

1st Response Paper:

“ Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form” (Transforming Cities, 1997)

Edited by David Harvey

In the introduction of David Harvey’s response to Nick Jewson’s and Susanne MacGregor’s book *Transforming Cities* (1997) Harvey precisely analyzes the urban politics with regard to social relations and ecological processes within the cities. How are cities depicted when it comes to the human condition and social structures? Why are cities not subject of the fields of modernization, modernity and postmodernity, when there is a massive urbanization of the human population taking place, especially in the cities? How come that a thematic as important as this is completely neglected in those fields? These are questions the geographer is trying to find an answer to.

David Harvey is not only interested in the fields of politics and governance, he diggs deeper under the surface of the urbanization in order to grasp the current human condition stating that it is important to look at cities in terms of processes and not just things for reasons of race, ideology, gender and a variety of other social relations<sup>1</sup>. Why is the notion of process so important here? For Harvey:“ Processes are both shaped by time and place and shape time and place.”<sup>2</sup> In order to clarify this statement he gives the reader a precise example of communist China sending millions of urban intellectuals to the countryside. Here, China as defined as a specific place and the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution as a specific time describes the social process that took place back in the day. By referring to a specific event of the past and the fact that he gives detailed numbers and situations of the event, he supports his argumentative structure and makes himself even more credible.

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<sup>1</sup> Harvey, David. “Transforming Cities: Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form.” *Transforming Cities*, Nick Jewson & Susanne MacGregor. 1997, p. 230.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. 230.

Another important aspect for Harvey is the notion of community with regard to the natural and built environment. It is an overall assumption among certain scholars that cities alienate people from each other and even break down communities. For Harvey community building is a: “ Recipe for isolation.”<sup>3</sup> He gives the example of higher class people playing golf together, creating a community surrounded by walls in which lower class people, with less money, do not find their place:“ The positive identification of groups is often achieved by first defining other groups as ‘the other’ - devalued and semi- human.”<sup>4</sup> According to Harvey, natural and built environments should go hand in hand in order for communities to function better socially. He underlines this statement by mentioning that by the year 2000 there will be more than 500 cities in the world with over 1 million inhabitants, which makes more than half of the world’s population rather urban than rural.<sup>5</sup> Right after giving the reader numbers at hand and making a statement, Harvey raises an other question in order to keep the reader’s attention and arguing the case with a personal opinion. He comes back to the time and space thematic:“ Space and time are not simply constituted of social processes. This is also true for the urban. The urban and the city are not simply constituted by social processes, they are constituted of them.”<sup>6</sup>

Harvey closes the circle of his argumentation by claiming that in order to gain economic change and growth it is inevitable to get things economically right. For him, the same is true for all social relations namely, that it is important to look at the nature of things in order to change something. In order to gain change one should link ecology and cities for the juxtaposition of economy and cities and the progress of the two.

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<sup>3</sup> Ibid. 231.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid. 231.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid. 232.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 234.

## Works Cited

Harvey, David. "Transforming Cities: Contested Cities: Social Process and Spatial Form." *Transforming Cities*, Nick Jewson & Susanne MacGregor. 1997.