are all to the point; played back "again and again," as Lucier's description underscores, the work's procedure provides a formal analogue to the stutter evident in his reading. With its predetermined permutational logic, the composition replaces the idiosyncratic and unpredictable repetitions of speech, which Lucier characterizes as "extremely personal," with the impersonal and mathematically predictable space of classical Newtonian physics. Similarly, the cyclic patterns that result from the repetitive process of the work — the tremulous vibrato of the wave interference that comes to replace the voice — extend the local instances of Lucier's stutter to the entire sonic field, making the stutter into the most salient characteristic of the music as a whole. Despite Lucier's claim to "regard this activity not so much as a demonstration of a physical fact, but more as a way to smooth out any irregularities my speech might have," the activity in fact reduplicates and amplifies the "irregular" reduplications of his stutter. Moreover, the tremolo of Lucier's stuttered syllables are one of the very last characteristics of his speech to survive the degradation of the tape recording; they remain rhythmically recognizable even after the syllables themselves can no longer be discerned. So, as Christof Migone points out, "Lucier's intent to smooth out his stutter provides the impetus for the piece but what results is a heightened stutter."[10]

Like Lucier, Pierre Guyotat has also attempted to smooth out the stutter, and with similar results: radically deforming the comprehensibility of language and transferring the logic of the stutter to the text itself. In many ways, the two could not be further apart; Lucier's hygienic, barely intrusive minimalism and flatly descriptive prose stand in stark contrast to Guyotat's aggressively maximalist excess. The comparison is instructive, however, because Lucier's clear model of how content extends into form — how conventionally discursive and referentially communicative speech can be systematically transformed in order to draw out its musical properties — helps to highlight the same process at work in Guyotat's later prose, where the deformations are just as systematic but less immediately apparent because the formal logic of his sound experiments is masked by the distractingly lurid content.

Recognized as one of the "indisputably major literary talents of his generation" — the generation of the 1960s who followed the *nouveaux ro-*

manciers and were associated with the marriage of Joycean experimentation and leftist politics, including writers such as Philippe Sollers, Julia Kristeva, Jacqueline Risset, and Marcelin Pleynet — Guyotat came to prominence in the mid-1960s with work that fused literary experimentation with hardcore pornography and a postcolonial sensibility dramatically opposed to the French occupation of Algeria.[11] Pursuing the dream of an experimental fiction that aspired to be as radical in form as in content, Guyotat became a mythic figure of the *arrière-garde:* keeping the faith of verbal violence valorized by the historical avant-gardes and writing novels that can still manage to elicit a genuine shock. Guyotat's 1975 novel *Prostitution* opens:

> [debout, la bouch' !, j'a b'soin ! »] [. ., te m'veux, m'sieur l'homm' ? » — « j'vas t'trequer au bourrier ! » — « j't'déslip', m'sieur l'homm' ? » — « oua. ., tir'-moi l'zob du jeans a j'vas t'triquer ! » — « te peux m'trequer en sall', m'sieur l'homm' ! » — « oua. ., put' !, te veux m'piéger la pin' ! » — « me, j'veux qu'te m'l'encul' chef, m'sieur l'homm', a qu'ton gros poil de couill' m'étrangl' l'bouquet !. ., mets !. ., mets ! » — « mlih !. ., mlih !, porq'qu't'se hâtée qu'j'te matt' l'chaloup' » — « cheï !, l'homm' !, ma ia des bourr' qu'viann't sonder les bourriers ![12]
>
> ([yeah, on yer' feet, dat' mout', gonna gim' me it!"] [. ., yuh want muh, mis'er guy?" — "gonna poun'ya out atda dumpster!" — "c'n I get dos' shorts off, mis'er guy?" — "uh-huh. .,yank dat pork out dos' levi's an ahl start poun'in!" — "yuh c'n poun' me in da room, mis'er guy!" — "uh-huh. ., slut, ya gonna booby-trap ma tree!" — "bu' I wanch'ya as'fuc' me,suh, mis'er guy, so dos' big nu' hairs strangle mah 'rroids!. ., work!. .,work!" — bueno!. ., bueno! bu' why da hurry me givin' ya a mas' for dat sloop!" — "nada!, guy!, bu' some pigs jus' finished stakin' th' dumpsters!)[13]

The book continues, and intensifies, for another 365 pages. Writing in the particularly French tradition of avant-garde pornography that took its cue from Donatien A. F. de Sade and Isidore Ducasse, peaking in the twentieth century with Georges Bataille, Antonin Artaud, and Jean Genet, Guyotat sets a relentless litany of sexually violent acts within a colonial military mise-en-scène. That combination initially provoked a correspondingly extreme response: Guyotat's third novel, *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* (1967), was forbidden to French troops and threatened with the kind of suppression that in fact met his next novel, *Eden, Eden, Eden* (1970); in an uncharacteristic act of post-Vichy censorship upheld throughout the 1970s, the French government ruled that *Eden, Eden, Eden* could not be displayed, advertised, or sold to minors.[14] The difference between the two novels is less one of

content, however, than of form. At their most horrific, the two works share equally repellent scenes of abject abuse. Stylistically, however, the scenes of corporeal indiscretions and intersections in *Eden, Eden, Eden* — the myriad permutations of possible bodily penetrations and the bestial coupling of different human and nonhuman species — find a parallel in the text's linguistic promiscuity. Guyotat mixes argot and patois with phonetic spellings, Kabyle vocabulary and Algerian pronunciation with contemporary urban slang, and colloquial idioms with archaisms of recherché etymological precision. Moreover, *Eden* dispenses with the romantic rhetoric, linear narrative, and familiar novelistic structure in which *Tombeau* couches its hallucinatory depictions of violent copulation. Starting with *Eden,* and intensifying in the novels that have followed, Guyotat simultaneously disassembles and distends language into what Roland Barthes termed a "sovereign metonymy": distilling the telegraphic style of Louis-Ferdinand Céline into an even more finely fragmented parataxis and extending the concatenation of those atomic fragments to the length of the book itself, eliminating those conventional fictional devices — chapters, paragraphs, dialogue, discursive markers — that might have organized or contained the rapid precession of brief, broken phrases.

In response to the government's ruling, a number of writers associated with the journal *Tel Quel,* including Roland Barthes, Marguerite Duras, Phillipe Sollers, Michel Leiris, Claude Simon, Jacques Derrida, and Michel Foucault, publicly defended Guyotat, focusing not so much on the graphic pornographic content of *Eden, Eden, Eden* as on the formal character of its prose. Indeed, contrary to what any reader of the English translations of Guyotat's work might expect, his defenders typically characterized *Eden* as if it were a pure play of the signifier with negligible referential content, as if it were more Stéphane Mallarmé than Denis Roche. As Roland Barthes writes, in a text used as a preface to Guyotat's novel, "*Eden, Eden, Eden* est un texte libre: libre de tout sujet, de tout object, de tout symbole" (*Eden, Eden, Eden* is a free text: free of any subject, any object, any symbol).[15] For Barthes, the remarkable aspect of Guyotat's writing is not the transgression of the narrative ("c'est sans doute la même chose," he dismisses), but a new textual unit:

> [une] phrase unique qui ne finit pas, dont la beauté ne vient pas de son "report" (le réel à quoi elle est supposée renvoyer), mais de son souffle, coupé, répété, comme s'il s'agissait pour l'auteur de nous représenter non des scènes imaginées, mais la scène du langage, en sorte que le modèle de cette nouvelle *mimèsis* n'est plus l'aventure d'un héros, mais l'aventure même du signifiant.

[a single, endless sentence whose beauty arises not from its "message" (the reality to which it is supposed to correspond), but from its breath — cut, repeated — as if it were the entire task of the author to show us not imagined scenes but the scene of language, so that the model of this new mimesis is no longer the adventure of a hero, but the adventure of the signifier itself.][16]

Those adventures include a number of 'patalinguistic pursuits akin to Velimir Khlebnikov's experiments with "internal declensions": the application of the Latin ablative absolute to French (in order, as Guyotat explains, "to efface anthropomorphism and make different processes take place simultaneously"); outrageous anthimeria (novel gerunds and nouns conscripted as verbs); and a severely restricted grammatical palette that further shifts suggestions of agency and narrative time onto those words that remain ("Totally suppress adverbs in order to relieve the action of temporal and psychological burdens," as Guyotat writes in his composition notebook). Most striking, perhaps, is Guyotat's orthographic tendency to eliminate silent vowels, particularly the final *e,* writing French as if it were a Semitic language.[17] By deforming French in these ways, as if it were subject to the laws of another language, Guyotat undertakes something akin to what Walter Benjamin theorizes as "the task of the translator."[18] In Benjamin's well-known argument, that task "consists in finding the particular intention toward the target language which produces in that language the echo of the original."[19] Pursuing a kind of linguistic (rather than semantic) literalism, in which the details of one language are preserved within the structure of another, such translations are unnatural and unidiomatic, but they open a space — not unlike the space of Lucier's room — in which the fundamental characters of the two languages can resound and interfere. "Instead of imitating the sense of the original," such a translation "must lovingly and in detail incorporate the original's way of meaning."[20]

One might apply Benjamin's distinction between meaning and the "way of meaning" to the other translations Guyotat's texts effect. To begin with, he translates between literary genres, writing novels as if they were verse. Where *Tombeau* imitated some of the *sense* of surrealist verse — abrupt non sequiturs, a fantasy dream logic, the libidinous drives of the unconscious — *Eden* incorporates poetry's *way* of meaning. Guyotat proclaims: "c'est par le rythme, par la poésie, donc, qu'on peut renouveler la fiction aujourd'hui" (it is through rhythm, through poetry, that is, that we could revitalize contemporary fiction).[21] Accordingly, as Stuart Kendall notes, "Guyotat does not write novels; he writes epic poems that must masquerade, however ineffectu-

ally, as novels in today's marketplace. *Tombeau pour cinq cent mille soldats* is subtitled 'Sept chants,' *Progénitures* is set in versets, strophic records of breath."[22] The distinction, however, is more than nominative or merely meta-phoric, more than the blasphemous *épater* gesture of using "versets" ("verses" in the sense most often used with the holy scripture of the Bible or Koran), and far more than a matter of marketing; in Guyotat's most recent writing his descriptions of sexual activity *sans mesure* are written in a carefully mea-sured prose. As Guyotat explains:

> c'est ce chemin vocal qu'il faut entendre dans *Progénitures.* Ce que je sais, c'est que mes versets sont calculés, syllabiquement calculés comme on le faisait pour les vers encore au siècle dernier. Mais ils sont deux, trois, quatre fois plus longs que ces vers calculés d'autrefois; et ils intègrent des libertés, des licences — élisions, contractions, etc. — qui n'avaient plus cours alors. La mesure de ce rhythm syllabique rigoureux, le calcul des pieds, est un des actes principaux du travail sur Progénitures: les nécessités de la métrique, souvent, engagent le sens, voire la direction de la fiction; dans ces moments de grande activité rythmique, je crois l'avoir dit ailleurs, déjà, c'est le monde environnant qui est touché; les panneaux publicitaires, les titres des journaux, les menus de restaurant, le cour-rier qu'on reçoit, les panneaux horaires des trains dans les gares, les annonces de départ et d'arrivée d'avion dans les aéroports, tout ce qui se voit et s'entend hors de la pièce de travail est re-rythmé selon la mesure du moment dans le travail.
> [One must comprehend the vocal path in *Progénitures.* That is, my versets are calculated, syllabically calculated in the way poetry was composed in the last cen-tury. But they are two, three, four times longer than that old metrical poetry; and they incorporate some liberties, some licenses — elisions, contractions, etc. — to which they did not formerly have recourse. The measure of that rigorous syllabic rhythm, the calculation of metrical feet, is one of the main tasks of the work on *Progénitures:* the metrical necessities often take on the meaning of the fiction, even engaging the trajectory of the plot; in these moments of great rhythmic activity, as I believe I have already said elsewhere, the real-world environment is touched: billboards; headlines; menus; junk mail; train schedules; airport flight announcements — everything one sees or hears beyond the work is re-rhythmed according to the measure of the moment in the work.][23]

Creating "un drame du sens et du son" (a drama of meaning and sound) — or, indeed, a drama of sound *as* meaning, where "le rythme invente de nouveau sens" (rhythm invents a new meaning) and "the stutter *is* the plot" — Guyotat grafts the essential logic of poetry onto fiction, returning the counting to ac-

count, all with the hope of further translating that new hybrid to the quotidian nonliterary genres of advertising and mass transit schedules.[24]

At the same time, Guyotat is also translating between body and text. In general, he locates the formal properties of his metrical prose in the irreducible physiologic formations of his own individual body: idiosyncrasies of lung capacity; cardiac rhythms; the architecture of the throat.[25] The measured rhythms of his *versets* are based on a body that they in turn regulate, recording a corporeal capacity that subsequent silent readings subconsciously register and that oral readings — like Guyotat's infamous, periodic, marathon recitations at the Centre Pompidou — must attempt to approximate. Rhythm, for Guyotat, brings the sound of poetry to fiction, and by incorporating the respiratory measure of the breath that literary rhythm in turn carries with it the sound of the body:

> cela pose la question du souffle, *le souffle,* il faut le répéter, *sous-tend continûment le travail textuel,* d'autant qu'il porte la voix ; je travaille avec un *paquet de voix* dans la gorge (bouillie de voyelles, de consonnes, de syllabes, de mots entiers même, qui demandent à sortir, à gicler sur la page).
> [that raises the question of the breath, *the breath,* it must be repeated, *continually underlies the textual work,* all the more so because it carries the voice; I work with a *vocal package* in my throat (pulp of vowels, of consonants, of syllables, of whole words even, which need to get out, to squirt onto the page.]][26]

"Dans la gorge" (in the throat) or "à l'intérieur de ma gorge" (inside my throat) is the site of the vocal packages that underlie not only Guyotat's text but also those that threaten to provoke his stutter:

> Je dois alors dans les boutiques, aux caisses, préparer, à l'intérieur de ma gorge, la phrase de demande que je vais faire, prévoir le petit commentaire, et quoi, et comment y répondre, choisir les mots d'appui du début, du milieu et de la fin de la phrase, répéter ces paroles à plusieurs reprises, placer de telle façon ma main sur le comptoir pour appuyer l'émission de la phrase ; placer mon pied sur le sol pour exister, apparaître comme autre chose qu'un fantôme.
> [In shops, therefore, I must, at the counter, prepare, inside my throat, the inquiry that I am going to make, envisage the little comment, and what, and how to answer there, choose my supporting words from the beginning, the middle, and the end of the sentence, repeat the words several times over, place my hand on the counter in such a way as to support the utterance of the sentence, my feet on the ground in order to exist, to appear as something other than a ghost.]

The commercial backdrop against which Guyotat dramatizes the social terror of stuttered speech is not coincidental.[27] The scene at "le comptoir" (the counter) further underscores the parallel between the numerically calculated syllables of his poetic "vocal packages" and the patterns of everyday patter he hopes they rerhythm. With this sense of rhythm, "répéter ces paroles à plusieurs reprises" might be the hallmark of either literary language or stuttered language. Moreover, Guyotat again describes handling and delivering those vocal packages, first chokingly trapped in the throat and then blurted out, as the essence of both his literary compositions and his stuttered speech. Simultaneously a condition of blockage and of flow, of phonemes prolonged and postponed, a linguistic production at once excessive and insufficient, the stutter — like the concatenated units of his sentence-long novel — is both too much and not enough. As Guyotat recalls:

> Ce qui marque principalement ma petite enfance . . . c'est mon bégaiement (je ne puis "lancer" les phrases qui débutent par une voyelle, etc.), qui contraint mes premiers maîtres à me faire écrire toutes les "interrogations" orales, bégaiement en même temps que, si la parole était déclenchée sur ma propre initiative, une grande faconde pour raconter à des adultes, femmes le plus souvent, les romans et récits d'exploration que je lisais à ce moment.
>
> [What chiefly marks my childhood . . . is my stutter (I cannot get out sentences that begin with a vowel, and so on), which required my first teachers to have me write all the "oral" examination, a stutter at the same time as, if the word were started on my own initiative, a great fecundity for recounting to adults, most often women, the novels and adventure stories that I happened to be reading at the time.][28]

Language, for Guyotat, is either frozen and immobile (he cannot launch [*lancer*] his sentences) or else — when taking the form of stories or when squirted on the page ("à gicler sur la page") — unusually fertile (*un grande faconde*), with the hint of being spermatozoically motile. That fecundity, significantly, is both explicitly literary, assuming the outlines of novels (*romans*), and once again associated with counting. Guyotat can free language from the throat when it is recounted (*raconter*), or at the counter [*comptoir*], or metrically counted (*calculé*).

Across his critical and autobiographical writings, Guyotat's stutter thus comes to be rhetorically associated with his literary composition. Moreover, as in Lucier's composition, Guyotat's compositional techniques actually project and amplify the poetics of the stutter onto the structure of the texts

themselves. The attendant contradictions, furthermore, work much as they did in *I Am Sitting in a Room.* On first reading, one might hear Guyotat's distinctive style as an attempt to "smooth out" the irregularities of his stutter, or even to counter and thwart it outright; his neologistic contractions not only suggest a Semitic orthography but also tend to remove vowels: precisely the type of phonemes that most provoked his stammering as a child and prevented him from speaking. Indeed, Guyotat's radical syncope, at both the syllabic and the grammatical level, clips and slurs elements rather than multiplying them, as if he were intent on moving language in the opposite direction of the stutter's reduplications and away from the kind of repetitions suggested by the insistently stuttered title with which *Eden, Eden, Eden* opens. At the same time, however, Guyotat's texts emphasize the fundamental logic of the stutter in other ways: working at the submorphemic level of phonemic particles, regulating the consonantal tattoo of his syncopic language into rhythmic patterns, and creating a grammar at once broken (those "vocal packages" that erupt in the short bursts and blurts that often typify the speech of stutterers) and simultaneously prolonged — suspended without grammatical or narrative resolution.

Moreover, this is the point at which Guyotat's themes extend to meet up with his form. An excessive, spasmodic, convulsive lack of bodily control describes not only the stutter but also the anarchy of Guyotat's characters, with their general abandonment of social constraints and all the local bodily events of visceral reflex that cause so much blood and semen and excrement "to splatter on the page" (à gicler sur la page).[29] In short, Guyotat's later prose presents a series of ejaculations, in both formal and thematic terms. Similarly, the pervasive prostitution and sexual slavery in Guyotat's fiction, from the ubiquitous bordello settings to the eponymous title of his 1975 novel, relate economically to the metrical accounting of the text that describes them. But slavery, moreover, has also long been linked in the popular imagination, at least since Aesop, with stuttering.[30] In an inflected projection of the author's dysphemia, form and content thus double back on one another in Guyotat's work, where the "form of content" reiterates the "form of expression" (to adopt Deleuze's terms). Form, when recognized *as such,* is always the stutter of content.

To triangulate the broad literary field mapped by the poetics of stutter I want to turn to a third work, Jordan Scott's poetry collection *blert.* In most respects, Scott's project stands quite far from either *I Am Sitting in a Room* or *Progénitures,* instead resembling the family of post-language-poetry lyrics

published since the 1990s. Indeed, the publication and reception history of Scott's work associates it with poetry from the Calgary small press community (Ryan Fitzpatrick, Derek Beaulieu, Christian Bök) and other Canadian writers (Peter Culley, Mark Truscott, and Jill Hartman among many others) using lyric disjunction as a primary compositional mode.[31] A typical page from *blert* reads:

> Coca-Cola tonic krill
> gill baleen
> dream wrenched
> Kleenex smack
> Baltic Pyrex
> megahertz humpback
> kickback: flex
> nukes flub
> blubber sexy
> plankton number

The agrammatical frisson and microphonic sound play of these lines immediately recall the pioneering work of Bruce Andrews, and one can hear echoes, in Scott's verse, of Andrews's signature alliteration, internal assonance, and syntactic collisions, as well as his habit of pairing technical scientific vocabulary with colloquial phrases. Compare Scott's stanza above, for instance, to lines from almost any of Andrews's poetry: "selectary slam simplomatic dinge dinabee coca-colonization cubbyhole shack"; "drawer natural wrench annex allure"; "putty pups / trick or treat . . . plankton catcall / Placebo addiction."[32] Poets such as Andrews no doubt gave a necessary license to Scott's experiments, but the phonemic density and radically disjunctive couplings in *blert* arise not so much from the facture and fracture of language poetry as from the details of Scott's own lifelong stutter.[33] In Scott's particular case, his stutter seems to be tripped by initial stressed syllables beginning with nasal stops or plosive occlusives (whether aspirated, partially voiced, or voiced nasals) and exacerbated by terminal fricatives and the repetition of internal vowels across words. *Blert,* in short, is a text written to be as difficult as possible for its own author to read. The work is thus a formal analogue to Scott's dysphemia, transferring the etiology of his stammer onto the structure of poetic language. While some aspects of Scott's poems, like some aspects of Guyotat's prose, might be read as reflecting the speech habits of a typical stammerer — short phrasal bursts (the "blurts" signaled by the poem's title),

a sophisticated vocabulary developed by the need to substitute for certain difficult-to-pronounce words, a similarly high degree of apposition — *blert* is not primarily a mimetic representation of stuttering, or the reproduction of a stutter's symptomatic results, but rather a statistical mapping of the interior logic of the stutter's neurolinguistic structure and its initial lexical triggers. Enacted rather than named, the stutter here is not an affect registered *in* language but rather an effect *of* language.

Blert, however, also stutters in other significant ways. By basing his text on particular types of phonemes placed in particular syllabic sequences within words, Scott has essentially created a system of rhyme that is formal, motivated, and palpable to the ear, but in which the recurrence of any particular sound is never quite predictable. The densely packed patterns of unexpectedly repeated sounds in *blert* weave a thicket that even the most fluent reader will find hard to navigate without some stumbling. At the same time, the nimble reader who actually does manage to succeed in a fluent pronunciation *necessarily stutters* when reading the poem; the many intentionally paired syllables in words such as "cuckoo," "coco," "cocoons," "coca-cola," "Zsa Zsa," "tam tam," "cucumber," "bubble," "bumblebee" require that the perfectly proper and fluid pronunciation of *blert* is the stuttered pronunciation. *Blert* thus offers a strange combination of inducement and evasion, concealment and display: foregrounding the stutter at its most fundamental level and encouraging readerly dysfluency while simultaneously camouflaging its sounds behind the proper reduplications of the alliteratively repeated syllables of legitimate words. Accordingly, one might say of Scott what Deleuze says of Charles Péguy: his "stuttering embraces the language so well that it leaves the words intact, complete, and normal, but it uses them as if they were themselves the disjointed and decomposed members of a superhuman [that is, structurally linguistic] stuttering."[34]

"Poetry," in one of Roman Jakobson's definitions, "is a province where the internal nexus between sound and meaning changes from latent to patent and manifests itself most palpably and intensely."[35] The poetry of *blert* is precisely such a nexus (though perhaps not quite in the way that Jakobson envisioned), and Scott's poems perform the same kind of formal stutter registered in Guyotat's fiction. The formal, material, sonic aspects of his poems, that is, not only re-embody his stutter but also, in turn, explain the otherwise frankly inexplicable thematic content of the book, which disjunctively returns, again and again, to a very specific constellation of interwoven themes: glaciers, neurotoxins, marine mammals, the geology of small rocky debris,

and human skeletal anatomy. In fact, part of the initially restive estrangement of the book — the asemantic frisson that suggests the work of a writer like Andrews — is that these themes seem at first to be entirely unrelated, a vocabulary "unhinged from a narrative construction," as Derek Beaulieu describes it.[36] On closer inspection, however, the reader finds that these themes in fact hinge at very precise points on single key words. The line "Chorus clast," for just one example, recalls Scott's use of "osteoclast" in another poem and enacts a self-reflexively broken version of the word *clastic,* from the Greek *klasos* (broken), which denotes broken pieces of older rock as well as small, segmented, anatomical structures such as the carpal bones of the hand. *Carpal,* not coincidentally, is a word that in fact repeats often in Scott's poetry and rhymes with another repeated word, *scarp,* as in the phrase "Limestone talus scarp."[37] *Scarp* is the geological term for a steep hill or cliff, precisely the kind of geological structure at the base of which clastic talus accumulates, and *talus* is both a kind of *scree* ("a pile of small broken rocks at the base of a cliff or incline," as the *Oxford English Dictionary* has it) as well as the name for the ankle bone — and so back, again, to *clastic,* in both senses of the word.

Such instances could be multiplied, but although the seemingly disconnected themes of Scott's poetry are in fact concatenated in these local ways, the logic of the themes themselves — the single category that can encompass them all at a more abstract level — is explained only by the dialectic pull of the stutter, its paradox of suspension and falter. In a line that Jakobson cites just before giving the definition of poetry quoted above, Paul Valéry defines the poem in terms that might equally describe the stutter: "le poème, hésitation prolongée entre le son et le sens" (the poem: a prolonged hesitation between sound and meaning).[38] In the dysfluent space that opens between the two possible referents of Valéry's phrase, between the poem and the stammer, we can glimpse the key to Scott's poetics of stutter. The standard clinical description of the two corresponding categories of typical stuttering — either "freezing" a syllable or "breaking" syllables — offers the ready explanation for Scott's themes of freezing (the arctic, obviously, but also the neurotoxins, which turn out, on inspection, to all be paralysants) and breaking (bones and rocks and glacial debris). Small broken rocks, moreover, are famously associated with the history of stuttering through the great orator Demosthenes. In Plutarch's frequently reiterated documentation:

Demetrius, the Phalerian, tells us that he was informed by Demosthenes himself, now grown old, that the ways he made use of to remedy his natural bodily

infirmities and defects were such as these; his inarticulate and stammering pro-nunciation he overcame and rendered more distinct by speaking with pebbles in his mouth.[39]

Similarly, the emphasis on the clastic bones enumerated in *blert* points not only to their frequent "breaking" but also — in the context of vocabulary naming tendons and ligaments and connective tissue — to their idiomatic link with "articulation."

Fluency and stutter, the articulate and the broken: the same dynamic ex-plains the deep sea whales that recur through Scott's poem, which are known for both their mellifluous *singing* (singing, interestingly, seems to obviate stuttering even among those for whom speech is a problem) and their *blub-ber* in the obvious sense of cetacean lipids but also always suggesting an in-articulate voicing — a *wailing* as the homophone would have it. Moreover, the first entry for *blubber* in the *Oxford English Dictionary* defines the word as "the foaming or boiling of the sea," so when Scott entitles one of the po-ems in *blert* "jokulhlaup," the Icelandic word for the kind of "boiling of the sea" that the U.S. Geological Survey defines as a "glacial outburst flood," he captures — in a word made almost unpronounceable for the non-Icelandic speaker by its stuttered *l*'s — both the technical sense of *blubber* and the blubbering logic of the stuttered blurt: an excessive, flooding outburst that is at the same time paradoxically glacial, prolonged and hesitating, fast and slow, frozen and boiling, fluid with water and viscous with rocky debris.

That same paradoxical logic defines "the poetics of stutter," as I have been using the phrase. The stutter structures language in two opposing directions, both blocking certain speech and impeding the facile consumption of lan-guage, while at the very same time permitting or producing literary compo-sitions based on its formal characteristics. Under the sign of that poetics, "the poem is free to be inarticulate," as Peter Quartermain writes, "even to stutter."[40] Those working within the poetics of stutter, like the three writers under consideration here, demonstrate a way of addressing the formal rather than the mimetically thematic or representational aspects of a "disability aesthetic."[41] Indeed, when heard in the context of disability studies, the stut-ter — understood as a critical category flexible enough to negotiate between the impeding and the productive, between the embodied individual and the social abstract — offers one way to understand the full range of inarticu-late effects on display in the writings of the avant-garde and its broad chal-lenge to the ideologies of normalcy, fluency, transparently communicative

expository eloquence, and any notion of a dematerialized or disembodied language. Moreover, the poetics of stutter calls into question what Michael Davidson has recognized as "the larger implications of corporeality in the arts."[42] "Which," as Davidson has written elsewhere, "is why a poetics — as much as a politics — of disability is important: because it theorizes the ways that poetry defamiliarizes not only language but the body normalized *within* language."[43]

Bodies, like poems, always mean what they ceaselessly say: that even if they could speak — and they can — we would not understand them.