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Citation

Ertür, Başak. 2016. Barricades: resources and residues of resistance. In: Judith Butler; Zeynep Gambetti and Leticia Sabsay, eds. *Vulnerability in Resistance*. Durham, North Carolina: Duke University Press, pp. 97-121. ISBN 9780822362906 [Book Section]

Persistent URL

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Barricades: Resources and Residues of Resistance

Başak Ertür

*We fight on the bridge cast between
vulnerable being and its ricochet to
the sources of formal power.*

René Char, *Leaves of Hypnos*

The material recurrence of the barricade throughout the past several centuries and across the globe is complemented by its symbolic and figurative force in vocabularies of resistance where it has come to signify insurgency, self-sacrifice, heroism, martyrdom, and a politics of antagonism. The more recent return of barricades, from the Arab Spring to the European *indignados* and various occupy movements, allows us to appreciate anew the spirit of the barricades in more varied terms attuned to the combination of vulnerability and resourcefulness that has vividly marked these uprisings. Taking my cues from the emergence of barricades and a number of other dynamics during Istanbul's June 2013 Gezi uprising, I attempt in this essay to explore the role of vulnerability in resistance terms of its materializations and afterlives. As a contribution to this volume's concern with vocabularies of resistance that do not deny vulnerability as a resource, I draw on the language of monumentalization and counter-monumentalization as a loose analytical framework that brings spatial practice, representational strategy, vulnerability and its memory into conversation. As artifacts that embody a good measure of anti-instrumentality and untimeliness, in addition to what we may call an *ecstasis* of collective embodied action, barricades, I propose, can

be considered as counter-monuments of resistance. If I collapse metaphor and matter, anecdote and evidence in the course of this essay, I do so not out of a commitment to analytical fallacies, but in an attempt to grasp something about the relationship between vulnerability and resistance that often proves intransmissible.

The Gezi Barricades

Much has been written about the myriad issues and events that culminated in what has come to be known as the Gezi resistance, an uprising that began in Istanbul and spread rapidly across Turkey.¹ The immediate occasion was demolition works at Gezi Park in a blatant breach of planning permissions. The resistance began on 27 May with a few dozen people keeping watch over the park and avalanched within five days into tens of thousands gathering together to defy the brutal force and tear gas that the police dispensed liberally so as to secure the unlawful demolition by cordoning off the park, refusing assembly there and in the abutting Taksim Square. Eventually, on the afternoon of 1 June, when people forced the police to withdraw predominantly by non-violent means, the park, Taksim Square, and a large surrounding area became a state-free zone for ten days (fig1).² This zone was demarcated by tens of barricades of various sizes and styles. On Gümüşsuyu, the main artery that climbs up to Taksim Square from the Beşiktaş Stadium, there were more than a dozen successive barricades built with pavement stones, scaffolding materials and corrugated metal sheets from nearby construction sites (fig2). Surrounding the other sides of Taksim Square, in the streets and boulevards of Tarlabaşı, Talimhane and Harbiye, the barricades featured reappropriated crowd-control fences with their “*polis*” signs graffiti-ed over to read “*halk*” (the people), as well as materials from the major

renovation works at Taksim Square such as enormous cement pipes and iron rods (fig3). The wide junction near Taşkışla, a historic building of Istanbul Technical University situated amidst a cluster of five-star hotels, was blockaded with several burnt out public busses parked sideways (fig4). No matter how wide or narrow, every street in the area that would eventually lead to Taksim Square was striped with barricades.

The barricades were made collectively and spontaneously, as if one always built barricades with strangers on the streets, as if building barricades was just what one did. This knowing-just-what-to-do around barricades, even without any prior experience is something of a mystery. In his study of European “barricade events” from the 16th until the end of the 19th century, historian Mark Traugott hones in on this enigma of a knowledge “that has been sustained, transmitted, and applied without the benefit of formal organization or institutional hierarchy”.³ He suggests that the “uncanny convergence in the behavior of individuals thrown together by their common desire to protest” and the expression of this convergence in barricades throughout the past centuries may serve as key to “the logic that inheres in even the most unstructured and chaotic instances of civic rebellion.”⁴ Barricades, then, embody the ways in which something of a structure emerges when bodies that are moved by or are beside themselves with indignation, desire, grief, or desperation act in concert. *Gezi Tune*, a short film released online one week after the encampment in the park was evicted, captures something of that strange coupling of spontaneity and structure, fever and sobriety involved in the collective labor of building barricades. Shots of pavement stones being lifted and passed from hand to hand in a long human chain are intercut with another chain transferring basic necessities and yet another moving together in a

dance – resistance is depicted as a buzz of activity that creates its own measure and music as it unfolds.⁵ (fig5&6)

People who kept guard at the barricades day in, day out were mainly youth in their teens or early twenties, some of them members of radical left factions, but the majority not.⁶ This was an odd amalgam of the dispossessed from the surrounding neighborhoods and middle and upper class but otherwise disenfranchised kids – predominantly male, but there were also young women around in this tough-guy space. There were worries about undercover police activity at the barricades, as people reported plain-clothes police infiltrating these spaces to provoke conflict with the uniformed police on the other side of the barricades, leading to arrests. The inevitable permeability of these structures were experienced in a different way at the park: for the first several nights after the police retreated, the park was still enshrouded in tear gas wafting up from the barricades where seemingly avoidable clashes continued to take place. And yet the barricades provided their regulars a point of participation in the resistance, a space of articulation at the threshold of the polity-in-making of the occupied zone. Compared to the life in the park, this was a somewhat marginal incorporation, but one that was given priority: those at the barricades were the first to receive their share of the daily medical provisions, food, clothing and equipment that were donated to the occupation and redistributed from the self-organized central coordination at the park.

As the fighting subsided and their utility became less immediate, the barricades began to come alive in different ways. It appeared that they were in constant flux – undone, remade, fortified, beautified, and renamed so as to commemorate losses new and old. One morning, the occupation awoke to the smiling bricks of one barricade

(fig7). And then, the bricks of another barricade had been neatly ordered into six perfect 1.5m x 1.5m x 1.5m cube structures. One barricade repurposed the frame of an appropriated billboard as a pedestrian gate “of freedom”; another ironically sported the “opening soon!” banner from a nearby shopping mall construction; another was played by drummers for an impromptu concert.⁷ The inside of one of the blockading busses was painted all in pink, as if a public vessel for a collective psychedelic trip, another in sky blue. The barricades seemed to live and breathe as they pointed to an endless possibility of doing and undoing.⁸ They testified to a magnificent and spontaneously self-organized collective labor, and yet in addition to being permeable, it was obvious that they ultimately wouldn’t stand a chance against the armory of the state. In that sense, they were both transient and inextinguishable. They embodied something of the vulnerability with and despite which the actual bodies in resistance stood against police violence.

Monumental Space and Strategy

It may be significant that the key sites of the majority of the recent uprisings were those that we may identify along with Henri Lefebvre as monumental spaces.⁹ Lefebvre suggests that the didactic function of monumentality, the clear intelligibility of its simple message, masks “the will to power and the arbitrariness of power beneath signs and surfaces which claim to express collective will and collective thought”.¹⁰ This masking, however, is never total – “[m]onumental ‘durability’ is unable to achieve a complete illusion.”¹¹ So monumental spaces attract protest and oppositional political claims not only because they provide the most symbolically charged sites for the contestation of arbitrary enclosures of the political, but also

because that's where the cracks are most easily revealed. Indeed, much like Cairo's Tahrir, Madrid's Puerta del Sol, Athens's Syntagma and Kiev's Maidan, Istanbul's Taksim Square is the "emblematic site in urban public consciousness for the enactment, production, and regeneration of the political" in Turkey.¹² With Ankara designated as the capital of the new Republic in the early twentieth century, Sultanahmet, Istanbul's previous political center which was so by virtue of its proximity to the palace, became obsolete. Taksim was reinvented as the monumental space of the Republic in Istanbul, the square where official ceremonies and election rallies were held. The symbolic weight of this space is propped up by a number of monumental structures, most importantly, the Republic Monument built in the late 1920s. Located just off the center of the square, this is the first figurative monument in Turkey to depict Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's founding of the Republic.¹³ Another key monumental structure in the square is the landmark Atatürk Cultural Center (AKM), whose architectural style embodies the top-down modernization project of Turkish republicanism. Gezi Park itself shares this monumental aesthetics, it is elevated above street level with stairs leading up to the park from all four sides and most majestically from Taksim square – it is as if the park sits on a pedestal.

Over the past several years, it has become apparent that Tayyip Erdoğan's Justice and Development Party (AKP), in power since 2002, has its own monumental vision for Taksim Square. For example, the AKM building has been a major source of controversy since 2005 when plans to destroy and rebuild it were first aired. There has been a characteristic lack of transparency around the fate of the building, but government spokespersons have variously said that it will be replaced with a business conference center, a modernized cultural center, and lastly, as announced by Erdoğan

during the Gezi uprising and much ridiculed since (fig8), a giant baroque-style opera house. Closed to public use since 2008 under the pretext of renovation in the aftermath of the controversy, the building, as revealed during the Gezi occupation, had been completely gutted and left to decay. Most recently, plans are underway to build a mosque in Taksim, presumably partially to offset the powerful presence of Hagia Triada just off the square, one of the largest Greek Orthodox churches in Istanbul (one cannot help but see parallels with the building of the Sultanahmet mosque to overshadow the Hagia Sophia at the height of the Ottoman empire). It has been reported that Erdoğan himself has been overseeing the revisions of the architectural design of the planned mosque and his level of involvement and investment in this project is not entirely surprising given that during his time in office as the mayor of Istanbul in the mid-1990s, he had been a key actor in the failed campaign to build a monumental mosque in Taksim.¹⁴ Most tellingly, the Gezi protests themselves were instigated precisely by the current neo-liberal government's monumental desire for Taksim, as the illegal destruction of the park was meant to make space for a shopping mall whose façade would be a replica of the 18th century Ottoman barracks once located there.¹⁵

As with the fate of most monumental spaces, Taksim Square has been hosting protests and mobilizations since the 1950s,¹⁶ and the political claims that have found expression there over the past few decades have been quite diverse. But Turkey's left has its own history with the square, a key moment in which was 1 May 1977, when half a million workers and revolutionaries marched there. Paramilitary snipers whose identity remain unknown opened fire on the masses from nearby buildings, 34 people were killed and hundreds were injured in the ensuing mayhem. The event serves as

one of the milestones in the brutal repression and the eventual crushing of the left in Turkey. The period between the 1971 and 1980 coups d'état was one during which the Turkish state honed its expertise in developing calculated methods for unleashing incalculable suffering. While most on the left experienced this expertise in the unspeakable privacy of torture rooms, events like the Bloody May Day in Taksim publicly displayed the kind of violence that the state was capable of planning and executing. Since 1977, May Day rallies have not been officially allowed in Taksim Square, leading to annual unofficial marches countered by police brutality, except from 2010 until 2012. During those three years there was a temporary lull in the traditional May Day clashes: rallies were permitted in the square and hundreds of thousands came to celebrate labor and commemorate the losses of 1977. However since 2013, the old state tradition has returned with a vengeance, as the measures taken by police to obstruct assembly in Taksim amounted to de facto exercise of martial law powers.

Notably, in the recent history of left mobilization in and around the square, something like a fantasy of “taking back Taksim” is discernible as a driving force. This operates as if the square had once properly belonged to the people. But it is that very *as if* that testifies to the entanglement of monumental spaces with political imaginaries that yields particular forms of spatial practices. In Lefebvre’s account, monumentality is a texture, it operates as a web of meaning, and monuments merely “constitute the strong points, nexuses or anchors of such webs”.¹⁷ Following Lefebvre, Rita Sakr suggests “looking beyond the site of the monument to the different acts of monumentalization and counter-monumentalization that occur phenomenologically and discursively across a range of macro- and microhistories,”¹⁸ that is, to

performances and practices that constitute and disrupt textures of monumentality. In this account, space is produced performatively. So when the imagined possibilities and spatial dynamics of protest are simply limited to “reclaiming the national, local or communal space and its symbolic attributes,”¹⁹ the claim remains indexed to the monumental injunctions of a prefabricated space.

Although largely characterized by different dynamics, the Gezi occupation itself was not entirely spared from such monumentalizing longings. These were noticeable in various spatial practices in the occupied zone, as well as in articulations during Taksim Solidarity meetings.²⁰ The meetings were open to all, though they were mostly attended by representatives of the organized left. Other politically identifiable constituents of the Gezi resistance, such as feminists, participants of the LGBT Bloc,²¹ and representatives of Müştereklerimiz²² would also attend, but it is fair to say that the representative capacity of the meetings were off-balance: while the organized left were in fact a minority in the occupied zone,²³ their representatives made up approximately half of the attendees at the Taksim Solidarity meetings. Significantly, from the beginning of the occupation onwards, all Taksim Solidarity meetings were held outside Gezi Park, in the offices of a trade union in nearby Beyoğlu. Among the other groups and unaligned individuals active in the occupied zone with various self-assigned tasks, there was a sense that the umbrella meetings were either too disconnected with the dynamics in Gezi, or were simply too dull and deadly to sit through.

Indeed, at these meetings during the first few days of the occupation, certain relatively urgent questions concerning infrastructural mobilization, such as coordination and physical security in the occupied zone (the latter was particularly

vital as the space was partially a construction site) kept being bogged down in extended debates on the symbolic value of this or that practical move. Pragmatic proposals for supporting life at the occupation were repeatedly sidelined by concerns about the show of presence in Taksim Square, “taken”, the rhetoric went, after decades of revolutionary struggle for the sake of which many lives had been lost. Such debates paralyzed the meetings for the first three days with regards to coordination efforts. Meanwhile, the occupation in the park set up infirmaries, distribution points for provisions and a kitchen in entirely self-organized efforts loosely coordinated by various groups such as the LGBT Bloc and Müştereklerimiz. The irony of the situation became particularly pronounced when at a Taksim Solidarity meeting on day three, one man took the floor to proudly announce his party’s first major expenditure for the sake of the occupation: they had ordered thousands of flags to be produced for distribution on Taksim Square, carrying not the logo of their party, but the image of Deniz Gezmiş as a figure who, they had reasoned, all occupiers could share as an icon. But a sense of the tragic articulates itself to this irony of infrastructural ineptitude when we consider that for at least two generations on the left, the 1972 execution by hanging of the revolutionary student leader Deniz Gezmiş along with two of his comrades is an event that has served as a similar point of cathexis as that of the Bloody May Day of 1977, publicly crystallizing an otherwise all too intimate knowledge of state violence. It appeared during the Gezi resistance that instead of providing a source of attunement to present vulnerabilities and the need to tend to them, the memory of past violence had benumbed its bearers into monumentalizing consolation.

On the other hand, the notion of counter-monumentalization goes some way to capture the dynamics that characterized the Gezi resistance and its political aesthetics. This is not limited to what people did with the monuments themselves, though admittedly there was something paradigm-shifting in witnessing AKM and the Republic Monument being covered with banners and flags of various radical factions (fig9); seeing people walking on the rooftop of AKM; walking past people sitting, lying or pitching tents on the landscaping around the monument (previously so unimaginable as ground to tread on that it hadn't even required the usual warning signs for people to keep off); gathering around bonfires in the square; watching flags featuring the portrait of the imprisoned Kurdish leader Abdullah Öcalan wave freely there; and witnessing what came to be known as the “eternal *halay*”, the literally ceaseless circle-dance of Kurds gathered around the tent of their party, BDP, in one corner where Gezi Park meets the square (it didn't matter whether it was the height of midday heat or 5am, the dance continued). Lefebvre suggests that the usual spatial opposition between inside and outside is insufficient “when it comes to defining monumental space,” instead “[s]uch a space is determined by what may take place there, and consequently by what may not take place there (prescribed/proscribed, scene/obscene)”.²⁴ This begins to explain something of the paradigm-shifting effect of the material practices that transgressed the monumental injunctions of Taksim Square.

But these spatial practices were combined with other political dynamics, a counter-monumentalization that we may identify with Meltem Ahıska as “inhabit[ing] and politically subvert[ing] the gaps and excesses within the assumed totality of the nation.”²⁵ Many accounts not only of Gezi but many of the myriad uprisings of the past several years touch on this: the state-free zone became a site for a politics of

contact between identities, groups, and organizations that previously would not and could not exist side by side. Another quality of the Gezi resistance that is often emphasized in accounts, the explosive humor, was also decisive in this dynamic of counter-monumentalization – it took hold of the social media, covered the walls of the city, subverted the words of traditional leftist chants, seeped into the choreographies of spontaneous collective performance pieces, and mixed into the bricolages of the barricades. Humor has its own peculiar way of disarming, and laughter, we found out, can go some way towards shattering the brittle categorizations that regulate the body politic. Those days in June allowed a glimpse of the political landscape that could emerge through a re-articulation of constituent power in its diversity, the unravelling of rooted prejudices and worn out enmities, and the emergence of new subjectivities as visible and viable beyond the petrified subjects of the official nation-state ideology. This process might well be described as the counter-monumentalization of political imaginaries.

Counter-monumentalization: A Bricolage

In a 1992 essay, James E. Young contemplated the counter-monument in light of the work of a number of artists exploring the possibilities for critical memorialization practices in Germany the aftermath of the Holocaust. The challenge that these artists attempted to address was the incommensurability between the politics of the traditional genre of public monuments and the need to memorialize the nation's own victims, since conventionally monuments commemorate the victories, heroes and martyrs of the nation itself.²⁶ In traditional monuments of martyrdom, past vulnerability is anonymized and appropriated, it is reconfigured into a narrative of

selfless sacrifice for the glory of the nation. In monuments of victory, past vulnerability is often erased altogether along with the erasure of the victims of the depicted triumph. The artists of the counter-monument movement sought to produce public memorial artifacts that would neither erase nor appropriate the memory of violence in an anaesthetizing closure that shores up the current order. Their works were instead meant to stimulate in their audience a responsiveness and liveliness to the very continuities of the conditions of political violence and vulnerability in the present.

As indicated, the notions of monumentalization and counter-monumentalization lend themselves as nodes of a conceptual framework for addressing political dynamics beyond a strictly literal interpretation of these terms as simply indexed to the erection of monuments and similar spatial practices.²⁷ Meltem Ahıska describes counter-monumentalization as “the visualization of a certain *aesthesis*” through oppositional social practices and movements. Here, *aesthesis* refers to “the heterogeneous experiences of sensuous perception embedded in the fabric of life”, which are otherwise repressed by the political aesthetics of monumental transmission.²⁸ Thus we can think of counter-monumentalization as an undoing of the anaesthetizing stasis of monumentalization, as a reclamation and reconfiguration of the ecstatic. This is intimately connected to the question of vulnerability, if we understand vulnerability, following Judith Butler,²⁹ as an ontological condition that marks the ecstatic dimensions of our being, the various ways in which we are always already outside ourselves. In Butler’s account, vulnerability defines our inalienable unboundedness, our fundamental dependence on others and on infrastructures, the ways in which we are given over to pleasure and pain, to abandonment and

sustenance, as well as to various affective states beyond our control. If, in addition to certain spatial practices, monumentalization names a framing of the body politic in ways that foreclose certain affective responses while marshaling others, counter-monumentalization can be figured as resisting and subverting such foreclosures and imperatives. In this sense, counter-monumentalization operates as a reclamation of vulnerability, a form of re-attunement to vulnerability.

The conceptual framework of monumentalization/counter-monumentalization further assists in attending to the aesthetic and political operations that forge the relation between the constitution of the body politic and political violence. This potential has been taken up by a number of legal scholars who have turned to the language of monumentalism and counter-monumentalism to explore the affinities between memorial practices and constitution-making,³⁰ to trace museological practices that approximate the truth of constituent power,³¹ and to call for a counter-monumental constitutionalism.³² It is perhaps not entirely coincidental that this vein of work mostly pertains to South Africa where constitutionalism has urgently and unavoidably been tied to the politics of memory, or more specifically, to a range of official efforts undertaken to address past political violence in ways that reconcile the victims to the present order, and thereby bolster the conditions of cohabitation. Notably, critical legal works that draw on this vocabulary to inquire into the dynamics of constitutionalism tend to figure counter-monumentalism as a form of fidelity to the liveliness, diversity and ambivalences of constituent power, whereas monumentalism is used to capture the ossifications of constituted power: elective framing of constituent dynamics, exclusionary closures, and the redistribution of legitimate violence.

The jurisprudential significance of representational strategies also finds a relatively simple articulation in the “anti-monuments” of the Mexican-Canadian artist Rafael Lozano-Hemmer. His works use light, shadows, programming technology and sometimes sound as medium, and urban public squares and buildings as sites. They crucially depend on the active participation of members of the public, to the extent that without their engagement the work cannot come to *be* – a quality that destabilizes the distinction between maker and audience. The anti-monuments are designed to allow discrete individual participation while facilitating the emergence of collective patterns of self-organization among strangers who happen to be engaging with the work. As prototypes meant to capture and reflect structures emerging from collective action, these works can be understood on one level as inquiring into the dynamics and potentials of constituent power. Indeed, Lozano-Hemmer explains that he is working towards a “relational architecture” as an alternative to “the fetish of the representation of power”,³³ which we may in turn read as a figuration of the forcible frames and monumentalizing aesthetics of constituted power. Admittedly, Lozano-Hemmer’s works bracket out vulnerability, or more specifically, the questions of violence and necessity that inevitably accompany constitutional processes, the former as threat and/or means, the latter as the necessity to provide basic infrastructure for the sustenance of lives. Then again, this bracketing brings to the fore another aspect pertaining to the ecstatic, namely, the ludic element of collective action and collective self-organization, something we rarely contemplate in attending to the serious business of the political.

Encountered in various guises in art history, memory studies, literary criticism, legal scholarship and other fields, the concept of counter-monumentalization may be

productive for contemplating the historical possibilities for resistance today, as it gathers together a key set of issues including memory, violence, vulnerability, collective embodied/material/spatial practices, representational strategy, and the polity to come. The convergence of these questions is relevant in the immediate aftermath (if not midst) of a global wave of uprisings that no left analysis foresaw and many left analyses are quick to dismiss, either through hasty diagnoses or frustrated prescriptions. The weight of left history sits heavily as monumentalized left failure,³⁴ as so many elaborate analyses of the overwhelming entrenchment of the forces to be resisted, and as intimate knowledge of our vulnerability before the legal, hyperlegal³⁵ and extralegal instruments of *raison d'état*. Then again, the barricades return.

So I return to the barricades in the remainder of this essay, as a way to probe into the lives and afterlives of vulnerability in resistance. As a long-standing “repertoire of collective action”, barricades serve both as a materialization of and metaphor for resistance. They are temporary embodiments of collective agency that combine spontaneity and structure, and yet in doing so resist a logic of utility vs. futility: they shield but only provisionally, they fail but only to return again. Young’s description of the counter-monument powerfully resonates with the significance of the barricade as an artifact of resistance in public space: “its aim is not to console but to provoke; not to remain fixed but to change; not to be everlasting but to disappear; not to be ignored by passersby but to demand interaction; not to remain pristine but to invite its own violation and desecration”.³⁶ Indeed, as edifices that defy monumental premises of representation, closure, fixity, stasis, continuity, durability, pristineness, as well as the traditional hierarchies between maker, object, and audience, barricades present themselves as counter-monuments, embodying something of the ecstasis of

resistance. Further, the associations of memory-work that the phrase counter-monument evokes are not entirely lost on the barricade, as the phenomenon raises its own problems and paradoxes for memory, in its awkward combination of historical consciousness with untimely spatial strategy.

The Memory of Barricades

The tension between monumentalization and barricades was something that Walter Benjamin attended to in the Arcades Project. In Convolute E, entitled “Haussmannization, Barricade Fighting,” he gathers passages on the transformation of Paris in the mid-19th century under Baron Haussmann, as well as a range of materials on barricades such as a passage on Friedrich Engels’s notes on the barricade as strategy, several citations concerning the different materials used for building barricades, and descriptions of barricades from 1830, 1848 and 1871. The convolute betrays Benjamin’s fascination with the numbers and the ubiquity of barricades in 19th century Paris, and the use of overturned omnibuses in barricade building. His juxtaposition of Haussmannization and the barricades is far from arbitrary: Haussmann’s regeneration of Paris was an undertaking of “strategic embellishment” meant to destroy the architectural infrastructure that rendered barricade fighting effective. As Benjamin writes in the exposé of 1935, “The true goal of Haussmann’s projects was to secure the city against civil war. He wanted to make the erection of barricades in Paris impossible for all time.”³⁷ Benjamin also highlights the monumentalizing ambitions of this transformation: “The institutions of the bourgeoisie’s worldly and spiritual dominance were to find their apotheosis within the framework of the boulevards. Before their completion, boulevards were draped across

with canvas and unveiled like monuments.”³⁸ In the revised exposé of 1939, he appends to this passage the following succinct critique of monumentalization: “With the Haussmannization of Paris, the phantasmagoria was rendered in stone.”³⁹ The defiant return of the barricades during the Paris Commune despite the new unaccommodating cityscape seems to signify for Benjamin a triumph over monumentalized phantasmagoria: “The barricade is resurrected during the Commune, it is stronger and better secured than ever. It stretches across the great boulevards, often reaching a height of two stories, and shields the trenches behind it. Just as the *Communist Manifesto* ends the age of professional conspirators, so the Commune puts an end to the phantasmagoria holding sway over the early years of the proletariat.”⁴⁰

An aspect of the tension between barricades and monumentalization that does not find its way into the Arcades Project is the attempted erasure of the Commune’s memory through the monumental architecture of Sacré-Coeur.⁴¹ But there is another, perhaps more significant one: the monumental defensive structures that were built over several weeks by the Commune’s Commission of Barricades under the direction of shoemaker Napoléon Gaillard (the “stronger and better secured” barricades that Benjamin seemed to celebrate) actually performed disastrously in combat. Barricade historian Mark Traugott explains, for example, that the largest of these edifices, built on the corner of Rue de Rivoli and Rue Saint-Florentin, fell quickly when the Versailles army attacked, because it was easily outflanked and captured from behind. “By contrast, many of the spontaneous barricades set up on the spot by unorganized insurgent forces put up a fanatical resistance and long held out against overwhelming odds.”⁴² Eric Hazan notes a similar dynamic concerning the barricades of June 1848.⁴³ Indeed, we find that the military leader of the Commune, Gustave-Paul Cluseret, put

his finger on the matter in his memoirs written in the Commune's aftermath. Here he insists on the necessity for the barricades precisely to *not* be like monuments: "The building of barricades was, first of all, to be carried out as quickly as possible; in contrast to the unique, well-situated, and centralized civic monument, whose aura derives from its isolation and stability, barricades were not designed around the notion of a unique 'proper place'."⁴⁴

While barricade histories teach us that the monumentalization of barricades hastens their fall, triumph at the barricades is in any case fleeting and rare. Most of the time, the best they effect is to prove costly for and delay the machinery of state violence. Traugott notes that although barricades featured prominently in the 1848 revolutions and later insurgencies, their practical utility had already diminished by 1848 from a strictly military perspective. This is also the crux of Engels's notes on barricade fighting in his introduction to Marx's *Class Struggles in France*, though he dates the shift post-1848. He states that all military, technological and urban developments since then had made the conditions far more favorable for the arm of the state and far less so for barricade fighting. Reporting on the brief Hamburg uprising of 1923, Larissa Reissner chimes in to this chronology and laments the "old romantic barricade" of 1848: "As a fortified wall between revolutionary rifles and government cannon the barricade long ago became a specter. It no longer serves as a protection to anyone but solely as an impediment."⁴⁵ Then again, like a specter, the barricade keeps returning even if "its military effectiveness has fallen asymptotically over time to nearly zero".⁴⁶ Historian Dennis Bos notes a further irony: the barricade became internationally ubiquitous precisely at the same time as it became militarily futile.⁴⁷ So why is it that the specter keeps returning and roaming the world?

Notably, for both Bos and Traugott, the return of the barricade despite its tried and tested vulnerability can be explained by a kind of transmission that we may identify as a form of monumentalization. According to Bos, the recurrence of barricades across borders in the 19th and early 20th centuries is an effect of the mythology of the Paris Commune in the international socialist labor movement. He lightly traces the disseminations of accounts, reporting, images, speeches, poetry, plays, songs, and other literature on the Commune across Europe to demonstrate how the barricade “transformed from matter into myth” along with the romanticization of the Commune in chivalrous and suicidal imagery: “Addressing socialists on a personal and emotional level, the barricade referred to an imaginary world of socialist chivalry. In many accounts the symbolic barricade functioned as a stage for acts of bravery or as the background for scenes of proletarian martyrdom.”⁴⁸ In Bos’s account, the enormous losses of the Paris Commune, the massacre of twenty thousand Communards within a week by the Versailles army, were mythologized into legends of virile heroism and self-sacrifice. He further suggests that later barricades could not shake off the key themes of this legend, neither in how they were inhabited, nor in how they were represented: “there is no escape from the weight of an established tradition ... Both in literature and in actual conduct there seems no choice but to conform to the stereotypes set by history and mythological representations.”⁴⁹ We may read what Bos describes as a process of the monumentalization of resistance in socialist imaginary and memory: the ossification of unmourned loss in tales of self-sacrifice, the erasure of vulnerability in chivalry.

Traugott has a similar explanation for the spectral return: He suggest that we can only explain the “miraculous” non-disappearance of barricades by looking beyond

the purely pragmatic considerations, thinking not only in terms of their material efficacy but also the more abstract functions they perform.⁵⁰ For this, he first turns to Eric Hobsbawm's explanation in the introduction to *The Invention of Tradition* of how the practical utility of an object or practice has to wane for it to be appropriated for symbolic or ritual purposes. Then he draws on Pierre Nora's concept of *lieux de mémoire* to suggest that "[b]uildings, monuments, and battlefields are classic examples of the type of locations that help perpetuate a sense of connection to pivotal historical events. Barricades, which possess properties in common with all three, likewise exerted a powerful influence over the popular imagination."⁵¹ In this account, the barricade keeps returning due to its "iconic status" as a symbol of the "revolutionary tradition".

It seems to me, however, that both of Traugott's references are ill-suited to explaining the recurrence of barricades. Hobsbawm's idea of the invention of a tradition is largely a top-down affair, he writes of "imposing repetition", "formalization and ritualization" by either single initiators (i.e. Baden-Powell and The Boy Scouts), official institutions such as armies and courts of law, and at the very least by private groups such as the parliament or the legal profession.⁵² This is very much at a remove from the spontaneous uptake of the barricade as a structure by insurgents across cultures and from a diversity of backgrounds who do not even necessarily identify with a particular ideological tradition. The concept of *lieux de mémoire* may be similarly counter-productive here: the comparison of barricades to buildings, monuments and battlefields is flawed as the latter are site-specific and relatively permanent. But even if we were to go with Nora's less spatially anchored examples of archives, festivals, anniversaries, treaties, depositions and fraternal

orders,⁵³ the concept still does not quite yield itself to the phenomenon of barricades. For Nora, *lieux de mémoire* “originate with the sense that there is no spontaneous memory”,⁵⁴ what goes by the name of memory in modernity is “is in fact the gigantic and breathtaking storehouse of a material stock of what it would be impossible for us to remember, an unlimited repertoire of what might need to be recalled.”⁵⁵ Nora opposes this to what he provisionally terms “true memory, which has taken refuge in gestures and habits, in skills passed down by unspoken traditions, in the body’s inherent self-knowledge, in unstudied reflexes and ingrained memories”.⁵⁶ As idealized as it is (and perhaps Nora himself would not accept this nostalgic formulation’s application to as untethered a phenomenon as the one under consideration) this formulation of “true memory” seems to capture more about barricades than his *lieux de mémoire*.

The figure of the barricade has served as an emblem of and metaphor for resistance, and there are indeed entrenched political, rhetorical and aesthetic traditions established around it. However, an account of monumentalized transmission based on the allure of mythology and iconicity misses all that is precisely counter-monumental about barricades: their refusal to accommodate phantasmagoria, their resistance to monumentalization, their embodiment of an ecstasis of resistance. A more accurate account would be of counter-monumentalizing transmission, one that would mark the role of vulnerability in resistance rather than disavowing it through mythologies of virility, fantasies of impermeability, iconographies of heroes/martyrs, or consolations of monumentalized failure. Hannah Arendt offers a clue here, borrowing a formulation from *Leaves of Hypnos*, the journal of prose poetry that René Char kept while fighting in the French Resistance: “Our inheritance was left to us by no

testament”.⁵⁷ Arendt begins *Between Past and Future* and ends *On Revolution* with Char’s fragment. An inheritance has been left, but without any prior testament. Something has been passed on, but it has been foreseen by no tradition.

In both texts, Arendt supplies her reading of this fragment with a number of other expressions that she gleans from Char, most importantly this: “If I survive, I know that I shall have to break with the aroma of these essential years, silently reject (not repress) my treasure.”⁵⁸ Departing from Char’s passages, Arendt playfully proposes that the history of revolutions “could be told in parable form as the tale of an age-old treasure which, under the most varied circumstances, appears abruptly, unexpectedly, and disappears again, under different mysterious conditions, as though it were a *fata morgana*.”⁵⁹ Char’s text does not readily reveal what this treasure may be, but Arendt is characteristically confident in her interpretation: the treasure is what was once known as “public happiness” or “public freedom”. She explains that during the Resistance, Char and his generation of writers were forced into a political existence that they had not planned or foreseen. Because they were moved to take it up on themselves to resist tyranny, they began to act in a public sphere of their own making. Arendt proposes that eighteenth century political thought identified precisely this, the active participation in the making of the public realm, in terms of “public happiness” (in America) and “public freedom” (in France) – something that she discusses in more detail in the earlier chapters of *On Revolution*. She expresses her preference for the American formulation: if they knew to call it “happiness” it is because they knew it through experience, rather than merely in theory.⁶⁰

Mark the gesture towards the ecstatic here, both as a resource and as the experience of resistance. In fact, Arendt often mentions in passing “the great ecstasy”

of collective action.⁶¹ In one place she formulates this in terms of “the exhilarating awareness of the human capacity of beginning, the high spirits which have always attended the birth of something new on earth”, as something those engaged in building a polity are bound to experience.⁶² Something akin to what she is describing traverses the testimonials from the current wave of uprisings where narratives of overwhelming emotion are common. For example, Yasmine el Rashidi writes of witnessing a “reservoir of emotions that I never thought I would ever bear witness to” in a number of encounters on Tahrir Square – one is with a man with missing teeth who sat on a sidewalk and wrote page after page of slogans, poems and essays: “He had been in that same spot for two weeks and said he would stay until the day he died. ‘I carry the emotion of a nation, not only my own’.”⁶³ In two beautifully written diatribes against the attempts by “experts of expertise” to render the Gezi uprising “knowable, calculable, measurable”, Hazal Halavut writes of “the beautiful knowledge” of resistance as one gained through emotion.⁶⁴ Slavoj Žižek is not impressed: “The mass movements that we have seen most recently, whether in Tahrir Square or Athens, look to me like a pathetic ecstasy. What is important for me is the following day, the morning after. These events make me feel as one does when one awakes with a headache after a night of drunkenness.”⁶⁵ But the trouble with this easy dismissal is that it fails to register the thought-defying diversity and extent of infrastructural mobilization that actually has emerged in the midst of the ecstatic in these uprisings. It is also shortsighted even if formulated as a mastery of foresight – why be *moved* to collective action if the morning after is to banish the ecstatic through such hasty claims to sobriety?

What moves us to collective action even when it is most unexpected is the felt necessity to reclaim anew a world that fails to contain the ecstatic dimensions of our being, a world that abandons us to our private political irrelevance, if not destitution. So in the spirit of Arendt's untimely "treasure", I would propose that barricades return not because but more likely despite entrenched traditions; not because we need heroes or martyrs, myths or monuments, but precisely to release the aesthesis foreclosed by such ossifications. Resistance, then, may be understood as a reclamation of vulnerability, even when it appears as its very defiance through heroic acts by ordinary people who put themselves on the line. In other words, we resist not just despite, but perhaps owing to and for the sake of vulnerability.

Captions

Fig 1. Gezi Commune Map by Oscar ten Houten (used under Creative Commons license: BY-NC-SA / modified slightly)

Fig 2. Gümüşsuyu barricade, the first of more than a dozen. Photo by author.

Fig 3. Talimhane. Photo by author.

Fig 4. Taşkışla. Photo by author.

Fig 5. Smiling barricade, 6 June 2013. Photo by Atilla Erdoğan.

Fig 6. Barricade featuring banner from the nearby construction site for a shopping mall: "Opening Soon!"

Fig 7. Monumental misinterpellation: "Did somebody say baroque opera?", Istanbul Pride Parade in Taksim, 30 June 2013. Photo by Kemal Hamamcıoğlu. (copyright still to be cleared)

Fig 8. Atatürk Cultural Center on 10 June 2013. Photo by author.

I wish to express my gratitude to the editors and contributors of this volume for their careful engagement with earlier drafts of this essay, to Meltem Ahıska for the initial and continuing inspiration, to Stewart Motha and Alisa Lebow for providing thoughtful commentary, and to Hannah Franzki for luring me back into the *Arcades*.

* * *

¹ A number of insightful collections include the pamphlet *This is Only the Beginning: On the Gezi Park Resistance of June 2013*,

https://www.indybay.org/uploads/2014/03/03/this_is_only_the_beginning.pdf (Oct

2013); Umut Yildirim and Yael Navaro-Yashin, eds., “An Impromptu Uprising: Ethnographic Reflections on the Gezi Park Protests in Turkey”, *Fieldsights - Hot Spots*, *Cultural Anthropology Online* (Oct 31, 2013),

[http://culanth.org/fieldsights/391-an-impromptu-uprising-ethnographic-reflections-on-](http://culanth.org/fieldsights/391-an-impromptu-uprising-ethnographic-reflections-on-the-gezi-park-protests-in-turkey)

[the-gezi-park-protests-in-turkey](http://culanth.org/fieldsights/391-an-impromptu-uprising-ethnographic-reflections-on-the-gezi-park-protests-in-turkey); and Anthony Alessandrini, Nazan Üstündağ, and Emrah Yildiz, “*Resistance Everywhere*”: *The Gezi Protests and Dissident Visions of Turkey*, *JadMag* 1:4 (Fall 2013).

² The police lifted most of the barricades and repossessed Taksim Square on 11 June, then evicted the camp at Gezi Park on 15 June.

³ Mark Traugott, *The Insurgent Barricade* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), xi.

⁴ *ibid*, 11.

⁵ “Gezi Havası”, *Vimeo*, 22 June 2013, 4:21, <http://vimeo.com/68917094>.

⁶ This is captured in a number of interviews at the barricades published in the Gezi special issue of Turkish-language journal *Express* no. 136 (June-July 2013): 52-55.

⁷ Hakan Vreskala & Taksim Gezi Direnişçileri, “Dağılm Lan”,

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cjfoXoz69sw>.

⁸ This sense of the barricade as a living being is found in Larissa Reissner’s account of the 1923 Hamburg Rising: it “sprout(s) from the ground multiplying at an incredible rate” and then “courageously catches with its breast all the blind frenzied fire that troops rain down on their unseen enemy”. Larissa Reissner, “Hamburg at the Barricades”, *Hamburg at the Barricades and other writings on Weimar Germany*, trans. Richard Chappell (London: Pluto Press, 1977), 66-67.

⁹ Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991).

¹⁰ *ibid.*, 143.

¹¹ *ibid.*, 221.

¹² Yael Navaro-Yashin, *Faces of the State: Secularism and Public Life in Turkey* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002), 1.

¹³ Mehmet Ö. Alkan, “Taksim’in Siyasî Tarihine Mukaddime,” *Birikim*, no. 291-292 (July-August 2013): 150.

¹⁴ See Alev Çınar, *Modernity, Islam, and Secularism in Turkey: Bodies, Places, and Time* (Minneapolis: Minnesota University Press, 2005), 114-118.

¹⁵ At first glance this seems like a generic choice for a symbolic return to the glorious days of the imperial past. However, it has been suggested the choice may have more to do with the government’s own heritage of political Islam (Alkan, 148-149). The Taksim barracks was one of the key sites of the April 1909 counterrevolutionary uprising, which “spoke in the language of religion” against the constitutional coup of

1908, the latter being an important precursor to the secular republicanism of modern Turkey. See extended discussion by Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (Cambridge: CUP, 2011): 224-283.

¹⁶ Alkan, 150.

¹⁷ Lefebvre, 222.

¹⁸ Rita Sakr, *Monumental Space in the Post-Imperial Novel* (New York: Continuum, 2012), 3.

¹⁹ Ayşegül Baykan and Tali Hatuka, “Politics and Culture in the Making of Public Space: Taksim Square, 1st May 1977, Istanbul,” *Planning Perspectives* 25, no. 1 (2010) 55.

²⁰ Taksim Solidarity is an umbrella formation of more than 100 organizations, including numerous political parties on the left, labor unions, chambers and NGOs. Taksim Solidarity was established in March 2012, in opposition to the government’s regeneration project for Taksim Square and environs. A full list of constituents can be found here: <http://taksimdayanisma.org/bilesenler?lang=en>.

²¹ LGBT Bloc did not exist as an entity prior to the Gezi uprising, but named those that gathered around the rainbow flag at the resistance.

²² Müştereklerimiz (“Our Commons”) is a relatively new formation of various activist groups including local groups from neighborhoods threatened with eviction, ecologists, feminists, LGBTs, anticapitalists, and a migrant’s solidarity network, who have been meeting in search of a common ground since February 2013. “Our Commons – Who, Why?”, <http://mustereklerimiz.org/our-commons-who-why/>.

Müştereklerimiz had been coordinating the camp at Gezi Park from the first day onwards, before the matter exploded into a popular uprising.

²³ In KONDA Research and Consultancy's survey of 4411 people over 6-7 June in Gezi Park, 6.4% identified themselves as "representatives of a group or formation" while the rest identified as "ordinary citizens". Further, 21% identified as "a member of a political party or a nongovernmental organization such as an association, foundation or platform", while 79% had no such membership. KONDA, "Gezi Parkı Araştırması: Kimler, neden oradalar ve ne istiyorlar?",

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5zP6TnfALQU>.

²⁴ Lefebvre, 224.

²⁵ Meltem Ahıska, "The Imperial Complex: Monumentalization and Counter-monumentalization in Turkey," unpublished paper, 2013.

²⁶ James E. Young, "The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today," *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 270-271.

²⁷ Ahıska.

²⁸ *ibid.*

²⁹ See, for example, Judith Butler, 'Beside Oneself: On the Limits of Sexual Autonomy', *Undoing Gender* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 17-39; 'Violence, Mourning, Politics', *Precarious Life: The Powers of Mourning and Violence* (London: Verso, 2004), 19-49; 'Survivability, Vulnerability, Affect', *Frames of War* (London: Verso, 2009), 33-62.

³⁰ Johannes Synman, "Interpretation and the Politics of Memory," *Acta Juridica* (1998): 312-337.

³¹ Stacy Douglas, “Between Constitutional Mo(nu)ments: Memorializing Past, Present and Future at the District Six Museum and Constitution Hill” *Law & Critique* 22, no. 2 (2011): 171-187.

³² Norman W. Spaulding, “Constitution as Countermonument: Federalism, Reconstruction, and the Problem of Collective Memory,” *Columbia Law Review* 103, no. 8 (2003): 1992-2051; Wessel le Roux, “War Memorials, the Architecture of the Constitutional Court Building and Counter-Monumental Constitutionalism”, in eds. Wessel le Roux and Karin van Marle, *Law, Memory and the Legacy of Apartheid: Ten Years After AZAPO v President of South Africa* (Pretoria: Pretoria University Law Press, 2007), 65-90. For a similar spirit of inquiry that opposes memorialization to monumentalization see Karin van Marle, “The Spectacle of Post-Apartheid Constitutionalism”, *Griffith Law Review* 16, no. 2 (2007): 411-429.

³³ Rafael Lozano-Hemmer, “Alien Relationships from Public Space,” in *Transurbanism*, ed. Arjen Mulder (Rotterdam: V2/NAI, 2002), 138-159.

³⁴ Wendy Brown, “Resisting Left Melancholy”, *boundary 2* 26, no. 3 (1999): 19-27.

³⁵ Nasser Hussain, “Hyperlegality”, *New Criminal Law Review* 10, no. 4 (2007): 514-531.

³⁶ James E. Young, “The Counter-Monument: Memory against Itself in Germany Today,” *Critical Inquiry* 18, no. 2 (1992): 277.

³⁷ Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap/HUP, 2002), 12.

³⁸ *ibid*, 11.

³⁹ *ibid*, 24.

⁴⁰ *ibid.*, 12.

⁴¹ David Harvey, "Monument and Myth," *Annals of the Association of American Geographers* 69, no. 3 (1979): 362-381.

⁴² Traugott, 16.

⁴³ Eric Hazan, *The Invention of Paris: A History in Footsteps*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2011), 241.

⁴⁴ Cited in Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 36.

⁴⁵ Reissner, 67.

⁴⁶ Hazan, 241.

⁴⁷ Dennis Bos, "Building Barricades: The Political Transfer of a Contentious Roadblock", *European Review of History* vol. 12, no. 2 (2005): 345-365.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, 355.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, 359.

⁵⁰ Traugott, 221.

⁵¹ Traugott, 222-223.

⁵² Eric Hobsbawm, "Introduction, Inventing Traditions", *The Invention of Tradition* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983): 4-5.

⁵³ Pierre Nora, "Between Memory and History: *Les Lieux de Mémoire*," *Representations* no. 26 (Spring 1989): 12.

⁵⁴ *ibid.*

⁵⁵ *ibid.*, 13.

⁵⁶ *ibid.*

⁵⁷ René Char, *Leaves of Hypnos*, trans. Cid Corman (New York: Grossman, 1973), ¶62. This edition reads “Our heritage is not preceded by any testament”. If not providing her own translation, Arendt must have been quoting from the 1956 Routledge collection of Char’s work, *Hypnos Waking: Poems and Prose*, which I have not been able to access.

⁵⁸ *ibid*, ¶195. In this edition, the full fragment is: “If I escape, I know that I shall have to break with the aroma of these essential years, reject (not repress) silently utterly my treasure, reconduct myself to the very principle of the most indigent behavior as at the time when I sought myself without ever acceding to prowess, in a naked unsatisfaction, a hardly glimpsed knowledge and inquisitive humility.”

⁵⁹ Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future* (New York: Viking, 1961), 5.

⁶⁰ Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution* (New York: Penguin, 1965), 119.

⁶¹ For example, in *On Violence* (New York: Penguin, 1970), 49n17.

⁶² Arendt, *On Revolution*, 223.

⁶³ Yasmine El Rashidi, “Cairo, City in Waiting” in eds. Layla Al-Zubaidi, Matthew Cassel and Nemonie Craven Roderick, *Writing Revolution: The Voices from Tunis to Damascus* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 62.

⁶⁴ Hazal Halavut, “Gezi ya da Uzanıp Kendi Yanaklarından Öpmenin İhtimali”, *5harfliler*, 27 June 2013, <http://www.5harfliler.com/gezi-ya-da-uzanip-kendi-yanaklarindan-opmenin-ihimali/>; “Gezi’nin Kalan’ı”, *Amargi*, 28 September 2013, <http://www.amargidergi.com/yeni/?p=245>.

⁶⁵ Nicolas Dutent, “Slavoj Žižek: The eternal marriage between capitalism and democracy has ended”, *l'Humanité*, 2 September 2013, <http://www.humaniteinenglish.com/spip.php?article2332>.