

Book Review - Profiles



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L. Boltanski, A. Esquerre, *Arricchimento. Una critica della merce*, Bologna: il Mulino, 2019, pp. 592, ISBN 9788815285287.

The two authors summarize in this book the result of a long research and a theoretical analysis of the commodification of new goods as a feature of current capitalism. The growing availability of personal wealth makes the emerging elites of the global economy ever more attentive to the need for social distinction. Exclusivity, authenticity and refined aesthetics are qualities that distinguish the consumer goods desired by these elites, from works of art to luxury objects, from buildings to tourist sites, to food and wine products. The more these goods are aspired, the more they are enriched by a sort of special aura, which is the result of narratives proposed by historians, journalists, art critics, who with their specialist knowledge contribute crucially to attribute charm and desirability to objects and places, often glorifying the past as a marketing strategy.

J.D. Van der Ploeg, *Agricoltura e contadini nella Cina d'oggi*, Roma: Donzelli, 2019, pp. 168, ISBN 9788868439491.

China has the largest agricultural system in the world: Chinese farmers, compared to just 10% of the cultivated area of the planet, generate as much as 20% of world food production. Chinese agriculture also stands out due to its impressive growth rate: production and productivity have grown, going hand in hand with an extraordinary reduction of rural poverty. Van der Ploeg, an international expert on agriculture and rural societies, has carried out a careful fieldwork to get in touch with the families that make up the fabric of the Chinese rural society and to study their forms of adaptation to a reality in constant evolution. This book presents a vivid description of the mechanisms used by peasant families to defend their way of life and, at the same time, succeed in increasing agricultural production by tracing an important alternative to the modernization model of Western agriculture.

J. Beckfield, *Unequal Europe. Regional Integration and the Rise of European Inequality*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019, pp. 312, ISBN 9780190494261.

In this book, Jason Beckfield convincingly argues that European integration has weakened the welfare state and increased, rather than mitigated, income inequality over the past four decades. The recent Euro-crisis has clearly demonstrated that European Union policies play a crucial role for

the distribution of resources within and between European nation-states. Throughout the crisis, distributive conflicts between the EU's winners and losers worsened, and are still reverberating in European politics today. The author places the recent crisis into a broader sociological, political, and economic perspective by analyzing - using individual and household level income survey data, combined with data on social policies and case studies of welfare reforms - how European integration has reshaped the distribution of income across the households of Europe. Beckfield develops the concept of "technocratic capitalism" as an interpretation of a predominant current form of capitalism in the EU.

D. Harvey, *Geografia del dominio. Capitalismo e produzione dello spazio*, Verona: Ombre Corte, 2019, pp. 140, ISBN 8869481247.

Harvey offers a revelatory look into how the logic of capitalist accumulation upsets economic and political balances, technique and work, the environment and climate, society and life forms. Capitalism is presented as a system of space production, that is able to shape places, profoundly change landscapes, transform space-time relationships. The market standardization of the world involves an incessant proliferation of differences: economic, social, geographical, cultural, geopolitical. This dynamism forces capitalism to invent "spatial solutions" to the contradictions that undermine it and to the various negative effects they produce. What Harvey's work invites us to is that in order to understand the planetary capitalism and unequal relations underlying it, is fundamental to grasp the spatial logic of this mode of production.

Y.N. Harari, *21 lezioni per il XXI secolo*, Milano: Bompiani, 2018, pp. 528, ISBN 9788845297052.

This book addresses some of the most urgent issues on the global contemporary agenda. Why is liberal democracy in crisis? What does the rise of Donald Trump mean? What can be done to counter the epidemic of false news? Does Europe have to keep the doors open for migrants? How can we defend ourselves against terrorism? Questions that most people, being pressed by other daily urgencies - working, taking care of their children or giving assistance to elderly parents - are not able to go deeper. The author tries to shed some light on these great themes, with the intention of involving a wider audience than the small group of people from whom the destiny of contemporary societies seems to depend.