Constructing barricades and creating borderline events

Dorita Hannah

To cite this article: Dorita Hannah (2015) Constructing barricades and creating borderline events, Theatre and Performance Design, 1:1-2, 126-143, DOI: 10.1080/23322551.2015.1032501

To link to this article: http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/23322551.2015.1032501

Published online: 04 Jun 2015.

Submit your article to this journal

Article views: 112

View related articles

View Crossmark data
Constructing barricades and creating borderline events

Dorita Hannah

Professor of Interdisciplinary Architecture, Art & Design, University of Tasmania, Australia, Adjunct Professor of Stage & Space, Aalto University, Finland

This article articulates how an expanded conception of scenography is capable of critiquing our built environments in order to disclose architecture’s role in reinforcing power structures, socially sanctioned behaviours and geopolitical cartographies. As an interdisciplinary practice, travelling between discursive fields, performance design casts a performance studies lens on scenography, thereby broadening its scope and capability of confronting and reimagining our lived reality, especially within a globalized condition of proliferating borders that reduce, control and deny mobility for bodies and information. By adopting a ‘broad spectrum approach’ we are able to recognize that those constructing our world – the architects, planners, engineers, builders, technicians, manufacturers, suppliers and politicians – tend to be complicit in spatially suppressing our motility, flexibility and expressivity. Through such spatial performativity, the built environment reinforces a contemporary barricade mentality, curtailing our freedom of movement and expression in the very name of ‘freedom’. And yet the borderline – more than a simple dividing line between us/here and them/there – thickens into a complex geographical and metaphysical terrain that inhabits us just as we inhabit it. Scrutinizing our contemporary borderline condition, alongside constructed and deconstructed barricades created by artists, designers and architects, unearths a critique of how our public performances are limited and controlled. Positing the barricade as an architectural and social formation allows us to consider its shifting political implications seen in public artworks that are aligned with Rubió Ignaci Solá-Morales’ concept of ‘weak architecture’ as a productively scenographic approach to spatial analysis and its mediation.

Every performance enacts a theory, and every theory performs in the public square.
(Diana Taylor, The Archive and the Repertoire)

On the borderline

The journey of my article commences and concludes with the West Bank Wall, an object both mobile and immovable, which represents what Mike Davis calls ‘the interlocking system of fortification, surveillance, armed patrol and incarceration’ that ‘girds half the earth’ (Davis 2005, 88). Such border control has become an essential characteristic of neoliberal global capitalism, paradoxically claiming radical mobility through the collapse of cultural, monetary and geographical boundaries, yet producing an age of barriers, barricades and borderlines, from the visceral to the
virtual. However, the ensuing crossings through discursive territories – navigating disciplinary fields and moving between hemispheres – begin with the image of a man walking the line.

In 2005 Francis Alÿs traversed Jerusalem carrying a leaky can of green paint that dribbled a continuous line, seemingly meandering across the 24 kilometres of ground he covered – traversing roads, buildings, backyards and historic sites. But the Green Line of this Mexico-based Belgian artist is an artwork that deliberately follows Moshe Dayan’s ‘armistice border’ indicated on a map subsequent to the 1948 Arab-Israeli war: an abstract boundary outlined in green crayon, replaced by another constructed of concrete – an other border in an other(‘s) place. Alÿs’s profoundly fluid line has since been obliterated: worn and washed away by weather, feet and car tyres. The artist subtitled his durational performance (Sometimes doing something poetic can become political and sometimes doing something political can become poetic). As an architect-turned-artist, Alÿs enquires into the role poetic acts play in highly charged political situations, while acknowledging that the relation between poetics and politics is always contingent. Eric Herschthal (2011) wrote that the Jerusalem walk ‘achieved that rare artistic feat: chastising the political status quo without becoming either cynical or simplistic’. Like Gordon Matta-Clarke, another architecturally educated artist, Alÿs turns to the profound effect of small but radical acts that critique monolithic manoeuvres in public space, and the resulting performances of these artist-architects are powerfully resonant. Tapping into the politics of the event, they constitute what Ignaci Solá-Morales referred to as ‘weak architecture’, a concept I intend to unfold throughout this article, with particular reference to the barricade as both an architectural and social formation.

As an architect and scenographer focusing on spatial performativity, whose formative years were spent in New Zealand while my Lebanese relatives endured a civil war, I have become increasingly preoccupied with an emerging, and generally unquestioned, barricade mentality around the world: a preoccupation that has intensified post-9/11, having lived in New York City during and after this spectacular time and the ensuing global ‘war on terror’. Borderlines, as marginal practices, anomalous conditions and existing constructs, have therefore informed a theory of performance design, in which the limits are engaged and examined.

During World Stage Design 2009 in Seoul, I visited Korea’s DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) in a moment of ‘dark tourism’. As a 250-kilometre borderline between North and South Korea, it is anything but demilitarized. But most compelling was the ecosystem that developed in its four-kilometre-wide no-man’s-land, within which flora and fauna thrive. This was also the case with Beirut’s Green Line during Lebanon’s civil war (1975–1990): a place of demarcation in which things grew where people feared to tread. Rather than dividing lines, precisely cutting between one state and another, these wild(erness) borderlines thicken to form volatile and uncontainable organisms that resist their own claims to fixity, stability and enduring separation.

More recently, in July 2014, a hillside overlooking another contested and constructed border was arranged with tables, chairs, couches and cars, establishing an improvised amphitheatre that faced the walled-in Gaza Strip upon which bombs were falling and lighting up a sky shared by both sides of the divide. Referred to as the Sderot Cinema, the makeshift auditorium in this southern Israeli town utilized the site it faced as a screen upon which live military attacks were played out as a
macabre performance. The border, which lay a kilometre away, was virtually transformed into an epic vertical surface that rendered the bombardment as moving images with accompanying sound effects. Through such a highly mediated and deeply problematic event, we are confronted with the blurring of boundaries between performance and everyday life as well as the complex multiplicity of space in an ever-extending field around the performing arts.

Performing performative performance design

Manifestations such as the Sderot Cinema, in which catastrophic events are aestheticized through improvised gatherings, cause one to wonder at a world that, as theorist Jon McKenzie states, ‘has become a designed environment in which an array of global performances unfold’ (2008, 128). In his essay on ‘Global Feeling’, McKenzie suggests that the complexity of our contemporary condition, folding grand narratives, theatricality and the everyday into each other, could be understood through the discursive tool of ‘performance design’ (McKenzie 2008, 176). Like the ‘theatre of cruelty’ proposed by Antonin Artaud as a vehicle for facing and addressing life’s cruelties, performance design can expose, critique and reimagine the designed performances that proliferate locally and globally.

As an interdisciplinary and collaborative field, performance design negotiates cutting-edge contemporary practices that cross boundaries and often fall ‘between’ theatre and other performing, spatial and visual art forms. Emerging as an interstitial space for extending scenography’s influence in the new century, it operates as an open field of border encounters, avoiding terms such as ‘scenery’, ‘costumes’ and ‘lighting’ in order to focus on how objects, environments, garments, bodies and the intangible elements of sound, light and media perform; that is, how they are all active agents within the performance event (Hannah and Harsløf 2008). In this way we can regard design as a performance landscape expanding beyond the frame and refusing to be contained: a symbiosis between varying elements that fluctuate in their powers but unite in their effect. This aesthetic ‘acting out’ – outside the proper roles of design and theatre’s sanctioned sites – enables a critique of the manifold performances in our daily lives and on the global stages of culture and politics. Inhabiting a viscous, vibratory zone in which human encounters are formulated, staged and examined, the emphasis of performance design is on performativity as a dynamic enactment of ideas rather than their mimetic description.

Taking performance design as a contemporary practice that moves beyond serving written text and stage direction, I will proffer it not only as a critical tool but also as the means of creatively harnessing dynamic forces in our lived reality via the orchestrated ‘event’. An emerging, oscillating and indeterminate field – operating between varying disciplines, between performers and participatory publics, between discursive and geographical territories – performance design can emphasize the interstitial boundary condition as a ‘non-site’ (both abstract and actual) that, mobile and eluding resolution into a knowable whole, is constructed, contested and contaminated. The fleeting acts of performances, which leave few traces, have the capacity to momentarily overcome the ever-reproducing blockades set up in the name of ‘security’ and challenge those who commission, plan and build such barriers.
This article therefore proposes that, as a defiant borderline practice – physically and discursively located ‘in-between’ sites, discourses and disciplines – performance design reacts to overt and covert political strategies, which themselves constitute designed performances, as asserted by Jon McKenzie in ‘Global Feeling’. The particular events to which I will refer – enacted by artists, architects, theorists and spontaneous participatory publics – are formulated to challenge and expose the inherent spatial violence that surrounds us. This first requires some understanding of the complexity of borderline conditions (physical and psychological) and recognition of architecture’s active involvement in controlling and limiting our movements (embodied and organizational). The second half of the article then turns to particular performative projects: Journée des Barricades (2008), a 24-hour object-as-event in Wellington, New Zealand; and two other projects, Carried by the Wind (2008) and The Transparent Wall (2004), both sited at the West Bank Wall – the most insidious of barricades that forms, above all, a barrier to peace (Sorkin 2005).

From borderline images to events

In my theatre work I use the notion of the ‘borderline image’. This is an image which, because I extend the normal duration of observation, has time to penetrate into the observer’s brain. The image then makes history for the observer. (Jan Lauwers, King Lear)4

Belgian designer/director Jan Lauwers speaks of his quest for ‘the moment when form and content make an “absolute” image that goes beyond all anecdotalism’. He refers to this potent picture, designed to persist in the gazer’s mind long beyond the performance event, as a ‘borderline image’, one in which ‘time seems to stand still’ and yet is durational, allowing for oscillations and complexities to play within the scene.5 While Lauwers’ work focuses on the conventional stage where his borderline images are distinctly framed by the proscenium and apprehended from the auditorium, this article borrows the term and applies it to a more embedded and immersive event that incorporates the complexity of its site, either far-flung from the proscenium stage, or indeed utilizing such a stage as a site-specific zone unbounded by the frame and protocols of a contained theatrical production.

In considering the contemporary role of scenography, I am haunted by a borderline image that is as literal as it is theatrical: a rigidly concrete wall on the West Bank boundary, momentarily rendered transparent on an evening in 2003, through the play of digital light, shadow and image. I return to this incident at the end of my article, but will first set up the notion of a borderline event that doesn’t only privilege the viewed image and is more apposite for this Middle Eastern moment to which I refer, as well as the potential created by the Morisons’ Journée des Barricades around which this article also orbits.

The borderline is an element that, through cleaving territory, constructs its own suture between one side and another. Writers such as Gloria Anzaldúa (Chicana lesbian, activist and theorist) have remapped our understanding of the ‘border’ as not only a geographical dividing line but something that encompasses the psychic, sexual and spiritual, representing ‘painful yet also potentially transformational spaces where opposites converge, conflict and transmute’.6 This can be found in the English language, which not only refers to the borderline as a physical demarcation
but also a condition denoting anomalies, things that are barely acceptable in their belonging. Open to doubt, borderline places, practices and personalities are marginal, indefinite, unsettled, undecided, unclassifiable, disputable, controversial and ambivalent. Like the Green Lines of Korea, Lebanon and Israel, they contain their own fluctuating ecosystems that defy clear and consistent delineation. For Michel de Certeau, culture’s limits are radically mobile borderlines akin to a coastal condition, separating ‘men of power’ [sic] in the dynamic sea from “the others” (representing ‘an unknown, seductive or menacing horizon’) who stand at its shifting and unstable shoreline (de Certeau 1977, 38). Operating at geographical, disciplinary and psychological limits, the borderline condition is the space of desires and their withholding.

Writing on the borderline condition’s indeterminate character, Deleuze and Guattari maintain that ‘it is impossible to tell whether the anomalous is still in the band, already outside the band, or at the shifting boundary of the band’ (1988, 245). This is where animals, sorcerers, revolutionaries and artists reside, as well as those (sanctioned and unsanctioned) who patrol the margins. So while barricades at the border attempt to assert a law of the land, affirming who is included and who is excluded, they signal both peril and susceptibility in their performance of power, generally via a fragile architecture – constructing separation through the flimsiness of iron fencing (barbed, electrified or otherwise), trenches of water (filled with predators or otherwise), concrete barriers moved into place by machinery, elaborate solid walls designed to foil human bodies attempting to surmount them, or even the retractable belt stanchions that have migrated beyond the border controls in airports to regulate movement in galleries, museums, post offices and even theatres. While weak in their constructions, borderlines can be brutally strong in their effects. Yet all – places, practices and personalities – require physical and virtual surveillance to be maintained.

In articulating the complex nature of borders, boundaries and barricades, the physical and the psychological are collapsed, shuttling between the geopolitics of place and the formation of the subject. Borderline subjects are those operating or abandoned at society’s limit, dwelling in a condition that, according to Lacan, forecloses on the law of signification (discussed by Oliver 1993, 76). Considering the ‘borderline experience’, Julia Kristeva maintains that the subject is split between the positions of actor and spectator as a ‘commentator, a theoretician, a commander of signs’ ([1981] 1996, 110), rejecting the Symbolic as a mirage and returning to the maternal condition, which is inherently abject. This led to her proposal for revolutionary borderline aesthetics that work with the instinctual, archaic and maternal: acknowledging and transgressing the law; destabilizing the Symbolic order in order to recreate a new one (Oliver 1993, 99).

The abject – that which is (r)ejected from the status quo – occupies the borderline as resistant forces (borderline subjects and fluctuating objects), presenting a condition that is both fascinating and terrifying. Elizabeth Grosz suggests ‘hovering’ over this imprecise margin in which ‘anomalies, ambiguities, and borderline cases [mark] the threshold, not of humanity in itself, but of acceptable, tolerable, knowable humanity’ (1996, 55). She also refers to Mary Douglas, for whom ‘all borderline states, functions and positions [are] sites of possible pollution or contamination’, concluding that ‘[t]hat which is marginal is always located as a site of danger and vulnerability’ (Grosz 2003, 301). It therefore seems significant that marginal
locations, particularly borderline ones, are where detritus accumulates; where graffiti flourishes, edges crumble and plastic bags cling or dance in the wind. But, as established in the first section, these images of sites we tend to block from our vision are replete with movement and micro-actions.

Through an ‘act of exclusion’, the abject becomes the outcast contaminant capable of infecting and affecting those within its ambit (Bataille 2005, 11). This contaminating physical presence, which leaks, deforms, decays and erupts, indexes Kristeva’s ‘fluid states of structures’ that are political, social, cultural, psychological and physical (Kristeva 2005, 16). Asserting the paradoxical condition of in-betweenness, the abject creates hybrid conditions that inherently undermine structure. Rather than a still picture, they challenge signification and law as fluctuating spatiotemporal and sensorial events.

While Lauwer’s technique of creating theatrical borderline images offers a critical means of addressing an inundation of mass media’s images, I would propose fleeting borderline events staged to take into account the specific evental nature of the sites they briefly occupy. Such aesthetic acts also harbour the historical event and a multiplicity of quotidian events particular to the locale and its spatial practices. Challenging the real and imagined lines of exclusion and inclusion, the borderline event, operating at the physical and socio-political margins, calls representation into question, as demanded by the theatrical avant-garde and more recently advocated through post-dramatic performances. In crossing disciplinary borders and understanding the complexity of the ‘evental’, performance design can produce borderline events through a resistant and productive spatial dramaturgy, capable of momentarily weakening the power of media and the brutality of a fortified world. Before looking at such events, the following section considers a world of proliferating borders and barricades and their relation to architecture, which is designed to withhold the destabilizing effects of abjection: to maintain a world that is safe and sound; to evade the wear and tear of time; to design who is in and who is out.

Architecture as the performance of politics

In his book *Architecture, Power and National Identity*, Lawrence Vale asserts that government buildings are ‘an act of design in which expressions of power and identity seem explicit and inevitable, both for the government client and for the designer’ (2008, 3). To support this statement, Vale refers to Nelson Goodman’s 1988 essay, ‘How Buildings Mean’, which insists that how architecture conveys meaning is more critical than what meaning it conveys (Goodman, 33), a sentiment echoed almost 20 years later by David Leatherbarrow in the opening essay of Kolarevic and Malkawi’s anthology, *Performative Architecture*, where he states that it is more productive to ask not what a building is, but what it does (Leatherbarrow 2005, 7).

I would propose that expressions of power and identity are applicable to all our constructed environments – both real and virtual. By mutually incorporating power systems, architecture defines, regulates and limits our daily practices (Foucault 1980, 149), and, as handmaidens to power, architects are responsible, a claim reinforced by Henri Lefebvre who believed that the ‘logic of space’ conceals an authoritarian and brutal force, ‘at times as implacably hard as a concrete wall’ (1997, 57). Such spatial brutality is acutely evident in the West, since the defining spectacle of 9/11, after
which freedom of movement and expression is purposefully curtailed – locally and globally – in the very name of ‘freedom’. Designers of public space are more actively complicit in architecture’s role to silently and subtly condition the competence and performance of the subject, especially in this age of a constructed ‘war on terror’ that maintains a continual state of siege. In 2007 New York Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff described this new art of architectural defence as Medieval Modern:

The Green Zone in Baghdad, Jerusalem’s separation barrier, the concrete bollards that line corporate headquarters on Park Avenue – all are emblems of an unintended new mentality ... [T]his state of siege is beginning to look more and more like a permanent reality, exhibited in an architectural style we might refer to as 21st-century medievalism. Like their 13th to 15th-century counterparts, contemporary architects are being enlisted to create not only major civic landmarks but lines of civic defense, with aesthetically pleasing features like elegantly sculpted barriers around public plazas or decorative cladding for bulky protective concrete walls. (Ouroussoff 2007)

As Nietzsche wrote of the architect, ‘His buildings are supposed to render pride visible, and the victory over gravity, the will to power’ (1968, 521). Yet in our current age of liquescence – where nothing is stable, where fiction constantly folds into reality and where sedentary structures can no longer house the mediatized spectacle of daily life – this fatal resolve is countered by a desire to create more porous, open-ended and transparent environments. Thom Mayne of Morphosis Architects has discussed how contemporary architects are presented with solving a ‘highly oppositional problem’ that negotiates between promoting transparency and social connectedness in the city ‘while in reality producing opacity or the type of protection necessary for the various performance criterion of the [required] security’. Mayne refers to how he rises to this challenge by camouflaging security elements within the structural form and décor of buildings, seen in his award-winning design for the Caltrans District 7 Headquarters Building in Los Angeles (2008). However, masking the fortifications diminishes neither the architectural rigidity nor power’s hegemony.

A decade and a half later, 9/11’s ‘grand narrative’ continues to sanction authoritarian spatial control, foreclosing on ease of access and expression while asserting architecture as the art of constructing and reinforcing boundaries. However, this barricade mentality need not involve the obvious gestures of fortification referred to by Ouroussoff or the covert manoeuvres Thom Mayne employs. We live in an era of more ephemeral barriers; from data codes that restrict our access on and offline; to fleeting constructions of plastic tape and synthetic webbing, which file us into obedient rows in institutional, cultural and corporate spaces; to the more overt portable concrete fences that surround public buildings or divide contested territories. A proliferation of signs dictates our civil behaviour and CCTV cameras form a network of supervisory eyes.

Although these ephemeral elements of control limit action in public space and tend not to be as transient as their ephemerality suggests, they also provide the possibility for resisting such restraint through their performativity within an event construction. As discussed earlier, a performance design approach helps articulate the notion of architectural performativity, destabilizing architecture’s will to be fixed and durable through a concentration on the complexities of architecture as event.
Such realignment redresses Henri Lefebvre’s critique of architecture’s implacable *objectality* with Gilles Deleuze’s focus on the mobilized *objectile* where the continuous and explosive phenomena of form and matter activate the built environment through an *object-event*, no longer framing space but overflowing its boundaries so as to annihilate the representational frame (Deleuze 1993, 37). This transforms architecture from a disciplinary machine to an open-ended volatile form of spatial action. An emphasis on architecture’s temporal mutability also reinforces Sanford Kwinter’s demand for ‘an all-encompassing theory and politics of the “event”’ (11) outlined in the following section, which addresses the shifting political implication of the barricade as not only a global symbol of revolt and collective action, but also a contested site of performative engagement.

Rather than architects, contemporary artists provide a key for returning the barricade to architectural discourse, challenging its contemporary role of obstructing body and thought in both built and virtual environments. Engaging with the ‘event’, these artists co-opt anti-architectural strategies, which could re-inform spatial design.

**A performance paradigm and event-space**

*Building* (action) is performative practice and enactment of history; it renders a *building* (artefact) performing object. By focusing on spatial performativity, we are able to recognize the built environment as a system of active forces that work on human occupation, which in turn acts back. Vale’s reference to the ‘act of design’ posits architectural design as both *a doing* (the event of designing) and *a thing done* (the designed artefact experienced as an event), what Jacques Derrida referred to as an ‘event of spacing’ (1997, 335). The ‘event’ therefore becomes a means of questioning architecture’s assumed fixity, durability and monumentality as well as its political role in regulating public, spatial performances. This has considerable relevance in a contemporary moment haunted by the spectre of calamity that tends to inform and reform our spatial constructions and practices. Acknowledging spacing as a creative event also recognizes the ‘hand of the architect’ in creating affects and effects.

Linking the event to architecture, Sanford Kwinter writes:

... to approach the problem of ‘the new’, then, one must complete the following four requirements: redefine the traditional concept of the object; reintroduce and radicalise the theory of time; conceive of ‘movement’ as a first principle and not merely as a special, dismissible case; and embed these later three within an all-encompassing theory and politics of the ‘event’. (Kwinter 2002, 11)

Here Kwinter is rendering mobile the static architectural object, reinforcing architecture as a political act of spacing. Aligned to temporality, gesture and mobility, the *evental* (from multiple micro-moments to monumental turning points) undermines the traditional role architecture plays as a stable, enduring object designed to order space and those who occupy it. By recognizing performance as action-in-space and architecture as space-in-action, *event-space* provides a means of challenging the part power plays in our constructed environments. The spatial event is complex: cited (as significant historic moments that shift thought), sighted (as dramatic spectacles, shows and displays) and sited (as multiple quotidian
spatiotemporal performances) (Hannah 2008a). Slavoj Žižek has pointed out that, although ranging from banal to transformative, every event carries the possibility for philosophical transformation in which something may intervene to upset the established rhythm of daily life and even question the eternal order of Ideas (2013, 1), which he describes as ‘the effect that seems to exceed its causes’ inseparably bound to ‘the space of the event [… opening] up the gap that separates an effect from its causes’ (2014, 5).

Irruptive of the status quo, event-space houses the potential to ‘make room’ for the new, while confronting us with the abiding presence of the catastrophic, which architecture is designed to elude. In Architecture and Violence I discussed this through an analysis of the 2002 Moscow Theatre siege, which, as a spectacular international event, exposed the inherently disciplinary nature of the contemporary cookie-cutter auditorium found in performing arts centres worldwide (Hannah 2008b). Designed to control the public’s performance as prototypical passive observers, conventional theatre architecture proved an ideal site for barricade hostage taking, capturing spectators, performers and Chechen guerrillas as well as a captivating global media audience. This violent event revealed the violence intrinsic to seemingly prosaic architecture, but through its conformity rather than its radicality. Inherent to my article is an assertion that the artwork as performative event provides a spatiotemporal zone for indicating and critiquing such spatial hostility, which harbours the catastrophe, ideally by means of performances that mobilize joyful commune … and even love.

Journée des Barricades

The temporary public artwork entitled Journée des Barricades acted as a rupture in the everyday comings and goings of the city. An assemblage of car wrecks, discarded furniture and other urban detritus that barricaded a central city street, the sculpture suggested associations with the history of political actions and social unrest. As a collection of discarded consumer products it also brought to mind questions about our environmental and economic future. Challenging people to look squarely into the future and prepare themselves for what might be coming, it proposed a shift in thinking from the popular environmentalist view that we must preserve the status quo to the survivalist approach of preparing for an unstoppable and inevitable change. In stark contrast to the sculpture’s grandiosity was its temporality – installed overnight between dusk Saturday and dawn Sunday, the work was in situ for just 24 hours before ‘disappearing’ overnight, returning Stout Street back to normal for the Monday morning rush-hour.

This article was initially provoked by Journée des Barricades, a large transitory construction erected in Wellington that was developed for the One-Day Sculpture series, a New Zealand-wide project commissioning national and international artists to create 24-hour place-based artworks. Created by UK-based artists Heather and Ivan Morison, Journée des Barricades (14 December 2008) confronted Christmas shoppers in New Zealand’s capital city with a monumental installation ‘made up from the detritus of Wellington’, which inhabited and bifurcated a street in its downtown area. A colossal mass of inorganic rubbish borrowed from local recyclers and the dump inhabited the street for a single day, it was constructed the night before and totally disassembled the following evening – hence its title, Journée des Barricades, The Day of Barricades (Figure 1).
With its direct allusion to the Parisian revolutionary barricades, *Journée des Barricades* also referenced the blockades of more recent protest and warfare as well as forming a post-apocalyptic image that suggests some ‘climatic disaster’.[11] Anomalous in its presence and abject in its contents, this artwork, which takes on the role of playing between past, present and future histories, not only elicits an aesthetic charge within the civic realm, but also could feasibly harness public and private performances.

Returning to performance, described by Elin Diamond as ‘a risky and dangerous negotiation between a doing […] and a thing done’ (1996, 5), the barricade – an unstable and ephemeral architecture originally built as a communal act of camaraderie and defiance – presents a powerful concept for spatial performativity. Like the words ‘construction’ (a structure and the act of its making) and ‘refuse’ (that which is rejected and a mode of resistance), ‘barricade’ (a temporary obstruction and its swift formation), as simultaneously noun and verb, represents both object and action. A barricade constructed of refuse is therefore potentially an active and activating thing. However, an inconsistency resides at the heart of the Morisons’ project – the place where noun and verb fail to cohere – thereby withholding the barricade’s promise as both object and action.

*Journée des Barricades* – which translates into *The Day of Barricades* (objects) as well as *The Day of Protest* (action) – refers to the Parisian revolt of 12 May 1588 when the populace successfully enacted a spontaneous uprising against the king and his troupes by hastily constructing street blockades. Parisians have since utilized this improvised architecture as an effective means of public insurgency during a number of nineteenth-century revolutionary events (influencing the design of Baron Von Haussman’s 2nd Empire Paris), as well as those of 1968 – commonly referred to as *Année des Barricades* (*The Year of Barricades*) – where street obstructions were created by literally uprooting the urban environment (trees, cobblestones and street furniture) as well as disgorging and hastily reassembling household contents. Revolutionary events therefore signalled a shift in attitude against monumental architecture, for which architects such as Gottfried Semper (1803–1879) were renowned. Yet Semper designed and supervised the construction of a makeshift wall of carts and domestic items outside his house during Dresden’s 1848 revolution, referred to by Richard Wagner as the ‘famous “Semper” barricade’ (1983, 515) which resulted in the architect’s banishment from Germany. Mikesch Muecke points
out that Semper’s temporary architecture of resistance was ‘significantly not a conventional building but rather an intervention between buildings’, as well as an intervention between theory and practice, art and architecture, the status quo and resistance (Muecke 2005, 14).

When regarding the Morisons’ barricade in New Zealand (a country consistently ranked among the top five most peaceful countries in the world), such radical events, in which streets are torn apart and domestic environments are emptied out to create lines of defence, seem far away and long ago. Yet Wellington’s Journée des Barricades followed hard on Thailand’s airport blockade, an eight-day public siege in which demonstrators against the government paralysed cargo shipments and stranded thousands of travellers by setting up an encampment around the airport. The project directly coincided with riots in Athens (in protest against the police shooting of a teenager) where clouds of tear gas were blanketing the city while protestors hurled paving stones at the police and set Christmas trees alight. These extended moments of public insurgency force us to question the value of an aesthetically constructed barricade in downtown Wellington during the Christmas season.

In her investigation on the emergence of post-revolutionary social space, Kristen Ross (1988, vi) suggests that the bricolage construction of the nineteenth-century barricades – where quotidian objects are recycled – provided an antithesis to the autocratic. As a radical form of architecture continually fashioned from the debris of assault, the barricades transformed the concept of space from sedentary environments, designed to contain and control our lives, to more dynamic structures we helped create (Ross 1988, 8). Here the revolutionary barricade encapsulates a borderline event, with its inherent instability and incorporation of the abject via its formation out of waste.

Five centuries after the first Journée des Barricades in Paris, we find ourselves living in an era of architectural, technological and ephemeral barriers. No longer constructed as revolutionary acts of resistance, these shifting obstructions are directly associated with the status quo. The Morisons’ barricade reminds us that in this current condition it is critical that we question the many obstructions (real and virtual), which are created as a means of public protection.

So now that the tables are turned, what role can we play in this new era of the officially erected bureaucratic barricade? Less than two weeks after Wellington’s Barricade was constructed and dismantled, Israel attacked the Gaza Strip where Hamas were resisting being fenced in and blockaded by building tunnels below the borders. The anonymous artist Banksy shows us that the artwork can still do battle in the face of power’s brutal obstructions. His graffiti images on the West Bank walls – silhouettes of children lifted into the air by balloons, ladders inviting escape or apertures showing views onto more idyllic landscapes – remind us that these barriers form what Bansky names ‘the world’s largest open prison’. Such guerrilla activities, which challenge the status quo, do not require permission or negotiation with the authorities.

The paradox of the Morisons’ project is that, despite its associations with political resistance (involving radical, hostile or unexpected manoeuvres), the erection of their barricade engaged in neither spontaneous nor furtive action. Theirs was a carefully planned installation that required exhaustive negotiations with the authorities in order to close off a city street, erect a blockade and comply with health
and safety issues – all with minimal disruption to the city’s traffic and negligible damage to its urban fabric. This pacified both the object and its historical objective, rendering the artwork monumental, sculptural and totalizing rather than durational, subversive or communal. The giant barricade – perspectively framed by some of the most European buildings in Wellington – also resembled a scenic backdrop, recalling Sebastiano Serlio’s Renaissance revolution whereby scenografia, as an idealized painted view, integrated the science and craft of architecture, scenery and painting into a combined stage and auditorium, which in turn influenced the planning of buildings, streets, cities and landscapes. However, once you approached the Morisons’ spectacular assemblage, you realized it was not possible to engage with it, other than to marvel at its epic scale or enjoy looking at the astutely arranged objects within objects. Discretely placed stewards discouraged any physical contact.

As a distanced, static object, Journée des Barricades foreclosed on the element most critical to the barricade as a ‘global symbol of revolt’ – what Mark Tragouutt calls the ‘repertoire of collective action’ (1995, 54). Diana Taylor takes up this notion of the ‘repertoire’ as opposed to the ‘archive’, maintaining that the former is predicated on ‘being there’ as a necessary part of the transmission (2003, 20). The performance of public artworks calls upon the public to participate as social actors in the scene: ‘as witnesses, spectators, or voyeurs […] What is our role “there”? – how are we ethically and politically implicated?’ (Taylor 2003, 32). Yet it is in Journée des Barricades’ archive (the place in which the repertoire is banished to the past) (Taylor 2003, 21) where we find the project’s true action. These images of the barricade being erected by a team of volunteers who willingly and communally took on hard physical labour – expending a huge amount of energy to create something so transitory – are more compelling than viewing the work after they had departed. This was witnessed ‘live’ by those few who happened upon this ‘happening’ – Nuit des Barricades – in the small hours of Sunday morning.

**Borderline events know no boundaries**

…but security comes not through walls but through negotiations for peace. How can we negotiate with our neighbours if there is a wall cutting us like this? (Palestinian onlooker in Carried by the Wind documentary)

…because I did not understand the nature of this event, I just experienced the nature of this place and suddenly the walls seemed smaller and I felt that the strength of our spirit is more smart than the blind, dumb and deaf concrete. (Palestinian onlooker in Carried by the Wind documentary)

The question therefore remains, how can the barricade become a site of critical and constructive encounter for a potentially performing public? We now return to the West Bank wall that Banksy and Alÿs attempted to breach and critique with their unsolicited markings. This spectral reality, which negates the line marked by Dayan, has been referred to as a ‘security fence’, ‘separation barrier’ and ‘apartheid wall’. Its seemingly temporary and mobile aesthetic renders it a barricade that plays into the state-of-emergency mentality but ends up barricading the possibilities of constructive negotiation. Yet this wall has been creatively breached in two projects outlined below, not by overwhelming physical force but by a will to make it
transparent through immaterial means – sound and data – that inherently resist physical boundaries, and is dependent on an actively responsive community.

It is in carefully orchestrated events such as those of Dutch composer and theatre-maker Merlijn Twaalfhoven’s Carried by the Wind (17 April 2008) and the Transparent Wall (1 April 2004) created by Artists Without Walls that estranged communities are united for brief moments of joyous commune. Twaalfhoven and his partners utilized rooftops and balconies on either side of the barricade upon which 75 professional and amateur musicians from Ramallah and Bethlehem performed with children from Palestinian West Bank refugee camps. Unable to be contained, music proved its inherent resistance to boundaries, briefly bridging and uniting the separated zones. Here, through sonic infusion, the event undermines the wall’s objective to cleave a site in two. The sounding from voices and instruments – as performative spacing – filled an air that cannot be segregated, asserting Twaalfhoven’s statement that ‘Music knows no boundaries’.17 As a Palestinian onlooker passionately enunciated, ‘It is symbolic. It gives us hope. It means if I heard music from there and the music talks together [...] one day the time will come also to talk to each other’.18 While this woman was referring to a dialogue between Palestinians and Israelis, the Transparent Wall (Figure 2), created four years earlier, provided an event that briefly reunited estranged villagers who could talk to each other via a digital strategy.

Through nonviolent and creative actions, ‘Artists Without Walls’ will seek to eradicate the lines of separation and the rhetoric of alienation and racism. (Artists Without Walls)19

Artists Without Walls are a group of Palestinian and Israeli artists and architects who meet in Ramallah and East Jerusalem as ‘a permanent forum for dialogue between individuals engaged in all fields of art and culture’.20 Together they devise alternative means to what they see as the repeatedly failed protest strategies against the separation wall, described by them as ‘a monument to failure and a testament to pessimism’.21 In 2004 they selected Abu Dis as a site for creative rebellion: a Palestinian village suddenly and violently split by an eight-metre-high concrete wall, making it impossible to access services in Jerusalem without a permit or a time-consuming, convoluted and demeaning journey. They intended to highlight that, although the wall aspired to construct a sense of security for Israelis by separating them from Palestinians, in effect ‘the real separation created is between Palestinians and their families, neighbours and communities as well as jobs, hospitals and schools’. Setting up video cameras either side of the barrier, they passed the technology through the small holes designed to allow machinery to lift the heavy units into place and then projected the live transmissions from each sector on the opposite side of the wall, briefly reuniting the village’s inhabitants who gestured ecstatically and moved together rhythmically while speaking to each other on mobile phones. In his essay ‘Primitive Separations’, Dean McCannell described witnessing this event:

When both sets of images were projected simultaneously the effect was a very large virtual hole in the wall. We were able to protest together, singing, dancing and cheering as though the wall was not there. With a prodigious act of the imagination, even this most forbidding wall can be used as a device to bring people together. (MacCannell 2005, 44)
The art of weak architecture

The potency of *Journée des Barricades* lay in its scenic splendour as a sculpture that fleetingly linked the theatrical and the quotidian with the catastrophic. Confronting the public with an image that suggests some sort of epic failure (social, political or ecological) recalls Walter Benjamin’s conflation of the ‘moment of enchantment’ with the ‘figure of shock’ (Benjamin 1997, 27). And yet this transitory construction at the end of the world could have reminded us New Zealanders that we are not so peaceful; that we have had our own share of suicide bombers, violent protests, contested territories, ecological disasters and dispossessed peoples; and that we need not merely consume art as part of our Christmas shopping. Perhaps if the public were invited/permitted to dismantle the construction, an alternative economy could have been put in place, recycling and reactivating dead artefacts and permitting the barricade to be more action than object. Such participatory action would transform the wall from being a borderline object into a borderline event.

Made under the watchful and hostile eye of Israeli authorities, *Carried by the Wind* and the *Transparent Wall* enacted subtle manoeuvres with formidable effects. Speaking to power, they momentarily undermined the rigidity and violence of the patrolled borderline. Along with *Journée des Barricades* these fleeting events left negligible physical traces behind but nevertheless constituted radical borderline acts, exposing an inherent vulnerability within the Symbolic order. All three events equate with McKenzie’s proposition of ‘political love’ as a means of combatting and resisting orchestrated spectacles of war and terror, transcending ‘private, familial
and bourgeois notions of love’ with one ‘that is both intimate and immense, both personal and public, both proximate and distant’ (McKenzie 2008, 135). This aligns with Žižek’s claim that love is also evental, as are political events and the rise of a new art form (which performance design is here considered), due to their ‘miraculous’ nature as well as circular structures linking effects to causes (Žižek 2014, 4).

To conclude, we return to Nietzsche who separated artists – as ‘visionaries par excellence’ – from the wilful architect implicated in the construction and expression of history’s powers. Although Nietzsche was mindful of architecture’s potential, as a form of power, to mediate between the creative and destructive forces upon which his philosophy was built, the Nietzschean architect (working for the status quo) forecloses on Nietzschean architecture (working against the status quo). The philosopher desired to undermine monumental architecture by introducing what Una Chaudhuri calls a ‘rule of disorder’ (1997, 21). It is for this reason that I have focused on performative events enacted by artists: provocateurs for an alternative architectural porosity achieved through an accumulation of refuse; a line leaking over contested territories; the mimetic force of guerrilla graphics; utilizing sound as an element that recognizes no borders; or by piercing a concrete wall with digital technology in order to momentarily dematerialize it and the power it represents.

Brian Massumi writes: ‘What is pertinent about an event-space is not its boundedness, but what elements it lets pass, according to what criteria, at what rate, and to what effect’ (2002, 85). For architect and author Ignaci Solà-Morales, this is achieved by ‘weak architecture’, a utilization of the fleeting, vestigial and ephemeral, to construct a new type of monumentality ‘bound up with the lingering resonance of poetry after it has been heard, with the recollection of architecture after it has been seen’ (1997, 81). This recalls Lauwer’s desire to ‘make history for the observer’. Solà-Morales refers to the tendency for architectural modernism to foreclose on chance by attempting to create itineraries of control. In order for architecture to be transformed into an event, the aleatory and temporal, as found in the aesthetic event, must be admitted: ‘This is the strength of weakness; that strength which art and architecture are capable of producing precisely when they adopt a posture that is not aggressive and dominating, but tangential and weak’ (Solà-Morales 1997, 71). As discussed earlier, the barricade oscillates between weak construction and brutal control, yet exposing the intrinsic weakness of this inherently scenographic construction through poetic acts can diminish its violence.

In Dark Writing: Geography, Performance, Design, artist-academic, Paul Carter maintains that we must redraw our maps ‘differently’, incorporating the movement forms of communal encounter in order to de-territorialize power (2009, 7). Contemporary feminist philosopher Elizabeth Grosz (2008) suggests this can be achieved through art, which indicates futurity in the present. She also demands that we ‘make architecture tremble’ (2001, 6). By doing so, perhaps power can also tremble. Through performative moves against coherent structures, sites can be de-territorialized and communities both fragmented and cohered. Moshe Dayan’s waxy green line on the armistice map was not a line of defence but, when considered to scale, forms a thick smudgy zone (ranging from 60 to 80 metres wide), reminding us that a border is a space between people and how we creatively open, activate and inhabit that space can be achieved through a poetics of weakening conventional architecture and supervisory structures in the public realm.
Disclosure statement
No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author.

Notes
1. Herschthal was rightly questioning why this critical work was omitted from curatorial selection in a MoMA exhibition of Alÿs’s work.
2. Allan Sørensen first reported this in the Danish newspaper, the Kristeligt Dagblad, maintaining that the gathering, involving more than 50 people, transformed the hill into something ‘most closely resembling the front row of a reality war theatre’. Cited in The Independent, Sunday 13 July 2014: ‘Israel-Gaza conflict: “Sderot cinema” image shows Israelis with popcorn and chairs “cheering as missiles strike Palestinian targets”’, http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/israelgaza-conflict-sderot-cinema-image-shows-israelis-with-popcorn-and-chairs-cheering-as-missiles-strike-palestinian-targets-9602704.html. Images and videos on the web suggest that this gathering occurred over several days.
3. The concept of ‘non-site’ was formulated by Robert Smithson (principally as a staging of the outdoors indoors), a site that ‘coming out of a comprehension of limits’ effaces itself (Flam 1996, 234), ‘a site of mapping that is always inherently unmappable’ (Kaye 2000, 97).
8. This section is largely reproduced from the book chapter, “Constructing the Barricade: an Urban Performance Between the Archive and the Repertoire”, in One Day Sculpture.
13. http://www.banksy.co.uk (accessed 2012). Now no longer online, this statement has been cited in many books and newspaper articles.
14. As Heather Morison explained in a radio interview that morning, the site was carefully selected in order to create minimal disruption for the public: ‘we didn’t want to inconvenience people’ (Arts on Sunday, Radio New Zealand National, 14 December 2009).
15. Sebastiano Serlio, Book II, Architettura (1545), the first Renaissance treatise on architecture to include a section on theatre in which perspectival scenography for the comedies, tragedies and pastorals was applied to the design of urban, suburban and rural settings.
17. Ibid.
18. Ibid.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
22. In 1982 anarchist punk rocker Neil Roberts killed himself in an attempt to blow up New Zealand’s Police Computer in Wanganui. This coincided with the first modern suicide bombings in the Middle East, which began in the early 1980s.

Notes on contributor
Dorita Hannah’s creative work, teaching and research focus on the intersection between performance and space. She publishes on practices that negotiate the spatial, visual and performing arts, with her designs incorporating scenographic, interior, exhibition and installation design, as well as a specialized consultancy in theatre architecture and the creation of international movement-architecture projects. Focusing on ‘event-space’ her work investigates how the built environment housing an event is itself an event and an integral driver of experience.

References