

This article explores the complex relationship between the yankee, the Impressionist and the minoritarian in Laforgue's work, and suggests that Deleuze's notions of the minor and of stuttering, and his analysis of the characteristics of Anglo-American writing, are particularly pertinent to our understanding of Laforgue's poetics. There is a nineteenth-century context for the minor, but there is a danger that we capitulate to a 'majoritarian' criticism if we too quickly espouse lines of filiation. The article constructs an account of Laforgue's developing perception of, and relationship with, verse prosody by examining how he scumbles the outlines and activity of syllables, how he pushes line-structure into a *terrain vague*, how he re-orientates accent towards the qualitative and tunes the acoustic to Hartmann's Unconscious. His uses of the imperative and infinitive, and their associated punctuations, are related to his responses to Impressionism. The argument ends with reflections on Deleuzian becoming in Laforgue.

Keywords: *Sprechgesang*, Deleuze, minoritarian, stuttering, syllable, accent, *mot-valise*, imperative, infinitive, becoming.

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THE STUTTERING POET: A DELEUZIAN READING OF A LAFORGUIAN POETICS

Why invoke Deleuze (and Guattari) to deepen one's understanding of Laforgue? We might begin with a critical coincidence. What does Laforgue's 'clownesque' mean as a performance style? Thinking partly of Albert Giraud's rondel-cycle *Pierrot lunaire* (1884), and their subsequent appearance, in Schoenberg's setting (1912), in Otto Erich Hartleben's blank-verse translations (1893), and more particularly of the notion of the 'minutieux' (the microtonal?) in matters of voice,¹ thinking partly, too, of a late nineteenth-century Parisian cabaret *diseur/se* (rather than *chanteur/se*), it struck me that *Sprechgesang* might be the place to start for an aspect of Laforguian voice – its very voicedness – which is remarkably neglected. To adopt the notion of *Sprechgesang* would be to suppose four things: that the poet's voice is focussed more on changes of timbre (*Klangfarbe*) and expression, than of pitch (accentual pattern); that pitch (accent) might be approached or touched on, but cannot easily be fixed, is left to float; that the alternative to conventional verse-music is not natural speech but scripted orality; that the movement between pitches, or pitch-positions, is one of sliding (microtonal glissandi) rather than jumps. It might also be to suppose that the resulting 'atonality' is a peculiar fusion of the pre-tonal (the Unconscious) and post-tonal (hypertrophied consciousness). These are embryonic reflections we shall return to. But it was striking to find Deleuze using *Sprechgesang* to capture the way in which, in the adaptational theatre of Carmelo Bene, there is no real dialogue because voices are continuous variations of each other, and text merely a pretext for a certain scale of variables: 'C'est une espèce de *Sprechgesang*. Dans le chant, il s'agit de tenir la hauteur, mais dans le *Sprechgesang* on ne

cesse de la quitter par une chute ou une montée. Dès lors, ce n'est pas le texte qui compte, simple matériau pour la variation' (1979: 105). Do we then overemphasize the dialogic and the polyphonic in Laforgue, do we miss the metamorphic vocal drifting?

This question is worth putting if only because Laforgue's name crops up in the work of Deleuze and Guattari on only two occasions (Gelas and Micolet, 2007: 567), and that in this same text, on Carmelo Bene, 'Un manifeste de moins' (*Superpositions*, 1979). Deleuze writes of Bene: 'Précisément, sa pièce sur Hamlet, il l'appelle non pas un Hamlet de plus, mais "un Hamlet de moins", comme Laforgue' (Bene and Deleuze, 1979: 87-8). Some pages later (96), Laforgue is grouped with Villon and Kleist,² as one of the 'intempestifs', the untimely ones, or the ones of indeterminate time. Bene, Kleist, Villon, Kafka, Beckett, Luca, Roussel, Artaud, Cummings,... so Laforgue joins Deleuze's band of minoritarian writers, his stutterers, not of language, but in language, and does so with Laforgue's own authorization: 'L'Inconscient; le principe, après l'effort, l'apothéose de la conscience artistique parnassienne se consolant dans des protestations bouddhiques, le principe en poésie de bégaiement, de l'en allé' (1903: 128). This comment might act as a rough summary of Laforgue's own development from *Le Sanglot de la Terre* to *Les Complaintes* and beyond. I do not want to suggest that Deleuze's related concepts of the minoritarian and the stuttering are keys to Laforgue, merely that they, and their various extensions, provide fruitful ways for thinking Laforgue. And reading through Laforguian criticism, one is struck by what sound like periodic, glancing references to Deleuze: Jean-Pierre Bertrand, writing of the narrative continuities in *Les Complaintes*, speaks of '[...] quelques fils blancs qui tissent une sorte de rhizome narratif' (2000: 58-9); Juliet Simpson describes the Hartmannian Unconscious as 'a principle of perpetual becoming' (2001: 480); Joëlle Gardes Tamine remarks 'que la complainte repose avant tout sur sa tonalité mineure qui la place, dans la poésie lettrée, près

de l'élégie' (2000: 93). This last musical reference, however, reminds us how easily the meanings and overtones of terms might drift.

But there are, after all, plenty of historical reasons for suggesting this connection. We might start with Baudelaire's identification of Constantin Guys as one of the '*poetae minores*', hunting out a 'beauté de circonstance' (1976: 683), using a rapid hand to produce the stuttered sketch of a regiment: 'Harnachements, scintillements, musique, regards décidés, moustaches lourdes et sérieuses, tout cela entre pêle-mêle en lui' (1976: 693) – shifts from the material to the immaterial, confusions of category, elusive plurality or unquantifiability, slight changes of perceptual tempo, phrasal/optical contractions and expansions, associative acoustics/colour tones. One might mention the minoritarian nature of the emerging prose poem: a mode of writing caught in generical transversals, in attitudinal multiplicity, opportunistic, heterogeneous, responsive to temperamental variability and the 'soubresauts de la conscience', a wonderfully *adaptable* medium. Or we might turn to Zola's indictment of the Impressionists as minor, a 'minority', who for all their initial originality and 'hardiesse', failed to confront Salon officialdom head on and made do with the unrealised and unfinished: 'Le grand malheur, c'est que pas un artiste de ce groupe n'a réalisé puissamment et définitivement la formule nouvelle qu'ils apportent tous, éparse dans leurs œuvres. [...] ils restent inférieurs à l'œuvre qu'ils tentent, ils bégayent sans pouvoir trouver le mot' (1970: 337-8). Zola does not grasp the Impressionists' resistance to reterritorialization, to the 'puissant' and to the 'définitif', their cultivation of the 'épars', the virtues of 'bégaiement'. Or, to return to our musical problem, we might cite Verlaine's 'Tout en chantant sur le mode mineur' (4>3>3). This line, the fifth, is what establishes the 4//6 decasyllable of 'Clair de lune', but what constitutes the 'mode mineur', the disabused, the ambivalent, the teasing, the errant are perhaps those wandering rhythms of the 'vers simples', lines 1 and 4:

Votre âme est un paysage choisi

2>5>3

Tristes sous leurs déguisements fantasques 1>7>2

And the doubts about the underlying structure still played with in line 2:

Que vont charmant masques et bergamasques 5//5 or 4//6 ?

What Verlaine is doing is what Deleuze finds in Kafka and Beckett : ‘Ce qu’ils font, c’est plutôt inventer un *usage mineur* de la langue majeure dans laquelle ils s’expriment entièrement : ils *minorent* cette langue, comme en musique où le mode mineur désigne des combinaisons dynamiques en perpétuel déséquilibre’ (1993: 138).

But immediately we must enter another caveat, a caveat that we will go on further to explore: the point of treating Laforgue as a minor writer is to attach to him a mode of minor criticism, that is, to resist applying to him a majoritarian, normalising, literary historical criticism which generates lines of filiation (generic, metrical, stylistic, thematic) rather than the shifting and improvised spray of alliances, and which institutes arborescent rather than rhizomatic thinking. What exactly did Laforgue owe to Baudelaire, or to the ‘chanson populaire’? Where is Laforgue to be placed on the map of Decadence? Is Laforgue to find his niche ‘dans la lignée des fantaisistes’ (Newman-Gordon, 1964: 139-47)? As Deleuze puts it : ‘D’une part, on élève au "majeur": d’une pensée on fait une doctrine, d’une manière de vivre on fait une culture, d’un événement on fait de l’Histoire’ (1979: 97).

Accordingly we address the ‘chanson’ of *Les Complaintes* not as the purveyor of certain kinds of collective experience, or of lore, but as the transformer and deformer of the syllable, the improviser of liaisons and elisions (syncope, apocope, epenthetic e and feminised r, liaisory t and z, shifts between synaeresis and diaeresis). ‘Complainte de l’Orgue de Barbarie’ opens with a quatrain of octosyllables, more or less repeated as the closing stanza:

Orgue, orgue de Barbarie,

Don Quichotte, Souffre-Douleur,
Vidasse, vidasse ton cœur,
Ma pauvre rosse endolorie.

But either the first line contains a missed note, is already an unreliable music, or it asks us to unelide the first e, treat it as a *coupe lyrique* and create a hiatus into the bargain:

Orgue,/or/gue de Barbarie, 2'>1>5

On this evidence, we might be encouraged to read the third line with the same halting shift from *coupe lyrique* to *coupe enjambante*:

Vidasse,/vida/sse ton cœur, 3'>2>3

and begin to imagine that the fourth line might be an enneasyllable:

Ma pau/vre rosse/ endolorie. 2>3'>4 or 5'>4

We see that what we are opting for in these instances is the *sung* end of the *Sprechgesang* continuum; indeed, one might say that the *coupe lyrique*, and the refusal of elision, are indices of song; in similar fashion, to be 'correct' heptasyllables, the refrainic lines 3 and 34 of 'Complainte de cette bonne Lune' need to be read:

On y danse,/on y danse 4'>3

Laforgue has no scruples about adjusting syllabic values from one line to the next, as here in the 'Complainte de l'Orgue de Barbarie', in the pentasyllabic lines 37-8:

Qu'est-c'que moi j'y puis, 3>2
Qu'est-ce donc qu'ils veulent? 3>2

If the barrel-organ is the voice of *Les Complaintes*,³ 'pleurard', 'inconsolable hululant ses complaintes', 'Scie autant que Souffre-Douleur', condemned to the nomadic life of the streets, it is partly because its complexity of timbre outweighs its musical value – the opposite

of the piano⁴ – because it can only feel its way towards harmony. Its mechanism, long the victim of abusive wear and tear, makes it a prey to unpredictable dissonances, bum and superfluous notes (Tourette’s syndrome), unsteady tempi, distortions of pitch. We hear all this in the fabric of Laforgue’s verse. Sometimes the piano itself may seem to covet some of this ungainliness, some of the out-of-true and roughly articulated:

‘Tu t’en vas et tu nous laisses, 3>4
 Tu nous laiss’s et tu t’en vas, 3>4
 Que ne suis-je morte à la messe! 5>3
 O mois, ô linges, ô repas !’ 2>2>4

(‘Complainte des Pianos qu’on entend dans les
 Quartiers aisés’, ll. 57-60)

The drama acted out in *Les Complaintes* concerning the syllable, and particularly the *e atone* and synaeresis and diaeresis, relates to the tyranny of the written and its wilful deformations of register, enunciation, performative mode, but also to a deeper wish to push things out of true and outwit signification.

In the end, the barrel organ may produce structural slippages in its music which leave the listener at a loss to know what kind of animal the line is. The decasyllables in the ‘Complainte de l’Orgue de Barbarie’, for example, are sometimes only a classical 4//6 by virtue of a *césure lyrique*:

Quel silence,//dans la forêt d’automne 4’>4>2

sometimes only a romantic 5//5 by virtue of an interjection :

Oh ! je ne veux pas//aller à l’hospice! 1>4>2>3

sometimes a 3//7 or a 7//3 :

Oh ! j’ai peur,//nous avons perdu la route ; 3>5>2/1>2>5>2
 Paul, ce bois est mal famé!//chut, écoute... 1>2>4>1>2

In a world of polymetricity, in a world of self-dismantling metricity, in a world of monosyllabic interjections, interruptions, ruptures, the syllable ceases to be a metrical matter, a quantitative unit with a value of one, and becomes a rhythmic matter, that is to say, a constitutive element in a multi-dimensional play of paralinguistic effects – tempo, loudness, duration, tone, pitch, intensity. And as this happens, so standard verse-lines risk masking the stuttering, risk re-equilibrating a syntax, a rhythmicity, a complex timbre which wish themselves in continual disequilibrium,⁵ the restless vibration of Impressionist colours.⁶ Laforgue makes no bones about these risks in a letter (16 December 1884) to Gustave Kahn : ‘Autre chose, vos I and II sont bien en mineur, justes d’air, mais que ces alexandrins et ces rimes alternées font du tort! Êtes-vous si paresseux que vous acceptiez l’alexandrin pour des pièces si balbutiées de langue et si infinies de décor ? On y perd en insaisissable. Et surtout impossible de s’y livrer, comme avec des strophes à part, à cette distribution en staccato et en menus enroulements et déroulements fugués qui est devenue pour moi un besoin [...]’ (1995: 720).

What one needs here is a mode of analysis which captures prosody and its operations in what Merleau-Ponty would call a ‘cadre moteur’ or in their ‘mouvements naissants’ (2014: 10), pushing at the limits of the known or knowable, not knowing what they generate or import. If I read a pair of alexandrines as:

L’Extase du soleil, peuh! La Nature, fade 2>4>1>3>2
 Usine de sève aux lymphatiques parfums. 2>3>4>3
 (‘Complainte à Notre-Dame des Soirs’, ll. 1-2)

I have slipped inside the predictions that can be made on the basis of the known and recuperable. This has two kinds of consequence. The first is prosodic. I no longer know the purport of 12, as a project of measures, of periodicity, of accentual architectures. Its rhythmicity, in other words, does not derive from its 12, so much as aggregate itself as 12, as the compound of its movements, as the outer limit of its inner dynamic. We might equally

take a converse view: we take 12 and refuse its protocols in order both to make it a *mere* number, vulnerable to other numbers, other numbering (the *vers libre* perspective) *and* to suggest a 12, an alexandrine which belongs to a different species of verse-making, to a different regime of combination and variation, both of itself and of its partners (the *vers libres classiques* perspective). The second consequence is vocal: the alexandrine has attached to it certain conventions of discourse. These conventions can change; so in the early nineteenth century Hugo and Sainte-Beuve inject it with new flexibilities, in the directions of the dramatically heteroclitite and the prosaic respectively. But what if this 12 has no conventions for voice, if the voice occupies it unenveloped by styles of discourse or discursal expectations? What if prosody serves paralanguage *directly* (i.e. not tempered by a certain lexical and syntactic register)?

In this last circumstance, the nature of accent itself changes, a perception Laforgue may have been helped to by his 1886 translations of Whitman. Deleuze's essay on Whitman (1993: 75-80) concentrates on constructional characteristics: the fragmentary, the patchwork (federated States and multi-ethnic population), the dry-stone wall of assorted but uncemented pieces ('alliance' rather than 'filiation', 'camaraderie'); the parts are not generated by a preconceived whole – the whole emerges from the contingencies of the parts and is adequate only to them (1993: 79). With Whitman, the minoritarian is in part that element of the convulsive which undoes English, a delirious, asyntactic writing 'avec ses changements de direction, ses bifurcations, ses ruptures et ses sauts, ses étirements, ses bourgeonnements, ses parenthèses' (1993: 77). These observations about the disjunctive-conjunctive and about a heterogeneous dynamic help us to understand how it is that the reader can constantly shift the intensities, the affective emphases, the expressive energies of accent in Laforgue's verse, and particularly in his free verse. Where accent in regular verse creates pattern by measuring verse, sustains a discursal fluency and generates abstract rhythmic configurations, the accent

of free verse, even of *vers libéré*, looks to jettison the quantitative for the qualitative, to make all accents negotiable and to bring into play the full range of accentual features: intensity, duration, pitch, vocal colouring. This ‘psychologisation’ of accent is something that Rudmose-Brown was already referring to in 1905: ‘*Je définis donc l’accent comme le relief psychologique*’ (1905: 16). I have elsewhere argued that Whitman may have persuaded Laforgue away from metrical stress towards sense-stress and a cadence-accentual version of prosody (1990: 98-110). Here I would merely like to indicate the possible accentual variety in an enumerative line, a habit Whitman may also have helped to reinforce:

Lampes, estampes, thés, petits-fours 2’>3’>1>3
(*Derniers vers* I : L’Hiver qui vient)

The dwelt-on accent of ‘Lampes’, savoured in the *coupe lyrique*, creates ambient warmth and intimacy, while the modulation into /estãpə/ may bring a heightening of pitch and accompanying wryness of tone, with the plosive /p/ more clearly enunciated to generate framing, a certain fastidious orderliness and pretention. The summariness of the following monosyllable /te/ encourages a quickening of tempo, a flattening of pitch, an offhandedness of tone, which the expansion into ‘petits-fours’ ritualizes with a slightly chanted dismissiveness. This investment of accent with paralanguage, this flexibilisation of reading posture, makes reading itself more exploratory, more searching, more groping, more stuttering.

Whitman is part of that line of affinity between Laforgue and Deleuze which lies in the ‘yankee’. For Laforgue, it is through the exploitation of the yankee that Baudelaire makes French verse deviate and stutter (1903: 113-14, 118-19):⁷ dissonant, confrontational, cultivating disproportion in comparisons, espousing excess, finding the invigorating in the vulgar, subverting the oratorical with the uncompromising and abrasive, ‘sans parti-pris’, unafraid of flaunting verse-mechanics (‘On voit les fils de fer et les trucs’). Roberto Calasso (2012: 279) believes that Americanism lies at the heart of Baudelaire’s ultimate ambition, as described and endorsed by Laforgue : ‘Faire des poésies détachées, courtes, *sans sujet*

appréciable [...] mais vagues et sans raison comme un battement d'éventail, éphémères et équivoques comme un maquillage, qui font dire au bourgeois qui vient de lire "Et après?" (1903: 116).

Deleuze's remarks on Anglo-American literature (1996: 47-91) are not always as linguistically focussed as Laforgue's on Baudelaire, but they always have clear linguistic consequences. First, Deleuze's general statement: that the Anglo-American literary mind is on a line of flight – Laforgue's 'en allé' – which is linguistic deterritorialisation, a 'fuir' which is also a 'faire fuir'. This assertion involves an adverse diagnosis of the French condition: the French are beset by the failure to become, actively to embrace different kinds of consciousness, and instead maintain a critical distance, so that perception is tied to the linearity of history, which in turn prevents them making the past untenable, but instead threatens to reterritorialise them in relation to that past: 'Fuyant tout, comment ne pas reconstituer et notre pays natal, et nos formations de pouvoir, nos alcools, nos psychanalyses et nos papas-mamans ?' (1996: 50). This is perhaps one reason why Laforgue was bound to go beyond *Les Complaintes* and their baggage of strophic play, albeit subverted and *détournées*, to *vers libre*.

This puts at the heart of Laforgue's verse a fruitful betrayal : 'Il y a toujours de la trahison dans une ligne de fuite. [...] On trahit les puissances fixes qui veulent nous retenir, les puissances établies de la terre' (1996: 52). Being a traitor to one's calling, one's sex, one's class, to the interests of the *majeur*, is not achieved by the assumption of the insignia of the rebel, but by the surrender of identity, the refusal to be identified: one becomes an apparatus of consciousness, a dispersed fifth columnist. What relationship should one seek with one's self if not experimentation, the avoidance of becoming one's own victim? The threat of the self is the threat of the significant and the interpretable, the threat of interpretation itself (routine, ritual, refrain). So one must slip and slide, working only in variation and microtonal

morphing, in the distractions of the perceptually hallucinogenic. Linguistically this involves the release of the polymorphous capacities of language; we hear words in each other, we hear in words the urge to become other, if the other itself will reciprocate. What does it look like when ‘crépusculaire’ engages in becoming more degenerate, more a poor copy of itself, more approximate, thus more deserving of another suffix? ‘Crépusculâtre’. What happens when ‘éternité’ essays a becoming-‘nulle’ (syntagmatic deterritorialisation) or a becoming-‘nullité’ (paradigmatic deterritorialisation), and vice versa? The *mot-valise* ‘éternullité’. But every rhyme is potentially this same venture, the desire, on the basis of an acoustic kinship, to enter other experiential territory; every rhyme is a *mot-valise* in the making.

The pull of the *mot-valise*, the need to think in the direction not of identity (‘EST’) but of what ‘fait filer les relations hors de leurs termes et hors de l’ensemble de leurs termes, et hors de tout ce qui pourrait être déterminé comme Être, Un ou Tout’ (‘ET’) (Deleuze and Parnet, 1996: 71), is another betrayal, a betrayal we have already referred to, the betrayal of filiation in favour of alliance. This particular betrayal, which, for Deleuze, is traceable to the principles of Jefferson and Thoreau, but has a particularly clear expression in Melville’s *Bartleby*, is the betrayal of linear patriarchy in favour of ramifying fraternity:

Libérer l’homme de la fonction de père, faire naître le nouvel homme ou l’homme sans particularités, réunir l’original et l’humanité en constituant une société des frères comme nouvelle universalité. C’est que dans la société des frères l’alliance remplace la filiation, et le pacte de sang, la consanguinité. L’homme est effectivement le frère de sang de l’homme, et la femme, sa sœur de sang: c’est la *communauté des célibataires* selon Melville, entraînant ses membres dans un devenir illimité (1993 : 108).

This is of course but a stone’s throw from Laforgue’s :

Qu'elle adoptât l'homme comme égal
 Oh! Que ses yeux ne parlent plus d'Idéal
 Mais simplement d'humains échanges!
 En frères et sœurs par le cœur,
 Et fiancés par le passé,
 Et puis unis par l'Infini !
 (*Derniers vers V: Pétition*)⁸

Thus, from time to time, Laforgue betrays his own unsteady misogynies with a vision of easy sexual equitability ('Le ET comme extra-être, inter-être' (Deleuze and Parnet, 1996: 71)). But, for the poet, alliance has other implications, namely a verse, *vers libre*, no longer governed by metrical hierarchies and stipulations, in which vocal interjection can have rhythmic credentials, in which lines are bound together not by pre-given stanzaic law but by ongoing shared interests, in which rhyme has a psycho-associative rather than a structural value, and in which rhyme relationships are varied in intensity by the varying interval between rhyme-partners.

But fraternal exchanges of acousticity do not merely engineer *mots-valises*, they also create lines of flight across the body of verse. In the lines from *Derniers vers II: Le Mystère des trois cors*:

Le sanglant étang, aussitôt s'étend, aussitôt s'étale,	5(3>2)>5(3>2)>5(3>2)
Noyant les cavales du quadrigé	5(2>3)>4
Qui se cabre, et qui patauge, et puis se fige	3>4>4
Dans ces déluges de bengale et d'alcool!...	4>4>3

the repeated /ã/ of 'sanglant' draws out /etã/ which /setã/ so that it can /setal(ə)/, but only under the release-mechanism of /o/ as it doubly reduplicates itself in /osito/. Then /nwajã/ allies /a/ and /ã/, while 'cavales' doubles /a/, but only after /k/, which 'quadrigé' echoes, modulating into /iʒ/; 'cavales' also echoes /alə/. 'Cabre' is the last of the /ka/ combination, and 'patauge' provides /a/ with another voiceless initial (after /t/ and /k/) and /ʒ/ with a modulation in /oʒ/ before /iʒ/ is restored in 'fige'. At the same time, the line diminishes the /se/ of the first line to /sə/ while maintaining /e/ in the repeated 'et'. /e/ reappears in the final

line, along with /ʒ/, /ã/ and /al/ (bis), and a new hue, the /ɔl/ of ‘alcool’. /d/ is also a newly insistent tone, picked up from ‘du quadrigé’, and as if echoing, in voiced equivalents, the equally insistent /t/’s of the first line. This acoustic weave, where sounds are sometimes accentuated, sometimes not, sometimes only half-heard, has its own rhythms, and intervals, and respiration, as it shifts its weight from pentasyllabic measures to tetrasyllabic ones. It is as if purely acoustic needs generated lexis, as if paronomasia was a way of thinking, as if continuous variation was both an unpredictable foray into unexplored territory and a constant re-circulation of materials in ever-new configurations. Do I know how to read/hear these lines, do I know how to appropriately perform this tissue and texture of sound? A sunset, but a sunset in acoustic vibrations, in an acoustic chromaticism. I am tracing with my ear, with my mouth, not just colours, but depths and transparencies and shifting interactions, which are not *derived from* words/images so much as set in motion by them, but which those words must re-absorb, so that the syntax which enables them must yield to another syntax, an asyntax of relativised listening, which still has consecutiveness, but only to put in place cross-linear, transverse series, echoes, modulations, gravitations and radiations. What is all this if not the making audible of the Unconscious?

Just as we speak of the atonality of *Sprechgesang* as both pre-tonal and post-tonal, so we might speak of the Impressionist eye, in Laforgue’s 1883 account, as pre-conventional (‘naturel’) and post-conventional (‘dans l’évolution humaine l’œil le plus avancé’ (1988: 170)). Indeed, a task, perhaps insufficiently undertaken, is the translation of Laforgue’s view of Impressionism into a corresponding verse-art: the rejection of studio-vision, or synthetic vision, in the interests of volatile immediacy; the rejection of contour and perspective (abstract rationalisations), and studio lighting, in favour of a vision born of a ‘sensibilité prismatique’ and ‘vibrations lumineuses’, of the minute, variable and varying gradations of colour. In what sense might a line of verse, or a stanza, or a poem be a prismatic

decomposition of utterance? How can verse capture the play of reflection and refraction and chromatic interaction?⁹ What are the ‘touches irrégulières’ of language ‘qui, de loin, établissent la vie’ (1988: 170)? If syntax is a pre-established perspectival arrangement of language, oriented towards the vanishing point of a full-stop, what must verse do to its syntax to achieve the changing planar notations of aerial perspective? Above all, how do you create a text in which ‘[l]’objet et le sujet sont donc irrémédiablement mouvants, insaisissables et insaisissants’ (1988: 172)?

Impressionism is a stuttering with the hand, partly so that time itself is intimately constitutive of the perceptual flux, a pressure, an urgency (this, too, is the ‘minutieux’ of the moment), an intensity above all; partly so that the artistic medium, paint, is captured in its very application, as a kinaesthetic response to looking; partly so that the process of representation never takes place, or is left floating in its virtuality: the spectator only has access to the picture’s ‘subject’ by putting it together as it is/was being made, in optical mixture, not on the palette but in the spectator’s eye. The concept of ‘intempestivité’ in the minor, stuttering poet, finds one manifestation in what Détrie and Verine call Laforgue’s ‘temporalité cacophonique’ (2003: 216). But Laforgue is also ‘intempestif’ inasmuch as he both drives event into a present moment, into the urgency of the here and now, particularly by means of forms of the imperative, and also lets event float out into the temporally wide-ranging and indeterminate by resorting to forms of the infinitive, about which Deleuze observes, in his reading of Anglo-American literature, that it ‘sort d’un état de choses, et le survole. Les verbes infinitifs sont des devenirs illimités’ (1996, 78). When in *Derniers Vers* III : Dimanches, Laforgue writes :

Et alors, eh! allez donc carillonnez,	4>3>4
Toutes cloches des bons dimanches!	3>5
Et passez layettes et collerettes et robes blanches	5>5>5
Dans un frou-frou de lavande et de thym	4>3>3
Vers l’encens et les brioches!	3>4

he uses the imperative to drive repeated routines into punctuality, he accelerates towards the moment with the recurrent ‘et’, he applies pressure with the exclamation mark, and the articulated e’s of the second and third lines create an irresistible fluency of uninterrupted liaison. And the plurals further underline the Impressionist effect by capturing the event in its overallness, in the diversification of activity, in the scumbling of spatial distinctions, in the blurred outlines of metamorphic change. But a few lines further on we encounter a shift to the infinitive :

Non, non! C’est sucer la chair d’un cœur élu,	2>5(3>2)>4
Adorer d’incurables organes	3>3>3
S’entrevoir avant que les tissus se fanent	3>6>2
En monomanes, en reclus!	4>4/5’>3

and drift into the impersonal, into ‘accusative’ forms of subjectivity, where the poet becomes submerged in processes greater than he is, processes which can hardly be given a singularity or an inimitability. The infinitive is partly the death-knell of an active verb, the measure of a pointlessness; but it is also to let the self into a virtual state, the opening up of channels, however unfruitful, a space of multipliable alternatives.

We can already see that no easy equivalence is to be established between the imperative and the exclamation mark; the infinitive might also find a companion in the exclamatory. And whatever the exclamation betokens in terms of hypertrophy, exasperation, impatient energy, exercise of the will, it must find its place on a continuum with *points de suspension*, which may embody a shrug of the shoulders, the inability to continue, the inability to sustain the communicative impulse, but which, at the same time, lead us into the text’s blind field, prolong the line-terminal pause such that qualities of the infinitive are indeed embraced. But what are we to make of their periodic combination:

Vivent l’Amour et les feux de paille !...

Comme on se fait dur et boudeur à leur approche !...

Pauvre, pauvre, sous couleur d'attraits !...

(*Derniers vers* IV: Dimanches)

What we are to make is, precisely, their combinability, their being variations of each other. And perhaps a factitious inflatedness being shrugged off in spiritual inertia? Or a fusion of contrary impulses: to capture and make present to the self, and to project and let go into a shared and available condition. But our inability to say, with any reliability only reinforces the fact that Laforgue's punctuation has little to do with syntactic function and everything to do with paralinguistic performance. As the Impressionists' spectator is implicated in the vision of the painting by the needs of optical mixture and indeed by the painting's very embodiedness (gestural), so the reader of Laforgue is implicated by the paralinguistic provocations and invitations, and the articulatory eventfulness of the text. Paralanguage is a deterritorialisation of the written; Deleuze and Guattari would say that all language involves a deterritorialisation of the mouth (in relation to eating), a deterritorialisation that is reterritorialised in meaning. Meaning 'explains' sounds, turns acoustic mechanism into objective (1975: 35-7). For this reason, meaning must be kept firmly in abeyance.

One might add to the area of influence of the infinitive and, perhaps, of the apostrophe, Laforgue's liking for the enumerative, already touched on. Cataloguing is American dry-stone walling or patchwork, 'le monde comme échantillonnage' (Deleuze, 1993: 76), even if Laforgue's catalogues are less celebratory and more 'déroutants' than Whitman's:

O géraniums diaphanes, guerroyeurs sortilèges,
Sacrilèges monomanes !
Emballages, dévergondages, douches ! O pressoirs
Des vendanges des grands soirs !

(*Derniers vers* X : 'O géraniums diaphanes,...')

Enumeration is an impediment to hypotaxis, to processes of ‘plotting’, of extracting or projecting meaning, by linear consecution. Enumeration pushes aside the ratiocinative mind, and human agency more generally; and in the place of the syntax of teleology and controlled temporalities and interpretative processing, it installs a non-perspectival (planar) parataxis, of indefinite limits, a problematic temporality, a spirit of contingency which poses searching questions about continuity, function, epistemology. Enumeration does not tell us what knowledge we have of things nor what might make things meaningful for us.

We have no difficulty in thinking of Laforgue as polyphonic or heteroglossic, as ventriloquial, but this is not close enough, it seems to me, to the ground of the voice, to voicedness, to coming to voice, as opposed to the exercise of voices, to do Laforgue full justice. As we have already intimated, Laforgue complicates this coming to voice by sliding between the scripted voice and the performing voice, by exploiting the conversions of the written into the vocal and the vocal into the written (the way the voice produces a visual scandal of punctuation, of apostrophe, of hyphenation, ellipsis, the dash).¹⁰ One must be wary of the polyphonic reading because it casts Laforgue too easily as a multiplicity of constituted personae – clown, Pierrot, Hamlet, dilettante – as a set of borrowed identities, rather than as a constant becoming, running the risks of multiplied consciousness, and of non-classifiable sensations embodied in prosody, in the structure of the stanza or line-group (*vers libre*). These personae are perhaps better seen as versions of characters from Thomas Hardy in Deleuze’s description: ‘les personnages chez lui ne sont pas des personnes ou des sujets, ce sont des collections de sensations intensives, chacun est un tel collection, un paquet, un bloc de sensations variables’ (1996: 51), with the added provisos that each ‘paquet’ is in continuous variation with the others, and that together they create lines of deterritorialisation across the landscape of the poem. Criticism seems to want it both ways perhaps: Laforgue afloat on the Hartmannian Unconscious, totally relativised, the ductile, labile keyboard,¹¹ and

a writer in whom multiplicity takes on identifiable shapes which themselves conceal/reveal an underlying, unified enunciator.¹² This latter view does a grave injustice to the values of variation as the living dynamic of perception, and precisely sets at nought any notion of becoming; a better candidate for underlying unity is indeed the inclusive unity of Hartmann's Unconscious : 'Plus de mélodie isolée, le tout est une symphonie qui est la vie vivante et variante, [...] comme l'Inconscient, loi du monde, est la grande voix mélodique, résultante de la symphonie des consciences de races et d'individus' (1988: 171). The tendency to immobilize Laforgue in attitudes and modes of representation leads to a reading of his verse as tensional, as caught on the cusp of a range of oppositions : pathos/humour; irony/compassion; egoism/altruism; audacity/timidity; physical/metaphysical. This movement of oscillation masks a principle of variation 'sans suite', a principle of non-recurrence, despite the deceptive mirage of refrains.¹³

What then might constitute Laforguian becoming? This question has perhaps two answers, one of macrocosmic proportions, the other microcosmic. Becoming is our attachment to the totality and design of the Unconscious, itself a law in perpetual becoming; as we push against our own limits, as we refine our senses, as we generate momentary identities and empathies between subject and object, so we gain some access to the evolutionary drive of the Unconscious; all sliding back into convention, into givens, blocks the path to the Unconscious; where conventions are inevitable – the pigments on the palette are an inadequate translation of the effects of natural light – then these conventions must be turned into forces of creative mediation, by virtue of their own renewal.¹⁴ We have seen what this might mean in the treatment of verse conventions. At the microcosmic level, becoming involves the psychophysics of verse-making and verse-reading, the development of the senses of modality, expressive weight, capacity for variation. Becoming can only occur in a situation of asignifying experimentation; signification halts the progress of surpassing, refuses the

necessary proliferation. This is also to say that, in some senses, linguistic material does not *achieve* expression or form but remains just that, material, in the process of *triage*, alliance, varying kinship, acting beneath the horizon of definition because it seeks to go beyond definition. In becoming, one reaches, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, ‘un continuum d’intensités qui ne valent plus que pour elle-mêmes’ (1975: 24) and at the same time there occurs ‘une dilution du *je* lyrique dans un hybride énonciatif indémêlable’ (Détrie and Verine, 2003: 24). I have elsewhere argued (1986: 157-76) that, in Laforgue, specific modal values should be attached to the exclamations ‘Oh!’ and ‘Ah!’: ‘Oh!’ is future related, jussive and optative in modality, expressing a wish whose fulfilment is by no means guaranteed; ‘Ah!’ is past-related, with an ‘if only’ modality, expressing a sense of failure. These exclamations are set against the apostrophe ‘O’, which installs the temporality of writing itself, or has the force of the infinitive, a temporal virtuality, an access-point to any time. I wanted to show, too, what kinds of prosodic interference these potentially ‘maverick’ syllables could produce. Altogether Laforgue’s interjectional, apostrophic and otherwise phatic linguistic habits remind us that his verse is perhaps more a communicative apparatus about communication than a system for making meaning; and, further, that the phatic generates the fraternalistic (alliance), ousting a paternalism (filiation) of *mots d’ordre* (Deleuze and Guattari, 1980: 95-109). All these are part of the continuum of ever-varying and interactive intensities generated by Laforgue’s verse, as are his punctuation marks, his parts of speech (infinitive and imperative forms), his syllabic and accentual stuttering. Only *vers libre* perhaps can properly capture this becoming.

In the end, we could argue Laforgue out. We can, for example, accept Laforgue’s identification of his nervous condition (1986: 762), but are not persuaded by his self-declared decadence (1986: 749; Scepi and Saint-Gérard, 2000: 172): incurability, hypertrophy, atrophy, the super-sensitivity of the temperamental keyboard, yes, but not the hereditarily

foregone, in its entropic unfolding, in its long-term determinism, not an aesthetics of the fastidious choice of fetishized material goods, not self-cultivation; rather, beachcombing among worldly detritus, constantly letting go, the determinism of the circumstantial instant (relativity); Laforgue is more dilettante than dandy. But all this is interpretation, the privileging of certain signifiers. A ‘major’ criticism will give us the impression that we are reading the symptoms of a diagnosis we have already read, that the Laforgue can only utter his condition and that we can only re-read it, refining it from time to time. It is ironic that Richard should speak of ‘le corail’ in Laforgue as ‘un agglomérat déstructuré, mais pourtant dynamique et expansif, un peu comme le rhizome de Deleuze’ (1984: 48), and almost immediately read ‘*plasma*’ as ‘le spasme (*pâle?*) de *papa/maman...*’ (1984: 48). In his letter to Ephrussi of December 1883, Laforgue reminds us of his scattered aesthetic sources: ‘une esthétique qui s’accorde avec l’Inconscient de Hartmann, le transformisme de Darwin, les travaux de Helmholtz’ (1986: 850). Laforgue has a wonderfully conciliatory resourcefulness. In choosing the minoritarian way, we leave Decadence and Impressionism and even the yankee to occupy their territories and attract their definitions, their adherents, their lineages; for us, Laforgue disperses himself among these terminological interpellations, in a permutating patchwork of unresolved kinships which ensure the continuing nomadism of his verse.

NOTES

1. These terms of course occur in Laforgue’s letter to his sister Marie of 14 May 1883, in relation not to voice but to ‘langue’: ‘[...] je possède ma langue d’une façon plus minutieuse, plus clownesque [...]’ (1986: 821), but this comment is preceded by the sentence : ‘Je trouve stupide de faire la grosse voix et de jouer de l’ éloquence’.
2. Deleuze defines the minoritarian in Kleist, Lenz and Büchner as an ‘anti-Goethe’ (1996: 54), since Goethe is the State, and perfectly situated in his own time. Whether one might say that the French ‘minor’ poets of the late nineteenth century were ‘anti-Hugo’ is less easy to assert, since Deleuze makes only few and passing references to him (Gelas and Micolet, 2007: 564). But Mallarmé’s version of Hugo leads one to believe that, despite his years of political exile and his visionary drawings (Deleuze,

1993: 142), he was at least the State of poetry: ‘Hugo, dans sa tâche mystérieuse, rabattit toute la prose, philosophie, éloquence, histoire au vers, et comme il était le vers personnellement, il confisqua chez qui pense, discours ou narre, presque le droit à s’énoncer’ (2003: 205).

3. Laforgue’s barrel-organ may have some affinities with the ‘miaulement’ he hears in Baudelaire’s verse: ‘Il a trouvé le miaulement, le miaulement nocturne, singulier, langoureux, désespéré, exaspéré, infiniment solitaire [...]’ (1903: 114).
4. For a discussion of the relationship of organs and pianos in Laforgue, see Corbellari, 2000.
5. Deleuze expresses the connection between disequilibrium and stuttering thus : ‘Mais si le système apparaît en perpétuel déséquilibre, en bifurcation, avec des termes dont chacun parcourt à son tour une zone de variation continue, alors la langue elle-même se met à vibrer, à bégayer [...]’ (1993: 136).
6. Just as the quotation in the previous footnote might suggest this connection, so a further, later (13 August 1886) comment of Laforgue’s, on a poem by Kahn, also calls up the notion of linguistic vibration: ‘La 2^e pièce est la plus pure. Pas de surcharges de sensation, pas de rimes tympanisantes, tout d’une éclosion déchiquetée et vibrante, et puis (ô cliché!) flagramment vécue’ (1995: 866).
7. Daniel Grojnowski’s article on Baudelaire’s ‘Americanism’ (2003) provides a timely reminder that, for the likes of Baudelaire and Huysmans, America had also very negative associations (venality, philistinism, the degradations of progress and democracy). Grojnowski also points out that Laforgue’s model American is a compound figure (‘tout autant le Peau-rouge que l’Aventurier ou le rustre’ (89)), and, most pertinently, that Laforgue is particularly sensitive to vocal effects in Baudelaire : ‘Cette appréhension des *Fleurs du mal* a le mérite de ne pas s’en tenir aux sujets traités, aux formes et aux procédés mais de mettre les poèmes à l’épreuve de la vive voix. La part ainsi laissée à leur actualisation [...] les *désinscrit* de la page imprimée pour donner sa chance au surgissement d’une profération qui associe les règles de la prosodie aux aléas de la diction’ (92-3).
8. This, in turn, is but a stone’s throw from what Laforgue has to say in his notes ‘Sur la femme’: ‘O jeunes filles, quand serez-vous nos frères, nos frères intimes sans arrière-pensée d’exploitation! Quand nous donnerons-nous la vraie poignée de main!’ (1903: 48).
9. For Deleuze, the short answer to this question lies in continuous variation : ‘En effet, la variation continue s’appliquera à toutes les composantes sonores et linguistiques, dans une sorte de chromatisme généralisé’ (1979: 100). Here we can benefit from both the pictorial and musical significances of ‘chromatisme’.
10. Jean-Michel Gouvard, in his study of strophic structures in *Les Complaintes*, seems to be making a dangerous assumption when he asserts : ‘La mise en page des textes et son incidence métrique éventuelle doivent d’autant plus retenir l’attention que les poèmes étaient destinés avant tout à être lus, même si certains d’entre eux évoquent les pratiques orales [...]’ (2002: 5). Better to take note of Grojnowski’s remark about Laforgue’s reading of Baudelaire cited in footnote 3.
11. This, of course, refers to Laforgue’s remark about Impressionism: ‘Chaque homme est selon son moment dans le temps, son milieu de race et de condition sociale, son moment d’évolution individuelle, un certain clavier sur lequel le monde extérieur joue d’une certaine façon. Mon clavier est perpétuellement changeant et il n’y en a pas un autre identique au mien. Tous les claviers sont légitimes’ (1988: 172-3).
12. ‘Cependant, derrière ses locuteurs fictifs, se devinent les "invariants" d’une parole référentielle à un énonciateur unique : chaque complainte, dans son orchestration

singulière, rejoue en fait la même pièce – farce ou drame -, celle de la faillite du désir sur fond de banalité incurable, dont il faut bien rire’ (Scepi and Saint-Gérard, 2000: 16).

13. It is extremely tempting to align Laforgue’s refrains and ‘ritournelles’ with Deleuze and Guattari’s ‘1837: De la ritournelle’ (1980: 381-433). True, there is a difference in the scale of definitions: Deleuze and Guattari’s is an altogether broader and more multiform notion, and there is much material in Deleuze and Guattari’s argument that has little application to Laforgue: e.g. the relationship between, and different modes of operation of, milieus and territories, the continuities between human and animal ethology, the different patterns of ‘agencement’. But it certainly seems fruitful to pursue, in Laforgue’s verse, the idea that rhythm is a negotiation, or music, or relationship, between different milieus (rhythm as the instrument of transcoding, transduction), or that the shift from the functional to the expressive gives verse access to new configurative possibilities, or that Laforgue’s unstable verse-music and rhythmic waywardness constantly deterritorialize refrain and improvise it into a future. But all this requires a carefulness of argumentation that we have no space for here.
14. For a searching treatment of Laforgue’s aesthetic theory, see Hannoosh, 1984.

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