



VOLUME II

***CRITIQUE OF EVERYDAY LIFE***

Foundations for a Sociology of the Everyday

**HENRI LEFEBVRE**

TRANSLATED BY JOHN MOORE • WITH A PREFACE BY MICHEL TREBITSCH

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Everyday Life

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*Translated by John Moore*

*With a Preface by Michel Trebitsch*



VERSO

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## **Translator's Note**

This translation is for the people of Amara, who taught me how everyday life can be an art and a festival.

*Itzuli dudan liburu hau Amaratarrei eskaintzen diet. Gora gu eta gutarrak.*

Except when preceded by (*Trans.*), footnotes are from the original. When titles appear in French, the quoted material is my own translation.

## **5 The image**

Unlike the symbol, the image is an individual work, but is communicable. Unlike the sign, it does not belong in abstractness, any more than it does in sensuousness. Like the symbol, it appeals to affectivity; it is born in and emerges from a level of reality other than that occupied by signs and their connections. On one hand, it has certain of the powers of the symbol, arousing affective complicities and pacts directly, without using representations as such. It makes itself understood by setting emotion into movement, and by arousing it. It exerts an influence, and includes those who understand it within a group which is characterized by a certain tonality. And so to a certain extent it shares the selective and discriminatory power of signs. It is a form of consciousness, or a level, or a modality if you like, but not the emergence of an 'unconsciousness' which might resemble a storehouse of images. However, it is multiple; it appeals to all the senses, and it arouses obscure emotions by travelling back to ancient seasons and bygone ages of the individual, the group and the species. Thus it activates and actualizes a link between the present and the past, something the sign cannot do. In this respect it is an aspect of expressivity. Communicated and communicating, it is original and unique; it carries the hallmark of inventiveness, of spontaneous or cultivated poetry. It needs signs (today's words and graphic or typographic signs) to communicate, but it overloads these signs with its emotional (expressive) content, the origins of which are lost in the mists of time, together with symbolisms. Although it is alien to the (logical and formal) structure of discourse, it intervenes in discourse by propelling it forward and colouring it with its own emotional tonality. The threshold to this emotive content is always vague and hard to delimit. It works by insinuation and suggestion rather than by imposing itself, which is why it requires complicity and pacts; and yet it overcomes obstacles and barriers which hinder precise signification. It creates misunderstandings and dissensions, but it can also resolve them. Thanks to the image and the content which makes up a part of its influence, opaqueness becomes somewhat more transparent. Distances vanish as if by magic. Could this content be limitless? Possibly, although it may be an illusion inherent to imagination. If we speak of limitlessness, it is in the context of harmonics, where resonance goes

on indefinitely, perceptible only to the sharpest of ears, although all perception is limited in such matters.

Therefore the image is the opposite of the signal and the sign. Whereas these address action and the present, the image turns towards the past, like the symbol. It rescues the past from darkness (from 'unconsciousness', to use another terminology) and dispersion, bringing it into the light of the present day. However, unlike the symbol, the image also goes towards the future. It strives to attain something not yet present and to 'presentify' or present it. So it is a prospector in the distant territory of what is possible and what is impossible. It prepares choices and indicates them. It arouses emotions, feelings and desires, in other words virtual actions, and compels imagination to wager on a future it foretells and anticipates, and which it helps to determine (through 'projects of choice'). Thus imagination could be seen as the function of what is possible (in so far as we can talk about 'function' in this context; troublesome but useful, demanding but free, this 'function' is something we could well do without).

From the point of view of reflective thought, there is a kind of incompatibility between retrospection and prospection. They are opposite attitudes or intentions. As for imagination, it knows how to use the past in order to invent the future. It projects what it has acquired through experience towards the future, and frequently starts from something extremely archaic to represent the farthest realms of the impossible/possible. This is not simply a reference to science fiction. We also have the brilliant Fourier in mind, whose vision of everyday life in future society was based upon archaic communal life, but enriched with everything that human development can offer, as Marx put it (and Marx owes much more to Fourier than is generally admitted).

The image is an act. In this respect it implies the will to be effective: sometimes to help make what is possible real or to represent the impossible, sometimes to prepare a project of choice, sometimes to captivate and touch another human being. In so far as it is a social act, the image is the image of an action which it deliberately projects towards the 'subject' – the human being it is addressing and whom it wants to influence. Touched and moved, this person responds to the effects of the image and projects it back towards its initiator. This

double projection produces a result which is no longer a projection but a mutual presence, and even an emotional sameness. All communication involves images, and the deepest communication of all is achieved through images.

The image is only active when it is 'expressive'. It arouses what it expresses, and provokes it. The image has an inherently provocative character. When we use an image to provoke an emotion, we ourselves do not need to be moved. However, we cannot invent an image without having previously felt an emotion. As the concept of expressivity becomes more precise, it is turned on its head. On the level of the image, expression is active in its effect, as much and more than in its condition or cause. Whoever experiences this effect locates it in the image, which he qualifies as 'expressive', while for whoever employs it, its expressivity may well be far away in the past. The result is a permanent lag between the invention of images and their use, and between the situation of whoever employs them and whoever is influenced by their action. Thus mutual presence does not rule out misunderstandings and dramas, quite the reverse: it encompasses their possibility.

Although it is not up to us to give a theory of imagination (or of language for that matter), since it has been formulated elsewhere, we will summarize it.

The study of archaic magic and its repercussions demonstrates the emotional effectiveness of practices such as gestures, ceremonies and ritualized expressions, etc. The magician *evokes* people who have disappeared, who are absent; he evokes obscure powers; he *resurrects* the dead, and achieves the *repetition* or the renewal of the past. He can challenge what has been accomplished and act as though what is not. He can influence the future by *bringing it into the present*. He changes his personality by *identifying* it with a wide variety of 'beings' – demons and gods, kings and genies – in a *participation*.

Now imagination and magic share the same categories. More precisely, the modalities of magic have become the modalities of imagination: to evoke, to resurrect, to identify. So we may maintain that, historically and sociologically, imagination is an extension of magic. However, a profound discontinuity divides them. The magician used his procedures (such as spells and dances) on his patient to produce emotional states which were both entirely illusory and



entirely real (lived). The purpose of magic procedures was to create real states in a real collectivity (groups of initiates). When it is aimed at individuals, individual imagination produces images, not states of trance. The illusory character of the image is almost always perceived as such, although in the final analysis participation becomes complete again, and imagination joins forces with magic once more.

## **6 On several confusions**

In order to locate the elements or formants of the semantic field as precisely as possible, we have made clear distinctions between them. We have emphasized their specificities.

However, rather than distinguishing between them, people tend to confuse them. Critical analysis reveals that several of today's most widespread theories are responsible for this.

There is absolutely no question of denying the importance of the work of the Pavlovian school, from Setchenov to Smolenski and Bykov. Some of the criticisms levelled against the scientific results of their research are unacceptable. It is irrefutable that Pavlov's work proved a total activity of the cortex in higher animals and in man (higher nervous activity), and not simply the existence of isolated reflexes. In any case, we can hardly expect physiologists to be sociologists and psychologists as well. However, what we can expect of them is not to refute the existence of other areas and levels of reality and analysis. Refusal to accept this may be partially and subjectively justified by the effort required to extrapolate all the consequences from an important discovery, but finally it will result in the dogmatism and subjectivism characteristic of schools (scientific clans), and their members run the risk of endlessly following up a line of research which will finally become exhausted. The Pavlovians simply forget that the relation of the human brain with the outside world cannot be reduced to the connections between the cortex and stimuli or signals. The human world is made up of objects, products and human works, not of things. It is also made up of other human beings and of the language which links them together. It comprises repetition and non-repetition, and the relations between the two are problematic. To a certain extent this human world which is given to the individual (who

for? How can one grasp a signification from inside? How can one grasp it from outside? Perhaps a god can, as a Mind, or simply the 'I' of the thinker. There can only be signifying structures in an imminent or transcendental way, and neither make very much sense.

### 3 The Specific Categories

1. See H. Lefebvre, 'Justice et vérité selon Nietzsche', *Arguments*, no. 15, 1959, pp. 13–19.

2. (*Trans.*) Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. R. Livingstone, Merlin Press, London 1968, p. 27.

3. See Merton, *Elements of Sociological Method*, which is a study of political operations in the electoral 'machine' in the USA, with the 'boss', corruption, brutality and illegality, etc. According to Merton, moralistic criticism loses its validity when faced with what the 'functions' of the machine actually are. The 'boss' maintains the machine in good and effective working order by deliberately sharing power via a democratic constitution determined to uphold freedom. The 'boss' makes the law personal, and even humanizes it by adapting it to the real concerns of the population: inner-city areas, underprivileged groups which need assistance or advice. 'The Machine knits the links between men and women together with the complicated links of personal relationships.' Even backhanders have a function in the chaos of competition. 'Rackets' and 'gangs' facilitate social mobility, etc.

4. Merton, one of the few American sociologists before the 'New Wave' (Mills, Riesman) who penetrated the everyday life of American society, was introduced to Hegelianism via Marx and Engels, whom he quotes extensively in the book's footnotes.

5. (*Trans.*) Marx, 'Critique of Hegel's Doctrine of the State', *Early Writings*, p. 127.

6. See J. Huizinga, *Homo Ludens*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1949, and the works of Roger Caillois.

7. Like the equalization of general rates of profit which Marx described and analysed as a self-regulating and stabilizing mechanism in a free-market capitalist society.

8. The existentialist thesis which defines the alienation of women as the treatment of a 'subject' as an 'object' adds very little to what Kant said, when he demanded respect for all 'subjects'. It goes back to before Hegelianism, for which objectivization is a necessity, i.e., the transformation of subjective intentions and tendencies into works, and goes so far as to condemn beauty, ornaments, fashion, and everything which makes 'woman'

beautiful and desirable, as alienating. (See A. Gorz, *La Morale de l'histoire*, Editions du Seuil, Paris 1959.) Intellectual activity is becoming misanthropic and ascetic again.

9. See, D. Riesman, *Lonely Crowd*, Doubleday Anchor Books (abridged edition) and Yale University Press, 1950; W. H. Whyte, Jr., *The Organization Man*, Penguin, Harmondsworth 1960; A. C. Spector, *Exurbanites*, Berkeley Publications, 1955.

10. (*Trans.*) *Je est un autre*. Lefebvre is quoting from Rimbaud's *Une saison en enfer*. Conventionally, the translation would be 'I is another'.

11. This is implied in the work on the 'non-directive' by the American psycho-sociologist Rogers and his school in France, for example.

12. We have already published a series of articles (see notably *La Pensée*, 1956) in which we have taken this controversy up with several philosophers, in particular the late and much-missed Maurice Merleau-Ponty. We take them to task for applying the idea of ambiguity to the relations between being and consciousness, i.e., for generalizing it as an (ontological) philosophical category. In this context we consider it to be a specific (sociological) category.

13. See J. Galbraith, *The Affluent Society*.

14. (*Trans.*) A ceremonial activity among North American Indians involving the distribution of gifts.

15. According to the English historian Arnold Toynbee, every people responds victoriously to a challenge by *nature* (as long as it keeps its vitality: Egypt and the periodic Nile floods, England and sea defences, etc.), and this determines a perishable civilization. This theory is a useful and significant one. However, taken as an isolated hypothesis, and carried to the absolute, it becomes erroneous, and even dangerous. What we are considering here, sociologically, is challenge between groups.

16. See J. Duvignaud, *Pour entrer dans le XXe* Grasset, Paris 1960, where the author restricts the question (by limiting it to literature).

17. We borrow the expression (*rythmanalyse*) from Gaston Bachelard.

18. See G. Gurvitch, *Traité de sociologie*, and *La Multiplicité des temps* Cours de la Sorbonne, 1957–8, CDU.

19. See Jean-Paul Sartre's old idea about 'to make and in making to make oneself', which is now very widely accepted as a formulation of *praxis*. (*Trans.*) In French, the verb *faire*, which means equally to make and to do.

20. The most recent example: information theory originated in telecommunications and in the transmission of telegraphic messages using a general conventional code. Zipf's Law was discovered by Estoup a long time before Zipf, in his studies of the work of shorthand typists. These important theories only developed thanks to radio and, above all, to television.

21. (*Trans.*) A reference to the 100 metre distance signs on French roads.

22. At the same time as theorems of existence were appearing, mathematicians introduced *dual* properties and demonstrated theorems of *duality*. This is connected with the influence concepts originating in physics have had on mathematics. (See Licherowicz, *Algèbre et analyse linéaires*, on the spectrum of a matrix, the inverse spectrum, etc.)

23. For Jean-Paul Sartre in *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, the stable (the ‘practico-inert’) is antidialectical. For Stéphane Lupasco’s ‘logic of contradiction’, the logical level and the level of contradiction go beyond dialectical logic, and become merged. It is contradiction which produces stability.

24. This is more or less the attitude Jean-Paul Sartre adopts in *Critique*.

25. Obviously the gap between these two types of contradiction is not great. It is a distinction which already appears in the texts in which Hegel presents a kind of gradation, from distinction and difference to the alternative (antagonism), by way of contrariety, opposition, inner contradiction and antinomy. In the *urnhoeser Schriften* we are dealing with a progression which he observes empirically and turns into a general law. In Book 2 of *Greater Logic*, it is rather the result of reflection which develops the idea of dialectical movement. The Marxists have not added very much to Hegelian thought.

26. See W. H. Whyte, *The Organisation Man*.

27. (*Trans.*) Rastignac is the ambitious hero of Balzac’s trilogy *Le Père Goriot: Illusions perdues* and *Splendeurs et misères des courtisanes*.

28. This essay on characterology was to appear in a projected trilogy we were to write in collaboration with Norbert Gutermann, *La Conscience mystifiée, La Conscience* and *La Conscience sociale*. Only the first of these appeared (*Les Essais*, Gallimard, Paris 1937). After the Liberation, we completed most of the project in Volume I of *Critique of Everyday Life*.

#### 4 The Theory of the Semantic field

1. The system of telephone numbers, for example. Each one corresponds to a possible signal (a call or a reply). They make up a rigorous set which leaves little margin for error (for ‘noise’, to use the vocabulary of information theory). Moreover, the set of numbers reflects a network. Each one corresponds to a determined *place* in a determined space, and to a determined *time* (linear and discontinuous, for I cannot call A or answer him until I have finished answering B, and so on and so forth, through a series of disjunctions). Since each call and answer is a possible *event*, the set of numbers defines a *space of events*.

2. Notably in the work of André Martinet, which we have already mentioned.

3. In other words, there is a certain terminology which we are unable to accept. The mathematician does not use symbols, but signs, which are as stripped of content and as formal as possible, and almost like signals of operations which are stipulated in advance.

4. We will deal with the problems of semeiology, general semantics, ‘semantemes’ and partial systems of social signs when we look at ‘communication models’.

5. (*Trans.*) A reference to Baudelaire’s poem *L’Invitation au voyage*: ‘*Là tout n’est qu’ordre et beauté, calme et volupté.*’

## 5 The Theory of Accumulative and Non-accumulative Processes

1. In *Critique of Dialectical Reason*, Jean-Paul Sartre changes rareness into a fundamental and absolute category. He ‘worldifies’ rareness, creating a ‘world’ of rareness, violence and oppression. In doing so he fails to recognize the twofold aspect of these ancient societies (in which occasionally need almost became authentic desire . . .).

2. Here we are modifying somewhat a theory we sketched out elsewhere, which suggested that *form* might be the common measure between diverse cultures, notably between antiquity and ‘modernity’ (by analogy with formal logic and law which subsist across differing modes of production). This theory does not seem to be inaccurate, but can only be applied to a number of limited cases.

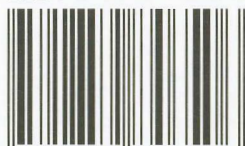
3. Marx also demonstrates how the cycle of economic crises in the context of free-competition capitalism re-establishes proportions by eliminating excess, and allows accumulation to resume. The crisis is part of the system’s process of self-regulation. Marx reveals a dialectical movement: ‘balance - crisis - resumption’. Thus our study does not agree with the often remarkable views of G. G. Granger, who emphasizes factors of structure and internal balance.

4. In free-market capitalism, adjustments (of values, prices and rates of profit) and the formation of an average rate of profit play this role of self-regulation and internal balance, across a cycle of crises.

5. Work on ecology and modern demography (in particular in France, with Alfred Sauvy and Jacques Fourastié) has used mathematics to explain such processes. According to a paper presented to the Groupe d’études by A. Moles, it could be possible to study the number of publications which

'Henri Lefebvre was the last great classical philosopher. ... The concept of "everyday life" was one of [his] ideas: now that it has been fruitfully disseminated through any number of thought modes, from cultural studies to the new urbanism, it behoves us to return to the source, in this first, prophetic postwar statement.' Fredric Jameson

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