This is a jam-packed book, full of ideas, data, and thought-provoking perspectives on everything you want to know about retail geography (and more). My reaction after reading the book was that it would be a pity if it is only read by those who are directly concerned with retail geography because the cases and theories drawn on by Wrigley and Lowe have so much to tell us about the contemporary economy. This is not a coincidence. Retailing is now a major force shaping advanced economies, the major employer in many countries, and a publicly recognized index of economic health (through consumer confidence measures). Wal-Mart is now the world's largest firm, both with respect to profits and employment (1.2 million directly worldwide, and millions more through its supplier networks). And although, admittedly, Wal-Mart is gargantuan and thus something of a unique case, the retail sector is a more important economic driver than would have been thought possible in the 1980s. *Reading Retail* tells us why this is so and what it means.

Despite its importance, however, contemporary developments in retailing have only begun to draw the interests of geographers beyond an adventuresome crew, including our authors, Lowe and Wrigley. Perhaps this is because the subject has been associated with the deadening hand of central place theory and spatial modeling. The authors argue convincingly that the new geography of retailing is different. As in other areas of economic geography, there has been a move away from modeling and toward questions about capital market dynamics, market governance, and organizational strategies, that is, toward institutional questions. What is most revolutionary about retail geography, however, is that there is a link between economic analysis and what has been dubbed 'the cultural turn' in British geography, a way to connect economy and society. In retailing, to neglect the consumer and the consumption process is to miss the point. This new retail geography offers geographers a very different understanding of space, one that is, as Blomley (1994) describes, "strategic, open to manipulation and production". This is a considerable distance from the kind of spatial relations that can be modeled.

The book is divided into sections that focus on the economic and cultural dimensions of the new retail geography and is considerably advantaged by the complementary expertise of the two authors, fully exploring the considerable literatures and debates concerned with the geographies of retailing and consumption. After an introduction that distinguishes this new approach to the geography of retailing from that which preceded it, the authors plunge into an analysis of forces altering the organizational structure of retail corporations, including technology and changes in regulation. In much of the business literature, the spatial implications of these changes are neglected and this part of the book does a notable service in bringing the spatial dimension to the fore. Employment relations in an industry that employs or has employed most of us are also considered. Part 3 of the book will be of particular interest to planners and policymakers, because it deals with 'spatial switching' and the interregional and intraurban consequences of retailers' decisions to invest and disinvest. The final section of the book focuses on the literature that delves into the relationship between place and consumption, including the street and the home.

Although the book is a very satisfying review of the literature and debates, I wished for a conclusion in which the authors tried to bring their perspectives together more fully, if only in a speculative way. There are certainly intimations of this in the book, the references to commodity circuits that link, in a reflexive way, consumption, production, and distribution, and, in the introduction, use of the case of Starbucks coffee to demonstrate how the 'concept' of coffee has been refashioned by the company and can only be interpreted via a 'cultural geography of production'. The authors rely on the idea that any single description of the new geography
of retailing can be read from a variety of perspectives, some emphasizing consumption and culture and others emphasizing firm strategies and the imperatives imposed by regulatory and corporate governance regimes. Although this is certainly true, there are routes through which the two perspectives on the geography of retailing can be brought together. One is via an analysis of the cultural and economic construction (and continuous reconstruction) of the consumer. This is a project for the future.

As I have already suggested, however, this book is about more than retailing—it resonates with broader questions in geography, planning, sociology, and cultural studies about the character of the contemporary economy—the need to understand multiscalar economic and cultural forces, the impact of regulation, and the role of the state, the construction of self, and the construction of space.

Thus, among the multiplicity of possible readings of this body of path-breaking work is this one—an understanding of the new retail geography is very useful, if not necessary, for those who would attempt to interpret the transformation of advanced economies.

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Reference

Gender, migration and the dual career household by I Hardill; Routledge, London, 2002, 162 pages, £55.00, ISBN 0 415 241731

One of the furthest reaching social transformations in recent decades is the normalisation of the two-worker household. Though we hear much in the media about solo-adult and lone-parent households, it is the household with two workers and a shared mortgage that impacts most on housing and labour-market interdependence. Dual-career families have been the big winners, financially, in a profound reshuffling of life chances. Indeed, because competitive housing markets require two good jobs (with high status and salaries to match) the dual-career household is for many the ‘optimum survival kit’ (Forrest and Murie, 1987). Although materially advantaged, the dual-career household faces an uphill challenge supporting parallel employment, one or more home(s), and a shared life. In each of the neoliberal advanced economies featured in this book (the United Kingdom, USA, and Canada) the majority of children grow up with two parents who both work outside the home, often for long hours. The sociospatial manifestation of this balancing act (which changes over the life course) represents an important field of study solidly tackled in Gender, Migration and the Dual Career Household.

Those who should read this book include town planners and housing-market analysts. It is because the two-worker household rarely finds two jobs (especially in specialist occupations) and a home all in proximity that efforts to steer housing and travel behaviour in environmentally friendly ways so often fail. Beyond the routine practice of stretched daily commuting, this book illustrates how dual-career households employ elaborate spatial strategies to meet the conflicting demands of two careers. There are those who ‘live together apart’ as weekend couples (chapter 4), others who live as ‘astronaut families with parachute children’ (chapter 6); some pursue individual careers and an egalitarian relationship; others prioritise intimacy and parenting by ‘sacrificing’ individual career aspirations. Although the gender dynamics of ‘trailing spouse’ syndrome are well known in migration studies, the impact of this on multinational firms has received less attention. It costs some US $60 000 to relocate an employee, a move which can be short lived when firms fail to take spouse career and children’s education into account (page 102). Military careers, which require families to ‘follow the flag’, are quintessentially disruptive, as witnessed by soaring divorce rates (chapter 7). Tellingly, hospitals relying on overseas recruits explicitly seek applicants without the encumbrance of a partner or dependent in tow (chapter 8).

Organised around nine chapters, including a very short (two-page) conclusion, this book makes connections between social and spatial mobility. Written for the specialist, the book’s strength is its...
synthesis of existing research. Any dissertation student or consultant wishing to review the literature on dual-career migration need look no further. Its weakness is the lack of overt original findings. Claims that the book demonstrates biographic analysis at a number of spatial scales are problematic: there is little sense of home, neighbourhood, or local labour market. Data for three countries remain undifferentiated and evidence of comparative analysis is disappointingly absent. Although in theory the household is the key unit of analysis, interview excerpts are introduced randomly for individuals and the reader is left to trawl the end notes to make sense of these in relation to household biographies. Readers wishing to interrogate data collection and means of analysis have to refer to articles published elsewhere. It would have been worthwhile including a short methods appendix, thus circumventing this task.

Assuming the popular notion of increasing individualism, this book identifies with separate cultures of work for those who ‘live to work’ and others who ‘work to live’. The puzzle in this book is that Irene Hardill chooses not to question the accuracy or usefulness of this dualism. Published as part of the highly regarded International Studies of Women and Place (edited by Janet Momsen and Janice Monk), this slim volume sits a little awkwardly, being the only monograph in this series, perhaps lacking the breadth and critical engagement of the others.

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Reference

Livable cities? Urban struggles for livelihood and sustainability edited by P Evans; University of California Press, Berkeley, CA, 2002, 277 pages, $45.00 cloth, $17.95 paper (£29.95, £12.95) ISBN 0 520 23024-8, 0 520 23025-6

The theme of this edited collection is that the politics of urban livelihood and ecological sustainability have become the archetypal challenge of 21st-century governance. Urban livelihood and sustainability are thereby investigated as the two faces of urban livability. Although the prefatory remarks of Manuel Castells, who is often cited in the volume, stress that amidst an extraordinary technological revolution the world is also experiencing the largest ever wave of urbanization, at the outset of this volume the opportunity is never fully taken to document the precise extent of this contemporary urban impulse, nor the magnitude of its environmental and socioeconomic concomitants.

Rather, the introductory chapter of Livable Cities, penned by the editor, sociologist Peter Evans, ranges widely and in places somewhat disparately over a variety of theoretical contexts, including the efficacy of market-driven approaches under technologized neoliberalism and associated increasing ‘openness’, the likely costs in the form of the prisoner’s dilemma, globalized political economy and political ecology, civil society, empowerment, nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), and the multiple roles of the state. Usefully, this account serves to emphasize salient arguments including the stark fact that “pollution is free and preventing it costly” (page 5), and the assertion that poverty is the greatest of all polluters. However, for me, this opening chapter never really adds up to more than the sum of its constituent parts. And the lack of a clear outline concerning the scale of the environmental and socioeconomic challenges that are faced by poor urban denizens at the beginning of the new millennium is surely a missed opportunity. Perhaps this is inevitable in what is, after all, an edited volume that was reportedly originally conceived as part of a conference. The origins of the volume are attributed to the financial support and intellectual impetus provided by the Social Capital and Public Affairs Project of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences, directed by Robert Putnam, and funded by the Carnegie, Ford, and Rockefeller Foundations.

And so as readers we are ultimately presented with a set of case-study chapters. All the nations considered are characterized as having recently moved in the direction of increased electoral competitiveness and increased reliance on markets in the neoliberal period. The chapters
deal with the experiences of eight major urban areas in three world regions: East and South East Asia (Seoul, Bangkok, Hanoi, Ho Chi Minh City, Taipei), Eastern Europe (Budapest), and Latin America (São Paulo and Mexico City). So Livable Cities exhibits a strong focus on Asia, and cities of other major world regions, such as Africa, the Middle East, and the Caribbean, are not part of the picture presented in this collection of essays.

As well as dealing with different urban areas, the six case-study chapters deal with various aspects of urban environmental conditions and urban governance, including social capital and environmental conditions in squatter communities in Seoul and Bangkok (Douglass et al), the foundations of Taipei's environmental movement (Hsiao and Hwa-Jen Liu), community-driven regulation and state–society synergies in fighting industrial pollution in Vietnam (O'Rourke), the politics of toxic waste management in Budapest (Gille), water supply and land-use policy in São Paulo (Keck), and the local NGO-inspired grassroots mobilization within irregular settlements in the greenbelt of Mexico City (Pezzoli).

In the closing chapter, Evans pulls the lessons of the main chapters together and in so doing emphasizes the salience of the community as the starting point for appropriate action, as well as its likely socioeconomic class base, with the urban middle-class occupying an essential position of privilege. However, notwithstanding the readability of this final chapter, the volume represents a typical edited volume following a conference or a broad collaborative programme of research. For some the very diversity of topical and geographical coverage will make this a valuable specialist reader. But for others, despite the excellent production of the paperback edition (save for the rather garish cover) and the reasonable price, this will primarily represent a reference work to be cited as part of specialist reading lists.

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Work to welfare: how men become detached from the labour market by P Alcock, C Beatty, S Fothergill, R Macmillan, S Yeandle; Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2003, 291 pages, £45.00 cloth, £22.00 paper (US $60.00, $22.00) ISBN 0 52180249 0, 0 52100286 9

One of the most interesting trends of the last decade or so has been an apparent reversal of gender inequalities. Men, once the dominant sex, are apparently failing at school, outnumbered in higher education, outcompeted at work, and generally outclassed by women, to such an extent that a ‘crisis of masculinity’ has been identified by both the popular media and the academic press. This book examines one part of this conundrum: the growing numbers of men of working age who, compared with previous decades, have been downsized, left work early, or moved out of the labour market completely because of sickness or redundancy and who are now looking for a new role in life in their late middle to old age. These are the men that the authors classify as ‘detached’ from the labour market.

All the authors of this edited volume, except Pete Alcock, are or have been, members of Sheffield Hallam’s Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research. The book is based on a large-scale interview survey based at Hallam of men aged between 25 and 64 years who were economically inactive, unemployed for more than six months, or working on a part-time basis in seven distinctive local labour markets: Barnsley, Chesterfield, Northampton, West Cumbria, North Yorkshire, North Norfolk, and South Shropshire. All of them live in the less buoyant regions of the United Kingdom where traditional work for men has suffered a long decline, although the extent of labour-market detachment for men ranged from high levels in Barnsley to relatively low in Northampton. The main body of the interviews (1703 in total) were carried out in 1997/98, in-depth interviews with a subsample in Barnsley, Chesterfield, and Northampton in 1998/99 and then a small number (87 in total) of followup interviews were undertaken. The authors thus had a rich dataset to analyse, consisting not only of workplace information but also the family and health circumstances of these men.

The central part of the book (part 2) consists of seven empirical chapters assessing different aspects of these men’s lives. It is preceded by a useful set of context-setting chapters, two outlining the main features of the UK labour market and benefits system, respectively, with an interesting intervening chapter assessing international trends in male detachment.
Each of these ten chapters is single or jointly authored by the different editors, and in part 3 they contribute a jointly written chapter about the policy implications. I was slightly puzzled by the decision to attribute the different chapters to particular members of the team, as the research on which the book is based surely was a joint effort, but on reflection decided this must reflect a strategy driven by the Research Assessment Exercise. Just one more regrettable step towards an excessively individualised competitive academic culture. But, no matter, the book itself is a magnificent reflection of cooperation.

Unsurprisingly, the book paints a complex and variable picture of the reasons for and circumstances of men's detachment. For the few, affluence and index-linked pensions made an active early retirement an attractive option, but for many more the decline in opportunities in heavy male-employing industries, especially the pits, led to ill-health and redundancy, with a growing reliance on the benefit system to eke out a precarious existence, often in a poor-quality local environment. For many of the men, whose voices and lives are reflected in these pages, the optimistic debates about downsizing, sustainable lifestyles, or even flexible careers have little purchase. Economic restructuring and technological change have not only increased the diversity of men's working lives and employment patterns but have perhaps recemented class and regional differentials in postmillennium Britain, despite the significant 20th-century gains in rights at work and on dismissal or redundancy. Too many of these men have been forced from work and many of them report that they would prefer still to be working on a full-time basis. But many of them have also become resigned to their unemployment and have stopped looking for work. Their previous skills are lost to the economy as a whole, although, of course, these skills are themselves too often obsolete in a service-dominated economy.

Behind these men's detachment and job loss lies the rising labour-market participation of women. This is predominantly a contemporary phenomenon as young women's high rates of attachment to the labour-market challenge traditional gender divisions of labour and the male breadwinner ideology that lay at the basis of the postwar settlement and the establishment of the welfare state. It is significant that, although the labour-market participation rates of middle-aged women (post 50s) are now similar to those of middle-aged and older men, women's association with employment is not constructed as either an economic problem, nor an issue for their identity. These women, of course, have their traditional role as housewife and helpmeet to sustain them. But what of the detached men, 70% of whom were living with a partner at the time of the research? Some of the younger men seemed to have successfully adapted to changing roles within their households, taking on care of children, for example, while their female partners were in waged work. Among the older men, their caring responsibilities were more likely to consist of looking after an ailing partner who was unlikely to be in employment. Overall, however, these men were a minority among the detached. Whereas some of them had made positive choices, perhaps to combine fewer hours in employment with domestic responsibilities, others found themselves trapped, through relationship failures, for example. As the chapter on health also made clear, for many men attachment to the labour market is fragile and more easily disrupted than re-created, proving a challenge to conventional assumptions about masculine identity and traditional responsibilities to provide financially through labour-market participation rather than other forms of effort.

This book is a superb mix of statistical comparison, survey data, and moving testaments from the in-depth qualitative interviews, combined with a detailed knowledge of the benefit system and a good concluding chapter assessing the scope for policy change. As the authors claim, its singular focus on men is a welcome corrective, or rather complement, to the more usual focus on women's working lives and work-life balance policies. It makes a powerful plea for new policies to assist in men's reattachment, as well as a useful reminder of the significance of place. Locality-specific policies may be needed. I would have liked, however, some recognition of women's contribution to these men's lives and some reflection on the adaptations women also face when their male partners choose retirement or involuntarily become detached from the labour market. It may be, too, that the survey data, reflecting the particular circumstances of the late 1990s, paint an excessively gloomy picture. It seems that male participation rates, at least for the 50s and over, are rising again. What matters, however,
is what sort of jobs older men are able to enter, and whether or not they provide pension and benefit entitlements, as financial insecurity in old age seems only set to increase.

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