

Response paper on “Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form” by David Harvey

The idea that cities are the medium to understand human condition, David Harvey tried to expand this idea to a much larger scale. The study of the cities in terms of materialistic elements and at the same time from a philosophical standpoint is present in his discussions. That gives his discussions an artistic view rather than being a piece of mechanical writing. He talks about the natural and built environment, the community building strategy, space and time, things, others etc. He criticizes the classic method of community building which associated with a sort of pick and choose process and a bunch of laws and rules. He argues that this kind of processes create a group called others that are marginalized and destroys the idea of community building as a whole.

Harvey talks about bringing the missing term urban back into discussion. The reorganization of people due to globalization and migration has made the term urban worthy of being a discussion topic, especially in the twentieth century because of the rising number of cities across the globe. He argues on the dystopian view of cities and the strategy that were followed in the nineteenth century to make the cities a mixture of ideologies and create better living conditions. The notion of underclass is quite interesting in this discussion, that how the underclass is marginalized because of elite classes and gated communities. The idea of process makes the urbanization a fluid process and creates things on its way, so to understand the cities better, we can focus on the process more rather than focusing on things.

The relation between space/time and process is quite significant here. It shows how the space/time influence social process and rejects the term urban to be an insignificant idea to talk about. The social process creates things on its way such as cities and gets influenced by them on the way of it. The nuclear power stations are used as an example of that influence, that if any accidents happen with a nuclear power station is nearly impossible to sit and democratically discuss about the solution than taking quick actions by the experts.

The criticism of the idea of community, that it isolates people and groups from the actual city is quite impressive. Because, people tend to rely so much on the community that they start believing that it will fix all the mess that are done. With Iris Marion Young's quote (p. 235), Harvey tries to show how it creates social difference, racism and moreover the tendency of othering. Harvey also criticizes the nineteenth century thinkers for prioritizing the things over the process.

The argument about differentiating the city and the environment has also got a fair spot in the discussion. Harvey calls the environmental modification as a natural process that continues naturally and according to him will continue. It indicates that nothing and more specifically cities are not any different from being environmentally modified. He uses the phrases "Where does society begin and nature end? Go and look in a field of wheat.....You can't do it." (p. 236). He closes the discussion with the notion that the world of ecology and cities are not different entities and they proceed together.