Commodity chains & Consumption and retail

consumption and retail

new eco geography
- e.g.
  - Sex & the City
    - style & identity in NYC
    - brand conscious style icons
  - relevant to economy as well as culture
  - elite forms of consumption
- quantitative marxist political - consumption / institutionalism / cultural turn
- extending control of MNCs
  - corporate structures and organisation
  - fewer companies own larger share of market
- rise of service sector in advanced capitalist economies
  - cornershops disappearing
  - concentration of capital
- importance of consumption and retail in contemporary capitalism
  - retail a major part
- orthodox retail geog
  - location models
  - need to look at identity, imagery, branding, cultural processes
- theorising retail capital
  - from mid 90s
- retail restructuring
- retail and financial capital
  - US supermarkets worked on credit to open new stores, internet retailing etc.
- relations between retail sector and regulatory state
  - deregulation
  - some regulatory responsibilities passed to retailers as they become more powerful
    - e.g. Food Safety Act 1990
      - delegated responsibilities to supermarkets

new retail geog
- corporate cultures of retail firms
  - brand identities
  - family based?
  - ASDA
    - emphasis on blue collared workers
      - cheap
      - good value
  - Waitrose
    - high margin
    - quality food
- retailer-manufacturer relations
  - price points
  - when deliveries happen
  - retailers call the shots
  - e.g. Zara
    - high speed fashion
- retailing and the labour process
  - feminisation of labour force
  - casualisation of labour
    - increase in part time work to fit into schedules
  - element of performance & interaction with consumer
    - wasn't necessary in manufacturing
- changing retail landscapes
  - out of town
    - artificial huge centres for people to consume at whole days at a time
- must take both its economic and cultural geographies seriously (Blomley, 1996)

landscapes of retail and consumption
- geographies of retailing
  - city centre to suburbia and back again
  - globalisation of retail
  - alternative retail spaces
    - car boots
    - charity shops
  - e-tailing
    - retail corporations to ebay
- spaces of consumption
  - the store
    - sites of display
    - space consumed by people who may not be buying or selling
  - the street
    - leisure & recreation to stroll and see
  - the dept store
    - insulated from dangers of the street
    - no obligation to buy
    - browse and meet
      - focal points for social life
    - centre for entertainment & tourist attraction
    - new modern retailing space
    - goods becoming increasingly standardised
    - growing emphasis on aesthetic and symbolic attributes of commodities
    - e.g. Macy's
  - the mall
    - exotic flowers
    - waterfalls
    - carnivalesque atmospheres
    - designed for tourism, entertainment and leisure as much as purchasing commodities
  - the theme park
    - increasingly ubiquitous form of consumption experience
    - consumption of multi-sensory experiences which may combine simulated environments
    - visitors pay for admission to an entire complex
  - privatising spaces of consumption
    - gated communities
  - homes as spaces of consumption
    - value / meaning
      - physically / in terms of
        - homes a financial and emotional investment
        - each time we bring a product home, the home is transformed
    - rise of
      - 'home making' magazines
      - 'lifestyle' stores
        - e.g. Ikea
      - low cost TV makeover shows
        - e.g. 60 minute makeover

retail, consumption and power
- globalisation of retailing
  - TNCs
    - aggressive m&a activities
    - rapid organic growth
    - dominant market positions
  - latest phase
    - rapidity of international expansion
    - scale of investment unprecedented
    - significant impacts o retail structures of host countries
      - 6 of Poland's top 10 retailers foreign
  - e.g. Tesco
    - different in different countries
      - city centre dept store
        - Prague
      - part of large multi funtion devts
        - Bangkok
    - however, store formats and signage common across all markets
- 3 perspectives
  - consumer sovereignty
    - price based decisions
    - free will of individual customers
    - unaffected by society
    - can choose to buy or not
    - control over eco system as a whole
  - consumers as dupes
    - primacy of production within eco system
    - consumption led by production
    - passive customers enticed into parting with their money
    - producer profit
      - fuels capitalist model
  - culturalist perspective
    - consumers construct their own identity through consumption
    - not as individualised as consumer sovereignty
    - part of larger social forces and trends within society
      - e.g. teenage fashion
- Wal Mart
  - emergence in China
    - symbol of globalisation
  - supply chains
  - one of the best known retail corporations
  - FDI
    - controlling labour and corporate geographies
    - increasing retailers
      - not just manufacture

recession
- how are retailers involved?
  - close down, contract etc.
- retail arms out of business
  - e.g. Zavvi

retail work
- low status jobs
- labour intensive
- feminised workforce
- servicing and performance
- emotional work

fragility in economic crisis
- implications for consumption and retail capital
- consumer spending patterns and practices
- retail structures
- retail employment
- regulatory structures

commodity chains
- from production all the way to consumption, via circulation
- 'things' are good to think with
  - through capitalist system
- 'follow the thing' (Cook)
- commodities starting points for understanding geography
  - geography fluid, complex and dynamic
    - helps us understand the world
  - looking across the discipline
    - devt
    - knowledge economies
    - gender
    - cultural representations
    - consumption geographies
- connect sites of production with sites of consumption
  - also spaces between and beyond
- power of the brand
- various nodes/phases
  - chain links these nodes
- economic geographers
  - marxist approaches
    - reveals exploitation at sites of production
    - where did last meal come from?
  - institutional-economic perspectives
    - understanding global networks of trade
      - their impacts on eco devt
      - role of MNCs
  - cultural-economic views
    - addressing the complex movement of knowledge around the commodity chain
      - how different representations of knowledge move around the system
        - power of brands
        - where do these knowledges come from?
- stories of capitalism
  - commodities produced for a form of capitalist (market) exchange
  - commodity economies
    - labour power and money are commodities

global (and ethical?) commodity chains
- jewellery
  - consumption
    - as gifts
    - cultures of display and fashion
      - class
        - expensive
      - how we see and want to see ourselves
        - wedding ring
          - tells a story about a person
  - retail
    - corporate power
      - dept store
      - specialist jewellery store
        - reduced number of independents
    - commodity prices soaring
      - opportunity for small scale mining to evolve into a rewarding activity
  - production
    - poor labour conditions
      - lack of respect for human rights
      - e.g. funding war in Sierra Leone
  - conflict diamonds
    - political notions
    - NGO campaigns
      - created industry awareness
      - beginnings of reform within the multi-billion dollar sector
    - consumer conscious
      - Hollywood
        - Blood Diamond 2006
      - Kanye West
        - diamonds fr mSierra Leone
    - most diamonds in the market now conflict free
  - ethical
    - certification schemes
      - ethically sourced
      - not linked to conflict
  - fake
    - alternative economy
- footballs
  - fields of consumption
    - power of celebrities
  - brand manufacturers
    - presence of brands in production of footballs
  - child labour
    - India
  - NGO campaigns
    - Oxfam fair play
      - e.g.
        - London 2012
        - South Africa world cup
  - fair trade footballs
    - Pakistan and premiums
      - premium amount of money paid to producers