Third Text, 2013
Vol. 27, No. 2, 208–220, http://dx.doi.org/10.1080/09528822.2013.772348

Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

Revolutionary Romanticism
Henri Lefebvre's Revolution-as-Festival

Gavin Grindon

The concept of revolution-as-festival is one that has persisted in the language of radical movements in the global cycle of social struggles since the 1990s, from Reclaim the Streets to the Seattle World Trade Organization Carnival Against Capitalism, Euromayday and Climate Camp to Occupy's Debt Jubilee. Its stress on the role of the aesthetic in social change has served to articulate multiple re-imaginations of the art and culture of social movements, but it has less often been interrogated in itself as a specific twentieth-century theoretical construct, despite possessing an intellectual history which goes back well beyond 1968. One of the origins of this notion lies in the thought of Henri Lefebvre and his sustained engagement with the role of the aesthetic in social change. This engagement, inspired by the experiments of Dada and early Parisian Surrealism between art and political action, ran in parallel with that of Georges Bataille, and dovetailed with later experiments by the Situationist International, Amsterdam Provos and others in the 1960s.[1] This article examines the development of this aspect of Lefebvre's thought and his notion of revolution-as-festival, between 1924 and 1968.

In 1924 Lefebvre was a founding member of a small avant-garde group made up of a handful of young students from the Sorbonne who called themselves the *Philosophies*.[2] In retrospect, Lefebvre's described his concept of festival as originating here:

> A few years after the Russian revolution, we naively imagined the revolution as an incessant popular festival… From 1925, we wrote many things on the end of work. At that moment, we saw the transformation of work as the revolutionary task.[3]

Yet the actual exact coordinates of this term are hard to pin down as he reiterates it, alongside associated notions of the moment, play and work-refusal throughout his career with different emphases of meaning. Sometimes he did not provide formal definitions until much later and at any point tended to reinterpret his own intellectual history in light of

1. See Gavin Grindon, 'Alchemist of the Revolution: The Affective Materialism of Georges Bataille', *Third Text* 104, vol 24, no 3, May 2010; and Grindon, 'Surrealism, Dada and the Refusal of Work: Autonomy, Activism and Social Participation in the Radical Avant-Garde', *Oxford Art Journal*, vol 34, no 1, 2011.

2. See Bud Burkhard, *French Marxism Between the Wars: Henri Lefebvre and the Philosophies*, Humanity, New York, 2000

3. Rémi Hess, interview with Henri Lefebvre, February 1988. Cited in Rémi Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle*, Métailié, Paris, 1988, pp 52–53

current concerns. The Philosophies group had no fully formed theory of festival but was the beginning of Lefebvre's concern with exceptional moments of subjectification and social change and a synthesis more thoroughly Surrealist-Marxist than either that of André Breton's Surrealist Group or Bataille and Roger Caillois' College of Sociology. Lefebvre developed this over several books, culminating in his *Critique of Everyday Life*:

> Mystics and metaphysicians used to acknowledge that everything in life revolved around exceptional moments. In their view, life found expression and was concentrated in them. These moments were festivals: festivals of the mind or heart, public or intimate festivals. Up until now the principle of Festival has stood for a divorce from life… Is this life's fate?… From this point of view, we are witnessing the 'essence' of Marxism.[4]

Tom McDonough has argued that Lefebvre's festival tended towards a 'simplistic' vision of 'easygoing bonhomie' advocating a humanist working-class subject which echoed Jean-Jacques Rousseau's writing on festival (in his 1758 *Letter to D'Alembert on Spectacles* and his 1762 novel, *Julie*).[5] There are similarities between their use of the folk-cultural festival (their focus on culture's civic role; their valorization of the rural contra the city; and their use of examples drawn from idealized personal memory). Lefebvre is commonly read and critiqued as a humanist Marxist. However, it is possible to read him within and against this position. Lefebvre was addressing the problem of the cultural constitution of political subjectivity, a topic which was dominated by the narrowly bounded conceptual repertoire of liberal-humanist language. Inevitably, engaging with this language, Lefebvre can be seen not as simply adopting a humanist position but as employing Marxist theory critically to make use of and open up central categories in humanist thought: of the subject, creative labour and art. This idiosyncratic move, critically engaging with, even opposed to, humanism, was the central content of his 'humanist-Marxism'.

Rousseau valorizes folk festivals, at the very moment they were being eclipsed, as the ideal public spectacle against which a 'decadent' urban theatre must be judged. His festival poses a *better* spectatorship more conducive to republican civic unity than theatre's 'aristocratic' division of actor and spectator: 'Let the Spectators become an Entertainment to themselves… so that all will be better united.'[6] By contrast, Lefebvre's revolution-as-festival does not simply valorize popular folk cultures, but proposes a thorough re-conception of social movements' cultural forms of collective political participation. His method of doing so poses a tacit opposition which attempts to imagine agency in culture against spectatorship per se. The culture of social movements had long been devalued in fundamentally aesthetic terms by conservatives, in notions of the mob or swinish multitude still prevalent in the early twentieth century through the work of Gustave Le Bon and others, which defined social movements as the *absence* of culture.[7] Lefebvre's festival does offer a principally aesthetic counter-valorization of this culture. But beyond this, his festival – like Bataille's – is the result of a Surrealist-influenced attempt to think the aesthetic as a political determinant. But where Bataille's aestheticization of politics endorsed a vision of the working class as a lumpen mob, Lefebvre attempts an alternate visualization

4. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume One: *Introduction*, John Moore, trans, Verso, London, 1991, pp 250–251

5. Tom McDonough, *The Beautiful Language of My Century: Reinventing the Language of Contestation in Postwar France, 1945–1968*, MIT Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, 2007, p 139, pp 144–146

6. Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *Letter to d'Alembert and Writings for the Theatre*, New England University Press, London, 2004, p 344. His approach appears a counterpoint to Schiller's contemporaneous co-option of the disappearing popular culture festival in the improving 'play' of the faculties in high culture.

7. Themselves derived, at least partly, by inverting Rousseau's valorizations of 'savage' native and foreign culture. Edmund Burke, *Reflections on the Revolution in France*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2009, p 82, pp 171–172. Both some critics of Burke and later Romantics would alternately champion Rousseau's terms and re-invert Burke's.

that uses, but troubles, humanist categories by combining them with Marxist conceptions of labour and species-being in order to interrogate the relationship between culture and the labour of political participation.

I AM NOTHING AND I MUST BE EVERYTHING: POETRY AND LABOUR-POWER

Lefebvre tried to bring the Surrealist concern with exceptional moments of intense affect in moments of dis-identity and self-transformation within a dialectical-materialist framework which articulated this as a refusal of capitalist social relations. He made this clear in his rejection of the Philosophies group, in which he had participated:

> The cult of adventure, of the "other", of the "possible" that is not determined in advance' revealed 'two conceptions of Freedom: to be nothing (while able to become everything) and to be anything at all (after an arbitrary "adventure"). These two propositions are equally false.'[8]

Lefebvre here evokes Marx, who had claimed in his *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right* that such a dialectical pairing of everything and nothing is found in the revolutionary perspective which flings at its adversary the defiant words 'I am nothing and I must be everything.'[9] From this perspective, the materialist dialectic already takes on the task of a sur-real revolution, as it 'unites the real and the possible'.[10]

This self-valorization and negation of capital would be re-imagined and reiterated in various tropes within Lefebvre's writing, and Robert Shields has, for example, examined the centrality of 'the total man' to Lefebvre's thought.[11] This is not Marcel Mauss's 'total man' of the potlatch but draws on Marx's reading of utopian socialist Charles Fourier who imagined a geometric science of society which balanced the needs and passions of all, culminating in a harmonious state where labour became 'impassioned collaboration'.[12] Marx reiterates this notion dialectically in 1844, distinguishing between a reductive appropriation of the world and a fuller, sensuous, social self-appropriation within the world:

> The sensuous appropriation of the human essence and human life, of objective man and of human works by and for man – should not be understood only in the sense of direct, one-sided consumption, of possession, of having. Man appropriates his integral essence in an integral way, as a total man.[13]

The figure of the total man foregrounds the role of the aesthetic in socially composing a labour-identity. Later, employing a more Nietzschean methodology, Lefebvre would reiterate the total man's self-valorization in the notion of poiesis. Through a genealogical, iterative play, he redefines 'Poiesis'. As Nietzsche does to tragedy, Lefebvre claims an etymological validity in which his term signalled an originary plenitude, as in Greek *poiesis* originally referred to making or creation, and only with its transmission into Latin did this become limited to literary creation: 'poetry reduces the meaning of the word'.[14] Instead Poiesis is total human activity, which creates and appropriates nature 'around and within the human being... Poiesis is thus the creation of works (*oeuvres*).'[15] Here, production as (art)'works' (*oeuvres*) is rhetorically opposed to production

8. Henri Lefebvre, 'Retrospections', in Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas, and Eleonore Kofman, eds, *Key Writings*, Continuum, London, 2003, p 8

9. Karl Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, Joseph O'Malley, trans, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 1982, p 140. The phrase's use by Marx is itself a reference to Emmanuel Sieyès' revolutionary pamphlet of 1788, *What Is the Third Estate?*, which famously answered this question in its first line, 'Everything. What, until now, has it been in the existing political order? Nothing.' Emmanuel Joseph Sieyès, 'What is the Third Estate?', in Michael Sonenscher, ed, *Political Writings*, Hackett, Indianapolis, Indiana, 2003, p 94

10. Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman, 'Introduction', in Vladimir Iliitch Lénine, *Cahiers sur la dialectique de Hegel*, Henri Lefebvre and Norbert Guterman, trans, Gallimard, Paris, 1935, p 105. Cited in Kevin Anderson, *Lenin, Hegel, and Western Marxism: A Critical Study*, University of Illinois Press, Urbana, Illinois, 1995, p 191

11. Robert Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*, Routledge, London, 1999, pp 49–50

12. Charles Fourier, 'Work, Anxiety and Freedom', in Jonathan Beecher and Richard Bienvenu, eds, *The Utopian Vision of Charles Fourier: Selected Texts on Work, Love and Passionate Attraction*, University of Missouri Press, Columbia, Missouri, 1983, p 142

13. Karl Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, Martin Mulligan, trans, International, New York, 1972, p 138 (translation altered). Lefebvre cites this passage himself in Lefebvre,

Critique of Everyday Life, Volume One, op cit, p 173.

14. Henri Lefebvre, 'Prolegomenas (from Métaphilosophie, 1965)', in Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleanore Kofman, eds, *Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings*, Continuum, New York and London, 2003, p 27. For another discussion of this notion, and its echoes of Bataille, see also Shields, op cit.

15. Lefebvre, 'Prolegomenas (from Métaphilosophie, 1965)', op cit, p 26

as work (*travaille*). Like the dialectical turn of the total man, this genealogical broadening of the notion of creativity is a reiteration, in Marxist garb, of Dada and Surrealism's own reiteration of the autonomy of art as a refusal of work. In Poiesis' oeuvres, the autonomy of art-as-a-value provided Lefebvre with the language for a broad conception of immanent social creativity, and its aesthetic character, in a discursive move which directly echoes the Surrealist Louis Aragon's earlier treatise on a new 'style' of living:[16]

> In the future the art of living will become a genuine art... The art of living presupposes that the human being sees his own life – the development and intensification of his life – not as a means towards 'another' end, but as an end in itself... The art of living implies the end of alienation – and will contribute towards it.[17]

The attempt by these notions to conceive of a role for the aesthetic in subject-formation and social change is, methodologically at least, deeply ambiguous. Marx's total man famously relies upon a social-historical transposition of Hegel's account of the master–slave dialectic. And whilst 'The Total Man' is the title of the final section of Lefebvre's 1939 *Dialectical Materialism*, in his book on Nietzsche published in the same year, he reiterates the term, entangling it with Nietzsche's account of the *übermensch*. Both Hegel and Nietzsche present models of historical self-overcoming through a narrative of masters and slaves, but methodologically they are mutually antagonistic. Equivocation between them would run through Lefebvre's writing. So whilst Lefebvre's total man gestures towards Marx's 'I am nothing and I must be everything', it also recalls Nietzsche's aphorism in *Daybreak* in which 'factory slaves', in order to be everything to themselves, should refuse to be anything to capital:

16. Louis Aragon, *Treatise on Style*, Alyson Waters, trans, University of Nebraska Press, Lincoln, Nebraska, 1991

17. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume One, op cit, p 199. See also his claim that, 'the question of style concerns life as well as literature', Henri Lefebvre, 'Le Romantisme révolutionnaire', *Nouvelle Revue Française*, 1 October 1957, p 29.

> *The impossible class*... This would be the right attitude of mind: The workers in Europe ought henceforth to declare themselves *as a class* a human impossibility... they ought to inaugurate within the European beehive an age of a great swarming-out such as has never been seen before, and through this act of free emigration in the grand manner protest against the machine, against capital, and against the choice now threatening them of being *compelled* to become either the slave of the state or the slave of a revolutionary party.[18]

Throughout his work, Lefebvre would both champion dialectical method and find it haunted by a Nietzschean spectre. His notion of festival is underpinned by a series of resonances and equivocations between Hegel and Nietzsche. His notion of social-subjective transcendence veered between a dialectical *aufheben* which 'steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present',[19] and an excessive swarming-out which finds 'his own morning, his own redemption, his own *daybreak*'.[20] His attempt to map an account of the central determinacy of the aesthetic in social change would be plotted using these two contrary points.

18. Friedrich Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, R J Hollingdale, trans, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge and New York, 1997, pp 125–127 (translation altered)

19. Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, A V Miller, trans, Clarendon, Oxford, 1979, p 111

20. Nietzsche, op cit, p 1

MOMENTS WITHIN AND AGAINST

This tension is clearest in his theory of moments. Bataille's notion of festival stood in opposition to Hegelian dialecticism, focusing on the moment

when the 'excessive' negative value triumphs as an impossible third space which attempts to step beyond and outside of dialectical logic – an other which refuses recuperation. This 'excess' posited a moment external to the dialectic, but Lefebvre would assert a parallel moment as internal to, and even founding, the movement of his dialectical logic.

Lefebvre's theory of moments sought to identify historical agency at a local level through a theory of self-transcendent 'moments' in everyday experience. Though he formalizes this approach in 1961, in the final section of volume two of his *Critique of Everyday Life*, 'The Theory of Moments',[21] the term first appears in Lefebvre's writing in 1925.[22] However, it is first interrogated and examined in and of itself in 1939 in *Dialectical Materialism*. Lefebvre takes up the term 'moment' from Hegel's *Phenomenology of Spirit*.[23] Lefebvre explains the concept by example: A is A is logically true, but if A has real content such as in the formulation 'A tree is a tree', then A is also not-A because 'a tree is only a tree by being such and such a tree'.[24] The 'moment' is the presence of the real content of this tree. The moment moves towards totality – its immanent limit – through real content's assertion of itself in all its particularity. A negative moment takes itself to the limit of its identity by becoming purely and absolutely negative. In its absolute *success* at achieving negativity, it reveals positivity. It uses up everything it has in a single push, so that 'every moment becomes an absolute'.[25] Regularly adopting an anthropomorphic register, Lefebvre articulates the moment as a sort of will to power *within* the movement of dialectical logic, asserting it as its basic animating force. The moment is the real material content of any dialectical analysis but also exceeds such analysis. Lefebvre tacitly shifts the ontological ground of dialectical logic: no longer a closed system founded upon a transcendent logic, but an open and incomplete process founded upon the motive power of the moment. This vitalist-dialectical dynamic is ambiguous – both self-possession and self-loss. Its will to totality is a *false* totality in its exclusion of other moments:

> It is destined to fail, it runs headlong towards failure. Everything happens as if he – the man who has changed his passion into a 'world' – wanted to fail. Negativity operates at the heart of whatever tries to structure and constitute itself into a definitive whole.[26]

Despite particular moments being doomed to compose a history of tragic failure by their own vitality, the moment's vital movement is nonetheless always beyond the particular finite closures of any system, even a dialectical one. Lefebvre argues this is the beginning of a revolutionary possible/impossible dialectic, to be solved by the future. The moment will eventually be triumphant – the final dialectical move – in which the dialectic impossibly exceeds and transvaluates its own logic. He reworks Hegel's famous dictum regarding the owl of Minerva: 'Sadly, the stars of what is possible shine only at night.'[27] This open dialectic poses an unpredictable but immediately present *possibility*, not unlike Bataille's excess. At the limit of this argument, Lefebvre wagered that the course of the possible could be charted at this open edge of his dialectic:

> [The theory of moments] must be capable of opening a window on supercession, and of demonstrating how we may resolve the age-old conflict between the everyday and tragedy, and between triviality and Festival.[28]

21. Henri Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume Two, John Moore, trans, Verso, London, 2005, pp 343–344

22. Shields has identified this first usage, in 1925 in 'La Pensée et l'esprit', *Esprit* 1, 1925. Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*, op cit, p 59

23. The term appears throughout the *Phenomenology*, but the 'laws of the pure moments of the inner' are specifically addressed by Hegel in the chapter on 'Reason'. See Hegel, *The Phenomenology of Spirit*, pp 145–147. It refers to the 'steps' of dialectical logic's movement, as one term becomes another. Henri Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, John Sturrock, trans, Jonathan Cape, London, 1968, p 36, p 40. Elden also draws out several resonances with Nietzsche's writing on time. Stuart Elden, *Understanding Henri Lefebvre: Theory and the Possible*, Continuum, London and New York, 2006, p 172

24. Lefebvre, *Dialectical Materialism*, op cit, p 41

25. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume Two, op cit, p 346

26. Ibid, p 347

27. Ibid, p 348

28. Ibid, p 358

This crack opened in dialectical logic did allow one to slip through into considerations of local, bottom-up agency, but read critically this possible/impossible dialectic also allowed him to postpone a present crisis emerging within his own dialectical method. These contradictions were embodied in the image of 'festival', which filled exactly this gap: between his agency-oriented theory of history and the historical change it foretold.

REVOLUTION-AS-FESTIVAL

Lefebvre first began using 'festival' as a concept in 1947, in volume one of his *Critique*, but developed it most centrally in a 1962 essay and later book on the Paris Commune. Lefebvre's source for the image of festival-as-social-change was not French revolutionary pageants, Proletkult theatre or Kwakiutl potlatch, but one much closer to home: the rural French culture he had grown up with. The closing section of volume one of his critique, entitled 'Notes Written one Sunday in the French Countryside', make this link. However, this festival did not simply mark a Romantic town/country opposition; or even a spatial division of labour, as geographical readings of Lefebvre have tended to emphasize. Lefebvre's festival marked a division of *cultural* labour, between folk-culture's relatively open and collective participation in cultural production and urban capitalism's increasing specialization of roles within cultural production and its separation of cultural labour from other forms of production.

In his analysis, the condition of rural work changed with the rise of industrialization from 'oeuvres' (whole works under their own control) to 'products' (commodities produced without autonomy). The specific 'rural regime', or whole 'way of life', is finally lost under Fordist capitalism as the countryside and its everyday life now exist as an exception rather than a rule.[29] Like Bataille and Nietzsche, Lefebvre draws on the originary plenitude of the festival, but uses it as evidence that plenitude and joy were *historically* primary: an ideal example of the moment within his open dialectic.

> Peasant celebrations tightened social links and at the same time gave rein to all the desires which had been pent up by collective discipline and the necessities of everyday work. In celebrating, each member of the community went beyond himself, so to speak, and in one fell swoop drew all that was energetic, pleasurable and possible from nature, food, social life and his own body and mind.[30]

This returned Lefebvre to the problem of how the festival's overcoming of capitalist divisions in cultural production was to be manifested within capitalism. He found the answer secreted in Marx's writing, in what he called the greatest festival of the nineteenth century: the 1871 Paris Commune. Through this case study, festival would become not just an abstract category by which to rethink agency and political participation vis-à-vis culture, but a specific re-imagination of the culture of social movements.

Lefebvre's 1962 essay 'The Meaning of the Commune' developed new inflections on the idea of festival articulated in his *Critique*, and marked its most developed statement. But he did not develop this statement alone.

29. Henri Lefebvre, 'Perspectives on Rural Sociology', in Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas and Eleonore Kofman, eds, *Henri Lefebvre: Key Writings*, Continuum, London and New York, 2003, p 115

30. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume One: *Introduction*, op cit, p 202. He would also later briefly sketch rural festivals in similar terms in his 1955 literary study of Rabelais, when he argues for the importance of the experience of festival in rural life as the context to Rabelais' writing. Henri Lefebvre, *Rabelais*, Editeurs Français Réunis, Paris, 1955, pp 81–84. Elden examines the similarities to Bakhtin, given this shared interest in Rabelais. Stuart Elden, 'Through the Eyes of the Fantastic: Lefebvre, Rabelais and Intellectual History', *Historical Materialism*, vol 10, no 4, 2002, but one should not go as far as to conflate their terms or assume a historical link, as other critics sometimes have. Although Lefebvre also uses the term carnival in his Rabelais book, Mikhail Bakhtin was not introduced to France until after Lefebvre's central arguments had been made, when in 1966 Julia Kristeva presented a paper on Bakhtin at a seminar directed by Roland Barthes. Her first publication on him came a year later, in Bataille's journal *Critique*. The first French translation of Bakhtin's own writing was his *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics* in 1970, though *Rabelais and his World* became available in English in 1968. See Louis-Jean Calvet, *Roland Barthes: A Biography*, Sarah Wykes, trans, Polity, Cambridge, 1994, pp 156–157; and Julia Kristeva, 'Word, Dialogue and Novel', in Leon Roudiez, ed, *Desire in Language: A Semiotic Approach to*

Literature and Art, Columbia University Press, New York, 1980. In fact, the characterization of festival in Lefebvre's *Rabelais* as ordering social space and time has stronger resonances with Caillois' essay on festival.

31. Debord cites Lefebvre's *Critique…* and 'Revolutionary Romanticism' in early issues of *Internationale Situationniste*, and also acknowledged *La Somme et la reste* as a key influence. Lefebvre wrote to him in January 1960, having read *IS* and suggesting they meet Debord; *Correspondence*, p 331, p 335.

32. Henri Lefebvre, 'La Signification de la Commune', *Arguments* 27–28, 1962, pp 11–19. The text is reprinted in 'La Signification de la Commune', in Christian Biegalski, ed, *Arguments IV: Révolution/classe/parti*, Minuit, Paris, 1978.

33. They would attack him on numerous occasions in their journal. 'Les Mois les plus longs', *Internationale Situationniste* 9, 1964, pp 30–37; 'L'Historien Lefebvre', *Internationale Situationniste* 10, 1966, pp 73–75

34. All these dates appear in the later publication of the text in *Internationale Situationniste* 12, 1969, pp 108–111.

35. He would also rework this material to speak and write on the Commune later, particularly for publications and conferences around its 1971 anniversary, where he would regularly defend his thesis by comparing his account of the Commune's festive character to both that of the French 1968 revolt, the 1944 liberation and Sophocles' *Trachiniae*. (Notably, in 1960 Simone de Beauvoir had also likened Caillois and Bataille's festival to emotional opposition to

Whilst working on the first two volumes of his *Critique*, Lefebvre came into contact with the Situationist International (SI).[31] Some of the SI visited Lefebvre at his home in Navarreux for a series of discussions which came to focus on the Paris Commune. When Lefebvre soon after published 'The Meaning of the Commune', in the journal *Arguments* in 1962,[32] the SI jealously turned on him for the resemblance it bore to a very similar publication of their own produced by these discussions.[33]

The SI had produced 'Theses on the Paris Commune', written on 18 March 1962 (and reprinted in 1963 in their pamphlet 'Into the Dustbin of History', which reprints their theses with paragraphs of Lefebvre's essay cut-and-pasted alongside them to demonstrate his 'plagiarism').[34] These theses have been seen as central for the SI, yet curiously they did not print either these theses, or the pamphlet that highlighted Lefebvre's plagiarism, in their journal until its final issue in 1969, when it was printed to contest academic and media claims that it was Lefebvre's ideas that influenced students in 1968. Prior to this text, Lefebvre had already used the term festival, albeit without such fully revolutionary associations. According to a note at the end of his text, Lefebvre extracted his text from a book-length project on the Commune he was already working on. Indeed, undeterred by the SI, his article appeared reworked in 1965 as a substantial history, *The Proclamation of the Commune*.[35]

Lefebvre and the SI's vision of the Commune as a festival also recalls Bataille and Caillois' earlier essays on the festival of potlatch vis-à-vis social effervescence and change, especially Bataille's 'Notion of Expenditure', not least in its Surrealist-inspired approach to the role of the aesthetic in social change and its conjunction of Marx and Nietzsche. But, even whilst mixing in the circles of Parisian Surrealism, Lefebvre and Bataille apparently never came into direct contact, despite sharing the dubious honour of being ravaged side-by-side by Breton in his *Second Manifesto*.[36] Yet it seems improbable that with so many shared concerns Lefebvre was unaware of Bataille's work.[37] In fact, it is possible that before making the claim that the revolution would be a festival itself, Lefebvre had encountered Bataille's 1933 essay on 'The Notion of Expenditure' in Boris Souvarine's journal *Social Critique* (Souvarine was expelled from the PCF, the French Communist Party, of which he was a founder, four years before Lefebvre joined). The journal also published early French translations of Karl Korsch, including 'Theses on Hegel and Revolution', which Lefebvre would have been interested in and even influenced by.[38] Moreover Tristan Tzara, Breton and other avant-gardists he knew were involved in the Democratic Communist Circle from which *Social Critique* emerged. He was even more likely to have read Caillois' 1939 'Theory of the Festival'.[39] That Lefebvre, moving on a remarkably similar intellectual trajectory, begins to use the image of revolution-as-festival in 1947 seems more than simply fortuitous. In either case, their use of the term owed to a common interest in Nietzsche and Lenin (this latter interest was far stronger for Lefebvre than Bataille).[40] It is most likely that Lefebvre's Situationist collaborators are responsible for the echoes of Bataille in this vision of the Commune as revolutionary festival. Guy Debord in particular was very familiar with Bataille's writing.[41] Beyond the SI's key provocative theses, Lefebvre integrated this vision of the Commune-as-festival into his thought in ways that are potentially more politically productive than the vision of negation sketched in the SI's

the French occupation. Simone de Beauvoir, *The Prime of Life*, Peter Green, trans, Penguin, Harmondsworth, 1973, pp 572–573, p 597.) Henri Lefebvre, 'La Commune et la Bureaucratie', *Les Cahiers de Varsovie: Le Centenaire de la Commune de Paris* 1, 1971, pp 43–56; 'La Commune: dernière fête populaire', in James Leith, ed, *Images of the Commune/Images de la Commune*, McGill-Queen's University Press, Montreal, 1972, pp 360–375; and 'L'Avis du sociologue: état ou non-état', in *Colloque universitaire pour la commémoration du centenaire de la Commune de 1871*, Ouvrières, Paris, 1972, pp 173–190

36. André Breton, *Manifestos of Surrealism*, University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, Michigan, 1969, p 145

37. Despite arguing that 'Lefebvre didn't read Bataille's articles in this period', Hess concedes that 'He was however knowledgeable enough on the positions of Bataille, which he was well acquainted with'. Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et l'aventure du siècle*, op cit, p 52

38. In *Social Critique* (*La Critique Sociale*) 5, March 1932; Korsch's essay appeared alongside Bataille and Queneau's 'Critique of the Foundations of the Hegelian Dialectic'. See Boris Souvarine, ed, *La Critique sociale: revue des idées et des livres*, Différence, Paris, 1983. Shields' account of Lefebvre's thought supports this hypothesis. He contends that in developing his own Hegelian-Marxism, 'before the war, in the late 1930s, Lefebvre appears to have been aware of the work of Korsch, Horkheimer and Raphael'; Shields, *Lefebvre, Love and Struggle*, op cit, p 36.

theses, which in many respects remained close to Bataille's problematic dual embrace of a classist vision of the unruly mob and a colonialist primitivism.

Lefebvre's reading of the Commune imposes on it his analysis of the festival as pre-industrial labour's unalienated 'whole way of life', describing it rather lightly as returning 'a spring festival in the city'.[42] He draws the metaphor from his concern with the relation between country and city. Baron Haussmann's architectural reforms of Paris famously reorganized the city into administrative districts: government and work took the centre, whilst workers' accommodation and everyday lives were pushed out into the periphery. In the Commune, workers who now found themselves a foreign agent within this arrangement retook the city and restored to it that 'whole life' which they brought from the country. In his book-length study, Lefebvre devotes an appendix to documenting the folk-festivals and celebrations which took place in the city during the Commune.

But this analysis which found rural festivals in the city does not account for Lefebvre's much more ambitious social-critical claims, not just for rural forms of labour and subjectivity in the city, but for 'festival' as a metaphor of the revolutionary and aesthetically founded *remaking* of urban labour-identities. The key to this extrapolation is located in his book-length study. In his introduction, entitled 'The Style of the Commune', he posits a sociological emphasis on the 'style' of the Commune as making up an important part of its historical meaning. He argues that the political value and novelty of the Commune is in its aesthetics, rather than in tactics or organization. Thus Lefebvre reads one central problem of the Commune as a lack of innovation, which was simultaneously aesthetic and strategic. It 'placed authentic revolutionary creations in ancient dressings which smothered them'. Lefebvre and the SI both stress this point, but the SI focus on the Commune's 'mass of unaccomplished acts' and, in a move somewhat resonant of Bataille's celebration of lumpen violence,[43] recognize its moments of negation as a first step to creativity.[44] Both texts share the example of the conflict between artists who defended Notre Dame Cathedral in the name of 'permanent aesthetic values' and those Communards who wished to burn it down to access *their* self-expression against a society which would condemn them to defeated silence. But only Lefebvre extends this reading to the particular history of the destruction of the Vendôme Column, a monument to Napoleonic imperialism.[45] Against Haussmann's urbanism, he recalls this as a positive creative act, the necessary first stage of a revolutionary urbanism. Not only does he stress the importance of the aesthetic by this focus on apparently 'symbolic' acts as central to the Commune's labour and identity, but, recognizing the value of these acts in specificity, he moves beyond a reductive reactionary account of the Commune as irrational destruction, whether celebrated or condemned.[46] His appendix on the particular folk-festivals the Commune develops is thus just as important as this celebrated reading of this more visible flamboyant act.

This valorization, as culture, of particular moments of the Commune is founded on a broader philosophical reading in which the Commune's 'style of living' reveals itself as the liberated creativity of poiesis. He cites the passage (mentioned earlier vis-à-vis the total man), of Marx's *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, which deals with the 'self-feeling' of classes in Germany:

> But every class in Germany lacks the consistency, the keenness, the courage, and the ruthlessness which would mark it out as the negative representative of society… that genius that animates material force into political power, that revolutionary boldness which flings at the adversary the defiant phrase: *I am nothing and I must be everything*… The relationship of the different spheres of German society is therefore not dramatic but epic.[47]

Lefebvre reiterates Marx's extrapolation from dramatic forms to the stage of history: 'Empowered by this perspective of Marx's on political genius and style, we can loudly proclaim that the true style of the Commune was that of festival.'[48] The performance of this festival would embody this defiant will to be everything, and neatly coincide with the logic of his theory of moments. Lefebvre locates Marx's citation of revolutionary will, 'I am nothing and I must be everything' in the Commune as a historical example of the will to power also evident in the moment. Moreover, this provided an example not only of a transcendent collective social joy but of such joy tied to poiesis's refusal of work: the impossible assertion of labour-power beyond labour. Extrapolating Marx's dramatic prompt, he was able to interpret the everyday life of the Commune as this poiesis:

> The Commune? It was a festival, the greatest of the century and of modern times. Even the coldest analysis uncovers the impression and will of the insurgents to become masters of their lives and of their history, not only in regard to policy decisions but in the everyday. In this sense we understand Marx: The greatest social measure of the Commune was its own existence in action, 'Paris, all truth, Versailles, all lies.'[49]

This reading of the Commune relies heavily on the particular tone of Lenin and especially Marx's own laudatory language regarding the 'heaven stormers' of the Commune. Marx collected his reflections on the Commune in *The Civil War in France*, published in 1891. This text itself was not translated into French until 1953, and we can clearly see how it might have inspired Lefebvre's 1962 text. Marx, reacting to bourgeois horror at the Commune, regularly plays on the language of possibility/impossibility, celebrating it as 'Communism, "impossible" Communism!' and portraying it as joyful and laughing: 'The working class can afford to smile at the coarse invective of the gentleman's gentleman with the pen and inkhorn… pouring forth… in the oracular tone of scientific infallibility.'[50] In this sense Marx's characterization of the Commune, bound to particular engagements with conservative social critics, was essential in providing Lefebvre with an appealing historical proof. What this suggests is that a central foundation of Lefebvre's concept of revolution-as-festival is the coincidence that in both European folk festivals and urban mass mobilizations a subaltern or emergent culture and its modes of production enters the visibility of participation and documentation within those of a dominant culture (which he characterizes as a relation of margin/centre). Their shared power of discursive constitution, the impact and visibility which forms a point of access to subaltern culture, stands behind revolution-as-festival's co-location of a focus on collective political participation and folk-festival aesthetics of joyful reversals. It is on these foundations that (counter to Bataille's more problematic combination of notions of the lumpen mob and colonial potlatch) Lefebvre coins the concept of revolution-as-festival as a

Souvarine at least was certainly aware of Lefebvre's translations; see Anne Roche, *Boris Souvarine et la Critique Sociale*, Découverte, Paris, 1990, p 111.

39. The essay, first published as chapter four of Caillois' *Man and the Sacred*, was republished with alterations in the *Nouvelle Revue Française*, to which Lefebvre would himself later contribute, and it had been notable enough to be attacked in Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Roger Caillois, *L'Homme et le sacré*, Gallimard, Paris, 1939, p xi, p 146; 'Théorie de la fête (I)', *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 315, December 1939, pp 863–882; and 'Théorie de la fête (fini)', *La Nouvelle Revue Française* 316, January 1940, pp 49–59, translated in 'Festival', in Denis Hollier, ed, *The College of Sociology 1937–1939*, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis, Minnesota, 1988.

40. The image of festival as a primary joyful plenitude appears consistently in Nietzsche's writing from *The Birth of Tragedy*, and both Bataille and Lefebvre make reference to Lenin's writing. Lefebvre makes his debt clear in referring to the commune as 'a festival of the disinherited and proletarian', in Henri Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune*, Gallimard, Paris, 1965, p 21, p 488, echoing Lenin's 'Revolutions are festivals of the oppressed and exploited', in Vladimir Lenin, 'Two Tactics of Social-Democracy in the Democratic Revolution', *Collected Works*, Volume 7, Progress, Moscow, 1962, pp 15–140.

41. Debord's earlier group the Lettrist International entitled its journal *Potlatch*; his first film, 'Screams for de Sade', was titled after 'Dali Screams

with Sade', Bataille's original title for his essay 'The Lugubrious Game'; and *Society of the Spectacle* contains further allusions to Bataille's *The Accursed Share*, which developed his concerns with festival and excess into a book-length study.

42. Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune*, op cit, p 21. A short section of this later text is available in translation, as 'The Style of the Commune (from La Proclamation de la Commune, 1965)', in Elden, Lebas and Kofman, op cit.

43. They are alone in celebrating as creative a rebel's murder of a bourgeois *because* he had never been involved in politics; see thesis, note 5 of the SI's text.

44. Lefebvre, 'La Signification de la Commune', p 13. Theses 8–10 of the SI's text

45. Although the SI, perhaps influenced by Lefebvre, reproduced a photograph of the column's demolition in a 1962 article which reiterates the first of their theses on the Commune to describe contemporary wildcat strikes in Europe. *Internationale Situationniste* 7, 1962, pp 14–16. The Column would be discussed in these terms again in the English SI section's unpublished 1967 essay, 'The Revolution of Modern Art', and extrapolated in one of their posters, 'The Communards Burn the Louvre. The Most Radical Artistic Act of the Nineteenth Century', King Mob Collection, Tate archive TGA 200720. Raoul Vaneigem would also refer to it later in his 1979 *Book of Pleasures*.

46. Kristin Ross's Lefebvre-influenced text on the Commune extrapolates directly from this point in reading the material culture of its barricades as a positive embodied example of such aesthetic creativity. Kristin Ross,

transvalued positive concept for the culture of social movements, and the affects and aesthetics of collective social change.

This focus on the 'impossible' in Marx is also a legacy of Lefebvre's encounter with Dada and Surrealism. Lefebvre's valorizing recognition of social movements as having discrete cultures and values, rather than being the unruly absence of culture, is made in terms indebted to the avant-garde. His Marxist leveraging of the humanist terms of poetry, creativity and man is a theoretical working-through which attempts to offer solid ground for the initial opening of those terms by the 'self-critique' of the radical avant-garde. His revolution-as-festival and total man retrospectively 'rediscover' not only the language but the performative remaking of subjectivity characteristic of Berlin Dada's street actions and Parisian Surrealism's marvellous, in a developed fashion and on a broad historical scale among social movements. This particularly idiosyncratic conception of the role of creativity, affect and aesthetics in the labour of political participation would nonetheless become an influential conceptual frame for social movement action, most importantly and immediately for the SI.

REVOLUTION-AS-TRAGEDY

Lefebvre's use of Marx's frame of dramatic analogy became problematic. As dramatic metaphor, the excessive wastage of an annual folk festival neatly matched the narrative arc of his theory of moments which use up all they are in a single push. In this generalized rhetorical attempt to grasp the aesthetic composition of the Commune, Lefebvre stresses his case for the role of the aesthetic in history through repeated lyrical, even anthropomorphic, assertions of the joy present in the Commune. And even though his later book-length study presents a detailed historical account of the Commune, in both article and book the historical events of the Commune are subordinated to a predictable, psychological dramatic-narrative arc. The Commune was an impossible leap:

> A general and delirious 'all or nothing.' A vital and absolute wager on the possible and the impossible… One would have leapt in a single step from blind necessity into the joyous reign of Liberty, into a great festival without end.[51]

Here a notion of the Commune as irrationality persists in Lefebvre's analytic scheme, albeit in heroic terms. Intoxicated joy turned to melancholy as the festival descended into bloody tragedy. For Lefebvre, this was inescapable from the start:

> The popular festival apparently changes character. In truth, it continues; it gives way to pain. We know that Tragedy and Drama are bloody festivals, during which defeat, sacrifice and the death of the superhuman hero who has defied destiny are performed… Then comes death and the triumph of destiny and misfortune, defeat and the final holocaust… And so the Festival becomes drama and tragedy, absolute tragedy.[52]

In this romance of Paris in flames, the Communards are damned to failure. Rather than a revolt overcome by military force, this was somehow a product of the irrationalism of their will to totality. They were angels of purity:

> Those who have fought to the cry Liberty or Death prefer death to capitulation and the certainty of servitude. They are still fighting, desperately, insanely with boundless courage; afterwards they light with their own hands the pyre on which they want to be consumed.[53]

Both Lefebvre and Bataille's analyses of the potential for affect to found radical social change, entangled with settling the competing accounts of Nietzschean and Hegelian models of change and movement as much as with bourgeois rhetoric surrounding nineteenth-century workers' movements, are two sides of the same coin. Bataille maintains the possibility of revolution-as-festival, but only on the condition that it be endlessly violent. Lefebvre by contrast sees it as joyful, but ultimately doomed. Both articulate the notion of revolution-as-festival, not through a practical contemporary engagement but in literary terms, extrapolating suggestively from a historically distant example. Beyond these tragic options, Lefebvre did suggest more quotidian solutions, such as a campaign for the reduction of the work day[54] and a later enthusiasm for council communism.[55] But the aesthetic, cultural aspect of these went undeveloped. Yet an earlier essay of 1957 explores precisely this ambiguous theorization in what would be revealing and influential ways.

THE IRREPRESSIBLE LIGHTNESS AND JOY OF REVOLUTIONARY ROMANTICISM

If Constructivism and Socialist Realism had been attempts to think the role of the aesthetic vis-à-vis the composition of the Communist working-class, Lefebvre proposed a parallel aesthetic self-imagination for Western anticapitalist movements, under the name 'Revolutionary Romanticism'. The essay bearing this title would prompt his engagement with the SI, and the notion was centrally influential upon them.[56]

Whilst Lefebvre's critique exposed bourgeois cultural 'values' as a mystified fetish, he also tentatively began to explore emotive investment and imagination beyond a critique of the commodified fantasies of false consciousness. Could not the 'real content' of his moment be considered itself a 'value', and his dialectical critique simply a call to other emotional investments? Picking up this problem in the midst of writing his *Critique of Everyday Life*, in a 1957 article for the *Nouvelle Revue Française* Lefebvre imagines just this: a 'revolutionary romanticism' which rejects 'the bitter root of the real… in the name of possibility more real than the real'.[57] This romanticism is not a rational critique of everyday life but an accompanying attempt to inspire and enthuse, which equally begins from the moment of alienation:

> It supposes that by pushing to the limit – instead of masking – the problematic character of art and life, it draws out something new… Why? Because the feeling of the ethical, aesthetic and social 'spiritual void' effectively envelops the obscure consciousness of the *possible*. And moreover: its closeness at hand. The possibility of a new plenitude only returns on account of such a consciousness of the void, and of such a void of consciousness.[58]

There is an ambiguity here regarding fantasy and alienation. This scheme entails not a subject alienated from himself, but one who is *already* a total

The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune, Macmillan, London, 1988, p 18

47. Marx, *Critique of Hegel's Philosophy of Right*, p 140 (translation altered)

48. Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune*, op cit, p 0

49. Lefebvre, 'La Signification de la Commune', op cit, p 11

50. Karl Marx, 'The Civil War in France', in Hal Draper, ed, *Writings on the Paris Commune*, Monthly Review, London and New York, 1971, p 77. On the class-cultural aspects of the Commune, see also Roger Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, Illinois, 1995.

51. Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune*, op cit, p 23

52. Ibid, pp 21–22. Starr also discusses Lefebvre as using reactive categories in the trope of 'confusion' which surrounded accounts of the Commune. Peter Starr, 'The Uses of Confusion: Lefebvre's Commune', *Contemporary French Civilisation*, vol 19, no 1, 2005, pp 67–84.

53. Lefebvre, *La Proclamation de la Commune*, op cit, p 22

54. Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, Volume One, op cit, p 175

55. He co-founded the journal *Autogestion*, which lasted from 1966–1969.

56. The text is mentioned specifically in their first exchanges. Guy Debord, *Correspondence: The Foundation of the Situationist International (June 1957–August 1960)*, Semiotext(e), New York, 2009, pp 330–331, pp 349–350. Alice Debord's footnote to this letter suggests Debord is

man. Here, the will to power replaces dialectical supercession, and we might read revolutionary romanticism as an account of the moment's self-overcoming. It is an impossible but necessary leap. The very sensibility that feels the impossibility of its 'dissatisfaction and incompleteness' is itself proof of the existence of a critical subject who, if they are not to be stifled and extinguished by that impossibility, must leap beyond it. This feeling can only be founded on the untimely embrace of the future: on imagination and desire.[59] Lefebvre sees Romanticism as 'man in thrall to the past'.[60] Instead, he proposes taking one's poetry from the future: '*Man in thrall to the possible*, such would be the first definition, the first affirmation of the attitude of revolutionary romanticism.'[61] Lefebvre opposes examples of the 'possible-possible': to get a job, an apartment, to take commodities as defining reality, to use jargon… to the 'impossible-possible': the empowered participation of everyone in the spheres of technology, state and social wealth: 'The new (revolutionary) romanticism affirms the primacy of the impossible-possible and grasps this virtuality as essential to the present.'[62] Revolutionary romanticism's aesthetic of the future in the present is the point at which Lefebvre's logic actively seeks its limit, tests it powers, and tries to find out what it can *do*. But this conception of affect's motive social power runs into the same problems as Bataille and Caillois' engagement with Georges Sorel's idea of 'myth'. First, to take one's values from the future, in order to create that future, is a circular move. Lefebvre does briefly begin a dialectical critique of this romanticism, but such a critique is precisely the 'impossible' of which his philosophy of the moment is a rebuttal. More seriously, Lefebvre's essay falls back into a call for a cultural vanguard to lead the way with the production of inspiring values and makes him susceptible to his own earlier critique of the role of imposed values as reification and ignores the collective, social-movement production of values which inspired him in the Commune. Revolutionary romanticism was a programme at the limit of Lefebvre's theory of moments, a suspended dynamic of revolutionary joy and left melancholy.

Lefebvre opened up a problem that remained central for the SI. In issue one of *Internationale Situationniste*, Debord would agree with the basic propositions of Lefebvre's 'Revolutionary Romanticism', but argued that this was only a starting point. 'Consciousness of the possible' was not enough. One had to go beyond representation into experiments with new ways of being. However, after falling out with the SI, 'a love affair that ended badly', he would critique their 'neurotic' elitist sectarianism as symptomatic of party cadre-based approaches to revolution which deferred the problem of transition:[63]

> They do not offer a concrete utopia, but an abstract one. Do they actually imagine that one fine morning or decisive evening, mankind will look and say, 'Enough! Enough of labour and boredom! Forget it!' and enter into the eternal festival, into the creation of situations? Though it happened once, at the dawn of March 18, 1871, this circumstance will not occur again. Would it betray the revolution to say this and remember the questions left unresolved by the great revolutionaries: 'What is the period of transition and change? What does it consist of?'[64]

Lefebvre continued to regard the Commune as the ideal festival, a bright, tragic and beautiful flare in the moribund pages of history. Reading the

referring to a different text with the same title, 'Revolutionary Romanticism', published a year later in 1958, co-written with Tristan Tzara, Lucien Goldmann and Claude Roy. However, Debord's own essays in 1958–1959 refer explicitly to the argument of Lefebvre's sole-authored 1957 text. 'Theses Sur la Révolution Culturelle', *Internationale Situationniste* 1, 1958, pp 20–21; 'Le Sens du dépérissement de l'art', *Internationale Situationniste* 3, 1959, pp 3–16.

57. Lefebvre, 'Le Romantisme révolutionnaire', op cit, p 48. Translated in Henri Lefebvre, 'Revolutionary Romanticism', Gavin Grindon, trans, *Art in Translation*, vol 4, no 3, 2012, pp 287–300

58. Ibid, p 42

59. Methodologically, this foreshadows Vaneigem's 'radical subjectivity', though both are possibly influenced by Cornelius Castoriadis's developing open, and later anti-dialectical, Marxism.

60. Lefebvre, 'Le Romantisme révolutionnaire', op cit, p 43

61. Ibid, p 43

62. Ibid, pp 49–50

63. Kristin Ross, 'Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview', *October* 79, 1997, pp 69–83

64. Henri Lefebvre, *Position: contre les technocrates*, Gonthier, Paris, 1967, p 195. The SI, responding to this attack with the benefit of hindsight, would coolly reprint this 1967 passage in an article detailing the events of May 1968, headed by Arnold Ruge's famously ill-fated comment to Marx in March of 1844, 'You believe that these Germans will make a political revolution in *our* lifetime? My friend, that is just wishful thinking.'

'Le Commencement d'une époque', *Internationale Situationniste* 12, 1969, pp 3–34, p 62; Ross, op cit, pp 69–83

Commune as festival while holding to this open dialectic both sustained the possibility of radical agency and entailed a hopeless paralysis. He held to the possibility of transition, but had no model of this himself (his and the SI's shared flirtation with council communism notwithstanding). His overdetermination of Hegel and Nietzsche in the 'moment' deferred by ingestion the problem of charting an intimate, affective path to social change. But despite Lefebvre's melancholy and the SI's rebuffs, revolution-as-festival – the central trope of this impasse – nonetheless provided a new political language for both the SI and other activist-art groups in the 1960s and after. The trope of revolution-as-festival was not only a visualization of social movement culture in positive terms, but provided a term through which to imagine social change founded on the aesthetic. Despite its shortcomings, it was a means to sustain the present and a point to act from. The impossible leap of Lefebvre's revolutionary romanticism permitted others, from the SI on, to reimagine art's role vis-à-vis social movements. In these terms, it has already proved itself an effective 'revolutionary-romantic' concept.