

McDonaldization, Rationalization, and Increasing Stupidity

Special Appendix II

**Review of
David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity***

**(along with Andreas Reckwitz's
Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten
as supplement)**

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I regard David Harvey's *The Condition of Postmodernity* as the definitive version of historical materialism and Marxism proper to the current “consumption phase” of capitalism. It is to the contemporary age what Marx's *Deutsche Ideologie* or *Das Kapital* were to the formative phase of capitalism. It is the work which my own version of historical materialism (according to my Thermodynamic Interpretation of History) should have incorporated in order to become a comprehensive analysis of the contemporary age and its materialist causes. Its principal thesis is also what my new McDonaldization thesis should have incorporated in order to acquire greater clarity.

This work of Harvey's is the last great work of historical materialism. Its aim is to identify the material conditions which have given rise to postmodernism, specifically the thesis that postmodernism is generated by a new experience of space and time which is itself produced by the new material and social conditions since 1973. Harvey has composed this work specifically in opposition to the current generation of scholars and leftist activists, who, as postmodernists or under the influence of postmodernism, eschew historical materialism: “It is conventional these days, for example, to dismiss out of hand any suggestion that the 'economy' (however that vague word is understood) might be determinant of cultural life even in (as Engels and later Althusser suggested) 'the last instance'” (p. 336). The reason why it is so significant for me is that Harvey's analysis of postmodernism's origin in the new material (economic) conditions since 1973 provides many details which are amiss in my similar analysis of how the new material (economic) conditions since 1973 have given rise to feminism, political correctness, or the new “leftist paradigm” (since the New Left) as their ideological support (to reinforce the new consumer culture in the Western world), or how globalization is forcing advanced societies to McDonaldize. In the following I shall not only summarize Harvey's ideas, but shall also show the connection of these ideas to my own thermodynamic interpretation of history and new McDonaldization thesis. After that, I shall take note of the latest ideas of the German sociologist Andreas Reckwitz which in many ways complement Harvey's old ideas.

How Harvey formulates the substructure-superstructure relationship

Harvey subscribes to the modern formulation of historical materialism, i.e. the “regulation school”. In this new formulation, the substructure is called “regime of accumulation”, and the superstructure, “the

associated mode of social and political regulation”. The “regime of accumulation” can be stabilized over time only when it has brought “the behavior of all kinds of individuals – capitalists, workers, state employers, financiers, and all manner of other political-economic agents – into some kind of configuration that will keep the regime of accumulation functioning” (p. 121). The regime of accumulation must socialize everybody in the society to production and consumption habits that can support the regime in stable continuance. This is how the superstructure is invented to stabilize and support the substructure.

How Harvey formulates the production and consumption phases of capitalism

Harvey detects an abrupt change in the “regime of accumulation” in 1973. He calls the regime before the change “Fordist-Keynesianism”, and the regime after it, “flexible accumulation”. This is the change in the substructure. The mode of regulation (the superstructure) before the transition is modernism, after it, postmodernism.

When I spoke of the “production phase of capitalism” (or its formative phase), I was in effect referring to Fordist-Keynesianism. When Nancy Fraser spoke of “state-managed capitalism” (*The Fortunes of Feminism*), she was also referring to Fordist-Keynesianism. When I spoke of the “consumption phase of capitalism” (or its mature phase), I was referring to “flexible accumulation”. Harvey also names other authors who have named this production and consumption phase yet in other ways, especially in regard to the inflexible and flexible mode of accumulation process which correspond to each phase: the “old capitalism” (industrial paradigm) vs the “new capitalism” (post-industrial paradigm) according to Halal; “organized” vs “disorganized” capitalism according to Lash and Urry; “Fordist” production (based on economies of scale) and “just-in-time” production (based on economies of scope) according to Swyngedouw. Later, I shall add Andreas Reckwitz's distinction between “modern” (industrialized) and “late modern” (de-industrialized; *spätmodern*) which corresponds to Harvey's distinction between modern/ Fordist and postmodern/ flexible and my distinction between production/ formative and consumption/ mature phase of capitalism.

It should be noted that, in my scheme, the “production phase of capitalism” runs from the start of industrial revolution in the late eighteenth century all the way to 1973. This is a far more general way of looking at the matter. Strictly speaking, both Fordism and Keynesianism are sub-phases of the whole production phase of capitalism. Fordism was first implemented as a further development of the production phase in early twentieth century in the United States, and Keynesianism was implemented in 1930s as a supplement to Fordism in order to stabilize it. In Harvey's view, Fordist-Keynesianism only *fully* represents the production phase of capitalism during the post-war boom, from 1945 to 1973. The break-up of the Fordist-Keynesian regime in 1973 then ushered in a new regime of flexible accumulation, which I have called the “consumption phase of capitalism” or the phase of globalization.

Fordist-Keynesianism (1900/ 1945 - 1973):

(1) Although implemented by Ford in the United States in 1910s, Fordist production didn't become widespread in Europe and Japan as well until WWII. And only afterwards did it become standard across advanced capitalist nations. Car-manufacturing in France, for example, didn't become Fordist

until after WWII.

(2) The principle of Fordism: mass production, and therefore sustained profit, is not possible unless there is mass demand. The whole society must be transformed, a new, total way of life instituted, in order to sustain mass demand on the long run: mass consumption, higher wages to enable workers to consume more, a new system of the reproduction of labor power, a new politics of labor control and management, a new aesthetics and psychology (modernism), i.e. a new kind of rationalized, modernist, and populist democratic society (p. 126). (Again, this is the mode of regulation, how the substructure conditions the superstructure.) The Fordist phase of (production) capitalism went through a crisis in the 1930 (the Great Depression), when demand fell and mass production could no longer be sustained. Keynesianism (large infrastructure projects initiated by the state) and the welfare state were then instituted essentially to sustain mass demand, and therefore mass production and continual profits. Keynesianism and the welfare state are tailor-made for Fordism just as, later on, neoliberalism is tailor-made for flexible accumulation. After WWII, in order to sustain the mass consumption needed to sustain Fordist mass production, the society went through a further phase of suburbanization and de-concentration of population and industry (p. 127). This is the third subphase of the Fordist phase, Fordist-Keynesianism properly speaking, the postwar boom from 1945 to 1973.

Fascism (in Japan, Italy, and Germany in the 1930s) is merely a different form of Fordism just as communism/ socialism is merely a different form of industrial production. In my view, as I have repeatedly stated, both Soviet socialism and fascism are just different forms of Fordist-Keynesian regime rather than oppositions to it. What is important is not private or public ownership, but the production regime and the consumption regime which sustains it.

As noted, free-market economy under Fordist-Keynesianism especially boomed from 1945 to 1973. During this period, mass demand was especially sustained by the increasing consumption power of well-paid, unionized workers. The unions secured for them high wages in exchange for their obedience to the de-skilled, monotonous Fordist production model. (This is somewhat a continuation of the trend which Ford first set down in early 1900.) Now these unionized workers were mostly white males. I would assert here that it is *this* which ensured the continual white male dominance and prevalence of their values in American society until Fordist-Keynesianism disintegrated. The other factors which had sustained the effective demand which sustained mass production included: reconstruction of war-torn economies, suburbanization, urban renewal, geographical expansion of transport and communication systems, and infrastructural development both within and outside the advanced capitalist world. (These factors were absent when Fordism first got underway in early 1900s.) The development of Fordist-Keynesianism on the international scale between 1950 and 1973 (part of the project to reconstruct war-torn economies and expand infrastructural development outside the advanced capitalist world) had ensured America's status on the world stage during this period as a creditor and export nation. Raw materials were imported from underdeveloped regions, American unionized workers turned them into industrial products, and the products were then exported back to the underdeveloped or war-torn nations, thus helping America sustain its industrial capacity or even absorbing its surplus industrial capacity.

Because Fordist mass production requires mass consumption, American society during the Fordist-

Keynesian phase (1945 – 1973) was already a “consumer society”, and yet I have reserved the term “consumerism” only for the period that came after. This is only a difference in terminology, rather than in substance. Harvey has noted that the consumerist society created to accommodate Fordist-Keynesian regime had in effect laid the foundation of the counter-culture movement which would flourish just before the transition to flexible accumulation. Fordism had artificially created need and raised common people's expectation about living-standard in order to sustain the mass consumption needed to sustain mass production. With greater expectation about life, the youths from the white middle-class segment were ready to rebel. The disadvantaged minorities also rebelled under the general climate of rising expectations.

Flexible accumulation (1973 – present):

The transition: Harvey's reason for the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation is the capitalist system's attempt to cope with the problem of over-accumulation, the defect inherent in capitalism which from time to time threatens to destroy the whole system. Since 1848 capitalism has suffered crisis engendered by overaccumulation several times, the economic crisis 1968 – 1973 being the latest. Thus, the sharp recession of 1973 Harvey regards as simply the crisis engendered by the capitalist system's inherent contradictions.¹

During this latest crisis, the capitalist system learned that it must become more flexible and mobile. Consequently the capitalist system underwent a “sea-change”. The “sea-change” associated with the transition to flexible accumulation in consequence of the 1973 crisis consists of the following:

(1) *A wave of corporate merger (especially in the 1980s):* in the increasingly competitive global environment, corporations merge into larger entities in order to enhance their competitiveness.

(2) *The reduction of “turnover time”:* To sustain profit under this increasingly competitive environment, the “turnover time” in both production and consumption has to be reduced. The shortening of the “turnover time” of capital is the capitalists' invariant response during all the crises. This time in particular: “The half-life of a typical Fordist product was, for example, from five to seven years, but flexible accumulation has more than cut that in half in certain sectors (such as textile and clothing industries), while in others – such as the so-called 'thought-ware' industries (e.g. video games and computer software programs) – the half-life is down to less than eighteen months. Flexible accumulation has been accompanied on the consumption side, therefore, by a much greater attention to quick-changing fashions and the mobilization of all the artifices of need inducement and cultural transformation that this implies. The relatively stable aesthetic of Fordist modernism has given way to all the ferment, instability, and fleeting qualities of a postmodernist aesthetic that celebrates difference, ephemerality, spectacle, fashion, and the commodification of cultural forms” (p. 156). Furthermore, “the need to accelerate turnover time in consumption has led to a shift of emphasis from production of goods (most of which, like knives and forks, have a substantial lifetime) to the production of events

1 In this Harvey does not deviate from Marxist orthodoxy. Marx has theorized that capitalism goes into crises every ten years or so because the anarchy which reigns in free market causes over-production from time to time. During these crises, workers are starving not because there aren't enough products but because there aren't enough consumers for the over-produced products. See Engels' summary in *Anti-Dühring* (Part III, Socialism, Theoretical).

(such as spectacles that have an almost instantaneous turnover time)” (p. 157). Herein we find the origin of the McDonaldisation of society. The need to accelerate turnover time has resulted in the need to process greater quantity in shorter time on both the production and the consumption side. More on this later.

(3) *In the domain of labor process*, there occurred (a) the breakdown of unionized worker system in the heartland itself with the emergence of subcontracting and other informal types of labor process long thought to have become extinct (sweatshops, family business, self-employment, work from home) and (b) the relocation of Fordist production system to developing nations to exploit the cheaper labor there (*peripheral Fordism*). In general, the detrimental effects which these processes of plant relocation and more flexible manning practices and labor markets have exerted on the Fordist unionized worker system are reinforced by technological advances resulting in automation and accelerated product innovation. Theorists have generally called this whole process “deindustrialization”, and I have been referring to it as “de-manufacturing”.

The change in the labor practices in the heartland occurred in response to the need to change the mode of production thanks to increased competition: “the economies of scale sought under Fordist mass production have... been countered by an increasing capacity to manufacture a variety of goods cheaply in small batches” (p. 155).

(4) *The growth of the service sector*: In the heartland of advanced capitalist societies, “de-industrialization” means “a rapid growth of service employment, not so much in retailing, distribution, transportation, and personal services (which have remained fairly stable or even lost ground), as in producer services, finance, insurance, and real state, and certain other sectors such as health and education” (p. 156).

(5) *The growth of the service sector includes the emergence of information as commodity*: The increasing importance of information (and the growing trade of information) has spawned a wide array of highly specialized business services and consultancies capable of providing all this information (p. 159). The commercialization of higher education is also a side-effect. Hence commentators often refer to the new flexible regime as the “information age”.

(6) *The growth of the service sector also means the emergence of an independent financial sector in the heartland*: For the sake of a more flexible capital accumulation system, Bretton Woods agreement was dismantled (1971) and, along with it, the convertibility of US dollars to gold. This resulted in the shift to a global system of floating exchange rates (p. 296). “Since 1973, money has been 'de-materialized' in the sense that it no longer has a formal or tangible link to precious metals... or for that matter to any other tangible commodity.” An independent financial system had emerged de-linked from any active production and from any material base (p. 297). Money consequently became volatile in its representation of value, and inflation assumed a greater magnitude as a result.

The result was “the complete reorganization of the global financial system and the emergence of greatly enhanced powers of financial co-ordination. Again, there has been a dual movement, on the one hand towards the formation of financial conglomerates and brokers of extraordinary global power, and,

on the other hand, a rapid proliferation and decentralization of financial activities and flows through the creation of entirely new financial instruments and markets” (p. 160 – 161). In the United States, this entailed the undoing of the centrally regulated financial system set up during the beginning of Keynesianism of the Fordist era along with the breakdown of the Bretton Woods system. “There had... always been a delicate balance between financial and state powers under capitalism, but the breakdown of Fordist-Keynesianism evidently meant a shift towards the empowerment of finance capital vis-a-vis the nation-state.”

(7) *Underlying the whole “sea change” is the new requirement for flexibility, which also explains the corporations' new diversification program and the newly emergent “paper entrepreneurialism”.*

This recapitulates the previously listed characteristics of the flexible accumulation regime.

(a) Corporations needed to develop increasing “capacity for instantaneous response to changes in exchange rates, fashions and tastes, and moves by competitors” (p. 159). This also means a greater emphasis on information: up-to-the-minute information on market trends and instant data analyses. Also information about scientific and technical know-how, government policies, and political shifts. Again, the emergence of information as commodity and the new “information age”.

(b) Corporations also acquired a more flexible labor regime. Subcontracting is, for example, a more flexible labor process. To ensure greater flexibility, all corporations decreased the proportion of permanent workers and increased the proportion of part-time, temporary, and contract workers. All corporations needed to become more flexible in order to instantly respond to the faster changes in market conditions and consumer tastes. Again, the new, more flexible, labor process.

(c) Corporations also acquired more flexible money-making regime in order to survive the increasingly competitive climate. Major corporations began to diversify their business in order to develop other ways to make profits. (US Steel, for example, is no longer simply making and selling steel. “We are here to make money, not steel.”) They even had to find “ways other than straight production of goods and services to make profits”, e.g. “creative accounting”, or profits gained from shifts in currency values and interest rates. This is called “paper entrepreneurialism”, to “gain paper profits without troubling with actual production” (p. 163). This is a consequence of the de-linking of the financial system from precious metals and actual production.

I must add that the increasing prominence of “parasitic activity” (“paper entrepreneurialism” and “financialization”, i.e. all the ways to make money without actually producing anything), its very possibility, reflects the fact that, in this new era, the size of the economy from the perspective of each corporation had considerably enlarged thanks to globalization. In the context of my new McDonaldization thesis, this increasing trend to make profits without bothering with production is the most important source of the increasing corruption of American society. More on this below.

(8) *Neoliberalism instead of Keynesianism*: In this perspective, neo-liberalism is not an accidental occurrence nor a simple revival of an obsolete form (the return to the forgotten *laissez-faire*),² nor does

2 Nancy Fraser has misunderstood neoliberalism precisely in this fashion: “By the 1980s, however, history seemed to

it mean that these traditional economic liberals like Milton and Hayek have finally proved themselves correct. Neo-liberalism is simply the philosophical principle newly created or revived from old to serve as the foundation of the new flexible accumulation regime. Harvey has understood this very well. “The electoral victories of Thatcher and Reagan are often viewed as a distinctive rupture in the politics of the postwar period. I understood them more as consolidations of what was already under way throughout much of the 1970s” (p. 166 – 167). Neoliberalism is specifically the framework invented or revived to make possible the new labor process and the new business practices and organization associated with the new flexible regime of accumulation. The Fordist system had been an extremely rigid system, and the crisis of 1973 caused a “direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism” (p. 147). In order to become more flexible in production, labor process, and business regime, corporations needed a new sort of *laissez-faire* environment. Neo-liberalism was thus introduced to accommodate the flexibility which the new capitalist system required to survive the crisis. Naomi Klein has also completely missed this point in her *The Shock Doctrine*.

The fall of white men: part one: on the material front

Harvey notes that the more flexible labor process, the shrinkage of the permanent (unionized) work force, and the consequent “declining significance of union power” had “reduced the singular power of white male workers in monopoly sector markets” (p. 154). Plant relocation to developing nations further caused the traditionally white male unionized work force to become obsolete. The problem was that white men had constituted the main labor force under Fordist regime, so that, once Fordist production plants collapsed under the demand for greater flexibility, white men found themselves out of fashion. Harvey's observation that this erosion of white male power during the transition to flexible accumulation did not entail the rise of women and minorities in the labor market is only valid during the initial period of the transition (i.e. until the time his treatise was published, in 1989). Even in the beginning, a more flexible labor system had required the partial replacement of traditional higher-paid white male unionized labor with lower-paid female labor on a part-time basis (p. 153). While this, for example, did not mean that women could rise in power in the labor market, it did mean the erosion of white male power under the transition to a more flexible system. The resurgence of patriarchal practices, homeworking, and sweatshops under a more flexible production system, while appearing to be exploiting minorities as cheaper labor than traditional unionized white male labor, also meant the erosion of white male labor power. Today, women and minorities have clearly gained significant access to privileged positions in the new labor market in the service sector and the “flexible labor sector” which has replaced a good portion of the traditional unionized labor. While the exploitation of women and minorities during the initial period of flexible accumulation regime has paved the way for their integration into the new labor system later on, the exclusion of white males during this initial period has guaranteed that these white men could not succeed in transiting completely to the labor market of the new system once the old Fordist system had collapsed. This is how white men's share in important sectors of the new labor market has shrunken to a minority portion in comparison to their former majority share back in the good old days of Fordist-Keynesianism.

have bypassed that political project. A decade of conservative rule in much of Western Europe and North America, capped by the fall of Communism in the East, miraculously breathed new life into free-market ideologies previously given up for dead. Rescued from the historical dustbin, ‘neoliberalism’ authorized a sustained assault on the very idea of egalitarian redistribution....” *Fortunes of Feminism*, p. 4.

How the substructure determines the superstructure

Harvey's thesis is that a particular production regime conditions a particular experience of space and time, which then conditions a particular cultural mode. This is how “regulation” works, i.e. the capitalists' control (determination) of our experience of space and time is how they are able to socialize all of us to habits of behavior and thoughts which support their accumulation regime. Specifically, the development of capitalism has been conditioning a certain “compression” in our experience of space and time in line with the continual shortening of capital's turnover time. (You cannot understand the shortening of turnover time during flexible accumulation until you have understood the more general process of “compression of space and time”). The process of compression has proceeded in three phases.

Phase one: the rationalization of space and time. (a) The progressive monetization of relations in social life, to become so prominent later on during the formative period of capitalism, started with medieval merchants. The medieval merchants constructed precise measurement of time (with clocks and bells) for the sake of orderly conduct of business. This change in the experience of time promoted new kinds of social relations (p. 228). The experience of space also changed with the mapping of the world for the sake of appropriation of new lands. This revolution in our conception of space and time is usually referred to as the “rationalization of space and time” (certainly coincidental with the rationalization of life and society beginning with the Protestant ethics), which is really a sort of quantification of time and space at the expense of their qualitative experience (our former subjective, ego-centric, impressions of space and time).

(b) During the Renaissance, this quantitative experience of space and time developed further. The exploration of new territories in the West (the beginning of globalization in Sloterdijk's words) required, and the introduction of Ptolemaic map enabled, the development of maps, a factual, objective, and quantitative representation of space. It was a totalizing vision of the whole world and brought about the concept of “infinite space”. “The Renaissance separated scientific and supposedly factual senses of time and space from the more fluid conceptions that might arise experientially” (p. 244). Namely, the rational conception of space and time vs the former subjective experience of space and time.

(c) Just before Enlightenment, this new factual, quantitative, and totalizing time and space lay the foundation for the formation of nation-state, Cartesian rationalism, capitalism and free market, individualism and the accompanying “rights of men”. “Objectivity in spatial representation” made possible “accuracy of navigation, the determination of property rights in land (as opposed to the confused system of legal rights and obligations that characterized feudalism), political boundaries, rights of passage and of transportation, and the like” (p. 245). During Enlightenment, the possibilities offered by the new representation of space and time became fully actualized: individualism, nationalism, and either parliamentary democracy on the one hand or a centralized national regime on the other. (As these two options would later develop into “capitalist free world” and “communist totalitarianism”, this is another indication that both capitalism and communism are just two facets of a single development. More on this later.) In both cases, the integration of the nation-state and the

disintegration of feudalism: the total representation of national territory under one efficient administration. The emergence of man as free, active, and endowed with consciousness and will (p. 249). Both the nation-state and capitalist accumulation (industrial production) depended on the new rational ordering of space and time as their condition of possibility.

Phase two: the first round of space-time compression: During the period of industrialization, the new quantitative experience of time and space became more tightly organized and, after some time (i.e. after 1848), more “compressed” under the pressure to make profits. A full explanation of the concept of “turnover time”: “Material commodity exchange entails change of location and spatial movement. Any complicated system of production entails spatial organization. Overcoming these spatial barriers takes time and money. Efficiency of spatial organization and movement is therefore an important issue for all capitalists. The time of production together with the time of circulation of exchange make up the concept of 'the turnover time of capital'. This, too, is an extremely important magnitude. The faster the capital launched into circulation can be recuperated, the greater the profit will be. The definition of 'efficient spatial organization' and of 'socially necessary turnover time' are fundamental norms against which the search for profit is measured” (p. 229). Hence the drive toward the compression of time: for the sake of profit, the capitalists must “accelerate their turnover time vis-a-vis the social average”; they thus lead the way in increasing the pace of life in their society (p. 229). This means that they must drive the workers to work faster and encourage the consumers to consume faster. The pressure on the workers is enormous. They have been forced to accept as valid the increasingly precise representation and tighter organization of time and can only complain within this new framework of time (p. 231). Then also the drive toward the compression of space: for the sake of profits, the capitalists must constantly enlarge the geographic (spatial) extent of the market, reduce spatial barriers, and “annihilate space through time”, i.e. make people, commodities, and information move through space with increasing ease and speed (within ever shorter time).

Phase three: the second round of space-time compression: During the information age – the mature period of capitalism, the age of globalization, or the age of flexible accumulation – the compression of space and time that was started since the industrial revolution has continued to the most extraordinary degree, i.e. the extraordinary degree to which our life has been speeded up and the spatial barriers in our life removed. Space appears to have shrunk to a “global village of telecommunication” and time horizon seems to have shortened to the point where the “present” is all there is (p. 240).

The relationship of postmodernism to modernism

Harvey's definition of modernism – and therefore the relationship of postmodernism to modernism – is unconventional. He takes his departure from Baudelaire's formulation of modernism: “Modernity is the transient, the fleeting, the contingent; it is the one half of art, the other being the eternal and the immutable” (p. 10). Modernism is characterized by an admission that reality is but transient, fleeting, and contingent, and yet by an attempt to extract from the transient, the fleeting, and the contingent the underlying eternal and immutable. Postmodernism, on the other hand, consists essentially of the admission that the transient, the fleeting, and the contingent is all there is and the rejection that the search for the eternal and the immutable can ever be anything other than illusory (merely an illusion to justify the power structure). “... the most startling fact about postmodernism: its total acceptance of the

ephemerality, fragmentation, discontinuity, and the chaotic that formed one half of Baudelaire's conception of modernity” (p. 44). Postmodernism's focus on, and celebration of, “otherness” (manifested as women, minorities, and “deviants” like gays and transsexuals) derives directly from its notion of reality as ephemeral, fragmented, and incoherent. (Namely, back in modernist days, the white man was taken to be the norm and the coherent part of the human and social reality.) Harvey repeatedly emphasizes “the continuity of the condition of fragmentation, ephemerality, discontinuity, and chaotic change in both modernist and postmodernist thought...” (p. 44). It is the experience of compression of space and time which, after 1848, first gave rise to the experience of fragmentation, ephemerality, and discontinuity. Harvey demonstrates that the transition from modernism to postmodernism (from the search for the eternal and immutable to their complete abandonment) merely reflects the underlying further compression of our experience of space and time.

In the following, the secondary characteristics of modernism and postmodernism will be derived from their primary characteristics (the eternal and the immutable behind the transient and multiplicity and the transient and the multiple at the expense of the eternal and the immutable) and the relationship of these characteristics to the experience of space-time compression will be elaborated upon.

Superstructure: modernism.

Since Enlightenment, the belief in the eternal and the immutable – hence the “universal” – conditions the optimism that characterizes modernism through all its phases. The focus on singularity of reality despite multiplicity of particulars and the construction of meta-narratives. The search for the universals: equality, liberty, universal reason; the control of nature through command of laws of nature which are universal; hence human emancipation through reason and domination of nature. In the words of Terry Eagleton: “Generally perceived as positivistic, technocentric, and rationalistic, universal modernism has been identified with the belief in linear progress, absolute truth, the rational planning of ideal social orders, and the standardization of knowledge and production” (p. 9). The understanding of nature (understanding of universals) leads to understanding of the world, of the self, moral progress, justice of institutions, prosperity, and the happiness of human beings (p. 13). These are the secondary characteristics of modernism.³ The modernist optimism was only temporarily disappointed by WWII (fascism, Hiroshima), but resumes in the Fordist-Keynesian era (1945 – 1968).

Insofar as the production phase of capitalism has conditioned modernity, modernism has three phases which correspond to the three phases of the production regime during the production phase. Such is Harvey's elaboration. Namely, the first round of space-time compression itself consists of three subphases.

(1) Classical Enlightenment corresponds to the early industrial phase, from 1770 to 1848. After 1848 a class dimension is introduced to the Enlightenment mode. This is the beginning of modernism. Throughout this period, modernism becomes increasingly associated with urbanism and the urban experience. Continuing the Enlightenment sensibility, modernism experiences itself as a radical break with the past. (2) The unstable mode of modernism, with many of the singularity and linearity

³ Jacques Julliard has provided a best summary of the optimism which originated with Enlightenment and which ran through all phases of modernism in his *Les gauches françaises*, p. 45 – 6.

dismantled through the introduction of perspectivism, from 1890 to 1945, corresponds to the early phase of Fordist production regime. (3) High modernism, from 1945 to 1968, corresponds to the Keynesian phase of Fordist production regime. In this period, modernism has completely transited out of its mode of opposition to the traditional order and become itself the establishment. The counter-culture movement from late 1960s onward started out as oppositional movement to high modernism and became the precursor of postmodernism.

Harvey's thesis is that crisis in accumulation (the “overaccumulation” problem) gives rise to time-space compression (during early twentieth century and then during 1968 – 1973), which then also gives rise to the turn to aesthetics (to be elaborated upon below). The history of capitalism is the “history of successive waves of time-space compression generated out of the pressures of capital accumulation with its perpetual search to annihilate space through time and reduce turnover time” (p. 306 – 7). The three phases of modernism therefore must be interpreted and understood in terms of the changing experience of space and time as progressive “compression”.

This is how Harvey explains modernism as arising out of the experience of space-time compression. The experience of compression happens two times. (Two subphases of the first round of the compression of space and time.) After 1850, the expansion of the railroad system and foreign trade and investment had caused the expansion of the experience of space (more space could now be covered in shorter time) and therefore the compression of the experience of space. Then, the new systems of credit and corporate forms of organization and distribution, along with technical and organizational innovations in production, helped speed up the circulation of capital in mass markets (p. 264). The progressive sense of time of the Enlightenment was dismantled, to which the experience of the barricades of 1848 had also contributed. This is the beginning of the compression of space-time in our experience. Namely, this is an elaboration upon the first round of space-time compression. The experience of compression was manifested in art and letters, e.g. in new forms of novel like Flaubert's, which explored the simultaneity of events rather than narrating them sequentially. It is also the beginning experience of the fragmentation of space. Nevertheless, because the compression had yet to be carried to the extreme, intellectuals retained the desire to identify the universal, the rational, and the eternal within the apparent compression, fragmentation, simultaneity, and “speed-up”.

After 1910 began the second subphase. (Still part of the first round of space-time compression.) Fordist mass production (Ford set up his assembly line in 1913) initiated another round of space-time compression. There was a new emphasis on rational ordering of space (even tighter organization of space in assembly line mass production plants). New communication techniques (telegraph, telephone, and radio) enabled people to cover even greater stretches of space in shorter time. The further compression and further fragmentation of space was reflected in art in Picasso's Cubism and Kandinsky's Expressionism. It is because modernism of the early twentieth century was also determined by time-space compression just as postmodernism of late twentieth century is so determined that Simmel's classic description of modern life in urban environment (“The metropolis and mental life” or “Die Großstädte und das Geistesleben”) still sounds true for urban life in postmodern time. The new experience of space gave rise to the increasing significance of command over space as a fundamental source of military, economic, and political power, and hence to movement for nationalist expansion (“manifest destiny” in USA, “white man's burden” in Britain, *mission civilisatrice* in France,

and the need for *Lebensraum* in Germany). Here Harvey introduces the additional consequence of space-time compression in human experience: politics began to be forged according to aesthetics, e.g. the rise of Hitler, the charismatic leader who won following with pomp and spectacle, i.e. by appealing to people's sense of aesthetics rather than to people's sense of right and wrong – because ethics tends disintegrate under the weight of more extreme degree of space-time compression.

Superstructure: postmodernism.

David Harvey provides a masterful summary of the new capital accumulation process which the dominant ideas about reality, among both academia and common people, are supposed to imitate (the regulation process) (p. 284 - 285):

The transition to flexible accumulation was in part accomplished through the rapid deployment of new organizational forms and new technologies in production. Though the latter may have originated in the pursuit of military superiority, their application had everything to do with bypassing the rigidities of Fordism and accelerating turnover time as a solution to the grumbling problems of Fordism Keynesianism that erupted into open crisis in 1973. Speed-up was achieved in production by organizational shifts towards vertical disintegration – subcontracting, outsourcing, etc. – that reversed the Fordist tendency towards vertical integration and produced an increasing roundaboutness in production even in the face of increasing financial centralization. Other organizational shifts – such as the 'just-in-time' delivery system that reduces stock inventories – when coupled with the new technologies of electronic control, small-batch production, etc., all reduced turnover times in many sectors of production (electronics, machine tools, automobiles, construction, clothing, etc.). For the labourers this all implied an intensification (speed-up) in labour processes and an acceleration in the de-skilling and re-skilling required to meet new labour needs. Accelerating turnover time in production entails parallel accelerations in exchange and consumption. Improved systems of communication and information flow, coupled with rationalizations in techniques of distribution (packaging, inventory control, containerization, market feed-back, etc.), made it possible to circulate commodities through the market system with greater speed. Electronic banking and plastic money were some of the innovations that improved the speed of the inverse flow of money. Financial services and markets (aided by computerized trading) likewise speeded up, so as to make, as the saying has it, 'twenty-four hours a very long time' in global stock markets.

Of the many developments in the arena of consumption, two stand out as being of particular importance. The mobilization of fashion in mass (as opposed to elite) markets provided a means to accelerate the pace of consumption not only in clothing, ornament, and decoration but also across a wide swathe of life-styles and recreational activities (leisure and sporting habits, pop music styles, video and children's games, and the like).

A second trend was a shift away from the consumption of goods and into the consumption of services – not only personal, business, educational, and health services, but also into entertainments, spectacles, happenings, and distractions. The 'lifetime' of such services (a

visit to a museum, going to a rock concert or movie, attending lectures or health clubs), though hard to estimate, is far shorter than that of an automobile or washing machine. If there are limits to the accumulation and turnover of physical goods (even counting the famous six thousand pairs of shoes of Imelda Marcos), then it makes sense for capitalists to turn to the provision of very ephemeral services in consumption. This quest may lie at the root of the rapid capitalist penetration, noted by Mandel and Jameson, of many sectors of cultural production from the mid-1960s onwards.

Of the innumerable consequences that have flowed from this general speed-up in the turnover times of capital, I shall focus on those that have particular bearing on postmodern ways of thinking, feeling, and doing.

Harvey then lists elements of our new value system: the volatility and ephemerality of fashions, products, production techniques, ideas and ideologies; the virtues of instantaneity (instant fast food, etc.) and disposability (plastic cups and plates, etc.), hence the “throwaway society” (not just produced products, but also relationships in the name of individualism and emancipation); the love of novelty. “Through such mechanisms [i.e. the acceleration of the turnover of goods in consumption] individuals were forced to cope with disposability, novelty, and the prospects for instant obsolescence” (p. 286). Our psychology itself has changed in response to the new era of constant novelty and instant obsolescence. All this signifies an underlying transformation of our experience of space and time, a new round of compression of space and time, due to the sudden change of course from modernism to postmodernism. This is why, among the intellectuals, there is no longer any search for the eternal and the immutable within the transient and the contingent.

It is thus flexible accumulation which has conditioned the rise of postmodernism. “... the way in which norms, habits, and political and cultural attitudes have shifted since 1970s, and the degree to which such shifts integrate with the transition from Fordism to flexible accumulation” (p. 170 – 171). “To begin with, the more flexible motion of capital emphasizes the new, the fleeting, the ephemeral, the fugitive, and the contingent in modern life, rather than the more solid values implanted under Fordism” (p. 171).

As for the intellectual domain: the postmodern “emphasis upon ephemerality, collage, fragmentation, and dispersal in philosophical and social thoughts mimics the conditions of flexible accumulation” (p. 302). “Postmodern flexibility... is dominated by fiction, fantasy, the immaterial (particularly of money), fictitious capital, images, ephemerality, chance, and flexibility in production techniques, labor markets and consumption niches...” (p. 339).

Just as the capitalists are now more focused on profit gaining in the short run without long term plan, so do philosophical and social thinking. Just as image-production has become a new business enterprise, so did the emphasis on random images without deep narrative in philosophical and social thoughts. Hence Baudrillard's analysis of consumer society as a society of signs and the popularity of semiotics and deconstruction. In philosophy and social sciences as well as in literature (comparative literature), all meta-narratives or “grand narratives” (Hegel, Marx, August Comte) are denounced, which, coupled with the new focus on the “non-standard” (women, minorities, and gays) and their “emancipation”, are

now taken to be “illusion” which the dominant group (white men as the “standard”) have perpetuated to enforce their power position. Hence liberation philosophies derived from semiotics and deconstruction, like “French feminism” and Judy Butler's theory of gender. No more singular reality, no more meta-narrative, but only the coexistence of incommensurable realities. Trendy is now the new close attention to “other worlds” and other voices (women, gay, minorities, colonized peoples) (p. 42): “... all groups have a right to speak for themselves, in their own voices, and have that voice accepted as authentic and legitimate...” (p. 48). And correlatively a denunciation of the “Self” for whom the “Other” was once the “Other” (the white men). Fashionable are now also the vigorous denunciation of abstract reason and deep aversion to any project that might seek universal human emancipation through mobilization of the powers of technology, science, and reason (p. 41). That was white men's way in the former time. While modernity is characterized by depth and paranoia, postmodernity is characterized by depthlessness and schizophrenia. Hence Gilles Deleuze. The producers of culture themselves (artists, editors, and writers) play an important role in the new round of compression of our experience of time which underlies this celebration of fragmentation and the voice of the Other. In the new experience, the future and the past are all compressed into the present. The consequence is precisely McDonaldization and dummification:

... the dimension of time had been shattered, we cannot live or think except in fragments of time each of which goes off along its own trajectory and immediately disappears (quoted from Italo Calvino, p. 291).

Again, more on this below. This new orientation (fragmentation and Otherness) meshes perfectly with the latest communication technology which has contributed to the “annihilation of space through time”: all space has collapsed. That is, the diminution of spatial barriers in favor of the emergence of a global urban system. The consequence is the increasing importance of local differences, the differentiated qualities of a particular space. The greater sensitivity of the capital to the variations of place within space engenders a greater incentive for places to be differentiated in ways attractive to capital. So many cultures in the superficial forms of cuisine and images are now concentrated in a single locale, reinforcing our experience of the compression of space. We have increasing difficulty in maintaining any sense of historical continuity in the face of all the flux and ephemerality of flexible accumulation (p. 303). Hence our loss of traditional identity (ethnic, national).

Just as during the 1930s, there now came about a turn to the aesthetics in politics in the 1980s. This is the direct consequence of the collapse of meta-narrative. Namely, when the experience of time and space has changed (has been compressed), the confidence in the association between scientific and moral judgments has collapsed as well; in turn, aesthetics has triumphed over ethics as a prime focus of social and intellectual concern; images now replace narratives, ephemerality and fragmentation take precedence over eternal truths and unified politics (p. 328). Hence the Reagan era. People loved Reagan not because they agreed with his policies – they didn't – but because Reagan was “charismatic”, i.e. aesthetically pleasing.

Harvey incessantly searches for the manifestation of this new perspective on reality in architecture and urban planning. (Postmodern architecture and city planning.) Our very experience of the city – the hallmark of modernism – has changed, from rational planning, homogeneity, and hierarchy to the new experience which Jonathan Raban first expressed in his 1974 novel *Soft City*: encyclopedia, emporium

of styles, labyrinth, scrapbook filled with mutually unrelated colorful entries. This is precisely the postmodern “grand narrative” about what reality is. (While dismissing former grand narratives, postmodernism is itself a new grand narrative.) There is no longer the fear for the totalitarianism of planners, bureaucrats, and corporate elites which used to characterize our experience of the big cities.

The switch of experience from rational planning and discipline to the chaotic “Do as you please” and *laissez-faire*, this new postmodern experience, as one can see, underlies the Hippie movement of “liberation from authorities”, from their “oppression”, from the oppressive rational order they had imposed on young people. The postmodern experience is thus an experience of liberation just as much as modernism was an experience of radical break with the past. (The 68 revolution, as significant in world history as the 1848 revolution, signifies thus, in Alan Bloom's words, the “age of relaxation”: “relaxation” is another consequence of the new emphasis on ephemerality and fragmentation.) This experience of liberation also includes the “liberation from white men's rule”, the new focus on minorities, women, and the deviants, which, as noted, ultimately arises from the disposal of the coherent, the eternal, and the immutable which the speed-up in production and consumption has conditioned.

Postmodernism clearly illustrates the extension of the market into formerly autonomous cultural phenomena, partly the result of the integration of modernist high art into popular culture. “Postmodernism... signals nothing more than a logical extension of the power of the market over the whole range of cultural production” (p. 62) “...the integration of the production of culture into commodity production generally” (p. 63). This indicates that “the cultural evolution which has taken place since the early 1960s, and which asserted itself as hegemonic in the early 1970s, has not occurred in a social, economic, or political vacuum” (p. 63). This is Harvey's complaint that the contemporary leftist movement has completely forgotten historical materialism, and thus failed to understand the origin of their ideas in the new material (economic) condition of Western societies since 1973.

The fall of white men: part two: on the ideological front

It has been said that a new focus on, celebration of, the Other in consequence of the new conception of reality as fragmented and ephemeral gave rise to an ideological antagonism toward white men. (The antagonism toward white men is the foundation of leftist politics: the new “social justice” celebrating diversity, minorities, women – the more different from the white men, the better.) This correlated with white men's loss of significance in the new labor process. As has been noted in my *Thermodynamic Interpretation of History*, (cultural) feminists, and postmodernists in general, found congruence between the new fragmented conception of reality and women's subjective experience (accepting the contingency and ephemerality of reality without trying to impose a systematic order, a linear and coherent meta-narrative, upon it). This conception of women's subjective experience, if true, really refers to the less rigorous nature of women's intellect (their inability to see a grand order among the fragments of reality), and yet, because it fits into the new accumulation regime and the conception of reality to which the new regime needs to condition us, is now taken to be the “correct” way of understanding reality. White men's former way is further discredited. The celebration of women's less integrated experience of reality as “correct” is thus part and parcel of the McDonaldization of society and the dummification of population which the flexible accumulation regime requires as its support.

The new postmodern emphasis on emotional intelligence, intuition, empathy and so on, in opposition to white men's culture of the Fordist-Keynesian era (IQ and mechanical and logical thinking) is part of this same “celebration of the Other”, especially of women, insofar as women are stereotypically assumed to have higher emotional intelligence, better intuition, and greater ability for sympathy (even if this might no longer be true).

While Harvey has spoken of the increasing aestheticization in politics since the 1920s in consequence of space-time compression, the contemporary surge of women's power and significance of other minorities might also be partly motivated by aesthetics. The image of woman and femininity (neotenous forms) is inherently more aesthetically pleasing than the image of man (adultish). Or it might be that the image of women have become more aesthetically pleasing since 1973 partly because people are tired of images of men which used to be the norm (“cultural fatigue”) and partly because neoteny is more congruent with ephemerality and fragmentation than with holism and coherency.

Harvey's postmodern phase of space-time compression is the foundation of McDonaldization and dummification

The implication of Harvey's theory (the history of capitalist development as the history of the progressive compression of our experience of space and time) for my McDonaldization and dummification thesis is obvious. In my thesis, dummification is caused by McDonaldization. The shortening of turnover time results in ever faster pace of life in society; the ever faster pace of life means that society's institutions must necessarily McDonaldize. What this means is that the mind must process information increasingly faster without any time left for reflecting on it deeply. Harvey's “shortened turnover time” means precisely “processing ever larger volume in shorter time” according to my new McDonaldization thesis. When the capitalists speed up the pace of our life in order to shorten the turnover time of their capital, we inevitably become dumber.

Harvey frequently speaks of (complains about) the replacement of meta-narrative (or grand narrative) by the juxtaposition of superficial, meaningless, and mutually unrelated images (“collage”) during the postmodern era. The images may come from the remotest corner of the world. They certainly come from all parts of the world. In other words, we get a glimpse into every corner of our world, but without any coherent narrative to explain them or their interrelations – because we lack the time for thinking deeply on them having been overwhelmed by their quantity. The compression of space means the expansion of breadth at the expense of depth. (The fact must also be taken into account that, the greater the diversity, the more difficult it is to see a “totalizing” coherent pattern unifying the many pieces.) This is just one example where the mind has to process a vast amount of information without the time and resource to understand them. This is why the postmodern condition is *inherently* dummifying: ephemerality and fragmentation, as the consequence of the compression of space and the shortening of turnover time, hinder thinking. Firstly, the overwhelming quantity of information coming about through the compression of space and the faster turnover time of each piece leaves the mind no time to think. Secondly, Insofar as the leftist political paradigm (political correctness, or “social justice”) is part and parcel of postmodernism, it *forbids thinking* not only in the sense of an imperative to not question the celebration of women, minorities, and the deviant and their “victim status”, but also in the sense that

intelligence and wisdom themselves, such as “grand narrative”, are condemned as “instrument of oppression”.

The “interruption un-culture” of which Mariam Meckel has spoken is another consequence of the shortening of turnover time and another manifestation of the fragmentation of the contemporary experience of space and time due to latter's progressive compression.

We must also emphasize that the postmodern condition not only hinders thinking (even forbids it) but also corrupts morals. This is not only in the sense that traditional ethics has gone out of the windows having been replaced by aesthetics (and, I shall add, “social justice”), but also in the sense that the new material condition encourages parasitic behavior. Flexible accumulation has meant the switch-over to “casino economy”, “with all its financial speculation and fictitious capital formation (much of it unbacked by any growth in real production)” (p. 332). The new economy in the heartland of globalization (the US and other English-speaking countries) is where people simply move things around and speculate where they will appear later rather than actually making anything. Just as slavery used to breed idleness among the southern whites (de Tocqueville), so this new conception of reality (“We can become rich without actually making anything real”) breeds today the bad habit of taking “cheating” and “shortcut” to be the norm. The root cause of increasing sickness and corruption and unrealistic beliefs in American society.

The resistance movement: de-McDonaldization

Harvey speaks of the oppositional social movements against capitalism's rational and regimental organization of space and time to accommodate commodity production and turnover of capital (p. 237 - 239). If the incredible shortening of turnover time during the flexible accumulation phase is the basis of McDonaldization, de-McDonaldization is essentially this oppositional movement against the contemporary mode of organization of space and time under capitalism. The movement for *Zeitwohlstand*, De-Growth, and Convivialism for which I have expressed high regard are thus additional examples of such sort of oppositional movement. That is to say, any movement which advocates that economy must not grow any longer, which is akin to saying that the pace of life must not be speeded up anymore, but must slow down.⁴

Harvey's significance for our revolution

We have been trying to understand where “revolutions” in the past two centuries had gone wrong. We have been emphasizing that there are in fact no essential differences between capitalist development and communist revolution, that both are merely different forms of the same *Vernunft*, of the same Enlightenment project. This *Vernunft* is: (1) industrial production (i.e. the accumulation regime), (2) rational bureaucracy, and (3) mass society. In the one case, the industrial production and the masses are

4 Another new example which has not been previously mentioned is the new book by Alberto Acosta and Ulrich Brand: *Radikale Alternativen: warum man den Kapitalismus nur mit vereinten Kräften überwinden kann* (Oekom Verlag, 2008). Herein, again, the authors argue that we must get out of the growth paradigm in addition to flying less. See Deutschlandfunk Kultur's review: http://www.deutschlandfunkkultur.de/neues-buch-radikale-alternativen-auswege-aus-der.1008.de.html?dram:article_id=413270.

centrally organized and controlled; in the other, the control of production and the masses are decentralized. In the one case, the industrial production is state-owned; in the other it is privately owned. Meanwhile, both cases are characterized by “bureaucracy” in Weber's sense. The failing of the one case (communism) has discredited itself only in terms of means, not in terms of ends. (Increased production, bureaucracy, mass consumption, and mass government.) Fascism and National Socialism are yet another form of the same development (of the same *Vernunft*). It is important to note (again) that the communist regimes have never evolved beyond the rigid, Fordist mode of accumulation regime and the massive Keynesian regime devised to support the Fordist production regime.

We have not said very much about the fact that both capitalist and communist nations are characterized by “mass society” just as much as by industrial production. The leftists have, throughout their history, always wanted mass society, hence the dismantling of hierarchy and the ultimate form of mass “democratic” government: Räterepublik, Paris Commune, Anarchism. In the same way, Mao wanted the same egalitarian mass society, i.e. mass participation, although it shall be explicitly under his dictatorial direction. (Hence the Cultural Revolution, where he directed the masses, at least the youngsters in the cities, to rise up and take over the party bureaucracy.) Again, the “masses” here are under centralized control instead of spontaneous self-control. All this is the fulfillment of the Enlightenment project, “power to the people”. Mass society not only means mass mobilization for production and consumption and mass participation in politics; it also means a society where the dumb masses take precedence over the intellectual elite: putting the dumb masses on the pedestal and giving them the rein to develop society. We not only see this unfolding in America, but also in China, e.g. during the Cultural Revolution, where the dumb students (the Red Guards) practically took over, and destroyed, the entire government bureaucracy. The key is to remember that, since the very beginning, there have been two competing versions of the Enlightenment project: a diffused sort of nation-state, mass society, and industrial production, and a centralized form, and that two types of fate characterize them (e.g. the centralized form is inevitably characterized by purges: the purge of Danton and Robespierre; Stalin's show trials; and Mao's Cultural Revolution).

The leftists since the New Left, like their Marxist predecessors, have not recognized that both communism and capitalism are merely different facets of the same development, and, unlike their Marxist predecessors, have even regressed by forgetting historical materialism completely. Harvey didn't address the former issue (unlike Marcus who has done so implicitly), but did address the latter in the chapter, “The crisis of historical materialism”. The leftists have thought, erroneously, that they have improved upon orthodox Marxism by abandoning the working class and focusing instead on race and gender issues, and yet, by forgetting historical materialism, they have lost “the ability to have a critical perspective on itself or on the social process of transformation that underlay the surge into postmodernist ways of thought” (p. 354). Namely, they are consequently completely blind as to how their ideas are *not* invented to oppose capitalism but are in fact generated by capitalism (now in its flexible accumulation mode) to facilitate its evolution. Erroneously believing that one has oneself invented one's revolutionary ideas because one is smart or one's consciousness is raised is the most disastrous consequence of this forgetfulness of historical materialism. Like most people, the leftist revolutionaries are simply carried forward along history by history's *Vernunft* without any awareness what is going on and where history is going. The leftists do not see the close relation, or resemblance, between their social justice on the one hand and neoliberalism and fictitious capital formation against

which they set themselves on the other. Without historical materialism, they do not know why they believe what they believe and why they do what they do. It's here that Harvey has almost broken through the “traditional leftist paradigm” (fighting capitalism's “oppression” and “exploitation” of women and minorities) and entered the new leftist paradigm of my Thermodynamic Interpretation History. (Just as Nancy Fraser could have broken through the old leftist paradigm and entered my new paradigm by going further with her improvement of Pollanyi's double movement into the triple movement.)

The latest supplement to Harvey's classic: Andreas Reckwitz's new classic

Andreas Reckwitz, with his *Die Gesellschaft der Singularitäten* (Suhrkamp, 2017), is a contemporary author whose comprehensive description of postmodern society elaborates upon David Harvey's classic by slightly updating it and describing in greater details a few things which Harvey has left incompletely described. For a quicker discussion, we shall also rely on two Deutschlandfunk Kultur broadcasts in which Reckwitz's arguments are succinctly summarized: Simone Miller's review on 23.10.2017, “Das Besondere wird zum Maßstab”, and Thorsten Jantschek's interview with Andreas Reckwitz on 10.03.2018.

(1) Reckwitz's classic is, like Harvey's, devoted to the description of the structural change of Western society as it switches from Fordist-Keynesianism (what he calls “classical” or “modern”) to flexible accumulation (what he calls “late modern”) (*Strukturwandel von der klassischen zur spätmodernen Gesellschaft*). The most striking character of the “sea-change” is the switch from a homogeneous mass society (where everyone is the same and consumes the same thing) to a “society of singularity” (where everyone tries to emphasize his or her differences and consumes products and services tailored to him- or herself). The new era is characterized by the imperative to distinguish oneself as “different” and “special”.

Was jetzt vor allem zähle, sei das das eigene Profil und das Besondere. Unsere Gesellschaft wird regiert von einem unsichtbaren Gesetz: dem Imperativ des Besonderen. (Miller.)

Harvey has hinted at this characteristic when he describes the postmodern emphasis on “collage of the incommensurable”, on heterogeneity, on fragmentation so as to become more flexible, on local difference so as to attract capital; or the postmodern city as the “emporium of styles”. Reckwitz has here elaborated upon this postmodern characteristic. Whereas a modernist society is one which produces standardized things and socializes its members to conform to a standardized version, a postmodern society is one which produces particular and differentiated things and socializes its members to seek to become particular and different. The transition from the modern society of homogeneity and standardization to a postmodern society of heterogeneity and collage:

Die Industriegesellschaft hätte unter dem Vorzeichen des Allgemeinen gestanden: Ökonomie und Öffentlichkeit wurden in der klassischen Moderne standardisiert und formalisiert. Im Kulturellen und Privaten ließ der Konformismus die Massenkultur entstehen. In der Spätmoderne hingegen verkehrte sich diese Vorherrschaft des Allgemeinen in ihr Gegenteil: Nicht mehr allein Fleiß, bestandene Prüfungen und gerahmte

Zertifikate garantierten den Erfolg. Es sei vielmehr das eigene Profil, das zählt. Nur wem es gelinge, sich in seiner Einzigartigkeit, Originalität und Attraktivität zu profilieren, hätte heute eine Chance auf monetäre und soziale Anerkennung.

Sehr minutiös, deshalb stellenweise ein wenig langatmig, stellt Reckwitz unter Beweis, wie das Besondere zum Maßstab aller gesellschaftlichen Sphären wird: Seien es die Märkte, die Arbeitswelt und Lebensstile, aber auch die Welt der Dinge, Ereignisse und Orte – der Druck der Besonderung dringe selbst in den letzten Winkel der Gesellschaft vor. (Miller.)

Reckwitz's transition from the general (*Allgemeine*) to the particular (*Besondere*) is the re-statement of Harvey's transition from extracting the eternal and the immutable from the ephemeral and the contingent to the acceptance of the ephemeral and the contingent as free-standing and valid in themselves. Reckwitz is quick to point out that the term “rationalization” which many, e.g. Weber, have used to describe modernist society, means precisely “standardization” and “generalization”, i.e. extracting the general type from the particulars.

Die klassische Moderne der Industriegesellschaft ist im Grunde ein Prozess der tiefgreifenden formalen Rationalisierung. Und alle Ausprägungen dieser formalen Rationalisierung – ob in Wissenschaft und Technik, in der ökonomisch-industriellen Produktion, im Staat oder im Recht – fördern und stützen, wie ich hinzufügen möchte, eine Herrschaft des Allgemeinen. Überall ging es um Standardisierung und Formalisierung, um eine Verfertigung der Elemente der Welt als gleiche, gleichartige, auch gleichberechtigte: auf den Fließbändern der industriellen Produktion und in den Gebäuden in Serie des International Style, im Rechts- wie im Sozialstaat, im Militär, bei der ‘Verschulung’ der Kinder und Jugendlichen, in den Ideologien und der Technik (p. 15).

It is interesting to note that Reckwitz sees modernism as having been fully actualized in both the US and the USSR in the 1960s (p. 14 – 15). Namely, he would agree that communism is just a different facet of the same development of which capitalism is another facet, although the communist version of the *Vernunft* has never evolved beyond Fordist-Keynesianism, i.e. the era of standardization and generalization.

(2) Reckwitz identifies the cause for the transition to be globalization and digitalization. (He mentions also the “culturalization of economy”.) Specifically, he sees that, while during the Fordist-Keynesian age, the development of economy and technology resulted in standardization of everything, their continual development during the era of flexible accumulation then leads to the opposite of standardization:

Was sind die Ursachen für diese tiefgreifende Transformation? Meine erste Antwort auf diese Frage, die ich in diesem Buch ausführlich entfalten werde, lautet: Die beiden machtvollsten gesellschaftlichen Motoren, welche die Standardisierung der industriellen Moderne vorantrieben, haben sich in den 1970er/80er Jahren in Motoren der gesellschaftlichen Singularisierung verkehrt – die *Ökonomie* und die *Technologie* (p. 15).

Because he is not a historical materialist, he is weaker than Harvey in the diagnosis of causes. While he could have named the crisis of accumulation between 1968 and 1973 as the cause for the transition, while he could have identified the de-industrialization of Western society as having caused the singularization of society, he couldn't have identified the progressive compression of time and space as the motor for first standardization and then singularization. Nevertheless, Reckwitz as well as Harvey recognizes, firstly, that the continual development of the same thing often leads to opposite results. The continual development of the capitalist system, the continual compression of space and time, first leads to a society centered on standardization, objectification, and affect-reduction (*Affektreduktion*), then to a society centered on singularization, culturalization (*Kulturalisierung*), and affect-intensification (*Affektintensivierung*) (p. 17). I have similarly been saying that the continual development of the capitalist system first leads to a male-centered society, but then reverses everything to end in a female-centered society.

Secondly, like Harvey, Reckwitz recognizes that what has become prominent in the postmodern phase has always already existed in the modern phase. Reckwitz has summarized modern vs postmodern in the oppositions: standardization vs singularization (*Standardisierung / Singularisierung*), rationalization vs culturalization (*Rationalisierung/ Kulturalisierung*), objectification vs affect-intensification (*Versachlichung/ Affektintensivierung*). Reckwitz emphasizes, much in the manner of Harvey's use of Baudelaire, that the affective pole with singularization and culturalization has always coexisted with the rationalization pole in modernist consciousness, and that what has happened in the transition to postmodernity is merely a change in the relationship between the two poles. (Specifically, Reckwitz asserts that, during the postmodern era, the rationalization pole has never really disappeared, but now functions as the background for the affective pole.)

(3) Reckwitz has a particular thesis about the “culturalization of economy”. Namely, the consumer products today are “culture items”: they attract consumers by their very attractiveness, whereas during the Fordist era they were marketed solely on the basis of their functionality. Reckwitz is describing in a different way Harvey's observation that postmodern emphasis is on images rather than on a coherent narrative content.

(4) The most important insight which Reckwitz has provided and which we don't see in Harvey's classic concerns the new political structure which has arisen in Western societies due to the transition to a society of fragmentation and singularity. The new leftist paradigm (feminism and political correctness) which the new material conditions have produced as their ideological support (as the new “regulation regime”) is in fact something brand new, something that is *not* the continuation of the traditional leftist position before 1973.

Reckwitz's basic argument is that the traditional parties, whether social democrats or Christian democrats, are *Volksparteien*, that they are “mass parties” proper to the “classical industrial society” (Fordist-Keynesianism, the era of standardization and generalization) and therefore, under society's transformation to postmodern (late modern; *spätmodern*) condition, when the industrial sector has eroded and society has been singularized, have lost their appeal.

(a) *A new class structure has emerged during the era of singularization* – the former middle-class has

split in two: (1) the ascending segment (*das aufsteigende Segment*) of the new service economy, belonging to the knowledge economy (*Wissensökonomie*) and correlated with the expanded educational sector (*Bildungssektor*). This is the “new middle-class” (*die neue Mittelklasse*); (2) the descending segment (*das absteigende Segment*), employed in the “simple service sector” (*einfache Dienstleistungen*). This is the new “polarized society”.

... haben wir jetzt eher eine sehr stark differenzierte und polarisierte Gesellschaft: die aufsteigende neue Mittelklasse auf der einen Seite, die eher absteigende neue Unterklasse auf der anderen Seite und dazwischen noch so etwas wie eine alte Mittelklasse oder einen alten Mittelstand. Insofern ist das nicht einfach nur eine unendliche Differenzierung der Gesellschaft in viele Kleingruppen, sondern man kann schon ein Muster erkennen, das relativ deutlich ist. (Reckwitz, interview.)

(b) *A new political structure has thus emerged during the era of singularization* corresponding to the new class structure. During the Fordist-Keynesian era, politics is defined as “left vs right”: the discontented “Have-Nots” who wanted change to have more (the left) and the contented “Haves” who consequently didn't want change:

Und die klassische Konfliktlinie ist natürlich links/rechts, gewissermaßen die Unterprivilegierten auf der einen Seite, die aufsteigen wollen, die ihre Rechte einfordern, und auf der anderen Seite diejenigen, die eigentlich mit dem zufrieden sind, was sie haben, und das gerne bewahren wollen. Das ist ja die klassische Links-Rechts-Unterscheidung, auch im Sinne von Arbeit versus Kapital – Das war ja die Geburtsstunde der Sozialdemokratie – und auf der anderen Seite dann die konservativen Parteien, die einen anderen Part gewissermaßen bespielt haben. (Reckwitz, interview.)

In the new era, the structure has changed to “cosmopolitan” (*Globalisten, Kosmopoliten*) vs “communitarian” (*Kommunitariern*). The “new middle-class” is the cosmopolitans who like the current situation (globalization and de-industrialization) and the “new under-class” (of the simple service sector plus some elements from the old middle-class) is the communitarians who don't like the current situation. The cosmopolitans want “openness”, open society, immigration, and free-market; they are urban and educated – the best example is Macron's “En Marche”. The communitarians, who are rural and uneducated, want a closed society, don't want immigration and free market (want tariffs). This new political structure (the mainstream “left” vs populist “right”) has replaced the old “left-right” division in that both sides are somewhat left and somewhat right from the traditional (Keynesian) perspective. Reckwitz's major contribution is thus the insight that the current “left-right” is *not* the continuation of the “left-right” from the Keynesian era.

(c) Reckwitz emphasizes that *digitalization*, correlated with the postmodern era of singularization, *has eroded the general, homogeneous public sphere and replaced it with a new, heterogeneous and discontinuous, public sphere*. The one, uniform public sphere created by mainstream newspapers and TV news during the Fordist era is now replaced by many small regional public spheres which have crystallized around online groups and online alternative news media.

Da kann man, denke ich, tatsächlich sagen, dass die Digitalisierung auch dazu führt, dass in jeder Hinsicht so was wie eine allgemeine Öffentlichkeit erodiert und es viele Partikularöffentlichkeiten gibt. Also, einfach gesagt: Auch die alte Industriegesellschaft war ja eine, in der es eine gemeinsame Öffentlichkeit in mancher Hinsicht gab, über – zum Beispiel – die großen überregionalen Zeitungen oder über das staatliche Fernsehen. Das waren ja gewissermaßen Medien, die sich an alle gewandt haben, die auch sehr hohe Einschaltquoten hatten, wo man sagen kann, die verschiedensten Milieus der Gesellschaft haben das rezipiert und hatten, könnte man sagen, eine gemeinsame Debattengrundlage. Ich will das jetzt gar nicht verklären. Das hatte ja auch durchaus seine Schattenseiten. Es war ja auch ein gewisser Konformismus möglicherweise in den alten Medien.

Und jetzt haben wir aber durch die Digitalisierung die bekannte Entstehung von Partikularöffentlichkeiten, über soziale Medien, über verschiedene Blogs, über verschiedene Gruppen, die sich im Internet versammeln. Das ist ja auch die Chance des Internets, dass sich kleine Gruppen mobilisieren lassen, dass sie einen Kommunikationsraum erhalten. Aber das bedeutet natürlich auch andererseits, dass diese gemeinsame Klammer durch die alten Medien, an denen alle teilgenommen haben, erodiert. Also, wenn man sieht, dass auch jüngere Leute immer weniger – es gab jetzt eine neue Statistik – die alten Tageszeitungen lesen oder das staatliche Fernsehen schauen, sondern dass sie zum Beispiel ihre Nachrichten über die sozialen Medien bekommen. Und die sind ja auf sie selbst zugeschnitten. Sie haben ja dann entschieden, was sie lesen wollen oder was sie interessiert, und dann bekommen sie eben über ihren Newsfeed nur eben die Nachrichten, die sie interessieren. Und so kann sich dann jeder sein individuelles Weltbild zusammenbauen. (Reckwitz, interview.)

(d) The transition from Fordist-Keynesianism to flexible accumulation also means *the replacement of the politics of the general* (die Politik des Allgemeinen) *with the politics of the particular* (die Politik des Besonderen):

Das ist ja meine generelle These auch in dem Buch, dass wir in verschiedensten Bereichen der Gesellschaft eigentlich, man könnte sagen, ein Ersetzen von zentralen Kriterien haben, also, dass diese Orientierung am Besonderen, am Einzigartigen, man könnte auch sagen Individuellen, gewissermaßen immer stärker wird und dass diese Kriterien des Allgemeinen, die also in der alten Industriegesellschaft ja sehr stark waren, also von der Industrieproduktion bis hin zu den Volksparteien, erodieren. (Reckwitz, interview.)

This is manifested in the increasing number of small parties instead of a few grand mass parties. Reckwitz argues that politics has today shed its former concern with the well-being of the general population but is now more concerned with marking out differences (*Markierung von Differenz*). This is a very neoliberal, competition-oriented politics, marking out differences through competition. Hence the increasing prominence of “identity politics” in the USA: how individuals' difference need to be respected.

(e) Reckwitz also emphasizes the change in our value system: “Den Wertewandel kann man ja auch

empirisch sehr gut nachweisen seit den 70er, 80er Jahren, also weg von den sogenannten Pflicht- und Akzeptanzwerten hin zu den sogenannten Selbstentfaltungswerten.” (Reckwitz, interview.) This is another way of characterizing the era of “relaxation” and “self-centeredness”.

If neoliberalism is deregulation in the domain of economy and politics, identity politics – gender equality and LGBTQ movement – is deregulation in the social domain. In this sense, Reckwitz has broken through the traditional leftist paradigm: how neoliberalism and the expansion of capitalism have conditioned philosophies of liberation like Gille Deleuze's or Judith Butler's and form in fact the same (postmodern) package with them.

(5) The era of singularity is inherently dummifying – this is *my* thesis. I have earlier defined intelligence as the ability to connect with, and represent, reality. But this means also to understand it. There is no possible way to understand reality if we cannot extract the general from the particulars. Physics is about extracting the general laws from the particular cases. Stating that we today live in a society of singularity is itself arriving at a generalization from observation of the particular cases.