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En-Force: Pascal Hachem’s Art

Zéna MESKAOUUI

How are we to distinguish between this force of the law, this “force of law,” as one says in English as well as in French, I believe, and the violence that one always deems unjust? What difference is there between, on the one hand the force that can be just, or in any case deemed legitimate, not only as instrument in the service of law but the practice and even the realization, the essence of droit, and on the other hand the violence that one always deems unjust?1

The Artist

Pascal Hachem (b.1979), an artist and designer, falls within the broad category of ‘second’ post-war generation, and in a segment of artists who are still interested in tackling the subject of war or at least related notions. The ‘first’ post-war generation have addressed the subject of the ‘war’ (1975-1990) through amnesia, memory, archiving, and history on a personal or collective level (Akram Zaatari b.1966, Walid Sadek b.1966, Walid Raad b.1967) and the question of representation and perception during and after the war (Lamia Joreige b.1972 and Paola Yacoub b.1966). From Hachem’s generation, Rayanne Tabet b.1983 and Alfred Tarazi b.1980 for example, use historical facts, events, objects, and sites to rethink the construct of historical narrative, geography, and mapping, among other things.

Hachem’s work dwells on issues of contemporary relevance, identifying notions at stake during the Lebanese war (1975-1990) to rethink their recurrence in everyday life. The notion of violence I

discuss in this essay has been addressed by a number of artists namely Samir Khaddaje (b.1939), Lina Majdalani (b.1966), and Rabih Mroué (b.1967). They use the motif of body (and sometimes ruins) as a site to address this complex issue. Hachem, on the other hand, resorts to objects from everyday life to underline the notion of ‘force’ and disclose its complexity in relation to law and social and political order. As Raza writes, “At its core, his work manifests his responses to the world, to the power relations and social situations, he relentlessly examines and critiques”3. Yet, the human figure is generally absent from his body of work, and the work discussed in this essay.

Social and Political Context

In Lebanon, the war ended in 1991 yet peace did not prevail4. Sporadic eruptions of violence, assassinations, punctual battles and un-rest on borders, have prevailed5. Ordinary life is contaminated by this general ambiance of no-war, no-peace on a daily basis6. Hachem lives and works in Lebanon7. He experiences on a daily basis the effects of a country

(2) In an e-mail to the author dated April 20 2015 Lina Saneh ‘proclaimed’ that she will be using her new name Lina Majdalanie.
(4) Some analysts argue that the state of war is still prevalent. Samer Frangié calls this ambiguous state “a crisis” (azamah) and relates it to the civil war (1975- 1990). He refers to Hobbes (among others) who calls ‘civil war’ a ‘natural state’ to stress the civil war’s equivocal relation with the present state of ‘no-peace no-war’. “azamat al harb al ahliah” “The Crisis of the Civil War (my translation),” Al Hayat, May 25, 2015, http://daharchives.alhayat.com/issue_archive/Hayat%20INT/2012/5/25/الأهلية_الحرب_الأزمة_0.html
“breaking its own record of the longest term without a president”\(^8\), and whose citizens long for order and law. He confirms that his work “is inspired by aspects of everyday life in the city”\(^9\). The description I give below stems from everyday life and exposes how law and order (dys) functions. It explains Hachem’s take on everyday issues whereby I read his work as a response to this (dis)order.

Post-war Lebanon exposes, the questions of law and force in mundane tasks—driving and walking\(^10\)—as much as in failing to guarantee basic services like water, electricity etc. in a resigned (I prefer irresponsible) state whose legitimacy is questioned. Corruption\(^11\), ignorance of laws, and disobedience are ‘universal’\(^12\). In Lebanon, they are less and less concealed and are featured in the quotidian of “ordinary people”\(^13\). In the (quasi) absence of an enforcement of the laws, on a daily basis ordinary people are forced to choose between obeying and transgressing the law. One chooses to abide by the rules or transgress them—provided one knows the rules—or follow personal codes of conduct—that might be ethical but not necessarily legal. In any case the choice one makes, is a kind of continuous and instantaneous drafting of laws through compromise and negotiations. The questions of right, law and force are at the heart of all above choices ordinary

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people are forced to face in daily mundane acts\textsuperscript{14}.

**Right, Law and Force**

If the questions of right and law during the war (1975-1990) were overshadowed by the intensity of battles, bullets and bombs and “the fear... for [one’s] life”\textsuperscript{15}, “the practice and even the realization, the essence of *droit*, of right and law\textsuperscript{16}, resurface in the post-war state of no peace, no war. The question of right and law is at the core of this selection of works that bring forth the notions of violence and force, along with law.

Pascal Hachem’s installations reproduce controlled, meticulous, and rigorous mechanisms that posit an order through regular and repetitive acts of violence. Yet, despite the formal aesthetics and the precision of the mechanism, the actions produced are useless: they don’t achieve anything. Parodying a ‘faultless’ and useless mechanism, Hachem problematizes the very nature of law and order. He reveals the inevitable workings of force in law, “to enforce the law,”\textsuperscript{17} and the hazy demarcation between “just force, or in any case deemed legitimate” and “the violence that one always deems unjust”\textsuperscript{18}.

In my interpretation of the works, I use the notions of force, violence, and law and order formulated in Jacques Derrida’s “Force of Law” and I argue that Hachem’s work offers a critical evaluation of violence in which “one must first recognize meaning in a violence that is not an accident arriving from outside law”\textsuperscript{19}. Asef Bayat’s concept of

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\textsuperscript{(14)} Legal Agenda, “*shahadat el mouhamiyya Youmna Makhlouf; ihda adha` lijnat al muhameen lil difa` `an al mutathahereen,*” video, 15:19, January 19, 2016, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hfRnGWXPqDg. Youmna Makhlouf’s testifies to the use of negotiation in the judiciary system; negotiations take over the commitment to laws. Both, the police and the judicial system justify means by the end creating a paradox: “there is no solution for the antinomy when a contradiction emerges between just ends and justified means. Positive law would remain blind to the unconditionality of ends, natural right to the conditionality of means”. Derrida, *Force of Law*, 985.


\textsuperscript{(16)} Derrida, *Force of Law*, 989.

\textsuperscript{(17)} Ibid., 935.

\textsuperscript{(18)} Ibid., 927.

\textsuperscript{(19)} Ibid., 989.
‘nonmovement’ in *Life as Politics,* helped bring together the concepts of force, law, and ordinary life. Putting together force, law, and everyday life underline the questions that the body of work addresses: is there possibility of just force? Is not force always unjust? Could force be non-violent? The questions take a particular significance in a region “witness[ing] a cry for change”\(^{(20)}\), but not “a change by force”\(^{(21)}\).

My two main sources for studying the artworks were the monograph of Hachem, entitled *pascal hachem,* and the information provided by the artist—a long meeting in his workshop in the summer of 2015\(^{(22)}\). They helped me get familiar with his work, which is rarely exposed in Lebanon. The fact is that most of his installations were displayed outside the country he lives and works in, i.e. Lebanon. Moreover, Hachem is represented by a British art gallery; he navigates between the ‘local and the global’. I will briefly highlight in the monograph a few points that reveal Hachem’s awareness and response to the equivocal ‘place’ he stands in, in the contemporary art scene.

\(^{(20)}\) Bayat, *Life as Politics,* 1.
\(^{(21)}\) Ibid., 8.
\(^{(22)}\) Pascal Hachem in discussion with the author, summer 2015.
The monograph presents a collection of Hachem’s works from 2002-2010\textsuperscript{25}. It was “conceived and designed” by Rana Haddad (the artistic partner of Hachem in 200grs\textsuperscript{26}) with minimalist layout and design. The cover page bears, in the middle, the name \textit{pascal hachem} with underneath the barcode and numbers of the book (fig.1-1). A number of significant features emerge. The first is the visible stitching of packs of folded A4 papers. The second is the lack of a ‘strong’ cover. The third

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(23) Cover page, courtesy of the artist, and stamped cover page of Pascal Hachem’s Monograph, personal digital photograph.

(24) Stamped text, my translation. In Arabic ‘we’ and ‘us’ are one word \textit{nahnou}. It is written in the text \textit{nehna}, as pronounced in Lebanese dialect

(25) Haddad, \textit{pascal hachem}.

(26) “200 grs,” 200 grs, \url{http://www.200grs.com/about/}.
is the Arabic stamping, on an English book during the launch. And last, the Arabic rule of no-capital letters in the title; it remains so in the text. Hachem explains his intentions concerning the cover and the stamping as follows: “The whole idea was to have a naked book, very fragile, without cover, without protection. The Arabic writing was stamped, a gesture to sign the books”27. The monograph underlines first its significance as a *receuil*, a recollection, through the visible stitching. The mixing of two languages and the ‘fragile’ cover—a book ‘without cover’ feels already open—suggest both ‘gathering’ and ‘welcoming’ (*acceuillant*) (at least in the designated cultures: Arabic and English)28. Lastly, on the cover, the ISBN number and barcode on the (un)cover are obvious references to the market; by the placing the ISBN number and the barcode right under the title-name put forth the question ‘who/what is for sale?’

Hachem intentionally ‘ruins’ the rigor of the book, undoing a number of expectations in the ‘laws’ of aesthetics and language. By weakening the rules he pins down subjects that relate to relevant contemporary issues, he, as artist, lives and witnesses. I will single out the politics of “duality” of the art market, the local versus the global that Hachem is aware of, and concerned with29. This duality leads to at least two consequences. The first is, according to Nada Shabout, the weakness of the (MENA) region in “evaluating its art”: “[t]he problem thus far in the region’s evaluation of its art has been that it was never seen as equal to and as ‘good’ as western art”30. The second is, according to Hamid Keshmirshekan, “the erasure of contextual frames”31. Both constitute a risk and a challenge “for local artists and institutions to set standards and criteria for evaluating their

(27) Pascal Hachem, e-mail message to the author, January 26, 2016.
own production”32, “be aware of the market force” and “act against the erasure of contextual frames”33.

One may push the evaluation of the monograph’s features further and think of Hachem’s ‘ruining’ strategy as a response to the above challenges. The key of those challenges would be in the ‘welcoming’ and ‘gathering’ (highlighted above). The Arabic stamp of ‘i, we/us and you’, what Hachem calls “the forces”34, exposes the above issue and answers it by breaking up identities and dichotomies (global/local, East/West etc.)35. It blurs boundaries between cultures whereby the ‘i’ and ‘our’ or ‘us’ and ‘you’ navigate between and within cultures. Hachem’s ‘signature’ alone “act[s] against the erasure of contextual frames;” the reference to the market force—the ISBN barcode and number—and to a multicultural frame “demonstrat[es] an awareness of the fact that contemporary art is capable of transcending the politics of location”36.

I would like to think that Hachem’s monograph also offers an answer to Shabout’s request to set standards for evaluating local production. The intentional fragility or weakness can be set as standard since fragility allows ‘welcoming’; ‘my’, ‘our’ fragility as well as ‘my’ ‘our’ rigor are “for you” where you, we, and I become interchangeable. Fragility, ‘gathers and ‘welcomes’, and in this context is critical awareness of the (potential) inflexibility of rigor. Fragility as critical force can be a standard, a means to take up the challenge (by “us for you”).

The ruining strategy is an underlying feature in most of the work analysed below. Hachem’s installations stage rigorous mechanisms. They actually parody the rigor of the mechanical process since the process is factually useless. Yet it is this uselessness—a parody of rigor

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(32) Note that Shabout evades the use of a definite ‘we/us’ that Hachem undermines too in the stamped ‘signature’.
(34) Hachem, E-mail, 2016.
(36) Keshmirshekan, 18.
for rigor’s sake\(^{37}\) or “stupid uselessness”\(^{38}\)—that denudes the workings of force and violence in law and order.

**Systematic and Ordered ‘structions’**

Hachem’s works share a number of significant features. The first is the use of domestic (everyday) objects. The second is a meticulous and minimalist, and I could add, ‘unemotional’ aesthetics. The last feature that echoes the second is particular to his installations’ motorized mechanism: they are neat, and rigorous. The motorized mechanics are repetitive acts that enforce an order, in which violence is concealed yet represented in threatening domestic objects. They posit a ‘neutral’ position, a ‘struction’, since the constructive and the destructive aspect of force is not actualized by the objects. The generated repetitive acts highlight a force inherent to that position and consolidate it whereas its uselessness empties it from any meaning. The mechanical actions parody rigor for rigor’s sake, a “stupid uselessness” that “relates to the mechanism of execution and the subsequent rigor mortis of the corpse”\(^{39}\). It is this very “stupid uselessness” that reveals the workings of force in a position, a law and an order. The apparent absurdity and unproductive use of force (deadly?) in some of the installations examined below propose a critical reappraisal of order and law–its justness and rightness.

**The Question of ‘Race’**

In 2008, the Italian art critic and curator, Constantino D’Orazio (Fondazione Merz) organized the exhibition “Hopes and Doubts” in Beirut, at the Dome, familiarly called The Egg\(^{40}\), “a corn kernel-


\(^{38}\) Geoffrey Bennington, “Rigor; or, Stupid Uselessness.”

\(^{39}\) Ibid., 20.

shaped concrete husk that is the last residue of modernist architecture in reconstructed downtown Beirut\textsuperscript{41}. Six Italian and six Lebanese artists participated in the project that “aims to build an ideal bridge between the Lebanese and Italian contemporary art scene... Despite the difference of their recent history”\textsuperscript{42}. Hachem’s artwork is entitled \textit{i’ll race you} (fig.2). The 	extit{receuil’s} sober description is that it consists of “a row of six hammers affixed to a single motor that draws them back, one by one, to strike the concrete wall of the derelict space”\textsuperscript{43}.

![Image](image-url)

\textit{Fig.2 i’ll race you}\textsuperscript{44}

Visually, the hammers are grouped in pairs; each pair separated by a metallic arm attached to the wall. At the bottom end of the wooden sticks of each hammer, and through the supportive arms, a metallic extension

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item Haddad, 	extit{pascal pachem}, 079.
\item Haddad, 	extit{pascal pachem}, 079.
\item Pascal Hachem, \textit{i’ll race you}, 2008, installation, Beirut and Turin: steel structures, 6 wooden sticks, engine and an electronic box, dim., 330 x 110 x 60 cm, courtesy of the artist.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
is affixed. The six-pierced extensions are joined perpendicularly, with the fixed supportive arms, through an inserted long metallic poll. The metallic poll, activated by a motor suspended on the left end, actuates the movement of the hammers.

The mechanical process of striking is methodically controlled. The silent, slow, smooth, and almost imperceptible movements of the hammers intensify the controlled aspect. The work is barely noticeable, as it is suspended very high on the wall. One slowly becomes aware of the repetitive grave sound produced by the impact of the hammer on the wall; a long moment passes—actually 30 seconds—before the next strike, frustrating a curious audience that awaits it. The very slow movement of the hammers confuses the viewer as to which hammer will strike next; one needs to observe patiently to figure out which hammer, slowly bending towards the wall, will strike. This confusion is due to the fact that “actually all hammers are independent from each other, controlled by 6 ovals connected through one long rotating axis”45.

The sound of the impact is low-pitched and without echo. The strike does not have a violent resonance: it is planned, mechanical, unlike the projectiles of the war. A projectile, that one would hear sometimes departing, and would hear its swishing intensifying as it gets close, then diminishing as it passes, before hearing the explosive sound of the impact at the ‘arrival’ point. And unlike the projectiles of war, that were obviously meant to kill, the strikes of the installation ‘do not strike’ and have no apparent aim. The temperance of the sound and the smoothness of the whole installation normalize the act of striking a wall with hammers: it becomes unnoticed. The continuous clubbing and the lack of mark empty the repetitive act, the order, from meaning. It becomes a gratuitous violent act, a means with no end to justify it. Its danger lies in both its running unnoticed and its being accepted, since it does not obviously ‘hurt’ or leave a trace46.

(45) Hachem, E-mail, 2016.
(46) Often, only “severe violation” of human right is reported. The ICTJ report, for example, states that it offers “a preliminary examination and understanding of violations of human rights and humanitarian law that have had an impact on Lebanese society” to “redress and prevent the most severe violations of human rights”. International Centre for Transitional Justice, “Lebanon’s Legacy of Political Violence: A Mapping of Serious Violations of International Human Rights and Humanitarian Laws in Lebanon, 1975-2008.”
The audience returns back to explore the artworks displayed in the temporary open space—a space that is itself a work of art that bears the effects of time, of the civil war (1975-1990), and of failed attempts to destroy it after the war\textsuperscript{47}. The \textit{receuil} confirms that \textit{i’ll race you} is indeed “inspired by the erasure of Beirut’s architectural patrimony by reckless post-Civil War development”\textsuperscript{48}. Thus the striking bears the symbolic meaning of the destruction processes. Yet, unlike the dome that hosts it, the striking alludes to construction as much as to destruction.

\textbf{Repetition in Context}

The same work was displayed at Fondazione Mario Merz, in Turin, Italy. Unlike in Beirut the mechanism was this time placed on eye level, on a white painted wall, with the electrical motor placed on the floor. The differences in the positioning of the work and locations produce different meanings on one level, yet reveal the similar workings of force in law.

In Beirut the mechanism was out of reach of the audience; one was \textit{forced} to climb to be able to \textit{face} the hammers. The installation felt like an order, an imperative out of control, as if imposed \textit{from above (as if, because it is one’s decision to get closer to it: inviting awareness?)}. The fact that it ran in a diagonal rather than parallel to the floor added an aesthetic incoherence. In Turin, the staging of the installation in a ‘white cube’\textsuperscript{49} heightens the rigor of its formal aesthetics. The reachable display relays the impression that the audience can scrutinize and understand its workings: both the workings of a ‘white cube’ exhibition space and those of mechanics are immediately accessible. The significance of the strikes, in Turin, loses its ‘out of reach’ and ‘imposed from above’ aspects it had in Beirut, but keeps the meaning of a coherent position within the frame of the workings of a mechanical system and those of an art space.


\textsuperscript{(48)} Haddad, pascal hachem, 079.

In Beirut the significance of the strikes is further affected by the location, the symbolism of Beirut’s the Dome bears witness to consecutive violent clashes during the war. Its symbolism is enhanced by its location in downtown Beirut—what used to be the Green Line, the line separating East and West Beirut during the war—and its being abandoned during the 15 years of war. It also bears the scars of failed attempts at destruction after the end of the civil war. It has remained in a ruined state since then, in spite of its use for cultural events. The successive traces of strikes on the Dome left by the war and after become significant in reading the hammers’ strikes of *i’ll race you* as a continuous systematic and gratuitous competition of destruction. The strictly formal and unemotional visual forms of the meticulous system underline gratuitousness and empty violence of any useful aim, including the means to reach a higher order.

The context in which the aimless striking is performed underpins the reading of an act of violence as legitimate (Turin), and legitimate yet destructive (Beirut). The repetition of the installation (itself a repetitive act) lays the foundations of force as inherent to law and order, while the change of context reveals that legitimate force can be unjust. *i’ll race you* divulges an order in which violence is channelled, established and accepted. The dysfunctional aspect of the work—the unproductive striking (the impact leaves no visible trace)—questions the familiar—also embodied in domestic objects (the hammer)—and exposes violence.

The title *i’ll race you* echoes the above interplay of force. ‘race’ in *i’ll race you* refers both to a battle, a conflict or a competition and the (supposedly) distinct traits of a community or a group. Both meanings are challenged and undermined in the artwork since the ‘i’ (in *i’ll race you*) is interchangeable with you. The work disrupts and calls for a critical awareness of the familiar to question it. This approach is shared in the works discussed below.

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(51) It is also worth to note that the non-erected *i* challenges the notion of a sovereign *I* as for example in the artwork, the *I Box* of Robert Morris 1959.
Disrupting and Revealing

The three works of the series entitled no condition is permanent were performed in Amman. Hachem uses domestic objects, a bench, loafs of bread, and plates and provokes the audience by disrupting a condition, forcing the audience to become aware of its dysfunctional aspect. The works incite the public to face and maybe challenge or resist that order. Violence is not apparent, nor embodied in the objects employed as in the previous work.

4 meters bench is the first of a series of three works, 01/03 works and was performed in Amman, at Midan Paris. (fig.3). It “is made up of four-meters-long wooden timbers” installed on the original structures of much smaller benches that were never completed ... “Whenever anyone sat on the right side of the thing, then it vibrated, giving the impression of instability”.52

Fig.3 4 meter bench [no condition is permanent 01/03 WORKS]53

The description of the work in the monograph explains: “the intent was to provoke the public to think what happens when a structure

(52) Haddad, pascal pachem, 063.
(53) Pascal Hachem, 4 meter bench [no condition is permanent 01/03 WORKS], 2007, installation, Amman, courtesy of the artist.
is made to accommodate far more people in defiance to its original design”64. “[T]he work was inspired by the artist’s frustration with a public space that has benches but none of them with seats”65. The instability of the installed bench echoes the existing dysfunctional seats. It raises awareness, as to what is dysfunctional in public spaces, and subtly incites to resist, refuse, or challenge the state of things; after all, as the title’s series suggests, no condition is permanent.

Fig.4 aysh [no condition is permanent 02/03 WORKS]66

aysh al qanoun, the second work (fig.4) reads concurrently as ‘live by the law’ and ‘bread [is] on/above law’67. The sentence enacts two contradictory meanings because aysh, depending on its pronunciation –‘aysh and ‘eesh–means respectively ‘bread’ in Egyptian dialect, and

(54) Haddad, pascal pachem, 063.
(55) Haddad, pascal pachem, 063.
(56) Hachem, aysh [no condition is permanent 02/03 WORKS], 2007, installation-intervention, Amman: bread, ink and stamp, dim., approx. dia., 20cm, courtesy of the artist.
(57) The translations used in the monograph are “to live on law” and “bread of law”. Haddad, pascal hachem, 065.
‘live’ in Arabic. The substitution, of the terms bread and live, juxtaposed with law, enact two contradictory injunctions: ‘follow the law’ and ‘break the law’. Bread, a basic need, becomes both the literal and symbolic condition to read the injunctions as ‘follow or break the law’. Poverty is indeed a main cause and a reason for civil unrest. Poverty rates in the Arab countries are high, especially in Egypt where it reaches 27 percent\(^58\); the reference to Egypt as illustrative of poverty is obvious since aysh’s reading as bread is ‘Egyptian’.

The last of the series of *no condition is permanent* is *banquet of laws* [work 3/3]. The intervention is a public banquet, set at in a public place where “Hachem proceeded to ‘serve’… bystanders who happened to be at Saha Hashimiya on that day… Rather than putting food to their plates, however, he used the white plates as medium, upon which to write messages in felt-tipped pen”\(^60\). Hachem “serve[d]” messages

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(59) Pascal Hachem, *banquet of laws* [no condition is permanent 03/03 WORKS], 2007, installation, Amman: 50 minutes, courtesy of the artist.

(60) Haddad, *pascal hachem*, 067.
in the form of “legal injunctions” or commands. The provocation is
evident as it forces the audience to face the existing order: “people are
trapped within Hachemite authoritarianism”\textsuperscript{61}. The call to understand
the workings and (dys) functions of law and order is also at stake.

In the series above, household objects, unlike the previous works,
do not point \textit{directly} at the force of law. What the three works do is
disrupt an order that “has been imposed on me as a sort of obligation
or condition by a sort of symbolic force or law in a situation I do not
control”\textsuperscript{62}. The disruptions “remind us that law is always an authorized
force, a force that justifies itself or is justified in applying itself,
even if this justification may be judged from elsewhere to be unjust
or unjustifiable”\textsuperscript{63}. The disruption leads to raising awareness and
questioning that force’s justness. The call for resistance, if any, is subtle.

It is certain that the works address foremost an Arab audience,
since they were set in and “Inspired” by various Arab countries. They
suggest states in which both gratuitous use of force–staged by the
injunctions–and lack of basic needs for living–\textit{aysh}: live and bread–
are addressed. The works, through the use of domestic objects and
mundane activities, address the ordinary and designate in it a concealed
violence. I would call it ‘ordinary violence’ since it is not considered
a “major violation” of human rights and humanitarian law\textsuperscript{64}. Hachem
bears witness to Lebanon’s ‘ordinary violence’ in the dysfunctional
supply of water and electricity.

\textbf{Street and State: Silence and Force}

The two following works stage two issues at stake in the region: the
silence of the ‘street’ (referring to authoritarian regimes in the region or
its incapacity to change), and the violence of founding a State. \textit{continuum
connection} (2009) was set in Egypt (fig.6) and \textit{keep sharpening your
knife and it will blunt} (2010) was installed in the United Emirates.

\textsuperscript{(61)} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{(62)} Derrida, \textit{Force of Law}, 924.
\textsuperscript{(63)} Derrida, \textit{Force of Law}, 925.
\textsuperscript{(64)} \textit{Lebanon’s Legacy of Political Violence: A Mapping of Serious Violations of Internationa
Human Rights and Humanitarian Laws 1975-2008}.
Juxtaposing them (despite the fact that they were set in two different Arab countries) brings to light the similar working of force in both a silent or silenced ‘street’ and the founding and enforcing of a State and a state. The term ‘the street’, al share’ in Arabic, refers to the ‘people’ al sha’b as different from (or in opposition to) the ruling class and politicians.

**Streets’ Silence**

continuum connection (2009), consists of a pair of bullhorns that “promises to be doubly amplified and projected into two different [opposing] directions [yet] the new device has no mechanism in which to speak”\(^{(65)}\). The promise is ‘doubly’ deceiving and speaks a silent or silenced ‘street’. The act of “graft[ing] together” the bullhorns “at their respective mouthpieces”, envisions within itself both acts of slicing and splicing at once\(^{(66)}\). Hachem forced two objects into becoming one, removing by the same token their use as amplifiers of sound while (paradoxically) designating silence.

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(65) Haddad, pascal hachem, 093.
(66) Ibid.,
(67) Pascal Hachem, continuum connection, 2009, installation, Cairo: air of bullhorns, steel body, dim., 28 x 68 x 30 cm., courtesy of the artist.
In this work, there is no movement and no mechanical processes. The work stands still, as a ghost, a reminder or remainder. The mechanical process took place before, in slicing the two bullhorns. Slicing is a violent act inscribed within the work, as “silence is inscribed within language”\(^{(68)}\). The references to silence and to force in silencing are evident. Hachem’s designation of an imposed silence, an imposed force, takes a particular significance in the Egyptian uprising of 2011, followed by uprisings in other countries which “challeng[ed] some of the region’s entrenched authoritarian regimes”\(^{(69)}\). The reference to silence, the unheard loud sound of the ‘street’, takes its full significance in *continuum connection*.

The reading of the work could also be that of an apparent immutable position. It would suggest that silence is a position that cannot be changed, or that change cannot occur. This reading is challenged in both Asef Bayat’s notion of “nonmovement” and in Jacques Derrida’s notion of imperceptible “transformation”, which I discuss at the end of this essay.

**The States’ Violence**

The last work analysed hereafter, *keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt* (fig.7-1, 2) was installed in 2010 in Jumeirah, Dubai. This time, the state and the founding force of a state are at stake. The installation is “Inspired by the incongruous sky-line of the Emirati city-state that hosts the art fair”\(^{(70)}\). The erected ‘I’ of ‘Inspired’ (in the monograph) is intentional and stands out in the texts that bear no capital letters. It may represent the authority of ‘I’ or that of a State.

The installation consists of “a table… atop which sand has been poured. Beneath the table, in full view of passers-by, are six ranks of kitchen knives... rigged, blades up, to a mechanism that elevates them

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\(^{(70)}\) Haddad, *pascal hachem*, 095.
gradually, at different rates until they project above the table-top" (71). The table-top at “its least threatening... appearance” looks indeed inspired by the desert: nature, and the blades underneath are reminiscent of man-made objects. The blades move up smoothly and slowly, forcing softly the sand to move. The rising blades on different levels remind the viewer of a city arising from the desert. The reference to Dubai, and the Arab Emirates (a relatively young state) is literal as the shape of the blades looks like the Jumeirah building: founding force takes shape (72).

The blades, lying underneath the ‘ground’: the table-top, slowly emerge to acquire the meaning of building-blades. As they all reach their maximum height, they begin to slowly disappear from above the table-top. The sharp-blades’ slow movement of elevation and fall designate first the founding force: “the imposition of a state law”, second, its enforcement, that is conservation, through the repetitive act of founding. The third notion involved is the imperceptible transformation. Both founding and conserving are violent, according to Derrida, and “the structure of fundamental violence calls for the repetition of itself” (73), a repetition literally staged by the mechanism where slowness heightens the integration of a ‘mute’ violence inherent in the blades that ‘cut’ through the table-top and the sand. The below quote fortifies the reading of the artwork as the act of founding in which repetition refounds and conserves since “conservation is in turn refounds” (74). The repetition of the act posits an order since “position is already iterability, a call for self-conserving repetition” (75).

(71) Ibid.
(72) The federation was founded in 1971 December - After independence from Britain, Abu Dhabi, Ajman, Dubai, Fujayrah, Sharjah, and Umm al-Qaywayn come together as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) (BBC Middle East).
(73) Derrida, Force of Law, 997.
(74) “Conservation in its turn refounds, so that it can conserve what it claims to found.” Derrida, Force of Law, 997.
(75) Ibid.
Fig. 7 (1) *keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt*. P. Hachem, *keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt*, 2010, installation, Dubai: knifes, sand, table, electric motor, dim., 70 x 30 cm, courtesy of the artist.

Fig. 7 (2) *keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt*. P. Hachem, *keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt*, 2010, installation, Dubai: knifes, sand, table, electric motor, dim., 70 x 30 cm, courtesy of the artist.

(76) P. Hachem, *keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt*, 2010, installation, Dubai: knifes, sand, table, electric motor, dim., 70 x 30 cm, courtesy of the artist.

(77) P. Hachem, *keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt*, 2010, installation, Dubai: knifes, sand, table, electric motor, dim., 70 x 30 cm, courtesy of the artist.
“It belongs to the structure of fundamental violence that it calls for the repetition of itself and founds what ought to be conserved, conservable promised to heritage and tradition, to be shared”\textsuperscript{78}.

The third notion involved in this structure and in the artwork is transformation. Position, according to Derrida, or law “is essentially deconstructable”\textsuperscript{79} and “calls for the repetition of itself”\textsuperscript{80}. It is this very repetition of the “origin” that ‘provokes’ its own transformation. “Iterability requires the origin to repeat itself originarily, to alter itself so as to have the value of origin, that is, to conserve itself”\textsuperscript{81}. \textit{Keep sharpening your knife and it will blunt} and \textit{I’ll race you} highlight the fact that an \textit{imperceptible} transformation is at work in the repetitive act; a transformation, an \textit{alteration}, potentially leading to a new position or law. Change occurs because “there is no more a pure foundation or pure position of law, and so a pure founding violence, than there is a purely conservative violence”\textsuperscript{82}. Change is thus produced by an imperceptible transformation, as well as by social and political movements.

\textbf{Ordinary Politics: A Promise}

The above installations and interventions of Hachem’s, pin down as starting point relevant societal and political issues. They disclose the workings of force in a given order, to posit problems, reveal their workings, and provoke responses. Scrutinizing his work using the theoretical framework provided by Derrida in “Force of Law” and that of Asef Bayat in \textit{A Life as Politics}, helped bring together apparent disparate issues: a dysfunctional public bench and the founding and conservation of a state. The similar workings of force in ‘ordinary life’ and in politics staged in the works, become apparent. Violence, as just or unjust force, is inherent to order: a State, a silent street, lack of basic living needs, unfinished public benches, interruption of electric power,

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\textsuperscript{(78)} Derrida, \textit{Force of Law}, 997.\textsuperscript{79} \end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{(79)} “The structure I am describing here is a structure in which law (\textit{droit}) is essentially deconstructable, whether because it is founded constructed or interpretable and transformable textual stata... or because its ultimate foundation is by definition unfounded.” Ibid., 943.\textsuperscript{80} \end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{(80)} Ibid.,.\textsuperscript{81} \end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{(81)} Ibid., 1009.\textsuperscript{82} \end{flushright}

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\textsuperscript{(82)} Ibid., 996.\textsuperscript{83} \end{flushright}
and distribution and lack of water etc.

Hachem’s works are political. They are political acts in the way Asef Bayat explains how “ordinary people, the subaltern… strive to affect the contours of change of their societies”. His endeavour reflects on the region’s “cry for change” and echoes the concerns of ordinary people in issues grounded in everyday life, emphasising the weight of the ordinary through the use of domestic objects. With his work, he, like ordinary people—his non-capital ‘i’ asserts it—“generate[s] new spaces within which [he] can voice [his] dissent.” His “dissent” is a subtle call to the ‘street’ to resist and challenge dysfunctional orders: calling for change but not a “change by force.”

The apparent contradiction in ‘change but not by force’, is justified by Bayat by the role of ordinary people who “affect the contours of change in their societies”. Bayat’s endeavour in *Life as Politics* challenges the claim that “the Middle East remains ‘unchangeable’”.

He proves that an imperceptible transformation is already at work by “nonmovement—the collective endeavors of millions of noncollective actors, carried out in main squares, back streets, court houses, or communities.” This transformation is comparable to the ‘alteration’ (of the ‘original’) provoked by iterability; they are both imperceptible.

Could this imperceptible transformation be a ‘nonforce’—in a similar account of Bayat’s notion of ‘nonmovement’? Force would then be neutral, “neither legal nor illegal”, within the moment of “encroaching the law and enforcing ‘new’ laws”, because “in this initial moment, it is neither legal nor illegal—or, others would quickly say, neither just nor unjust?” The hasty saying “neither just nor unjust” indicates that even ‘nonforce’, a neutral force, would leave out the question of it being just or unjust: a “just force, or in any case deemed legitimate” or “the violence that one always deems unjust”.

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(84) Bayat, *Life as Politics*, 3.
(85) Ibid., Preface, IX.
(87) Ibid., 924.
(88) Ibid., 927.
(89) Ibid.
Nonetheless “nonmovement”, in Bayat’s account, “could lead under certain circumstances to a collective uprising”\(^{(90)}\). He adds:

Few Arabs and Muslims in the region consider “change by force” as a viable and dignified strategy, not least because it is essentially immoral, inflicts widespread violence and destruction, and impinges on people’s dignity\(^{(91)}\).

By excluding ‘change by force’, one is left with the option of “encroaching the law” and “enforcing ‘new’ laws”, the option of ‘a life as politics’. This position in which an imperceptible transformation forcibly takes place, opens up the possibility of change that does not discriminate between ‘just’ and ‘unjust’; change would lead to a better or worse ‘new’ position. Yet, this stand is a promise, because “every position (Setzung) permits and promises (permet et promet)”\(^{(92)}\).

Hachem’s installation and public interventions endorse and expose ‘life as politics’: a mise-à-nu, a bare or exposed position. Exposing ‘life as politics’ stresses the impact (the responsibility?) of the choice one makes in ordinary life. The choice one is forced to make in ordinary life—highlighted at the beginning of the essay—is indeed a kind of continuous and instantaneous drafting of laws through compromise and negotiations; it drafts for better or worse a new position. Hachem’s position is that of an art that is “tangible”: “an art that has a purpose to say things and change things”\(^{(93)}\).

\(^{(90)}\) Derrida justifies this by the “differential” characteristic of force and the similarity between founding and conserving violence: there is “[n]o rigorous difference between them”, and “no rigorous opposition between positioning and conservation, only what I will call (...) a différentielle contamination between the two, with all the paradoxes that this may lead to.” Derrida, *Force of Law*, 929, 997.


\(^{(92)}\) “Every position (Setzung) permits and promises (permet et promet), it positions en mettant et en promettant. And even if a promise is not kept in fact, iterability inscribes the promise as guard in the most irruptive instant of foundation.” Derrida, *Force of Law*, 997.