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## The Barricade

Başak Ertür

**[myth]** On the matter of the barricade, the myth precedes the matter. The barricade speaks of a glorious if tragic history of insurgency, self-sacrifice, heroism, martyrdom, and reassuringly clear-cut antagonism – it is hard to be confused about which side of the barricade you're on. Powerful as it is, the symbolism is also misleading. It may truthfully capture the enormity of collective will and sacrifice that the barricade has historically accommodated and materialised, but the barricade is no monument.

**[memory]** The barricade is no monument but it remembers. The practice of building barricades in rebellion is at least half a millennium old. When barricades are built collectively and spontaneously in the here and now, they occasion a kind of knowing-just-what-to-do, as if one always built barricades with anonymous strangers on city streets. The mysterious transmission of this knowledge across centuries and around the globe is an enigma that barricade historians such as Mark Traugott and Dennis Bos have honed in on. They say it must be the myth that carries the structure. I think it must be the structure that carries the memory. The barricade remembers that a structure emerges when bodies are moved to act together by indignation and hope, by fury and desire.

**[matter]** Back in the 16<sup>th</sup> and 17<sup>th</sup> centuries in Paris, when these material structures named historic days after them, the material that was easily available was *barriques*, or barrels, easily rolled to desired positions while empty, then filled with paving stones or earth. Later barricades incorporated carriages and omnibuses, also easily positioned before being filled up and toppled over to become a temporarily immovable barrier. Today's barricades still feature sacks and paving stones, and vehicles such as cars and buses, but also containers, billboards, tyres, repurposed crowd control fences and whatever else is to hand. Recently in Hong Kong, bamboo poles were lashed together to create intricate lattices webbing over roads.

**[time]** The barricade is best built spontaneously and in haste. When built in advance over an extended period to perfection, as during the Paris Commune, they can prove completely

useless, as reported by the anonymous Englishman whose texts accompanied Bertall's album of the Communards in the English edition. Instead, "it was at the improvised Street Barricade, hastily run up under that curious Parisian instinct, where the Battle was really waged." Hastily is the keyword here. In a 1832 street-fighting manual, Francis Maceroni begins describing how to build an effective barricade, only to become impatient with his own instruction: if you do it intelligently, he writes, "the barricade [will] be effected in less time than it has taken me to write the last two pages". Get on with it! The barricade is out of time.

**[place]** The sovereign act of drawing a line in the soil is at the origin of law, and the plough (*urb*) that draws the line on the soil also names the city. This we learn from legal and media scholar Cornelia Vismann's re-reading of Carl Schmitt on *nomos*. The collective act of throwing up a barricade is also the drawing of a line on the ground: but this is a temporary battle-line that disrupts the city's established demarcations of territory, property and propriety. The barricade stakes an improper claim as it holds ground and makes space. The barricade is out of place.

**[transience]** Out of place, out of time, the barricade is a temporary materialisation of collective agency that combines spontaneity and structure, while resisting a logic of utility versus futility: It shields but only provisionally, it fails but only to return again. The untimely yet persistent recurrence of the barricade hints that the fight is always also elsewhere.

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