

David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Blackwell, 1990), Parts I and II

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protevi@lsu.edu / http://www.protevi.com/john/Postmodernity/PDF/David_Harvey1.pdf

THE ARGUMENT: Although there has been a simultaneous “sea-change” in political economy, culture, and the experience of space and time (to the “postmodern”) since around 1972, these are “shifts in surface appearance” when seen against “the basic rules of capitalistic accumulation.”

Part I: The passage from modernity to postmodernity in contemporary culture

I. Introduction (3-9)

A. Examples of pomo culture

1. Raban's Soft City: “subjective individualism”
 - a. Production of images rather than material goods
 - b. Entrepreneurialism and possession-status rather than class strata
 - c. Emporium of styles / city as theater vs rational planning
 - d. Diverse opportunity for consumption vs community
2. Cindy Sherman

B. Is there a new pomo epoch?

1. Modernism as positivistic, technocratic, rationalistic, linearity, etc
2. Pomo as valorization of heterogeneity, difference, fragmentation
 - a. Pragmatism in philosophy
 - b. Kuhn and Feyerabend in philosophy of science
 - c. Foucault
 - d. New mathematics emphasizing “indeterminacy” [really, unpredictability]

C. Common characteristic: pomo as rejection of meta-narratives

II. Modernity and modernism (10-38)

A. Baudelaire: conjoining ephemeral, fleeting and eternal, immutable (10-15)

1. Modernity as chaotic, ephemeral
2. Enlightenment project as aiming at eternal, immutable
 - a. Habermas: objective science, universal morality and law, autonomous art
 - b. Cassirer: progress and secularity
 - c. Horkheimer and Adorno: dialectic of enlightenment
3. Problems with Enlightenment thought

B. Critics of modernity (15-18)

1. Weber: iron cage of rationality
2. Nietzsche: creative destruction and “aesthetic experience beyond good & evil”
 - a. Haussman and Robert Moses
 - b. Schumpeter: entrepreneur

C. Cultural modernism: the artist-hero (18-22)

1. Rousseau, Kant, romanticism: aestheticism and politics
2. Baudelaire: extraction of eternal from the fleeting:
3. Representation and language: freezing time
 - a. Architecture
 - b. Poetry: montage/collage

D. Art market: creative destructive production and cultural consumption (22-24)

1. Art and politics: Dada, Gropius, Le Corbusier
2. Material conditions of art [re]production:
 - a. “Work of art in age of mechanical reproduction”
 - b. Modernism as reaction to factory mass production

E. Complexity of modernism (24-38)

1. Historical geography:
 - a. nationalism, globalism, urbanism (Simmel), etc
 - b. US vs Europe: pace of industrialism
2. Periodization
 - a. Enlightenment: only one answer; post 1848: multiple answers
 - b. Explosion post 1890; turning point 1910-1915: truth in perspectivism
 - (1) deep change in culture and knowledge
 - (2) class struggle: politics of art
 - (a) Democratic and progressive: critical of bourgeois life styles
 - (b) Contra anarchy, despair: still looking for truth under chaos
 - c. Trauma of WWI leads to heroic search for a modern myth
 - (1) rationality of the machine: Rivera, Bauhaus, logical positivism

- (2) fascist turn: Futurism, Pound
- (3) contradictions
 - (a) political art: surrealism, constructivism, socialist realism
 - (b) universal myths: Eliot, Picasso
- (4) myths taking over class politics: Sorel, Heidegger
- d. Universal or "high" modernism after 1945
 - (1) architecture: rebuilding cities: celebration of corporate power
 - (2) literature: canonization of previously shocking modernism
 - (3) art: Guilbaut: How NY Stole the Idea of Modern Art
 - (a) America as the essence of Western culture
 - (b) "artistic rebellion transformed into aggressive liberal ideology"
- F. Counter-culture of the 60s as turn to postmodernism (38)
- III. Postmodernism (39-65)
 - A. Recognition of pomo as novel "structure of feeling" [new body politic] (39-42)
 - 1. Architecture
 - 2. Urban planning
 - 3. Literature
 - 4. Philosophy
 - B. What is significance of pomo? (42)
 - 1. Radical break or movement within modernism?
 - 2. Style or period?
 - 3. Revolutionary potential or domestication of modernism?
 - 4. Undermine or integrate w/ neo-conservative politics?
 - C. Characteristics of pomo (42-65)
 - 1. Valorizing ephemerality and fragmentation leads to attack on meta-narratives
 - 2. Local struggles vs central attack:
 - a. Foucault & Lyotard
 - b. Aronowitz & Huysens: "Even into the heart of Marxism itself!"
 - c. Carol Gilligan
 - d. Pomo fiction
 - 3. Problem of communication among local voices
 - a. Lyotard: focus on technical and social conditions
 - b. Derrida and "deconstructionism": collage / montage as practice
 - c. Such concerns can be found in modernism: Marx, Benjamin
 - 4. Pragmatism as philosophy of action given a linguistic spin
 - a. Rorty, Lyotard
 - b. Habermas counter-attack and upholding of Enlightenment project
 - 5. "Psychological presuppositions": schizophrenia vs alienation / paranoia
 - a. Jameson, Lacan, Derrida, DG
 - b. Problems: no more Marxist alienation bcs no more whole self
 - 6. Loss of historical sense:
 - a. non-progress allows plundering of history & search for instant impact
 - (1) Architecture, art, historiography
 - (2) Problems for aesthetic judgment: Barthes & jouissance
 - b. Loss of depth
 - 7. Event, spectacle, image: bridging high and low culture
 - 8. Relation to "culture of daily life": most difficult question
 - a. Does pomo dictate to the masses or respond to what they like?
 - b. The question of TV's impact
 - c. Pomo as triumph of market over all of cultural production
 - d. Jameson: pomo as "cultural logic of late capitalism"
 - (1) is pomo an "authentic" response to 60s revolt against modernism?
 - (2) or is it capitalist fashion machine producing desires?
- IV. Postmodernism in the city: architecture and urban design (66-98)
 - A. Introduction: modernist planning vs pomo design: experience of space as key (66-68)
 - 1. Modernist passivity of urban "matter": "something to be shaped"
 - 2. Pomo: space as "independent and autonomous"
 - a. JP: hylomorphic principles to be ferreted out
 - b. Pomo here can be positive
 - (1) as recognition of self-organization of urban life
 - (2) minimal thresholds for functional whole: the neighborhood [Jacobs]
 - B. Defense of post war modernist planning: doing the best they could (68-71)
 - 1. UK urbanization; US suburbanization / "automobilization"
 - 2. Relative successes of postwar modernism

3. Behind ideology of high modernism: development machine; celebration of power
- C. Jane Jacobs as anti-modernist: Harvey completely misses main points (71-75)
 1. Jacobs as concerned w/ self-organization
 - a. Organized complexity
 - b. Social interaction depending on diversity and connectivity
 - c. Catalysts of processes
 2. Jacobs as critiquing modernism in terms of hylomorphism
- D. Harvey: pomo populism as "aesthetics of diversity" (75-82)
 1. [Maybe for pomo, but I see Jacobs as a great materialist of the body politic]
 2. Jencks: pomo from 2 techno shifts: communications and computer modelling
 - a. Thus niche architecture is possible
 - (1) but this doesn't address Jacobs' anti-modernist criticisms
 - (a) as it just substitutes differential market power
 - (b) for central State power and planning
 - (2) modernist urban planning homogeneity: represses "symbolic capital"
 - (a) creates "repressed desire" for diversity of the 60s
 - (b) but also pushes for ever-faster changes in fashion
- E. Dissolution of language of architecture (82-88)
 1. Conscious embrace of fragmentation
 2. Jencks' "schizophrenia": eternal as constructed vision of collective memory
 - a. Rossi: urban monuments
 - b. History as archive of events to be accessed for quotation
 - c. British manufacture of heritage
 - d. Search for identity in time of insecurity
- F. Urban spectacle (88-98)
 1. 1960s: riots, demonstrations, rock concerts
 2. 1970s counter-revolution: bread and circuses: city fairs
 3. 1980s permanent spectacle:
 - a. Examples: Harbor Place, Faneuil Hall, Fisherman's Wharf, etc.
 - b. Deindustrialized cities' image: attract service capital [appeal to yuppies]
 - (1) Eclectic monumentalism: Piazza d'Italia in New Orleans
 - (2) Deconstructivism: (e.g., Parc de la Villette in Paris)
 - (a) revealing chaos within order
 - (b) [JP: even as complexity tries to show order within chaos]
- V. Modernization [according to Marx] (99-112)
 - A. Revolutionary capitalism: "all that is solid melts into air": money economy (99-103)
 1. Dissolves personal relations
 2. Fetishism of commodities: masks social relations as relation of things
 3. Money as conventional fiction: signifier become object of desire
 4. Production of desires
 - a. Reterritorialized: individualized consumption of commodities [to realize s.v.]
 - b. Deterritorialized: ability to construct new social relations
 - B. Primitive accumulation: creation of proletarians (103-105)
 1. Separation of direct producers from means of production
 2. Alienation and sale of labor power
 - a. Alienation as principle of "otherness"
 - b. Capitalism makes use of pre-existing race / gender to create "others"
 - (1) but isn't this a bit Old Left, privileging economy?
 - (2) aren't race slavery and female domestic labor essential to capitalism?
 3. Anarchic social division of labor vs despotism of workshop and factory
 - a. Fragmentation of the "person" (but this presupposes its unity)
 - b. Worker as appendage to machine
 - C. Constant revolution of instruments of production devalues old investments (105-107)
 1. Creative destruction and constant crisis as essence of capitalism
 2. Creation of new wants and needs: creation of insecurity and instability
 - D. Unifying principle of capitalism is circulation of capital in search of profit (107-109)
 1. Banks and credit = fictitious capital: temporal tension in financial system
 2. State: principle of fixity and regulation
 - a. Aestheticization of politics: creation of the "national interest"
 - b. State itself disciplined by internal forces and external world system
 - E. Positive aspects of capitalist modernity: power over nature, creation (109-112)
 1. Heroic modernism and myth
 - a. Marxist demythologization
 - b. Versus dreamy bourgeois or even fascist remythologization

2. Marx as Enlightenment figure: get control of modernity for social good
 3. If capitalist modernity is flux, then postmodernism is merely
 - a. A different aesthetic reaction to underlying capitalist reality
 - b. Or a reflection of a shift in capitalist reality
- VI. POSTmodernISM or postMODERNism? (113-118)
- A. Positive and radical edge of pomo (113)
 - B. Pomo as mimesis of contemporary material practice (113-114)
 1. Literature expresses fragmentation of prole existence
 2. Architecture celebrates class power
 - C. Pomo as simple anti-modern “aesthetic intervention” into material practice (115-116)
 1. Even though modernity already contained nuances pomo misses
 2. And modernity’s material achievements are not insubstantial
 - D. Harvey concludes that pomo is a crisis within modernity (116-118)
 1. Over-valorization of flux and scepticism about eternity
 2. Ghettoization of the other in an incommensurate language game
 3. Complicity with aestheticization of politics

Part II: The political-economic transformation of late twentieth-century capitalism

I. Introduction (121-124)

- A. Definitions (121-122)
 1. Regime of accumulation (RA) = stabilization of social division of production
 2. Mode of regulation (MR) = norms, habits, laws, regulating networks
- B. Two problems in capitalism (122-124)
 1. Markets are untrustworthy so collective action by state and civil society must
 - a. compensate for market failures (damage to environment)
 - b. prevent monopoly power
 - c. provide collective goods (defense, education, infrastructure)
 - d. guard against problems w/ speculation (self-fulfilling prophecies)
 2. Conversion of embodied skill into labor (discipline, deskilling)
- C. Hypothesis: breakup of postwar boom = new “flexible” RA and “pomo” MR (124)

II. Fordism (125-140)

- A. Ford: necessary link of mass production/consumption (a new society) (125-126)
 1. Leisure time
 2. Social workers teaching family values
- B. New Deal = state adoption of Fordism (127-129)
 1. Class relations: organized worker resistance
 2. State intervention to discipline workers and absorb excess capacity
 - a. Danger of national socialist rational/irrational solution
 - b. Keynesian rationalist solution
- C. 1945-1973 postwar boom (129-137)
 1. Stable rates of economic growth / expansion of market by decolonization
 2. Material industry focus
 3. Growing demand in core
 - a. Privileged workforces
 - b. State: reconstruction, suburbanization, urban renewal, infrastructure
 4. Compromises by state, corporations, and labor
 - a. Labor: high wages in exchange for co-operation in Taylorist production
 - b. Corporations: big investments for stable growth
 - c. State: curbing business cycles by fiscal and monetary policies; social wage
 5. Total way of life on an international scale:
 - a. Variety of core strategies
 - b. Formal subsumption of TW requires info networks
 - c. Bretton Woods: currencies pegged to gold-backed dollar
- D. Discontent with postwar system (137-140)
 1. Division of labor markets:
 - a. Exclusion by race, gender, ethnicity
 - b. Rigidity of labor markets: difficult to retrain, able to resist, but under attack
 2. State under attack: increasingly expected social goods depended on growth
 3. Consumption: critique of conformity
 4. TW critiques of destruction of local culture, oppression, elite favoritism
 5. [JP: plus critiques of social “reproduction”: women’s movement, civil rights]

III. From Fordism to flexible accumulation [FA] (141-172)

- A. Problems in the mid 60s (141)

1. Declining corporate profits met by inflation (lower taxes met by printing money)
2. Eurodollar market
3. TW import substitution / multinational expansion = core wage competition
4. Breaking of Bretton Woods and establishment of currency market
- B. Rigidity in capital investment, labor markets, state commitments = inflation (142-146)
 1. Inflation = too much money and not enough investment (= excess capacity)
 2. 1973 OPEC embargo raised energy costs and created petro-dollar problem
 3. 1973-75 deflation revealed state overcommitment (NYC bankruptcy)
 4. Corporate responses to excess capacity: automation, new markets, mergers
- C. FA as response to economic crisis (cf. Empire emphasis) (147-159)
 1. Labor
 - a. New labor control via threat of relocation, automation
 - b. New labor structure: core vs periphery (out-sourcing, temps, etc.)
 - c. New labor vulnerability for women
 2. Productive organization
 - a. Patriarchal "pre-disciplining": sweatshops, homeworking
 - b. Small sub-contractors: "economies of scope" [vs scale]
 3. Consumption: product innovation, niche marketing, fast fashion turnover
 4. Service sector: FIRE (finance, insurance, real estate); production of spectacle
 5. Polarization of corporation size
 - a. Mergers and mega-conglomerates
 - b. Small businesses, sweatshops, artisans
- D. FA = organization through dispersal, mobility, flexibility, innovation (159-164)
 1. Information systems, commodified knowledge (universities), image control
 2. Global financial system (depends on info)
 - a. structure
 - (1) centralized: financial giants
 - (2) decentralized: new financial instruments and markets
 - b. effects
 - (1) breakdown of boundaries (repeal of Glass-Steagall)
 - (2) speculation and creative accounting
 - (3) decreased control by individual states
 - (4) TW debt
 - c. global currency market = financial discipline (vs state discipline)
 - (1) indirect: threat of capital flight / desire to attract capital flow
 - (2) direct institutional discipline: WB/IMF
- E. Role of the state (164-170)
 1. Discontinuity w/ Fordism
 - a. US imports increased
 - b. Thatcher/Reagan: attack on big government
 - c. Big government intervention into financial markets: TW debt, S&L
 - d. Pressure: regulate national capital / compete for international capital
 2. Continuity with Fordist era:
 - a. Collective state power to regulate global finance: WB/IMF
 - b. Government deficits via defense spending: military Keynesianism
- F. Culture (170-172)
 1. Competitive individualism / entrepreneurialism
 - a. = burst of energy, innovation
 - b. help already [tech / education] privileged: Bill Gates of Harvard
 2. Why? FA impedes collective action and encourages individuals
- IV. Theorizing the transition (173-188)
 - A. Three schemas (173-179)
 1. Halal: celebration: Schumpeter and entrepreneurial innovation
 2. Lash & Urry: "regulation school": power politics in economics and culture
 3. Swyngedouw: Marxist detail on technology and labor: logic of transition
 - B. Harvey: Marxist account of capitalist invariants (179-184)
 1. Three basic features
 - a. Growth orientation
 - b. Exploitation of living labor: need for labor control: class relations as base
 - c. Technologically and organizationally innovative bcs of competition
 2. Contradictions and crises of overaccumulation
 - a. Devaluation / destruction of commodities and/or labor power
 - b. Macro-economic control (e.g., Fordism-Keynesianism)
 - c. Absorption by temporal - spatial displacement

- (1) temporal displacement:
 - (a) investment via credit (“fictitious capital formation”)
 - (b) accelerations in turnover time
- (2) spatial displacement: geographical expansion (formal subsumption)
- (3) time-space displacement: TW investment
- C. Historical manifestation of these solutions to crisis (184-189)
 - 1. Fordist solution
 - a. Pre war: savage devaluation in Great Depression
 - b. Post war: absorption, macro-control, spatial-temporal displacement
 - 2. Crisis of Fordism = exhaustion of these mechanisms:
 - a. Debt, inflation, competition
 - b. Devaluation via de-industrialization and capital flight: geopolitical crisis
 - 3. Flexible accumulation
 - a. Identity: all capital must use basic strategies of profit
 - (1) Absolute s.v.: extension of working day relative to social wage
 - (2) Relative s.v.: through techno change: creation of techno elite
 - (a) temporary profits for innovative firms
 - (b) general profits through decrease of cost of basic goods
 - b. Difference: in FA we see
 - (1) tech innovation = layoffs = increased absolute s.v.
 - (2) revival of domestic, family, patriarchal exploitation
 - (3) overlap of different systems
 - c. Summary:
 - (1) Marx predicted all this
 - (2) we have to look for opportunities in FA as well
 - (3) and provide rigorous Marxist analysis
- V. Flexible accumulation -- solid transformation or temporary fix? (189-197)
 - A. Three broad positions on this question (189-195)
 - 1. Radical novelty (Piore and Sabel)
 - 2. Mere ideology
 - 3. Splitting the difference (Harvey’s position):
 - a. Mix of high-efficiency but flexible Fordism & traditional (“family”) systems
 - b. More market co-ordination vs direct corporate planning
 - c. Changed global working class:
 - (1) female labor (traditional crisis response)
 - (2) growing inequality of income
 - (3) crisis of underconsumption (mitigated by pushing consumer debt)
 - d. New financial instruments and markets
 - (1) flexibility in other factors due to search for financial solutions
 - (2) novel autonomy of finance from real production
 - (a) financial emphasis due to inflationary crisis
 - (b) debt / credit formation and absorption of defaults / devaluations
 - (3) tying together of consumer, corporate and government debts
 - B. Two tentative conclusions (196)
 - 1. Financial system is locus of novelty
 - 2. Stability must come through spatial - temporal fixes