**Retailing Consumption and Capital: Towards the New Retail Geography**
Clifford Guy
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Other chapters on specific regions, in being descriptive and fairly short, whet the appetite perhaps but do not really furnish sufficient information for us to be able to draw lessons and conclusions across the continent or wider. Pressure of space and time, maybe an urgency to complete the book for the UK research assessment exercise and the inherent nature of collected papers undoubtedly limited the abilities of the editors to address their own agendas effectively—to provide 'lessons that different countries and regions can learn from each other' (back cover). The concluding chapter demonstrates this with a necessarily restricted look at the foregoing. Nevertheless, Alden does make a worthy attempt to pull the case study material together against a 'conceptual, theoretical and empirical backcloth to regional development strategies' (p 296). In doing so he identifies four key issues: reducing regional growth disparities, the role of the European Commission, partnerships and strategies and the emphasis of the private sector. In concentrating on these dimensions, Alden neither contradicts the findings of the case studies nor most commentators' reading of the position of Europe's regions. In reflecting more deeply, the editors again do a service by marshalling further evidence from the material presented in the case studies to argue that regional development is a priority for the EU and its member states. Also, they believe that, despite persistent growth disparities, the strength of the structural funds and of the partnerships in the programme areas should lead to inevitable progress for the regions. Although the sentiments may be welcomed by the Commission and the players in the regions, it is doubtful whether the evidence assembled here in the absence of a general economic analytical framework is sufficient to reach this optimistic conclusion. That this book, and its conclusion, is a powerful and useful contribution to the debate is not in doubt, however, and the volume represents a worthwhile attempt at improving our understanding of the European regional development strategies paradigm.

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**Retailing, Consumption and Capital: Towards the New Retail Geography**
Neil Wrigley & Michelle Lowe (Eds)
*Harlow, Longman, 1996, 352 pp., £17.99 pb, ISBN 0-582-22824-7*

Much of the technical analysis used in retail planning has for many years been based on relatively simple 'retail geography' concepts originating in central place theory: shopping trips, catchment areas, attractiveness of centres, for example. This has stemmed from a tradition of quantitative empirical research, often carried out for commercial purposes. Not surprisingly, this work has often been criticized by academic geographers for its descriptiveness and lack of social theory, and by some for its 'applied' focus. Arguably, then, retail geography has not in recent years contributed much to the development of economic geography as a whole. Excellent publications otherwise such as Jones & Simmons (1990) and Bromley & Thomas (1993) have had little to say on topics such as the circulation of capital, corporate strategies of national and multinational companies, and 'cultural' interpretations of geographical phenomena, for example.

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This book both presents and responds to these criticisms. As well as seeking deeper and more theoretically informed explanations of geographical patterns of retail activity, it seeks to show that the study of retailing and consumer behaviour can contribute centrally to more general areas of debate in economic geography. Thus, two main concerns of this book are "theoretically informed accounts of the transformation of retail capital" and "analysis of the links between femininity, masculinity, place and consumption". The outcome is intended to encourage "a vibrant retail geography positioned at the cutting edges of theoretical debate" (p. 5).

The book itself is a collection of 16 papers by 21 geographers, mainly based in the UK. The editors have successfully imposed some order on what could have been a disparate series of essays, through a clear organization of the book and through frequent cross-referencing of chapters. The individual chapters themselves embody recent work and have not been published elsewhere. Thus the book forms a fairly coherent whole, and presents a great deal of novel and up-to-date material for the advanced student and the retail researcher alike. Inevitably, however, there is some unevenness between chapters, in theoretical approach, level of detail and quality of explanation.

After an introductory chapter by the editors which establishes these arguments and reviews previous work, the book falls into three sections. The first of these deals with "corporate restructuring and retailer–manufacturer–regulatory state relations". Marsden & Wrigley's chapter on relationships between the regulatory state and food retailing suggests that multiple retailers have benefited as much as suffered from increasingly tight regulations on food quality and retailer competition. They show that, in the UK at least, regulation has been partially privatized to the multiples themselves. I would like to have seen these ideas explored in the realm of land-use planning: it might be difficult to argue that the multiples have set the agenda for government policy towards the location of new stores. The following three chapters discuss relationships between retailers and manufacturers or suppliers, and include some interesting theoretical and empirical material. A more interesting chapter from the land-use planning point of view is, however, Wrigley's analysis of the recent development of new grocery stores in the UK. This shows clearly that this process has involved unsustainable rates of expansion and over-valuation of sites for development. Again, though, the effects of increasing planning restriction on out-of-centre development in the early 1990s are not discussed. I would argue that such changes in policy have added to the scarcity of suitable sites for large stores, and have implicitly favoured companies prepared to develop in traditional shopping locations.

The second main section reviews 'retail employment relations'. In a useful chapter Freathy and Sparks relate characteristics of retail employment in the UK to facets of consumer demand and retailer organization. This is complemented nicely by a more impressionistic chapter by Lowe & Crewe, which relates employment change to the growing importance of 'customer care' in retailing.

The final section on 'consumption and capital' is to me the most stimulating, if uneven, section of the book. The section begins with a very good review of 'consumption, shopping and gender' by Paul Glennie & Nigel Thrift: this clearly introduces the key concepts of sociality and reflexivity and relates them to consumption practices. One of the areas for further research signalled by these authors is the "interpretation, use and re-creation of new retailing and other

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spaces" (p. 237). It is odd, then, that the two following chapters, by Blomley and Domosh respectively, focus on 19th-century department stores, in Paris and New York. Their explorations of the cultural significance of the internal arrangements of these stores are interesting, but I still need convincing of the practical utility of this type of study. The following chapter, by Crewe & Lowe, describes simultaneous tendencies towards globalization and localization in fashion retailing, using the Nottingham Lace Market as an example of the latter. The final chapter by Clarke combines a good critique of 'orthodox retail geography' with some self-indulgent postmodern ramblings. This I find disappointing: it is essential for academics who are developing new approaches to a subject to be able to express themselves clearly and encourage others to take up the cause.

This book does, despite these minor criticisms, constitute an important stage in the evolution of 'retail geography' into a challenging and relevant academic discipline. I would not see this, however, as overriding the more traditional descriptive approach: this still has in my view considerable intellectual and practical value, and is perhaps more relevant to the concerns of land-use planning. Indeed, the 'new retail geography', as portrayed in this book, seems almost to ignore the influence of institutional gatekeepers such as property developers and land-use planners, despite its concern for the 'regulatory environment'. This may be a direction in which the subject needs to move.

To conclude, all researchers and planners interested in 'retail spaces', and selling and consumption practices, should read this book. It will widen their horizons and make them think more critically about these issues.

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## References

Bromley, R.D.F. & Thomas, C.J. (1993) *Retail Change: Contemporary Issues* (London: UCL Press).
Jones, K. & Simmons, J. (1990) *The Retail Environment*, (London: Routledge).

## The Dependent City Revisited: The Political Economy of Urban Development and Social Policy

Paul Kantor
*Westview Press, 1995, 265 pp.*

Paul Kantor has written a well-researched and wide-ranging book on the dilemmas facing urban authorities in the USA in their attempts to, on the one hand, promote economic development and growth, while, on the other, maintain social welfarist policies and programmes in the context of long-term economic instability. Kantor adopts a specific form of neo-classical political economic theory to explain the changes in urban politics which have developed in the US context. Both capital and labour, he maintains, have become increasingly mobile and it is in this setting of perpetual economic instability and the pervading threat of 'capital flight' that urban governance has had to adapt. Hence, he

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