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Conversation with Mazen Kerbaj

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Contents:

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Ideas in comics and music Three languages Influence of French language and culture
Gainsbourg, Brassens, Ferré and literature Sharif Sehnaoui and anglophone culture European Free
jazz Beginnings and first concert Development of a scene in Beyrouth Raed Yassin
and Charbel Haber Waltz with Bashir Civil war Beyrouth 2006 Not a
Lebanese artist

When it comes to art, the thing about thinking and doing, it's way more difficult because many times I want to do what I think and very rarely I can do what I think – I cannot speak for all artists, but at least in my practice it's very difficult to have an idea and then to make it concrete in the way you see it. But then, it's not a problem for me because I am very fond of this accident theory. I always try to arrive somewhere I didn't want to go to in the first place or I didn't plan to go. So, why try to put a thought or an idea into practice? What I'm looking for always, even subconsciously, is to arrive somewhere I didn't think of in the beginning. Most of my art, be it drawings, even stories, and music are in the field of improvisation and I try to put myself in a certain situation, then from there improvise to get out or to get deeper into whatever. *That reminds me of what you said before, that when you're lying in bed and you don't sleep and you have an idea you don't write it down.* No. *Because you don't really need it?* It's not that I don't need it. This is a little bit different. Many times in my life when I was younger I was thinking: Yeah, I had this great idea, what was it? I forget it and it happens with everybody. Somehow I finished with this angoisse, fear of losing an idea by convincing myself that a good idea will come back. And if it doesn't come back it was a bad idea, so I think, I don't need to write them down and the good ones, or the ones I need, will come. They ask me for comics, let's say a page of comics on a given subject, and then I am thinking and thinking, then this idea that I had like eight or ten years ago comes back and in a way I can do it, because ten years ago it wasn't feasible, something was missing somehow, and suddenly it's there. It was in my brain for these years and things were accumulating and today it's possible : so it comes back and it comes back in an almost finished way. I just begin and the flow comes. Many times I think : Ya, you should have written it down, there were some small details, anyway, I am a little bit, how do you say, paresseux, I am lazy, I'm a lazy artist and a lazy man. So, I prefer to keep it like this and I tell you, I convinced myself by saying : "The real good idea cannot just disappear, it will come back at some point, when it's needed it will come back." I also convinced myself of the same with this fear of the blank page, especially because I worked in comics a lot with newspapers and shit like this, sometimes even on a daily basis. And when I was young I used to say like : "If you work in a magazine and on the day when you have to deliver the page and there is no idea, what do you do?" It was really a fear and with time and experience and work, I know that the idea will come. It cannot not come. I mean, I have no fear of not finding an idea. Now the second thing is, I am sure that sometimes the idea is okay, it's not great as I would like it and most of the time it's okay and maybe every ten times you have a great page. But you're never below that, you arrived at a certain standard. So, I'm not like : "Wah, I don't have time any more, I should find an idea!" I just wait, you know. I have certain techniques to generate ideas. I convinced myself, I tell you, of a lot of things : I was very superstitious when I was young until I decided to break glasses and see if I will have seven years of bad luck, et cetera. And then I decided that I won't be

superstitious any more. Like many things in my life, it's really a clear decision I took : Okay, from now on I won't be afraid of the blank page because the idea will come at some point. And then it worked. *It worked from one day to the other?* Maybe not that fast. The superstition thing yes, I remember clearly saying : 'From now on, whatever there is, there is Friday 13th, I take the plane, just to prove that there is no – *There was Friday 13th, Yesterday, yesterday,* It seems, this year there are three of them, so for superstitious people it's nasty. I heard yesterday, they are saying it's the second one and there is one in July.

The fear of the blank page actually, it took some time, especially when I began to work with monthly or weekly magazines. In the beginning I was very afraid : how will I do it? And then I did it but for next week, what will I do? It took me a week of anguish. But now I have total confidence in the stress situation, I have total confidence that at the moment when I can not wait for an idea any more, it will come. The stress will generate this idea and all the things I would have thought before would just manage to find their way, but I told you, sometimes it's not this idea I'm very proud of but it's enough, by my standards at least, I'm not ashamed of publishing it, if you want. *So, you need this stress situation to finish a comic strip?* Ya. Ya. *Can you compare this stress situation to a situation on stage, during a concert or before a concert?* It's different but there is something, there is for sure the track, I don't know how you call it, stage fear you call it in English, I mean this thing actors, musicians have before going on stage. Somehow I had it very little in my life, maybe because I wasn't meant in the beginning to be a stage performer or musician or whatever. I was a comics artist ever since, or I was at least a visual artist and somehow it's a very solitary thing and you don't have fear because you draw and then it takes months or even years to be published. Then you get feedback from people who read it, some time – so you're not in this test situation where you're presenting your work. And then with music, I started directly playing music with 17 maybe – I wanted to be free jazz or free improv, I never wanted to learn music or to play something else. And the first time I played live, it was more of a challenge to play this music. It was more a serious and an aggressive way of playing it and provocative because I knew how the people would receive it, especially in Lebanon. So I was really not at all close to stage fear, it was more like a fear of going to the front, I mean, in a war, you know. It was a very aggressive fear, so I was waiting to go there to cut their heads, all of them, if you want. In the end, actually, it was very bad, I have a recording of it. It was a very bad gig but then, we had to do it at some point. *With whom?* The gig I played, this one was with Christine Sehnaoui [Abdelnour], and then Sharif [Sehnaoui] played the solo after us, then we played the three of us, it was the first gig, the first three gigs we did in Beyrouth. Then, sometimes I have big stress, especially when, let's say, we are expected to play at nine and then it's at ten thirty, this hour and a half are awful because you wait and – but usually I don't stay alone, I just

continue my life normally until I have to go on stage I'm still with people having some drinks – sometimes yeah, when I have to wait one hour more I get totally drunk but I try to avoid this. I draw, I do, I rarely have this stress, I occupy myself not to have this stress, I never go backstage and sit and wait – probably I would stress a lot if I would. Forget about it until it arrives. It's somehow like the comics, I told you, I wait for the last minute. I say : 'Okay, I just have four hours to finish the drawing, now I have to find an idea.' But before I avoid even thinking about this thing, like the concert. And to this, the music that we play, especially free improv in groups – somehow maybe what I'm saying is weird, maybe it should stress you more because you don't know what will happen while a classical musician or somebody reading music should be less worried. But for me, I think, because it's improv, it's somehow pointless to stress. We'll have to do a sound and then from there – the stress is on stage if you want, it's pointless to stress before because there is nothing to expect, nothing you can know. Most of the times I know the sound I will do – when I'm playing solo for sure, I know how I will start, then I don't know where it will go. But I have to take decisions because I prepare my trumpet. So if I put the tube in the beginning I cannot play another sound. Sometimes the others start and I feel : no. Then I remove it. I mean you put yourself in preparation for the first moment and then it's total unknown. So I think, this also helps to be not that stressed because it's pointless.

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You said, you have these techniques to be creative – Not to be creative, the specific thing is when I'm obliged to find an idea, yeah, I have a technique. *And you invented the technique yourself?* Yes, it's a totally personal technique. It's just finding something you want to talk about and sometimes it's difficult because I have five six seven options and the most difficult is to choose one and not to move any more and say : 'Okay, I'm gonna work on this.' And then, if you have an idea for another thing, you ignore it, you say : 'No no, I decided to work on this one.' Sometimes I'm in front of the TV, many times. It's not that I'm inspired by TV, I'm seeing shit on TV, just to remove my brain from thinking. Sometimes until the last minute, Racha, my wife, goes to sleep and says : 'You didn't find an idea yet?' I say no, and it's like one o'clock in the morning and at six o'clock or seven o'clock in the morning it has to go to print, so I say no and then she goes to sleep and sometimes I arrive at this stress situation like : fuck, I still have five hours. Then I say : 'Okay, you can draw it in 20 minutes at the end, so you have four hours and a half

for the idea, it's okay.' And then, eventually, usually at 1.30, like 30 minutes after she sleeps it's there and then I go to sleep at three o'clock and it's finished. *And she knows* – She knows that you cannot speak with me in this period. She asked me : 'Do you have an idea?' I say no. In the beginning she used to say : 'You want help?' But now she knows, she doesn't speak with me, she says : 'Do you have an idea?' I say no. 'Okay, good luck.' She goes to sleep and she knows, next morning she goes, she sees the drawing, it's there. Yeah, there is a stress but it's very positive, I mean, I know that the stress will generate the idea itself, without me somehow. So I accept this thing. *And when you are, here in the city, on the mobilette*, Yes, *I don't know how you move*, on scooter, yeah mostly on the scooter, *do you have ideas or do you think about music or do you think about drawings?* A lot, a lot, and same shit, I forget them. I'm always thinking and sometimes I say : 'Concentrate on the road!' Because you're not here any more, yeah, I think Nietzsche used to say that great ideas come when you are walking, at least for him, and he would go for walks. For me it's the same but on the scooter because I'm a lazy guy. *Yeah, you're from Beyrouth, nobody walks here*. You cannot walk. Then, yeah, it comes, a lot of ideas come. Sometimes I am happy to have a road to do, like 20 minutes road and I have an idea to find, I say : 'No, don't think about it now, think about it when you're on the scooter.' Sometimes I forget – then I'm like : 'Fuck, I had to think!' Then I don't know, it has always been very strange for me, this thing with ideas, where ideas come from and especially when you want to be an artist you always ask yourself : 'Where did he take this idea from?' You read stuff and you say : 'It's incredible! How do you find ideas?' And I think, they find you actually, they just arrive somehow, you just need to think. I mean, this technique I was talking about is just waiting for the idea to arrive, just prepare yourself to grab it when it passes. It's as easy as that. Put yourself in a condition, like with music also, I tell you, in a solo for instance, solo improvisation is somehow the easiest improvisation and the most difficult, because it's very difficult to improvise. You start, you know where you are going but to arrive at a subconscious condition where you are not thinking any more of the music and where things can happen and surprise you while you are playing – then you can arrive somewhere else, this is this accident thing. Actually Francis Bacon talks very well about this with paintings. I try to provoke an accident actually. I know what I want to do but then, while working I try to provoke an accident that will take me somewhere I couldn't imagine or expect. I think, it's the same in music. It's mostly this in music, in improv music, and this is impossible in any other kind of music.

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Another question which interests me a lot, because I also speak three languages, not your three languages but my three languages. Does this influence your thinking and do you mix the languages in your head and can this provoke ideas? This is a very vast question for us, Lebanese, and for me as an author. Until today I always try to know in what language I think normally. Now I'm talking to you in English and I think in English, it's very difficult. There is some tests that we know you can do, like for instance : just count to ten, quickly, you say to somebody and you see in what language he counts and yeah, for sure, I count in Arabic, but then, French is very close. It's not my second language, it's almost my second first language, like Arabic. It's different in this sense from your three languages where you learn the second one when you're already older. While French is for us, or English, it depends on whom, like from three years on you learn it. And then for me specifically, French was the language of comic books, so when I was young I couldn't imagine doing comic books in another language and that's why most of my work is in French. But then when I began to work in Arabic, because I worked for an Arabic newspaper [al-Akhbar], I was writing in Lebanese Arabic, not in literature Arabic, and I found that it opened things for me that were impossible in French. Not only to play on words and shit like this, but just the way of thinking in Arabic in comics really opened something else for me. For two three years, maybe more, even in my notebooks, I obliged myself to shift to Arabic, totally. The first 20 were in French, and then I did 14 in Arabic. And now when I work in French, I feel this input of Arabic in it, of thinking in Arabic. It's very vague, I cannot be precise about what is different between French and Arabic. Now, for sure there is the way of reading comics but for me it's okay to adapt to write from left to right or right to left, it's totally natural. I imagine some European comics author and you tell him : 'Work your page from right to left.' He'll probably don't know how to compose his page like this because he is not used to it. For me, I don't even question myself, I mean, both roots are valid. So it's something very natural but Arabic was not natural at all for me as a language for comics and as a written language, because the Arabic we speak and the Arabic we write is almost as different as French and Latin, you know, the dialect we speak, we all know it very well but it's not writable, you have to write the classical Arabic and in this I'm very bad, I cannot write, I mean, I don't read in Arabic. I read authors who wrote in Arabic but mostly, like if I want to read Franz Kafka, I read him in French, not in Arabic and so, this goes even for English authors: If I don't read them in English I read them in French, et cetera. Arabic I just read when I'm obliged to or when the book is in Arabic and written by an Arab author, but it takes an effort, I mean, French is easier, which is a shame but it's like this. It's this problem with the spoken Arabic and written Arabic.

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*So, on the one side, concerning comics, you have this big French cultural heritage. How is it in music? Because I read in Revue & Corrigé that you listened, and you told me, to Brassens, Boby Lapointe, yes, Gainsbourg. Yes, somehow French culture influenced me a lot in various stages. It was actually a very big disappointment when I discovered French people because I thought they are like their culture but I was wrong. But then yeah, I told you, not all my culture is French but came into my head with French language, also movies. When I was young I didn't speak English at all, I started when I was twelve, at school and I was very bad so it took me until I began to travel, until I began to work with people who speak in English, that I began to practice. Until 20 years, all the movies I would see, would be subtitled in French, even American movies – to tell you how important the French language was. So, all American movies, all the English shit was assimilated in French in my head. Then there is the French themselves, the French literature. There is Louis Ferdinand Céline, then Camus and Sartre for sure, not all, but Louis Ferdinand Céline is one of the best writers that ever existed for me. He's – in the 20th century you have Proust and Céline, I mean it's the two guys who transformed novel writing forever. His most famous book is called Voyage au bout de la nuit. Then he was with the Nazis and he wrote some anti-Semitic pamphlets, it was very nasty, an extreme-right guy but as a writer he's one of the most important writers of the 20s. Then I read Kafka, I read Fernando Pessoa, who's Portuguese, in French, I read all these people in French. Then also musically, I mean on the song level, when I was young I used to listen to the same shit as everybody, be it Madonna and Michael Jackson, or Elton John and Phil Collins – it was a fight who is better. But then, when I grew up a little bit I began to have – yeah, Phil Collins and Elton John, it was a total fight, like, who's better, who's the best. I am bit older than you Philipp – *Five years* – Five years yes, that's enough for this Elton John shit. Then, little by little, I discovered Aznavour or Jacques Brel, but just the very famous songs of Jacques Brel. Then I began to discover more interesting songwriting like Gainsbourg or Brel, the rest of him, or Brassens, Leo Ferré, Boby Lapointe, all this took a very long time. I would buy the Intégrale – all these guys are dead anyway, so you can buy their CDs and that's it. And then dig into them, like I would stay one year listening to Gainsbourg every day every day every day and reading the poetry with it to assimilate it. Sometimes it took two years to discover what he meant in a song. And this influenced me a lot, my way of thinking. For instance, Brassens helped me a lot to be a non-believer, to stop believing, I mean, I said : 'If this guy made these songs and still lived, he wasn't struck by thunder or something, it must be okay to fuck around with religion or whatever,' and also this way of, especially Brassens, this way of seeing everything from a humorous point of view and just making fun of everything, this is typically, I mean you know me, it's typically my way of being, and then finding somebody, who makes great songs with it – for me, that was great. Humor and sarcasm is not like only for day to day life, no, you can do great artistic things with it. And sometimes*

it's so touching, I mean, there is a humor but it's so depressing, you know. And then the depressive way of Leo Ferré which is the contrary – they speak about the same thing but one is very depressive and the other one is very funny. This was really at a period where it was very important for me to discover this, it was like, let's say roughly from 14 to 17, 18 and still today I mean, I still listen regularly to these people. *Do you still discover new things?* Rarely, very rarely. In Brassens I discovered lately a song that I used to think of as one of his not so great songs, but then it's : 'Fuck! It's an incredible and rich song!' It happens still and sometimes preferences change, like this one I used to like a lot, now I find it musically not that great. Then another one would change. But it was really the formation years, this 14 to 17, it really helped me a lot and around 17, it's the years where I began to read seriously, to read non-comics. Before, I would refuse to read even though I was a big reader since very young and I never stopped to be. When I had a good grade, my parents gave me the money for one comic book and when I had bad grades they would refuse me comics for two weeks and I would go crazy! But in the first years when I really began to read books there was this friend who introduced me to cinema and to literature and I introduced him to music and comics. *The dentist?* The dentist, it's Marc, and he is still, it's my alter ego, actually. He wrote the two préfaces to the books [Beyrouth 2006 and *Cette histoire se passe*], it's him. And I remember, he gave me a book of Kundera, Milan Kundera, *La vie est ailleurs*, I don't know what it's in English, *La vie est ailleurs?* Life is somewhere else, hehe, I don't know. Anyway, I liked it but then unfortunately for Kundera I read directly after it *The Trial* by Franz Kafka and never opened a Kundera since. Then I read all the Kafka and somehow I felt, maybe the fact, that I began very late to read made me avoid all the classics, even in French literature. I never read Victor Hugo, unless for school, but I never read all this. There is only Balzac who I read again because it's somehow incredible. But even Gustave Flaubert who is great, I really missed the moment to read it and now I have so many things to read that I cannot go back to the classics. *I tried to read Madame Bovary and I couldn't.* Like for me, because I was a kid reader, since like four, five years, until today, reading is better than seeing a movie, playing music or whatever, reading is my best activity ever. And when I try to convince my son : 'Yeah, playstation is cool but if you go into a book and for one week you are in it' – he's still not convinced, I hope one day he will be.

It's at this period, maybe from 17 to 20, when I discovered music per se, because before, like I told you, I discovered all this entertainment shit and then I switched to this French poetry songwriting and actually I wasn't very interested in English or American songwriters because I was not good in English so I wouldn't even understand. *And it's déjà beaucoup.* Yeah yeah yeah, nowadays that I understand English, I mean it's awful to say but there is nothing to compare with the French, at least this period of French songwriting. I mean, you take Bob Dylan and all the protest songs – it's there in Brassens 20

years before and Brassens is the biggest anarchist you can find if you read his poetry. My biggest interest was songs and well written songs, mostly because of what is said, so I didn't even consider music as music, like listening to music without words, for me it was like : okay, there is classical music and that's it. And this is for my father, it's not for me. In this period when I met Sharif there was one university teacher, he was very English educated and wanted to discover Brassens and everything. He was a copy-writer, so he liked words a lot, and he gave me Tom Waits and Frank Zappa in return, but we are talking about a period where Tom Waits was, like I didn't know anybody around me who had heard of his name. It was before The Black Rider and all this, you know, with the Russian dance that made him very famous or this taa taa taa taa taaa, there is this song that was passing everywhere. He gave me Rain Dogs, or Swordfishtrombones, he gave me one of these two. And Frank Zappa, he gave me the Live in New York and the Apostrophe (?) and Over-Nite Sensations and there is Stink-Foot in it that just fucked my head out. So then with Sharif –he was listening a lot to rock, old rock, like from Greatful Dead to old Pink Floyd– when he made me listen to Pink Floyd, I said : 'No, I don't want to listen to The Wall and this shit all my friends are listening to.' He said : 'No no, The Wall is shit, come and listen!' And he would put me, let's say Ummagumma or all these old CDs, even Atom Heart Mother with all it's –I think today it's very maniéré, il y a beaucoup de maniérismes– but with those we had to admit that yeah, you can sit for 20 minutes and hear music, it was weird. And from there I went to Jazz and Free jazz, also with Sharif. Both of us evolved on the same wave. But until 17 I never heard music as music just for the music, it was really about the words. *So you went with Sharif and the others just came in and joined your way?* Actually when we met – funnily enough we were in the same school but we never talked to each other. I was one year older and we had very different friends. We met at the end of a party at his place via a friend who invited me. Then another time he would say : 'Yeah come to Sharif', I said : 'No, I don't want to bother him.' He said : 'No, it's okay, I asked him.' Then, the third time I went without this friend, because Sharif saw me and said : 'Do you want to come?' And little by little we discovered affinities, for sure, but then we discovered that after three o'clock everybody goes back home or is sleeping and then Sharif and I would stay from three to six in the morning putting CDs and listening to CDs and he was very happy to find another crazy idiot who would stay up with him. And we would go to the party and wait for everybody to sleep and go home because we wanted to listen to CDs and discuss. It took very long but I remember very precisely a day where I said to Sharif : 'You know, why don't you give me your phone number, maybe I can call you and come directly without these other fuckers, I mean, just listen.' 'Yeah, great!' And then one day we went for a month and a half to a chalet in Faraya, just me and him and in the weekends some friends would come and sleep at the chalet and party and everything. But then we would stay five days, we had books, each one, and music

and we would go and discover things. I remember when Sharif brought Sweet Smoke, this group called Sweet Smoke who did just two CDs. They are a rock group but they do a reprise –in the middle of a song– they do a cover of 'The Creator Has a Master Plan' of Leon Thomas and Pharoah Sanders. And when Sharif discovered Free jazz and Jazz in France I would say : 'Jazz, man, come on, you're crazy! I listen to rock, you know.' He said no, no, and he convinced me saying : 'This is the guy who did the original 'The Creator Has a Master Plan' and it's on the disc Karma of Pharoah Sanders.' And he put it and I said : 'Man, it's very difficult to listen to, I mean, it's not music, it's fucking cacophony or whatever.' And then we began to like it and what we liked, that I remember very well : for ten minutes they are shouting because afterwards when they go down they are very happy. You have to suffer to be very happy. Today I listen to it, it's almost Easy listening music, after discovering Borbetomagus and shit like this. Today when I listen to Pharoah Sanders I find it, especially this one, I mean Black Unity is more harsh, but this disc, it's very melodic and very lyrical and it's not Brötzmann [Peter], it's not Machine Gun, at all. And I remember, we saw a gig of Misha Mengelberg at Bimhuis in Amsterdam, also with Sharif. We were going just to smoke some dope in Amsterdam – we were in France, so we went. Then we saw Bimhuis, Misha Mengelberg and we went there and there we saw the whole catalog of FMP, it was a dream come true for us. I had never heard of Brötzmann but when I saw this cover called Machine Gun, automatic gun for fast, continuous firing, I said : 'Fuck, I have to have this!' Then we took it and we stayed three days in Amsterdam on a boat, péniche, sleeping in it. We would go out, bring some pot to smoke – we hate coffee shops because there is Bob Marley or The Doors constantly turning inside. So we just buy, go back to péniche and put Machine Gun and smoke for the whole day. And somehow I find myself much more in the German and English, the European free jazz and free improv. It was very welcome because of my French education or way of thinking. So, after all the Coltrane and Albert Ayler and Spiritual Unity and Venus evolves around the Astral I don't know what and Karma and then you have Fuck de Boere of Brötzmann or Machine Gun or Balls or Nipples or whatever. So, yeah, I liked this way of disconnecting, I mean music is music, it's not what was it, The Healing Force of the Universe, it's just fucking music. And yeah, I find myself much more in this anti-mystical and really down to earth European way of seeing shit. And then Evan Parker, for sure. I remember when I went to Paris I took with me old CDs, old rock CDs I could sell there at a place and for every two I could buy another one, so I bought improv and free jazz and then Sharif once said : 'Buy this one!' It was an occasion, a second hand disc and it was Joe McPhee, Evan Parker and Daunik Lazro, a trio of sax – not great today when I listen to it, one of the ones I don't like a lot. Then we put it, we were smoking for sure, haa, at the house, smoking and listening and it took me time –because there is three sax players– to say at some point to Sharif : "There is one who is not breathing. There is

something weird with this shit, there is three sax players but there is one who since two minutes didn't take a breath.' He said : 'Yeah, it's Evan Parker, I saw him,' and actually it was the first improv gig Sharif ever saw, it was Evan Parker at Instants Chavirés, 'yeah, he does circular breathing.' I said : 'What?' He said : 'Yeah, I asked, and it's circular breathing.' I said : 'How?' He said : 'I don't know, just very quickly fffff and then continue.' And I stayed for a year trying on sax, because I played sax also, sax or trumpet, and just do this and try to not make a cut and then it was – it was not circular breathing, it was always cutting, I said : 'Fuck! How do you do it?' Until I found one day a manual on the net or something, how to do it and then I remember calling Sharif in Paris, I said : 'I can do it! I can do circular breathing!'

Evan Parker was a huge huge influence because for me he's really a person where European and American free jazz join, it's in Evan Parker, it's where John Coltrane and Peter Brötzmann, let's say, join. Still, he evolved very differently but I love his old solos where he did very little circular breathing and he is shouting and I mean, whatever John Butcher, Michel Doneda, Stéphane Rives are doing on soprano saxophone, he didn't do it, he was very far from what Doneda can do today or Butcher or Stéphane Rives, but he threw the first attempts on taking the saxophone and playing just a sine wave on it, he almost could do it for two minutes and it's nasty : Stéphane now does a 40 minutes set with very small variations. But really, for me Brötzmann was a big influence for the energy and I loved Albert Ayler before discovering Brötzmann, and Pharoah Sanders. And I think Brötzmann is very lyrical, like these American Free jazz players but Parker was – yeah, I called my son Evan in the end, to tell you about his influence. But then for sure, I don't like everything he does, I think, he repeats himself – but I'm still young, it's easy for me to say. Maybe in 20 years I'll be doing the same shit. Also Peter Kowald for me and Sharif, both of us, the hero of everything is Peter Kowald. We saw him once playing solo in Mulhouse. I paid my ticket to France in the middle of the summer where there is nothing to do in Paris, just to be able to go to the Mulhouse festival, I was really crazy about this music. And then, Peter Kowald made this great music and had this great attitude, this great anti-star system attitude, even inside Improv. He was ready to play with anybody playing any kind of music, he tried to adapt and to stay himself in this music and he was always travelling, he always wanted to play with more people. He was never like : 'No, I don't play with this one.' And I think it's the right attitude for this kind of music and I think it's the attitude that Sharif and I still, both of us, try to continue. Sometimes I say to Sharif : 'Maybe, yeah, we don't do this gig.' He says : 'Fuck you, man, Peter Kowald would have done it!' I say : 'Ok, let's do it,' you know, like : 'It's music, let's do it!' So, we like this attitude a lot. Peter Kowald was the first guy we wanted to bring to Beyrouth and after we did the first year here we saw him in Mulhouse and we told him about it and he was very excited, saying : 'Yeah, I want to come.' We told him that we have no money and he said : 'Yeah, it's okay, I want to come, I want to play with Lebanese

musicians.' And then we said : 'Fuck! Who's going to play? Me, you, what? Peter Kowald, man, we are pieces of shit, we cannot play with him!' Then, unfortunately he died too early.

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Actually when it started we had some friends and we put them on this music and Sharif was already with Christine, they weren't married but they were going out together and I was going out with a friend of Sharif who became my first wife. And we decided all to play, to jam together. We were all non-musicians except Sharif who took piano lessons when he was young and then played guitar, rock, for a while, so, he had some background and we decided to begin to play music and to improvise together, make jam sessions and Sharif said : 'I have a trumpet, do you want to take it?' And he offered me an old Jupiter Chinese trumpet, very very bad, and I said : 'Yes, sure, I take it, haha, why not?' I was the only one capable of blowing in it, just because I understood how to do it – you don't have to blow, you have to pfffft, you know. So then I started to play and Sharif was already living in France, Christine also. And I took some courses with a Jazz trumpet player and we ended up fighting, for sure. Miles Davis for him was already too experimental, it was Dizzy Gillespie and it stopped there. So how talk about Lester Bowie or Don Cherry or Don Ayler, for instance? He would say : 'This guy is shit.' Which is maybe not wrong with Don Ayler but for instance Lester Bowie for him was not interesting at all, the Art Ensemble of Chicago for him, it was not music. *French?* Lebanese, he's Lebanese. But Sharif would come back or sometimes I would go to France with my wife. My wife played sax and Christine played piano in the beginning, then sax. Then we would meet and play – we were ten people maybe or seven people – and then, *Was it Raed [Yassin], Charbel [Haber]?* Nono, nono, it was way before, it's in the late 90s. Then little by little we began to discover. I was training a lot here alone and especially after seeing some things, like Michel Doneda, where I discovered that you can play very low sounds and be very interesting, not just shout like an idiot. And Sharif and Christine were training a lot and every three, four month they would come to Lebanon and we played. The other five, they didn't play since our last jam. So, we were still bad maybe but we were evolving and we could listen and answer, we were not just shouting like hell. Maybe we have a recording, I don't know, from this just seven idiots shouting. Then little by little we did a natural selection, I mean, by saying : 'Man, you cannot not train.' The most difficult was my ex-wife, for sure, she was living with me and saying : 'What? You and Sharif and

Christine can play and I cannot?' I said : 'You don't train, come on, you just play.' And then one day Sharif came to my place and it was like four years that we played and we played a duo, I was still with Diane, and Diane came and wasn't believing that we were playing, she thought it was a CD. And for us, also, it was a revelation, I mean, we stopped playing and we said : 'Fuck, it was, okay, we're not having fun any more – we are playing music.' It was really clear. It was not all good, for sure, but somehow we both began to understand how to react to each other and we both had a beginning of a vocabulary on our instrument. And this encouraged also Christine and she went hardcore on the alto-sax until we did this first tentative where we played the three of us. I played a duo with Christine and then solo Sharif, then a trio at the end. I have footage of this concert, I told you, it was bad but it has a merit of existing, it was the first concert in Lebanon, this was in 2000, I think, or '99. *And who was in the audience? Were there many people and how did they react?* Maybe 25 people to 30 people, invited, we told friends, maybe four stayed until the end. I remember clearly Charbel Haber being in this audience. We were insulted, there was one guy who said : 'I stayed until the end just to insult you, fucking idiots, and you don't play music!' And I remember Charbel Haber coming and saying : 'Guys, my name is Charbel Haber, I play rock music, I'm interested. Why the fuck are you doing this?' We talked a little bit and then two years later we met again. And Raed, it was the same. I was alone in Lebanon, Sharif and Christine were in France and when they came we could do one concert. So I had to play solo for a long time. That's how I actually developed my solo work. *Like, in the same way as the bandes dessinées?* Yes, absolutely. Like really, you're alone, you have to do shit by yourself, find a way and in comics it's the same. Then I played some solos in festivals. There is one where there is also footage : people are laughing. I start the first sound and they begin to laugh but, not laughing at me, laughing because they thought I was doing something funny on purpose, like, I'm doing the idiot, for 20 minutes. So I go up, I shout, like higher, they laugh more, ahahaha – it was really a nightmare, it was the biggest nightmare of my life. I had to say : stay serious. *Where was it?* It was in Masrah Beirut, in the one theatre that is closed now, it was in a festival of theatre and performance and probably I played between two funny plays and I just would have needed a red nose to make it happen better. Then there is this guy [Tony Sfeir] who did a compilation of music, it was La Cedethèque, you don't know this place, no, it was already closed last year. It was a place that sold alternative CDs and you could find all kind of alternative shit, like Sonic Youth stuff. And we convinced him to bring Hat Art CDs, FMP, et cetera. So he had this kind of stuff. He wanted to do a compilation of new Lebanese music, like : the young generation. It was maybe in 2000, and he asked me : 'I still have room, would you like to record on it?' I said : 'Yes, sure.' I recorded this trumpet solo called Song for Evan, which was for my son and for Evan Parker. I did this thing with small sounds. The compilation was called Beirut Incognito and there was everything, from rap to techno to rock, then

they put my thing on the end as the last track and it's probably the first piece of improv ever recorded in the region or in the Arab world or whatever and people complained : 'Yeah, I got this CD but I want another one because it doesn't work, the last track is fucked up, it doesn't work.' They : 'No, no, it's real music, it's actually music!' Then people insulted me. I heard people saying : 'Yeah, why? What the fuck, I thought you draw, why the fuck are you playing music? It's shit!' Friends, they say : 'Man, I listened to this, are you crazy, you're playing music? Hahaha.' Lebanese way. Then one day I was very glad, I was in this Cedethèque and there was a guy who buys a lot of Contemporary classic and the owner who had made the CD said : 'Wait, I want you to listen to something,' and he put the thing on and he said : 'Who is this? Globokar?' And he listened and I was there but he didn't know that it's me. So I had a big smile : okay, somebody recognized it as music, at least. And then time went and once I'm at this Cedethèque buying CDs – there were many young guys selling CDs, some I knew, others I didn't know – and this one, I didn't know him, he said : 'Are you Mazen Kerbaj?' I said yes. He said : 'I am Raed Yassin, I want to play music with you.' I said : 'Man, I've been waiting for you for years!' And then I said : 'What kind of music?' He : 'I'm classically trained, I play double bass, I like to play free jazz.' I said : 'Super, let's try.' And I was amazed, it was no joke, the guy wanted to play free jazz and played it very well, I mean, at least as bad as me or as well as me and we played with a third guy who played sax. Then at some point I said : 'Would you like to remove the third guy and we try together?' And the duo worked perfectly. Then they did another compilation : Jazz Incognito, and we did a piece, Raed and me, for it, and then all the jazz scene went : 'What? This is Jazz? This is shit!' So whatever. Then for the festival in 2002 we decided to play, I said to Raed : 'Listen, you don't know him, you don't know Sharif but please, have confidence. If we add him to the duo it would be great.' Then we did this, we played the concert and decided to make a record. It is called Kerbaj/Sehnaoui/Yassin Trio and there is a guy with an open mouth saying A, as the first letter, the first sound ever or whatever. And for years we referred to our trio as the A Trio because of this cover I did and then it became the A Trio and this first CD is very bad. It's more in the free jazz, I played sax still and Sharif was still on electric guitar. There is some stuff where today I say : 'Yeah, it's nice but it's a bad CD.' So it took us years to accept to record another one which is the new one now and if you listen to both you cannot believe it's the same musicians. Raed yeah, was really a revelation, I still remember this day very well, this guy saying : 'I want to play with you.' And I didn't know, I never heard of him. And Charbel arrived a year later when we did this trio with a didgeridoo player, Jad Balaban. The trio was called BAO Trio. Later on, Jad left the group and we remained a duo for a while, until Sharif joined the group with electric guitar. The BAO Trio is still ongoing, adding some guests sometimes, like Raed or Tony Elieh. I call the music we play in this band psychedelic improv. It's with long drones, it's also the group with which we experimented the

most with taking drugs and playing music, because Charbel, you don't have to convince him, hahah, it's easy going. And I'm always interested and keen to try, I mean, I did so many drawings under effect of drugs, so many bad drawings, so many good ones. Sometimes I do masterpieces, like, when I took mushrooms I did masterpieces and when I woke up the second day I threw them away, because really, they are pieces of shit. I think, it's very interesting. I mean, when I was young I took drugs just for recreation but then I thought I'm wasting the drug on nothing, I should use it, somehow. So, drawing under influence of drugs – I experimented.

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Waltz with Bashir, you told me you didn't like it. Yeah, I didn't like it at all actually. I think visually it's an interesting thing but for a short movie, you get tired very quickly from this effect, I don't know how the process is done but I think it's interesting because it's so realistic in the drawing in the beginning but like I said, after ten or 15 minutes there is nothing interesting any more in this and somehow it's maybe even a little bit ugly. But then my problem is not at all with this, it's with the story. I hate this. It's difficult to explain because for Europeans it's very difficult to see stuff from inside, you see it from outside, it's normal. So, when you see this thing – it's done clearly for Europeans – you see this poor guy who was enrolled in the army, he was forced to go there and to do these atrocities and you sympathize with him. While me : He was forced to come to my place and not somewhere else, and then to play on this auto-flagellation chrétienne, presque, and also, il s'accuse lui-même pour qu'on sympathise avec lui et il parle de ces pauvres chiens sur lesquels il a du tirer, alors qu'il a massacré on ne sait pas combien des gens. He does this thing about Sabra and Chatila that, okay, it's Israel who did it but it's always the top chiefs and the Israeli soldier somehow is seen as an equal to the Palestinians or Lebanese who were killing. I mean, he makes it seem like it was not their fault, but they were invaders! And this I cannot accept. I cannot accept that you sympathize with this guy who shot – in the movie, he shoots a twelve year old boy because he has an RPG [rocket propelled grenade]. And somehow he wants you to understand what kind of crazy guys are these fucking retards who send their kids with an RPG to war. But he never questions why he is there on the soil of this kid and fucking killing his father and mother. He is not in his country, he's in this other country. And all these representations I cannot – then I can tell you, yeah, the movie is well written but for me it's pointless, all this is pointless. I am just

questioning why this fucking guy is here, from the beginning. Let him say : 'I don't want to go' and go to jail and then make a film on this jail because he didn't come to kill people. Then, beside all this, I become very picky : There are many errors, visually, like when you see the photos of Bashir Gemayel, who was the Christian leader, it was almost the Hassan Nasrallah of the Christians back then, when you see his pictures in Beyrouth West, where, if you would have said Bashir, they would have cut you into small cubes. There is errors, there was in the Sabra and Chatila camp a Christofle shop – Christofle is this very chicque silver cutlery, toutes sortes des fourchettes très chiques ouvert dans le camp de Sabra et Chatila c'est pas possible – but my biggest problem is a moral issue. It's the thing done to make a European or Western audience feel with them and in the end, the worst thing, the result is that the audience says : 'Yeah, you see how much the Israeli are like us, they are civilized people, they have the same sense of questioning. You see this guy who did the war, he does his mea culpa here,' and man, fuck him and his mea culpa! He came here, he fucking burnt I don't know how many people. To be sorry afterwards is not enough and to make people cry on your story because you killed some fucking dogs and you still hear them by night. Fuck you and these dogs, man! Really, I mean, I cannot take it, even if the guy is very sincere, I cannot accept this. He might be, he is, surely, very sincere, okay, he was enrolled by force and they obliged him to come here – it's not enough to wash your hands in this.

Today for me the civil war is a big subject, I mean, I was born in '75 with it and for 15 years I couldn't go to Beyrouth West, I couldn't see Raouché. I have plenty to say about this shit. I try as much as possible to avoid this because as a Lebanese it's my thing, I have to be exotic, it's like a Rwanda guy has to talk about the massacres in Rwanda and the guy from Iran has to talk about the Revolution et cetera. And for me, this tyranny of the subject, I refuse it, I prefer and I think you can do a great masterpiece with a silly subject and you can do a shitty piece with a good subject. The subject for me is accessory. Whatever the subject, you have to do good work. Then it's easy to have a subject and it's very easy to correspond to what they ask, I mean, the West asks from me to talk about the war and how we were victims of the war when we were kids. We were not victims. When I was young I wanted to kill all Muslims in Beyrouth, in Lebanon, in the world. I mean, this shit that it was people from outside Lebanon who gave money to support the war, yes, but we the civilians - no, we the civilians are fucking full of hate until today, 20 years after the war. So I hate this victimization and if today I talk of the war, believe me, it won't be beautiful. This hate of the other, I lived with it. Okay, today I can say, yeah, I'm married to a Shia but when I speak of the war, I say : 'We used to hate Muslims.' And the people would say : 'No, I didn't have any problems with Muslims.' I say : 'What? What the fuck!?' And nobody talks

about it. They have a great saying, *la guerre des autres*, in Lebanon, it's the war of the others on our land and we are totally poor Lebanese, we love each other. No, we don't love each other. Even between Sunna and Shia or Orthodox Christians and Maronites – they hate each other. And they always say, Lebanon is an example for the world – yeah, it's an example of what you shouldn't do. *And did art help you, be it drawings or music, to deal with this?* Maybe, but I think that art – when I say art I usually think of drawing first because it's really something since I'm very young, I mean, since I can remember. I don't remember a time when I didn't draw, like all kids, but then I continued, for sure. It's so natural for me that I cannot say it helped me, probably it helped me a lot. And today I can remember, all the times when we were blocked in the house or in the shelter and you can not go and play with your friends and you are getting worried, drawing was the best game. But then again, there's the guy who draws in Austria also, he's in a, let's say, small town and there is nothing to do, he draws. I mean, it's the same thing with the trumpet and these sounds of helicopters and bombs and whatever, like, they tell me : 'Yeah, we can hear the sound of war, we can hear helicopters.' *If you want to hear it* – Yeah, I say : 'Franz Hautzinger and Axel Dörner make the same sounds, you never hear bombs, you hear something else, I wonder why.' Maybe the fact of growing up in an extremist neighborhood – because the Christian neighborhood was more extremist than the Muslim actually, where there were Christians, while the Christian neighborhood here, it was really closed, it was a state in the state, it was very extremist. But my parents they are not extremist at all, I mean my father, on the contrary, is the example of the Lebanese who is open to everybody. But in school, it's not parents any more. Then, with your friends – one of the souvenirs which today drives me crazy and I also talk about it when I talk about the war : This guy, I still remember his name, Haitham Cha'ar, he was the only Muslim in our class – there was a very small amount of Muslims in my school – and this guy, when we played war games, he had to play the Palestinian and he would say : 'No, I want to be a Phalangist, like you.' We said : 'No, with your name, I mean come on Haitham, fucking Palestinian.' And he would cry. Just imagine, at seven years old to be able to think like this. Then at eleven, twelve years to be able to break up a Kalashnikov completely and put it back and remove the bullets, all this was very natural for us, or to have a hand grenade that you open and you make explode just the, *le truc qui explose, tu la remets* and you have an empty hand grenade and you can go to school and open it and throw it to make jokes. *I saw the comic.* Yeah, like today when you think of it as an adult, it's crazy. But then it was very safe, we would play war games with a real Kalashnikov but we knew how to remove all the bullets from it, it's really absurd, I mean, these are things –. But then I don't think I'm a war child and I have problems. I have, surely, many problems but not more than anybody who grew up anywhere and I would not exchange my childhood for anything in the world. With all this shit, it was also a super childhood, having bombs,

asking your mom like : 'Mom, what do you think, tomorrow there will be bombs?' Because I have an exam, maybe I won't study, if there is bombing, I won't go. It's really absurd we were kids, it was a game for us. *Does this come back in Cette histoire se passe ... ou ne se passe pas?* Mhm, it comes back weirdly, from outside, kids asking their parents about the war et cetera. Because now I begin to realize that we are a generation, my generation, I mean, we are old guys now, old, I mean, I'm 36, I'm not that old but old in the sense that there is another generation, a complete generation –they are adults, they're like 20 years old– who know nothing about this war, they just hear their parents talking about it. While for us it was a reality and in the 90s, when they told us that the war was finished, it maybe took five or six years to understand that the war is really finished. Like, I would go to Beyrouth West and I would say if they see I'm Christian they will kill me maybe, I was still a boy. This took time. Now there is a generation who doesn't care and it's super. We arrive at a place where they don't have the same repères, les mêmes points de repères, it's good, but unfortunately all our generation and the ones who are older talk about the war to their kids as a paradise : 'Yeah, back in the time it was great, you could do whatever you wanted!' So it's as if this new generation wants *their* war. *It's maybe like my grandfather who spent his youth in the [2nd World] war and it was their youth, so kind of their best time.* Yeah, for me, my youth, like the souvenirs, when today I hear bombs or rifles – two years ago there was an incident rifles and stuff, or even when Israel bombed in 2006 : There is something frightening because okay, you are afraid of the bombs like when you were young, but then there is something else more frightening, it's a nostalgia, you don't admit it to yourself but somehow when you hear these bombs, somewhere deep inside you are happy. It's weird, it's like a cheese you used to eat when you were young or a place where you used to go and you didn't, for 20 years, and they take you there and there is all this melancholic nostalgia or whatever. And there is a nostalgia of the time of war for me for sure, so the bombs frighten me but even this is something I am happy that I can remember and there is a fascination for this time, because it is childhood, it's as simple as that. Maybe also because it's a traumatic childhood, it's really powerful. But there is pleasure in being in war, in fact, and this is the most frightening shit. Somehow I knew this, we talked about this many times with some friends, Marc for instance, and in the préface of *Cette Histoire se passe* he talks about this fascination. And when the Israeli war happened, somehow, I had to prove that we are not just talking, like, just to make a theory – it's real, this thing, and there is one drawing where I say : *Comme c'est dur de s'habituer à être habitué à vivre en guerre* [How hard it is to get used to being used to live in war; translation ps]. So, you get back these reflexes : You know when you hear something : Don't go to the balcony, you know they are bombing from this side, so stay in that side of the house, it's safer. These are reflexes that a normal guy living in a normal house cannot even imagine, like where to go in the house et cetera, open a little bit, when the bombing begins, open

the windows for the glass to not be blown away, you have always to open a little bit for the air to enter when it comes close. *So in 2006 you put your computer to the North side of your house?* The shittiest thing in 2006 was that it was coming from above, it could come from anywhere. But when we were young we knew : Now it's a battle between this and that, so okay, it's coming from this side – the safest place in the house would change depending on who is bombing. When we were kids, it was so natural but then we lost the reflexes, fortunately, but when the war comes back you are glad, it's like a bicycle : You stop for 20 years and then first you are afraid but after three, four times you say : 'Wow, I can drive it and it's there.' You can drive the war, actually, when it comes back. And in all the e-mails from all the friends : Michael Zerang, Franz, everybody was sending us in the beginning of this war and I'd say : 'Don't worry for us, we are used to this shit.' I mean, we hope it will end but unfortunately we are used to this shit, 15 years is a whole youth, youth and teenage, it was the most natural thing. And today I cannot understand how our parents lived this. I mean for us, we were kids and it was sort of a game. *Raed said that for him it was natural just to grow up in the war, there was nothing before.* For sure, I also remember that we understood that there is peace –there was movies and everything– we understood there is peace outside, in other countries but somehow it was an abstract concept. Okay, what is peace? There is no bombs, that's it? And then, how will life go? It was some kind of abstraction, peace was abstract. My brother was born in '68, so when it started he was eight years, for him it was very difficult because all this innocence and all this childhood is fucking crashed and then in his teens it was really difficult for him. I think they are more traumatized than we are. For us it was the most natural thing, I mean, you are born, then after one year they tell you : 'This is water, this is a telephone, this is a bomb.' And you know : 'Okay, it's a bomb, this huge sound, it's something natural.' You are still a kid, you don't understand anything, it's normal in life that there is these sounds of bam! and you have to get used to it, okay it's not frightening, I mean, it frightens you but it's okay. Until you are nine or ten where you begin to be really afraid. I remember also the first time in my life, around nine to eleven, where a bomb came next to the house and I remember this feeling of : I could have died and I can die on each one. Really, a fear of death that is not normal for a kid. A fear of death that will arrive with age when you grow up, to be afraid of dying at this age is not normal. And I remember having this fear and never telling anybody about it because my friends would laugh at me when I'm afraid, because when you are kids you are not afraid. Then today, I imagine all my friends were afraid, I mean, we were all afraid but we were all : 'Bombs, yeah bombs, fuck bombs!' So you are even afraid to l'exterioriser, that fear. And it is somehow probably traumatic but I don't consider myself traumatized at all and I tell you : I won't exchange it for anything in the world. *Yeab – and you cannot.* I cannot, no, I cannot imagine my life without it, there were so many good moments I cannot count, it was a very happy childhood. When I

call it a happy childhood, it's a joke and it's not a joke at the same time. We were very happy when there was bombing for a week and we didn't go to school, we were : Champagne! Also, we would pray like : 'Jesus, please, make some war tomorrow or some bombs, don't kill anybody but please, I have an exam of math,' or something, so – I tell you the crazy thing is how our parents lived during these 15 years. Also we had this thing, we had some friends, when there was a lot lot lot of bombing, who'd go to Paris, do one year there or two years, or to Cyprus – and these were traitors. They would come back to Lebanon and they were always saying : 'Man, I said to my parents: Don't take me and they took me.' We would say : 'Yeah, you fucking traitor! We were here under the war, you are a sissy, you went there!' And they felt really bad. I have two friends like this, when we remember these days they say how bad they felt. I say : 'Man, we were shouting at you but I would have paid money to leave from here, but my parents didn't have the means, the money, whatever.' So somehow you convinced yourself : I stay for the country and I'm a courageous, brave guy. *But then, in 2006, you decided to stay.* Yeah, yeah, this is very different. Actually 2006, there is one thing that is really interesting. It was the first time in the history of Lebanon, since I'm born at least, contemporary history, where almost all Lebanese identified the same enemy. Almost, because some people were with Israel against Hisbollah, maybe 20 percent, but at least 80 percent, Sunna, Shia, Christians, whatever, were identifying the same machine of war. So this was one thing. The other thing was : I have a French passport, so I can travel much easier than back then, because my first wife was a French girl. I was called by the French embassy, twice, and then I said : 'I'm not French, I have the passport but I don't care about you, I'm staying here.' It's maybe some kind of stupidity or whatever but it's not for anybody to decide when I leave the country. But maybe, if the civil war will start again, I will leave. I cannot support this, I cannot. You have to take a side and I am totally anti-everybody in Lebanon, I have no political side. I am with nobody, I am against everybody, actively, at least in my drawing and in my work. A civil war would be impossible to bear for me, but a war like this one, I mean, it's not enough to make me leave and I had something to do, you know, I was happy to do what I'm doing, I mean, it's one of the most important, if not the most important creative period of my whole life. Probably, because in one month I did what I would do in one year and a half maybe, it's so powerful, it's an energy and it's so interesting, as an artist, to experience this and work. I could not leave. I wanted my son to leave with my ex-wife because I was very afraid for him. Many Lebanese stayed.

All my life I said: When I'm grown up I will go and live outside of Lebanon, I hate Lebanon, I hate Beyrouth. I still hate it, and love it, at the same time. And then when I began to travel a lot, I

understood it's the same shit everywhere, I mean, besides the politics and war. I always dreamt of living in France and do comics, or Switzerland or Belgium, somewhere where they speak French at least. And today I think, I hate to say this because I don't define myself as a Lebanese artist or an Arab artist and I'm not nationalist but I think my work here is more important than anywhere else. I mean, it's awful, I tell you, to say this because I'm very cynical usually and sarcastic but somehow when I publish a book here, it's more than my book being published. Today, when you are familiar with comics in Lebanon, I know by fact, I receive feedback from people who are younger than me, that what I did in the late 90s and beginning of 2000, opened the door for this. I mean, it could have been maybe not impossible but more difficult for people to do this. And the same is true for music and Irtijal, when you see there is a scene today and when you think, before 2001 there was no gig of contemporary classical – contemporary classical maybe – but no free jazz, no improv, it was not existing even in the mind of anybody. And when you see how much audience there is and how many people came and how many new musicians approach this music in Lebanon, it feels that each concert you do and each festival you do is more than what it is, actually. I tell you, it's difficult for me to admit this because I don't care about others and I'm a self-centered megalomaniac and I tell you : I don't feel that I belong to a country, I'm not a Lebanese or an Arab artist. You wouldn't think of Picasso as a Spanish artist. You are an artist, my music should be judged or seen against the history of music. If it doesn't stand there, it doesn't stand. You cannot say : 'Okay, but for Lebanon it's good.' I don't believe in this shit. I mean, I just said I'm a megalomaniac, I'm somehow a humble megalomaniac, I don't know if that exists, because in the history of music I know where my music stands : Towards this shit I know where it stands and towards this masterpiece I know where I am. I try to keep a lucidité, you say lucid in English? Stay bien ancré dans la terre et d'être bien lucid par rapport à ce que je fais, so not to think I'm a genius and not to diminish myself. I know clearly where to position myself, I try to see what is possible to make my work evolve all the time and to discover where I can take it to.