The Game of Life

-*"If I sometimes smoked one way* [...] *sometimes another, sometimes not at all, varied the way I dressed, was nervous, serene, ambitious, lazy, lecherous, gluttonous, ascetic – where would my `self´ be? What would I achieve? It's the way a man chooses to limit himself that determines his character. A man without habits, consistency, redundancy – and hence boredom – is not human. He's insane."*
-*"And accepting these self- defeating limitations is mental health?"* I said.
Luke Rhinehart, *The Dice Man*, Harper-Collins, 1999, pp. 65-66.

Gaël Charbau: A "retrospective"... there's a word I never thought I'd use about your work at such an early stage. Maybe "introspective" is a better description of this short exploration of your work. The larousse dictionary defines "introspection" as: "methodical observation of personal states of consciousness and inner life." What are your thoughts?

Gilles Barbier: Some of the work is twenty-five years old. That's half my life. The direction of my work, however, has been based on drift and retrospective narratives have difficulty mapping out this fluid form which has no backbone. It isn't easy to recount twenty-five years of drifting on an artificial lake without currents, winds, wrecks and islands, without making what is a maiden voyage appear disordered and agitated. This is my relationship to art. It is easier to talk about the holes, the bananas, the leaks, the insatiable hunger, the engines cutting out, the desire for treasure, and the great absentee, time, which is manifest only through its effects.

GC: I wanted to ask you about the holes theme. I was struck how many holes there are in your work. In the emmental cheese, the empty windows of buildings, the wormholes, in the dice of the *Dice Man*: there are holes everywhere. In the technique of moulding itself, you always have to think about the holes through which matter enters. A hole can signify emptiness, but when it is erogenous, lacan posits that it is essentially an edge. The hole is both created and also immediately covered by throbbing mucous-lined folds.

GB: lacan does talk about this, but holes cannot be reduced to their erogenous dimension. Holes are also passages, and they are defined by their "edges". There are military holes, economic holes and linguistic holes. There is, for example, a hole in the French language through which english words flow in, which proves our language is a living entity that is readily penetrable by the spirit of the times. It breathes. Any system that isolates itself dies. I am fascinated by the appearance of new holes and, over the past decades, we have been spoilt in this respect. More holes have appeared in the last fifty years than in the last two thousand years of history. Think about the hole that has opened above our heads to allow us to slip into space. The holes created by surveys burrowing into our thoughts, X-rays, ultrasound and mRi scans reveal our inner workings. And then there are the holes into our skin created by surgeons to patch us up. There is also the gaping hole of the internet, rimmed by the folds of global information. And the multiple holes that advertising has drilled to titillate our desires. We could also mention the holes that have opened up between disciplines, between states and economies. It's a dizzying list. Our world has become ridden with holes as never before, and to me this is a sign of radiant health. When things go wrong, we have to look at the holes that have been filled in. Franz kafka's short story *The Burrow* addresses this very issue, eloquently showing the morbid downward spiral of a man obsessed by the obstruction of a hole, the entrance to the small inner world of the burrow. I want to dig into the burrow, open it up and bring it into the light.
I do feel, however, that a lot of people today have become obsessed with blocking up holes. A certain kind of sensibility has taken this direction. And it is here that the lacanian hole helps to shed light: rape anxiety! A return to the hermetic body, vertical identity, the nation, and closed communities. There is a contradiction in seeking to block off only certain holes. On the one hand, we cannot expect transparency from politics and economics, the traceability and composition of everything we consume, as well as a world that is totally open, if we then shut the door on our own little world. Our species has a "packaging" mindset. Everything that happens inside must be seen outside. The gradual loss of privacy is a pill that is hard to swallow. This is the price to pay when information breaks free of its guides.
I try to bring a body to this world of holes, with its balanced dynamics of desire and angst, openings and closings, and recreate simple images so that we can appropriate this. This is what a work like *Aaaah!* Means; it is a body that opens to free up its interior. Burrowing animals and worms do the same work, digging galleries to let air circulate through vaults and caves. These are the white bubbles from which text flows in my "dessins noirs*"* ("Black Drawings"). Here again there is cheese, more specifically emmental cheese, with its famous holes and the pun that lends it a cerebral aspect. Significantly, cheese is symbolic of other passages, such as changes of state. The transition from a liquid state, milk, to curds, then onwards to a whole host of other states, from soft to hard, from moist to dry, from solid to perforated, from fresh to vintage. Cheese is indicative of the pathways of metamorphosis, and I am very sensitive to this. When there are holes in the narrative we can create other versions. Through our memory lapses, we rewrite our lives. But that is a different reverie, where the notion of versions plays the main role.

GC: There are holes too, in a way, when you infest classical paintings, essentially still lifes, with anonymously crafted, style-less, white architecture. You're using collage to create holes in a highly codified pictorial register, the result of a style and manner. It's like a hole in time, a way of introducing an anachronistic dysfunction into works that belong to our art-historical heritage. There is something surprising in the way you've grafted sculptures and images like this for the past twenty years. Many of the works have very similar titles: *Habiter la peinture* ("inhabiting the Painting"), *Habiter la viande* ("inhabiting the meat")*,* etc. Is this an obsession of yours?

GB: I started this series when I left the Beaux-Arts. I think I did this so that I could enter inside things and live within them. It wasn't aggressive, like Lucio Fontana's lacerations; I rearranged images and carefully bored holes inside them, trying not to disturb them too much. Looking back, I realize what I was doing. What you call grafting is in fact an attempt at incarnation. Penetrating inside, curling up and looking out from within. It's significant that this started with painting, particularly the still life. Then I began to incarnate myself in all matter of things, such as the *pions* [pawns] I started making. Likewise, when I implemented the dictionary-copying protocol, also in late 1992, I caught a glimpse of a huge castle of words of which I will one day be both the architect and inhabitant. Objects, bodies and language become inhabitable. Very soon, however, these tiny architectures, these troglodytes and burrows begged the question: am I owner or tenant? The latter applies and I know why. I shaped my identity with a permanent feeling of hopping from island to island, from one language to another, from one culture to another, in a country that was my own but didn't belong to me. Then when I arrived in France [see appendix], I found myself in a country that belonged to me but wasn't mine. As a result of globalisation, which begins with the flow of colonisation, followed by the ebb of decolonisation, there are millions of people like me. Internal exiles who have only a leasehold on life. This brings flexibility, but not access to ownership.

GC: You often use your own body as a motif in your work, or as its subject. Does this have some relationship to exile? Is it ultimately the only vehicle available?

GB: my body isn't the only vehicle available, or the most effective. But it is the most practical, the most loyal and the most docile. My body is my location, my rental. This notion situated between *being* and *occupation* enables a synthesis of the body conferred upon us (an ethical identity bestowed by heritage and nationality) and the person who occupies it. the latter is a tenant, arranging the furniture according to their own tastes, according to a movement that tends (with some difficulty) towards an aesthetic identity, the identity we build. In this sense, I wouldn't speak of exile but of design. All in all, I dream of a world where for just one moment in our lives we could be a homosexual French atheist islamic engineer married to a practising Protestant working-class swiss who likes pimping cars, reading Proust, the *ligne claire* comic book style, and opera, and is a fan of the Growlers, ty segall and Barbara, etc., without this combination creating friction. A world where ethics and aesthetics have made peace with each other. Then comes the moment of ageing when the final body is not the same as the beginning body. Here too time delivers its own set of versions for the same subject.

GC: I think I can say that there are rules to your way of working, rules you play by. Thanks to you, I have discovered a world familiar to mathematicians, that of the cellular automaton, the most celebrated of which is the one invented by John conway in 1970, the *Game of Life*. Let's say, for simplicity's sake, that a cellular automaton is a system that determines successive states by applying pre-established rules. We can visualise it as a grid with living (1) or dead (0) cells. The life and death of cells are regulated by the state (1 or 0) of neighbouring cells, according to very simple principles – for example: a dead cell possesses exactly three live neighbours. We first create a simple U, a cross, or a more complex motif, and the automaton then explains the rules of life and death, generating fascinating ensembles which unfurl, duplicate, change and frequently collapse into dozens, hundreds and thousands of other forms.
A whole section of your work is aptly titled *Game of Life*. This series has generated drawings, sculptures, an initial set and situations. What are its principles?

GB: To be quite honest, my interest in cellular automata was my answer to a formidable deficiency that emerged during my studies at the Beaux-Arts. I couldn't understand the ideas of *approach* and *coherency* in the way they were presented. I couldn't see myself spending all my life, like many artists, working on a single motif, theme or idea. To tell you the truth, it terrified me. I did the best I could, but when I left school and had the chance to stop *playing the artist who knows what he's doing*, I experienced a sudden liberation. I had collected a whole body of literature dealing with complex thought, edgar morin's work on the algorithmic theory of information, "auto-eco-organisation", cybernetics and cellular automata. Talking about it was unfortunately almost impossible. The art world is literary and often blind to hard science. I moved forward cautiously. What fascinated me, in the concepts that came to hand, was the relationship between structures of reasoning and the behaviour of living entities. Suddenly a movement could be understood in terms of micro-segments, retroaction, contamination, looping, homeostasis, parasites and weaving, etc. I had found an avenue to explore, a way of imaging art as one big game of life: a system composed of vital functions, time, chance and energy sources. It was very exciting: art became a virtual environment in which I could launch programs to see how they work, and how they die. It is at this point that you have to forget art and questions and answers; ideas have to be freed up to start thinking of nonsense, beyond the self; you have to let go. To become a pawn on the chessboard. It wasn't hard. I had nurtured myself on

luke Rhinehart's *The Dice Man*, I was a fan of comic books and science fiction, not inclined to introspection. In 1992, I produced my first *Game of Life*. A chessboard with a statement for each square, with a pawn and a dice for movement. It was a huge project, twelve hours a day to stoke the fire. The project went everywhere; the floodgates were open. My friends thought I was mad, but in six months, I had launched more programs than I had ever launched in my whole life, before this. Some programs died, others were transformed, others are still in fine shape. I should add that visiting the studio was absurd. I was going crazy because I was deeply serious and sincerely enthusiastic. I was sure that this field of experimentation would open up a new version of art and freedom, and I could see that nobody was interested. Curiously, at a time when it and virtual environments were ushering in a historic revolution, the mood was sociological and relational. I remember that in a transcription of one of my first interviews in France, "physique quantique" (quantum physics) was written as "physique antique" (quaint physics). I still couldn't express all this fluently, and in those days there was no synthesis to refer to. This is one of the hardest things about my way of working. As with cellular automata, to begin with we have zero motifs to connect the various cells. Sometimes you have to wait for a vast number of iterations to see things emerge. i was aware of this problem and realised I might have to spend my whole life without a single line, a single form, a single stable productive working cell emerging. Fortunately, the opposite happened. Over time – at once, so to speak – many motifs became stable and began their lives.

GC: How did you formulate these ideas in 1992? Were they were pretty broad, like *copy the dictionary*, or were they more detailed, with deliberate rules for each project?

GB: The statement is a suggestion involving few details. Some are vague, like "inhabiting the painting", "inhabiting the meat", "set out to conquer space", "do something with anything", "correct reality", "stashed in the studio", etc. others are slightly more precise, such as "place superheroes in bodies as old as their copyrights". For the larousse program, the statement was "work on sunday". Interpretation then took over, as in the i ching. i thought to myself: I must find a job that isn't a job, something equivalent, something part of the broad artistic ecosystem, something like Diy or mowing the lawn on sunday. A real activity, but one not recognised as productive in the territory of art. This kind of activity appeals to me. So I thought about copying. Copying can be difficult, but it isn't what creation is about. However perfectly you do it, copying is worthless. You can work hard without what you do ever being recognised as a job. I knew that this performance had to somehow last a lifetime. Then came the idea of copying the biggest book on my bookshelf: my 1966 larousse that I picked up when still at school. Through the time and vast amount of work I've devoted to this project (I'll soon reach the letter m, i.e. 2,500 gouache paintings and 120 square metres of spidery scrawl), I now know what my own development owes to chance. I love the idea that the motif or motivation emerges only in hindsight. Setting out on something vague, then seeing solid nuclei evolve on which something can be built. Cooking up the primordial soup, then seeing the first amino acids emerge.
My answer is but one of many possible answers. I'd love to live a thousand years so I could bring fresh answers. There are so many things i'd like to do again. From this desire, I established rules dictating that things had to be done again. Copying the dictionary was this field of experimentation, and the artefacts that emerged are all singular in their own way. Although a product of statements and identical rules, they end up being different. Genetics expresses this differentiation through notions of genotype and phenotype. Today I live with the idea that all objects are versions of themselves, visible sections of hidden continents on which all other versions sleep. Over time, an object and a subject can yield different versions of themselves, becoming this and then that. Some may say that the result is incoherence but I prefer to talk of metamorphosis, adaptation and freedom. In my world, it's the "and" that wins and the "or" that loses. Anybody who hesitates about how this decision is made comes up with an infinite arithmetical sequence: and *and* or? And *or* or? And *and* or *and* and *or* or? And *and* or *or* and *or* or? And *and* or *and* and *or* or *and* and *and* or *or* and or? And *and* or *and* and *or* or *or* and *or* or? Etc.

GC: You speak of "programs" and "motifs". I imagine these motifs are recurrent figurative forms that can actually be found in your work. Earlier we talked about holes; there are also bananas, houses, earthworms, pawns and many others besides. What exactly do you mean by "programs"?

GB: motifs are stable recurrent elements which appear over time, produced by cellular automata. They have been indexed and their names produce attractive mental images: "cannon", "craft", "glider", "puffer train", "hashlife", "replicator", "mathusalem", "garden of eden", etc. There are also "turmites", "Langton's ant", "Paterson's worms", among others. In the field of it, a program is a sequence of tasks encoded in algorithmic form. This is what I'm doing in a very rustic way. But I'm an artist, not a computer scientist or an engineer, and the notions that I glean from the hard sciences are only one way of approaching the structures of life forms. I also think of the program as a challenge to time. It enables me to satisfy both my bulimia and my need for rumination. In the "dessins noirs" ("black drawings"), for example, what I've been doing for fifteen years is part of a very precise program. Their format is defined, as is their medium. They can form groups, never of more than six, on a three-by- two grid, like squares on a comic book page. Their subject: everything that has an effect on my sensibilities – the memory of a drunken evening, a sentence, an image, a vision, a piece of music, a discussion with someone, etc. Collectively they may be seen as data recorded in the black box of my trajectory. They are then grouped together on large turnstiles, spinning on themselves, which then open and close this black box. All in all, we have: various elementary algorithms, data, a space for application and time. I feel immense freedom within this space. I no longer need to work. Things happen all by themselves, so to speak. So I can go back to my daydream. A program is basically something that works alone on an important task that needs to be performed, where your impulses are entrusted to an automated production system.

GC: To me, in the way your work develops and the insights you have just given, there is a metaphor for the Universe and the way it is currently described by astrophysicists: a kind of Big Bang (the *Game of Life* of 1992) triggers chain reactions (the statements, series, motifs, programs, etc., that we're talking about). This artistic universe is produced by you but simultaneously seems to exist outside of you, as if you were its explorer. To me this constraint on exhibitions for the tourniquets, which you mention, has a relationship to the scientific approach, at least in terms of intention. Science presents models in its expositions, while you state principles of exhibition. When you say that something (an artwork) is one possible state among others, it's very close to quantum physics, which posits hypotheses and probabilities regarding the situation of the objects observes. Could you be possibly be labelled a "science- fiction artist"?

GB: No labels, please, if you don't mind. I'm lucky enough to have a kind of teflon coating. Nothing sticks. However, I won't speak here of science fiction, but of the natural sciences. in that sense the parallel you're making is right because the physical structure of the real served me as a model to organize my method of production. What fascinates me most, ultimately, is life. The nature of life, how it comes about, how it grows, everywhere, all the time, like some kind of inevitability. And human nature, or just nature (it's a bit old hat to talk of human nature, given the amazing problematics that have so enriched art today, but I'm comfortable with the term). I didn't want life to become the subject of my work. I have looked at its structures, the way it's modelled. I looked to its strategies to elaborate my own working method. Life, in its intimate folds, couldn't care less about being right or wrong, contemporary or fashionable. What it wants to do is grow. It seemed to me that this stubborn foundation, so prolific and powerful when it comes to morphogenesis, offered a precious methodological model for a young artist. Because, at root, we are talking about a way of doing things – that is, roughly speaking: technique. The subject of my work, in itself, is fairly trivial, something like: the journey of a chap who, as he sets out on his travels, acquires a *consumer's* body. I don't know what else I could come up with. But due to its endemic schizophrenia, that body has sufficient wealth of form, in its endemic schizophrenia, the proliferation of its desires, its amazing relationship to inside-outside, the interconnected tubular architecture it develops to build its nest, its metaphysics and its icons, for me to be overwhelmed.

GC: I'd like to take a quick detour and ask you about your influences. In conventional interviews there's always a slightly uncomfortable moment where artists talk about other artists, whether deceased or getting there. Your unusual world sometimes makes me think of Marcel Broodthaers, if we position him in the Dadaist and Surrealist line. Are there any visual artists who have directly influenced your work?

GB: Broodthaers? Of course! He's one of those artists who opened doors for me. One of those who showed the way, like Francis Picabia, Bruce Nauman and many others besides, who showed me a blurred way of doing things, a non-linear architecture. Kurt Schwitters taught me an important lesson. With the *Merzbau* he turns exclusion into inclusion. It's very powerful and always light. I have a great affection for Gérard Gasiorowski. I've spent a lot of time with his work. His fictions greatly impressed me. In my personal *top ten*, there's also Paul Thek, who creates a fascinating synthesis between consumerism and sacrality. Then Mike Kelley and Martin Kippenberger's work slipped into my head like a hot knife into butter. I'd like to add the illustrator, Moebius, real name Jean Giraud. His influence has been crucial. He showed undeniable freedom in his extraordinary line and his scenario choices. Gotlieb's work is colder but he elaborates madness with extraordinary precision. Then there are Crumb, Morris, Franquin, Édika, the brilliant Francis Masse, etc. They made me want to be an artist when I was a teenager. Then, closer to home, there's Keith Tyson (we exhibit in the same gallery). I feel a great affinity with his work. Nobody's ever thought of bringing our ideas together, it's a shame. We had a discussion in 1995. I was showing *Comment mieux guider notre vie au quotidien* ("how to Better Guide our Daily life") and he was exhibiting a strange apparatus that he called his *Artmachine* method. He said the machine told him which direction to take. I never found out if he was lying or telling the truth. It produced some crazy stuff. I found it reassuring that another artist was attached to conceptual methods like my own. I like this distance between the work and its creator. I have to mention Marcel Duchamp, a tutelary figure in art. He impressed me with the precision of his actions and his lucidity of thinking. But especially the way he dealt with the problem of *and* and *or*. Do you remember the documentary where he presents his ready-mades? What he was essentially saying was that: producing art means choosing. Getting the *or* working full tilt. But he then goes on to say that he did this with perfect indifference. It's a clever way of neutralizing: this *or* that, what does it matter? It was an extremely effective shortcut to his ready-mades, which have both statuses: artwork and everyday consumer object. All in all, *Bottle Rack* is the artwork version of a bottle rack. QeD.

GC: Seeing as you mention Duchamp, and that we mentioned him before when talking about life and an artistic universe that exists both through and alongside the artist, here is an extract from one of his interviews, with Jean Antoine in 1966:
Jean Antoine: [...] *Marcel Duchamp, what have you done with your life? What would you say was your greatest achievement?*
Marcel Duchamp: *Using painting, using art, to create a modus vivendi, a way of understanding life; that is, for the time being, of trying to make my life into a work of art itself, instead of spending my life creating works of art in the form of paintings or sculptures […].*
I get the impression that your own life is inlaid inside your work, which is a slightly paradoxical thing to say...

GB: Paradoxical? Not really. I think there's a certain logic at work. By neutralizing the *or* with the notion of indifference, I think marcel Duchamp takes a somewhat haughty, aristocratic posture. For my part, I avoid the *or* by replacing it with an *and*. This doesn't produce the same effects. I work in "spending" mode, I "spend my life". I hate restraint and I look for directions through which I can multiply statements, points of view, techniques, and versions. The *and* virus is very invasive. It contaminates a

lot of space, including my life. But the reason for all that is elementary. Unlike Marcel Duchamp, I have no idea of what an artwork is, and I don't feel i'm an authority on the issue. I am happy at the stage where things are still *probably* works. Duchamp was tired of things. I'm bursting with energy.

GB: I delegate a lot, but within a given framework. In the studio, I keep an eye on every stage of production, I delegate to assistants trained in my working techniques. I implement protocols that have to be followed to the letter. From typography to gouache techniques, shaping, moulding and polishing. Everything is written down, even the type of jigsaw blade to use to cleanly cut methacrylate. I note down everything. And in my own way, I try to make my work methods algorithmic, to make everything smoother and easier to manage. Two things remain my preserve: my notebooks and copying the dictionary. I hate work that sweats and doubts and stumbles around. All experimentation and research is carried out in advance so that in the studio we can just turn on the taps. Things must never get heavy or sticky. Paradoxically, I don't set out to control. Control is a necessary step in letting go. What I want from a day in the studio is to feel totally comfortable, totally engaged in the task in hand and totally serene with it. It's like being *detached* (ouch! the return of Duchamp). This helps calm the fury of the *or*. The studio becomes a box of dreams. Using strict methods, I break out of the straitjacket of choice to curl up peacefully inside the *everything is possible*: *and-and-and*.... Without restrictions and without authority. It doesn't matter if the adventure takes another direction. Let's go, I say! This is where I feel comfortable and free. When things are worked in such a way and everything is open-ended, the studio becomes an incredible lever and an inexhaustible source of information. Each decision represents a fork in the road, and nothing precludes taking all two, three or more of its paths. If only to take a look, change my ideas, feel the fresh air of something you'd never imagined before. To me, this is what drift is all about; this is where treasures lie. The studio is a space where there are always people: assistants, visitors, gallery owners, collectors, friends, my wife, my children. They all have their own opinions, and I listen to all of them attentively. If there's something workable in this permanent flow of ideas, comments and suggestions, I use it.

GB: For a long time, as far as I can remember, language has played a very physical role; it's a kind of presence by my side. I see it as a colour, or rather a light. Some artists look for a special light. I look for the light in language. With the "dessins noirs" series, indeed,
I set out to use comic-book speech bubbles and the text that flows from them as a spotlight illuminating a stage, a hole in the darkness of the black gouache. That is to say that the ensuing language, like white neon, does not shed light on the meaning, but actually sheds light, even if, paradoxically, this risks opacifying and brutalizing the meaning. The integration of text at all levels of my work is related to the folds and twists that my education left in my behaviour. For many years I lived in an environment with three recognised languages [see appendix]. For a child of a linguistic harem, the idea of a *mother* tongue is fairly vague. There were also over eighty dialects. Language is spatialised there. In one district, you speak one particular language, and you cross the street and it changes. When you go to the market, you essentially hear languages you don't understand. At school, languages rotate... each game has its idiom. My father spoke a pidgin with ex-coolies that I didn't understand too well, a kind of Franco-Vietnamese creole. But when I heard those guys say to my father, "ti niaou koutwa", I knew they were talking about me: *ti niaou koutwa*, "your son" or "your child." languages were full of holes but splendidly baroque. I think that here, in some districts and suburbs, it's the same thing. The children who grow up here understand that their language is a compost, something crawling with life, and the light produced by this energy illuminates as well as casts shadow. Some territories are like that. Over the space of several square miles, there are Indian, Vietnamese, Chinese, English, French, Australian, Melanesian, Polynesian, Wallisian and Fijian districts. Languages become spatial data, postures, atmospheres, radiance and shadow. There are people who walk straight through it, straight-backed. I'm more like a liquid; I take the form of the container. There are also comic books, which have accompanied me from a very early age. In real life languages are spatialised and in fiction, text floats around in bubbles that spice up the image. In this context, a space without language would be almost incongruous. It was much later, during my art-history studies, that I discovered that text had long existed in religious painting. Around 2008, I remembered the existence of phylacteries and started including them in large gouache works, then in sculptures. It was a way of weaving in language, drowning the meaning of text in a fabric or rather a skein. Maybe it was a way of bringing together the brouhaha of intertwining languages. I could also mention sand drawings [see appendix], a surprising form where message and drawing interweave in rigorous geometric trails. These drawings are fascinating. I have a notebook where I resolve the figures imposed, like "the squatting Figure of the house of men", "the Rotten Fruit of the Bread tree", "I have come", "Nilambut" or "the Final star before the Rising sun". I also have fun inventing new ones.

GB: It is my policy to do everything and try everything. There remains, however, residual mass of ideas that have no support. I talked about this in a short story, "Nessie". I could make trailers for films that don't exist. Many feature- length films could exist in this form. It would save money. The content of the film would be implicit and would take on a new life in people's imaginations, whereas it falls apart when it tries to live in its film-body. I have a large quantity of simplified trailer scenarios in my head. As is the case for most artists, I have projects, simple statements or sketches lying dormant in notebooks for technical reasons: they are too expensive or too complicated. Sometimes, I tell myself I should wait for the right moment. I have never put an idea on hold for reasons such as: the idea was bad, or was too detached from who I am. I don't believe in such criteria. That being said, the answer to the question of whether an idea can suffice in itself is yes. I have no problem with that. If I choose to do something it's to follow the next trajectory. When ideas become cast in a form, they trawl along the bottom like fishing nets, bringing up all manner of things you weren't expecting – waste, monsters, unwanted intruders. This is what's interesting about the process. It's about positioning. If you're looking for yourself, ideas can be enough in themselves. It's your own idea, and the duo creates a play of mirrors. That's not what I'm looking for. Ideas are like fuel I put in a vehicle to take me on a journey, outside my head. They get twisted, amplified, crossbred, and their intentions change when they are *done* and often they emerge completely metamorphosed. I like this process. I don't care if ideas are taken far from their original intentions and bastardised. It's not me i'm looking for but what emerges from the process. In this sense, the studio brings me an invaluable ticket: a one-way ticket to where my idea and myself are going to end up. I would add that books also help me immerse myself in the questions in hand. Édouard Levé had the same experience in *Œuvres*. Once retranscribed, compiled and translated into *non-works*, as *empty spaces* in book form, his *ideas* underwent the same displacement. And that's why we remember them. Ideas do not have a Mount Olympus. I see them only in movement. What is important to me is the journey of the idea in the medium: a book, a performance, an object, a computer program, a thing.

GB: To answer that, I have to appeal to our notions of time and space. These entities are considered as infinite, but for us finite beings, with a beginning and end, this isn't easy. I have launched some projects that will take far longer to complete than an average lifetime. We could also have fun making a list of works that will logically never be completed. I have however heard it said that the child who can live a thousand years may have already been born. That opens up perspectives and, above all, reconfigures our relationship to time and to works in a broader content. So this remains to be seen. Space remains, dumbly unique, where contingencies are impossible in the world of the *and*. Maybe not if I have a longer lifespan than the one I already have. But in reality this prohibits activity. I tried to get around this difficulty with the *Correcteurs de réalité* ("Reality correctors"), as well as with my combinatory systems but all that's in its early stages. The real solution would be to construct a virtual double of the world, as in Greg Egan's novel, *Permutation City*. A perfect double in which we can immerse our own virtual double. In this world, time and space become plastic entities and we are free to exhaust contingencies without excluding one. I will say that, if I was given the time and a virtual double of the world, I'd be in a position to make *everything*.
At this point you'll say we are light years from art. That doesn't bother me. I have always thought that exhaustion is the only thing that is worthwhile.

Biographical notes
Gilles Barbier was born in Vanuatu. The archipelago was then known as the New Hebrides and under Franco-British governance (a condominium). There are three official languages (French, English and Bislama), and over eighty dialects, as well as Vietnamese, Chinese, Fijian and Wallisian, all cohabiting the Babel that is the capital, Port-Vila. In 1980, the New Hebrides gained independence and the country was renamed Vanuatu. In 1985, after long hesitating between the west coast of the United states and the east coast of Australia, Gilles Barbier finally moved to europe. His family stayed on Vanuatu, and he divided his time between europe and oceania, without ever being able to choose between them.
Sand drawings
Sand drawings are a typical tradition of the archipelago of Vanuatu. They are often very complex and elaborate compositions created by running the index finger over a carpet of sand or ashes. The finger must never return to the same line, nor leave the sand. Such drawing serve as tools for communication between the eighty linguistic groups and are mnemo- technical means for passing on rituals, mythological knowledge and oral information about local history, cosmologies, kinship systems, chanting cycles, agricultural techniques, architecture, craftsmanship and choreographic styles. Most sand drawings have several functions and levels of meaning. They can be "read" as artworks, sources of information, illustrations of narrative, and signatures, or simply as messages and objects of contemplation. They are not only "images", but also a combination of knowledge, incantations and narratives imbued with sacred or profane meanings.