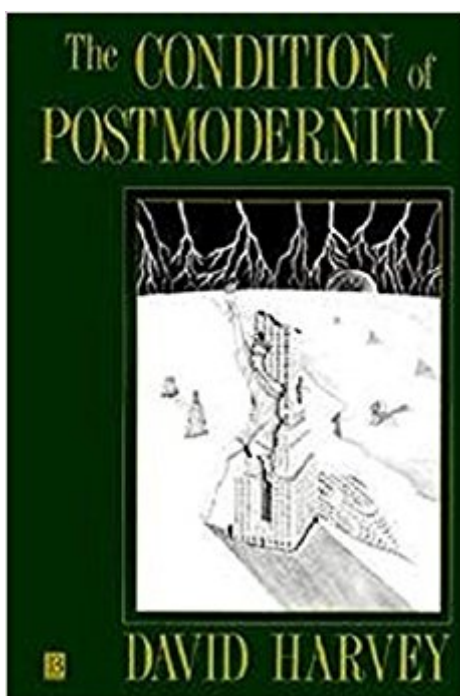


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The Condition Of Postmodernity: An Enquiry Into The Origins Of Cultural Change



Synopsis

In this new book, David Harvey seeks to determine what is meant by the term in its different contexts and to identify how accurate and useful it is as a description of contemporary experience.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Condition of Postmodernity is David Harvey's seminal history of our most equivocal of eras. What does postmodernism mean? Where did it come from? Harvey, a professor of geography and a key mover behind extending the scope and influence of the discipline of geography itself, does a thorough job here delineating the passage through to postmodernity and the economic, social, and political changes that underscored and accompanied it. As he clearly states, the rise in postmodernist cultural forms is related to a new intensity in what Harvey terms "time-space compression," but this new intensity is a qualitative rather than quantitative change in social organization, and it does not point to an era beyond capitalism as "the basic rules of capitalistic accumulation" remain unchanged. Unlike Fredric Jameson (whose equally rewarding Postmodernism stands as the twin pillar to Harvey's critique), who explicitly relies on Ernest Mandel's periodization of late capitalism, Harvey eschews a narrowly economic focus, the limits and contradictions of production that have led to the rise in the service sector, and takes a more multidisciplinary approach to his history. As comfortable discussing Manet as he is labor markets, Harvey is an excellent writer, and The Condition of Postmodernity is an exceptionally informative and enjoyable read. --Mark Thwaite, .co.uk

Harvey presents an illuminating and powerful critique of postmodernism, arguing that it represents the cultural manifestation of late capitalism and specifically that it emerges from a transformation of time and space to accommodate a shift from a political economy based on Fordism to one based on flexible accumulation. Harvey moves with ease and authority over a wide range of cultural forms from architecture and urban planning to painting and literature. He is well versed in currents of postmodernist theory but avoids the pitfalls of jargon and obscurity. The book is both penetrating and accessible, an important contribution to the postmodernist debate. See also *Postmodern Genres*, reviewed below.--Ed.- T.L. Cooksey, Armstrong State Coll., Savannah, Ga. Copyright 1990 Reed Business Information, Inc. --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

Deepest book you've ever read. I read Harvey's 'Enigma of Capital' and was astonished by the depth of knowledge he commands, so I knew this book couldn't be terrible, and wow, it was intense. So, onto the review.. having established that the man knows his Capital, he perhaps has more detail and logical/rational arguments to expound on the relation between economics and culture than his more literary counterparts-- like Jameson in 'Postmodernism, or the logic of late capitalism.' I've read some of Jameson's book on Postmodernism (I'm writing a paper on the topic as a Psychology/Philosophy student), which definitely makes a case for deepest book you've ever read, but I would contend that in it's often esoteric language, Harvey's more explicit rational (Modernist) language is a breathe of fresh air in these Postmodern times. Speaking of esoteric, this is precisely the thesis of this book, that the confusion of world markets, complex debt packages, inflation since the 70's etc. has been paralleled in cultural forms-architecture (modernist functionalism to Postmodern illusion), art (modernist representation to Post modern pastiche-imitation, death of history), philosophy (search for meaning to endlessly deconstructing meaning), and psychology, from Modern emphasis on what is signified, to the Postmodern emphasis on the ephemeral signifier. This last signifier vs. signified disparity is disturbing from an economic standpoint: what the Postmodern is prioritizing--money, for example as signifier--over the signifier, the value it represents or repression it necessitates, is merely echoing economic policies that began around the 70's, which have seen the rise of fictitious capital, the widening of the gap between paper money and any sense of being grounded in a real representative base. Harvey notes at one point the largest physical export out of New York City is paper, on which multifarious forms of imaginary capital are erected and distributed. As another reviewer noted, it is fascinating to read Harvey's detailed analysis of economics, and realize it was written in 1990! I double checked that as I was reading some sections, because he pretty much said 'there will be a crisis in the 21st century.' But to speak too

much of economics in this review would be to overlook the truly fascinating elements of this book. It begins with a detailed account of Modernism in all its complexities, and shows by the end that Postmodernism may not be its own historical-geographical movement as it claims, but rather, a continuation of Modernism in some respects (in the end, it cannot reject meta-theories without appealing to its own meta theory, in the self referential, circular logic it-- like Capital--employs). The final sections preceding the conclusion on Postmodernism itself, are much more philosophical. They focus on how our material relations with objects within economics, effects our perception of space and time throughout various modes of existence and cultural forms in Modernism, Enlightenment, and then Postmodernism. This space time tour makes you think a lot about how time and space perception are influenced and morphed throughout different time periods, debunking the common sense idea that time categories are universal. It makes you reflect on how ideologies are created and shaped through material practices, and implemented from the objective, to the subjective perspective, thus giving meaning to the stoner- like reaction to the present times-- 'duude, don't you feel like things move too fast heeere??' The answer is that they are, and that they HAVE to be because this is the new logic of the movement of capital. It flows instantaneously from border to border, shifting from Fordist-Keynesian logic of centralized mass consumption to what Harvey calls Flexible Accumulation and individualized consumption, aka. everyone is on their smartphones telling each other what they're buying via social (or more aptly named 'marketing') networks, so businesses can tailor to quick spurts of demand- patterns of consumption that have seen the dissolution of unions and other forms of stable work networks, comprising the shift from the vertical, hierarchical corporate formation, to a more ephemeral (Postmodern) horizontal formation. Read this book.

GOOD BOOK

The book is good and the shipment time is on time. Thank you i appreciate it.

Harvey does an excellent job describing how time and space is measured within various perspectives thourgout time. I enjoyed every letter in it.

David Harvey characterized transformations of capitalist system since 1973 as from managed to flexible accumulation. Harvey argued that since the Great Depression, Fordism emerged as not only a regulation model of production but also a whole package of social and political lifestyle. Fordism

bundled centralized, scientific and rational control of production with standardized and all-round incentives and welfare packages to encourage mass consumption of surplus products (pp.125-127). Technological and organizational progresses derived from World War II were widely adopted as new boosters of productivity (p.132). States across the globe were transformed into authoritarian, bureaucratic, rational political machines that simultaneously cracked down on radical working class movements and rationally managed economy through combination of fiscal, monetary and political strategies (pp.136-138). De-radicalized trade unions serve as collective bargaining and enforcement coordinators between workers and employers (pp.128). Social aesthetics correspondingly favored efficiency, rationality and collective progression (p.136). All in all, this stable Fordism social contract relied on state intervention and international coordination based on Keynesian economics, organized consent of workers and hierarchical standardized production. It was both a spatial fix based on collective long-term, large-scale efforts as well as controlled devaluation and accumulation of wealth, and a temporal fix based on expanding capitalist world (p.139 and pp.184-185). Harvey went on to compare flexible accumulation with Fordism. According to Harvey, the 1973 oil crisis, coupled with rising competition from matured alternative centers in East Asia and Western Europe and decline in US power signaled the end of rigid Fordism (pp.141-142 and p.145). Flexible accumulation emerged as short-term, flexible and segregated employment strategies of labor (pp.150-151) and production strategies as well as new industries based on information and in-time production (p.154), coupled by short-term, fast-changing and diverse consumer aesthetics (p.156). De-regulation from the state prompted more flexible organization of production (p.155) and freer movement of capital across the globe (160-161). Competitive individualism and entrepreneurship replaced collective aesthetics and progression (p.171). Most importantly, innovation in financial tools and expansion of global financial market provided new spatial fix of moving capital around the globe to chase the profit and new temporal fix of reaping short-term profit in disregard of long-term debt accumulation and risks (pp.161-163, and p.186). Harvey's theory makes a dialogue with Giovanni Arrighi's longue duree cycles of capitalism. Harvey complemented Arrighi's financialization perspective with the story on the production and labor side. Temporal and spatial fixes are also the two primary perspectives of capitalist transition shared by Harvey and Arrighi. On the other hand, while Arrighi saw repetitiveness of financial expansion (with compressed temporal and spatial cycles) based on longer historical cycles, Harvey highlighted financial innovation and expansion as a novel spatial and temporal fix technique. He also paid much more attention to consumption pattern and aesthetics as part of social contract of particular accumulation models. There is no need to ask the simple question of who is right or wrong, but the

convergence and contrast between Arrighi and Harvey does lead us to contemplate the mechanism of paradigm shift in capitalist social systems and whether post-modernity is a mere extension of modern capitalist system or a significant rupture from it.

The Condition of Postmodernity, although suffering from the author's modernist attitude, provides a vital and continually influential work on the perceived shift towards a postmodern cultural epoch. This shift is equated with the economic change from Fordist to Post-Fordist economies and the new regime of flexible accumulation. The book draws on theoretical examples as diverse as the work of Michel Foucault and Karl Marx and brings together empirical examples that are equally wide ranging. It has to be said that although Harvey provides a substantial appraisal and critique of the postmodern condition the meta-narrative employed leaves the author as the outsider looking in rather than the insider looking out.

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