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Cities in Global Capitalism

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In *Cities in Global Capitalism*, Ugo Rossi explores the historical and ongoing relationship between cities and capitalist systems of production. Charting the emergence and evolution of what he calls the ‘city-capitalism nexus,’ Rossi focuses on how cities have become enmeshed in global capitalism through the concentration of financial power, entrepreneurialism, and knowledge-based economies in urban centres. While the book is part of an ongoing literature on cities and capitalism, Rossi’s focus on the biopolitical and affective dimensions of the city-capitalism nexus helps *Cities in Global Capitalism* to stand out in this crowded field. Throughout the book, Rossi aims to show that as today’s cities have emerged from the Great Recession, they have become integral to the survival of global capitalism, acting as key sites where capitalist subjectivities are produced, and where social relations, culture, and life itself get swept up into capitalist circuits of valorization.

To build this argument, Rossi offers up a Foucauldian ‘history of the present,’ outlining the societal transformations that have deepened the links between cities and capitalism. While the book is by no means a strictly historical account of the city-capitalism nexus, Rossi spends significant time grounding what he sees as the ‘troubled’ and ‘ambivalent’ condition of today’s city-capitalism nexus in its historical context. Focusing first on the ‘emergences’ of the city-capitalism nexus, Rossi traces the interdependence of cities and capitalism to three key forces which he argues have been ‘brought to the fore within the contemporary round of globalization’ (p. 25): financial power, the entrepreneurialization of self and society, and the rise of cognitive capital. From here, Rossi explores how these ‘emergences’ have taken on a global dimension, reinforcing the city-capitalism relationship, and diffusing over (in Rossi’s reading) much of the planet.

These early chapters are as much a ‘history of the present’ as they are a whirlwind tour of urban scholarship since the 1970s. Rossi takes readers through the evolution of scholarly thought on the city-capitalism relationship, touching briefly on everything from world systems theory, to the planetary urbanization thesis, to ‘McDonaldization’ and ‘Disneyfication’. Rossi’s theoretical approach is eclectic, and he combines strands of political economy, neoinstitutionalism, and radical political theory to make sense of the evolving city-capitalism nexus.

Although Rossi’s coverage of these theoretical perspectives can feel rushed, these preliminary chapters effectively lay the groundwork for the book’s major analytical contribution: an exploration of how the city-capitalism nexus has emerged from the crisis of the global Great Recession. Rossi does not dwell for long on the causes or direct outcomes of the financial crisis or Great Recession (which is probably a good choice, since this is well-covered ground). Instead, Rossi focuses on how these recent crises have been resolved (at least partially) by transformations in urban economies and social dynamics—namely through a wave of new urban technology clusters and the growth of the sharing economy. Rossi argues that these emergent tech-based economies have given cities a new role as engines of post-recession capitalist growth.

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At the same time, however, Rossi argues that in acquiring this growth-promoting role, cities and urban social relations have become ground zero for the ‘life-oriented’ reconstruction of the capitalist system. In Rossi’s view, urban tech clusters and their associated start-up cultures encourage urban residents and workers to internalize entrepreneurial logics, becoming, in Foucauldian terms, an ‘entrepreneur of himself.’ Similarly, Rossi argues that the urban sharing economy—epitomized in companies like Airbnb and Uber—leads to an entrepreneurialization of not only the self, but also urban social relationships and collectivist economies. While Rossi argues that start-ups and the sharing economy could once be read as emancipatory and progressive, they have now become instrumental in the construction of new capitalist subjectivities within the city-capitalism nexus. These new subjectivities, the book aims to show, are tied up in capitalism’s ability to subsume urban residents’ social relationships, senses of self, and communities into its circuits of accumulation.

Overall, Rossi’s book provides a comprehensive, historically-grounded, and theoretically nuanced account of how cities and global capitalism have become increasingly enmeshed over time. Rossi’s overview of the evolution of previous scholarship on the city-capitalism relationship would be useful as an introductory text for undergraduate students, while the book’s treatment of the post-Great Recession transformation of the city-capitalism nexus will be very engaging for both general interest readers and specialists in the field. Rossi does a good job highlighting the contradictions and ambivalence inherent in today’s city-capitalism nexus, showing readers both the emancipatory potential of recent transformations in urban economies, as well as the risk of this potential being subsumed entirely by capitalist rationalities.

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