

Irmeline Lebeer

Interview by Anne Mœglin-Delcroix*

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Anne Mœglin-Delcroix and Irmeline Lebeer Hossmann, Brussels, 2001 Photo: Pierre Mœglin

Introduction

The interview takes place in a beautiful 1930s brick house in Uccle, an elegant residential neighborhood in the Brussels metropolitan area, on a cold and rainy winter weekend. But the atmosphere is warm. On the ground floor, two adjoining rooms are filled with books on art, literature, and the humanities, her “existential books” as Irmeline Lebeer calls them. They completely cover the walls, where tightly packed shelves reach up to the ceiling, or are piled up in unstable stacks wherever possible: side tables, window sills, chairs, or the floor. In the first room, which serves as an office with the necessary work equipment on either side, we sit down at a long central table to talk about the publications, with the books in hand. These are ready in the adjoining room, which is larger and very bright, with long bay windows overlooking a wild garden at the back of the house, where a huge Japanese cherry tree and a few large trees grow. Lined up side by side on a large white wool rug that

covers most of the parquet floor, these editions are striking in their variety. Around the room, in front of the bookshelves, are a few objects, notably Robert Filliou's object *Le Siège des idées* (The Seat of Ideas).

The conversation—somewhat disordered, as conversations between people who have known each other for a long time often are—goes beyond the sole subject of published books and lasts more than ten hours, interrupted only by one or two tea breaks in the small upstairs kitchen. We forgot to have lunch. Irmeline Lebeer lost her initial reluctance to be interviewed and, once she was assured that we would rework the raw transcript, spoke at length and with passion about the artistic and editorial adventure she had embarked on with her brother, Herbert Hossmann, and her husband, Paul Lebeer, as well as the artists that the three of them have supported in their desire to publish books, because that is often what it is all about.

We leave this house devoted to books to catch the train just in time, taking with us the image of Irmeline's long, slender silhouette, crouched at the edge of the carpet choosing an edition, or standing, leaning over an open book on the table, tracing its story with visible emotion.

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Irmeline Lebeer Hossmann and Anne Moeglin-Delcroix et, Brussels, 2001 Photo: Pierre Moeglin

Anne Mœglin-Delcroix: What was your educational background and how did you get into publishing?

Irmeline Lebeer: I did a PhD in public international law on the equivalence regime in future Europe. I chose this subject because I wanted to travel, preferably with leather suitcases like my grandmother had, with all the labels stuck on them: Budapest, Venice, etc. That was my goal! In the end, I never followed it; things just happened and took me elsewhere.

A.M.-D.: Where did you do your PhD?

I.L.: In Paris, at the faculty on Rue Saint-Jacques. There were thirty of us in the group, all very interesting people, including Japanese, Haitian, and Swiss students...

A.M.-D.: Why Paris?

I.L.: I got my law degree at 21, and since I wanted to train to become a diplomat and had to be 25 to do so, my father said to me, “Why don't you do a PhD, and since I always hear you talking about Paris, why not in Paris?” But we couldn't afford it at all: in Paris, I often didn't even have enough money to eat at the university cafeteria.

A.M.-D.: You came from Germany, didn't you?

I.L.: My parents were refugees. My father was Silesian, my mother was Prussian but of Austrian origin. And, how can I put it? When you're a refugee, suddenly you're stripped of everything—your house, your car, your income, your bank account—and you find yourself in a forest picking mushrooms, like my mother did with us! We ended up in a school in Thuringia, a boarding school that was very interesting because it applied the principles of the educational reformer Hermann Lietz¹: a return to nature, active learning methods, etc. He had gone to study education in England, which was his model. Each level was led by a teacher who was the father of the family, and we all ate at the same large table. We were wonderfully well looked after and stimulated; we were taught trades and music, and we worked 120 hectares of land for 120 children. There were refugee parents there too, who accompanied us in the fields. I had been a city girl, and I think this strong connection between culture and nature gave me direction. It was also helpful because we were taught to take responsibility. It was really great!

After that... In our family, there are lawyers and doctors! And since I had this goal—to travel—it seemed interesting to study international law. So, I ended up in Paris, studying a subject that didn't really interest me. For me, law boils down to two questions: “Whose fault is it?” and “Who should pay?” But I don't think there are answers to those questions, because it's always both parties' fault. But in the group of students, there was a Swiss guy who, with a friend, dreamed of opening a gallery in Switzerland.² They were interested in the people who were “in the know” at the time: Poliakoff, Hartung, etc., and I was very happy to learn all this from them. And since I wanted to stay in Paris and didn't have any money, I started working for German radio, Radio Berlin, doing reports, etc. At first, I covered art and literature, but I ended up giving up literature because I didn't find interviewing writers very enjoyable, probably because I wasn't meeting the big names!

¹ Hermann Lietz (1868-1919), founder of the Haubinda outdoor school in Thuringia in 1906 and inspiration behind the Landerziehungsheime in Germany, boarding schools located in the countryside and designed as “places to live.”

² Franz Larese (1927-2000) and Jürg Janett (1927-2026) founded their Erker Gallery in St. Gallen in 1958 and remained friends with Irmeline throughout their lives.

A.M.-D.: How did you meet Paul Lebeer?³

I.L.: Paul was a journalist. When I met him, he was editor-in-chief of the pages on Black Africa in *Jeune Afrique*. That's how I came to meet Paul: I was living in the university residence in Antony, which was full of fascinating Africans, such as Nanette Senghor, Senghor's niece, who was my neighbor. I went with them to Rome in 1959 for the second Congress of Black Writers and Artists, organized by the African Cultural Society founded by Alioune Diop.⁴ There, a man from Munich who wanted to start a magazine about Africa asked me to write the culture section. So, I wrote articles about the artists I met in Paris. It was in this context that I met Paul. One day, the Cameroonian writer Mongo Beti said to me, "There's a guy you should meet, he will interest you." He took me to a place near the National Library, and there I saw someone sitting at a huge desk covered with magazines, swinging his legs and wearing shoes with holes in them! He talked to me about Africa in a way that fascinated me. At the time, the whole movement in favor of the recognition of African culture was beginning in France, Belgium, and Great Britain, and we were witnessing something very interesting.

A.M.-D.: When was that?

I.L.: It was in the early 1960s. Paul had made his way from Brussels, where he worked for the French-language weekly *Pourquoi pas?*, which had sent him to the Congo. There, he had started a magazine with Black people in favor of independence! So, after a year, he was expelled along with the magazine's editor. He ended up in Paris and, with another couple, immediately set up an agency, a press agency on Africa, but one that covered the whole of Africa, which didn't exist in France. It was at this agency that I met him again. They were extraordinarily cultured and passionate publishers, and when I met Paul, I changed levels! That's how I had the chance to interview artists, particularly in Senegal.

A.M.-D.: And where did Paul Lebeer come from?

I.L.: His parents were from Mechelen. His grandparents made furniture and large suitcases for the Tropics. Rik Wouters⁵ had his studio in the backyard of the company. My father-in-law, Louis Lebeer, studied art history and became a leading expert on Bruegel's engravings. He taught in Ghent and Liège and headed the Print Room at the Royal Library of Belgium in Brussels. Paul used to say that when he was 12, he wanted to read Proust, but his father made him read Francisque Sarcey's *Le Siège de Paris*, so he read Proust in secret, with a small flashlight. I was also very fond of his mother; she was a teacher. Paul's parents were very refined, very modest, and very kind people. But Paul rebelled when he was still in high school, left for the south of France, and came back without school-leaving qualifications. He immediately became a journalist. But all his life, he lamented not being an academic. He used to say: "I envy those people because they get paid to think." Paul adored a bibliophile uncle, who was CEO of Union Minière du Katanga at the time he was expelled from the Congo! He had a private plane and went to all the sales of manuscripts, rare books, etc.

A.M.-D.: So, you met Paul...

I.L.: I met Paul. He wasn't in publishing yet, but books were his thing. He had gone to the Congo with a huge library of original editions of French surrealist works, and everything stayed there! He worked at

³ Paul Lebeer (1924-1994) became Irmeline's husband.

⁴ In 1956. Alioune Diop (born in 1910 in Saint-Louis, Senegal, and died in Paris in 1980) was a great defender of African cultures and an activist for decolonization. In 1947, he founded the magazine *Présence africaine* in Paris, followed by the publishing house of the same name in 1949.

⁵ Rik Wouters, a Fauvist sculptor and painter, was born in Mechelen in 1882 and died prematurely in Amsterdam in 1916.

this agency, and I knew Will Grohmann, who was a member of the editorial board of the beautiful magazine *Quadrup*, created by Ernst Goldschmidt,⁶ who was also the founder and director of Éditions de la Connaissance. That's how Paul got in touch with Goldschmidt. He was looking for translators, and I translated Giedion's *Space, Time, Architecture*, which he published in 1968. I also did some German translation work with Françoise Rosset, Borges' translator and Clément Rosset's sister: I sat at a small table with my Olivetti and sent a translation to Françoise, who didn't speak a word of German, and she turned it into good French. That's how I learned French! We did several translations for Goldschmidt. Then he offered Paul a position at his publishing house in Brussels and asked him to be his successor. And since Paul apparently had a life plan—first as a journalist, then as a publisher, and finally as a bookseller, which was his big dream! — he said “yes” right away, and we left Paris, a little nervous, for Brussels. We got off at the Midi station and entered a huge waiting room, where you could have heard a pin drop... So, Paul said to me, “We're taking the next train back to Paris...” We had kept the apartment, next to the Sorbonne, on Rue Victor Cousin. We had lived in Paris for 12 years. And we were still in the mood of May 1968...

A.M.-D.: When was that?

I.L.: 1970-72. However, Paul went to Éditions de la Connaissance and immediately set to work. Journalists work quickly, but that wasn't Mr. Goldschmidt's pace. He let it go, but after a while, things weren't working out between them. Paul wanted to create a collection on the humanities in relation to works of art, which he eventually did at Peeters in Leuven.⁷ They parted amicably, and Paul launched his own publishing house. We did it together, my brother Herbert, Paul and I. For my part, I had continued my interviews for the radio, etc., and I had been contacted by the editor-in-chief of *L'Art vivant*,⁸ whose name was Chevallier. I wrote for *L'Art vivant* from the very beginning...

A.M.-D.: From the very first issue?

I.L.: Not from the very first, no. Maybe issue 5 or 6.⁹ I had a great fondness for abstract art, but it wasn't our generation. Here, we were really looking at a new generation that was seeking to free itself from the market and galleries, and that fascinated us. And the artists I interviewed all had a book inside them! They all had this desire to make books. That's how we started publishing.

A.M.-D.: Your brother Herbert arrived at that point, and Édition Lebeer Hossmann was born.

I.L.: Yes. Paul was still working full-time at Goldschmidt; I was working a little at Goldschmidt, but not much. So, in order to be able to make these artists' books, we roped in my brother, who was totally up for it and who is also a voracious reader, like Paul. It was in Hamburg that my brother released all our first editions, but it was us who knew Boltanski, Le Gac, and all the artists who made the first books. At first it was Éditions Hossmann, until one evening, in our kitchen, my mother said to my brother, “Listen, don't you think it's high time you put Lebeer's name on it, too?”

A.M.-D.: Because Paul was already fully involved?

⁶ Ernst Goldschmidt (1906-1992), Belgian publisher, founder of Éditions de la Connaissance in Brussels in 1937 and of the magazine *Quadrup* (1956-1966).

⁷ In 1969, however, he edited a collective volume entitled *Les Sciences humaines et l'œuvre d'art* (The Humanities and the Work of Art) for La Connaissance publishing house.

⁸ *Chroniques de l'art vivant* (Chronicles of Living Art), published by Aimé Maeght, Paris, November 1968-January 1973. Jean Clair became editor-in-chief from issue 15 (November 1970).

⁹ In fact, it was issue 10 (April 1970). The articles are unsigned, but Irmeline Lebeer appears in the list of editors (her first name still spelled in the German style, Irmelin). She is certainly the author of the interview with Harald Szeemann, entitled “L'agence Harald Szeemann” (The Harald Szeemann Agency).

I. L.: Paul was fully involved. We parted ways with Goldschmidt, who wasn't interested. But my brother also worked hard on the first editions. In Hamburg, after 1968, there were alternative presses everywhere for pirated editions. There were small offset machines in basements, and students—my brother was still more or less a student—could print a book by Boltanski, for example, with a few typos that we corrected in the third edition!¹⁰ We didn't have much money and we could do all this cheaply.

A.M.-D.: What did your brother study?

I.L.: Law, too, because my father was a lawyer, so we were kind of pushed in that direction.

A.M.-D.: Where did Herbert's interest in contemporary art come from?

I.L.: He was influenced by us, of course, but he quickly developed a strong personal interest. In Hamburg, he was a member of the board of Kunstverein. We quickly came to an agreement.

A.M.-D.: How did you start your publishing venture?

I.L.: The catalyst was the "Happening & Fluxus" exhibition at the Kunstverein in Cologne in November 1970, organized by Harald Szeemann. That was my first report for *L'Art vivant*.¹¹ Paul came too, and we were staying at my brother's house. They were all there: there was Ben (Vautier), there was Brecht, there was Carolee Schneemann, there was Filliou, there was... It was wonderful! At the back of the room, there was a long table and people were drinking; I can still hear Brecht's laughter! Each artist had their own booth,¹² and Filliou was there with a barrel, and we had to throw in a coin and tell a joke, something like that. There was a garage, which was part of the exhibition, where Nitsch and the actionists performed their actions by slaughtering lambs on the artist's naked body and making a deafening noise with metal objects. It's a good way to cope with cruelty, isn't it? And another good way to distance yourself from it is to have a camera, which I did... But later, when I saw the photos, I really felt sick.

A.M.-D.: So that exhibition was the initial shock?

I.L.: Yes. I think it was shortly after that we founded our publishing house... And before that, we went to *documenta*.

A.M.-D.: The one in 1972, also organized by Szeemann.

I. L.: Yes. I think that *documenta* was very important for everyone. It was a really powerful moment. From then on, we really became part of a network, and that was thanks to Szeemann. We became really good friends with him; he came here, he lived here, and I still feel a great affinity with him. We were staying at the same hotel as Broodthaers, whom we had never met before. He was already very ill, with cirrhosis of the liver, I think. He was alone, and I approached him and said, "I'm a journalist, I'd love to interview you," and we went down two floors to his room, where we had large plates of cured

¹⁰ This is the 1998 reissue of Christian Boltanski's *Photographic Album* (1972). Irmeline Lebeer counts the limited edition of the first edition as the second edition, as it was produced later (see note 18 below).

¹¹ "Happening & Fluxus," *Chroniques de l'art vivant*, no. 16, December 1970-January 1971, pp. 4-5. Irmeline Lebeer also provided the photographic coverage.

¹² The original text uses the term "kot": A Belgian term used to describe a small space, from a storage room to a student dormitory. In this case, it refers to a cubicle. See the exhibition plan drawn by Wolf Vostell on the cover of the documentary booklet (untitled) that accompanied the catalog compiled by Harald Szeemann and Hanns Sohm.

ham and tea brought in, and we spent almost all our time with Broodthaers in his room! We saw the *documenta* too, but spent a lot of time with Broodthaers.

A.M.-D.: What particularly struck you about this *documenta*?

I.L.: There were three artists who wanted to dominate the whole thing: Broodthaers, Buren above all, and Beuys. You could really sense that Buren and Beuys didn't like each other at all, and Broodthaers really made that the theme of his first major exhibition in Düsseldorf that same year, which was based on the theme of the eagle [l'aigle].¹³ With Filliou, there was no such rivalry. Cladders had a section¹⁴ in which he had invited Filliou, whom we were also seeing for the first time. Filliou had said to Broodthaers, "Come to my space," and Broodthaers had said no and then told us, "It's unbelievable, who does he think he is, he wants..."

A.M.-D.: ...annex me?

I. L.: Yes, even though that wasn't Filliou's intention at all. For years, we spent a lot of time with both of them, and their perspectives on the same reality were always very different: Broodthaers was very caustic and scathing, while Filliou was kind, positive, and capable of finding great beauty in the large Buddhist murals on the walls of a restaurant.

A.M.-D.: So, after the 1972 *documenta*, you created your own publishing house.

I.L.: I said to myself: my brother, Paul, and I are really a collective. My brother came very often. We would prepare things with the artists, and he would often produce them in Hamburg because it was possible to do so cheaply there. He was very close to Dieter Roth; Paul was totally on the same wavelength as Broodthaers, right down to their childhood memories of *Quick and Flupke*; and I was close to Filliou, because he was naive enough for me to be able to follow him!

A.M.-D.: At the beginning, in 1972, you published three books: Boltanski, *L'Album photographique de Christian Boltanski*; Le Gac, *Le Récit*; and Gerz, *Exit*.

But there was a work by Vostell before that?

I.L.: Yes, but since it's an object, not a book, I left it out.

A.M.-D.: So, your first publication was with Vostell?

I.L.: Yes, *Salat*, in 1971. As part of the "Happening & Fluxus" exhibition, Vostell organized this happening where he invited the public on a train journey between Cologne and Aachen—a 40-minute trip—in a carriage filled with 25 crates of lettuce. One crate of lettuce continued to travel from station to station for a year, and monthly examinations allowed the progress of its decomposition to be observed. At the same time, all participants were invited to monitor their health throughout the

¹³ *Der Adler vom Oligozän bis Heute [The Eagle from the Oligocene to Today]*, Düsseldorf, Städtische Kunsthalle, 1972. Texts by Johannes Cladders and exhibition by Harald Szeemann. Cladders (1924-2009) was one of the most important curators of those years, spending most of his career at the Mönchengladbach Museum (1967-1985), where he supported many leading artists.

¹⁴ "Individuelle Mythologien I + II. Selbstdarstellung, 'Prozesse' (Individual Mythologies I + II. Self-Representation, 'Processes')," section 16 of the *documenta 5* catalog, Kassel, Documenta GmbH and Bertelsmann GmbH, 1972. Texts by Johannes Cladders and exhibition by Harald Szeemann. Cladders (1924-2009) was one of the most important curators of those years, spending most of his career at the Mönchengladbach Museum (1967-1985), where he supported many leading artists.

year:¹⁵ essentially, to track their own deterioration alongside that of the lettuce... which ended up looking like dried cow dung! And when they returned to Vostell, he said, "We're going to make an object out of this..." 23 copies of a wooden box containing salad residue, in a Plexiglas box. It was a large object because a second box contained all the documentation of the happening and a bronze cast of a salad, wrapped in canvas.¹⁶

A.M.-D.: Did he have the object made, or did you?

I.L.: I think we paid for it, but he really took charge of things. He did everything himself, I think. He was someone with such energy! A year later, once we knew the scene a little better, we said to ourselves that if we had known, we certainly wouldn't have started with Vostell!

A.M.-D.: So, you started by publishing what is known as a multiple. Were you aware at the time of the importance that multiples would take on, or were taking on, particularly for Fluxus artists?

I.L.: We did it because the artist suggested it.

A.M.-D.: Then there were the first books. Which one was the first? Boltanski? Le Gac? Gerz?

I.L.: As I recall, it was the same year.

A.M.-D.: Yes. So, it happened more or less at the same time?

I.L.: Yes. A year is a long time, isn't it? We discovered some of them at François Mathey's exhibition at the Grand Palais in Paris in May 1972,¹⁷ the exhibition where artists turned their canvases upside down: I thought it was a great way of saying, "I'm here and I'm not here!"

A. M.-D.: It was an exhibition commissioned by President Pompidou, on French art. That's where the Malassis brothers made a name for themselves by taking down their painting and showing that they didn't want to be co-opted by the right-wing government.

I.L.: Le Gac and Boltanski took part in it.

A.M.-D.: Really? Perhaps we could take a look at those first books you made with Boltanski, Le Gac, and Gerz.

I.L.: I remember Boltanski in particular. We had a short list of all the collectors. We always had this ambivalence: the idea was that the books should be sold at cost so that they could be accessible to everyone—which was very important to the artists—but that collectors, who would enjoy owning a limited edition, would help us finance the publication. We didn't have a penny! The first thing that

¹⁵ From November 7, 1970, to November 5, 1971. At the end of the happening, an exhibition (November 6–December 8, 1971), "Anatomie des Happenings Salat" (Anatomy of the Salad Happenings), took place at the René Block Gallery in Berlin. It included documentation, the salad boxes, and the participants' medical examinations.

¹⁶ A publisher's list from 1995 describes the multiple as follows: "Salad box under Plexiglas (63 x 42 x 25 cm). A second box containing documentation on the Salad happening from November 7, 1970, to November 6, 1971 (concept, idea, train schedules, plans, coupons, photos, press kit, biological diagrams, approx. 100 Xerox copies and 20 original photos) plus a bronze cast of a salad dehydrated after 92 days of the happening. 23 copies, numbered and signed in several places."

¹⁷ "1960–1972. Twelve Years of Contemporary Art in France," May 17–September 18, 1972.

came out was a very simple booklet, printed on a pirate press.¹⁸ Annette Messenger took the photos. Boltanski made a little notebook in which he pasted the photos and put the typed text underneath. Then there was a later version in a metal cookie tin, with the original prints.¹⁹ I think it's still worth keeping the photos... I think we sold it for 250 Deutsch marks [about €130] or something like that.

A.M.-D.: Why does it say Sonnabend Press?

I.L.: Boltanski was an artist at the gallery, and it's true, she did intervene, but she bought her copies from us.

A.M.-D.: In his interview, Michel Durand-Dessert says that she demanded to have her name on a book he was publishing because the artist was in her gallery, but she didn't want to pay a penny!

I.L.: It was at her place that we met Durand-Dessert! We waited together in the Sonnabend gallery, sitting on the marble steps! She was fair to us for this edition. Ileana was an intelligent and very elegant woman. She had a beautiful Romanian bearing, she was all Middle Eastern, but the only one who was reliable was her secretary, a German woman: with her, we could get paid. Ileana Sonnabend said to us one day, for example: "The MoMA absolutely must have your editions, etc., give them to me and I'll place them." She took about ten of the most expensive ones, the MoMA acquired one or two things, paid us, but we never managed to get back the copies that hadn't been sold.

A.M.-D.: Was the limited edition of *L'Album photographique* Boltanski's idea?

I.L.: He made it. It was those metal boxes where he put his little clay balls... And what you see on the box are his thumbs, his fingers, I think. That's something that appeared later, because normally the box is shiny. He wrote the title on it by hand, with a Pentel marker.

A.M.-D.: You reissued the standard version of the book in 1998, with a print run of 1,500 copies.

I.L.: Yes, that's right. It had been out of print for a long time and people were asking for it. We made a few improvements. Christian modified some of the photos because some of them weren't the right way round. He used the contents of the box as a model and everything now matches Annette Messenger's original photos. We included three languages to make it easier to read: German, English, and French. In the first edition, we added thin dividers between the pages with the translations. As always, I was slow to prepare this reissue, and when I finally released it, it went unnoticed! But the other problem is distribution. We need to create a website. I dream of a website that would be very, very simple. [Consulting a list of their publications] It's true that when you leaf through this list, you don't get much information about the publications. But if we create a website, I expect everything to sell out very quickly. It will be a little sad! But for the moment, no one thinks we still exist... And then, it's not easy to know how much things are worth and to set a price. For example, the Broodthaers *Atlas*²⁰ is something that is difficult to estimate because it hardly ever goes on sale.

A.M.-D.: Have you thought about republishing it, like Boltanski's book?

¹⁸ Christian Boltanski, *L'Album photographique de Christian Boltanski 1948-1956*, Hamburg, Hossmann; Paris, Sonnabend Press, 1972, 500 copies.

¹⁹ This is the limited edition (60 copies).

²⁰ Marcel Broodthaers, *La Conquête de l'espace. Atlas à l'usage des artistes et des militaires (The Conquest of Space: Atlas for Artists and Military Personnel)*, Brussels, Lebeer Hossmann, 1975. (50 copies).

I.L.: It's an idea that Maria Broodthaers has regularly: the *Atlas* needs to be republished. Maria even told me that if I didn't do it, she would do it with another publisher!²¹

A.M.-D.: And why don't you want to do it?

I.L.: Annie de Decker,²² for example, has a strict policy of never reissuing a book. For Boltanski, a reissue is the same book, and it's as cheap as it was originally. But with Broodthaers...

A.M.-D.: ... You think he wouldn't have liked that?

I.L.: I don't think he would have wanted that.

A.M.-D.: Broodthaers had a bibliophile side to him, didn't he?

I.L.: Oh yes! He was a bargain hunter himself. He used to go to the “Vieux marché” (Old Market) on Place du Jeu-de-Balle. It's a real flea market, unlike Les Sablons, which is an antiques market. I was told that Broodthaers was seen there one day with his table, and it started to snow: everyone else took refuge in the little cafés around, but Broodthaers stayed alone in the snow with his books. I hope he had an umbrella! That's why, in my opinion, this *Atlas* had to be signed by him, it had to have all the qualities of a rare item. When we made the *Atlas*, the opening was in December and he died at the end of January, so the *Atlas* is not signed by him. It was Maria who made a tiny little stamp from the estate to authenticate it.

A.M.-D.: This edition is very beautiful, but at the same time, we must remember that there are many people who would like to see the book but cannot.

I.L.: But there's one copy of the *Atlas* at the National Library, and there's another *Atlas* at Beaubourg too!

A.M.-D.: First you have to come to Paris, and you can't see it without making an appointment.

I.L.: But Broodthaers wouldn't have minded that!

A.M.-D.: There's also the printing plate that was used to make the book.

I.L.: It's here, in the hallway. I went to have it framed with Broodthaers, at his framer's. He wanted it to be like this [black mat, with a small bevel and a black rod]. He had already signed some of the plates.²³

A.M.-D.: Did you plan to make an additional print run for this plate, or was it a surplus?

I.L.: It was surplus stock, as there always is. But when Broodthaers saw the plates, he was struck by them and thought they resembled Sumerian writing. I have a friend who works in restoration, and I gave her an unsigned plate. To me, it has no commercial value, right?

A.M.-D.: Because it's not signed?

I.L.: Yes. Do you think it has any value?

²¹ This was done, without Irmeline Lebeer's consent, in 2016, by MoMA, in 500 copies.

²² Founder and director of the Wide White Space gallery in Antwerp from 1966 to 1976. Broodthaers was one of the artists she championed.

²³ 22 copies out of a print run of 50 were signed. The other 28 bear the estate's stamp.

A.M.-D.: It depends on what kind of value we're talking about! What's more important, the signature or the work?

I.L.: That's what the market dictates, not me!

A.M.-D.: Let's talk about Le Gac's book, *Le Récit*:²⁴ how did this book come about?

I.L.: Le Gac's idea was to collect all the press articles about his work and replace his name with that of Florent Max, a character from a novel by...

A.M.-D.: ...Maurice Renard.

I.L.: It's fiction, and Florent Max is his alter ego. I think we must have wondered about the content! I'd have to find that again... I kept a journal at the time.

A.M.-D.: It is one of Le Gac's first two books, the other, edited by Jean-Marc Poinot, also being about Florent Max, *Jean Le Gac / Florent Max*.²⁵

I.L.: In the limited edition, he included objects, invitation cards, and documents related to the exhibitions in question.

A.M.-D.: Jean Le Gac wrote in his own hand [Reading]: "I am enclosing here some of the elements that were used. This is a precursor to what would later become *Le Récit*," and it is signed Jean Le Gac. There is also a list of items that were included in the first edition: "Maps, amateur photos, 1970 model envelopes used to camouflage the stones, silkscreen printing on canvas, postal delivery, 200 recipients in October 1970, invitation card sent in November 1971 inviting recipients to visit the InfraWatt company store in Paris, proclaimed by the author to be an 'exhibition object' without the owner's knowledge, and invitation card for the 'Jean Le Gac / Florent Max' exhibition, Paris, December 1971, where Florent Max was mentioned for the first time. Since the exhibition "Jean Le Gac/ Florent Max" dates from December 1971, this means that the book of the same title must be slightly earlier than yours. Do you remember how this book came about?

I.L.: I don't remember who printed it, probably my brother, because that was the period when he was producing the majority.²⁶ We kept two sets of accounts, in Hamburg and Brussels: at the end of the year, he would come back from Hamburg, I would reimburse him, etc. But one year there was an audit and we were told: "What you're doing is a hobby, it's not professional. We're revoking your right to deduct expenses, etc." So, we stopped doing it. But at the time, I kept a list of the accounts, which I'll have to find.

A.M.-D.: I asked you this question because one day you told me that Le Gac wanted to write a book, but he didn't really know how to go about it and he wasn't one of those artists who comes up with a ready-made draft.

I.L.: I don't remember. I'd have to ask my brother. My brother often came here, he spent a lot of time here, but some artists also went to Hamburg and then had their work printed in Paris. I don't remember Le Gac being here, creating this book. We had a layout artist, Jean Toche, who was also the layout artist for *L'Art vivant*...

²⁴ Jean Le Gac, *Le Récit*, Hamburg, Hossmann, 1972. (500 copies).

²⁵ Jean Le Gac, *Jean Le Gac / Florent Max*, Paris, Cédic, 1972.

²⁶ The colophon is entirely in German.

A.M.-D.: What's his name?²⁷

I.L.: Jean Toche. He's a good layout artist.

A.M.-D.: Then you published *Le Fantôme des Beaux-Arts* from Le Gac.²⁸

I.L.: Yes. The book with a handwritten letter and the framed photo on the wall belong together.

A.M.-D.: And two years later, in 1977, you published *Der Maler*.²⁹

I.L.: The book was published for Le Gac's exhibition at the Kunstverein in Hamburg. It was a beautiful exhibition... My brother had acted as a liaison with the director of the Kunstverein in Hamburg, Uwe M. Schneede, who had commissioned us to produce what would become the catalog. Afterwards, Le Gac wanted to produce a limited edition. He had just discovered Caspar David Friedrich at the Orangerie in Paris, where there was an exhibition on German Romanticism,³⁰ and then at Hamburger Kunsthalle, where there are many Caspar David Friedrich paintings. So, there are reproductions of his paintings in this book: he mailed postcards to unknown recipients, each with a short text. We received a lot of mail at that time!

A.M.-D.: There is a card sent to "Mr. and Mrs. Lebeer" that is addressed to Jacques Morand, for example. Is this someone who exists or not?

I.L.: It is an imaginary recipient.³¹

A.M.-D.: Are the cards in the different copies of the first edition the same?

I.L.: I think they are the same.

A.M.-D.: That means Le Gac would have sent you several copies of the same cards to produce the entire first edition. The book's binding is coming apart. It can no longer be opened completely.

I.L.: Glue is a big problem for publishers, and now aging: every time I open a box, I worry.

A.M.-D.: Let's go back to your beginnings as publishers in 1972, with Jochen Gerz's book *Exit*.³² You co-published it with Howeg.

²⁷ There is a better-known namesake who was an artist and activist, founder of the GAAG (Guerilla Art Action Group, 1969-1976) in the United States. The model maker referred to here, born in Nice in 1930, was also a decorator and illustrator.

²⁸ Jean Le Gac, *Le Fantôme des Beaux-Arts*, Hamburg, Hossmann, 1975. (25 copies including a booklet, a handwritten letter, and a wall photo.)

²⁹ Jean Le Gac, *Der Maler*, Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1977. The limited edition discussed here (18 copies + 6 H. C.) includes six handwritten postcards (one in a sealed envelope) and a colophon card attached to tabs.

³⁰ "La Peinture allemande à l'époque du romantisme," (German Painting in the Romantic Era,) October 25, 1976 - February 28, 1977.

³¹ The colophon mentions that the recipients are painters Peter Stevens (2 cards), Jacques Morand, Livinia Chamsun, Bill Hawkes, and a sealed envelope is addressed to Éditions Lebeer Hossmann. The texts refer to the character of the "Painter" and the work of Jean Le Gac.

³² Jochen Gerz, *Exit. Materialien zum Dachau-Projekt*, Hamburg, Hossmann; Hinwil [Switzerland], Howeg, 1972. (200 copies, including 20 deluxe copies.) Reprinted in Zurich, Howeg, 1996.

I.L.: It was negotiated between my brother and Howeg: I suppose it was Howeg who suggested a co-publication because Gerz was never visiting here.

A.M.-D.: He wasn't one of your artists...

I.L.: No. I've always been a bit reserved, was not too attracted to Gerz. I thought he had taken Beuys' brown letters and I don't know what else from whom... But he evolved and ended up doing all kinds of interesting things with writing, environments, etc.

A.M.-D.: And how come the 1996 reissue was done solely by Howeg?

I.L.: Oh yes! He doesn't mention us anymore. But it was Howeg's initiative in the first place.

A.M.-D.: There was a kind of installation around this book: it was placed on tables, each lit by a small lamp, with a chair so that people could consult it.

I.L.: Yes, I saw it at the Museum of Modern Art in Paris. It was quite a striking environment, with a very gloomy atmosphere, full of sadness.

A.M.-D.: Was there also a limited edition?

I.L.: Yes, yes. It was the same thing but with the original photos, which had to be pasted in by hand.

A.M.-D.: On demand?

I.L.: Yes, like Annette's book: we've now reached the end of the thirty copies of her book.³³ But there are some photos missing for the last one, so we're in the process of remaking them... It's printed on Agfa paper, which is no longer easy to find. I pestered Annette to let me paste the photos into the last copies, and also to let her draw on the last photos.

A.M.-D.: The photos are glued onto accordion-folded boards, and each sequence is accompanied by a short story written by hand beneath the photos.

I. L.: Yes, there are five in total, [reading:] "The man in the striped sweater," "The man with rolled-up sleeves," "The young man with the satchel," "The man with the tie," and "The 45-year-old man." In fact, Annette sat on the terrace of a café on Boulevard Saint-Germain and photographed men as they approached, zooming in on their fly at the end! One of them called out to her, saying, "What are you doing, etc.?" and she replied, "I'm taking a picture of the Church of Saint-Germain!" She wrote these little romantic texts: "He had such blue eyes..." while aiming at their fly. And in the end, she drew them herself.

A. M.-D.: On photographic paper, then?

I. L.: Yes, exactly. In the end, the blow-up becomes so blurry that she intervenes herself. We chose a men's fabric—gabardine—to make a sort of portfolio for the booklets which we closed with men's shoelaces, and it became something very sought-after but impossible to find!

A.M.-D.: How did this project come about? Was the book made here? Or at your brother's house?

³³ Annette Messenger, collectionneuse, *Les Approches*, Hamburg, Hossmann, 1973. (30 copies, 5 accordion-fold booklets in a fabric portfolio.)

I. L.: No, I think Annette printed her photos herself, in her bathtub...

A.M.-D.: And the folding?

I. L.: ... she did all that. And she wrote by hand. We met her here, with Boltanski, very, very early on, at the beginning of the publishing house. He had this beauty on his arm, she had magnificent eyes, long hair, a beauty, eh? And she had never made any books... So we went to her apartment, which was funny because there was a hallway in the middle and four rooms, like a square around it, and in those four rooms there were lots of stuffed birds and things like that. Paul suggested she do a publication, and so she got started, brave Annette, and she did it all herself.

A. M.-D.: So, she did something completely different from what she was doing at the time with stuffed birds or birds dressed in knitted clothes.

I.L.: We talked to her about what interested her, and one day she came up with this project, if I remember correctly.

A.M.-D.: So, it was the invitation that prompted the publication...

I.L.: I think it was her first publication. She wasn't recognized as an artist at all yet.

A.M.-D.: That's true. Her public life as "Annette Messenger, collectionneuse" really began in 1973. You published *Les Approches* and Yellow Now published *Mes clichés témoins*: which came first, which came second, I don't know! And the following year she took part in François Mathey's exhibition, "Ils collectionnent," at the Musée des Arts Déco.

I.L.: "Annette Messenger, collectionneuse": did she keep that name her whole life?

A.M.-D.: No, only two years, in 1973-74.

I.L.: She's adorable, Annette and Boltanski are adorable, they don't want their share of the sales, etc.: it's really wonderful how generous they both are. Like all the artists whose first editions we produced. They felt supported, it was important to them, and they are grateful. Filliou also said to me one day: "I'm an old man of the desert, I don't forget anything!"

A.M.-D.: On the colophon, it says: "Édition Hossmann." But the double name, "Lebeer Hossmann," appears the same year, notably on Acconci's book.³⁴

I.L.: At first, as I said earlier, it was just my brother's name. When Paul really got started, we put the double name, "Lebeer Hossmann."

A.M.-D.: How did you get in touch with Acconci? Through *L'Art vivant*?

I.L.: No. Acconci was through Sonnabend. As Durand-Dessert recounts, Sonnabend became interested in us as publishers.³⁵ And she asked us if we would be interested in doing this book. We did it at our own risk, but she had to buy a certain number of copies from us anyway. I find it a really interesting book because it's the genesis of a happening. But I never met Acconci for this book; I met him later, here in Brussels...

³⁴ Vito Acconci, *Behavior Fields* [...] *Notes on the Development of a Show* [...], Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1973. (250 copies.)

³⁵ Acconci's *Pulse*, edited by Durand-Dessert, was also published in 1973.

A.M.-D.: Recently, you mean?

I.L.: Yes, a year or two ago.

A.M.-D.: But how did the book come about if you didn't meet the artist?

I.L.: We had an original, handmade by Acconci, which was reproduced as is. My brother did that in Hamburg.

A.M.-D.: And the small photos that are pasted into the book, did Acconci provide them to you?

I.L.: No, my brother had the reprints made.

A.M.-D.: Did he have the negatives or did he rephotograph them? It looks like a photographic reprint: a reproduction of the originals on photographic paper.

I.L.: Yes, that's right. My brother had a girlfriend who helped him with all the work of reprinting the photos. But it was my brother who retyped the texts one by one—250 copies! — and pasted them all in place. All these texts are quotations from authors who inspired Acconci.

A.M.-D.: If you run your finger over it, you can feel the relief of the typing.

I.L.: And the paper, with the red or black handwriting, is very similar to the original.

A. M.-D.: It's a very beautiful book. There's a map of the gallery with the three rooms, A, B, and C, and I think that dictates the oblong format of the book.

I.L.: That's possible. We still have a few photos: we're sticking them in as we go along, but with a weaker glue than in 1973 because it pierced the paper!

A.M.-D.: Does that mean Acconci had pre-signed the 250 copies?

I.L.: Acconci signed the printed copies, but they were blank, with no photos or text glued in. I still have a small package here to make the very last ones.

A.M.-D.: How did the collaboration with Sonnabend go?

I.L.: It was fine. But I think it was Sarkis who noticed at the time that the publisher's name wasn't mentioned. So, we stuck on little pieces of paper with "Edition Lebeer Hossmann" on them—it was Sarkis' idea—it's nicely done, isn't it?

A.M.-D.: That brings us back to the idea of small blocks of text stuck together! And what happened to the original?

I.L.: I think we had to return the original to Sonnabend, who had lent it to us.

A.M.-D.: Perhaps we could move on to Sarkis's binder?³⁶ Under what circumstances did you make it?

³⁶ Sarkis (Sarkis Zabunyan, known as), 23 classified documents, Hamburg, Hossmann, [1973]. (46 copies accompanied by an audio cassette.)

I.L.: He was the one who suggested it. Sarkis was very close friends with Paul—with us, but especially with Paul. Paul was a very inspiring figure for artists. He was very interested in crossing boundaries. That was probably the initial impetus behind a lot of the things we did here! Sarkis wrote texts that are half in French and half in Turkish: with him, everything is always mysterious, a little frightening too. He is very Eastern. I always said to him, “If you want us to do an interview together, we'll go to Istanbul, I need Istanbul as a backdrop!” And in the end, we did one here and one at his studio, which is very good, by the way.³⁷

A.M.-D.: So, he wrote the text?

I.L.: He made up a story where scary things happen. I like it because it's an open-ended story that the reader has to piece together. [She reads the text.] Each page has a stamp that says “Classified” and another that says “Based on the original copy.” Each document has a serial number. Passages are circled in green pencil and can be found on this tape. He added sound effects, so you can hear the telephone, the creaking floorboards, Turkish voices, etc., and you're not quite sure what's going on. Sarkis' recordings are always excellent quality.

A.M.-D.: Who took care of the printing? Was it him?

I.L.: It wasn't him; we produced the book.

A.M.-D.: In 1973, you also published a book by Hanne Darboven, *El Lissitzky*.³⁸

I.L.: It was co-published with Gevaert: we sometimes published things that Gevaert wanted to do for the Palais des Beaux-Arts, which was short of money and looking for co-publishers. He approached us...

A.M.-D.: So, the initiative came from Yves Gevaert?

I.L.: Yes. That's right. And he asked Darboven for something: it's not a catalog, it's a work of art.

A.M.-D.: It's a reproduction of a manuscript, isn't it?

I.L.: Absolutely. Gevaert printed it. Generally, we received a portion of the print run based on our various contributions. But I never received everything... It disappeared into that huge Palace of Fine Arts...

A.M.-D.: And did you work with Darboven on this book?

I.L.: Not on this book, but for *L'Art vivant*.

A.M.-D.: 1973 was a big year for you! There was also Filliou's suitcase and two Broodthaers. Seven editions in a single year!

I.L.: Incredible!

A.M.-D.: What was the first book you did with Broodthaers?

³⁷ It appeared in the catalog *Sarkis*, Strasbourg, Les musées de la ville; Brussels-Hamburg, Éditions Lebeer Hossmann, 1989.

³⁸ Hanne Darboven, [Das Sehen ist nämlich auch eine Kunst [...]] [El Lissitzky], Brussels, Daled; Hamburg, Hossmann; Brussels, Yves Gevaert, Société des expositions, 1973. (1,000 copies.)

I.L.: I think it was *Baudelaire*.³⁹

A.M.-D.: Then there's *Le Voyage en mer du Nord*, which is a co-publication.⁴⁰

I.L.: Petersburg Press was looking for co-publishers and contacted us, no doubt on Broodthaers' recommendation, so we did the French edition, Petersburg Press did the English edition, and Dumont did the German edition. For the book, he took a canvas here, extracted details from it, and also made a film based on this small canvas, which is a story without words. Petersburg Press printed the copies.

A.M.-D.: The three print runs?

I.L.: Yes, yes. And the limited edition, with the film, which is the same for all three editions. It was divided up according to what each person wanted to take. We took ten limited edition copies.

A.M.-D.: In the limited edition, is the book different from the regular edition: signed, for example?

I.L.: [Carefully unpacking his last copy and looking for a signature:] No, the book is not signed.

A.M.-D.: But look, there's a number there, on the envelope: 58/100. What makes it a limited edition is the addition of the film. It should be numbered... Ah, here it is, it's signed on the film box. [Reading:] "This film, 16 mm, color, silent, 4 min. 15 sec., is a companion to the picture book *A Voyage on the North Sea*. It accompanies the first hundred copies of this book. It is considered an intrinsic part of the publication. It must not be shown in public except by museums and universities." The copyright is from 1974. So, the film is later than the 1973 book.

I.L.: Broodthaers was eager to publish. Annie de Decker told us that one day he was offered an exhibition and a catalog, but he wanted a book. He preferred a book to an exhibition, like Dieter Roth, who said to me, "I don't care about my paintings, I do that to finance my books; that's what interests me."

A.M.-D.: And *Charles Baudelaire*, under what circumstances was it made?

I.L.: Broodthaers had an exhibition in Germany, I think it was at Werner's... or at Zwirner's, and we rushed like crazy... We arrived at the opening breathless and no one looked at the book! At the CNAC, I had the same experience: I had been asked to set up a pile,⁴¹ and I had prepared a pad of paper for the guard so he could record the sales, but the pad came back to me blank! At first, Broodthaers was really not recognised at all.

A.M.-D.: It's true that public recognition came quite late. After the exhibition at the Jeu de Paume museum [1992].

I.L.: So late? So long after his death?

³⁹ Marcel Broodthaers, *Charles Baudelaire. Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes*, Hamburg, Hossmann, 1973. (338 copies, including 13 head copies.)

⁴⁰ Marcel Broodthaers, *A Voyage on the North Sea*, London, Petersburg Press, November 1973. (1,100 copies, including 100 deluxe editions.) *Un voyage en mer du nord*, Brüssel, Hossmann, in association with Petersburg Press, London, November 1973. (1,000 copies). *Eine Reise auf der Nordsee*, Köln, M. Dumont Schauberg in association with Petersburg Press, London, November 1973. (1,000 copies.)

⁴¹ This must be *L'Angélu de Daumier*, Paris, Centre national d'art et de culture Georges Pompidou, Musée national d'art moderne, 1975. 2 volumes (parts 1 and 2).

A.M.-D.: I remember that until the 1990s, you had to explain what Mallarmé's *Le Coup de dés*, revisited by Broodthaers, was all about: very few people knew it. It was one of those references that were like passwords between connoisseurs! Then it became a cliché of contemporary art. But let's get back to *Charles Baudelaire*: why did Broodthaers choose this line— “Je hais le mouvement qui déplace les lignes” (I hate the movement that shifts the lines) — from the sonnet *La Beauté*?

I.L.: We didn't do any exegesis! I accepted things as they were. I'd have to find that long interview I did: as soon as we came back from *documenta*, we saw each other again throughout the summer. He came here very often, we talked a lot, and I recorded it. I was the one interviewing him, but Paul was often there, or Maria, and even Marie-Puck, his daughter, and you can hear all these people on the tape. Do you know Albert Béguin's wonderful book, *L'Âme romantique et le Rêve*? Broodthaers was like Novalis, an engineer and a poet, with this mixture of the conscious and the unconscious. He was both very sarcastic and very romantic: he would dismantle the mechanism of his work in discussion and then throw ink around like an octopus, so that it remained mysterious. For me, he was a true romantic.

A.M.-D.: And how was *Charles Baudelaire* produced?

I.L.: That was the period when it was still being done in Hamburg.

A. M.-D.: The colophon does indeed indicate that the book was published by Hossmann in Hamburg.

I.L.: Broodthaers had made a mock-up; no, not a mock-up, a drawing. Everything was drawn: the size, the English typography, what was in red, what was in black, etc. This time, the book was not printed on a pirate press, but in a small printing house in Hamburg, on a hand press.

A.M.-D.: Could the artist check the proofs?

I.L.: My brother sent them to us and we showed them to the artists. The artists never complained! A record... Broodthaers himself didn't correct anything!

A.M.-D.: The year 1973, which has definitely been a rich year, isn't over yet! There's still Filliou's suitcase, which is your first edition with him.⁴²

I.L.: Normally, everything always started with an interview for *L'Art vivant*, but that wasn't the case with Filliou, whom we discovered in Cologne at the “Happening & Fluxus” exhibition. We had a very strong connection. Then we went to see him in Düsseldorf at his studio at the time. He had moved there thanks to his friends, who had brought him over because he was starving in Villefranche-sur-Mer. They offered him room and board. The Filliou family led a nomadic existence and at that time they were more or less living in the guest room of a young teacher who was very close to the Düsseldorf group, Erik Andersch. He knew everyone and he bought and collected art. The Filliou family were truly like vagabonds, and wherever they went, Marianne always carried a small suitcase containing the manuscripts of Robert, who had been a writer and had written many plays. This suitcase, with the manuscripts, intrigued us. We suggested to Robert that he make another suitcase with reproductions of his manuscripts. It was quite an adventure because we searched for suitcases, especially at flea markets, and when we had gathered them all, it started to stink here! In the end, I think it was Filliou himself who found a shop in Düsseldorf that sold wooden suitcases to painters, where they were supposed to store their brushes and equipment. As they were made of white wood, they suited Filliou perfectly. He made things out of nothing, with a piece of wood or a piece of chalk;

⁴² Robert Filliou, *Research in Dynamics and Comparative Statics*, Brussels/Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1973. White wooden case containing 29 folders of documents and an audio cassette. (30 copies.)

that was his aesthetic. The only thing that bothered him was the handle, which was made of leatherette or something like that, so he removed the handle and replaced it with a wire. He made a card for each case, and when I open the cases, I find this card inside, and it's crumpled, I don't know why. There's also a kind of summary, a sheet of paper. And then a cassette tape with, on one side, a typewriter going clickety-clack... and, on the other side, a text by de Sade in which he lists all the tortures that humanity has invented, which Filliou reads like a kind of chant...

A.M.-D.: Are there any unpublished pieces?

I.L.: Yes, yes.⁴³ They were really Filliou's manuscripts, lots of pieces and other texts. We photocopied them and bought these "farde" (folders)⁴⁴ in all colors. I can still see him here, lying down, signing the folders. There was also a piece of graph paper, which we had problems with because it came unstuck from the lid of the suitcase, so we stuck it back on and you can see it, but with Filliou, it doesn't matter. He never went back to refine anything, it was done very quickly to convey an idea. And then, also stuck on the lid, there is a small handwritten comment in English explaining that the goal is to create "the Ding Dong Territory of the Genial Republic." The idea was that the sale of the suitcase would be used to finance the purchase of an old oil mill in Flayosc. They needed 30,000 marks (about € 15,000), so we made thirty suitcases and sold them for 1,000 (about € 500) each, I don't remember exactly: 400 or 500 for production and the rest was to go to the Filliou family. Dieter Roth and Thomkins, for example, really bought them to help Filliou: Dieter Roth put the suitcase under his desk and put his feet on it!

A.M.-D.: How many did you sell at that time?

I.L.: We sold some to Italian collectors, Giancarlo Politi⁴⁵ and Gino di Maggio.⁴⁶ Initially, it was really his loyal collectors and friends who bought them, and with that money, the Filliou family was able to buy Flayosc, the "territory of the Genial Republic." I described this story in a text called "Le voyage aux pays des concombres" (The Journey to the Land of Cucumbers).⁴⁷ When you bought the suitcase, you actually got 16,704 cm³ of pre-territory of the "Republic of Genius," as indicated on the lid. Filliou had attached a label with the title to the wire that replaced the handle and added on a piece of paper: "Caution: fragile handle, it is better to carry the honorable suitcase under your arm."

A.M.-D.: At the National Library, which purchased it in 1991, I don't know who removed this warning, thinking that it wasn't part of the work, that it was like the word "fragile" on an object! When I interviewed you at the time of the purchase, you told me that it was a bit like an original multiple, i.e., a multiple but each one different. There are handwritten parts, so each copy is necessarily different. And all the folders are titled by hand.

I.L.: Yes, that's true.

A.M.-D.: You also wrote to me one day⁴⁸ that you didn't work with all artists in the same way and that you contrasted Filliou, "with whom everything seems crystal clear to me from the outset," with what you called Broodthaers' "mental meanderings." Enigma and deliberate obscurity on the one hand, and

⁴³ Their publication is discussed below, in relation to the book *Mister Blue from day to day*.

⁴⁴ Original term is "fardes," a Belgianism for "folder" or "file."

⁴⁵ Founder of *Flash Art* magazine, among other publications.

⁴⁶ Milanese collector, creator of the Mudima Foundation.

⁴⁷ See *Robert Filliou*, Hannover, Sprengel Museum; Paris, Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris (ARC 2); Bern, Kunsthalle, 1984, pp. 206–208. Reprinted in English under the title "The Trip to Cucumberland" in Robert Filliou: *The Secret of Permanent Creation*, eds. Anders Kreuger & Irmeline Lebeer, Antwerp, M HKA; [Brussels], Lebeer Hossmann; Milan, Mousse Publishing, [2017], pp. 9-18.

⁴⁸ Fax dated May 3, 1996.

simplicity and transparency on the other. Could we go back to the *Atlas*? What was Broodthaers' goal with this book?

I.L.: I really like the *Atlas* because it is directly meaningful, and I can understand it! Broodthaers believed that artists are primarily concerned with occupying territory. As he was a poet, he disapproved of this. Yet he himself always had one eye on Buren and the other on Beuys: it was very funny! There were big discussions about the form this idea could take in a work, and we ended up with the artist's book. And this book, at a certain point, I remember very well, was supposed to be large format. Do you remember Kiefer's enormous books at the 5th *documenta*? Instead, we ended up with a tiny one called *Atlas for Artists and Soldiers*.

A.M.-D.: Do you think he had Kiefer in mind?

I.L.: No, I'm the one making the connection. But I remember discussions that took place here, during which we really considered making a book about territory, which would resemble a territory. The funny thing is that the scale isn't respected and each country has the same surface area: Liechtenstein seems bigger than the United States because it's more compact!

A.M.-D.: Did Broodthaers, and the artists you published in general, have the same relationship with money when it came to books and their other works?

I.L.: Broodthaers was always broke. But he criticized Carl Andre, for example, for selling his works for so many months' salary as a bus driver. Artists couldn't deal with this money issue because they were conflicted about it. That really characterized that generation. But they never viewed books in the same way: they wanted their books to exist, and so did we, and money really wasn't an issue, either for them or for us. It was about being able to produce it, and that was all, absolutely all. It was very pleasant compared to gallery owners: a gallery owner, however enthusiastic, is someone who has to support the artist, but a publisher doesn't! Did you notice that too?

A.M.-D.: Yes, definitely. What financial arrangement did you offer the artists?

I.L.: The books were produced with virtually no profit. We offered to share the profits when a piece was a little expensive, and at the end of the year, we made a statement of everything we had sold, deducted the production costs, and the rest was shared between the artist and us.

A.M.-D.: There were never any contracts?

I.L.: No, it was a verbal agreement. I remember that Broodthaers preferred to take half of the edition and handle it himself. But it was in their interest to wait, since they benefited from rising prices, which always happened.

A.M.-D.: Oh, they didn't rise that quickly!

I.L.: That's true, but at the time, even small sums were important to them and to us too. It was a very modest business.

A.M.-D.: And since we're on the subject of practical matters, how did you promote your editions?

I.L.: I've already told you how Boltanski and Le Gac each had a sheet with the addresses of their collectors. Generally, there were no more than thirty, so we sent the information to collectors, Éric Decelle and people like that, Sarkis too, and all of them bought the first copies almost automatically. Then we approached museums, but that was much more laborious. I remember that my brother showed the little *Atlas* to the director of the Kunsthalle in Hamburg, whom we knew very well. He said

he would think about it, kept it for a day, and when my brother came back the next day, he said: "I can't buy it because the Kunsthalle library stamp is three times bigger than the book!" In fact, Paul himself was only able to print Broodthaers' copyright notice because the *Atlas* is so small that there wasn't room for the publisher's copyright, and that's a problem because now Maria is the sole copyright holder.

A.M.-D.: In fact, it was you who did the distribution, the artists and you. And the bookstores?

I.L.: We prospected in Saint-Germain, at La Hune, where they refused Oppenheim's book⁴⁹ because it was too big for their shelves. We quickly realized that we needed to put spines on the books so they could be identified on the shelves. People who get into publishing forget about the spine at first. And that was a reason for refusal, because the artists weren't very well known at the time and artist's books were also a new medium. Our first audience was the few collectors for whom we produced a numbered edition, because that was important to them. There were also advertisers in Düsseldorf and Frankfurt, and many graphic designers: all these people mingled with the artists, and since they were earning money, they supported the artists and built-up fine collections. They were really interested.

A.M.-D.: Did they buy the first editions?

I.L.: Even the ordinary editions. That's how it was in Germany. In France, I never got a sense of where the collectors were... In Italy, there was always Politi, who was already publishing at the time. There was also Gino Di Maggio, who was a true patron of the arts, buying pieces, buying editions, and starting to make his own. Here, it was the Daleds who were buying. Artists like Filliou and Gilbert & George and many others often stayed with the Daleds and went back and forth between us and Daled! Herman Daled sold his collection to MoMA. When we talk about it among ourselves, we always say: it was a really small international circle, where we all knew each other, and everyone feels a little nostalgic about that.

A.M.-D.: Who did the bindings and slipcases?

I.L.: Initially, we entrusted this task to our two printers. But the result was that the first Atlases were a complete failure, and the printer, who had suffered greatly, sent us packing! Paul then called the director of the La Cambre school, who gave us the names of the first prize winners from the previous three years, including Liliane Gérard. Liliane Gérard often said to me, "I was lucky because you had already called the other two, who didn't answer, and I did!" We were also lucky because the bookbinders at La Cambre are like seekers of God to me; they strive for absolute perfection. There was such a difference between this and what we saw in the bookbinding workshops! They couldn't stand the slightest imperfection. Liliane was also the daughter of a printer, and it was the workshop manager at her father's printing shop who trimmed the *Atlas*. [Holding the book:] She made this little thing by hand and then, to protect the *Atlas*, she made a fitting case. Broodthaers and Maria thought it was normal! But Byars⁵⁰ sent letters to us with "Kisses for Liliane"! I have some extraordinary letters from Byars here. For a while, they arrived almost every day because Paul was discussing another crazy project with him.

A.M.-D.: Byars' book, *The Play of Great*, was a very long story...

I.L.: Yes, Liliane really created this book because Byars' instructions were: "I want a one-page book, with red tissue paper, bound in red silk." That's it! I think Liliane even determined the format.

⁴⁹ Dennis Oppenheim, *Proposals 1967-1974*, Brussels and Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, [1975]. (500 copies and 75 deluxe copies.) The book measures 29 x 41 cm.

⁵⁰ This is *The Play of Great*, Brussels and Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1981. (7 copies.)

A.M.-D.: This project with Byars dates back to 1981, I think, but it didn't really "come out" until much later.

I.L.: We couldn't get it out: it was an incredible headache that took us years because a book that has only one page of tissue paper, where do you put the colophon? So, the book existed, but there was no colophon. Unable to solve the problem, Byars decided that each buyer of the book would receive a handwritten certificate signed by him, with his usual little stars. It was a right solution, but Byars was always on the road, and when I had a buyer, he was in Egypt or California, where he was treating his depression at the Butlers'.⁵¹ He would undergo treatment and come back spruced up, bursting with energy, annoying everyone and seeking perfection. Perfection doesn't exist; it's a spiral that just goes up, up, up, and never ends. He drove everyone crazy. Even Liliane: one day in 1996, in Brussels, he said to me: "We have to redo the book because here you can see where it's glued, here it's darker, here it's not the same red as there, and that's unacceptable." I remember calling Liliane that day to tell her, 'Byars would like you to redo it.' So, Liliane replied, 'It's very simple, I have a small pot of glue here and I still have some tissue paper left; I'll give them to you and you can do it yourself!' She really took it badly. And of course, the book stayed that way!

A.M.-D.: I asked you earlier: here's an artist who wasn't satisfied with the result of your work!

I.L.: Yes, he thought the book wasn't perfect...

A.M.-D.: The book wasn't actually published until 1997.

I.L.: One thing I'm sure of, Anne, is that in your exhibition at the Bibliothèque nationale,⁵² you displayed the Byars on a pedestal all by itself, and it was a triumph! No one asked for a colophon or signature anymore! It's still difficult to launch a book without a signature or colophon. The problem wasn't solved, and Byars had died a few days earlier,⁵³ but now the book existed!

A.M.-D.: So, I acted as colophon, if not signature!⁵⁴ But it took you 16 years to publish this book. I found a fax dated October 16, 1996, in which you tell me about your efforts to obtain the certificates: "Three days of non-stop madness with James Lee Byars in Cologne."⁵⁵ Enough to write a 1,500-page Faulkner, but not enough to obtain seven measly certificates from him! "I continue: "He has a completely pathological block on this issue, constantly substituting solutions that are infinitely more complicated than the problem itself: having a second book made, identical to the first, bearing the signature and name of the purchaser; putting on a performance for all the buyers in Brussels, Cologne, New York, whichever they choose; in short, I would end up believing in the influence of the stars, so much so that everything, absolutely everything, seems to be getting stuck at the moment in a completely incomprehensible way." It was really difficult with him at that moment...

I.L.: I thought we would solve the problem in an afternoon. I stayed in Cologne for three days and left empty-handed. He was staying in a kind of pharaonic tomb, a guest apartment at the Werner Gallery, where everything was red, even the toilet paper. We parted ways shouting at each other, and I never saw him again! Do you want me to tell you everything? To turn the pages of his book, Byars would

⁵¹ Eugenia Butler, collector and gallery owner.

⁵² "Livres d'artistes. L'invention d'un genre," (Artists' Books: The Invention of a Genre), May 29–October 12, 1997.

⁵³ May 23, 1997, in Cairo.

⁵⁴ With this somewhat cryptic statement, A.M.-D. wants to imply that she legitimized the book by exhibiting it, even though it lacked the legitimations that are normally provided by the colophon and the signature. (Translator's note).

⁵⁵ During a performance by the artist, a procession around the cathedral. His dealer Michael Werner's gallery was in Cologne.

blow on them so as not to touch them, and he gave me all sorts of recommendations. I took the book home, showed it to Paul, and there was Byars' thumbprint on that perfect book!

A.M.-D.: It was Byars's, so it was less serious than if it had been someone else's! But what meaning did he give to this book?

I.L.: It was supposed to be called *The Play of Great*, because it was also a performance. The idea was that anyone who held it in their hands could say that everything they wanted was great. Byars wanted it to take place on the forecourt of the Royal Palace in Brussels, where the military parades are held... It forms an angle with the Palais des beaux-arts. He imagined a large procession, led by him, dressed in a red costume seen in a painting by Evenopoel, which I was to have made for him. He wanted a long train of 300 meters carried by the assembly of people who would follow him. The director of the Palais des beaux-arts had to take part in the procession and also—this was very important to Byars—the King! The Queen had agreed, but he wasn't interested. He was convinced that the King, whose gaze he had met as he stepped off the plane, knew him. In the middle of the royal forecourt, he would utter the word “great,” just one syllable. As I dragged my feet with this story, it never happened, and that's how he left Brussels and moved to Cologne, where I went to see him.

A.M.-D.: What an adventure! But let's get back to the timeline: in 1974, *Charles Baudelaire* was published. *Pauvre Belgique* [Poor Belgium]. Broodthaers borrowed and enlarged the layout of Baudelaire's text in the La Pléiade edition, but without the text. The cover reads: “Paris, 1974.” A tracing paper jacket hides the title with a series of letters, A, B, C.

I.L.: In fact, it was a book for which he wanted the Belgian publishers he knew, namely Daled, us, Gevaert, and I believe himself, to be co-publishers. So, there were 40 copies to be shared between the four of us. All 40 are signed, and it was Yves Gevaert who produced them.

A.M.-D.: Broodthaers added a note: “This book cannot be defined as a counterfeit in the sense that was common practice among Brussels publishers during the Romantic period. If there is any counterfeiting, it is a reference whose particular form refers to current controversies that go beyond a specific geographical context, at least that is what I aimed for.” Signed Marcel Broodthaers. This is followed by the justification for the print run: “Forty-four copies of this work were printed on proof paper for Herman Daled, Yves Gevaert, and Paul Lebeer, protected by a thin cardboard cover and a transparent dust jacket, four of which are marked A to D and 40 numbered from 1 to 40, signed and dated by the author. On the copy we have before us, No. 38, he added by hand: “Played dice, Brussels, September 26, 1974.” Why “played dice”?

I.L.: To assign the draw numbers to each person. David Lamelas was there, wearing his cap. He was the one who threw the dice.

A.M.-D.: Let's continue! 1975. There's Ben's book.⁵⁶

I.L.: We need to move faster: should I skip the anecdotes?

A.M.-D.: No, on the contrary, they make the history of the books more concrete!

I.L.: It's a book that Ben first published himself in Nice, in a few copies. We recreated the original copy he gave us: I went everywhere looking for the objects. I can still see myself in Cologne, where I found

⁵⁶ *Moi, Ben je signe* [Ben, Dieu, Total Art, Sa revue], Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1975. (300 copies and 75 limited edition copies.

the paper bag, which you had to blow into to make it crackle, in a disgusting department store... And the record, I think we found it at the old flea market.

A.M.-D.: There is a limited edition, in a box.

I.L.: 75 limited edition copies. [Consulting the colophon of one copy:] They are “numbered and signed in a box hand-painted by the author and containing various additional objects and a different handwritten text for each copy.” In this one, he alludes to Broodthaers: “Belgium and its poor Marcel.” Ben stayed here for a week to do this work.

A.M.-D.: The black paint he brushed on the lid is very beautiful.

I.L.: We went together to a chemist's, where we had some interesting experiences! We sorted out the colors for the black paintings and then he took some oil pastel to sign them.

A.M.-D.: Sometimes you see this title: Ben, Dieu, Art total, Sa revue, which is printed on the cover of the regular edition. But on the box, the title written in oil pastel on the “blackboard” is *Moi Ben je signe*. As for the cardboard box, did you buy it ready-made?

I.L.: No, I had it made. Even though the regular edition was remade based on the 1962 edition, which is unique among our editions, the box was original and it was a beautiful, precious object for collectors, but we liked it at the same time: I always feel a little embarrassed when we haven't created the original!

A.M.-D.: The paper used for the limited edition is slightly greenish; the paper used for the regular edition is different.

I.L.: For the limited edition, we used the original paper that Ben had used for his own publication. But he didn't have enough left over to make the regular edition, so we chose a simple wrapping paper. At the time, he used the cheapest materials available: there was this corn paper that French fry vendors used, I think, and inside there was a gray paper that fishmongers or butchers used, but these very simple things were difficult to find thirty years later. Would you like to see the original from '62? [Opening it:] Ah, there was already a box! That's interesting...

A.M.-D.: And it wasn't written in chalk on the lid. That's brilliant. It's not as pretty as what you did later!

I.L.: It looks like glue.

A.M.-D.: On the dictionary page, he circled “Beauté,” “Beaux-Arts,” and “je signe la beauté.” The tape has yellowed on the razor blade. He added by hand, with this arrow on the razor blade: “Not to be used unless aliens land, and even then, no.”

I. L.: We could have left it, couldn't we? But it was Ben who decided whether or not to keep the captions...

A.M.-D.: In fact, for the limited edition, he inserts the regular edition between three double pages at the beginning and end, on butcher paper, and adds either texts or collages and pieces of fabric.

I.L.: Yes, probably.

A.M.-D.: I thought the limited edition consisted of 75 copies. Why does it say on the box that there are ten?

I.L.: It's not possible that we only made ten! [She takes out a file and reads:] "Distribution of the edition: 1-10 us, 11-30 Ben, 31-50 us, 51-60 Ben, 61-70 us, 71-75 Ben." So, on the box, it's numbered 1-10 because that's the first series of numbers.

A.M.-D.: I see in your file, in 1975: "Jean-Paul Guy Brussels, ordinary: 60 francs. Galerie Bama, luxury: 920 [French] francs."

I.L.: Galerie Bama was really the gallery for us.

A.M.-D.: Does every artist have a file like this?

I.L.: Every artist has a file like this, with sales, prices, collectors, receipts, possibly correspondence, all that. Did you see the big Ben exhibition in Lyon?⁵⁷

A.M.-D.: I saw it.

I.L.: And?

A.M.-D.: I was very surprised because he had a huge space, but there was a total omission of his own publications, even though he published so many magazines, small publications, ephemera, etc. Your book was there, but hung on the wall, and only the pages with an object glued to them were shown, like individual works! In 1974, you co-edited a book by LeWitt, *Location of Three Geometric Figures*.⁵⁸

I.L.: It came through the Palais des Beaux-Arts and Gevaert, who asked us to co-publish it. Gevaert did some interesting things at the time. There isn't even a colophon in it; it's actually a catalog. I only got a few copies because apparently it got lost at the Palais des Beaux-Arts. I think I got about fifty copies.

A.M.-D.: Shortly after that, you published a book of photographs by the Leisgens, *Einige Möglichkeiten* [Some possibilities]....⁵⁹ How did that come about?

I.L.: We had spotted them. They were living in Belgium, in a small German-speaking village on the other side of the German border, Raeren, and they were starting to make a name for themselves in Belgium. The work we published is very typical of what they were doing at the time. It was quite appealing: Barbara would position herself in nature and Michael would direct her in such a way that she appeared to be pushing away the clouds or placing her hand on a hill, for example. Personally, it always reminded me of Caspar David Friedrich, the monk with his back turned, that kind of thing, very "German Romantic." I'm not entirely sure about Annette [Messenger], but I'm certain about the Leisgens: they got hold of some Agfa paper and developed and washed it in their bathtub. We had to redo half of the edition: a page was missing, the bookbinder messed up and bound it incorrectly. In the end, out of a print run of thirty, twelve were left that were in order.

⁵⁷ The Ben retrospective at the Musée d'Art Contemporain in Lyon (March 3–July 11, 2010) boasted of being the largest retrospective devoted to the work of Ben Vautier: 1,000 works displayed over 3,000 m².

⁵⁸ Sol LeWitt, *Location of Three Geometric Figures*, Hamburg, Hossmann; Brussels, Yves Gevaert, Société des expositions, 1974. (500 copies.)

⁵⁹ Barbara and Michael Leisgen, *Some Ways to Invent the World. Quelques possibilités d'inventer le monde*, Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1975. 30 copies.

A.M.-D.: Let's continue following the chronology of your publications and return to Filliou, whose work you published in brick form⁶⁰ after the suitcase. How did the idea come about?

I.L.: The idea was to produce a monograph. Di Maggio, the great Italian collector I mentioned earlier, who was a wealthy and very open-minded businessman, wanted to publish a monograph on Filliou. He asked me to write the text. And here I have to tell you something! I went down to Flayosc for a week to work at Filliou's house. I stayed in the guest room and we recorded every day, morning and afternoon. Marianne would come by from time to time with herbal tea and it was very intense. I was the first to write about Filliou when he was not yet known in France. And I had created a lexicon in *L'Art vivant*: "Le Petit Robert Filliou."⁶¹

He liked the idea and wanted to make another dictionary. He had already prepared index cards by theme. He took out the cards and commented on the different works as he went along. And I recorded it. Then I transcribed it. Then he got the Schwitters Prize, and the Sprengel Museum in Hanover decided to hold an exhibition of his work. The monograph project became the exhibition catalog. And then I had to deal with a curator, the exhibition commissioner, who just took my text and signed everything... He wrote an introduction in which he said: "I thought of alphabetical order because I felt that was the most appropriate format," etc. I remember his intrusive behavior, of all things, and that Robert wasn't very cool about it... He wrote me a little note: "I live here between a goat and a cow and there's nothing I can do from the middle of nowhere..." I thought Marianne might take my side, but she encouraged me to be patient, citing a Buddhist precept! The catalog came out with lots of typos because the original I had done in French. At the opening, Suzanne Pagé⁶² was there, and to console me, she said, "We are the pedestals on which artists sit."

A.M.-D.: Did the idea for the brick come about as an alternative to the monograph project?

I.L.: Yes. I had seen this brick at Filliou's house, a kind of prototype that Robert had made. It impressed me, and I suggested publishing it. We did the same thing, but added the colophon behind the strip of paper. He had found a refractory brick in his corner, but it was very difficult for us to find one here, and even now I am still looking for refractory bricks to finish the edition. I think there are still four or five printed strips left. When Filliou died, everyone wanted that brick!

A.M.-D.: And where does the title, *Je meurs trop* (I die too much), come from?

I.L.: It goes back to the time when he lived on Rue des Rosiers, something seminal for Filliou. They were living hand to mouth, and they talked about the tenants of this house where there was only one toilet per floor, on the landing... He had imagined a play, *Je meurs trop*, with all these people and their deaths.

A. M.-D.: And why, on the strip of paper, does he quote Artaud, "Une sensibilité unique au monde" ("A sensitivity unique in the world"), replacing the "e" in sensibilité with an 'a' ["sansibilité"]?

I.L.: It's to signify lack, I think, "sans" means "without" in French.

⁶⁰ Robert Filliou, *Je meurs trop*, Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossman, 1977. Brick wrapped in a strip of paper. (50 copies.)

⁶¹ *Chroniques de l'art vivant*, no. 18, March 1971, p. 20. The title of the article is, of course, a reference to the famous French dictionary, "Le Petit Robert."

⁶² At the time, director of the ARC at the Musée d'Art moderne de la Ville de Paris.

A.M.-D.: Continuing with Filliou: do you remember how Mister Blue from day to day was made?⁶³

I.L.: It was something he did with his group of friends from Düsseldorf. It was published at my brother's house: he had been invited to teach at the Academy of Fine Arts in Hamburg and stayed with my brother for a while. It was Robert who wanted this blue color, like the one used for school notebooks in France, it seems. He also decided on the format. He asked his friends to translate the story into German, and the book was published in two languages. Thomkins, Roth, Roth's son, and other German artists—Schult, a slightly crazy guy from Hamburg who never became famous, Jan Voss, Wewerka—each translated and illustrated one day in the life of the hero: *Mister Blue*. But the illustrations aren't very convincing. Except for those by Filliou himself, which I think are really great. This story was intended for his son. *Mister Blue* is a wonderful invention for children: what does he do on Tuesday? He pretends he's a whale, he swims in the sea and he spits. Every day he does something amazing for a four-year-old boy!

A.M.-D.: The print run is significant: a thousand copies.

I. L.: There's still a little bit left. I found some other stories about *Mister Blue*: for example, he's walking down the street with his elephant and passes a vegetable seller, to whom he says, "My elephant is hungry, and I need some lettuce for my green elephant." The seller tells him that his elephant isn't green. In the end, *Mister Blue* takes off his green glasses and puts them on the vendor's nose: "Now you can see that he is green!" And in the meantime, the elephant has eaten all the lettuce in the vegetable vendor's stall!

A.M.-D.: Did you find this story in *La Valise*?

I.L.: In *La Valise*, I found five or six unpublished stories and I want to make a small volume with them. But the unresolved question is: with illustrations or without? I've already tried two illustrators, but Marianne didn't like them. It's impossible to replace Filliou as an illustrator. When he draws, it's a bit like his deceptively childish writing, and it's really very funny. Now I'm wondering if I shouldn't just publish the text, in French and German. But everyone who has children says that children need pictures...

A.M.-D.: It wouldn't really be a book by Filliou anymore, because he wouldn't have chosen the illustrator... The following year, you published his *Longs* poems courts a terminer chez soi [Long Poems to be Finished at Home].⁶⁴

I.L.: He brought us the manuscript, and I think we decided that day to publish it. He let us choose between making a book or postcards. I chose the postcards. I was the one who took care of that. I printed the text, in which he explains how his poems came about, on the banner where the copyright is also located. Obviously, it's not signed or numbered, because it's a standard edition. When he saw it, I remember he was very happy, because it's something the public can complete, and that was important to him. Similarly, in *Teaching and Learning*,⁶⁵ there are blank pages for readers to write

⁶³ Robert Filliou, *Mister Blue from Day-to-Day. (Herr Blau von Tag zu Tag,)* with the collaboration of B. Roth, D. Roth, E. Schult, A. Thomkins, J. Voss, S. Wewerka, Hamburg Brussels, Lebeer Hossmann, 1983. (1,000 copies.)

⁶⁴ Robert Filliou, *Long Poems to be Completed at Home*, Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1984. (500 copies.)

⁶⁵ The French translation of this text, originally published in German and English (*Lehren und Lernen als Performancekunst / Teaching and Learning as Performing Arts*, Cologne & New York, Kasper König, 1970) was edited by Irmeline Lebeer: *Enseigner et Apprendre, arts vivants*, trans. by Juliane Régler and Christine Fondécave, afterword by Anne Moëglin-Delcroix, Brussels, Archives Lebeer Hossmann, 1998.

down their own thoughts about education and send them back to the publisher. In thirty years, I've never had any feedback on this, and I don't know to what extent people use this opportunity. But there is this children's book that children have to finish, and I've had a few completed copies sent back to me.

A.M.-D.: Is that the one you published for the “Livres d'enfance” exhibition, *TOI par LUI et MOI*?⁶⁶

I.L.: Yes, that's right, the exhibition organized by Pays-Paysage,⁶⁷ which I took part in thanks to you.

A.M.-D.: It's a posthumous book.

I.L.: But Robert always talked to us here about that book, saying that Yellow Now had had the manuscript for thirty years. One day, I called Yellow and got the manuscript back. I made a first edition, which the Musée d'Art Moderne de la Ville de Paris bought from me.

A.M.-D.: So, the limited edition is actually the manuscript? So, there's only one limited edition copy?

I.L.: Yes.

A.M.-D.: The book is dedicated to Louis and Florent.

I.L.: They're his grandchildren.

A.M.-D.: Did you design the cover?

I.L.: Yes, Yellow and I came up with this rather understated design. We searched high and low and finally settled on this cardboard that Yellow uses regularly.

A.M.-D.: I believe this little book sold well?

I.L.: We did a reprint with Yellow Now. Between him and me, it sold well. I love the idea that we're already on the second edition and imagining that there are hundreds of different books! I find that very satisfying. Filliou always encourages practical things: in *Teaching and Learning*, too, there are games, and the reader has to become active.

A.M.-D.: There is something pedagogical about Filliou, isn't it?

I.L.: Pedagogical, yes, more than any of the others. And in *Teaching and Learning* there are these conversations with other artist-teachers—Beuys, Roth, Kaprow, Cage—who weigh in on the problem of education. But is it a book that has left its mark on teachers?

A.M.-D.: I don't think the book reaches that audience, unfortunately.

I.L.: König is still on the first edition, which is not yet out of print, as far as I know. The format is horizontal, and I always found, while working on this book—because there are so many ideas developed in it—that the lines are too long and you lose the thread. In my French edition, I really changed the format to have shorter lines and preserve the white space that is in the first edition. I also

⁶⁶ Robert Filliou, *TOI par LUI et MOI*, Brussels, Lebeer Hossmann; Crisnée [Belgium], Yellow Now, 1998. (1,000 copies.)

⁶⁷ *Livres d'enfances*, exhibition catalog, Saint-Yrieix, Pays-Paysage, 1998.

added a table of contents that didn't exist and asked you for an afterword: it's our only artist's book where we really have an afterword because normally there are no comments.

A.M.-D.: I think it's Filliou's most important book, because education for freedom is a central theme in his work. It's not just a theoretical book, where he expounds his philosophy, but a practical book because, as you pointed out, it gives the reader space to do exercises, exercises in liberation. It's a book that you read while doing. Did you wonder whether or not it was an artist's book?

I.L.: The question of category didn't arise.

A.M.-D.: Do you remember how we spent hours discussing the best French translation of the title?

I.L.: ...and how I was horribly insulted because of this title by so-called Filliou specialists!

A.M.-D.: And yet, in Anglo-Saxon countries, “performing arts” covers everything from theater to dance to music, which is generally translated into French as “arts du spectacle” (performing arts), but the idea of spectacle was a misinterpretation for Filliou, since he said in this book that one had to be an actor and not a spectator, and that's how we came up with “arts vivants” (living arts), especially since “life” is an important concept in Filliou's thinking.

I.L.: I think it was you who came up with it.

A.M.-D.: I'm the one responsible!

I. L.: And I wasn't 100% satisfied either, but it was the title that best suited Filliou.

A.M.-D.: That's right, and I've thought about it since then and I remain convinced that it's the least bad of the titles, both from a linguistic point of view and from Filliou's point of view.

I.L.: But it provoked some really hateful reactions.

A.M.-D.: They came from people who, deep down, have appropriated Filliou and don't want anyone else to have anything to do with him, even though you knew him for much longer and had a relationship of friendship and complicity with him. It's a sectarian reflex.

I.L.: It's something that's really peculiar to Filliou: he was all about peace and love, yet he triggered feelings of jealousy, possessiveness, and “me, me, me” in some people. They think they're the guardians of the temple!

A.M.-D.: And *Le Siège des idées*?⁶⁸

I. L.: The famous *Siège des idées* was published the same year as the brick, because those are two things I saw at his place in Flayosc that struck me. Robert had picked up a folding chair at a dump in Flayosc, and he attached one of his orange index cards, which he always worked with, to the back of it. And during my stay, there was a friend named Edwige Regenwetter, who taught philosophy and logic at the University of Nanterre, I believe. She stayed for three weeks to help Filliou calculate—this is typical of him—the speed of art. He stayed for three weeks to help Filliou calculate—typical of him—the speed of art. Filliou took great pleasure in talking with mathematicians. Edwige and he would go running in the forest wearing thick pants to lose weight, it was incredible! She had written a text. And I

⁶⁸ Robert Filliou, *Le Siège des idées*. Logical analysis by Edwige Regenwetter. Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1977. (900 copies and 25 limited edition copies.)

was faced with this chair and Edwige's text, and I said, "Let's make a book out of this!" From the start, the two went together.

A.M.-D.: But we shouldn't read too much into the connection between the chair and the speed of art! And what about the limited edition?

I.L.: The limited edition is special in that Filliou wanted to create pastels, his wonderful pastels, one for each copy. He drew what he called "La Palisse's lies" on sheets of spiral-bound notebook paper: these are Matisse, Léger, Chirico, etc., great painters counterfeited by Filliou and certified as originals by his stamps. For Cézanne, you have an apple, for Brauner a self-portrait in which he paints himself blinded, etc. I said to Marianne, "It's amazing that Robert, who has never studied art and always says he knows nothing about it, has grasped so well what a Cézanne is, etc." She said, "Don't be silly! He looked it up in the Petit Larousse and did his drawings based on the pictures in the dictionary!"

A.M.-D.: We haven't yet mentioned Filliou's great friend George Brecht, whose *Water Yam*⁶⁹ you have reissued, originally published by Maciunas in 1963, then by Templon, among others. Where did the idea for this reissue come from?

I.L.: It's because the copies gradually sold out. There was Maciunas's first box with its very recognizable typography. He collected little enigmatic cards that Brecht sent to his friends or distributed. Basically, they are musical scores because Brecht speaks like a musician, and, as I explain here on the back of the cover, you could do whatever you wanted with them. Then there was a first reprint by Templon, which sold for a lot of money. And did he really sell out? I don't know, but the fact remains that it no longer exists on the market. Brecht wanted us to do a reissue: the little cards are still the same, they haven't changed between Templon and me. We copied all of that. As for Maciunas' box, I've never had it in my hands. It's very possible that the typography of the cards is already Maciunas's. I added a presentation that isn't in the other editions. Initially, we sold our box very, very cheaply. I had this wonderful screen printer, Roël Gousse, who made the box. It's beautiful, isn't it? One day, George Brecht and I went to Leuven and stumbled upon a store that sold old toys and old prints, including small cards with drawings of fish and other animals. They were for teaching children. We each bought some of these cards. And, using these cards from Leuven, he created two characters that form a speech bubble for the title: a fish and a kind of dinosaur... It was really George who made the box, and I was very happy because it's the only box he ever created. Templon made a wooden box and Maciunas made a box in his own style... And this one is the third. Some Japanese people made something too, but it was very Japanese. Our box wasn't numbered, but Templon's was. Anyone could buy ours. Now it's become more expensive because I don't have any more. But I'm very happy to have done that. It was my favorite gift. It was the one I gave most easily. I find it really inspiring because there's this openness that I love so much in everything, in music, literature, art.

A.M.-D.: We also need to talk about this Buddhist book, translated into English by Brecht⁷⁰ and into French by Filliou.

I.L.: The *Hsin Hsin Ming* is a text by a Zen patriarch from the 6th century, I believe, Seng Ts'an. George wanted the cover in mustard yellow because of the saffron color of Zen monks' robes. I also tried white characters on a black background, and I thought it looked so beautiful! [Showing it:] It may be more chic, but the yellow conveys the message more directly, don't you think?

A.M.-D.: It's almost notebook size.

⁶⁹ George Brecht, *Water Yam*, Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1986.

⁷⁰ Seng Ts'an, *Hsin Hsin Ming*, English by George Brecht, German by Albrecht Fabri, French by Robert Filliou. Calligraphy: Takako Saito. Brussels-Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1980.

I.L.: It had to be small so that people could put it in their pocket and be inspired by it. Brecht wanted to make it trilingual so that the text would be read more widely, but first and foremost because they were three friends who always drank together! The German, Albrecht Fabri, was an essayist and translator.

A.M.-D.: So, it was Brecht who proposed this text?

I.L.: Yes, he had read a lot of works of this kind and wanted to translate this Chinese poem literally. It was calligraphed by a friend, Takako Saito, a very interesting Japanese artist who was part of the Fluxus group and moved to the Rhineland in the 1960s. She bought sheets of Japanese paper and did real calligraphy of the 73 verses, two per sheet. So, we have 37 first editions with these calligraphies.

A.M.-D.: The first edition is much larger and thicker than the ordinary edition.

I.L.: Unfortunately, there are seeds in the paper, and these seeds leave grease stains...

A.M.-D.: In 1991, you told me about this little book by Brecht, that he had made a sound piece with the voices of the four authors, so to speak, and the sound of a drop of water falling: what exactly was it?

I.L.: It was made by German radio in Cologne, where Klaus Schöning was producing experimental sound programs.

A.M.-D.: One more word about Brecht and his book with Alison Knowles.

I.L.: *The Green, The Red, The Yellow, The Black and The White*:⁷¹ a book about beans, because that's one of Alison's major themes. She has always worked with beans in all their forms. They discovered an old German dictionary, similar to Larousse...

A.M.-D.: ...the Brockhaus Encyclopedia, I think.

I.L.: Yes, that's right. They cut out illustrations from it: as in the Petit Larousse, for example, you have the letter A and plates of illustrations of all the names of objects beginning with A. Then they replaced all the names with names of bean varieties, using the old-fashioned typography of old dictionaries. At home, we call this book the bean book.

A.M.-D.: So, it's like a primer, but it doesn't follow alphabetical order! See, B comes before A, then we have S, then M, etc.

I.L.: They must have determined the order with the I Ching! They did this work together, and Alison and we tried to give it shape.

A.M.-D.: Filliou also contributed.

I.L.: They were all friends and asked him to write an introduction. I really like "La faim des haricots" ["The Hunger of Beans"]!⁷²

⁷¹ George Brecht & Alison Knowles, *The Green, the Red, the Yellow, the Black, and the White*, preface by Robert Filliou, Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1983. (80 copies.)

⁷² In his short text, Filliou explains that seeing beans everywhere in the book makes him hungry: "la faim des haricots."

A.M.-D.: It's a very beautiful book, unlike anything else. Liliane Gérard did the binding and Roël Gousseu did the silkscreen printing. Irmeline, time is passing and we haven't mentioned Dieter Roth yet...

I.L.: I have to show you his wonderful journal, because we're really thinking of publishing it: *Flacher Abfall*, which means "flat waste." For a whole year, in 1975-76, he sent my brother a cardboard box every day with the contents of his trash. Everything was flattened in plastic bags and bound in binders. My brother made these binders and wrote the date on the spine. By Christmas, there were six volumes because there were all kinds of wrapping paper! When he arrived in Hamburg, everything suddenly became very colorful: bars, bras, thousand-mark bills, all of that was in his trash. When he returned to Iceland, in his five houses, he was close to nature: I remember dried fish and things like that. It was basically an autobiography through the objects he threw away. My brother emptied the largest room in his apartment in Hamburg and started setting up the binders and asked an Austrian photographer friend who lived nearby to photograph them.

A.M.-D.: Where is this work?

I.L.: We don't have it anymore; we sold the entire collection. It's now part of the Flick Collection at the Hamburger Bahnhof in Berlin. Initially, people could buy a binder of one day or a week or a month. But we quickly realized that this wasn't the right solution because Dieter felt, and I think he was right, that it would be such an important piece that it would be better not to disperse it. I tried to place it in France, and I first went to see Hultén,⁷³ who told me that he would have to be dead before he would buy it!

A.M.-D.: He didn't like Dieter Roth?

I.L.: When he was in Stockholm, at the Moderna Museet, there had been an opening with Dieter Roth who, as always, had gotten completely drunk, and he had very bad memories of it... "I never want to go through that again!" he told me. Then I tried to place it in Lyon, but no one wanted it, and in the end, it was Dieter Roth himself who managed to sell it to. A few copies of the binders are in circulation.

A.M.-D.: And what became of the publishing project?

I.L.: When Dieter finished this series, I went to Hamburg to interview him. In the first twenty pages, he explains to me the reason for his obsession with keeping everything... For example, it hurt him so much when he finished a carton of milk to crush it, because he imagined the person who had designed the label—which was his own training, incidentally—and so he couldn't throw it away. He then started keeping all these kinds of things for a year, but in a very haphazard way, then he wanted to do it systematically with my brother so that we could publish it. So, he started explaining all this to me, that it was to save these things from death, etc., and he began to tell me about his life. So, we went from topic to topic and ended up talking about his whole life. He's an extraordinary talker. They're all great talkers, Broodthaers, Filliou, Spoerri, Emmett Williams too. But Dieter is the greatest! And when he talks about all this, it's extraordinary. It would need to be translated, but only a poet could do it. You have to recreate his language, which means straying far enough from his text, and that's tricky.

A.M.-D.: How many pages is your transcript of the interview?

⁷³ Pontus Hultén (1924–2006) was the first director (1973–1981) of the National Museum of Modern Art at the Centre Georges Pompidou in Paris.

I.L.: 370 pages. Dieter had decided that it would be published by Rainer, Max Ernst's nephew and my sister's boyfriend when he was in middle school! He had already published many of Dieter Roth's books. Do you know him?

A.M.-D.: Yes, is that Rainer Verlag?

I. L.: Yes, Rainer Pretzell. So, Rainer Pretzell was supposed to publish it, and it dragged on and dragged on, and Dieter said—this was the last time I heard him speak — “I’m going to put pressure on Rainer... I’m going to sit in his kitchen and I won’t move.” But Rainer wouldn't give in, so Dieter decided it would be Lebeer Hossmann, but he died and Hansjörg Mayer published it, without my consent, along with other interviews.⁷⁴ He said Dieter had given him permission and he didn't pay me a penny in royalties.

A.M.-D.: He only published part of your interview, didn't he?

I. L.: They distorted this interview.

A. M.-D.: Distorted, how so?

I. L.: To help us keep track of this long interview, I had written the dates of the events in his biography that Dieter referred to in the margins. I organized the whole thing myself by giving it titles and adding notes when Dieter quoted something. We did the interview over several days, and when he got tired of talking, he would read his poems or send me out to get beer! When he read his own poems, it was wonderful. That's when he was happy. [Showing a passage from the interview:] Here, for example: he read all of this in one go, so I put the reference in the margin. In Hansjörg Mayer's edition, I found all these references integrated into the text in bold. He made a comment at the end, saying that it was incomprehensible that I hadn't published this interview yet: my patience is legendary, my slowness too, but my patience above all... I was waiting, especially since the problem was that Dieter had blacked out certain parts where he talked about his father beating him bloody, where he spoke badly of his ex-wife, etc. He expurgated all of that. And one day, just after he and my brother had decided to publish it, but before we had decided which version to publish, expurgated or not, a package arrived in the mail with three of the five copies and a cover that he had bound by hand with gauze.

A.M.-D.: Was it an unedited edition?

I.L.: Yes, five copies, which he designed entirely himself. I sold one; he got two, and I still have two.

A.M.-D.: And those pages at the beginning, in color photocopy?

I.L.: He did that. The manuscript was in a box, and the box was at Rainer Pretzell's house. When he told him he was going to take care of his manuscript himself, he took the box and photocopied what he found in it: the first thing he found was a card I had sent him. And then there was a plastic bag with things in it, which he glued in. Then the manuscript begins. Then it starts again for the last pages.

A.M.-D.: So, none of these elements appear in Hansjörg Mayer's edition?

I.L.: No, absolutely not. He just took the text and included my marginal notes.

A.M.-D.: How did Hansjörg Mayer get hold of the interview transcript?

⁷⁴ Dieter Roth, *Collected Interviews*, ed. Barbara Wien, London, Edition Hansjörg Mayer, 2002.

I.L.: We had given it to Barbara Wien, because Hansjörg Mayer said that my interview wasn't interesting... but then he put it at the beginning of the collection, while the others are in chronological order!

A.M.-D.: Maybe because it was the only one that hadn't been published before. So, it's the redacted version?

I.L.: Redacted, yes. I prefer to publish Dieter Roth's edition, because it's an artist's book, a book that Dieter Roth created entirely himself. But he's a difficult artist to sell. Even Suzanne [Pagé] wasn't enthusiastic about Dieter Roth.

A.M.-D.: I suggest we stop there, because of the train schedule! We weren't able to look at all your editions, and perhaps there are some you regret not having had time to talk about?

I.L.: Yes, for example, Jacques Charlier, *Fabulous Monsters*.⁷⁵ He worked in Brussels in a technical department, and there was a whole group of them who, to go out to eat, had to walk around a house that bothered them. So, they imagined that this house was inhabited by fabulous monsters. Charlier took photos of his colleagues wearing masks in front of the house, wrote short texts, and they even recorded a song on a small cassette tape.

A.M.-D.: It comes in the form of a file containing two binders, one with documents and texts, the other, oblong, with photos. Everything, including the cassette, is in an archive bag.

I.L.: Oppenheim's book⁷⁶ is also important to me. As his father was an architect, he got into the habit of drawing his Land Art projects and installations on tracing paper. I have a roll here with all the original tracings: they've been there for 20 years and I don't dare open it. For the limited edition, we reproduced them on tracing paper in four different colors, one for each period. So, there's a book edition and a roll edition. We never sold them because people were wary of their fragility.

A.M.-D.: Irmeline, I think we're going to have to stop... Unless you have any more regrets?

I.L.: Charlton,⁷⁷ perhaps. His canvases are always gray. And the edition we did is a kind of recapitulation of all his series, on the scale of the original formats.

A.M.-D.: The gray color isn't inside, but on the cover.

I.L.: Charlton had a box where he kept a sample of the canvas with the color for each of his series. So our screen printer printed the exact color on the canvas, and the bookbinder had to figure out how to bind each volume in the color of a particular series.

A.M.-D.: So, the 50 covers are all different?

I.L.: Yes, all different. And in the colophon, Charlton himself indicates the painting in question, with its dimensions and date.

A.M.-D.: It's a co-publication with Durand-Dessert.

⁷⁵ *Fabulous Monsters Story*, 1975. (15 copies.)

⁷⁶ Dennis Oppenheim, *Proposals 1967-1974*, Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, [1975]. (500 copies of the book and 75 deluxe copies with 62 blueprints rolled into 4 tubes held together with straps).

⁷⁷ Alan Charlton, *50 Grey Books*, Paris, Liliane and Michel Durand-Dessert Gallery; Brussels Hamburg, Lebeer Hossmann, 1989. (50 copies, all different, in a cardboard box.)

I.L.: Yes, and at a preview,⁷⁸ Durand-Dessert showed the entire series, all the covers: it was very, very beautiful to see, all those gray volumes. The gallery was filled with Charlton collectors looking to buy the volume that matched their series. Everything sold out very quickly. I think that by the end of the opening, Durand-Dessert had sold its share of the print run—because we produced the book, but we shared the publishing rights. That's why he doesn't mention it, because he didn't live with it. I still have a few copies, but of course no one knows that!

A.M.-D.: Irmeline, we've left you with a real battlefield with all these editions we've looked at! And we didn't have time to talk about the records...

I.L.: When I see all this spread out, I think to myself that what we've done is very diverse!

A.M.-D.: Each work has found its form.

I.L.: In my head, I can't seem to synthesize it all. What kind of publishers are we? I just know that we were always looking for books we hadn't seen before. We were chasing a chimera, basically!

A.M.-D.: You see, there on the carpet, no two books are alike. And yet there is a family resemblance, a style so to speak, linked to the manufacturing, the choice of paper, etc., but the formats are incredibly diverse.

I.L.: Very often the format was chosen by the artist, so it was on a case-by-case basis. It was only for Filliou's suitcase that we invented the medium.

A.M.-D.: Before we go, one last question: what do you think of the current evolution of artist's books?

I.L.: I think there are far too many photos. And here in Belgium, there's a real danger, which Bernard Villers and I often talk about: artist's books are taught in art schools, so students do things like recount their grandmother's recipes, or things like that. They're very good at bookbinding—the great tradition of La Cambre—but as for the content...

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⁷⁸ "50 Grey Books," March 23, 1989.