
Guest editorial

Seattle, Quebec, Genoa: *Après le Déluge* ... Henri Lefebvre?

In 1969, barely a year after the Parisian student uprisings, Monthly Review Press published a slim book with an intriguing title: *The Explosion*. It was written by one of the greatest, though frequently maligned and underrated, 20th-century Marxists, Henri Lefebvre. In the text, seemingly long forgotten, the Nanterre sociology professor, then in his sixty-eighth year, defended the students' political mobilizations and street antics against their left-wing protractors, the French Communist Party and its handmaiden union, the Confederation of General Workers. Lefebvre's commentary was so timely, so hot off the press, that we can almost imagine him writing it (or dictating it, as he was wont to do) while the Molotov cocktails exploded on the Boulevard St Michel. His window on events was particularly unique and fascinating, given that he had a foot in each camp: the ex-communist, expelled from the Party for 'ideological deviations', nonetheless remained a socialist true believer, a maverick fellow traveler, who would actually rejoin the flock during the 1970s; meanwhile, a lot of student radicals and active participants in the demos and occupations, like Daniel Cohn-Bendit, had once been mentored by Lefebvre and were putting his lectures into practice.

This double allegiance meant his Marxist take on May 1968 was at once orthodox and heterodox, rooted in the 'objective conditions' of French postwar society, as we would expect any Marxist to be, conditions expressive of economic contradictions and crisis tendencies in long waves of growth; on the other hand, Lefebvre was equally sympathetic to the 'specific' and 'subjective' grievances of the youth, their alienation, their contestation of institutionalization and bureaucratization. Thus, Lefebvre sought to unite both, galvanizing the 'old' Left, his generation, who tended to rally around class, Party, and trades unions—and who knew their Marxist theory—with an emergent 'New Left', a younger generation less steeped in theory, sometimes middle-class kids, rallying around anti-imperialism and identity issues, speaking the language of culture and everyday life. In essence, the wily Lefebvre wanted to highlight what was simultaneously general and specific about this latest 'French Revolution', what was objective and subjective, structural and superstructural, old and new in the situation, and then grasp them dialectically and explain them in their totality. He sought not to denounce the students' exuberance and street spontaneity, but to foster it, to use it productively, constructively, tactically, alongside skeptical working-class rank and filers. In a nutshell, Lefebvre wanted young and old progressives to dialogue around theory and action.

When I first read *The Explosion* as a graduate student back in the late 1980s, the book didn't do too much for me. Doubtless the political climate of the time hardly helped. After all, my friends and I, as well as most of the British Left, were afflicted with New Right blues, or languid with the melancholy of postmodernism. At any rate, direct action militancy didn't really speak to me with a lot of urgency. So when I began to reread Lefebvre's *Explosion* quite recently, actually for my class at Clark on Marxist urbanism, I wasn't quite sure what to expect. Some things were different now, of course. To begin with, postmodernism had practically died a death, proving the fad it always threatened to be: nowadays, the intellectual left isn't so much bothered about deconstructing Los Angeles's Bonaventure Hotel as an icon of late capitalist 'hyper-space', as it is about supporting the Hotel and Restaurant Employees' (HERE) Local 11 reconstruct the union there. Moreover, this was also the 'post-Seattle' world, the age of

globalization and its discontents, with a many-striped multitude of foes to corporate neoliberalism. Young people were out on the street again, and direct action was alive and apparently well, growing in strength. What a difference a decade makes! Reexamining Lefebvre's thesis on 1968 in 2001 is, accordingly, a lot more rewarding than examining it in 1989. Most amazing of all is its relevance, its amazing salience and insight for figuring out our own current situation. But its lessons are two pronged and double edged, just as they were in 1969: it issues words of wisdom about critical analysis and radical tactics, and duly throws down the gauntlet to both the New Left and what we might now call the 'new New Left'.

These days the New Left are those who came of age during the 1960s' civil-rights and antiwar movements. They were once yippies and hippies and SDSers⁽¹⁾ but are now the gray-haired and gray-bearded 'used' Left, an assorted coterie of still-radical tenured professors, public school teachers, writers and intellectuals and dedicated subscribers of *Monthly Review*, *Dissent*, and *The Nation*. The new New Left, meanwhile, comprise angry members of the United Students Against Sweatshops, young college kids launching consumer boycotts of campus garb made by toiling Third World subminimum wagers; others are straight out of college, well educated and ripe for high-paying jobs in the business world yet have rejected the whole corporate bit, and are instead unofficial lieutenants in autonomous organizations like Global Exchange and the Ruckus Society, footloose campaigners against the World Bank, the International Monetary Fund, and global trade inequities; environmentalists with Friends of the Earth, Greenpeace, the Sierra Club, and Rainforest Action Network; still more are graduates of the Anti-Apartheid and Latin American democracy movements, or black-masked anarchists and various free spirits, rebels with a cause; all, however, are more likely to root for the Zapatistas than for Karl Marx. The generational rift between these two factions is apparent, as are their organization platforms and ideological bases. And yet, both have important messages for the other, if only each would listen. In what follows I want to explore Henri Lefebvre's *The Explosion* more closely. I want to posit him as a sort of radical honest broker, as somebody who can help bring older Marxists and the younger Seattle protesters together to analyze the same problematic and to act together out on the street. He tried to do it thirty-odd years ago and he can help the Left ferment the kind of oppositional lingua franca it needs today, especially to move resistance against neoliberalism along and to develop a more sustained political praxis, transcending dissociations and differences while transcending a shaky global capitalism.

Dionysian Marxism

First, a few words about Henri Lefebvre himself. Somebody once asked Lefebvre in the late 1970s whether, in fact, he was really an anarchist.⁽²⁾ "No", he was reported to have said. "I'm a Marxist of course... so that one day we can all become anarchists!" It's a nice reply, elusive and playful, typical of someone who proclaimed himself the last French Marxist. (It's an opinion only Daniel Singer and Guy Debord could have then justifiably quibbled with.) But there were always unexpected twists and turns to Lefebvre's brand of Marxism, fitting given his lifelong desire—which spanned almost the entire 20th century (1901–91)—to make Marxism more graphic, more joyous, more everyday. And not only was that life long, it was equally rich and adventurous. After all, he lived through two World Wars, drank wine and coffee with leading Dadaists and Surrealists (like Tristan Tzara and André Breton), participated in the *Philosophes* journal, became an ever reluctant Party and ex-Party man, fought for

⁽¹⁾ SDS—Students for a Democratic Society.

⁽²⁾ That somebody was Ed Soja, the UCLA geographer, who posed the question to Lefebvre in 1978. The incident is recounted in Soja's *Thirdspace* (1996, page 33, note 8).

the Resistance Movement near Marseilles, drove a cab in Paris, and taught sociology and philosophy at numerous French universities. Meanwhile, he translated and helped introduce Hegel's thought into France, and developed a whole body of existentialist, dialectical Marxism that transformed unhappy consciousness into alienation, and sought erotic as well as rational knowledge, love and romance more than five-year plans.

Indeed, Lefebvre wrote prolifically—actually over three-hundred articles and sixty books—on art and literature, on everyday life and dialectical method, on urbanism and space. He was a staunch critic of Stalinism from the very beginning, though in this rejection of Soviet-style socialism he saw no reason to reject real socialism, nor Marxism, as both bore no necessary connection to that system anyway. In fact, Lefebvre rejected any systematic rendering of Marxism; he never took it as a holy writ or dogma, and always emphasized an open-ended practice as central to democratic socialism. Fully developed individuality came about through differentiated practice, not through drudge or routine.

In the mid-1940s Lefebvre began to reverse the scale of Marxism, amid cries of heresy, pitching his critique of bourgeois society to the concrete 'everyday', to quotidian experience, to ground zero—to the scale that most of us find meaningful. Modern postwar capitalism, Lefebvre said, continued to exploit and alienate at the workplace, but alienation also began to cut deep into life in general, into nonworkplace practices, into reproduction and urbanism, flourishing through consumerism, seducing via media and advertising, intervening through state bureaucracies and planning agencies, seemingly lurching around every corner and booming out on every billboard. Now, wrote Lefebvre in *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, "you are being looked after, cared for, told how to live better, how to dress fashionably, how to decorate your house, in short how to exist; you are totally and thoroughly programmed." But if this whiffed of Marcuse's *One-dimensional Man*, it wrenched itself away from Marcuse's closure and pessimism. In Lefebvre's Marxist eyes, everyday life possessed a *dialectical* nature. On the one hand, it is the realm colonized by the commodity, and hence shrouded in all kinds of mystification and alienation. "The most extraordinary things are also the most everyday", he quipped in *Critique of Everyday Life—Volume One*, reiterating Marx's comments on the 'fetishism of commodities'; "the strangest things are often the most trivial." On the other hand, paradoxically, everyday life is likewise a primal site for meaningful social resistance, "the inevitable starting point for the realization of the possible". Or, more flamboyantly, "everyday life is the supreme court where wisdom, knowledge and power are brought to judgment."

Somehow, politics has to begin and end in everyday life; it can't do otherwise. Today's everyday life, yours and mine, literally internalizes global capitalism; and global capitalism, in turn, is nothing without many everyday lives, lives of real people in real time and space, coexisting with other people in real time and space. Everyday life is like quantum reality: by going small you can begin to understand the whole structure of life. By changing everyday life you can change the world; why change the world if it doesn't liberate everyday life? And yet, how can you change everyday life without changing the world? Decisive in transforming everyday capitalist society—and changing the world—are actions Lefebvre tantalizingly called "lived moments", which *disalienate* everyday life, and involve collective and individual feats of resistance. Lived moments might be building occupations, street demonstrations, free expressionist art and theater, flying picketing, rent strikes, or even a general strike. They might be serious—sometimes deadly serious—as well as playful; indeed, for Lefebvre, they should be luminous "festivals of the people". Festivals left a lasting impression on Lefebvre's intellectual imagination, the Catholic boy from the Pyrénées-Atlantique who integrated rural festal traditions into a modern industrial and urban context, and then affirmed them as a prospective Marxist political practice. He said that festivals "tighten social links and at

the same time give rein to all desires which have been pent up by collective discipline and the necessities of everyday work.” True, they always “contrasted violently with everyday life”; “but they were not separate from it”. Quite the contrary: festivals represented “Dionysiac life”, and “differed from everyday life only in the explosion of forces which had been slowly accumulated in and via everyday life itself.”

Marxist theory and practice

From the standpoint of classical Marxism, with its Promethean impulse, this all sounds pretty weird. Still, Lefebvre saw no necessary contradiction between ideas about festival and those of workers’ self-management and socialism. Besides, “revolutions of the past”, he claimed, like 1789, the 1871 Commune, even 1968, “were festivals—cruel, yes, but then is there not always something cruel, wild and violent in festivals?” Festivals unfold out on the street, staging epic (and absurd) political theater, settings for in-your-face militancy. Lefebvre demands this of Marxism, and in books like *The Explosion* sought to steer a dialectical path between the *rationality* of theory and the *irrationality* of action. He tries to deal with the slippage between the two, recoupling thinking and acting within an explicitly *political* analysis, an analysis that opens up the horizon of possible alternatives. “Events”, he insisted at the start of the text, “believe forecasts”. Who, for instance, could have predicted with any certainty the turbulent May days in Paris or those of Seattle in November/December 1999? “To the extent that events are historic”, he said, “they upset calculations. They may even overturn strategies that provided for their possible occurrence. Because of their conjunctural nature, events upset the structures which made them possible.” To that degree, events are always original.

Nevertheless, original events do get reabsorbed into a “general situation”, and their “particularities in no way exclude analyses, references, repetitions, and fresh starts.” Nothing “is absolutely virginal, not even the violence which considers itself ‘pure.’” So eruptive events are both unique and general. Either way, they are rude awakenings for those who show contempt for history or are preoccupied with stability. Eruptive events, Lefebvre said, in words that could have easily been directed at our current neoliberal honchos, “pull thinkers out of their comfortable seats and plunge them headlong into a wave of contradictions. Those who are obsessed with stability lose their smiling confidence and good humor.” The big question that follows is exactly “what is new and what is certain in the midst of uncertainty?” Some things change, other things don’t. In 1968, like today, Lefebvre noted an ennui with Marxism. Then, like now, history was apparently propelled by technology not by class struggle; the main dilemma was no longer control of development but the “technical programming of the fruits of technology”—as Alan Greenspan frequently likes to emphasize. Then, as now, alienation was said to have disappeared in a society of abundance, leisure, and consumption. In 1968 French life was ruled by a technocracy and ‘monopoly capital’ who tried to ‘de-ideologize’ society, yet whose grip on that society was loosening. The older generation had previously wanted in, had demanded consumer goods, increased wages, refrigerators and automobiles; the younger, ’68 generation actually wanted out, demanded something more—a bit like today—asking what price the growth, what cost the material wealth?

Then, as now, a complex intermingling of cultural, political, and economic forces prevailed. Then, as now, there was a mixture of old and new contradictions. Of course, the basic class contradiction between private ownership of the means of production and the social character of productive labor, considered primary by Marx, remained unresolved in 1968—and still does. But ownership of these productive forces was in 1968, like now, no longer the same as in Marx’s day. What has happened instead, Lefebvre thought in 1968, presciently for 2001, is a newer contradiction: the growth

of “the entire complex of organizations and institutions engaged in management and decision-making. They are superimposed on the economic organizations proper, and constitute the foundation and instrument of what is called Power. They appear to constitute a system. The term ‘capitalist system’ has not lost its meaning in the century that has elapsed since the appearance in 1867 of Volume I of *Capital*. Far from it. Its meaning has become more precise. It has become clearly and distinctly *political*.” Thus, on the one hand, nations and nationality have been engulfed by economic factors and commodity dictates, pretty much as the *Manifesto* prophesied; on the other hand, Marx clearly overstated bourgeois commitment to ‘free trade’, to its tearing down of every barrier to production and exchange. Indeed, the most powerful members of this class have collectively devised all sorts of regulatory (and deregulatory) devices to *politically* finagle and actively restrict, manipulate, and control certain markets (as well as the world market), establishing new superstate and supra-state authorities, new gigantic executive committees for managing the common affairs of the whole bourgeoisie. Hence there is an ever-growing list of organizations, trade agreements, and acronyms, bizarrely touting the virtues of ‘free trade’, of a neo-liberalism without tears. Consequently, Lefebvre is right to suggest Marx “could not anticipate the flexibility and adaptive powers of these relations, and this in spite of his stipulation that capitalism had inherent limits.” Nor, moreover, could Marx ever have foreseen “that critical and revolutionary Marxism would be transformed into the ideological superstructure of socialist countries.” Neither could he foresee exactly where, and when, any radical contestation of this capitalist executive committee would flare up.

Contestation, spontaneity, violence

Marx never really elaborated a theory of ‘contestation’, so Lefebvre lends a hand. What is crucial about contestation, Lefebvre believed, is “its aim to link economic factors (including economic demands) with politics.” Contestation names names, points fingers, has institutions and men merge, makes abstractions real, and is one way ‘subjects’ express themselves, ceasing to be ‘objects’. Contestation, he said, “replaces the social and political mediations by which the demands were raised to an all-inclusive political level.” In other words, contestation blooms because activists know, for certain, that capitalist representative ‘democracy’ is a ‘crock of shit’. Thus, contestation means a “refusal to be integrated”; it’s “born from negation and has a negative character; it is essentially *radical*”. It “brings to light its hidden origins; and it surges from the depths to the political summits [even to the ‘Summit of the Americas’!], which it also illuminates in rejecting them.” It rejects passivity, fosters participation, arises out of a latent institutional crisis, transforming it into “an open crisis which challenges hierarchies, centers of power”. It “obstructs and undermines a rationality prematurely identified with the real and the possible”, putting an end, if you will, to the complacency of TINA.⁽³⁾ Meanwhile, contestation, the AFL-CIO might want to take note, “surges beyond the gap that lies between the realm of limited economic trade-union demands and the realm of politics, by rejecting the specialized political activity of political machines.” In rejecting narrow economic demands, “contestation reaches the level of politics by a dialectical process that reflects its own style: critical and theoretical contestation, contesting praxis, and the theoretical examination of this process.”

Frequently, Lefebvre thought, contestation flared up *spontaneously*, and this can be a prodigiously creative force. In fact, contestation thrives off spontaneity, “has the outlook and limits of spontaneity.” But Lefebvre recognizes its ambivalence, and knows there’s no such thing as ‘absolute’ spontaneity anyway, as it erupts out of prior conditions and is never purely ‘savage’. (Even the Direct Action Network, a conglomerate of

⁽³⁾ TINA—there is no alternative.

grassroots groups who were most active in Seattle's downtown battles with the riot police, had painstakingly planned its street maneuvering months prior via the Internet. A lot of their spontaneity actually arose in response to police heavy-handedness.) The debate about spontaneity, of course, has a history within Marxism itself, having brought Rosa Luxemburg to blows with Lenin in 1904. Lenin belittled spontaneity, insisted it was a 'subjective element' which could never congeal into a fully blown 'objective factor'. In *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back* he said the "spontaneous development of the workers' movement leads precisely to its subordination to bourgeois ideology." He reckoned a 'socialist consciousness' could only be brought to the people from the outside. Alone, the working class is only capable of a restrictive, "pure-and-simple trade union consciousness". Instead, it needed a party, led by an elite vanguard, dedicated intellectuals who would make revolution their calling, who would purge the movement of its spontaneity, dictate a tight, tactical program of action, especially "to rebellious students... to discontented religious sectaries, to indignant school teachers, etc". The Marxist-Leninist campaign against spontaneity, Lefebvre lamented, "has since been waged in the name of science, in the name of insurrection viewed as a technique, and in the name of organization." It has sometimes had a catastrophic effect on looser, populist protesting, throwing the baby out with the bathwater. Indeed, certain strains of Marxism followed Lenin's edict that spontaneity was devoid of value, that it was essentially irrational. It lacked the military discipline Lenin wanted, lacked his centralist take on organization, regressed into 'tailism', with the tail wagging the dog, the masses steering the Party, and a "slavish kowtowing before spontaneity".

Luxemburg had no truck with Lenin's 'ultra-centralist tendency', rejecting his contempt for nonaligned, working-class activism. Different progressive and working-class federations, she wrote in *Leninism or Marxism?*, needed a 'liberty of action'. That way they would better "develop their revolutionary initiative and ... utilize all the resources of a situation." Lenin's line, on the other hand, was "full of the sterile spirit of overseer. It is not a positive and creative spirit." Luxemburg, like Lefebvre, is more generous, more sensitive to the ups and downs of struggle, in the course of which organization emanates and grows, unpredictably pell-mell. Social democracy, she said, isn't just 'invented'; it's "the product of a series of great creative acts of the often spontaneous class struggle seeking its way forward." It might not immediately recognize itself within this class struggle, insofar as people only become aware of themselves, objectively, as members of the working class, during the course of struggle. They define themselves through their opposite, through encountering a 'ruling class', their other, people who are different from them, who have power and wealth and authority, and whose interests are different from theirs, against theirs somehow. Class becomes acknowledged en route, not a priori, through a struggle for *recognition*, as Hegel might have said. Sometimes this could be *misrecognition*, too. There are no precisely prescribed set of revolutionary tactics, no tactical recipe books. In fact, "the erection of an air-tight partition between the class-conscious nucleus of the proletariat already in the party and its immediate popular environment" is, for Luxemburg, mindlessly sectarian. The unconscious comes forth before the conscious; the movement, she said, advances "spontaneously by leaps and bounds. To attempt to bind the initiative... to surround it with barbed-wire, is to render it incapable of accomplishing the tremendous tasks of the hour."

Lefebvre's humanist Marxism bonds here with Luxemburg's, mirroring Louis Althusser's antihumanist bonding with Leninism. Lefebvre and Luxemburg should be on the reading lists of antiglobalizers everywhere; ditto every Marxist's. "Killing a spontaneous ideology, instead of trying to understand it and guide it toward a practice which may overcome it at the right moment—neither too early nor too late—that", Lefebvre maintained, "is a mark of dogmatism". Without spontaneity nothing happens,

nothing progresses. “Power therefore regards spontaneity as the enemy.” Always, spontaneity expresses itself in the street, the authentic arena of Lefebvre’s Marxist politics, where it can spawn within everyday life, even transform everyday life, be festive, an intense moment of everyday life, a catharsis. The street, Lefebvre said, is that arena of society not occupied by institutions. So institutions fear the street, try to cordon the street off, try to repress street spontaneity, try to separate different factions of protesters in the street, quelling the apparent disorder, seeking to reaffirm order, in the name of the law. From street level, from below, contestation can spread to institutional areas, above; spontaneous contestation can unveil power, bring it out in the open, out of its mirrored-glass offices, its black-car motorcades, its private country clubs, its conference rooms—sometimes it doesn’t even let power into its conference rooms! Since Seattle, streets have become explicitly politicized, filling in the void left by institutional politics; in the streets, globalization is brought home to roost, somewhere. Therein lies the strength of spontaneous street contestation; therein lies its weakness: the weakness of localism, of symbolism, of ‘partial practice’, of nihilism.

Moreover, the upsurge of street politics and spontaneity in Seattle, in Washington, and, more recently, in Quebec, where tear gas and water cannons met those protesting the Free Trade Area of the Americas talks, has led to the rebirth within radicalism of the phenomenon and problem of *violence*. Violence is connected with spontaneity and thus with contestation—“with forces that are in search of orientation and can exist only by expressing themselves.” Violence, for Lefebvre, is unavoidable in radical struggle. Breaking things up, making nonsense out of meaning (and meaning out of nonsense), throwing bricks through Starbucks’s windows, driving tractors into McDonald’s, burning cars, daubing graffiti on walls—all are justifiable responses to state repression and corporate injustice, to the ‘latent violence’ of power; hence they are legitimate forms of ‘counter-violence’. In this sense, violence expresses what Lefebvre called a “lag” between “peaceful coexistence” and “stagnating social relations”, symptomatic of “new contradictions superimposed on older contradictions that were veiled, blurred, reduced, but never resolved.” Lefebvre saw a certain political purchase in slightly mad destructive behavior, in senseless acts of beauty—so long as they did not degenerate into “the ontology of unconditional spontaneity”, into “the metaphysics of violence”. Reliance only on violence, he concluded, led to a ‘rebirth of a tragic consciousness’, antithetical to the dialectic of becoming. Serious concern with contestation, spontaneity, and violence, consequently, requires at the same time a serious delineation of spontaneity and violence. But this needs to be done in the name of a theory “which pure spontaneity tends to ignore”: Marxist theory.

The Marxist ‘third way’

Last April, 30 000 protesters piled into Quebec City where 34 heads of state gathered to talk about a ‘free trade’ bloc for the Americas, a sort of NAFTA on steroids. 800 million people would be drawn into its web, spanning Alaska to Argentina. “Smash Capitalism”, one oppositional graffiti read; “Freedom can’t be brought”, said another. Cheerleaders, using bullhorns, sang “Welcome to the carnival against capitalism.” Gray-haired activists linked arms with their green-haired counterparts, and as well as marching in the street, chanting, and singing, they organized their very own ‘Peoples’ Summit’, with its counterglobalization manifesto, a grassroots version. Surrounding the venue was a giant chain-link fence, a security zone, keeping demonstrators strictly off-limits. “Wall of shame” became its nickname, before rebel rousers tore it down. As ever, civic commotion to corporate promotion faced a predictable ideological barrage from mainstream media, from free-trade pundits, from its experts, consultants, business school professors and economists. As ever, protesters are denounced as idiotic, juvenile, naïve: listen up, wise up, grow up. There is no alternative.

And yet, 'childish' pranks refuse to let up. 'Immature' young people can still teach grown-ups a thing or two about mature life and politics. Even the sexagenarian Lefebvre knew as much. He knew that maturity often spelt certitude, and certitude frequently translated into dogmatism; it tended to move from the relative to the absolute. On the other hand, incertitude spelt nihilism, lurched toward absolute violence, to a lot of people getting hurt, especially young people. Lefebvre framed the paradox thus: "Spontaneity acts like the elements: it occupies whatever empty space it can find, and sometimes it devastates this space. Thought offers another space, sometimes in vain; and other forms, sometimes to no avail." Lefebvre wanted to stake out a position somewhere in-between, somewhere that had a "unity of knowledge", that retained "political awareness" and "theoretical understanding", that expressed "the scope and orientation of revolutionary truth." It would center on concrete problems that are both practical and theoretical, and would require both sobriety and exuberance, savvy theory and mad, raving ideals. It meant, too, an "unceasing critical analysis of absolute politics and the ideologies elaborated by specialized political machines." It was neither dogmatism nor nihilism but something else entirely, something, ironically and interestingly, Lefebvre labeled a "third way."

In no way does it resemble a political third way, of course; nor, needless to say, should we confuse it with the pseudo neoliberalism of today's 'Thirdwayers'. Instead, Lefebvre's Marxist third way keeps intact the notion that politics can be *romantic*, that the future can be different, *that we can still believe in the future*. As such, he warned long ago, and we should take heed now, the ruling class will try to suppress this contestation, will try to convert romantic possibilism into realistic actuality, and denounce any critical theory. "The centralized state", he said, "is going to take charge of the forces that reject and, in essence, contest it. It will attempt this while at the same time forbidding contestation." At this point, Lefebvre reckoned, "action will change into agitation and spectacle, and this spectacle will change into spectacular agitation." We have already begun to witness 'spectacular agitation' erupt on our streets, coalescing around many different agendas, voiced by many different groups, pitched at many different scales—canceling Third World debt, banning child and sweatshop labor, ridding cars from our cities, keeping city life vital, saving turtles, shutting down the World Bank and IMF, taming unfettered globalization, changing life, and changing the world. Participation is in motion, and people seem to be joining hands, especially as the batons flail and the tear gas flows. One day, maybe, with a little theoretical foresight and a lot of practical ebullience, they might come together for a great big global class struggle, spontaneous yet somehow organized, fun yet deadly serious—a multiaged and multihued poetry of the future.

Andy Merrifield

References

- Lefebvre H, 1969 *The Explosion* (Monthly Review Press, New York)
 Lefebvre H, 1971 *Everyday Life in the Modern World* (Penguin Books, Harmondsworth, Middx)
 Lefebvre H, 1991 *Critique of Everyday Life—Volume One* (Verso, London)
 Lenin V I, 1978 *One Step Forward, Two Steps Back (The Crisis in Our Party)* (Progress Publishers, Moscow)
 Luxemburg R, 1961 *The Russian Revolution, and Leninism or Marxism?* (University of Michigan Press, Ann Arbor, MI)
 Marcuse H, 1964 *One-dimensional Man—The Ideology of Industrial Society* (Routledge, London)
 Soja E, 1996 *Thirdspace* (Blackwell, Oxford)