The publisher gratefully acknowledges the generous support of the Ahmanson Foundation Humanities Endowment Fund of the University of California Press Foundation.

The Insurgent Barricade

Mark Traugott

UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS
Berkeley Los Angeles London
The Functions of the Barricade

One must never forget that the barricade, though a material element in any insurrectionary situation, plays above all a moral role. Instead of functioning as fortresses do in a time of war—as physical obstacles—barricades have served in every revolution simply as a way of halting the movement of troops, thus placing them in contact with the people.

Leon Trotsky

At first glance, it might appear that the function of barricades is straightforward and self-evident: they serve to protect those who build and defend them. A closer examination reveals, however, that barricades can have many purposes other than the provision of physical cover and that the diversity of their functions goes some ways toward explaining why insurgents have turned to them so consistently.

We have already observed barricades being used to challenge the legitimacy of the regime in power, delimit the lines of cleavage in society, and define the identity of insurgent groups. It should also be apparent that insurgents construct barricades in an attempt to influence the behavior of a variety of other groups including governmental authorities, social control forces (police and soldiers, for the most part), the general public, and even, on occasion, a disinterested audience of international observers. This chapter explores the many less obvious purposes that barricades can fulfill, stressing throughout how this tactic, far from remaining static and unchanging, has evolved over time in response to constantly shifting military, political, and cultural exigencies. For the sake of convenience, I have grouped the functions of barricades into three broad rubrics—practical, social, and symbolic—even though the boundaries among these categories are rarely hard and fast and any given barricade is likely to serve multiple objectives.

The Practical Functions of the Barricade

The manifest functions of the barricade—in other words, those that insurgents more or less consciously intend such structures to perform—are mainly pragmatic in nature. The rebels’ overall aim is to mitigate or overcome the disadvantages that irregular forces inevitably face in any confrontation with better-trained, better-equipped, and better-organized troops. This asymmetry of power between the two sides in a civil conflict often creates the appearance that barricades are essentially defensive. In reality, barricades can just as readily serve an offensive purpose (especially when used as a means of asserting the moral ascendancy of the insurgents’ cause), and they have been instrumental on many occasions in assuring the defeat of militarily superior forces. Our initial goal is therefore to summarize the practical functions of barricades without prejudging the question of their strategic potential.

To Provide Protective Cover

The barricade’s role as a refuge from attack presumably requires little elaboration. At least through the end of the nineteenth century, this simple physical barrier presented a formidable obstacle to assaults by foot soldiers. It was even better suited to countering the effectiveness of mounted troops, which might otherwise be employed with devastating results against urban crowds. And though only the most robust barricades could withstand the destructive force of cannon fire for long, a sturdily crafted example could often slow the progress of an artillery barrage enough to allow the rebels to beat an orderly retreat. This was an eventuality for which insurgents often prepared in advance by using pickaxes to open passages through the walls of adjacent buildings. Because, unlike soldiers, they wore no uniforms, they could hope to blend in with the noncombatant population as long as the struggle on the barricades, even when unsuccessful, gave them time to effect a well-ordered withdrawal.

The protective aura that barricades possessed had a psychological dimension that could be no less important. Maxime du Camp, who was equally unsympathetic to the June Days of 1848 and to the Paris Commune, remarked that in both conflicts, barricades increased the willingness of insurgent forces to fight by providing the reassurance that there existed a haven behind which they could retreat if driven back from their forward positions. His conclusion, far from being the fanciful speculation of a political commentator, was based on personal experience as a combatant in the June insurrection (on the side of order, to be sure) and is backed up by the testimony of no less an authority than Louis Rossel (1844-71), who briefly served as the Commune’s delegate at war. At his trial, Rossel acknowledged that the commission charged with building the colossal showcase barricades in the place de la Concorde and the place Vendôme had been very poorly organized; but this was of little consequence, he argued, since the true purpose of these projects had been “more to reassure the men on the ramparts than to serve as a veritable means of defense.”
To Bar Passage and Impede Circulation

Barricades may have promised a measure of security, real or illusory, but individual insurgents were not the only ones they were intended to shield. We saw in chapter 2 that from their earliest beginnings, barricades were a form of neighborhood defense, used to safeguard residents' families and property. Those who complained against Henri III during the First Day of the Barricades turned to such structures because they feared their revolt would become a pretext for criminals and the dispossessed to stir up an orgy of riot and pillage that would devastate their communities even as it discredited their cause. Like the custom of stretching the chains (of which they were an outgrowth), Parisian barricades began as a way of marking the limits of urban neighborhoods and preventing outsiders from intruding.

The result of encumbering the streets with barricades—and remember that in 1838, they could be found at thirty-yard intervals in some quarters—was to make it impossible for individuals to move freely about the city unless equipped with the secret password or a laissez-passer issued by the neighborhood militia. According to Poulain, the king's spy within the councils of the Paris Sixteen, an additional benefit that barricades conferred was to confine members of the nobility who might otherwise have rushed to the aid of the king, while at the same time leaving the League's own supporters free access to the Louvre and other sites where concentrations of royal forces could be attacked. The selective permeability of the barrier thus created has been one of the hallmarks of this tactic ever since supporters of the Catholic League seized control of Paris during the First Day of the Barricades, denying freedom of movement to the emissaries and lieutenants of Henri II, but allowing passage to Catherine de Medicis when she was sent on a mission that held promise of a compromise favorable to the duc de Guise.

The capacity of these barriers to make such fine distinctions remained one of the signal advantages associated with their use. In 1648, when "a flood of barricades" again washed over Paris, Anne of Austria gave orders to dissiper la canaille ("disperse the riffraff"). Unfortunately, her Swiss guards were powerless to comply, having been immobilized by barricades that Parisians "had set up with their innate skills as revolutionary engineers." Yet, when it suited their purpose, insurgents were quite prepared to grant passage. They immediately cleared the way for a delegation of the Paris parlement on a mission to implore the queen-regent to release Broussel and his fellow prisoners. Then, when the magistrates returned empty-handed, they were suddenly refused passage by members of the crowd for whom the liberation of their champion was the price of relaxing the stranglehold they held over the capital. President de Mesme and his colleagues were forced to repair to the nearby Palais-Royal to engage in further deliberations. In the end, this ploy on the part of popular forces was successful. The delegation of parlementaires eventually hammered out a conciliatory decla-
in anger to this attempt to salvage the Orléanist regime. Arriving before the porte Saint-Denis, where the Société des droits de l'homme had erected an awe-inspiring barricade that reached as high as the second story of adjoining houses, Barrot's party was met with a deadly silence. He reported that, although no one actively tried to prevent their passage, this chilly reception left the dignitaries in doubt as to whether they would be permitted to proceed to the Hôtel de Ville or, should they encounter resistance further along in their journey, once engaged upon that course, be allowed to retrace their steps. Upon reflection, the group decided to turn back then and there.

Although Barrot managed to put the best face on this setback, claiming that his principal goal had already been achieved, the inability of this newly appointed president of the King's Council to make his way through the barricaded city marked a significant turning point. As all would soon come to realize, events had proceeded beyond the point where a reshuffling of ministers could satisfy the militants. The situation inevitably deteriorated. Sporadic clashes soon gave way to fierce fighting and, within hours, the effort to form a new government was abandoned, leaving Louis-Philippe little choice but to abdicate.6 Of course, once the king had fled, members of the provisional government, chosen by acclamation of the boisterous Parisian crowd, had little difficulty making their way through the capital to the new seat of power in the Hôtel de Ville. The lesson of the February Days, as of the earlier examples, was that the physical constraints imposed by the barricade could be exploited with considerable subtlety so as to make the conduct of politics as usual all but impossible and thereby influence the course of political events.

To Isolate Social Control Forces and Disrupt Communications

From an early date, barricades were used to interdict access to rebellious neighborhoods. Insurgents may at times have sought to restrict the movements of the anarchic hoi polloi (whose propensity to loot and pillage was greatly feared) or their polar opposite, the vengeful aristocratic supporters of the constituted order; but nearly always, the primary targets remained police and troops. Barricades were meant to halt their movement and cut off their lines of supply; to hamper communications between barracks, armories, and storehouses; and to deprive the authorities of basic intelligence concerning the activities of the insurgents themselves. In this way, the military chain of command was severed, the army's logistical superiority compromised, and its repressive capacity diminished, all of which went some considerable way toward placing insurgents and repressors on a more equal footing.

To illustrate this effect, we can again turn to the earliest of major barricade events. In 1858, barricades were already being used to sequester plateaux of the Swiss Guard from one another, leaving them dispersed and vulnerable within the capital.8 "Paving stones were piled up from the streets, chains were stretched, and barricades were raised to isolate the royal troops and render them incapable of defending themselves against the musket volleys and clusters of paving stones thrown from the windows."72 In some quarters, where barricades appeared on every block, troops often became hemmed in on all sides. The immediate effect was to make them easy targets for marksmen firing from adjacent buildings as well as to projectiles that included, in addition to pavés, pots and pans and household furniture.13 Officers who had initially been contemptuous of the preparations made by a civilian rabble soon found themselves trapped, their communications disrupted, and their supplies of munitions and food intercepted.14 The historian A.-J. Meindre writes that "as the insurrection gained ground and the troops became dispersed across Paris, surrounded on all sides and abandoned to themselves without orders or provisions, they fell into a state of discouragement and cried out for mercy."73 Subsequent insurrections, down through the 1860s, followed a pattern that differed only in details. The goal of immobilizing social control forces became all the more crucial once the authorities began to rely on cavalry to quell civil unrest. E.-A. Iambert, to whom we owe the most detailed account of the 1832 insurrection in Paris, asserts that early nineteenth-century barricades were aimed specifically at mounted troops, which normally moved so quickly and which civilians found so terrifying.6 Frédéric Fayot, writing about the July Days, is even more categorically. He notes that obstructions made of paving stones, barrels, vehicles, furniture, and the trees that lined many Parisian boulevards were deliberately aimed at blocking the movements of horses (and therefore also horse-drawn artillery).87 So effective was this tactic that when Polignac, president of the King's Council, urged his military commanders to deploy columns of soldiers throughout the capital, he was told by General Vincent that even 100,000 men would be unable to cross Paris, given the state of exhaustion of the population and the defenses insurgents had built.17 Even when Major-General Marmont's soldiers succeeded in cutting their way through a series of barricades in the faubourg Saint-Antoine without apparent difficulty, the insurgents quickly repaired the damage done to their structures and were soon able to overpower and disarm the troops.19

This dynamic was by no means unique to Paris. The 1854 rebellion of Lyon silk weavers produced only a dozen or so substantial barricades in the workers' quarters of the Old Town, but General Buchet observed that as his soldiers proceeded from one to the next, they became increasingly dispersed and began taking fire from the rear.19 According to J.-B. Monfalcon, this was a self-conscious strategy on the part of insurgents, intended to isolate the troops and surround them on all sides.21 In still larger-scale events, the sheer number of barricades created the constant risk that military units would be cut off. An advancing column might encounter slight resistance, dismantling without hindrance barricades
that insurgents would quickly abandon. But as troops proceeded deeper into hostile territory, they were likely to see those structures resurrected in their wake, blocking their natural avenue of retreat and severing all contact with their central command. We have previously noted the use of this tactic during the journée of 4 Prairial, but Auguste Nougare dé de Payet observed that in the February Days of 1848, these same maneuvers managed to exhaust and exasperate the troops. General Perrot was so concerned about the morale of the units involved that he gave orders for an artillery salvo. Two cannonballs fired in the rue de l'Oseille put an instant end to resistance in that neighborhood, but the effect was strictly temporary. In the journal that he kept during that same conflict, the English ambassador, Lord Normanby, reflected on the blunders that had made the overthrow of Louis-Philippe possible. He underscored that "hardly one order ever arrived in time to all the troops crowded into Paris," and he attributed the gaps in his own narrative of events to "communications with various parts of Paris being cut off by numerous barricades."22

Pierre-Joseph Proudhon's analysis was similar. He credited the ascendancy of the February insurgents not to the success they had in face-to-face clashes but to the overall effect their tactics had on the troops' resolve:

The demoralization of the regime and the army were responsible [for the insurgents' easy victory in the February Days]. Contrary to what people imagine, the success of an insurrection doesn't depend on real combat. It results, above all (and even uniquely) on the rapidity and generality of the movement. To have this impact, the troops need to be occupied at a few points and made to chase after the uprising from one barricade to the next, even as barricades are being raised on all sides. Then, when the initial momentum has drawn everyone in and the city is all topsy-turvy, the army reflects and hesitates.24

*Elan*, or revolutionary momentum, can thus help counteract the superiority the military typically enjoys thanks to its mobility and firepower. But in this passage, Proudhon also hints at another dimension of barricade use, one that enters a realm where social interaction between insurgents and the general population—and perhaps most critically, between insurgents and social control forces—is as important as any exchange based on power and lead. Without downplaying the significance of the factors already enumerated, in the next section, I shall focus on the attempt to legitimate the insurgency in the eyes of the populace and on the struggle for the loyalty of gendarmes and soldiers, factors that often prove decisive.

**The Social Functions of the Barricade**

Alongside the manifest functions of barricades exist others that might be termed *latent* because they generally escape the conscious awareness of participants and analysts alike. In defining the concept of the barricade in chapter 1, I remarked that these structures create a singular *physical* space, adapted to the imperatives of armed combat. But this insurrectional setting also gives rise to a distinctive *social* space, along with a corresponding set of human relationships that can be even more pivotal in determining *how* civil conflicts unfold. Although the significance of this sociological dimension may pass unnoticed by most of those present, it remained the critical focal point for the most astute strategists of insurrection, from Blanqui to Lenin.

Lenin's comrade-in-arms Leon Trotsky, the twentieth century's preeminent theoretician of the barricade, may have gone too far in claiming that these structures should not even be thought of as physical barriers, but this was merely his way of underscoring the underappreciated fact that the social and not the military dimensions of barricade use were more likely to determine the outcome of a civil conflict. As he emphasized (see chapter epigraph), preoccupation with the practical aspects of barricade combat can be a distraction from their more consequential sociological properties. The sections that follow dissect these social functions and discuss the influence they exerted on the course and outcome of specific popular insurrections.

To Mobilize the Crowd and Identify New Recruits

Of the many ways insurgents can choose to declare their intention of contesting the status quo, building a barricade is surely among the most dramatic. But while this act of defiance may ostensibly be aimed at the powers that be, its true targets are often members of the general population—in particular those sympathetic to the insurgents' cause who have not yet taken sides. The spectacle of barricade construction is well calculated to arouse their curiosity and draw them in, easing along them a path that leads to full commitment.

Cauväudière provided a vivid description of the sights and sounds that abruptly jarred Parisians from their daily routines on February 23, 1848: the constant beating of the drums and ringing of the church bells; the rauous crowds gathered before the town hall; the frantic efforts of new arrivals to obtain information; the cadence of marching feet as National Guard companies traversed their home territory trying to muster the last of their members; and the verbal appeals directed at army units.25 Taken together, these are all elements of the phenomenon that students of collective action have sometimes referred to as "milling," in which customary rates of social interactions suddenly intensify even as the mix of excitement and apprehension puts everyone on high alert. In such circumstances, individuals' sense of who they are and what they are capable of becomes subject to redefinition. This openness to change, even to the point of modifying one's self-conception, is facilitated by barricades, which Charles de Freycinet, another participant in the February Days, called "places of assembly and chat."26
Sometimes, not even the tragic intervention of violent death was enough to disperse this atmosphere of heightened sociability. In May 1830, only a few hundred Parisians actually took up arms, but a much larger number of casual onlookers were mesmerized by the confrontation. At the National Guard’s first rifle volley, the barricade situated in the Marché des Innocents was abandoned by all of its defenders save the two struck dead on the spot.

But this did little to disperse the crowd that had gathered in the adjacent streets and filled the rue Saint-Honoré, the Halles, the Saint-Merri Cloister, the rues Saint-Denis and Saint-Martin, and that entire district of the capital, so densely inhabited and normally congested with street traffic. On the contrary, the rifle shots fired in the marché des Innocents only increased the crowd, due more to people’s curiosity than to any malicious intent.

Barricade combat clearly capitvated these bystanders, who were prepared to risk life and limb to witness events that some may have hoped and others feared would have momentous consequences.

The sharp-eyed Englishman Percy St. John, in Paris at the time of the February revolution, aply conveyed the heady atmosphere of the French capital in the earliest stages of unrest. Carriages were stopped, omnibuses overturned, and paving stones dug up as part of the preparations for barricade construction, a task that was periodically interrupted by cavalry charges and soldiers’ efforts to right the vehicles and repair the pavement. Yet the appearance of troops, far from causing people to flee, merely made them more inquisitive and rebellious. The crowd grew denser by the minute.

For militants, the physical assembly of such a throng was an opportunity not to be missed. Barricades had always been active sites of political proselytizing, and those engaged in barricade-building never hesitated to launch appeals to the uncommitted in any form they thought might work. Countess Éléonore de Boigne, whose Paris apartment looked directly across at the spot where a barricade in the rue du faubourg Saint-Honoré was erected in July 1830, relates one intriguing example. From this vantage point, she observed an individual arrive and briefly occupy himself with readjusting paving stones that had been disturbed by passersby. Soon, however, he broke into full-throated song—"in a very beautiful voice and with extremely clear pronunciation"—offering five couplets in honor of Napoléon II. Her description of the scene outside her window communicated both how barricades served as points of assembly and how they generated a sense of unity and anticipation:

This place had become a center. Neighbors gathered around the twenty-five or thirty men on guard. The latter did not budge from their post until they were relieved by their replacements, headed by a student from the École Polytechnique, and only after twenty-eight hours on duty, during which time folks from the neighborhood had made a point of bringing them food and drink.... The drama played out upon this tiny stage was being repeated at the fork in every road throughout the city and gives a fairly accurate idea of the general situation.

Thus, a barricade site drew not just would-be insurgents but also those still straddling the fence (and even the merely curious), for this was where they could make contact with their peers, hear the latest reports, and observe the state of preparations. Part public information booth, part recruitment station, this tiny node of insurrectionary activity invited them all to take part in innocuous preliminaries such as listening to speeches, singing songs, and signing petitions. For the most receptive among them, helping to build a barricade was one modest further step in the direction of declaring their loyalties and throwing in their lot with the insurgents. This was a process that gave concrete meaning to the colloquial expression "deciding on which side of the barricade one stands."

To Claim turf, challenge legitimacy, and build solidarity

In its earliest stages, a developing insurrection might appear to be ruled by an irreducible spontaneity, as participants milled about, sharing not just the scanty information that each possessed but also their sense of uncertainty and anxiety, thus fueling the process of rumor propagation. The fluidity of this situation would, however, rapidly give way to more routinized behaviors, among which the construction of barricades was one especially striking example. The ritualized character of many of the actions undertaken and the consistency with which they reappeared in successive insurrections remind us that we are dealing with components of a well-established repertoire of contention.

There existed a sequence of standard behaviors, many of them built around unmistakable aural and visual cues, that signaled that a barricade event was potentially in the offing. The tocsin—the loud, continuous ringing of church bells to declare a state of emergency—reached every corner of the city, alerting inhabitants that normal business should be suspended. Crowds soon circulated through the streets, loudly calling journeymen out of their workshops. Apprehensive merchants closed their shop doors, adding to the crush. If night had fallen and a clash with troops seemed imminent, insurgents might begin smashing street lamps in order to create a protective cover of darkness for their activities.

Amid these harbingers of unrest, drummers were dispatched, sounding the call that would muster local National Guard units, while knots of fascinated bystanders gathered on street corners to speculate as to which side the militia would take in the impending conflict.

Militants soon set off on errands of a more pragmatic nature, above all the search for weapons. The arms dealer Lepage, located in the vicinity of the Palais-Royal since the early eighteenth century, somehow survived being pillaged in
one Parisian uprising after another (see fig. 25). Insurgents who made off with the available stock of rifles and side arms occasionally took the time to draw up "requisition orders" or to pen handwritten notes promising to return the weapons once the battle had been won. Others foraged door-to-door in search of firearms, using a system of chalk symbols to mark residences that had already been searched in vain or that had willingly turned over their guns and ammunition.

In the expectation that barricade building would soon begin, insurgents went in search of levers and crowbars to pry up paving stones, and carts and wheelbarrows in case they needed to be transported to the site of construction. Their comrades scavenged for beams and wrought-iron railings, useful in binding loose materials together to make a solid, sedentary mass. Still others set out to commandeered wheeled vehicles of every variety. St. John mentions witnessing insurgents' seizure of two omnibuses, two small carriages, a wagon carrying stones and gravel, a brewer's dray, and a hackney cab on February 22, 1848.3

On that very same afternoon, Count Louis Molé, crossing the Champs-Elysées on his way home after having failed in his efforts to form a new ministry, made a narrow escape from barricade builders who tried to seize his coach.35 Heinrich Heine was not so lucky. On the following day, he was stranded in Paris when the carriage he had engaged to take him to the rue de l'Oursine was overturned to form a barricade.34

The impression of vehicles was a refinement of technique that gave rise to a fascinating set of secondary rituals. Reports from several nineteenth-century uprisings call attention to the deferential, even chivalrous, attitude of the rebels who demanded the surrender of private carriages. They wasted no time freeing the horses by removing the harness or simply cutting the traces, but they were generally respectful in their treatment of any occupants. Nougarede de Fayet, for example, notes the "remarkable politeness" with which they requested that passengers descend and, if women were present, the exaggerated courtesy they displayed, often offering assistance in negotiating the debris-strewn site of barricade construction.36 Only then would they turn back to the empty conveyance and proceed without fanfare to heave it on top of the growing pile.

The highly conventionalized character of these and other behaviors associated with barricade construction alerts us to the possibility that they had a significance that cannot be explained solely on the basis of practical utility. Irrespective of the setting in which they occur, rituals are used to mark the transition between two distinct statuses.27 In the conditions that obtain during barricade events, such ceremonial activities served to separate the state of everyday political existence, with its presumption of status or continuity, which most of us take to be "normal," from the insurrectionary situation, which, even in the context of nineteenth-century Paris, remained exceptional and was perceived to hold both the potential for sudden violence and the promise of meaningful change. In other words, the construction of barricades was an act that invited people to question the presumption of normalcy, including the legitimacy usually enjoyed by a duly constituted government, and to contest the authorities' right to use repressive measures to maintain their power. When used effectively, the barricade helped create the state that Trotsky called "dual sovereignty," in which competing visions of how society should be governed openly struggled for supremacy.

Of course, the building of barricades amounted to an attack on the regime's legitimacy in a far more immediate and threatening manner as well. The very appearance of such structures in an urban setting challenged the state's most fundamental prerogative: the monopoly it claimed over the use of force within its territory. Barricades were an effective mechanism for announcing insurgents' defiant intention of overthrowing the government. For as long as they remained standing, they cast doubt on the regime's ability to preserve order and therefore, by extension, on its fitness to rule. In the process, they inevitably affected the lives of ordinary citizens, recasting their activities, outlook, and attitudes.

Barricades increased the difficulty of navigating the urban landscape to the
point of severely dislocating habitual patterns of sociability. The hazards of moving about slowed commerce to a crawl and caused many workshops to close their doors, releasing those who usually toiled within from the constraints of their daily work schedule and flooding the streets with potential new recruits. The exhilaration of the novel situation into which they had suddenly been thrust rendered these individuals psychologically as well as physically more available. Those who readily joined in barricade construction were presented with a series of concrete actions requiring reciprocity and coordination with others. Indeed, contemporary images of the construction process are especially revealing of the form and function of barricades, as well as of the social relations they engendered (see, e.g., Fig. 26). These shared activities helped them to make an instant transition from strangers to comrades-in-arms, fostering a sense of mutual identification that was reinforced by their shared sense of risk and the knowledge that their own fate might depend on the resoluteness and commitment of those with whom they toiled. Undertaking the simplest tasks of barricade construction gave them a chance to try on the persona of insurgent and, at the same time, assess the trustworthiness of their peers.


To Gauge Public Sentiment and the Probability of Success

But it was not just the sentiments of those already taking part that mattered. The public’s receptiveness to the prospect of an insurrection was a critical consideration, on which barricade construction could also shed light. A particularly striking and well-documented mechanism for gauging the eagerness of the general population involved the barricade’s use as what I like to call an “insurrectionary toll booth.” The practice involved refusing passage to persons who had not declared allegiance to the uprising until they had made a labor contribution to the construction process. The assistance demanded might be token or substantial, depending on the circumstances. Failure to comply was likely to result in recriminations, threats, or physical mistreatment. Tocqueville, in his Recollections, evoked the experience of his friend and colleague Claude de Corelre at the start of the June Days:

Being impetuous to gather information about the state of the town as quickly as possible, Corelre and I decided to separate; he went one way and I the other; his excursion nearly turned out badly for him. He told me afterwards that, having first passed several half-constructed barricades without obstruction, he was halted at the last one: the workers building it, seeing a fine gentleman in a black suit with clean white linen quietly walking around the dirty streets by the Hôtel de Ville and stopping in front of them with a placid air of curiosity, decided to make some use of this suspicious onlooker. They asked him in the name of fraternity to help them in their work. Corelre was as brave as Caesar, but in the circumstances he rightly thought it best to yield without a fuss. So there he was leveraging up the pavement and putting the stones one on top of another as tidily as he could. His natural clumsiness and his wandering thoughts luckily came to his aid, and he was soon dismissed as a useless laborer.19

The conscription of a well-dressed, aristocratic member of the National Assembly may have been an exceptional case, but efforts to compel ordinary citizens to help with the physical labor of barricade building as the price of passage were notorious (see Fig. 27).20

By 1871, supporters of the Paris Commune had refined the procedure and made its observance nearly universal. A correspondent for the London Times explained that a barricade near the Buttes-Chaumont was able to spring up so quickly “by reason of the rule that is enforced that every passer must place a quickly “by reason of the rule that is enforced that every passer must place a stone.” On March 18, the agent in charge of the telegraph office in the La Villette district cited the problems his employees were having in moving about the city as a justification for a decision to suspend the delivery of messages: “The postman just returned from delivering three telegrams to Belleville. He was able to get through only with the greatest difficulty. There were barricades in every street.
He was obliged to carry paving stones before being allowed to pass and even then, they wanted to stop him and make him take up a rifle.  

Thanks to Agricol Perdiguier, we have a terse verbatim record of another such exchange. It took place on May 21, 1871, at the start of the Semaine Sanglante, when the worker-author, then sixty-five years of age, was importuned at a site of barricade construction. Three times he was asked to carry a paving stone or to fill a sack with earth, and three times he refused, going so far as to ask whether the sentry who had stopped him would have him sent to prison for saying no. The national guardsman thought it over, weakly replied with a simple “No, I guess not,” and allowed Perdiguier to be on his way.  

It is tempting to dismiss this custom as a clumsy but pragmatic method for enlisting many hands to make light work of the onerous task of barricade construction. Louis Rossel, whose skepticism toward the Commune’s reliance on barricades we have already encountered, actually considered it “harsh and inefficient” to coerce casual bystanders into contributing in this way. The persistence of this grassroots practice in the face of grave misgivings on the part of the Commune’s chief strategist is reason enough to ask whether it performed an important latent function, having little to do with military efficiency. Indeed, in light of the abject failure of the Barricade Commission’s experiment with the new monumental style of state-organized barricades, it might be argued that the blind faith that leaders of the Commune placed in the superiority of military planning over spontaneity was completely misplaced, causing them to overlook the critical social functions of the barricade.  

Fortunately, the illustrative cases cited here offer valuable clues to the less obvious functions that barricades fulfill. When Tocqueville’s friend Corelle decided that it was the better part of valor to accede to the February insurgen’s demands that he assist them, he presumably made a quick mental calculation of his odds of extracting himself from the situation unscathed should he choose to refuse. But, far more important to the decision whether to proceed with a potentially deadly firefight, the insurgents were making a simultaneous appraisal of the influence that their numbers and level of commitment were having on the behavior of even so unlikely a recruit as Corelle. The process of barricade construction afforded insurgents repeated opportunities to observe the impact that their appeals had on all segments of the population, ranging from those favorably disposed to those frankly hostile to their goals, but focusing mainly on those wavering in between. In nineteenth-century France, in the absence of opinion polls (or even a well-elaborated system of party politics), this amounted to a direct canvass of public sentiment, from which insurgents derived invaluable intelligence concerning the likelihood of succeeding in the enterprise upon which they were about to embark.  

How valid was the information thus obtained? In the case of Perdiguier’s refusal to comply when accosted by insurgents in May 1871, we know that it was perfectly indicative of his personal stance toward the Commune. Though he had been a staunch supporter of the Second Republic and quite active in municipal affairs during the siege of Paris, he became an outspoken critic of the Commune’s continued resistance to the Versailles government. Perdiguier’s reaction at the Barrière du Trône would not in itself have had an appreciable effect upon the insurgents with whom he interacted, but it did constitute a hint worthy of being integrated into insurgents’ ongoing calculations of their chances of success. Indeed, had the barricade builders of May 12, 1839, or June 13, 1849, paid more attention to the indifference of the public to their early mobilization efforts, they might have avoided those costly defeats.  

Even more important than individual reactions were the responses of organized entities like political clubs and neighborhood associations. For example, on 4 Prairial, 1795, militants in the rebellious faubourg Saint-Antoine gratefully received assistance with barricade construction from the nearby Section de l’Indissolubilité, and their joint efforts were enough to intimidate the lone column led by General Kilmaine. But this proved to be the only form of outside support the insurgents received, and it soon became apparent that the prognosis for a direct challenge to the authority of the National Convention was poor. When, therefore, a larger military force began to assemble at entry points around the circumference of the faubourg with the clear intention of disarming its population, resistance quickly crumbled. The construction of the first three barricades had, in a sense, done its job by revealing the tepid response of the general population and the hopelessness of the insurgent cause.
Details on how this process of calibrating the relative strength of the two camps was managed are typically lacking. Participants in failed uprisings remained silent for obvious reasons, while even in triumph, insurgents displayed a natural reluctance to acknowledge that they had ever been less than fully committed or confident of victory. But we do gain occasional insights into how carefully participants weighed the probabilities on which their lives depended. For example, in 1839, as Auguste Blanqui and Armand Barbès assembled the members of the clandestine Société des saisons for a preliminary assault on the Lépegu frères weapons shop, some of the more hesitant members demanded that their leaders redeem a previous pledge to make known the name of the important political personalities who were backing the revolt before they were asked to begin building barricades. It fell to Blanqui’s lieutenant, Martin Bernard, to respond to their request. He offered a few vague references, barren of details, regarding public figures whose names appeared on a proclamation that had been printed up for distribution by the insurgents. As he returned to his place on the ranks, Bernard surely realized that his performance had hardly satisfied his comrades’ curiosity, but his situation was delicate, for he knew what they did not: that the only signatures that had not been forged were those of Blanqui, Barbès, and himself. The warier members of the group, dissatisfied with the assurances offered, promptly deserted. Those who did not share their caution went on to take part in one of the most spectacularly unsuccessful revolts of the period.39

The June 1832 insurrection in Paris with which this book began offers a further glimpse of the convoluted calculus on which the decision to proceed often depended. When a council of republican notables gathered at the editorial offices of Le National, Armand Carrel remained the sole dissenter from the consensus that conditions for an uprising were ripe. He had just crossed Paris on horseback and was discouraged by what he had observed. When he asked insurgents in the street whether they had a regiment on their side, the answers they blurted out were, to his mind at least, anything but confidence-inspiring. “We have them all,” boasted one of his interlocutors; to which Carrel replied, “That’s too many. I just want one!” But when he recounted this exchange to a meeting of republican leaders, their revolutionary zeal prevented them from heeding his call for caution. A variant of Carrel’s dilemma cropped up in the same group’s dealings with Maréchal Bertrand Clausel. Though Carrel himself refused to take part in what he deemed a futile enterprise, he reluctantly agreed to meet with this veteran of the armies of the First Republic to try to convince him to throw his support behind the uprising. The exchange that took place between Clausel and the members of a follow-up delegation amounted to the elite equivalent of the same calculation in which barricade builders throughout the city were then engaged. Clausel hesitated to commit to joining the conspirators unless they could provide assurances of the participation of at least one regiment. To this, a spokesman for the insurgent leaders offered only this curt reply: “Pardon ma, Sir, but if, as we speak, we had a regiment under our orders, we wouldn’t need you!”40

Of course, the decision whether or not to take part in a budding rebellion—especially once it had reached the stage of active barricade construction—was rarely arrived at in isolation. The court-martial records of those arrested in June 1848 provided an occasional look at the lively back-and-forth surrounding the question of whether or not to take that fateful step. The case of Ferdinand de Charetton, Ambroise Jacquent, a captain in the 8th Legion of the Parisian National Guard, and the rue de Charenton; but when his opinion was ignored by the men in his company and (he himself was called a coward and threatened with physical harm), he tolerated rather than break ranks with his men.41

To be sure, the building of barricades was not always an irrevocable act. These structures were sometimes erected even though insurgents had no firm intention of holding them if they were attacked. Indeed, the rebels’ willingness to abandon their creations at the first appearance of troops suggests that their testing function could sometimes be more important than their role in military defense. Even during the February Days, an insurrection that carried the day more easily even than the August 1832 rebellion, the streets could then be seen helping to right them alongside soldiers who might otherwise have been captured by the author whose name is most closely associated with barricades. As Victor Hugo wrote: “There are accepted insurrections which are fought for. As it was, the attacks on the rue de Charenton; but when his opinion was ignored by the men in his company (he himself was called a coward and threatened with physical harm), he tolerated rather than break ranks with his men.41

In brief, barricade construction needs to be thought of as a process of give-and-take among multiple parties. Achieving tactical advantage was one critical take among multiple parties. Achieving tactical advantage was one critical advantage of the contending parties, but at the same time, information was being exchanged, attitudes shaped, consequences assessed, commitments made, but also between the branches of power and those in power—and thus allowed these various parties to gauge the costs and benefits of progressing to the stage of outright hostilities.
To Foster an Appropriate Level of Insurgent Organization

For barricades, as for any component of a well-established repertoire, a mixture of spontaneity and structure is the rule. This did not prevent commentators throughout the nineteenth century from hotly debating the role that organization should play in barricade events. Among those who advocated increased discipline and rationalization, Auguste Blanqui spoke from the greatest depth of practical experience. Looking back on decades of personal involvement in popular uprisings, he concluded that all had suffered from a debilitating lack of overall command structure and the virtual absence of coordination among isolated sites of combat. From his pragmatic perspective, “The army has just two great advantages over the people: the Chassepot rifle and organization. The latter especially is immense, irresistible.”

We are already familiar with the concurring opinion of Rossel, whose military training no doubt accounted for the grave misgivings he expressed regarding the improvised actions of irregular forces. Yet it was none other than Rossel’s successor as the Commune’s delegate at war who most vigorously advanced the case for “revolutionary war.” By this, Charles Delescluze meant reliance on the spontaneous and unorganized initiative of the people. In a proclamation issued on May 22, 1871, a day after the Versailles forces began their final assault on the capital, he framed the issue in these terms: “Enough of militarism! No more staff officers branded and gilded on every seam! Make way for the people, for the fighters with bare arms! . . . The people know nothing of clever maneuvers. But when they have rifles in their hands and cobblestones under their feet, they have no fear of all the strategists of the monarchial school.” And, if one were to judge solely on the basis of the disastrous performance of the ready-made edifices of the Commune’s Commission of Barricades, Delescluze’s point might seem well taken.

But it was not just strategists and theoreticians of civil unrest who weighed into this controversy. Eyewitness observers throughout the classic era of the barricade repeatedly clashed over the extent to which barricade events had—or should have—an organized character. Some saw clear evidence of coordination and planning in insurgents’ adoption of the very same tactics, their use of passwords, the speed with which barricades spread, or the fact that outbreaks occurred nearly simultaneously in disparate locations. Others, conversely, emphasized the shortage of arms and ammunition, the purely defensive posture adopted by strictly local mobilizations, and the near-total lack of widely recognized leaders as proof that advance preparation had been minimal or nonexistent.

It may seem entirely natural that such discrepant opinions have been expressed about the general category of barricade events, which includes some highly orchestrated affairs (like the Catholic League’s 1588 rebellion or the Société des saisons’ attempted coup of 1839) alongside others (like the 4th of Prairial, 1795, or the Parisian response to the coup of December 2, 1851) that were precipitated by events over which insurgents had no control and only after their leaders had been jailed or driven underground. It may therefore be useful to examine instances where observers arrived at contradictory assessments of one and the same event, where observers arrived at contradictory assessments of one and the same event, where observers arrived at contradictory assessments of one and the same event.
to greater credit and helping to justify the repression that swiftly followed. In the other, the aim was to minimize the scope and seriousness of the rebellion and make it look entirely spontaneous in the hope of diffusing responsibility and allowing those apprehended to escape judicial penalties. Despite these differences in perspective, we can briefly explore how the question of organization impinged on the use of barricades.

The Emergence of a Division of Labor. Because barricade events almost never involved a stark choice between organization and spontaneity but rather incorporated a measure of each, a corresponding ambiguity surrounded the question of the division of labor among participants. Jean-Claude Caron has rightly pointed out that barricades had the capacity temporarily to erase distinctions of age, gender, and class in the name of solidarity. This facility, most evident in the initial stages of mobilization, was, moreover, integral to the barricade’s power to transgress boundaries and catalyze change. But as an insurrectionary situation progressed from incipient protest to lethal conflict, the confusion that initially reigned behind the barricade gradually gave way to an informal hierarchical order—one that mirrored, however imperfectly, arrangements in society at large. The logic of the barricade began to restructure the social as well as the physical space that the insurgents sought to control.

To understand how the barricade reconfigured that social space, we need to look beyond the myths created by iconic representations of barricade combat. In his writings on the July Days of 1830, David Pinkney reminds us how misleading it could be to base our image of the revolutionary crowd on a literal reading of a work like Delacroix’s La Liberté guidant le peuple. The three principal figures that the artist placed atop a barricade—a classically draped female bearing the tricolor flag, flanked on one side by a boy brandishing pistols and on the other by a properly attired bourgeois, clutching his rifle—are idiographic elements used to portray the vulnerability, innocence, and unity of the people, and therefore the justice of their resort to revolution as a means of overthrowing their ruler. As for the “common folk”—a different and more restrictive definition of “the people”—they too are visible in the painting, but only as the fallen bodies over which the central trio lead the charge, or as the mass seen indistinctly following behind.

As Michael Marrinan has pointed out, contemporary artists were often influenced more by the folklore of the July revolution than by a concern for accurate historical depiction: “In these works, women and children, top-hatted bourgeois gentlemen and shirt-sleeved laborers, Napoleonic veterans and students of the Ecole Polytechnique fight side by side to defend the embodiment of their collective resistance: the barricade.” These observations call seriously into question whether artistic representations of barricade events can be relied upon for an accurate portrayal of what happened without confirmation from other types of sources.

Despite the distortions that such representations potentially introduce, can they at least be useful in suggesting the diversity of those who fought on the barricades and the roles they played? Certainly, when it comes to age, the factual record shows that participants ranged from the very young to the very old. Hugo’s gamin Gavroche had many real-life counterparts among the insurgents of the nineteenth century, and observers of an event like the June Days at times marveled at their number. Yet, despite abundant anecdotal testimony (including all the attention lavished on the relatively modest contingents of students who
fought in 1830 and 1848), systematic data—mainly casualty lists and compensation records—show that the proportion of adolescents who fought and died on the barricades was quite small. To judge by contemporary representations (e.g., figs. 26 and 28, or, for that matter, fig. 4, on page 19), they, like women, might have been a mainstay of the effort to build many a barricade; but once the fighting began, they were more likely to be relegated to support roles. Quite apart from any moral scruples that older insurgents may have felt, this was a practical necessity, since weapons were usually in such short supply in the rebel ranks that those available ended up being allocated to more experienced (or at least more mature) individuals. Youths were instead used as couriers or assigned such tasks as pouring lead into bullet molds, preparing wadding for cartridges, and reloading rifles (fig. 29). When, however, an insurgent was struck down by enemy fire, his rifle and his place on the barricade would, more likely than not, be taken by one of these adolescents.

As for the very old, they too were present, though their numbers were probably less significant than the influence they frequently exercised over other insur-

**Figure 29.** Behind the barricade. *Illustrated London News*, March 18, 1848, 184. Drawn by Paul Gavarni.
both 1830 and 1848 were paraded through the streets of Paris to help rouse the people's thirst for vengeance—there is ample evidence of their having served as active combatants and even leaders. As early as 1848, the wife of a parlementaire is said to have ordered the beating of the drums and given the signal to begin building barricades in the quarter Saint-Jacques. A contemporary collection of primary sources on the 1830 revolution not only mentions the part played by women and children in barricade construction but describes an incident in which women attacked a column of the Swiss Guard. Indeed, the first image to depict a female barricade combatant of which I am aware is a watercolor, painted by Louis-Philippe’s son François, celebrating a “barricade heroine” being carried in triumph in the aftermath of the July revolution. Perhaps the most celebrated image of this type portrayed an “Amazon” poised atop a Prague barricade in June 1848, holding a musket and dressed in a traditional Slavic costume. Still, female combatants remained the exception, and those that took part in fighting did so as individuals, at least through the middle of the nineteenth century. Though anecdotal information abounds, the best systematic sources confirm that in the aggregate, the presence of women among those arrested in the wake of nineteenth-century insurrections ranged from 1 to 4 percent. The all-female legion known as the Vésuviennes, founded soon after the fall of the Orléanist monarchy, may have demanded that the provisional government provide its members with arms and a role in the defense of the Republic, but I have been unable to find any evidence that their demand was met or that they actually took part in the June Days on either side. Thus, it was not until the “bloody week” of May 1871 that organized female detachments assumed a prominent role in combat. Through associations such as the Union des femmes and several local vigilance committees, Louise Michel, Nathalie le Mod, Elisabeth Dmitrieff, and others were able to coordinate the participation of women in constructing and defending barricades. Indeed, female combatants, who sometimes fought in National Guard uniform, were frequently said to be more uncompromising advocates of the insurgent cause than their male counterparts. Though there is abundant testimony concerning women’s active participation in this epic battle, the conditions of civil war—and, more particularly, the summary executions conducted by the Versailles forces after the fighting had ended—make it especially difficult to specify the extent of their involvement with precision. All that we can reasonably conclude is that female deaths in the struggle numbered in the hundreds (and possibly the thousands); and that if we include, along with combatants, those who cared for the wounded, helped erect barricades, or merely provided more passive forms of support and encouragement to the insurrection, as many as ten thousand women may have taken part in some way.

As for the question of class, the pattern is similar: on the one hand, a good deal of anecdotal information, some of it contradictory, indicating the wide range of social strata represented on the barricades. On the other hand, systematic data from the major events of 1830 and 1848 suggest a clear working-class preponderance in the aggregate. Thus, in providing circumstantial detail concerning the Parisian insurrection of 1832, Heine allowed himself the bold assertion that the lower classes were less well represented than had generally been assumed and that the insurgent ranks were filled primarily with thelikes of students, artists, and journalists. While it is conceivable that intellectuals and members of the middle classes may have been overrepresented in a highly circumscribed event like the one in question, the records that have survived from the large-scale occupations rather closely mirrored those of the general population. In mid-nineteenth-century Paris, this meant that the great majority of participants were skilled artisans, a generalization that is, at this point, far too well grounded in empirical research to need elaboration here. Still, it makes perfect sense that particular occupational specialties would be
on the Parisian insurrection of 1832 contended that "no individual belonging
to the respectable class [la classe honnête] of the population participated in the
construction of barricades," attributing the structures built in the rue Saint-
Martin instead to "men dressed in masons' work clothes." The autobiography of
Martin Nadaud, the most publicly recognizable mason of his generation, suggests
a different picture from the one painted by Heine. In the very same insurrection
of June 1832, Nadaud and his co-worker Luquet could be found in the thick
of barricade construction in the rue Saint-Martin. Indeed, Luquet was arrested
and briefly detained. Nadaud, by way of explaining the resurgence of Parisian
secret societies after the 1832 defeat, relates how he, Luquet and two other masons
from the Creuse were warmly applauded at a meeting of the Société des droits
de l'homme when they announced that in the event of a future insurrection,
they knew where to find crowbars, hammers, and planks with which to build
barricades.

Nadaud was hardly an isolated case. The most formidable of the barricades
raised during the Rouen insurrection of April 1848 was supervised by a plaster
worker named Groult, and the memoirs of Martial Sénisse intimate that it
was no more than that, he, a mason, was appointed to assist Guillard père, a
shoemaker, on the Commune's Barricade Commission. In each case, the man's
practical experience uniquely equipped him for the task at hand.

Of course, it was not the manual trades alone that could qualify an individual
for special responsibilities on the barricades. Any doctor, nurse, or medical student
associated with the insurgent cause was likely to end up in the ambulances
offering help to the wounded. Éléonore de Bologne attributed the authority
enjoyed by the students of the École Polytechnique in 1830 in part to the usefulness
of their training as military engineers when it came to the construction of
barricades. The advantages of other occupational specializations may have been
less immediately obvious. Richard Wagner recounts how Gottfried Semper,
designer of the Dresden opera house, turned up in the uniform of a sapper,
ready to do his part in that city's 1849 insurrection. He was so appalled at the
"highly faulty" manner in which the initial barricades had been built that, at
Wagner's urging, he addressed his criticisms and suggestions to the military
commission in charge of insurgent fortifications, which quickly put his expertise
good use. Paul Maritaine cites the example of a colleague named Dianoux, also
an architect, whose skills qualified him to oversee the rapid construction of
barricades in the place Père-Cé in May 1871.

More commonly, however, the special contributions of nonworkers on the
barricades were primarily political or organizational in nature. In the absence
of formal political parties, it was newspapers that often provided coherence to
opposition movements. The printing press enabled key leaders of the French
Revolution to wield influence over the insurrectionary crowd, most clearly per-

through the association of Desmoulins and Danton with the Vieux Cordelier,
Marat with the Ami du Peuple, and Hébert with the Père Duchesne. Though it
remained unusual to see such figures actually shouldering a rifle, the tradition
of direct participation was carried on by the likes of Auguste Fabre in 1830, Marc
Causilière in 1848, Alexandre Ledru-Rollin in 1849, and Henri Rochefort in
1870, all of whom were journalists as well as instigators of barricade events.

Both before the era of mass-circulation newspapers and later—notably in
periods when press censorship was especially severe—political organizations,
whether open or clandestine, fulfilled much the same function. In its facilitating
role, if not in its substantive political outlook, the Catholic League of 1588 was the
distant precursor of the Société des droits de l'homme in 1832 and 1834, and of
its successor, the Société des saisons, in 1839. From the ranks of such groups rose
the likes of Cosse-Brissac, Raspail, and Blanqui, men whose names are forever
linked to the history of the barricade. Less well known but often just as effective
were individuals who briefly emerged from obscurity to assume temporary leadership over an insurgent movement. Such a figure was Louis Pujol, a cadre
in the Parisian National Workshops, who gave a stirring speech on the eve of the
June Days that hardened the attitude of the crowd and set the rendezvous for
insurgents to gather the next morning, rifles in hand, to build barricades and
campaign government forces in armed struggle. Similarly, much of the credit for the success of both the July 1830 and February 1848 revolutions should arguably go
to the mostly anonymous National Guard commanders who brought their units
over to the insurgents.

The deference shown to men with military training was a special case of the
more general regard that barricade combatants displayed for those with relevant
skills and experience. Insurgents turned instinctively to veterans, even when the
latter's expertise had little to do with barricade construction or street warfare.
So it is not surprising to find a man named Jamod, who commanded the bar-
cracies in the quarter where he resided in 1830, being identified primarily as a
"former soldier" and only incidentally by his civilian trade (ironworker).
Fernand Rude, in his account of the 1831 silkworkers' uprising in Lyon, took
note of the major role played by veterans of Napoléon's armies, who were more
battle-hardened than the then-active troops sent against them. By drawing upon
these "Rhône volunteers" for its cadres, that insurrection reaped the immediate advantage of tried-and-true leadership. Just as opportunistic were participants
in the Paris revolt of 1832 who accepted a recent defector from the regular army's
63rd regiment, one Vigouroux, as commander of their last-ditch stand at the
Eglise Saint-Merri.

The same pattern persisted in 1848. An anonymous observer of the February
Days identified the two men issuing orders at the massive barricade in the faub-
bourg Montmartre as noncommissioned officers who had served in Algeria.
Transcripts of the courts martial held after the June Days included examples like Paul Saintard, who had been a member of the montagnards, or republican guards, organized by Cauvièrè following the February revolution but was caught up in a swirl of events leading to his June arrest as a chef de barricade in the Jardin des Plantes quarter."18 In fact, regard for military qualifications was often a more important credential for leadership roles than nationality. In 1848, the reputation of Poles as experts in insurrectionary combat helped win them positions of responsibility in German as well as French uprisings. And in May 1871, Le National reported that a former officer in Garibaldi’s army of liberation had been chosen to oversee the construction of barricades near the place de la Guillotière in Lyon."35

As the historian Charles Schmidt observes of the June Days, “Each barricade had its impromptu organizer,”37 Those thrust into positions of authority were assigned a variety or more or less grandiose titles by their peers (or assumed them on their own.) Cauvièrè spoke of summoning “a few chefs de barricades” to give them instructions during the February revolution.38 Charles Lelard, Heine’s American translator, did not hesitate to call himself “a captain of barricades” or to refer to those who helped him pry up paving stones in that same insurrection as “my followers.”39 A hat maker named Hibruit—another former republican guard, it would appear—was tried in absentia for his role in the June Days based largely on written appeals addressed to other insurgents in which he affected the title of commandant of the barricades in his neighborhood.40

In short, despite the sometimes facile assumption that anarchy and chaos reigned behind the barricades, the surviving records of nineteenth-century insurrections demonstrate that a semblance of order more or less quickly emerged. This included a simple division of labor and the germ of a command structure that granted authority on the basis of many of the same criteria used to structure everyday social life: age, gender, class, experience, and qualifications or merit (as those concepts were understood in the anomalous circumstances of an insurrectionary situation). But in the life-or-death struggle that could be expected to follow the construction of barricades, this might not be enough. In order to succeed, insurgents’ most essential task was to neutralize or turn to their own advantage the terrible destructive power arrayed against them.

To Fraternize with Soldiers and Police

Insurrectionary situations are characterized by a fundamental asymmetry, one that militates against the insurgent cause, but that barricades are well suited to help rectify. Supremacy in armament and equipment, complemented well by the discipline and hierarchical coordination that are the hallmarks of military organization, normally confer upon government troops an insuperable advantage over irregular forces, however highly motivated. This disparity has, of course, been widely remarked upon, and the conditions under which insurgents can overcome this handicap have been endlessly debated. In Les misérables, Victor Hugo observes that “these battles of one against one hundred must always end in the crushing of the rebels unless the spirit of revolution, spontaneously arising, casts its flaming sword in the balance.”44 While essentially correct, Hugo’s formulation seems imprecise or misleading in its estimation of what determines the outcome of such a struggle. On the one hand, insurgents do not always find themselves outnumbered, while numerical superiority is by no means indispensable, or to forces of order, which rely for victory on their tactical preeminence.45 On the other hand, when an insurrection does succeed, it is rarely because the populace, unaided, has been able to defeat the army in head-to-head combat. Trotsky, who spoke from ample personal experience, described the crucial role of the soldier as “the mainspring of insurrectionary events.”46 There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: “There is no doubt that the fate of every dynamic in far more pragmatic terms: """\n
Yet, as the history of nineteenth-century France makes clear, some insurrec-
secure their allegiance. The tactics at the disposal of army commanders range from persuasion to coercion. Their initial recourse is to appeal to soldiers’ sense of duty and patriotism as a way of shoring up morale. When necessary, they may also offer practical incentives like hazard pay, the promise of supplemental leaves, and rewards like the "liquor and sausages" to which Marx, in *The Eighteenth Brumaire*, attributed the loyalty of Louis-Napoléon Bonaparte’s troops in 1851. Still, the most reliable expedient of all is simply to confine the troops to their barracks whenever civil unrest threatens and rely on military sanctions to enforce a strict separation between soldiers and the population they are expected to keep in check.

The goal of insurgents was, of course, to break down that isolation, communicate directly with the troops, and sap their willingness to fight by putting a human face on the insurrection and its goals. To this end, militants would march through the city streets, particularly those where barracks were located, singing traditional airs, chanting slogans, and shouting out appeals like "Vive la Ligne!"—Long live the Army of the Ligne—in the hope of melting the resolve of regular army units. This, however, was far less effective than the sort of personal interaction that barricades made possible. Whenever troops came up against one of these structures, whether on routine patrol or because they had been ordered to attack some outpost of insurrection, the initial encounter almost invariably produced a moment when, though actual fighting had not yet begun, the two sides confronted one another at close quarters (see, e.g., fig. 2, on page 11).

The ensuing exchanges might be fleeting but were typically impassioned. In a scene depicted in a number of nineteenth-century images, insurgents at a barricade, their shirts torn open to bare their chests, defiantly challenge the troops: "Shoot them! If you dare!" (fig. 3). Such a confrontation could lead to either of two unthinkatable outcomes: the individual issuing the challenge might instantly be shot dead by soldiers not so different in age or social origin from himself; or, more rarely, military discipline might disintegrate because, in spite of all their training, the troops refused to fire. Whatever the denouement, such encounters occurred only because the construction of a barricade had brought the parties face to face, unleashing powerful social forces that neither side fully comprehended or controlled.

Traquin recounts an incident from the February Days that showed how the protagonists in such engagements sometimes found ways of conveying their sentiments with considerable subtlety even when few words were exchanged. Troops, arriving in the rue de l’Echaudé, where insurgents were actively preparing barricades, were greeted with cries of "Long live reform!" and "Long live the Army of the Ligne!" The soldiers, who had drawn up in formation just twenty-five yards in front of the principal barricade, proceeded to fire a volley into the air as a way of signaling their nonaggressive intent. The insurgents immediately responded in kind. Thunderous but harmless exchanges of gunfire, all aimed toward the sky, continued for fifteen minutes before the troops withdrew to further acclamations by the insurgents. The unique, contested social space created by the barricade had facilitated a form of interchange that, in this instance at least, ended without bloodshed, a conclusion in which every member of both camps had a vital interest. In the event, this incident provided an accurate portent of how the insurrection would play out over the next twenty-four hours.

The ultimate goal for insurgents was, of course, that genuine commingling of forces known as *fraternisation*, for they assumed, with some justice, that face-to-face contact and a frank sharing of perspectives would forge an indissoluble bond capable of overcoming any initial antagonism. They thus grasped intuitively that such exchanges offered their best—perhaps their only—chance of prevailing. Even a handful of defections among army units had the potential to break the back of the repression by causing military commanders to reassess the reliability of their troops and withdraw forces to prevent the spread of disaffection, thus shifting the momentum of the struggle. Savvy insurgents almost invariably directed their first entreaties to the National Guard, which, by virtue of being a citizens’ militia, could never be completely insulated from contact with the
people. The Guard was the natural bridge between the army and the civilian population, for members’ loyalties always hung in the balance. For leaders on both sides, the political orientation of this corps was considered the most reliable predictor of the outcome of civil conflict. The watchword of experienced observers of nineteenth-century unrest became “As goes the National Guard, so goes the insurrection.”

Henri Rochefort (who, two decades later, would play a key role in the barricade events of the late Second Empire) has provided us with a glimpse of how this process of intermingling operated during the February Days and of the assumptions, however naive, that insurgents made about its efficacy. Though he and his schoolmates treated much of this interlude as a lark that allowed them to escape the boredom of the classroom, there were sobering moments as well. Rochefort recounted how, as a member of a crowd of loiterers stationed on a sidewalk in the place du Panthéon, he was slow to recognize the implications of the arrival of a regiment of infantrymen that had taken up positions on the opposite side of the broad rue Soufflot:

I was in the front row, completely exposed, and I affected a tone full of indifference to ask one of the men who was distributing arms to our group: “Are those soldiers going to attack us?”

“Of course not,” he responded. “Those are friends. They have fraternized. Just yell ‘Long live the Army of the Line!’”

So we began shouting at the top of our lungs, “Long live the Army of the Line!” and all the more enthusiastically since, had they not fraternized, the adventure would doubtless have ended with a bloodbath that would have been terrible for our side, none of whom knew how to shoulder a rifle.

Such amiable exchanges between opposing forces might take place at the moment of first contact or even during full in the fighting. And whenever practical, it proved particularly effective for insurgents to be accompanied by women and children. Because they were seen as peace-loving and especially vulnerable, their presence cast the uprising in a softened light and perhaps called to the soldiers’ minds the families they had left at home. Eugène Pelletan relates how, during the February Days: “In the market quarter, women threw themselves into the ranks, haggled soldiers, offered them food, and cried out to them: ‘My children, don’t fire on our sons, our fathers, our husbands.’”

Victorine Brocher, perhaps describing that very same scene, tells how, even as market women were taking advantage of a break in the February hostilities to launch their appeals, workers and soldiers traded good-natured barbs. Her comments underscore the special moderating role played by those whose age or gender made them seem less threatening: “[Insurgents] gaily continued to put up their barricades, right before the eyes of the soldiers, singing all the while. A few

Parisian gamins laughingly called out to the officers: ‘Hey, don’t shoot without at least warning us! Yell “Look out!” first. Even the officers laughed at that.’ This sort of good-natured repartee, so striking in the midst of a mortal conflict, could have a marked reassuring effect, possible only because barricades were not just a site of combat but also a locus for social interaction.

The insurgents were not the only ones who recognized how damaging an impact on solidarity morale the presence of women and children could have. After the fall of Paris in 1871, General d’Aurelles de Paladine testified that the mingling of women and children among army soldiers was directly responsible for two regiments refusing to obey orders. Indeed, military commanders were sometimes prepared to advocate draconian measures aimed at protecting their troops from this pernicious influence. Maréchal Bugeaud, who had firsthand knowledge of the disastrous effect fraternization had produced in 1848, circulated the following directive to his subordinates when he assumed command over the Lyon garrison at the start of the following year:

Troops must never let themselves be approached by a column of rioters or by women and children. The infantry’s hesitation to fire can compromise it and cause it to be disarmed. The rioters must be ordered to stop at a distance of two hundred yards, and if they do not obey, firing should begin immediately. Women and children carry out the killing of officers; they are the avant-garde of the enemy and must be treated as such. Under no circumstances should anyone enter into communication or parley with the rioters; the commanding general alone has that right.

Of course, with or without their commanders’ permission, officers in the field often had no choice but to engage insurgents in conversation when barricades literally stood in the way of carrying out their mission. In the Paris revolt of June 1832, an infantry sergeant sought to gain passage for his detachment by promising the defenders of a barricade in the rue Aubry-le-Boucher that his soldiers would not fire. The insurgent leader rejected this request, vowing that the troops would be allowed to pass only after laying down their arms—and seismic the opportunity to urge the entire unit to cross over instead to the cause of the people. Sensing his soldiers’ reluctance to fight, the officer ordered an immediate withdrawal, a move that was greeted with cries of “Long live the Army of the Line!” from the ranks of the rebels. He may have been aware of other recent incidents in which detachments had displayed a singular lack of enthusiasm for battle, or he may simply have shared the perspective of one captain who responded to a similar situation just blocks away by scribbling this note to his battalion commander: “Sir, I beg you to accept my resignation … and to permit me to return home. Allow me to assure you of my obedience when we make war with foreigners.”

In brief, what I have tried to show with this scattering of examples is how barricades helped insurgents to surmount the inherent difficulties to which
Chorley and others have pointed. The activities surrounding their construction and defense generated or reinforced bonds of solidarity among the partisans of revolt; facilitated the search for new recruits; allowed an internal division of labor to emerge; identified effective leaders; and fostered a level of organization that irregular forces would otherwise have been unlikely to attain. They also helped participants gauge the extent of support or resistance among the general population, as well as the level of resolve within the army or police. In sum, barricades permitted insurgents to mobilize the crucial resources—material, social, and moral—without which they were destined to fail.

We earlier saw how barricades interrupted the field communications of military units and cut them off from the overarching command structure, thus depriving them of an essential benefit of military organization. Yet, even more important was the ability of barricades to break through the isolation of ordinary soldiers from the general population. Once fraternization had been initiated, the rebels could contest the government's view of the world before the only audience that truly mattered: the troops summoned to defend the social order that the insurgents sought to overthrow.

Barricades made possible this challenge to the government's legitimacy because they defined a social space in which insurgents, most of whom had never previously met, came together with a powerful sense of common purpose. They marked a break with everyday experience and private preoccupations. The sudden rise of these massive structures epitomized the way that the collective will could easily accomplish what individuals could never hope to bring about. By offering up an alternative frame of reference in which what had seemed impossible all at once appeared attainable, they helped generate an irresistible sense of exaltation and transcendence. And yet, as momentous as its sociological implications may be, the barricade's significance in the history of contention cannot be appreciated without also attending to its cultural dimension.

**PRACTICAL VERSUS SYMBOLIC FUNCTIONS OF THE BARRICADE**

"Rebellion in the old style, the street fight with barricade, which up to 1848 gave everywhere the final decision, was to a considerable extent obsolete [after the June Days], Friedrich Engels observes in his 1895 introduction to Karl Marx's *The Class Struggles in France.* He then goes on to point out, correctly, that it had always been exceptional for insurgents to defeat military forces and that, in those rare instances where they did prove victorious, success depended on "making the troops yield to moral influences." Still, his essential premise concerning the decline in the effectiveness of the barricade needs to be critically examined and refined. This section therefore begins with a review of the remarkable results that barricades have at times achieved—both before and after the target period that Engels had in mind—preliminary to arriving at an assessment of how they have developed over time. Only against this background can we appreciate one of the most striking anomalies in the history of the barricade: that, even as its practical utility diminished, its use, far from coming to an end, appeared, on the contrary, to flourish.

**On the Efficacy of Barricades**

For the period covered by this study, and as measured by their magnitude and outcome, the four best-known successful instances of barricade use—1588, 1648, 1830, and February 1848— all took place in France. Still, it is possible to cite many other events where the technique produced remarkable results, albeit on a smaller scale or in a losing cause. During the 1830 revolution in Brussels, for example, one barricade in the marche aux Porcs stymied the advance of the Dutch army despite the latter's clear superiority in both numbers and firepower. According to C. J. Mackintosh, a few dozen Belgians held out against 800 infantrymen and 300 cavalrymen, who also had four cannon at their disposal. The troops' inability to turn their artillery to account and their consequent defeat could perhaps be attributed to a lack of familiarity with this novel style of urban warfare, which subjected them to a hail of paving stones and scrap metal thrown down from windows and rooftops by "noncombatants." But that excuse could hardly explain the difficulties that the French army, well acquainted with barricade tactics, encountered in Lyon in 1831. Units dispatched to quell the November silk workers' rebellion were "halted at every turn by barricades against which even artillery proved powerless." Their experience demonstrated that, under favorable circumstances, these structures could stand up against even the most formidable weaponry at the military's disposal.

A year later, in the Paris insurrection of June 1832, a barricade in the rue Aubry-le-Boucher managed to resist a barrage from two cannon and multiple onslaughts by infantry. We have seen that Armand Carrel, one of the foremost leaders of the republican Lefi, had expressed his skepticism about the utility of barricades, claiming that the people's victory in 1830 had been a fluke. His arguments did nothing to shake the conviction of the actual combatants that, in the hands of a tight-knit band of conspirators, the technique would all but ensure victory. The resilience of the barricade they constructed was due, in no small part, to the fact that it was protected by the flanking fire of snipers posted at the windows of adjacent buildings. Though the attackers were eventually able to use an encircling movement to take the barricade from behind, their repeated failure to overcome it by frontal assault was seen as proof of the tactic's continued efficacy.

Engels might be expected to object that these examples all date from the hey-
day of the barricade in the first half of the nineteenth century, when the effectiveness of the technique was still intact. As for the similar incidents recorded during the insurrections of the middle years of the nineteenth century—compare, for instance, Hugo’s description of one June 1848 barricade, “defended by eighty men against ten thousand [that] held out for three days”—Engels would no doubt have dismissed them as literary hyperbole or ascribed insurgents’ success to the fact that counterinsurrectionary tactics had not yet been perfected.\textsuperscript{26} Yet, as late as the time of the Paris Commune, observers continued to pay tribute to the effectiveness of the barricades, sometimes in terms that might seem, at first glance, grossly exaggerated. Maxime du Camp, generally no friend to insurgent causes, remarked upon an 1871 barricade in the rue de Chateaudun where five defenders stymied the advance of troops for an entire day. He mentioned another where a single individual, equipped with six rifles, fooled a squadron of soldiers into believing that his barricade, located at an intersection of the boulevard des Capucines, was so heavily defended that they wasted several hours trying to reduce it with an artillery barrage. When his ammunition eventually ran out, this lone insurgent quietly slipped away. It was only after a bystander informed the skeptical attackers that the barricade had in fact been abandoned that it was finally seized.\textsuperscript{27} P.-O. Lissagaray, every bit as fervent a partisan of the Commune as du Camp was a detractor, took note of a barricade manned by 100 insurgents that held out for two crucial hours, slowing the progress of the Versailles forces despite the deployment of two regiments of troops and concentrated artillery fire.\textsuperscript{28}

\textit{Technical Adaptations}

While it would be possible to multiply, almost at will, the number of anecdotes purporting to demonstrate the tactical advantages that the barricade could, well into the 1880s, confer upon insurgent forces, it would also be misleading. Despite the prodigious results achieved in special circumstances and a couple of resounding victories in large-scale uprisings, the reality was that the barricade’s utility steadily diminished, from a strictly military perspective, as the century wore on. The introduction of the railroad and telegraph in the 1840s may have accelerated the steep decline in the fortunes of insurrectionary initiatives, virtually none of which succeeded in the second half of the nineteenth century, but changes in the military equation had already made their influence felt as early as 1850.

The most obvious of those changes involved the army’s willingness to employ artillery to put down domestic uprisings. With rare exceptions, these weapons had previously been reserved for use in foreign wars.\textsuperscript{29} That restraint had clearly been lifted by the time of the July revolution in Paris, during which Charles X’s commanders showed little compunction about obliterating barricades with their cannon. Though this proved to be of little avail, it seems to have opened the
measures aimed at blunting the army's superior firepower. These included, for example, the use of multiple barricades, sometimes separated by only fifty or a hundred yards, at the side of which narrow passages were left open. This arrangement allowed the defenders of a forward position to quickly retreat behind a second line of defense once concentrated cannon fire made their initial position untenable. In some cases, insurgents anticipated the effects of artillery barrages by building their barricades in the shape of a V, the point of which was aimed squarely at the position from which the cannonade was expected to originate. The force of the cannonballs thus caused the prow of the barricade to collapse back upon itself, absorbing the blow, compressing the materials from which the barricade was made even more tightly, and preserving the structure's integrity. We have previously noted that insurgents frequently sought out the iron grillwork that enclosed public parks, adorned outdoor monuments, or embellished the balconies of residential buildings, using it to consolidate the heaps of paving stones in which it was embedded. The rebels also learned that the most formidable barricades were those firmly tied into adjoining buildings, allowing them to add structural strength even as they exploited the opportunity to establish covering fire from overlooking windows.

Still, for all the ingenuity that insurgents displayed in making these adjustments, most astute observers had concluded that the usefulness of the barricade had seriously waned by the time of the Paris Commune. Rossel and Guillard, whose opinions as leaders of the revolt against the government carried considerable weight, certainly had little faith in the military effectiveness of improvised barricades. As for Blanqui—who, even at his advanced age, would doubtless have been in the thick of the fighting had he not, with characteristically bad timing, been arrested just a week before the insurrection that established the Paris Commune—he had become convinced of the inadequacies of traditional barricades much earlier in the century. He argued that extraordinary popular elan had largely been responsible for the triumph of the revolution of 1830 (fig. 33), and that the February revolution had succeeded in 1848 only because of Louis-Philippe's passivity. Blanqui considered the June Days a more revealing test, and like most of the smaller midcentury events in which he participated, that insurgency had been an unambiguous failure.28

Engels's assessment of the barricade's efficacy actually varied a good deal over time. In the informal division of labor he and Marx had worked out, he had assumed primary responsibility for military strategy. He therefore provided frequent commentary on insurrectionary tactics. As the articles published in the Neue Rheinische Zeitung during the summer of 1848 make clear, Engels was a zealous proponent of barricade combat prior to the June Days. He even briefly served as "inspector of barricades" in the Elberfeld insurrection of May 1849.29 His enthusiasm at this early stage in his career as an insurrectionary leader might
seem exaggerated, given the mixed results achieved by the barricade events of that period. The pessimistic view he later developed—as expressed in the passage cited at the beginning of this section, written only a few months before his death—initially appeared better grounded. If ripe reflection on almost a half century of intervening history had persuaded Engels that the golden era of barricades had passed, it was for reasons that anticipated the subsequent analyses of Trotsky and Chorley.140

Referring specifically to Berlin, Engels mentions the "long, straight, broad streets" that urban renewal projects had introduced to European cities as one factor that had reinforced the advantage held by the armed forces.141 This argument had originally been made with reference to the rebuilding of Paris under the Second Empire, resulting in the replacement of the tortuous alleyways of the central districts with expansive thoroughfares. This was thought to have facilitated the rapid deployment of troops and their ability to train artillery fire on barricades from a safe distance, with devastating results. A similar controversy has swirled around the substitution of macadam for the more traditional paving stones, so much favored by barricade builders.142 However, there seems to be little warrant for the assumption that either Baron Haussmann or Napoléon III instituted this change with the intention of curbing Parisians' penchant for rebellion.143 As figure 34 shows, barricades allowed insurgents to assert control even in broad boulevards and open public squares before the great reconstruction projects of the 1850s and 1860s, and they continued to do so after. Though the widening of the main axes may have aided the troops' mobility and made the use of artillery more effective, the principal impact that Haussmann's grands travaux had on the incidence of insurrection resulted from the displacement of a large share of the rebellious working-class population from the warrens of the inner city to the faubourgs at its periphery.144

**STRATEGIC ADJUSTMENTS**

As we have already seen, a repertoire of contention evolves through reciprocal attempts at innovation that are part of the continual tug-of-war between social control forces and insurgents. In the case of the barricade, it might be argued, nineteenth-century military authorities shared fully in helping along the evolution of the barricade. Among their most important contributions was to come up with numerous proposals for countering the threat of barricade combat, all of which could be reduced, in the final analysis, to variations on just two basic plans which were tried out with widely inconsistent results. The first and arguably more intuitive approach was to dispatch troops to any reported hotspot at the first sign that insurgents had begun barricade construction in order to nip the incipient uprising in the bud and discourage broader mobilization. The alternative was to allow barricades to be built and the insulation to develop to the point where distinct centers emerged. These could then be crushed with overwhelming force without ever incurring the risk that small individual detachments of troops would be cut off, demoralized, and either disarmed or won over by insurgents.

In commenting on the debate between the advocates of those strategies of repression, most observers have correctly dated the French army's definitive choice of the second approach from the June Days of 1848. They rarely acknowledge, however, that General Louis Eugène Cavaignac's deliberate withholding of force was actually nothing new. It had already been tried in 1827, when the forces of oppression were actually nothing new. It had already been tried in 1827, when the army had restricted the police, the uprising to gain a firm foothold while they prepared the troops necessary for a coordinated attack to overwhelm. This resulted in a convincing victory over the insurgents, even though it also gave rise to accusations that of the highest-ranking officials had actually been complicit in allowing, if not encouraging or even organizing, the disturbances. Well-informed observers like Rémiust considered these criticisms misguided (or even cynically motivated by the opposition's desire to gain political advantage) but recognized the real damage they did to the monarchy's credibility.145 This may help explain why the opposite tack was taken in 1830, and again in February of 1848, with equally disastrous consequences. Chateaubriand charac...
terized the strategy employed by Marechal Auguste Wiese de Marmont during the July Days as one better suited to a force of 30,000 soldiers than the relative handful over which he actually disposed. Though the initial strike force was never bested in actual fighting, the detachments it left behind to maintain communications with headquarters were too small and too isolated to withstand insurgents’ efforts to frustrate. Similarly, in 1848, the decision to confront insurgents as soon as barricade construction began left troops dispersed over a great many sites all across the capital, where they became the immediate target of efforts to win them over.\footnote{\cite{foot1}}

The defection of even a small number of units often had a disproportionate and contrary impact on the two sides. Social control forces became deeply disheartened even as insurgents experienced sudden jubilation. Both reactions were completely disconnected from any material effect that such small shifts could have had on the military situation. Cavaignac was an attentive student of this dynamic, and his strategy as supreme commander during the June Days reflected an analysis consciously worked out in reaction to the mistakes of his predecessors. When members of the Assembly demanded to know why he had not prevented the construction of barricades in Paris on June 23, he gave this curt reply: “Do you think I am here to defend Parisians and their National Guard? Let them defend their city and their businesses themselves! I am not going to disperse my troops. I remember 1830 and I remember last February. If just one of my companies is disarmed, I’ll blow my brains out. I refuse to live with that dishonor!”\footnote{\cite{foot2}}

The vehemence of this reaction could perhaps be explained by the blow to General Cavaignac’s military pride that even a single incident of this kind would represent, but it seems more likely to have been motivated by the specter of the far greater disgrace of having overseen the army’s defeat by shabby groups of irregulars. History had shown that demoralization and wholesale defections could be set in motion by seemingly innocent acts of fraternization, and Cavaignac had drawn the obvious conclusion from France’s two nineteenth-century revolutions: barricade fighting against civilian insurgents was a highly specialized form of urban warfare that required a specially adapted response. His success during the June Days depended on acknowledging and countering the unique potential of this distinctive insurgent tactic.

**ON THE PERSISTENCE OF BARRICADES**

We have seen that the effectiveness of barricade combat has been tied to changes in repressive strategies, advances in military technology, improvements in transport and communications, and even transformations of the physical layout and demographic makeup of nineteenth-century cities. The odds of an insurgent victory, hardly encouraging during the first half of the nineteenth century, generally became more remote after 1848. From the purely pragmatic viewpoint that Engels adopted in 1895, “the spell of the barricade was broken.”\footnote{\cite{foot3}} Yet miraculously, barricades did not disappear. To understand their persistence will require that we look beyond purely pragmatic considerations and consider the more abstract functions that barricades also perform.

The wonder is, after all, that barricades—unlike the food riot, the charivari (i.e., serenading the unpopular with “rough music”), and other early-modern routines of contention with which they once co-existed—did not vanish, once their utility as a tactic of physical confrontation had waned. Though the frenzy of barricade construction that occurred in 1848–49 would never be matched for sheer intensity, the technique not only outlasted the “age of revolution” but somehow managed to broaden its appeal over the course of the twentieth century, with insurgents on every inhabited continent adapting it to their own struggles. In the European context, this was achieved despite the tactic’s gradual loss of efficacy and the erosion of the legitimacy of popular direct action once the rise of political parties, the adoption of universal suffrage, and the elaboration of reformist modes of political participation gave the advocates of social change alternative avenues to pursue.\footnote{\cite{foot4}} The counterweight to these attenuating forces was the emergence of the barricade’s role as symbol.

It may initially seem curious that the same period that saw a sharp decline in the barricade’s military value witnessed the expansion of its figurative significance, but E.J. Hobsbawm has hinted at the reasons why the two developments should be seen as systematically rather than coincidentally related. In explaining how traditions originate, he postulated that the practical utility of an object or practice acts as a fetter or constraint which has to be relaxed or eliminated in order for the object to be appropriated for symbolic or ritual purposes. By way of example, he mentions the spurs that are a conspicuous element of the dress uniforms of British cavalry officers, noting that they acquired symbolic significance only once they had become purely ornamental, thanks to the corps’ shift from horses to mechanized vehicles as a mode of transport.\footnote{\cite{foot5}} In much the same way, as barricades began to relinquish their value as a method of combat, their resonance as symbols of an insurrectionary tradition became more profound. Of course, the analogy goes too far if it seems to suggest that in the process, the barricade was relegated to the status of a useless relic of merely antiquarian interest, for it continued to perform a vital political and moral role. For Bronislaw Baczko, the purpose of a symbol is “not just to make distinctions but also to introduce values and model conduct, both individual and collective.”\footnote{\cite{foot6}} Symbols are a way of tapping into the “social imagination,” an amalgam of hopes, fears, memories, and expectations that together constitute a collective framework both for the interpretation of personal experience and, even more significantly, for the
valorization of the past. In this view, the transformation of the barricade from a utilitarian instrument into a "collective memory" may even have enhanced its ability to mobilize individuals and given it the power to galvanize otherwise inchoate groups into concerted action.

Prototypical acts such as the defiant display of a flag or banner, the singing of the "Marseillaise," or the planting of a liberty tree, often closely associated with barricade events, serve to illustrate the dynamics of this process. Another was the adoption of distinctive headgear—including the use of ribbons, badges, and insignia—as a way of signaling a person's political identification. The brilliant blue and red caps worn by Etienne Marcel's followers in the fourteenth century, much like the Phrygian bonnets of the French Revolution, may have offered the practical benefit of allowing fellow rebels to recognize one another at a distance, but their more abstract purpose was to express (and to elicit) commitment to a cause. Though their meaning could be read by contemporaries without great difficulty, such forms of dress both conveyed a message of considerable subtlety and complexity and yet retained the ability to adapt to changing circumstances. Thus, at the start of the 1789 Revolution, the tricolor cockade came to signify the movement in the capital to reform the French monarchy by marrying royal colors (again, the blue and red of Paris) to the white of the Bourbon dynasty. For the revolutionaries, this new motif symbolized "the nation, united and indivisible," a meaning it was somehow able to sustain through abrupt changes of government and counterrevolutionary challenges, from the final years of the Old Regime through the height of the Terror, to Napoléon's empire and beyond.153

The barricade itself underwent a similar evolution. It first rose to prominence as a form of neighborhood defense in the essentially local revolts of 1789 and 1790 and was long thought of as a largely Parisian idiosyncrasy. The nationalizations of the 1789 and 1830 revolutions and the gradual spread of barricade events to more and more provincial cities as the nineteenth century advanced helped to redefine them as a broadly French phenomenon. It was only with the 1848 and 1871 insurrections and their echoes abroad that the barricade acquired an international overtone such that, from midcentury on, the mere mention or simple representation of a barricade could be used to evoke the vision (or specter) of revolutionary change for Europeans and non-Europeans alike. This progression thus involved a shift in what the barricade signified: from a physical site where political issues and outcomes were decided, it became an abstract symbol of the struggle itself.

The French historian Pierre Nora has popularized the concept of lieux de mémoire, places that have the capacity to summon powerful collective memories. Buildings, 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. Their role in maintaining the continuity among successive insurrectionary episodes is suggested by the observation, frequently made by contemporary witnesses, that barricades would reappear in identical locations within a Paris neighborhood in one nineteenth-century uprising after another.

And even then, the transformation of the barricade from a tactic that conferred a physical advantage in a situation of armed conflict into the preeminent symbol of revolutionary struggle was not the end point in its evolution. In time it would achieve iconic status, implying a still higher level of abstraction in which memories and associations had been so tightly compacted that the mere mention of the barricade or the display of its silhouette functioned as a surrogate for the revolutionary tradition as a whole.155 This recasting of the meaning of the barricade worked in the realm of political rhetoric and iconography a bit like a literary synecdoche, in which a part (the barricade) is taken to represent the whole (revolution). The image of the barricade was the nonverbal equivalent of the revolutionary slogans that laconically stated the insurgent program and perspective, such as "Bread or Lead!" or "Live Working or Die Fighting!" This radical compression of meaning is what allows the icon to cut through a tightly knotted cluster of contested social issues. Much like the actual construction of barricades, their iconic representation helped redefine ongoing political conflict as having reached the stage where it constituted an "insurrectionary situation," capable of resolution only through popular direct action. It thus translated a complex reality into a readily comprehended and easily communicated story. This process inevitably entailed the sort of simplification and exaggeration already noted in connection with the origin myth of the first barricades or the iconography of Delacroix's La Liberté guidant le peuple. It achieved the desired result through a mixture of selective and distorted remembering, supplemented as necessary by a bit of creative reconstruction or outright fabrication of the past.

Radical compression also made it easier to freight that message with intense, emotional overtones to which insurgents, despite personal differences in outlook, responded with a minimum of reflection or hesitation. Their concept of the barricade transcended the physical structure they had put before them because it also embraced those remembered from earlier events, however widely dispersed in time or space. As diverse or even contradictory as their individual values and objectives might be, they invested the barricade with what they took to be a common meaning, thus reinforcing their sense of participating in something much larger than themselves. The iconic barricade operated as a trigger for collective memories whose very indeterminacy sustained the illusion of universality.

We can now better appreciate why barricades (like emblems and insignia, cries and slogans, songs and poems—in short, symbols and catchphrases of all kinds that involve this sort of short-circuiting to varying degrees) can perform...
the solidarity building and legitimating functions noted earlier. Particularly in a population that shares a strong sense of common destiny, they engender a powerful identification with those who faced the same difficult choices in the past. Along with the sights, the sounds, and the memories (personal or vicarious) that accompanied the construction process, the cry "To the barricades!" unified those caught up in an insurrectionary situation by inviting them to situate themselves within a lineage of revolutionary activity and to declare in a very literal sense on which side of the barricades they stood. Barricades (like other elements of a society's repertoire of collective action) served the purpose of overcoming their natural reluctance to pass from the stage of vague predisposition to a state of actual mobilization. Specifying how they accomplished that feat is the focus of the concluding chapter of this study.

8

Barricades and the Culture of Revolution

Hegel says somewhere that all great historic facts and personages recur twice. He forgot to add: 'Once as tragedy, and again as farce.' Causidiké for Danton, Louis Blanc for Robespierre, the 'Mountain' of 1848–51 for the 'Mountain' of 1793–95, the Nephew for the Uncle. The identical caricature marks also the conditions under which the second edition of the eighteenth Brumaire is issued.

KARL MARX, THE EIGHTEENTH BRUMAIRe OF LOUIS BONAPARTE

The previous chapter hinted at the visibility and symbolic power that the nineteenth-century barricade derived from its association with a "revolutionary tradition." That last phrase may, at first glance, appear to have something of the quality of an oxymoron, since it joins two concepts that are commonly presumed to be polar opposites. On reflection, however, it is evident that even the most radical attempts to do away with every last vestige of the former status quo must confront the need to provide a social movement organization that can coordinate supporters' activities and give structure to their collective aspirations, since without such a framework, the chances of the new order prevailing remain remote. Moreover, to the extent that these initial challenges are surmounted and the revolution triumphs, the desire to make its success lasting and meaningful logically implies an effort to reconstitute society by coming up with novel institutional forms capable of replacing the old. In the process, revolutionaries assume roles, formulate policies, and devise alternative societal arrangements that respond to the demands of the immediate situation. They may perceive these expedients as being utterly without precedent, but in reality, the problems they are intended to address are timeless, and the "innovations" they introduce therefore inevitably share much in common with those championed by the system builders of earlier eras. Thus, even when the protagonists claim to be marking a sharp break with all that has gone before, they frequently appear to be reenacting rituals borrowed from the past.