

Letter from Guy Debord to Henri Lefebvre

5 May 1960¹

Dear Henri Lefebvre,

The text in question is actually directed against the “world of expression” of pseudo-communication; against a kind of politics of the worst. In what way can this be said to be revolutionary-romantic?² Revolutionary romanticism, such as you have defined it³ insofar as contents and motivations, can be applied to the analysis of all the manifestations of modern consciousness (including expression in a Stendhalian form of novel). But it seems to us that, in the precise manifestation that is the dissolution of modern art, the forms that negate themselves are directly motivated by the central contradiction of revolutionary romanticism, are the very forms of this content.

If Romanticism in general is characterized by a refusal of the present, then its traditional nonexistence is a movement toward the past; and its “revolutionary” variant is an impatience for the future. These two aspects struggle against each other in all modern art, but I believe that only the second aspect, which gives way to new claims, represents the importance of this artistic era.

Can one think that one is living today and thus be revolutionary-romantic – if that is the right phrase – even unconsciously, when no one has ever been socialist-realist, for example, without a firm decision?

Thus I count on “situationist” perspectives (which, as you know, don’t fear to go far), at least to confirm our romanticism on the revolutionary side; and, at best, to supersede all Romanticism.

I will also be in Paris around the middle of May, and would be very happy to meet you.

Quite cordially,
G.-E. Debord

¹ Published in *Guy Debord, Correspondance*, Volume 2, Septembre 1960 – Décembre 1964 (Librairie Arthème Fayard, 2001). Footnotes by Alice Debord. Translated by Bill Brown and uploaded to the *NOT BORED!* website (notbored.org) in 2005.

² On 30 April 1960, Henri Lefebvre wrote: “I appreciate the irony of the appearance of the slogan ‘revolutionary Romanticism’ on your [post] card, at the side of your name. But what exactly did you want? [...] Do you want to end up getting rid of the ‘world of expression,’ which doesn’t at all displease me, but doesn’t concern ‘revolutionary Romanticism’ or what is supposed to be that?”

³ *Revolutionary Romanticism*, co-authored by Henri Lefebvre, Lucien Goldman, Claude Roy and Tristan Tzara (1958).