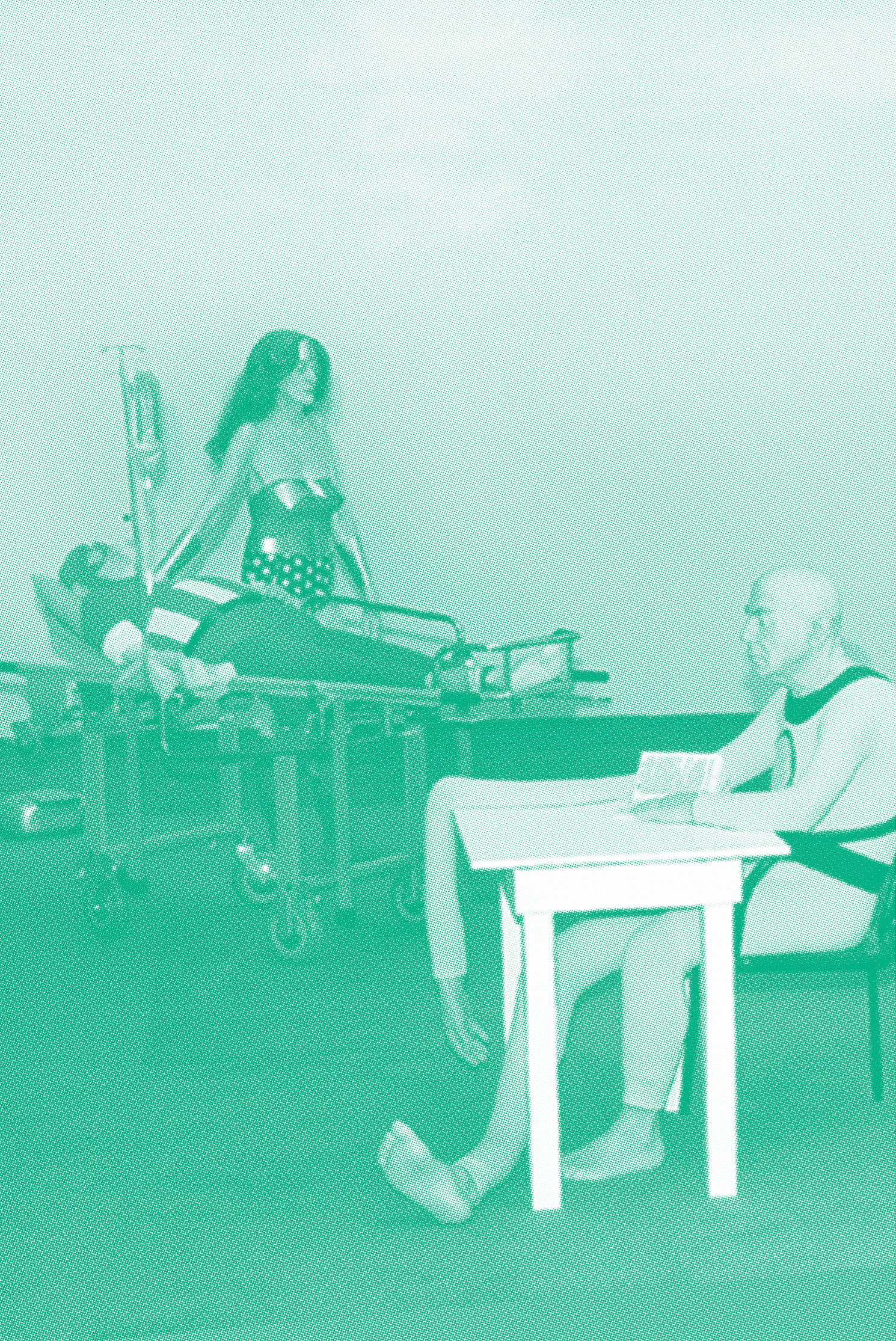




FROM
A TO —
Z
— AT
RANDOM

GILLES

BARBIER



Clov: *The end is terrific.*
 Hamm: *I prefer the middle.*

Samuel Beckett
 (*Endgame*)

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INTRODUCTION: ACTION! CUT...

How do you enter into the work of Gilles Barbier? It's a question that is put to most artists.¹ Historians will be quick to reply: at the beginning. Semiologists will say: through its structure (its signifier). But all that would produce nothing but misreadings. Barbier's work is not amenable to such approaches, and his network of burrows hollowed and inhabited by worms can be entered at any point. I realise that this will seem disconcerting to all those who have been educated in unifying linearities, but I must insist: you can enter wherever you like, with the worms, with the cosmos, with darkness, speech bubbles, copying, folds, cloning, *saive-qui-peut* panic, suicide, holes, etc. Come in and go out, Barbier enjoins: dig the earth and shoot into the sky. It all adds up to an intense, almost foetal territorialisation (the maternal breast as burrow) and the looming deterritorialisation of darkness. Desire might remain blocked at the bottom of a hole with no way out, but the surfboards, cousins of space ships, rise up into the black-blue sky and liberate that same desire in proliferating speech. A subterranean and aerial progression made of a single Gothic line without beginning or end, a rhizome, a piece of strapwork. Something like Celtic illuminations, the "noodles" of 1900s architecture and Pollock, all throbbing away on the Web. But where to begin? Anywhere. Just no chronologies, okay? Barbier offers a thousand points of ingress. His work constantly comes across as pocked and tentacular. You would not expect this kind of cephalopod to hold out its right hand.

To start at the beginning is always to glimpse the end (to think in terms of decadence). Art is stifled and dying from excess historicity: the history of art, the history of philosophy, the history of science, etc. If you teach only that then you will always miss the immanence of paintings and texts. With Gilles Barbier, then, you must just walk in, take the first path you find, the picture/connection *du jour*. The more mixed his work gets, the denser the tangle of multiple entities, the greater the number of ways in. Neither end nor beginning, just a middle. Don't try to diachronically hierarchise such a larval profusion.

So here we go: *Le Moteur*, 2007 [Engine, 140 cm x 250 cm], about which Barbier says: "The engine works, but stops as soon it starts up, then starts up again, and stops again; it's constantly breaking down and starting up. You could say that the engine is at the junction of two states. Worms, which sometimes wriggle up into the mechanism, get caught

in the cogs. As if rolled and crushed, from one end they produce a ribbon and from the other the Bacon scream.

Meaning? Well, that Barbier produces machines, machinic works, and that this machinery oscillates between motivity and stasis and that at a number of joins this paradoxical state (vertiginous speed and catatonia) engenders flashes that are called signs. The sign crackles between and at the intersection of two propulsive regimes. But let us not be in too much of a hurry to understand what this means. The machine does not represent anything; it simply functions. This forked, fractalised world requires from its commentator a text that is itself polyglot, a viral and catastrophic form of writing; a poetics (in the sense of Ponge meeting Artaud) on the brink of the illegible and constantly instilled with dynamism by humour. The last thing you want to say is, "In Barbier's work I really like this, but not at all that," because that would surely mean missing the hidden invariant. The term "invariant" here definitely does not suggest some structure imposed from above, in a superior, globalising sense, something like the Structuralists' "signifier." On the contrary, Barbier's invariant is invented by an inchoate process and must be revealed in the same way. It is a reptile. It is totally immanent in its own programme, the way harmonics are immanent in a musical improvisation. Explain nothing. Don't try to be simple and clear, but help this art to unfold, to increase its existential potential for the public. Barbier's works do not require analysis, do not suggest any secrets to be interpreted. To heedlessly insist on justifying each element would be like trying to say that Newton's apple was a Golden Delicious or a Granny Smith. New work such as this calls for a new discourse. This will be written in the manner of a shuttle – yes, that's the word –, a shuttling text adding its own trajectories to all those that go and come in his work, that are constantly interweaving, collapsing into each other, knotting and coming undone, weaving and unweaving in deflagrating networks.

The machine is vitalist. Its working organises heterogeneities in such a way as to produce extra forces. It is always connected. Above all, in keeping with its definition by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, it proceeds by flows and interruptions. With Barbier there is endless sectioning and this only increases the number of connections. It is not a matter of structures or signifiers, but of connections open to the outside. In *Le Moteur* the worm is stuck, like a connection/interruption. It is part of the machine, not its

victim (like Charlie Chaplin in *Modern Times*). On one side, a non-signifying ribbon-body, a pure segment devoid of organs, a totally decoded body. And, on the other, this cry, as an expression limited to eructating its "Ouch!" and "Ouille" in what is the minimal cry of the larval subject. The cry that preceded articulate language, the degree zero of language that splats out a message drowned in the a-signifying. All this constitutes the Barbierian machine, its interlacing of disparate multiplicities, prone to dispersion but solidly organised in a corpus of forces. That is indeed the privilege of certain machines which are pure intensity. For example, in *Le Moteur* the retinal, optical effects – the "Op Art" side of the picture, is tangible proof of the short-circuits that both immobilise and animate it. Op Art has an inclination (as in fact did Tinguely, a genius of the stumble and breakdown, wrongly enrolled in the Denise René stable under the heading of kinetic art) to provoke sudden bursts, flashing and crackling in which fluxes are superimposed on checks in a blinding electrical back and forth. But Barbier goes much father than the reversible lightning of Vasarely and Co. What interests him is the resonance of coupled series, truly heterogeneous connections of series, with contents and processes: narratives of spaces.

Le Moteur organises the coexistence of three types of semantic code, which take the mutating form of a single ribbon. As Barbier states, "There is obviously something of the speech bubble about this, and writing is inscribed as it is in old paintings. However, the idea of the ribbon comes from the computer ribbon in the famous Turing machine [...] onto which have been stuck the molecular ribbons of proteins and amino acids, and more especially the twisted ribbons of biological replicators." The idea here is not to contrast a socio-cultural mega-machine with the micro-machine of artistic desire; belated Romantics will do that for us. Barbier looks at the different coding operations whereby desire is constructed stratum by stratum, and stratum in stratum. It is a machine that encodes ribbons and cuts them. And the inevitable result of these semi-random encodings that Barbier regularly develops as probabilities and giant numbers is that it will or will not be. For him, the copy introduces difference into repetition, the smallest difference within the most implacable (or stupid) repetition. When the Western aesthetic and collective mindset has understood this we will finally get beyond that recurrent expressionism burdened with the death drive that unceasingly haunts our art and our thoughts. Expressionism is always the business

of a tortured ego, a sickness of expression. There is none of that in Barbier: the worm's scream is expressive, but not expressionist, for it is not made by a sick subject. Because his works are machinic, they are not limited to the expression of an isolated subject. And if, in *Le Moteur*, he used that small screaming mouth from the paintings of Francis Bacon, there can be no doubt that he did so knowing the words of that great painter: "I wanted to paint the scream more than the horror."

Quite clearly, *Le Moteur* is made up of a skein of lines that we must now disentangle. Let's start by identifying the different types. There are the ribbons/speech bubbles that appear in paintings of the Quattrocento: holy texts declaimed by angels and saints. "The writing is deposited on them," says Barbier. Indeed, what is spoken and repeated is Holy Scripture, not some invented speech. Next, the ribbons of a primitive computer (perforated boards) unfold and are perforated in order to programme a project for being. And they are immediately combined with the twisted ribbons of DNA, so as to encode the destiny of individuations in the name of programmes that are very profound. The computer for the sociologist, DNA for biology. All this starts taking on the appearance of topological curves. The Moebius strip drives the ribbons of computers and genetics mad. Where is the back, when does it come round to the front? How does the invariant of one surface become other? What happens before or after this ritornello-like synchrony? It becomes an aberration, and that is when acceleration is the same as breakdown. In comes the worm, the worm's scream. This, as Barbier states, is the ribbon compressed into two. On the one hand it obeys the codes and overcoding of encoding megamachines, on the other it emits the scream of a singular and victorious individuation. The cartoon bubble proclaims the subjectivity of the worm as proffered "between" regimes of coding.

Indeed, the first line was overcoding: "I announce to you, Mary, a New Covenant," says the Angel. The second and third were techno-biological codes. Line no. 1 of overcoding and line nos. 2 and 3 of coding constitute a hard stratum that could be called a "molar" base. There we see dominant, hierarchised agencies that are makers of meaning and laden with symbols. A whole collective arsenal powerfully encoded by sciences and myths is nested and deployed there. And Barbier does not resist. For him, the molar regime of signs (a dictionary!) is indissociable from the molecular regime (the copyist's mistakes). He activates supple lines (like that surprising *Élevage de singularités*

[Singularities Breeding] consisting of curved mountains rising out of a hard tiled floor) that pass through the molar tissue of the hard strata. They are positive and molecular lines of flight, that is to say, singular territorialities which actualise the big molar lines packed to bursting with religious, political, aesthetic, economic and social codes.

Why is *Le Moteur* constantly at risk of breaking down? Because the molar lines that it contains (and entangles with other molecular lines and lines of flight) stratify and organise the space of images. They are as peremptory as a plinth, a pedestal. One could see *Le Moteur* as a petrification, as vitrified tiling in which the hard strata form materials that immediately territorialise the slightest movement. That would be terrifying, for the strata invited by Barbier as bunches of physico-chemical, organic, anthropomorphic and aesthetic ribbons could then imprison the intensities of desire and mortally fix processes of singularisation. But, luckily, along comes the worm! It is contemporaneous with the big molar lines that grind it up, while at the same time it is produced by them as a residue. It is the surplus, or deficit. But it is the sign of an individuated production. In fact, *Le Moteur* is a reptilian weave throughout, and it should be seen as a differential of speeds and slowness (an essentially machinic process) in which the pipe, the tunnel, the airport corridors, the hypermarket, the boa constrictor, and the consumer's oesophagus appear as so many declensions of their perfect image, their common denominator: the worm.

Readers familiar with the works of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari will have identified in this introduction a series of themes expounded by these two authors in their book *Mille Plateaux* [*A Thousand Plateaus*]. Of particular interest is their theme of "becoming-animal." Barbier's lines of flight are concretised by his use of the worm as ideal subject. Crushed by the hard rotors of *Le Moteur*, these earthworms (or tapeworms) produce a new ribbon whose body manages to totally escape all the other ribbons mentioned above, and, on the other side, a scream. Here a becoming-larva signals the deterritorialising line of flight that is constantly exceeding the apoplectic machine of *Le Moteur*.

What is formative and foundational, in art, is not the symbol-laden image, nor the form in representation, but fields of energy, pre-individual stirrings, the stirring of the World. Freud picked the wrong universe when he interrogated the *Mona Lisa* via the smile of the Mother. He should have

started with the elliptical turbulences of the Flood. With Barbier, it all starts at the molecular level, as it does with all true seekers. He never starts with a pre-formed or formatted subject. Always ribbons, lines, pipes – a kind of formlessness still empirically undecided. Untimely crawling for a scene yet to be set up.

PAINT IT BLACK

Barbier's great migration ventures into a vertiginous temporal abyss. The darkness that upholsters his works is the night of the galaxies.

When Barbier draws or paints black, he does so with the shadows of the astrophysicist. Gone is Baroque chiaroscuro or even the blacks and whites of the cinematographer. This is cut from a very different cloth. It is another darkness. There's just no imagining its immensely traversable opacity! It's an *all-over*, a surface with neither ground nor edge whose flows and fringes are captured by Barbier. Not a colourless filling (but then "black is a colour" as some French ad for Portugal has it). Nothing carboniferous. What we are seeing here is a kind of surfing on the edge of a breaking wave called the "Universe." Neither Rembrandt, nor Steichen, nor Orson Welles saw the sheet unfurling. It is neither auroral nor crepuscular. It is black. That, Gilles Barbier understood, is what he would have to make his work from. Neither the angsty black of Goya, nor the Pascalian *dubito à la Georges de La Tour*, and certainly not a monochrome speculation about the end of painting, as per Ad Reinhardt. There is in Barbier's blacks something that escapes even music. A kind of unfathomable thinness with nowhere to hide. In a word, astronaut stuff. Night ahead, black behind, a chill and silent splendour all around.

And that is why Barbier's works spread this darkness all the way to the furthest edges where he must finally draw and try to write in the white "reserve." These whites leap out, compacted by the pressure of an omnivorous blackness. They are encircled by the cosmos and its intergalactic becoming. Hence the abundance of bubbles throughout Barbier's painted work. They are cries, surges, outpourings of messages that come when the breaking wave of black reaches the extreme limits of life and compresses them.

And Barbier's sculptures, I hear you say, how do those relate to the blacks? To me it's obvious. We are the black. These figures of drunkards, of suicides, of demonstrators, his grotesque dwarves and gardeners loom up amidst what is our own

darkness. They clamour for a strident brightness because humanity is lapping at their feet like a tide of night. Seen by a humanity that, it seems, is ready to forget the "blue planet," they can only scream out the clinical clarity of their clinical presence, something that seems neither dead nor alive. Something that no longer has to make a difference. It is there uttering messages, not to the big blue, but to an immense blackness whose vanguard is human beings. For Barbier is not being ironic and does not ask false questions that are already rich in answers. He does it humorously: the universe has no meaning, Earth likewise, and as for mankind, don't ask! Everything has less and less meaning: long live nonsense. The laughter of the pre-Socratics, of Nietzsche, of Rabelais and Woody Allen. Never has joyfully jocose art been made in such a desperate situation. The public, the masses, humanity, constitute a kind of endless soot. There is no need to go all the way back to Nietzsche to perceive this, or to harbour some ensuing fascist bad thoughts. You only need switch on the TV, look at the crowd, listen to the opinion polls, etc. If the Earth, its biodiversity and its habitability are going down the pan, it is because of our own night. Christians saw this as the approach and even the victory of sin. And they were right, on that point at least. "We must be watchful," they said. "Vigilant." And that is what Barbier is, like all those artists and thinkers who connect with the power of meaning: "keeping a lookout." These wax figures should be understood as watchmen, sentinels at the outposts of despair.

There is no need to dive into the sumptuous shadows of science fiction to comment on this. I think that Barbier's wax figures, hemmed in by shadowy, mute and blind fluxes, are simply expressing the infinite misunderstanding between art and the public. And I am not talking about contemporary art here, or even the moderns! Works from the past, too, are silently submerged in the black slick of the unseen, unread and unthought. This is not an elitist idea, just the way things are, a matter of statistics. And too bad for the demagogues. One day someone's going to have to say that some books are more relevant than others, that there are works and approaches that intensify meaning. So, Gilles Barbier, surrounded by the pack of noise, struggles to be obvious. Don't look for the meaning, see how it works! He writes and draws, takes the two channels cumulatively: I show you and I tell you. This takes us back to those blessed times when text and image cohabited in painting. Comic books know all about that and they're very much Barbier's contemporaries. But it's not so simple. Now the

cosmic-human soot is darkened, growing denser, more enduring. So one must resist and resist again: copy, copy, copy, chatter, accumulate, multiply. Barbier's work would love to be able to welcome the entropic darkness of humanoids with simplicity. But he cannot manage it and the situation has become untenable. A tumultuous black misunderstanding compels him to agitation.

Barbier's art rolls out its black carpet before us. And now it is diffracting. His questions immediately oblige him to look back, upstream of our planetary drift. World's end, wreckage, classification and moves – Barbier's world is also the world of a big bang. "Why all this and not Nothing?" It is a limit question battered by atheism. What was it like five seconds before the choke was pulled and the whole caboodle exploded all over the universe, in every galaxy? What? Samuel Beckett has asked the question that will plunge everyone, believers included, into an abyss of perplexity: "But what on earth was God playing at five minutes before the Creation?" As for Barbier, he prefers to put a few million years between himself and that very uncomfortable point 0 in order to throw himself into probabilistic suppositions. What were the chances, given the billions of combinations of atoms, proteins and acids, of life coming about? Making art with such a perspective (but the word is inadequate) is almost impossible. Does not the famous biologist Richard Dawkins say in the *The Blind Watchmaker* that the probability of the first viruses appearing on our planet are the same as those of a die ending on the same figure in six million consecutive rolls? And he continues in the same book: "Without a doubt, two thousand chimpanzees bashing away at typewriters will one day end up writing 'Hamlet.' But I don't feel like waiting for that to happen."²

When one creates one is necessarily in the dark. One meets no one. One is unaccompanied. Barbier, for example, is the stowaway on his own craft – a worm in the hold of Noah's Ark: alone, without even a female, because it is androgynous and segmentable. Cut it in two and you get a billion little worms. Alone and extraordinarily populous. They say that Earth is turning into a desert. But with Barbier it is overpopulated with aliens, with particles, alterities and fragments. Even his blacks are populations, nebulae of life and language. I am tempted to call them "ink blacks," but providing the ink comes from a laser printer cartridge. "Black is not black," contrary to what the song claims. Van Gogh said he could make out fifty of them in the paintings of Franz Hals.

In Barbier, an eye motivated by the imperceptible – in other words, a gaze concerned by painting – catches in his smooth velvet of liquid ebony something of the powdery grain of the infinitesimal. Am I seeing things? Not at all: great painting embodies the spirit in a molecular mode and this can only be done by exploring the limits, the imperceptible becoming of the visible and the living. It is untimely and necessary. One must go and look, become a seer, detect the micro-events beneath the images. For Barbier, the point is to reach the edges of an epiphanous tessitura. Give a mediocre painter some black (or white, or any other colour) and watch them spread an inert, fatal and totally inexpressive opacity. The blacks of Combas or Adami, for example, do not resonate, are not vibrant with any internal powderiness. Likewise the plaster-thick grisailles of Ming. But when black is raised to the point of splendour, by Caravaggio, Frank Stella, Rothko, Soulages and Sugimoto, it becomes pure expressiveness, that is to say, it reaches that point of intensity where matter becomes mental expression and spirit is expressed as matter. Making the powdery matter of a printer expressive the way Barbier does with gouache.

Barbier's blacks are cosmic and *photocopic*. They are made of printer ink and starry sky. They are celestial velvet. Barbier's blacks spread between two primary states of the universe whose mode of connection in time science struggles to grasp. In other words, a first state (300,000 years after the big bang) of a very dense homogeneity and an extreme uniformity, and a second state two billion years after the big bang, where the exchange of galactic seed and complex fluctuations took place. What is the real depth of this universe that has become our own? Barbier's always-even blacks suggest this (at least as far as the Virgo supercluster, 400 million light years from Earth), before they collide with images of unlikely life and heterogeneous formations.

Barbier's blacks are astronomic, and connected to explorations in weightlessness. But they are, just as much, subterranean, since worms live in them. They are skies and crypts, opacified immaterialities, habitable non-places. Nesting is done there and at the same time life floats there. The most important thing for Barbier is to manage to get his astonishing elements of memory and becoming to cohabit (co-exist). On one side, he piles up knowledge (memories with collective claims), and on the other, he loses all moorings. He has a need of territorialities, a kind of infancy of art founded on his own childhood, but

he is too well aware of the traps to let himself get boxed in. Consequently, he is constantly deterritorialising whatever might block off his lines of flight: school, the couple, family, society, great art, etc. The worm here is the very corpus of these lines, that which transforms all circular limits into aligned segments. This worm is capable of finalising the accord of the deepest underground to the broadest airiness in a single black stall. This is the ideal surface of inscription for Barbier: an astral, geological blackboard, that is to say, a surface that invents, and is at once material and immaterial. The painter's surface.

In experimental physics there is more and more talk of the "foam of space-time" and "string theory." For a particle astronaut, "sliding" means going beyond the ultimate barrier of matter (its limited entities derived from the atom) and plunging into a tessitura, a foam made of open or closed strings on Planck's scale of length, that is, a distance in the order of 10^{-35} metres. The tessitura of matter (space-time) vibrates there like membranes: hence the use of the terms "foam" and "bubble." To sum up: our universe is merely a very singular bubble that drifted loose about fifteen billion years ago, parallel to the development of "multiverses" existing beyond our time and our space which were the foam of a universe where chaos is constantly being regenerated. This would then engender bubbles of universes with unstable connections in a state of ongoing mutation. And what if art went for a stroll out there, without annexing the terrain of the boldest sciences? That is the complex lather on which Barbier surfs. This perforated black, the sliding foams, the disparate and connected bubbles, strings, and infinitesimal vibrations are all actors in a gigantic opera. A soap opera, for he sees simultaneously the soap and the music, the foam and the stage: "I had a scientific education, thanks to which I have a general understanding of the great contemporary ideas, in which I follow developments with the same interest as I take in art and literature. The architecture of my work is founded on certain concepts which were indeed formulated by the great scientific revolutions of the twentieth century. But I must insist on the fact that these concepts, beyond the references that they designate, imply within their original disciplines a way of seeing and thinking that is radically new and that integrates into its dynamic uncertainty, dispersion and multiplicity. These are all tools that can be used to track the misfortunes of form, unity and singularity: a slap in the face to what one could

call the motif (which as a result becomes a variable, or a moment, as in any other equation). The consequences are huge. But the work also consists in qualifying these concepts within the fluidity of a permanent and critical exchange with other fields. This ensemble constitutes the SOUP.

My methods, on the contrary, are not subject to any defined constraint; sometimes they have a hard rind, sometimes a soft one, they can be dense or full of holes, fresh or ripened in alcohol, industrial or hand-moulded, pasteurised or rustic. They accompany dispersion and achieve definition at the moment when coagulation accidentally occurs. Please understand by all this that the method is FORMING."

Such undertakings are violent in a number of ways. We are forced to go and see, forced to face the ineffable, forced to understand and forced to come back. Such is the violence of limits. That is why, with Barbier, the body sometimes bursts, is dispersed and eviscerated, falls apart and is scattered. Or why swarms of black logos tattoo an old woman's naked body. And one could speak here of cruelty, when the wrinkled skin is more like the screen-limit of a big system for marking and overcoding as part of commercial strategy. The pack of brands chooses the wrong target and is left suspended in the face – already – of death. Something like a truth comes forth from this concertina collision. But it is never a matter of torture. The exploration of limits, which for Barbier are "foamy" surfaces, has nothing to do with the sacrificial tradition in which some contemporary artists indulgently wallow. For Barbier there cannot be any torture because there is no longer a centred, contained subject here who is forced to talk, to answer to the inquisitorial ideologies. It is "elsewhere," like the hero of Terry Gilliam's *Brazil* at the end of his adventure. And so now comes the free roar of signs, Barbier's version of Rabelaisian verbal diarrhoea.

THE PLURAL OF THE LARVAL SUBJECT

Gilles Barbier has absolutely no wish to say or show that the worm is himself or some other specific person. The worm is a multiplicity that refuses the isolated subject. On its own it is already several. It teems and proliferates, exactly like the unconscious when it is liberated from the centred subjectivity that hardened it into a single layer. The worm is a crowd, a murmur, a formation. A worm never exists on its own because its head and its tail are ready for other segmentations. One should not try to number worms. One can reckon only forms, and the

worm is of the order of innumerable multiplicities, like snowflakes in a Bruegel painting or the hydrogen atoms in a Turner painting. The middle of the worm is the subterranean rhizome within which it is constantly moving, causing endless variations of constantly changing distances. Artists like Gilles Barbier and Wim Delvoye strive to capture living beings, not from head to toe, but through the mouth and anus. They are fascinated by the anal machine as a new means of individuation. Western thought has massively repressed the anus, reducing it to the shame of negative privacy. In contrast, the work of Miro, Antonin Artaud, Kurt Vonnegut and Gilbert and George clearly indicates a desire to express via the anus a whole, singular field of openness, an openness to the forces both of the unconscious and of the universe. The solar anus... Delvoye's techno-scatological *Cloaca* and Barbier's celestial, anal worm are new machines of subjectification. Barbier explains the conditions thus: "As of 1996 there was the 'fart organ' – my apologies to the Belgians but the air (the music) came before the substance (shown only once at Art Basel in 1996, then majestically ignored, to my great regret). I think it is useful here to remind readers that in both pieces the exterior is brought outside and horizontalised. There's the same concern with transparency, the same revealing of transit. [...] Wim takes the substance, I take the air. He gets the object, I get the music (the alchemical glass 'the fart organ' eventually produces birdsong). But for Wim and for me, the idea is the same: the relay, the internal tube brought out and falling to the ground. Exteriorised and horizontalised, the digestive system becomes what I call 'the oneiric Vaseline factory.' The body gutted like an angler fish (because that's what this operation leaves [we speak of the spectacularised organ, but of course nobody points to what remains: the body without its 'inside']) necessarily remembers its guts, and goes on dreaming of this ptosis, of this 'slow slide," of this secret and serene digestion."

As for the wormhole, it is just as intense as its passenger-worker-consumer. For Barbier, then, perforating a mass or a surface has nothing to do with wounding, removing or castrating; rather, it effects a switching in the movement of beings and, above all, in the speed of their particles. Hence Barbier's delight in launching rockets, in firing guns, in placing comic-book bubbles in the dark sky. These are all positive holes. Such moments push the image or object towards molecular multiplicities. And it is there, between two or three regimes of signs, that Barbier brings about the work as pure event.

MOULD AND MUSSEL³

In his magnum opus, Gilbert Simondon insists on the need to give up the old schema of hylomorphism (the relation of inert matter to an active form), which comes down to replacing the moulding of matter/form with a modulation of forces and materials.⁴ In *Sans titre (Vers) [Untitled (Verse/ Worms)]*, 2003, Gilles Barbier has a young woman in a grotto say: “I think it’s a mould. One puts little children who are learning language into the mouth of the MOULD and at the other end WORMS come out. These joyful slides are secret worm moulds.” All around her, worms are busy in the stellar darkness. Some are talking, others copulating, others have been sliced up. All around, aeroliths are like worms pending, or worm droppings, or their scattered territories. It is a prodigious ensemble, and it’s all there: the worm is indeed an embryonic machine transforming the infancy of language into modulations (fluid moulds). It is a choreography that is at once aerial and subterranean: the woman is talking to a kind of miner in a cavity. But this “sac” is in fact the terminal peduncle of a worm. “Your pants are showing” says the old explorer of earth. Thus we run the (multicoloured) gamut of the libido, from primary sexual connections all the way to modesty. But we never get to see the minge of all this moulding.

Indeed, the worm presents states of the body that come “before” a verticalised organic representation. It crawls, is traversed, is severed, seems to have neither head nor tail, nor top nor bottom, not even organs distributed over its limbs. It is an anamorphosed egg! A never-ending sketch. A creature verging on formlessness. What traverses it are intensities or regions of activity animating a wave of variations all along its axis, from one pole to another. Thus the worm belongs to the paradigm of the hole. It is an orifice elongated, a tunnel or tube, consisting only of thresholds, zones, changes of speed. Like a hole, in Barbier’s thought and work, it is complete, knows no emptiness.

MATTER AND ITS EXPRESSION

The worm eats. Day or night, that’s all it seems to do. It cuts through matter. Deep down. The surface? Never heard of it. And therefore not the clarity of signs, either. The worm could illustrate these words of Artaud’s on Lewis Carroll (perverse peruser of surfaces): “[...] When one digs out the caca of existence and of language, the poem must smell bad.”⁵ But the worm talks; it emits spoken texts, all surface! And the question that once again Barbier puts to modernity is thus the fundamental one of the expression of the depths and the relations

with the surface, in terms of effects. The trap for the moderns, as Greenberg showed, given the plitudinousness of the flatness that he inflicted on American abstraction and that was adopted by Minimalism, was that it rejected the sieve-like body through which the designation of the depths gets in phase with the surface meaning. We need to designate the dark so that it may resonate in the epidermis of meaning. And conversely, dig and make holes in the surface so that it can capture the deepest drives.⁶ Meagre depth (thinness) is what characterises Manet, Mondrian and Picasso. By emphasising sliding surfaces and energy-holes, Barbier is constantly evoking that. His poetic of the expressive surface in the name of depth has chosen the worm, a gastronome worm (and gastro-phore, or gastropod, for it is no more than a long belly), a cosmonaut worm, a rhetorician worm, in order to nest in its own segments and burrows its possible triple body: porous, fragmented, dissociated.

When there is speech in Barbier’s work, it always comes through boring and geysers; it shatters into pieces via holes and rockets, the utterances of a mouth immediately diffracted into a barrier of murmuring coral. But then is a coral reef, like the one in Australia that is 2,000 kilometres long, still an individual? And if it talks, where does it talk from, and through what? How many mouths to swallow the salt water and spit it out in words?

For Barbier, the language of the worm is similar to the state of decomposition of the soil on which it feeds. To be pronounceable and audible (consumable), it must be broken up into little bits, into fertile debris. In modern literature, the purpose of logorrhoea is always to fragment language and make it express the intimacy of vocal, psychic and symbolic matter. “Cocoa trees on cocoa farms don’t bear coconuts, they yield cocoa!” (*The Bald Soprano*, Eugène Ionesco). “*Chère, chère, chère peluche ! Depuis combien de trous, depuis combien de galets n’avais-je pas eu le mitron de vous sucrer !*” (*Un mot pour un autre*, Jean Tardieu). With Barbier, as with all artists with a schizoid tendency, every word is physical and language does not express things at a distance, but instead intrudes into and becomes confused with a new state of the body. The worm is the most successful at making language inexpressive, although doing this requires real effort! Speaking-eating are two mutually exclusive operations. When they are mixed (the case with Barbier’s worm), the result is a kind of terrifying cannibalism. Lewis Carroll offers a magnificent example of this: “ ‘You look a little shy: let me introduce you to that

leg of mutton,’ said the Red Queen. ‘Alice–Mutton: Mutton–Alice.’ The leg of mutton got up in the dish and made a little bow to Alice; and Alice returned the bow, not knowing whether to be frightened or amused. ‘May I give you a slice?’ she said, taking up the knife and fork, and looking from one Queen to the other. ‘Certainly not,’ the Red Queen said, very decidedly: ‘it isn’t etiquette to cut any one you’ve been introduced to.’”⁷ When Barbier’s worm speaks from its little cannibal mouth, however, it does not mix food and language in a single organ; rather, it offers to show their narrow frontier, the very thin line between them (thinner in the worm than in other species) where meaning is articulated. Of course, this frontier oscillates and trembles. It could at any moment turn into a scream zone.

Does a worm scream? Yes, but musically. The question put to language by the worm is that of the transition from the animal cry to the musical note, a question raised a thousand times by the great jazz musicians, and in particular the tenor saxophonists: Sonny Rollins, Coleman Hawkins, Ben Webster and, above all, John Coltrane. How do you get the metal to holler by making it a fusion of aurochs, slaves and Mozart? It is a great complaint and an immense rage. Something that travels all the distances of caravans and slave ships all the way to the cotton fields. Something that begins and ends in the wise skull of an elephant. Like a statue facing the tidal wave of History or a sentinel on the edge of chaos and violence. That, without a doubt, is where Barbier stands. And that is why he is an important artist. There can be no art without “that” playing some part in it. It is not a matter of illustrating human violence, but of being equivalent to the universal violence. Being worthy of such events (30 million Africans deported in two centuries) means tracing out something suitably mad. Like the speaking worm that, as I write, finds its black and blue notes.

“What is more serious,” asks Gilles Deleuze, “to speak food or to eat words?”⁸ Speak/eat, says the worm, why choose? The worm speaks. And if it is cut in two in my mouth, asks Barbier, then who is talking, which end? For he must doubt the simple speaking subject, the solitary expressive subject. He moves on at once to assemblages and utterances. A black hole can speak, an isolated organ likewise, or an object. The right question asked by Barbier is: to what do the worm’s fluxes of speech/writing (bubbles) relate? Or, what is the worm currently trying to “dig” in the language it speaks? By inventing the bubble, did not the comic strip overturn the locutionary orthodoxy

of official language? And if the vermicular were no more than a mould for versifying, a tube into which one introduces “children learning language” and that one gets back at the other end in the shape of verse?⁹ Horrible and magnificent machine for making linguistic sausages.

THE EVENT OF THE END, AND IN PRAISE OF ABUNDANCE

Start at the end. Think of the end, not as the final phase of a beginning already doomed to end, but as a big and very fine event in itself. The only fact worth considering. Barbier = playful millenarianism. Endgame. Supreme jubilation à la Beckett. So let’s start with that. Let’s strangle that stupid fear of the final chapter, of the last night, of the terrorising death of everything. Ah! The death of art foretold! “Painting has been decadent ever since Lascaux,” said Miro. So it’s hardly surprising that for most of us it seems livid, moribund, in a never-ending agony. Along comes Barbier with his spaceships, his survival rafts, his shipwrecks, his copying of copies. An apotheosis of the Apocalypse. It is an opera of brainstorming. For it to survive, to have a chance of staying afloat on the soup of chaos, it does effectively need to swarm or crawl. “*Grouillez-vous*,” Barbier seems to be saying. And this portmanteau expression combines vermin and speed. And that’s the point: Barbier = *le grouillais*, *le grouillamini*, *la grulescence* – vermicular agitation amidst a vast differential of speeds.

The worm is close to the cockroach, not because of its morphology but because of its milling movement. This is the primordial image of all animality. Everything that stirs and teems and wriggles reminds us in one way or another, carapace or not, of larvae. We can see that Barbier’s imagination has identified and perfectly explored this animal paradigm. It goes from invertebrates to robots, from vibrating lash to tentacles. Here is a whole sector of a reptilian “discursivity.” A radiant hell. There was an artist six centuries ago who experienced something similar: Hieronymus Bosch. Millenarianism, too: the Middle Ages were waning; God withdrawing. The miniaturisation beloved of the Van Eyck brothers was proving untenable. The world was becoming a crumbling anthill. Everything was going to the dogs – left, right and centre, every which way. Vermin was everywhere. The substance of the real itself was worm-eaten. However, with Barbier the obsession with the End of Time and the worm-eaten corpse of History assumes a different appearance. The end of the world is an old story. There is not a single mythology or religion that does not mention it. As for science

fiction, a literary genre that it would be wrong to consider minor, it has always found inspiration in the idea. No surprises there, really: life on Earth began a few billion years ago, it's going to have to die some day, just like the living beings and civilisations of which it is constituted. But the Apocalypse theme has changed somehow since the advent of scientific thought. Before, the final cataclysm had no date. If the text by Saint John the Evangelist measured it out in blasting trumpets and broken seals, that end of time nevertheless eluded chronology, belonged to another time and announced a new world. But the secular world began to conceive all this in precise terms, aware that in two or four billion years from now, the sun will explode, annihilating our planet in the fire of its supernova. No more redemptive utopias.

But whether it is mythical or astrophysical, with or without a last judgement, the end of the world is irreducible and human beings must now try to survive with this horrible thought: "All this, elephants, Chartres cathedral, the Amazonian rainforest, the plays of Shakespeare, the paintings of Vermeer, etc. – all this will vanish into thin air! The idea of this global and collective disappearance of terrestrial life is that much harder to bear because it also marks the end of all memory. The death of Earth and its treasures, for we are very probably alone in the Universe, alone and without heirs. The artist Barbier is keenly attuned to all these things. A double apocalyptic theme runs through everything he has done: 1) We must archive, copy, duplicate as much as we can in order to create a hypermemory in the form of a lyrical encyclopaedia of despair. 2) We must make plans to move, build hypotheses and devise space ships so that we can fly away and go look elsewhere. Clone everything and carry that encyclopaedia away on a new *Raft of the Médusa!* Of course, we have "everything," and this suggests a certain prolixity in the art of the miniature. This is where his approach becomes fascinating, when the superabundance of themes and images opposes a promise of annihilation. So, the world is doomed to destruction? So, this wonderful bio-noosphere was just a fragile artefact in the middle of an infinite silence? "Fine," ponders Barbier, "then we'll go for heroic and humorous proliferation. We'll make the galaxies echo with impregnable laughter, a *homerikoos geloïos* fractalised into infinite echoes." Already, in their time, the prospect of chaos made Rabelais and Brueghel bow to a similar need. All the great writers, musicians, painters and philosophers were prolix: Klee, Pollock, Warhol, Dostoyevsky, Kant, Alexandre Dumas, Rubens, Basquiat, Deleuze,

Hugo, etc. The only possible response to the Apocalypse is not the melancholy of the postmoderns but productive generosity.

But vermin inspire disgust and fear. When Michel Houellebecq describes them, he uses a whole arsenal of clinical words, handles the putrefaction with tweezers, like a forensic doctor. And that is not all: he also needs to conduct the devouring progression of worms towards a reassuring exit: the geometry of the coffin. "His grandfather died in 1962. In temperate climates, the body of a bird or mammal first attracts specific species of flies (*Musca*, *Curtonevra*), but once decomposition sets in, these are joined by others, particularly *Calliphora* and *Lucilia*. Under the combined action of bacteria and the digestive juices disgorged by the larvae, the corpse begins to liquefy and becomes a ferment of butyric and ammoniac reactions. In three short months, the flies will have completed their work. They are succeeded by hordes of coleoptera, specifically *Dermestes*, and Lepidoptera like *Aglossa pinguinalis*, which feed on fatty tissue. Larvae of the *Piophilila petasionis* feed on the fermenting proteins with other coleoptera called *Corynetes*. [...]"

Bruno could still see the beautiful black coffin with a silver cross. It was a soothing, even happy image: he knew his grandfather would be at peace in such a magnificent coffin."¹⁰

Here we can see at once what separates and even opposes Barbier's "vermigenic" vision from Houellebecq's, let's say, vermifugal conception. The former is a lyrical modern who meets death with a kind of pre-Socratic insolence. Barbier's "larval subject" is not "qualified" in any way, and can therefore face without perishing the terrible movements of life and thought at the crepuscular dawn of the twenty-first century. The latter, in spite of the qualities of his Flaubertian style, is disillusioned with modernity, haunted by the death drive and hemmed in on all sides. His sophisticated Self is chained to a nightmare that he cannot bear.

MINIATURE MULTIPLICITIES

Some artists, like Braque, Chardin and Morandi, are all about continuity: they spent a lifetime exploring and going deeper into the same reality. And there are even those for whom repetition is more important than difference: Saenredam, Ad Reinhardt, Toroni. In such cases, critical commentary is simplified – or so you would expect. And then there are creators of multiplicities and differences, whose production is superabundant. With them, things get complicated, contradictory, go astray and even become dispersed and mutually exclusive. Gilles

Barbier belongs to this family in which Picasso, Frank Stella, Tony Cragg, and Dubuffet have surprised and even discouraged their fair share of punters. Barbier even strikes me as an untimely and impertinent nutcase who defies the eyes and the understanding.

"Just don't let it look like a work of art!" This was a widespread obsession in the 1970s. With Barbier there's no need to worry. What he does overflows art. It could even be a kind of "intermediary" art, the best art of all, the kind that amuses children as much as it fascinates intellectuals. Barbier, cousin of Molière, Chaplin and Hergé. Art is something to be avoided, in fact, for specific art, specialist art, art for the art world, is a bad concept. But the only way to get away from art is through art (and not by invoking sociology, politics, or what have you). And that's what Barbier manages to do: to blow art apart with its own superabundance.

How does one accompany and clarify such disparities without simplifying or reducing? What logical or aesthetic connection might there be between Barbier's different themes? Between a surfboard, an earthworm, blowing your brains out, a banana skin, *The Illustrated Larousse*, Emmenthal cheese, the end of the world, a naked and tattooed old woman, etc.? At first glance (and quite possibly several more), all this might look like one great madreporic shambles, an infinite Baroque *morula*, a centrifuge of density. Neither body nor cosmos, but organs scattered in the darkness of a "pluriverse" (a portmanteau from which Lewis Carroll lovers will have no trouble disentangling the root of vermicular alongside plural, universe and verse).

Gilles Barbier's coherence can be traced back to the hazardous zones of "montages" such as these. But couldn't we catch him in red-handed incoherence when he speaks so passionately of "sliding," "foam," "wetness" – a general viscosity of which the worm offers a fine example, and yet, at the same time, of "miniaturisation," which is an activity in which clarity and detail are essential? Can viscosity and miniatureness add up to and cohabit in a style? Hieronymus Bosch, whose marshes are as precise as Van Eyck, could help us think this out and encourage us in this direction. In his monumental book on the anthropological structures of the imaginary, Gilbert Durand assembles the four structures of what he calls "the nocturnal regime of the imaginary."¹¹ We will now see that these cover the full extent of Barbier's art, and thus discover the extreme coherence behind its heterogeneous strands.

The first structure, according to Durand, is that of duplication. He calls it "perseveration," and of course it concerns copies, as when dreams nest the same within sameness. This structure privileges stereotypes, particularly the repetition of major details, of anatomies. Here Barbier the passionate copyist already comes to mind. But there is more. Durand insists on the "viscosity" of this sensorimental structure. Here images are "extended" as much as they are "repeated." And the figure of the worm arises, as do the themes of earth, the burrow, the house and the chair, as examples of structures of intimacy. Even in the middle of the cosmos, Barbier traces out caverns, and, as a passionate copyist, he is also an artist of fluid interlocking. The worm speaks with him via segments that are viscous but neat.

The second anthropological structure of the nocturnal regime of the imaginary, says Durand, extends the viscosity of visual themes with an emotional and social viscosity. It is adhesive. It belongs to what Barbier understands by "sliding," "foam" and "wetness." The worm is coated with this. Everything thus agglomerates and agglutinates, following tribes, packs and swarms of worms. In this way Barbier refuses isolation and his collective viscosity tends towards a kind of socio-cosmic Great Whole, a thick and teeming soup.

The third structure heightens the second by means of colour. It transfigures viscosity into splinters and pulls it out of the mulch in which it might get bogged down. It is an ecstasy, in the sense that it carries the subject beyond itself, either by projecting it into the cosmos, or by dispersing it in cerebral explosions or ventral dissections. Or possibly both. It is here that Barbier emerges as a brilliant colourist. Coloured sensation enables him to flirt with a kind of Baroque mysticism.

Finally, the fourth structure confirms the role of miniaturisation. Durand uses the term "Gulliverisation" and insists on the meticulousness of the process and the obsession with details, particularly anatomical ones. The miniature therefore aims at the "big detail"; the overall miniature (Barbier's mega-maquette). Landscape rather than portrait! And even, to evoke the fundamental principle of the miniature – i.e., the inversion of values – rather a worm than a face! The smaller it is, the more intelligent it is. For the moderns (and since Chardin), the more modest the artistic motif, the closer it comes to the sublime. Gilles Barbier, a master of miniatures obsessive

about detail, can count on the worm and on the strip cartoon (a lowly creature and a minor art form) in order to achieve a successful *microcosmicising*.

To sum up: first, copying, as the viscosity of detail, and re-copying on an intimate scale. Then, develop viscosity at the relational level, then raise up towards the cosmos this double viscosity through the dazzle of colour. Finally, make the whole thing intelligible and sensible as “big detail” by means of miniaturisation. Thus copy-viscosity-miniature form a chain of arrangements of great structural coherence. But the point is not to gather or recentre these four phases under a single big top of meaning. Quite the contrary: copy, viscosity, splinter and miniaturisation are on each occasion blocks of signs moving on orbits that are very wide but have defined edges. What is crucial here is the transfer towards the exterior. By miniaturising, by constantly upping the ante with “super-maquettes,” Barbier partly renounces his empathies and sensible dimensions in order to have access, as master of operations, to the intelligible dimensions of his approach. To this he adds the pleasure of the miniature as a rescue technique that is at once scientific and playful. Claude Levi-Strauss has clearly demonstrated the importance of the miniature in art and Gaston Bachelard states that “every miniature is at once mastery and reverie.”¹² A place where we lose ourselves and learn to understand. Barbier fully agrees. He moseys around between collections of miniature trains and Marcel Duchamp’s *Green Box*. “When you miniaturise,” he says, “it means that you have given up trying to synthesise.” In a way, if you compress the copy you get the miniature. The digital microprocessors that can print the fifty volumes of an encyclopaedia on a single disc constitute the apotheosis of thousands of years during which sprites and Tom Thumb magnified the exploits of homunculi. “The smaller it is, the more intelligent it is,” say computer researchers. As Barbier shows, dwarves have genius: nanism and nanotechnology are the future of humanity.

Although he seems obsessed with conserving things, it would be wrong to believe that Barbier wants to pile up personal memories like blocks of childhood. That kind of memory is circular, carceral reproduction, an album of mendacious photos. The encyclopaedia (the illustrated dictionary being copied by Barbier) – although, etymologically, the word means the circle of taught knowledge (*egkuklios paideia*) – opens the transparent circus of knowledge. Revisited by Barbier, the encyclopaedia becomes a spiral. Endless. It multiplies connections with a maximum number of polyvocal extensions. That

is why Barbier loves to slip in little mistakes. These little stumbles excite to an extreme degree the lines of flight at the centre of the circle on which knowledge of the social, political and cultural field is based. And even if he were one day to get to the end of his task, Barbier would only start it all again. He is already thinking about it. The encyclopaedia then becomes a ritornello and no longer desires to be an edifice. With a bit of imagination, one could say that Barbier’s secret wish is to make the dictionary “sing.” And the worm? It apparently does not speak, but would sing nursery rhymes. “Music begins where painting ends,” they say. Well, we’ll see (and hear), by looking at the porous frontier that unites them. To hear painting and try to see music would, it seems to me, be an initiative worthy of Gilles Barbier. By getting the worm to sing/talk, he manages to attain that impregnable region where the voice can be seen and does no more than murmur.

THE SOFT,¹³ CHEESE

It is not surprising that Barbier should accord such prominence to cheese in his works. And cheese with holes in, thus forcing us to deal simultaneously with two threads in his poetics. Let’s leave the hole and its apparent emptiness aside for a moment and concentrate on cheese. Jean-Baptiste Botul, a contemporary French philosopher who (they say) is very interested in Sartre, Merleau-Ponty and Bachelard, has given us a book entitled *La Métaphysique du mou*, which will be of great help to us here: “When you think about it, cheese is perhaps the substance that (from a phenomenological point of view) most perfectly reveals the degrees of softness, from soft-soft to hard-hard, the dialectical negation of the soft, in the Hegelian sense, of course.”¹⁴ Botul then dreams of the flowing motility of Camembert cheese. His word for softness, “*mouillé*,” irresistibly brings to mind the “*mouillé*” (wetness) in which Barbier loves to disport himself.

The worm makes holes in the earth, the bullet pierces the suicide’s skull: arsehole, bullet hole,¹⁵ Gruyere or Emmenthal? It’s all about little and big holes. Is making a niche for oneself [*faire son trou*] a matter of ownership or rent? Barbier’s space is riddled with all kinds of holes. It is a world pitted and pocked. But he absolutely does not see these holes as lack or as an absence of matter. “It’s a question of energy,” he says, “a place where matter changes speed.” For him, “To make a hole is to traverse matter as a malleable energy field” – in other words, to overlook the difference between outside and inside, mouth and intestine, face and brain, and also, above all, between sedentary

(proprietary) space and nomad (rented) space. It would not be possible to extend the earthworm’s network skywards without such a dynamic concept of the hole. And that is how Barbier manages to be a troglodyte 500,000 light years from Earth. Making holes in space in this way enables him to innovate in fantasy. It means running on a minefield by encouraging “sky-worms” to turn away from arable, pastoral lands and wander in out-of-orbit circumvolutions.

S.F.

Without a doubt, Barbier’s main source of inspiration, what propelled him towards this Rabelaisian superabundance, is his knowledge and love of science fiction. SF has extended our World to infinite dimensions. It is an extensive force that brings forth new conditions of individuation. In itself and by its influence on cinema and cartoons, it gave twentieth-century humanity the notion of unlimited possibility, whereby the past lost its pertinence, and the apocalyptic future its mortal weight. One example out of ten thousand: Dan Simmons’ tale of the travellers to *Hyperion*: “The electronically outlined image was of a matte black attack carrier. The thing was impressive in the way only warships through the centuries had succeeded in being. [...] Incongruously streamlined with its four sets of boom arms retracted in battle readiness, its sixty-meter command probe sharp as a Clovis point and its Hawking drive and fusion blisters set far back along the launch shaft like feathers on an arrow.”¹⁶ When approaching Barbier’s work it is worth bearing in mind this “matte black” that goes from Palaeolithic flint to the archers at the battle of Agincourt and these machines from an imagined future. As a sci-fi connoisseur, Barbier defines two categories: “Postwar science-fiction: territorial, paranoiac, macroscopic, technological, in the manner of Van Vogt, Asimov and Herbert. Post-computer-science SF: mental, schizoid, nanoscopic, psychological, that of G. Egan, D. Simmons, P. K. Dick, V. Vinge, which is the kind that excites me.” And he adds: “I would like to insist on the Australian writer Greg Egan. He was very important to me, especially when it came to grasping the potential of a concept such as dispersion, and his books really clarified my intuitions on this subject. And then of course he’s Australian, from the Antipodes, and that’s important too. He understands better than anyone else corals, islands and archipelagos, the cultural decentring that you find only in that region of the world with its mix of descendants of all parts of Europe with Chinese from Hong Kong, Japanese, Indians, Polynesians and

Melanesians. A bit like the United States, but much warmer, without the weight, without the eschatology. It is only in those regions that people are really thinking about the plasticity of melanins; it is only in those regions that people know, deep down, that the centre is elsewhere, definitively (or, better, that it is the twisted invention of Westerners). He is a compatriot but most of all he is an inventor of chaoses, of diffraction, of ‘whirlpools’. To me, he is as important as E. A. Poe and P. K. Dick.”

GILLES BARBIER AND COMIX

Rather than try to find out exactly which addressee is talking through the worm’s mouth and body, it would surely be better to ask how it talks, in other words, what the use of the bubble implies in Barbier’s worm’s speech. This makes a world of difference! Nothing beats a physical study of a medium when it comes to understanding its possible meaning. A comic-book bubble may make a hole in the image, but it always remains subordinate to the drawing, within which it constitutes a sub-frame. With Barbier (as with Franquin or Régis Franc), it is explicitly polymorphous, going from scream and speech to text. But the worm itself is polymorphous, a mutant bender, its body a stretched bubble, like that of Doctor Festus, the hero created by Rodolphe Töpffer, the genius from Geneva who invented comics in the mid-nineteenth century,¹⁷ or like that of Gaston Lagaffe and Little Nemo when he undergoes his anamorphoses. For Barbier, the comic-book medium produces bodies/languages whose bubble constitutes the segment endowed with the greatest plasticity. Without the speech bubble, comics would never have been able to amble between noise and language, nor would they have been able to proceed by means of aggregation (Barbier loves them!), collision, multiple levels (which he knows well), twists and catastrophes (which Barbier triggers). The bubble is the strong point where the hole we fall into becomes in a nanosecond the mouth that swallows and the mouth that talks. It is what animates waves, tentacles, crimps and mastications. The bubble is verbal chewing gum that eludes typography just as Barbier’s worm eludes anatomical schemas. Indeed, a bubble mouthed by a weightlessly floating worm eludes the homogeneous unity of what the Ancients called the “cosmos” (a well-decorated, adorned, groomed world). What Barbier is activating here has to do with dislocation. We cannot even talk of a “universe” for the “un,” the One, is not “versed” in anything particular. The bubbles of Barbier’s worms, like those of Winsor McCay’s Little Nemo or Moebius’s Major Fatal, carry messages with no return, panoplies of pluriversal moments/states.

It is not surprising that Barbier, being steeped in science fiction and comics, has shown a keen interest in the astrophysical “string” and “wormhole” theories. Adventurous physicists have even worked on the equations of quantal worlds in order to explore the possibility of entering a corner of the Universe via a singularity then coming out in another spot of the same Universe via another singularity. These two singularities would then be connected by a kind of tunnel located not in ordinary space but in a “hyper-space” that resembles the subterranean passage linking two holes made by earthworms in the soil. It was indeed this resemblance that inspired the American physicist John Wheeler (b. 1911), who has always had a knack for inventing names that appeal to the public imagination (he coined the term “black hole”), to come up with the term “wormhole” for this linkage of two singularities. The wormhole is very similar to a black hole, except that it does not have a horizon/sphere that, once crossed, makes it impossible to turn back. Whereas journeys in black holes are strictly one-way, journeys in wormholes can be in both directions. You are free to enter, but also to come out and communicate with the rest of the world if the fancy takes you. They do not exercise cosmic censorship. Most of all, they have an extraordinary property that inspires physicists and science fiction writers: they make it possible to travel in time. Enter a wormhole in one direction and you will go into the future. Take the opposite direction, and you will go back into the past. Instead of being a spationaut, the wormhole enables you to become a traveller in time, in other words, a “chrononaut”!

But don’t be in a hurry to buy tickets: there are still plenty of problems to be solved before wormholes can be used as time machines. First of all, we don’t really know very well how to make them. We know that black holes are engendered by the gravitational collapse of massive stars running short on fuel. But what agent lies at the origin of the singularities that constitute the ingresses and egresses of wormholes? To answer that question, we need to call two protagonists to the rescue. First, quantum mechanics, the branch of physics that describes the infinitely small and has the gift of enabling the existence of the most unlikely phenomena. And second, gravity, with its power to bend space. The alliance between these two protagonists produces, as we have seen, a theory called “quantum gravity.” The laws of quantum gravity imagine the existence of tiny wormholes in space, their size 10^{-33} , with an infinitely short life span of 10^{-43} seconds. A photographic flash

would last 10 million billion billion billion times longer! “Wormholes appear and disappear in a frenzied cycle of life and death, like a kind of ‘quantum foam’ floating in the space around us.”¹⁸

TWINS

At the base of Barbier’s ideas and art there is an anxiety, one that is not only linked to apocalyptic millenarianism, but also has an existential, personal side. It plays out against a background of adolescent solitude. For each one of us, Barbier invents a psychic double, a kind of ideal twin that dispenses with the fear of solitude. This totally phantasmatic other opens the doors to his Pluriverses and thus enables a de-centred creative practice. In a sense, Rimbaud’s “I is an other” and Freud’s “uncanny” are small sideways steps that, rather than losing the Self, give it, as Barbier likes to say, “more space.” The whole point is to duplicate in order to reassure yourself and yet to differentiate in order to define oneself. It is not surprising that for Barbier Hergé’s Dupondts are ideal characters, for their difference is minimal and their echolalias are prodigious.

Gilles Barbier belongs in the modern lineage of new doubles that have broken with pairings such as D’Artagnan-Planchet, Don Juan-Sganarelle and Don Quixote-Sancho Panza. No more masters and servants. Tweedledum and Tweedledee, the twins that Lewis Carroll (that’s two *rs* and two *ls*) introduces to Alice, are lateral doubles. For Jean Baudrillard, there is a cold sadness here: “Horizontal madness, our madness, that of genetic confusion, of the scrambling of codes and networks, of biological and molecular anomalies, of autism – as opposed to the ‘vertical’ madness of yesteryear, the psychical madness, the transcendent madness of schizophrenia, that of alienation, of the inexorable transparency of otherness. Today what we are seeing, rather, are the monstrous variants of identity: that of the isophrenic, with no shadow, transcendence, Other or image; that of the autistic who has, as it were, devoured his double and absorbed his twin brother [...]. Identitary, ipsomaniacal, isophrenic madness. Our monsters are all manic autists. As products of a chimerical combination (even when this is generic), deprived of hereditary otherness, afflicted with hereditary sterility, they have no other destiny than desperately to seek out an otherness, for themselves by eliminating all the Others (Frankenstein – but this is also the problem of racism). Computers are also autistic, bachelor machines: the source of their suffering and cause of their vengeance is the fiercely tautological nature of their own language. Everywhere, we see

horizontal madness opposed to vertical.”¹⁹ But this disillusioned vision is certainly not Barbier’s, even if it must have got under his skin. He is no doubt closer to Raymond Queneau’s *Exercices de style*. Out of the hundred or so texts constituting *Exercices de style*, the one entitled “En partie double” [Double Entry] comes second in the book, immediately after the basic text, or Notation. Could the whole book be merely a set of variations on this initial doubling, with the most extravagant wording, the most sumptuous rhetorical effects, the colourful language being in a way simply a disguised copy of the same contents, from page to page doggedly showing the original text, as is. This double opens onto a series that by its principle is unlimited. And even if Queneau had stopped there, at the “Notation” and “Double Entry,” the two first texts of his *Exercices*, it would already have been too late to stop the vertiginous variations. Too late, because the axis of depth, the one through which the ancient double attained the mirror of Narcissus and the subject’s depth of soul, has disappeared in favour of a horizontal multiplication of copies: “Towards the middle of the day and at midday I happened to be on and got on to the platform and the balcony at the back of an S-line and of a Contrescarpe-Champerret bus and passenger transport vehicle which was packed and to all intents and purposes full. I saw and noticed a young man and an old adolescent who was rather ridiculous and pretty grotesque; thin neck and skinny windpipe, string and cord round his hat and tile. After a scrimmage and scuffle he says and states in a lachrymose and snivelling voice and tone that his neighbour and fellow-traveller is deliberately trying and doing his utmost to push him and obtrude himself on him every time anyone gets off and makes an exit. This having been declared and having spoken he rushes headlong and wends his way towards a vacant and a free place and seat. Two hours after and a-hundred-and-twenty minutes later, I meet him and see him again in the Cour de Rome and in front of the gare Saint-Lazare. He is with and in the company of a friend and pal who is advising and urging him to have a button and vegetable ivory disc added and sewn on to his overcoat and mantle.”²⁰

The Dupondts in *The Adventures of Tintin* act and stumble along exactly this kind of ice rink. They are symmetrical in terms of their physique, their clothes, their gestures and their speech – in a word, that is, in terms of their stupidity. Neither will ever be the other’s shadow. Since neither is a model, neither can be a model. Speaking of *Bouvard et Pécuchet*,²¹ whose cousinly relation to the Dupondts is obvious, Roland Barthes evoked the

idea that the whole of Flaubert’s book was simply a homage to copying, and that this produces, not works or things, but languages: “The writer combines quotations from which he removes the quote marks,” adds Barthes, who falls to dreaming of Bouvard and Pécuchet “becoming Structuralists”! It is obvious that Dupont and Dupond are far from such a practice of signs. But one cannot resist seeing their endless quoting of proverbs, their countless repetitions and additions, as a simian caricature of the art of quotation and appropriation. The specific problem of the Dupondts, which makes them simplified sub-versions of Bouvard and Pécuchet, is that they are incapable of grasping the workings of the language that they mimic. They stick to the things themselves and want to duplicate these with words. For them, going from object to verb seems an obvious step to take. And so they bump into words as much as they do things, and their Freudian slips really are slips. As a result, the Dupondts have no more of a grip on the real than they do on language. At the end of the *The Castafiore Emerald*, a mystery brilliantly solved by Tintin, the two policemen to whom the precious jewel has just been entrusted lose no time dropping it in the meadow: “Ah, the grass is green...” “I would go further.” Much to readers’ delight, their final exchanges suggest that for them the object will remain a chase, a mercurial sign that is as elusive as language. “You’re the one who has the emerald!” “No, you are.” “Excuse me, I gave it to you.” “Not at all!” “On the contrary, it was you...” Are the banana skins strewn across the floor of Barbier’s exhibitions signs of a treasure hunt or physical opportunities to slip and fall? “It is not enough to juxtapose a cube with a cube to obtain a cube sign,” says Umberto Eco. “All you get is another cube, which may at best represent the first one.”²² Presentation or representation? Much of modern art has asked these questions and tried to answer them in a variety of manners, all the way from Marcel Duchamp to Pop Art. A bottle-rack by Duchamp was not meant to be the magnetic double of a bottle-rack, but a sign. The Dupondts immediately deter us from looking to them to find out what constitutes the play of the sign, its emptiness articulated with the real. René Girard says of Bouvard and Pécuchet that “they oppose and complement each other like vases on a bourgeois mantelpiece.” The point could not be made clearer: in such a situation, all contrast is absorbed by symmetry. “Don’t forget Echo,” says Barbier, “she is just as important as Narcissus.” Echolalia, the Dupondt’s watchword, and the leitmotiv before them of Bouvard and Pécuchet, forbids access to interiorised language. We can get a perfect idea of this if we study the definition in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*: “Resounding Echo, the resonant

nymph, incapable of answering to those who speak to her with silence, and of speaking first." Echoing symmetry is simply a passive segment of a language that goes beyond before and after.

THE BECOMING-ANIMAL OF THE WORM

Why are so many writers, artists and philosophers so drawn to larval forms such as the egg, amoeba, cockroach, worm, etc? Because, even when adult, these animals are embryonic. They have not left the plane of unformed intensities. Now, for Beckett, Kafka, and Artaud, the enemy is the organism and its rigidity, its "finished" side. The larval affords Barbier an intense milieu of non-organic substances. What, after all, is a worm, if not the ever-unfinished addition of rings (the thin model of the egg)? The worm knows no obsession with subjective individuality. Its individuation does not take it from an abstract universal (the species) to the existing individual. On its own, the worm is capable of actualising an intensive and real virtual field in which its differentiation is constantly played out. Since the worm is not indivisible, all the violence of modification can be inflicted on it. In a word, the worm is a virtual singularity, a kind of cable of virtualisation waiting to express itself. And with Barbier, that is exactly what it does: it talks, it speaks and it inscribes. At this moment, it is the event and actualisation of its own virtuality. It is impregnable! No meaning-reducing power can overcome it.

All important artists (those who create meaning and leave traces) develop a becoming-animal. This may be obvious, as with Wim Delvoye's pigs, Beuys's coyote and Barbier's worm; or more subtle, as in the case of Vermeer's bivalve hiding behind a pearl. To intensify one's becoming-animal is to pursue an alterity, to refuse the jails of identity subjectivity. It is to escape the traps sprung by institutions to catch the steps of art and, above all, it is to prove that art is directly concerned with life and discovers itself there. An octopus (Victor Hugo), a spider (Louise Bourgeois) or a simple apricot (Pierre Bonnard) may suffice; a quivering of the air or water (Virginia Woolf) will do the job. What counts is to escape the social banalisation of the animal: cute little Bambi the Mummy's deer, cry-baby Dumbo. Barbier never felt a moment's softening for that kind of animality, coded by psychoanalysis and developed in the circuits of media consumption. He chose the worm. No one will bother you there. No one in Disneyland is going to take a shine to becoming-worm. It is repulsive, and theoretically inexpressive and devoid of feeling. A bit like flies or mosquitoes, but without the aggression. A beast into which you can placidly

stick a hook. The worm is Barbier's becoming-animal, the positive line of flight and trace of a continuum of intensities. On and through the worm's body, all forms are foiled. Barbier must stop making holes in things: the worm is the elongation of unformed matter. The worm evokes no mythology. Has a fabulist, all the way from Aesop to La Fontaine, ever run the risk of stooping to such a low subject? And yet this worm is not to be sought in some lowly filth, for it develops by laterally and obliquely crossing thresholds and gradients. Worm-word. Worm-spaceship. Worm-sex. Worm-scream. And this scream-speech is what draws the doubly articulated language and voice into a pure event: sentence and noise. What the worm says is spoken by a subjective ONE. Only art is capable of exploring such zones where language is inextricably mixed with becomings-animal. Deleuze-Guattari speak in this regard of "zones of indiscernibility." For Barbier, the point is not to play the beast or anthropomorphise the animal, but to create a kind of suspended state, a state of levitation where metamorphoses are adumbrated and limned.

WORM — AS BODY WITHOUT ORGANS

The worm's sequential morphology encourages dispersion or assemblages (paradoxically, both together) of a body without organs, that is to say, a body in which the organs function outside the dominant project of an organism. Being a BwO, the worm marks the limit of the schizophrenic body, where it confronts the fragmented body and, above all, the bad partial objects that it emits or receives. It fits this definition by Antonin Artaud: "No mouth No tongue No teeth No larynx No oesophagus No stomach No intestine No anus I shall reconstruct the man that I am."²³ The worm thus appears as a big smooth body. Which is not to say that the BwO, the worm's, is an inorganic body. It should rather be seen, as Barbier sees it, as being peopled by indeterminate organs. At any moment an organ may escape and start up its little ritornello under the big blue sky. The anus starts singing. And this polymorphous, centrifugal faculty discourages the Oneness of the body.

To define a being is, *ipso facto*, to ask where it begins and where it ends, and all this along exactly what axis/axes. For example, the sea urchin beshits itself and must immediately clean itself by vibrating. That's quite a challenge, and is a long way from what the fly does when salivating on its prey, or from the octopus, or from *sapiens-sapiens*... For the latter, the end of the body is the gaze, its face-language, whereas for a lion, it's the maw, the teeth. And what happens, wondered Barbier, if

the worm's extremity is at once mouth, eye, language and locomotion? All in one. Something that would shatter all our concepts of the body, organs and organisms. Completely crazy, almost divine. The glorious body. Not that of Praxiteles, more like Artaud's.

How are the notions of "schizo," "consumption," "capitalism," "body without organs," "language," "larval subject" and "beginning of the end" condensed into the figure of the worm? That is the question that needs to be elucidated by examining Barbier's work over the last fifteen years. Such a complex, or constellation, opens (or digs) the royal path of all possible commentary on this subject. The worm, here, should be understood not as a metaphor or some replacement rhetorical image, but as the real itself. If there is one thing that Barbier discourages, it is that linking "like" which distinguishes between the real and the figurative. When Proust writes "The roast chicken in its golden chasuble," he is not comparing the profane and the sacred, he is compacting them in one single expression of which metaphor is both the vehicle and the binder. Barbier's worms are not allegorical images of the human body, but a single plurivocal and multilayered reality, a real that exists on the affective body of images.

The question: what body, for Barbier, would make a successful larval consumer? Sometimes, even a worm strikes him as too complicated, almost organic, and so he looks for something less directional. Before the worm, there is the egg, or a monocellular creature, the biological sac, a body without organs, or rather, organs that are highly independent, or even disruptive: organs that flow, fart, scatter and spread and try out novel connections such as anus-to-mouth. A body traversed by migrations! "One side of a machinic assemblage faces the strata, which doubtless makes it a kind of organism, or signifying totality, or determination attributable to a subject; it also has a side facing a body without organs, which is continually dismantling the organism, causing a-signifying particles or pure intensities to pass or circulate."²⁴ For Barbier, an egg has two identities. Either it is obese and monumental, churning a great quantity of materials like a factory or a turbojet: this is his *Prince des ventres* [Prince of Bellies]. Or it is scattered into the spores of a mycosis of ovocytes that are all but imperceptible – hence *L'Ivrogne* [The Drunkard]. In both cases we find what is the maximum state of the body without organs – as a question of stimuli, of the production of stimuli much more than of representation. An egg represents

nothing, it does not enter into the divisions and breaks of representation. It must be taken as a whole traversed by energies that are still undecidable. With Barbier, even blowing your brains out is not a fatal act to be registered, analysed and performed like a staging. It is a machinery, a machining. Something figurative/narrative that produces something figural/abstract. In order for the real to comply with this, and for the ideological, metaphysical and structural codes that are foisted on it to disappear, Barbier has chosen to explode it. See what's going on in the bloody Rorschach on the wall, behind the man whose brains have been blown out.

There are, then, more resemblances and affinities (whether structural, functional or signifying) between an earthworm and a turbojet than between the latter and a steam train, or between the earthworm and a rattlesnake. The real paradigmatic-dynamic family linking worm and jet engine is their dynamic-organic connection to their fluid medium. Earth or air sucked in and spat out with an added-value intensity: compost fertilised and shat out by the worm; air heated and spat out by the turboprop. The transporting, alimentary element passes through their hollow bodies and immerses them while at the same time making them emerge. Which is why Barbier and his larval becoming-animal can go without the slightest hiatus from the underground burrow of larva to the interstellar, machinic channels of cosmonauts. Such prodigious mutations, luminous like technology and paradoxically opaque like life (or art), have absolutely nothing to do with the faults, collapses and breaks of schizophrenic psychosis.

The worm is infinitely divisible, totally deterritorialised, a consumer mixing mouth and anus, speaking and devouring, scream and text, aerial serenity and subterranean anxiety. It is the BwO in person, for it manifests the desire to feed, move and express itself, all on the same plane of immanence. One cannot locate and organise its organs because they assemble themselves and make a mockery of any meaningful break. The worm could, for example, cock up its BwO by, for example, emptying itself or freezing itself in the dark cosmos. But Barbier has armed it with conjoined intensities so as to produce a continuum without culmination, since the worm, as a BwO without a centre, is a kind of platform of energies allowing other platforms (organism, significance and subjectification) to resonate together. The worm is a component of these passages, a passenger like the others. Organs are not the enemy of the worm as BwO. Barbier indeed welcomes them into many of his works (just as Basquiat did), but

never with a view to recreating an organism (which he disembowels). The enemy is the organism, its vertical organisation. The worm is never vertical.

It is noteworthy that Barbier's obsession with copying and his pleasure in cloning constitute the basic engine for all the worm's proliferations. Both, for him, imply nothing other than the openness of the open series. When it comes down to it, the worm allows Barbier to do without both, to move straight ahead to the limitless. Cut the One into two or three parts and it will energetically survive, for it is itself inhabited by an endless scissiparity. And of course, all this goes against the grain of what has been drummed into us on this subject. The subject being an entity to be considered in accordance with the principle of indivision. It is un-divided, in the same category as the atom (*a-tomos*), which is also indivisible in the Western tradition. Although bombarded with objects (the sub-jects of their projections), it stands firm. The subject so desires homogeneity that it shares neither its consciousness nor its sufferings nor its death.

Barbier's larval subject refuses to be caught. It is good at that, for it belongs to the paradigmatic band of becoming, let us say, lower animals: Kafka's beetle, Deleuze's tick. At such a level, animality is very close to particle physics and the biology of proteins. It takes us beyond the egresses that the animal might still block. The worm does not lend itself to the representation of a complete object, of a subject in the eyes of the law. With it we move towards a lyrical dismantling of machinic assemblages and over the threshold that an overly complex (and too proximately human) animal would be unable to cross. That is why it was important, nay, vital for Barbier that the worm should talk, that it should start vociferating, jabbering, in order to underline the fringe, the foam (the *wet*, says Barbier) in which the becoming-animal becomes an absolute desire: the breaking up of language in the name of a collective power. We do not say "Space Tragedy" but "Space Odyssey." The worm is not a subject, nor is Barbier; they are a general function, proliferating upon themselves and admirably capable of segmenting and multiplying, of swarming. It's like the scattering of spores in space. Pulverised by language, Barbier builds infinitesimal blocks or other, uppercase ones, all included in the same "astronomic" construction. This is set resolutely towards the future, but a future that is contiguous. Earth circulates in the worm like a prey being permanently digested in a long reptilian tube. The viewer must accompany

their slow lateral descent (we will find out about the importance of this direction in relation to Barbier's vision of the body as becoming-larva), which is very often horizontal, like a fall totally severed from its anxiogenic finiteness. Something like an anaconda taking three months to digest a pig. In cartoon format, you get Milou moving protuberantly through the reptile's long body, watched by an alarmed Tintin in the Congo. "Rumination," says Barbier to Jean-Yves Jouannais, that is to say, slowness and return, the reversibility of the food's fall to excrement. In a sense, a gigantic internal severance operation. Barbier's invariant here could be summed up as a strategy to counter falling in tubular space, that is to say, the slowing of food as it is swallowed and digested. Nothing is more essential here in order to sever us without too much suffering. All other falls, even the most slowed-down, are the source of great fear.

The worm is in total becoming. No nostalgia. Always forward. Wormward ho! It is a little turbine that drills and digs, strutting up its gallery with its own body. The worm uses its body to eat-advance-consolidate: the complete opposite of a political or cultural programme, which invokes its supports (its supporting references) before it has taken even a few blind steps. Barbier's worm is even capable of transfiguring the end (the final corpse, that of the earth) into jubilation. It is so synergetic, making organs and functions commune in the same motivity, that it has no fear. "Don't be afraid!" say the shrinks, popes and politicians, but they speak from out of their own dreads, and sooner or later they will contaminate their audience. As for the worm, there is nothing it need fear, for it has laboured within the great All. The worm progresses within the oceanic womb of the universe. It has become a positive line of flight. To have a becoming-worm is to melt into an unruffled existence, it is to really "become": "To become is [...] to find the zone of proximity, of indiscernibility or indifferenciation where one can no longer be distinguished from a woman, an animal or a molecule – neither imprecise nor general, but unforeseen and nonpreexistent, singularized out of a population rather than determined in a form."²⁵

OBESITY – THE GARDENER – THE SUBJECT

Take a plane to the United States if you want to get a quick idea of the consequences. A big aeroplane. An obese aeroplane for obese travellers. What is an obesity? A single form, the extension of the spheroid. A slow body that waddles like a

penguin in Antarctica. The experience of the deadly limits of the same. The obese no longer has an articulated body: it becomes monocellular. A worm that turned out wrong. For Barbier, the gardener pushing a wheelbarrow with his belly in it is a perfect example of this obesity. To the worm that lives in perfect harmony in its terrestrial milieu, moves through and fertilises it, the obese gardener responds with a prosthesis! His wheelbarrow adjoins his body as metaphor. But the worm is bare, having nothing to "object" with. A pure trajectory, it is in fact divisible but homogenous, gluttonous yet slim, subterranean but perfect.

THE STAMMERER AND LARGE NUMBERS

Speak or eat, and above all, speak or hold one's silence – these antitheses show just how deeply language is marked by dualities, binary divisions, which start with morphemes and phonemes and develop into dichotomies such as animal/human, masculine/feminine, etc. If it is true that language came first, then language invented dualism, and there can be no question of escaping it. Barbier seems to have understood that if you want to undermine the cult of language and its erection as a disjunctive force, it's no use increasing multiplicities, for additions and accumulations do not distance us from dualism. Take a pile of objects by Arman. Here, the question remains ironic: is it an object or a sign of art or non-art? Barbier chose to copy, or rather, a certain kind of copyist's activity: stammering. To stammer is to refuse frontal, deep access to the word. To stammer is to step like a crab, sideways, with words. Barbier would speak of "giving the word space." Barbier's worm stammers inasmuch as it eats and talks, inasmuch as it eats solid words. The stammerer adds ANDs and more ANDs, even if there are only two terms to be spoken. He undoes its potential dualism from within. We no longer need to ask what form is and what ground is, if it (the worm) or the artist is doing the talking. It does not exactly belong to a speaker any more but to a "versification" of the in-between. The floating words of a worm in space. Thus, all stammering/stuttering is musical. A singing exercise in a Mozart opera and Charlie Parker's demisemiquavers being the apotheosis of stammering language, the absolute flux of the sign.

Biologists tell us that the adventure of life on Earth hinged on the billions of years of cellular copies in which proteins played the dominant role in the elimination of errors: "In the genetic programme is written," says François Jacob, "the result of all past reproductions, the collection of successes, since all the traces of failures have disappeared."²⁶ Barbier's copying works on this

level. He sees it not as the strict, limp reproduction of the same but, on the contrary, as the adventure of our vital stability seeking itself. With Barbier we get arms and hands palpating proteins, combinations of cubes, phyla, huge populations of bacteria, migrating acids. It is like a stammering great text, the textual chart of biological becoming wherein the copyist, the transcriber (the stammerer) must do all he can to stabilise a programme. Each time, he tracks back, unsatisfied with the current or likely state of things. With him the copyist within is a navigator launching onto the oceans of Evolution. And if he sometimes hews to (or hams on?) the coast, he does so in order to flirt with the bitter shore of large numbers, those reefs where the cellular world in labour might run aground.

More and more television advertisements show various objects shattering into small cubes in space then flitting off elsewhere and regrouping as other forms. These are swarms of pixels, which are defined by three figures, suggesting the cubic nature of their physical existence. Advertising, which is always eager for technological novelties, has well understood the power of the process in which the pixel becomes the fractal vehicle of all 3D images. As it happens, Barbier has been working on this phenomenon for a while now, following a much more complex poetics. For him it is not enough to fractalise something then displace and metamorphose it within the same continuous space. For Barbier, fractals represent a strategy of duplication and evasion. They reflect, again, his taste for copying combined with the love of large-scale moving. Instead of staying on the same incline (a nesting declivity) he grabs the chance to atomise forms so that they can be propelled elsewhere. And so, thanks to the pixel, we move to an a-formal, subatomic level. The vast entities that form our world and seek to set out a coherent universe now spawn endless fractals. The edges of the cosmos fractalise with the energy of solar eruptions and shoot forth into the great darkness where they could be annihilated. They are abstract lines, words, organs, chairs, worms, etc. The unity of the human world confesses its heterogeneity in rockets such as these. Has Barbier enriched Mandelbrot's theory with a chapter about disruptions and discontinuities?

Thus can we bring to an end a first trajectory in Barbier's journey of the invariant: 1) End it and start again; 2) Move on the spot; 3) Copy while inventing; 4) Miniaturise for pleasure. Want an easy way of teaching kids the theory of evolution,

the logic of life forms and the relation of chance to necessity? Just show them the big Barbier drawing in which red marbles tumble, fill holes, go astray or hang in the air. How idiotic it was to separate the arts and sciences in our teaching! Barbier is neither the only nor the first person to show that scientists and artists in a given period are concerned with the same problems. Where the former approach them via new concepts, the latter enter into them via unprecedented percepts. Art and science are cheek by jowl, bosom pals like Seurat and Chevreul. Da Vinci was no one-off. When Vélazquez died, they found dozens of astronomy books in his personal library. Duchamp read Planck on *Quantum Theory* in around 1910. Cézanne wrote a long letter to the mathematician Klein (one of the masters of topology, or of the geometry of aberrant surfaces) and told him, “We are doing the same thing!” Tony Cragg knows the theory of DNA as if he had written it himself.

THE CONSUMER

There was a time when the human being was defined as a hunter or link/intersection within tribal societies and, later, as an interpreter of hierarchised signs, or again, as a solitary thinking subject and, finally, as a simple work force. Today, all these definitions of the subject have been dethroned by that of “consumer.” Barbier is fascinated by the worm because in it he can discern a kind of consuming exemplarity that points directly to others: MacDos, cosmetics, SUVs, etc. For him, therefore, the worm is a glorious body, the revealer of his own becoming-animal inasmuch as a direct relation of singularity to collective desire. The worm is Barbier’s desiring subject.

In Barbier’s work the worm is as much an actor of language (and even a code) as a consumer. Of course, there is an embarrassing contradiction here: how do you reconcile the active, creative word with passive, alienating consumption? Barbier suggests their paradoxical synthesis. For, since capitalism admits its inability to provide a single code for the entire social field, it is constantly unravelling the social body, to the extreme limits of its deterritorialisation, putting in phase: 1) The abstraction of capital flows. 2) The creation of a schizoid-type body without organs. 3) The consumerist pleasure which creates the artificial yet real link between abstract capital and the deterritorialising fluxes of desire. If we look closely at Barbier’s works and take the trouble to read his pertinent and abundant texts, we will find that they develop and image the gaudy allure of the consumerist capitalist system. His passion for the

worm combines the devouring/consumption of our age and the “body without organs” (the Deleuzian BwO), which is to be considered as a “larval subject.” Only such a subject is capable of dealing with the heterogeneous dynamisms in which consumer society immerses us. Centred, vertical subjectivities, formed, qualified and composed (heroic) subjects would perish there. Whereas the worm “passes” through and inside.

What is always at risk of being excluded from consumption? Old age. This tattooed old woman is a flowering planet, a spheroid victim of bad folds. Her anatomy’s wrinkles and subsidence are irreversible and in principle offer no surface of inscription for commodities. And yet a shower of “marking” black dust falls and encrusts itself on her. What was marked down becomes remarkable, unique, paradoxical, thought-provoking. What is important is what has a future. Here, the future of signs. One does not attain the future by consensus, but only by difference. This old lady could have been no more than a rubbish-dump Récamier, a waste-collection-centre obscenity, a big sad larva. But here she is transformed into a battlefield of meaning. She has become both legible and illegible, popular and experimental. She is resplendent. She offers the prospect of possible hypotheses, agreements in the midst of disagreement, for Barbier has put an end to her unilateral relation to the Other (the consumer, the aesthete, the moralist). Instead of trapping old age and excluding it from desire (which is a relation to the body via signs), Barbier has managed an astonishing de-coupling of desire. An artist is someone who can make new images out of ambient images. He takes images outside their usual screens. This is dazzling but not clear. The murmur of the marks on the silence of this senior nude produces something inaudible. One must wait, take one’s time – lots of one’s time. The last two lines in *Waiting for Godot* both say and show this: “Vladimir: Well, shall we go? Estragon: Yes, let’s go.” And Beckett adds: “They do not move.” The worm is not the passive identity of capitalism; it doesn’t illustrate it at all. Rather, it insinuates its difference and its possible death. As a consumer, Barbier’s worm axiomatises all the possible aberrations of capitalism’s generalised decoding. This worm invokes a whole lot of reassuring packaging. Barbier recuperates swarms of brands and attempts to line them up in its linear consumption. Packaging being the ABC of all consumerist symbolism. That’s where Warhol started: *Brillo*, *Campbell*, *Coke*. And all Barbier’s work can thus be seen as a gigantic piece of work involving

“spin-offs.” Art having first become multiplicities and then, logically, “packaging,” its fate was sealed between the Duchampian readymade and Warholian packaging. Dada and the Surrealists did not accept this, rejecting Pop Art on the grounds that it lacked a revolutionary dimension. This was to completely fail to grasp the new issues facing art in the twentieth century. Surrealism thus immediately put itself out of the running, maintaining ad infinitum its little teenage revolt, whereas everything was switching to the terrain of mass consumption: packaging, advertising, logos, television, etc. Today, with artists like Jeff Koons, Wim Delvoye and Gilles Barbier, we are witnessing the mature phase of a very new artistic era: the age of commercial artists. As for Barbier, he sees the art of packaging as a new way of posing the question, not only of art, but also of life in society: “In the register of invention, of true invention – behind which revolution certainly lies – packaging, it seems to me, warrants the greatest attention. Just think of it, the science of packaging transports, with infinite subtlety and cleverness, all the ‘inside’ of things towards a totally visible ‘outside.’ The box, the packet, the ‘skin,’ a cell that closes, protects, hides and contains becomes the agent of transparency whereby its contents are made completely naked. Imagine a house whose walls had the precise function of revealing and dissecting what they contain, and of inviting penetration. In this world, the very notion of the ‘inside’ no longer exists and is of no interest. Façades, as pernickety as a designation of controlled origin, as precise as the vitamin content of a breakfast cereal, are bursting with discursivity. One could, in such a world, regret the opacity of the object, the tranquillity linked to the intimacy of its use and the constancy of its value, but one would be wrong. A world in which each cell reveals its insides quite naturally and where no information is withheld from knowledge produces, it seems to me, a fully demilitarised world.”

What is a consumer, if not an individual who puts the emphasis on the generalised bankruptcy of codes. And “brands,” you ask me? It is true that they seem to codify their buyers, to imprint themselves in their memory, to trigger their stimuli, and even to inscribe themselves on their skin. The brand is indeed a signature that does precisely that: *brand* the product. But all this is only apparently on the surface. The flow of commodities runs over consumers like water off a duck’s back. And consumption in the media-industrial milieu rings out the bankruptcy of codes. Before, in so-called primitive societies, coded fluxes entered the flesh of the *socius*, whereas

in imperial-type societies, they rose up to it architectonically: scarification or the pyramid. Disoriented capitalism is constantly oscillating between these two regimes of encoding, but without ever managing to embody them or to supplement them with some third regime of the sign. In a hilarious science fiction novel, Eduardo Mendoza evokes this crazy skating rink of object-signs gone haywire as an extraterrestrial goes on a wacky shopping spree:

“15.00. Have some money now and decide to explore the town centre and go to the well-known shops. The sky is cloudy again but, for the time being, the weather doesn’t seem to be getting any worse. 16.00. Go into a shop. Buy a tie. Try it on. Decide that it looks good and buy ninety-four of the same. 16.30. Go into a sports shop. Buy a lamp, a jerrican, a gas stove for camping, a Barcelona football club shirt, the Barcelona Olympic club, a tennis racquet, a complete set of windsurf gear (in Day-Glo pink) and thirty pairs of trainers. 17.00. Go into a charcuterie and buy seven hundred smoked hams. 17.10. Go into a greengrocer’s and buy a pound of carrots. 17.45. Go into an electrical goods store and buy everything. 18.00. Go into a toy shop and buy an Indian outfit, one hundred and twelve pairs of Barbie panties and a spinning top. 18.30. Go into a wine shop and buy five bottles of Baron Mouchoir Moqué 1952 and an eight-litre demijohn of Le Pentateuque table wine. 19.00. Go into a jeweller’s and buy a waterproof, antimagnetic and shockproof gold Rolex automatic. Break it at once. 19.30. Go into a perfume shop and buy fifteen bottles of Eau de Ferum, the latest new product. 20.00. Decide that money can’t buy happiness, disintegrate everything I’ve bought and continue my stroll with my hands in my pockets and a light heart.”²⁷

All this produces some major paradoxes: signs, as they start to float on a codeless solid-body, give the illusion of great freedom. One of the finest and most lucid advertising campaigns ever launched was the one with the catchphrase “Perrier c’est fou !” Bubbly water presented as craziness, that is to say, a machine for taking apart meaning in the manner of the great “mad” surface of modern art. A product that is semantically nothing becoming a more than nothing, a better than nothing! Perrier, or the consumption of nonsense. The fact that it is a bubbly water is not without its bearing on our argument. But consumer capitalism is constantly blocking, limiting and closing off such expansion. Formatted pleasure, yes; unlimited desire, no. Witness the staggering number of advertisements for washing, cooking or beauty products in which the consumer’s pleasure is recentred by the gaze and moralising discourse of a maternal (or mother-

in-law-ish!) figure. Hence the commercial nature of brands, at once lures promising pleasure and packagers of desire.

It is however just as unthinkable for an artist of our times to duck this question of the consumer as it was for a Renaissance painter to reject perspective. In both cases there is a milieu, with a specific dominant note. One can try to create against a milieu, but not outside the milieu. The consumer has thus gradually become the sensorial, conceptual and emotional character of a creative process that is intimately bound up with merchandise. This was made explicit in Warhol and has been echoed in various ways in Koons, Keith Haring, etc. Today, artists like Wim Delvoye and Gilles Barbier have amplified this idea, divesting it of the Messianic and puritanical side of American art. It took the proponents of Pop Art quite some time to start including anality in their panoplies of consumption, whereas for Delvoye and Barbier it was immediate. For Barbier the theme of the radiant consumer is central (that is, if one dares centre such a universe). It is through this figure that his image of the Self is sketched out and that his larval subject is formed. And above all, of course, it is on him that Barbier experiments with his own love of signs. In order to do this, Barbier took up the figure of the worm.

The odyssey of the worm as the larval subject of the consumer unfolded for Barbier in three phases, in which the long, headless form of the earthworm was marvellously effective.²⁸ First of all, the production phase. The bodies we find there are mainly machinic. "Connect-I-cut" cried the little schizophrenic studied by Bettelheim: the *I* is a matter of connecting and severing. In Barbier, things are always adhering and coming apart. His corporeal machine refuses to allow an organ to be complete and central, an organic attractor on which the partial entities of life can converge. It must produce real fragments, disseminate real partial objects, and without anatomical nostalgia.

Barbier's vermicular consumer is a permanent swallower, a tireless machinic flux-/flux-breaker. But it does not consume in the name of a lack. The fact is that it lacks for nothing because consumption penetrates it, passes through it and survives it. The earth is its alimentary bolus and its shit is earth. It is a tunnel in a burrow, the buyer pushing his trolley round a supermarket. Choose, move around, pile up, pay, eat: same trajectory. From factory to shithouse, as in the

airport from security area to corridor and from corridor to cabin. Nothing but telescopically nested tubes. For Barbier, this process is so continuous in its apparent discontinuity (in fact, it is both, to equal degrees) that he could almost forget the symbolic values of things: A worm = a worm; a hole is holed; a suicide as accident, etc. Hence Barbier's deliberately realist style. Don't go looking for metaphor or metamorphosis. Observe the workings of the larval factory.

Next, the recording phase, which offers the consumer surfaces of inscription. This is the moment when one must choose – a crucial moment for Barbier: will he be able to pursue his quest for a continuity in which all things are connection? Will the consumer's body/tube be enough to host (in the works) that basic plurality which constitutes the sign? Otherwise it's the infinite reign of the same and the identical, something which fascinates Barbier so much that he is hypnotised into an incessant cloning. The copy as received sign, as a replacement of the created sign. Barbier responds to this problem with a kind of schizoid disjunction in which the contradictions do not close in upon their own terms. The "either this or that" is equivalent to AND, AND, AND, and is endlessly catching up with the *schizo* by means of a welding like, in music, Debussy, Piaf and Monk, pursuing dissonance in order to plug its holes. Thus, the disjunctions in Barbier, such as worm/language, hole/matter, one/two or one/multiplicities function as an overview of an indivisible musical distance. And it is clear that this has to be done in a state of levitation, like operations against a black background, astronauts on their space vehicles. Nor should we start looking for top and bottom, masculine or feminine. To choose is to be still squint-eyed. Whereas the first phase (of production) produced large quantities of sensations and drives, this one brings onto the *cham* of the work an abundance of concepts. The sign rises. The concept illumines and encourages it. Barbier can now come back to his passion for cloning. There he inseminates, by concepts and by art, a difference that seemed inconceivable.

The third phase, which is conjunctive with consumption, witnesses the emerging sketch of the Self. This is the regime of feelings and affects. But with Barbier there is none of the petty sentimentality exploited by advertising or cheesy songs. The affects of the Barbierian worm directly evoke a vital force, the pure life of intensities. These are measured on its body-without-organs in gradients, degrees and thresholds. To appear or

dissolve, emerge or p... off, replicate infinitely or implode, become an owner or remain a tenant (or vice versa). It is a totally de-centred becoming-mad, constantly oriented along the importance of becoming. To dig burrows is to move nomadically towards transient polyvocalities. And Barbier's consumer, instead of piteously stooping to the role of organiser of the Subject, the couple, the family or the State, is constantly occupying different positions in a plural becoming. Indeed, the speaking astronaut worm concerns becoming that are historical, geographical, animal, semiotic and political. No higher authority would be able to organise it, for it is not an organism with its forms and formalisations, but a constant formation (a squadron, a gang).

Sliding is an activity and a way of thinking that makes it possible to bridge contradiction and lubricate differences in order, not to turn them into closed syntheses, but to experience their extremities, the two ends in a space that cannot be broken down. For Barbier, all distances are positive: the worm's head and tail, the start and fall of a breaker, the original and its copy, the origins of the universe and its apocalypse. Sliding is the most affirmative of all these experiences of discrepancy. Not a pomade, a mollifying vagueness, a tactile fog, but a dazzling, simultaneous illumining of the phases of discrepancy. How does one introduce the One into the midst of multiplicities? How does one make the voice of Sense audible in the face of the choral (coral) packs of cosmic noise? Barbier's response is mobile, lubricated, continuous. It is the worm surfing, the copyist scanning, the schizoid division in which all things break up, but in itself. For Barbier there are no contradictions, no more than there would be for a surfer in the roll of his wave. The creatures that he propels into the black ether of his cosmogony never close up on possible antitheses. For example, if the worm speaks and emits bubbles, this is not to be seen as an aberration (something monstrous that would suggest a break) but as a magisterial opening, a sliding that vaporises speech in the intergalactic winds. Barbier's sliding is very often connected to these sac-bodies. It is swollen with spores that are ready and waiting to swarm – that is, to slide in Aeolian fashion. Obesity lies in wait for this bulimic body, but sliding ensures it a free, multidirectional, fractal and infinite disjunction.

None of this takes us very far from the consumer, who is a cursor, an exemplary skater. The choices he makes are not dictated by some transcendent power. The meaning of his choices is played out in

fluid immanence. He skims over the shelves, the shop windows, the screens. Advertising offers him a few mooring points because it knows that he, the virtual buyer, will never stop sliding. The whole of our culture's commodity aesthetic is indeed formulated under the sign of the smooth: design, communication, beauty products, transit, etc. We could see the figuration of the consumer as a kind of egg comprising zones of uncertainty and indiscernibility. Seeing the ovoid body of Humpty Dumpty, Alice, wonders if he is wearing a belt or a tie. Humpty Dumpty or the unpredictability of meaning. Will the consumer of signs be triggered here or there? Why did he react to such or such a stimulus? Here, sliding becomes plasticity, soft rind, for this hypermarket punter is the interiorisation of the great slide of consumption. Barbier is well aware of this and that is why he creates so many occasions where life, his creatures' intensity of desire, returns to the form of the first ovum. An egg is a contraction of a worm, and a worm is an extension of the egg. This is all stop and go, like a motorway with its speeds, accelerations and gridlocks.

The consumer, for Barbier, is the creature (half-egg, half-worm) that makes contradictions shine as coupled pure intensities. It is not a centred subject and advertising is wrong to try to "target" it. It is a nomadic slider whose body is a mosaic of races, revolutions, continents, stars, ancestors and consumer products. Barbier and his science-fiction caravanserai! Only major creative powers are capable of representing such a hurly-burly: Altman (*Short Cuts*), Basquiat, Godard (*Pierrot le fou*), Joyce, etc. Today, artists like Gilles Barbier and Wim Delvoye are achieving just that. To do so requires that they produce a kind of compression of history, a compact "packaging" of destinies. Or again, and this is particularly remarkable in their case, they need to locate themselves alongside the barbarians and the beasts. The luxury consumer: never heard of him. Ditto for higher art and elite culture. Barbier is constantly migrating towards the worm's burrow (with Delvoye it is the pig and with Broodthaers the eagle sliding towards the parrot), because it is from here, from this so-called "inferior" animality, that he can freely undertake his slide-consuming study. His consumer is an animal surfer gifted with the utmost semantic insolence. A guzzler of shit and mingled signs. Which do we eat first: the succulent hamburger ad or the pitiful hamburger substance?

1. This is the inaugural question of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's book, *Kafka. Toward a Minor Literature*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986).
2. Richard Hawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker* (New York: Norton, 1986).
3. The original French, "La Moule et le Moule" plays on the homonymy of the two words, and the fact that "la moule" is also a French slang word for female genitals (hence, below, the word "minge"). There is a similar double meaning in the word "vers" in the quotation that follows: "worms" or "line of verse"—TRANS.
4. Gilbert Simondon, *L'Individu et sa Genèse physico-biologique*, (1964), (Grenoble: Jérôme Millon, "Krisis," 1995).
5. Antonin Artaud, *Letter to Henri Parisot, Lettres de Rodez*, G.L.M. (1946) —TRANS in *Selected Writings* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1976), p. 449.
6. This was my argument in my book on Wim Delovye, an artist who is in many respects close to Gilles Barbier, *Le Devenir cochon de Wim Delvove* (Brussels: La Lettre Volée, 2007.)
7. Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass* (1871), (London: Chancellor Press, 1982), p. 225.
8. Gilles Deleuze, *Logic of Sense*, (Paris, Minit, "Critique", 1969), p. 36.
9. The French word here is "vers," which means both verse and worm —TRANS
10. Michel Houellebecq, *Les Particules élémentaires* (Paris, Flammarion, 1998), trans. *The Elementary Particles*, trans. by Frank Wynne (New York: Vintage, 2001), p. 30.
11. Gilbert Durand, *Structures anthropologiques de l'Imaginaire* (Paris: PUF, 1963), pp. 287–298.
12. Gaston Bachelard, *La Poétique de l'espace* (Paris: PUF, 1957), trans. *The Poetics of Space* (New York: Beacon Press, 1994).
13. The French for soft, "mou," echoes the word "moule," thus suggesting their connection in Barbier's system.—TRANS.
14. Jean-Baptiste Botul, *La Métaphysique du mou* (Paris: Mille et une Nuits, "Hors collection," 2007), especially pp. 25 and 51. In fact, Botul seems to be a fictive character created by a journalist working for a famous satirical weekly.
15. In French, "trou de balle" — literally bullet hole — is a humorous, crude expression for anus —TRANS.
16. Dan Simmons, *Hyperion*, vol. 1 (New York: Spectra, 1990), p. 15.
17. Rodolphe Töpffer, *Voyages et aventures du docteur Festus* (first published in 1846).
18. Trinh Xuan Thuan, *Chaos and Harmony: Perspectives on Scientific Revolutions of the Twentieth Century*, (Oxford/New York: OUP, 2000). p. 184.
19. Jean Baudrillard, *Cool Memories II*, 1987–1990, trans. by Chris Turner (Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, 1996), pp. 27–28.
20. Raymond Queneau, *Exercices in Style*, trans. by Barbara Wright (New York: New Directions, 1981), pp. 21–22.
21. Roland Barthes, cited by Yvan Leclerc in *La Spirale et le Monument, essai sur Bouvard et Pécuchet de Gustave Flaubert* (Paris: Sedes, "Présence critiques", 1988), pp. 174–175. In the same context, see *Dialogues de France Culture: Ecrire... Pourquoi? Pour qui?*, (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1974), p. 16.
22. Umberto Eco, *La Structure absente* (Paris: Mercure de France, 1972), p. 13.
23. Quoted by Gilles Deleuze in *The Logic of Sense*, trans. by Mark Lester (1969) (New York: Columbia University Press, 1990), p. 342.
24. Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Rhizome* (Paris: Minit, 1976) p. 10. Translation in *A Thousand Plateaus* (London: Continuum Books, 2004), p. 4.
25. Gilles Deleuze, *Critique et Clinique* (Paris: Minit, 1993) —TRANS. *Essays Critical and Clinical* (London: Verso, 1997), p. 1.
26. François Jacob, *Logique du Vivant. Une histoire de l'hérédité*, trans. *The Logic of Life*, trans. by Betty E. Spillmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).
27. Eduardo Mendoza, *No Word from Gurb* (London: Telegram Books, 2007).
28. These three phases, or syntheses of production, recording and consumption, are expounded by Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari in *L'Anti-Oedipus*, pp. 80–100, trans. (London: Routledge, 1999).



Cover

In the soup, a cheddar fondue and three nightmares, speech bubbles (tenant & owner), isolated segments (the infinite assassin) and bananas
2010
Mixed media
180 × 100 × 95 cm
Unique piece

Courtesy Galerie GP & N Vallois, Paris
photo: Jean-Christophe Lett



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L'Hospice / The Nursing Home
2002
6 wax figures, television, various elements
Variable dimensions
Unique piece

Martin Z. Margulies Collection, Miami, USA ; Courtesy Galerie G.-P. & N. Vallois, Paris
photo: Bernard Wipf



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Le fonds
2010
Acrylic and tippex on mylar
140 × 186 cm
Unique piece

Courtesy Galerie GP & N Vallois, Paris
photo: André Morin

