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RESEARCH IN SERVICE STUDIES WORKING PAPER NO 13, 2012

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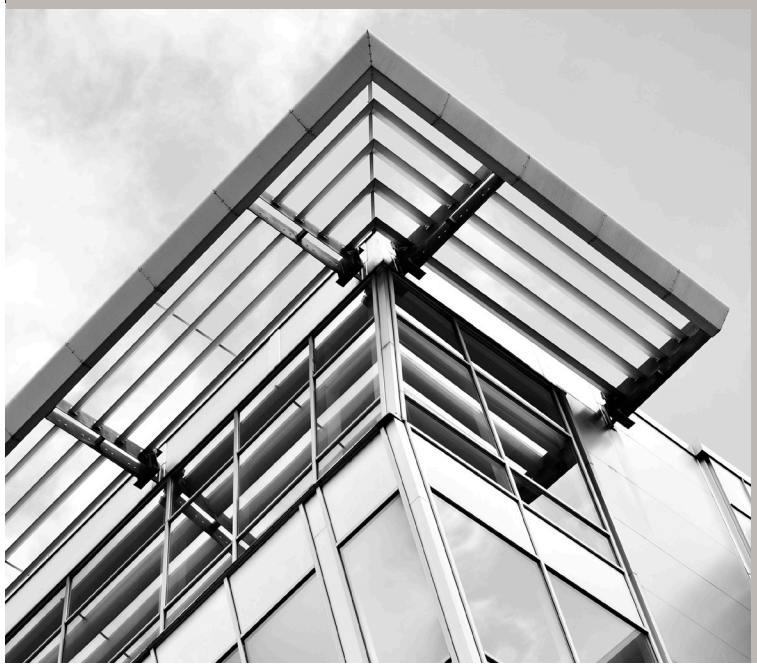

Socio-cultural retailing

A literature review

Christian Fuentes

Abstract

The aim of this paper is to contribute to the cultural turn in retail studies by offering an overview of the interdisciplinary field of socio-cultural retailing and, based on this introduction, draw out and discuss what this body of work can contribute to the field of retail marketing. The paper reviews socio-cultural retail research from the disciplines of marketing, cultural geography, sociology and anthropology. Taken together this body of work clearly shows that retailing and shopping practices are anchored in and also work to reproduce wider social and cultural processes. Retailing does not exist part from socio-cultural processes of identity and meaning construction but is intrinsically interlinked with these processes. Therefore, to understand why some store concepts, marketing practices and products work and others fail; it is important to understand the socio-cultural processes underlying the practices of retailing, shopping and consumption. In addition, accepting that retailing practices and spaces are not only linked to socio-cultural processes but also actively work to reproduce these processes means acknowledging the political role of retailing. From this perspective, retail practices and spaces are actively involved in the construction of identities, meanings and worldviews; they shape, to some extent, the way we view the world and ourselves.

Introduction

The field of retail marketing has undoubtedly produced an impressive and insightful body of work. As one can expect, one important theme in retail marketing has been how the store affects shopping behaviour. Some retail marketing studies take broad approach and include social, design and atmospheric dimensions (Wakefield and Baker 1998) while others focus more specifically on how different "atmospherics" impact on consumer evaluations and behaviours (Turley and Milliman 2000; Baker, Parasuraman et al. 2002; Babin, Hardesty et al. 2003; Eroglu, Machleit et al. 2005). These studies have examined how light, colour, smell, music and other aspects impact on consumers' emotional state, purchase intent, and actual shopping behaviour. These studies have shown that the "right" combination of atmospherics has effect on the time and money consumers are willing to spend in a store (see e.g., Donovan, Rossiter et al. 1994; Turley and Milliman 2000).

Another important theme in retail marketing is the consumer. Retail marketing studies have often focused on consumer motives and trying to find useful consumer typologies. For example, these studies have examined shoppers shopping motives and formed typologies based on these motives (e.g., Jin and Kim 2003), developed and compared the types of consumers that shop at different retail formats (e.g., Reynolds, Ganesh et al. 2002), and discussed the best way to study shopper typologies (e.g., Sinha and Uniyal 2005). Taken together these studies have generated a vast number of shopping typologies and also linked these typologies to different aspects of the retail offering such as retail format, types of products sold, and store design.

Consumer focused studies have explored also specific shopping phenomena such as fast fashion (Barnes and Lea-Greenwood 2009) or ethical shopping (Creyer and Ross 1997; Carrigan and Attalla 2001; Carrigan, Szmigin et al. 2004) or specific aspects of shopping such as unethical behaviour (Strutton, Pelton et al. 1997; Shaw and Shiu 2003) and the pleasures of shopping (Babin, Darden et al. 1994; Cox, Cox et al. 2005).

Other common themes in retail marketing research include pricing and promotion, branding, loyalty, services and in recent years also e-commerce (see for example McGoldrick 2002; Grewal and Levy 2007; Brown and Dant 2009; Grewal and Levy 2009; Hardesty and Bearden 2009 for reviews of this field).

As I have tried to indicate above, retail marketing research is a vast and established field. However, while this research has been valuable and taught

us a great deal about the world of retailing it also tends to view retailing, shopping and consumption from a specific vantage point. Preoccupied with managerial issues these scholars often take a more psychological or technical approach to retailing. Underlying these studies is often the explicit or implicit notion that research should contribute foremost to the improvement of retail operations studies. Guided by the goal to sell more products, reduce costs, and/or add value to the corporate brand, these studies often produce highly abstracted, linear, and rational accounts of retailing, shopping and consumption.

Missing from most mainstream retail marketing accounts is the socio-cultural dimension of retailing, shopping and consumption. While consumption research within for example sociology, anthropology, cultural geography, and certain streams of marketing has shown that consumption practices are inherently social and cultural, many traditional retail scholars still treat consumers as rational autonomous self-interested calculative agents. Similarly, while social and cultural research has shown that retail spaces are performative spaces where identities (see e.g., Jackson and Holbrook 1995; Miller, Jackson et al. 1998), gender (see e.g., Gregson and Crewe 1998; Clarke 2000; Pettinger 2005), ethnicity (see e.g., Friend and Thompson 2003; Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009), experiences (see e.g., Falk and Campbell 1997; Sherry, Kozinets et al. 2001; Kozinets, John F. Sherry et al. 2004), ideologies (see e.g., Arnould, Kozinets et al. 2001), and multiple meanings (see e.g., Jackson and Holbrook 1995) are produced and reproduced, retail marketing tends to treat retail spaces mainly as technical and psychological spaces.

This is however starting to change. During the last few years a number of socio-cultural studies of retailing have been conducted and also published in mainstream retail journals such as the Journal of Retailing. For example, Kozinets et al (2002) have offered a cultural analysis of theme brand shops, Arnold et al (2001) have analysed the Wall-Mart ideology as it is enacted by its flyers, Hollenback et al (2008) have offered a cultural analysis of museum shops, Griffith (2011) has analysed multiple meanings that people derive from shopping during the course of a lifetime, and Uusitalo (2001) has investigated the meanings that consumers attach to different retail formats and brands. In light of this development, researchers have even begun to talk about a cultural turn within retail marketing.

It is however also important to acknowledge that while the cultural perspective may be relatively new to the mainstream world of retail marketing there are numerous socio-cultural studies of retailing within other fields and disciplines, such as sociology, anthropology, geography and

history. Retailing and its relation to consumption has received much attention across the social sciences and, as a result, there is now an important body of work that addresses retailing and its relation to wider social and cultural processes (see for example Wrigley and Lowe 2002).

There is, as I will show below, thus a broad range of studies from which culturally inclined retail scholars can draw from (and contribute to); theoretical perspective to be inspired by, methodological approaches to make use of and a number of insightful cultural analysis regarding the role of retail in contemporary consumer culture to learn from. And yet these resources are seldom utilized. Why? I am sure that the difficulties associated with interdisciplinary has something to do with it. As others have noted in relation to management studies, there are few incentives and many barriers to interdisciplinary work (Knights and Willmott 1997). Regardless of the reasons, one can conclude that these resources are seldom utilised within the field of retail marketing.

Against this background, the aim of this text is to contribute to the cultural turn in retail studies by first (1) offering an introduction to and overview of the interdisciplinary field of socio-cultural retailing and second (2) based on this introduction, draw out and discuss what this body of work can contribute to the field of retail marketing. The ambition is thus to try and make socio-cultural retail research more accessible for those interested in following and developing the cultural turn within retail marketing.

This text is organized as follows: first a brief review of socio-cultural retail studies within marketing, cultural geography, sociology and anthropology is presented. What I offer is not intended to be an exhaustive review of the literature. Instead it is to be understood as an effort to illustrate the type of studies done and the issues discussed within and across these fields. It is an attempt to give an introduction, however sketchy, of an interdisciplinary (and sometimes disparate) body of work. Second, building on these reviews I try to draw out some of implications of taking a socio-cultural approach to studies of retail.

Marketing, Retail, and Culture

While it is true that mainstream retail marketing is mostly preoccupied with managerial issues and often take a more psychological or technical approach to retailing (see for example McGoldrick 2002; Grewal and Levy 2007; Brown and Dant 2009; Grewal and Levy 2009; Hardesty and Bearden 2009 for reviews of this field) there are also a number of studies within marketing that

take the social and cultural aspects of retailing seriously and some even speak of a cultural turn in retail marketing (Borghini, Diamond et al. 2009)[i].

Peñaloza, for example, presents a visual ethnography of Nike Town (Peñaloza 1999) in Chicago. This five-storey flagship store, filled with sports artefacts and imagery, is described as a hybrid space, a combination between museum and store, a space where consumers come to both look at sports memorabilia and purchase sports merchandise. Peñaloza argues that Nike Town, through its retail environment, urged and made possible the consumption of spectacle "both in the store experience itself and as context for additional purchase behaviour" (Peñaloza 1999: 379). But, more than that she shows that Nike Town works to produce consumer desire by making and position themselves within a sports world populated by celebrated and heroic athletes, it is a world in where the products of Nike inspire and help consumers to follow the example of their idolized athletes and "just do it".

In a similar vein Kozinets et al analyse the themed environment of the ESPN Zone in Chicago (Sherry, Kozinets et al. 2001; Kozinets, John F. Sherry et al. 2004) – a 35.000-foot retail complex dedicated to the theme of sports and operated by the Walt Disney Company. Focusing on the relation between retail space and consumer experience they argue against critical accounts of retail space showing that consumers do resist the rules and lures of this themed retail environment. Indeed, they show that these spectacular experiences depend on consumer actively participating and co-creating the experience. Spectacular consumption, they argue, has a do it yourself quality that has not been acknowledged in the past. It is not a matter of producers dominating consumers. Instead, "consumers produce producers' products at the same time and as much as producers consumer consumers' consumption" (Kozinets, John F. Sherry et al. 2004: 671).

The issue of producer-consumer relations is recurring in this work. For example, studies of malls have discussed the tensions and difficulties that arise between owners and consumers as malls try to be both economic and social spaces, that is spaces that allow for certain forms of sociality but that also are designed to sell products and generate profit (Sandikci and Holt 1998; Maclaran and Brown 2005).

Another stream of research within culturally influenced marketing studies of retailing explores the production of retail ideology and its role in making stores and the products they market meaningful to consumers. Arnold, Kozinets and Handelman, for example, argue that what makes Wall-Mart successful on the US market is, at least in part, that this retail chain "connects itself symbolically to the dominant ideologies of American life" (Arnould, Kozinets et al. 2001: 244). Through a semiotic analysis of Wal-Mart

flyers they show that this retail chain reproduces notions of values associated with the traditional American "hometown". That is, "through the imagery of frugality, family, religion, neighbourhood, community and patriotism, Wal-Mart locates itself centrally on Main Street of a nostalgic hometown" (Arnould, Kozinets et al. 2001: 244).

Borghini et al take the retail ideology discussion a step further by exploring how the retail brand ideology of American Girl – a brand of dolls and children's books mainly – is materialized through retail space (Borghini, Diamond et al. 2009). This study shows how American Girl, in order to sell products, enacts a brand ideology; it shows how they position their dolls (and other products) as moral and virtuous products. American Girl dolls have none of the vanity and shallowness of Barbie and none of the sexiness of Bratz dolls. American Girl dolls are inscribed with a set of different values; these dolls are patriotic, virtuous and heroic. They are dolls that teach young girls to be moral, social and caring. This is why "Ownership of the dolls, with their ethical implications, indicates one's parents´ significant investment, and indication of taste, distinction and morality." (Borghini, Diamond et al. 2009: 370). In both these cases, products and retail space are made meaningful for consumer by connecting to and reproducing wider American ideologies.

It is easy to see common themes in these studies. Two of these are worth noting here. To begin with, marketing scholars often take a particular interest in the large and the spectacular (in addition to those mentioned above see also Kozinets, Sherry et al. 2002; Haytko and Baker 2004; Hollenback, Peters et al. 2008). Like many other scholars within the social sciences, they focus mainly on the more visible and impressive retail sites. So, although there certainly are studies of smaller, more mundane retail sites and shopping phenomenon (e.g. Friend and Thompson 2003) and even some early studies of what could be called alternative retail spaces (e.g. Belk, John F. Sherry et al. 1988; John F. Sherry 1990; McGrath, John F. Sherry et al. 1993), this research is characterized by a preoccupation with large and spectacular retail sites.

Second, when investing these sites these studies often focus on the relationship between retail space/retail and consumer experiences trying to counter the "consumer as dupe" (Gabriel and Lang 2006) approach. Accordingly, these studies often put emphasis on the agency of consumers and explore the multiple experiences produced at these retail sites showing that consumers take an active role in the co-production of retailing sites.

Cultural Geographies of Retail

Retail and its connection to consumption has long been of interest to geographers (for reviews of this work see for example Wrigley and Lowe 1996; Wrigley and Lowe 2002). Inspired by the cultural turn a group of scholars within geography have set out to investigate the relationships between retailing, consumption, space and culture producing, in the processes, an extensive body of literature that addresses the cultural geographies of retailing (Crewe 2000; Crewe 2001; Crewe 2003). Within this vast amount of literature it is possible to discern two distinct approaches to retail sites.

One stream of geographical research critically examines the spectacular spaces of retailing. Focus here is on how retail sites such as shopping malls and supermarkets work, through deign, imagery and organization, to exclude, oppress and manipulate consumers (Jackson and Thrift 1995).

Goss, for example, provides a critical reading of malls arguing (among other things) that these retail sites work to control consumers, exclude minorities, produce a false sense of community and symbolize commodities (Goss 1993; Goss 1999; Goss 2006). According to Goss (1993; 1999), shopping malls work to persuade and even bully consumers into consuming (see also Clarke 1997).

This approach to retail has been criticized within (and outside of) geography. There are, critics argue, at least two problems with this work. The first is that it tends to "ignore the active role of consumers in shaping contemporary consumer cultures" (Crewe and Lowe 1995; Jackson and Thrift 1995: 210; see also Crewe 2003) thereby producing a far too deterministic accounts of retailing in where consumers are passive and powerless. The second problem with the critical studies is that they focus on a limited range of formalized retail sites such as malls and department stores (Jackson and Thrift 1995; Crewe and Gregson 1998). Like the marketing studies discussed above, this work has privileged large and spectacular retail sites.

In response, a second stream of geographic research has developed that has set out to do (at least) two things differently. First, they take the active role of consumers seriously. In these studies it is argued and convincingly shown that consumers do not "just buy passively or uncritically but transform the meaning of bought goods, appropriating and recontextualizing mass market styles" (Crewe and Gregson 1998: 47; Crewe 2000). Retail sites are not deterministic. Retail sites, it is argued, can and often are remade and reorganized by consumers. Consumption does not

only happen in space-time but it also plays a role in the production of place (Jackson and Thrift 1995; Ytterhus, Arnestad et al. 1999). These studies take a shopping-as-practice approach to retail interrogating not only how these practices happen in space but also how they perform that space (Crewe 2003). This work has shown that malls, shops and other sites are not simple, or at least not solely, spaces of oppression and manipulation. Retail spaces can also be fun and social, they can be meaningful and pleasurable (Jackson and Thrift 1995).

For example, Jackson and Holbrook (1995) illustrate the multiple meanings of shopping and discuss the relation between shopping and identity. Through an examination of shopping at North London shopping centres they show that shopping is "not an undifferentiated and impersonal activity; it encompasses a wide range of social activities whose meanings vary with the dynamics of class and gender, ethnicity and generation…" (Jackson and Holbrook 1995: 1928). In making this point they also show that this particular type of retail site – shopping centres – are not deterministic, these retail spaces are appropriated in different ways by different groups of consumers.

Second, in addition to reinvestigation conventional retail sites this stream of geographic research also set out to widen the scope of inquiry. In response to the second critique mentioned above, a series of studies have been conducted that move geographic research beyond the often studied retail sites such as malls and department stores (Crewe and Lowe 1995; Crewe and Gregson 1998).

For example, Gregson and Crewe (1998; 1998; 2011) investigate car boots sales. Car boot sales, they contend, are very different from conventional malls and department stores. These alternative retail spaces, they argue, are socially, culturally and geographically embedded spaces in where the importance of fun and sociality was emphasised. While vending is for many a full-time activity there were also many vendors at car boot sales who do not sell primarily to achieve profits but instead because they enjoy the activity of buying and selling. Car boot sales are retailing spaces in where prices are flexible and haggling is part of the fun and in where consumers turn into retailers and the other way around. "(T)he car boot sale provides a consumption experience characterized by excitement, anticipation, risk and unpredictability" (Crewe and Gregson 1998: 50) precisely because it is different from conventional retail sites. These studies also show that vending at car boot sales is an activity that requires considerable skill and knowledge. To be a car boot seller you do not only have to know how to sell but also how to buy. Most vendors get their products from other car boot sales,

charity chops, jumble sales, or even the local refuse tip. Therefore, knowing what to buy, where to buy it, and how to differentiate prices across geographical locations is central to the activity of vending at car boot sales (Crewe and Gregson 1998). In the same way, consuming at the car boot sales is also an accomplishment that requires skills, knowledge, and a lot of work. Considerable knowledge and know-how is often required to purchase items at car boot sales (Gregson and Crewe 1998). And the commodities purchased often need repairing, altering or "polishing up" (Crewe and Gregson 1998). For many, this consumption work was part of the fun of consuming second hand goods and a way to infuse the products with value and make them your own.

Joined by Kate Brooks, Gregson and Crewe have also taken on the world of retro retailers and their professional talk showing that positioning retro retailing as "alternative" is a difficult and unstable accomplishment (Crewe, Gregson et al. 2003). Retro retailers become special by differentiating themselves from an imagined mainstream. While retro retailers see themselves as creative, their products as authentic and unique, and their shops as fun and creative places they construct mainstream retailing as boring, purely economic, and bland. However, as the mainstream incorporates more and more elements of the alternative by for instance selling second hand products along with the regular product lines it becomes difficult to maintain the alternative/mainstream boundaries. Simply put: it becomes difficult to be different. As the paper explains, this is a serious problem for retro retailers for whom "alternativeness" is absolutely necessary, not only to uphold the identity of the retro shops and the retro retailers, but also to attract consumers and keep business going.

Other examples of this type of work include studies of charity shops (Gregson, Brooks et al. 2000; Gregson, Crewe et al. 2002; Gregson, Crewe et al. 2002) and the investigation of pioneer clothing retailers and their positioning strategies and practices (Crewe and Lowe 1995). By investigating alternative retail spaces these studies teach us not only something about how these retail sites work but also shed some light on conventional retail spaces and practices. These studies remind us that exchange does not always happen in the manner described by economics and that goods can have more than one life.

To sum up, the first stream of research produced mainly critical readings of malls and other "cathedrals of consumption". In contrast, the second stream of research provides new interpretations of well-visited retail sites - such as shopping centres - as well as explores alternative retail spaces. These studies show that consumers are active and knowing subjects and, in

the process, question some of our taken for granted understandings of exchange and the circulation of commodities.

The sociology of retail

Despite the economic and cultural importance frequently attributed to retailing there is little sociological work done on this issue (Gay 2004). The work done is organized around two streams of research.
First, not surprisingly also sociology has been attracted by the powerful lure of the malls and departments stores. The result is a group of studies that, not unlike their colleagues in geography, focus on the critical analysis of these cathedrals of consumption. And these show, just like those in geography, that malls and supermarkets can be deceptive, manipulative and illusionary spaces of consumerism.

Perhaps most representative for this tradition is the work of Gottdiener (but see also Chaney 1983; Chaney 1990). In a series of influential publications Gottdiener has, drawing on Barthes and Baudrillard, argued that malls (and other themed environments) have turned to "theming" as a means to compete for shoppers with down town city centres for shoppers (Gottdiener 1998; Gottdiener 2000; Gottdiener 2000). Malls have to be attractive, unique, and desirable space in their own right, they have to attract consumers to an area where there is nothing else except the mall (for a more detailed discussion on the competition between places see Urry 1995). Looking more closely at the *Mall of America* – a 4000 square feet mega-mall with over 100 different stores located in Bloomington, Minnesota – Gottdiener argues that thematic space serves two purposes. First it recreates a (romanticized) pedestrian urban milieu appropriated for shopping. And second the themed sections organize the different retail sections, creating distinction through signification. The mall, he goes on to argue, tries to disguise its commercial purpose by producing a resemblance of the social space that consumers are accustom to. In other words, in order to be attractive to consumers it must hide its instrumental purpose while at the same time function as an attractive and commercially functional space.

The second stream of sociological retail research I want to discuss stands in stark contrast to the first. Instead of critical semiotic readings of malls, supermarkets or entire retail landscapes this work stays much closer to the shop floor. Using predominantly ethnographic methods this work is often concerned with what happens in the everyday lives of shops. These studies

investigate the complex relationships between workers, managers, consumers and commodities.

Pettinger, for example, draws on an ethnographic study of three chains of retail clothing stores – that she refers to as Distinction, Cheap Chic and Fashion Junction – to explore how store brands influence the work done by retail sales assistants (Pettinger 2004). In this work she shows that store brand influences both who is hired and how these people then carry out their service work. As Pettinger points out:

> "sales assistants' cultural capital and social attributes of gender, age, class and ethnicity and lifestyle are appropriated by employers, as is any tacit knowledge about clothes and customers that such workers have, in order to enhance the brand aesthetic and sell more effectively" (Pettinger 2004: 179)

The workers hired are intended to enact the brand through the clothes they wear at work but also through their appearance. Workers embody the brand and these bodies are put to work to produce specific service cultures that fit and also reproduce the store brand.

For instance, at the store Distinction, a high-end fashion store, the workers were suits, are highly styled and made-up and the shops are usually kept well organized, display few goods and offer a high degree of personal service (for a more detail discussion on the role of uniforms and appereance in the provision of service see for example Solomon 1998). In contrast, at Cheap Chic, which sells more affordable women's clothing, the workers are predominantly young (under 20) women and "wear coloured t-shirts and black trousers or skirts, supplemented by hair and make-up styles that reflect the class, age and gender background of the workers, a form of working class femininity" (Pettinger 2004: 178). Furthermore, the shops are usually messier, display greater quantities of goods in smaller spaces, and rely heavily on self self-service.

The store brand, Pettinger shows, is enacted through a combination of service work and aesthetic labour. Through this analysis Pettinger illustrates the close relationship between store brand, workers and their bodies and the service they provide. But she also, on another level, demonstrates the close relationship between culture and economy and consumption and production.

Cochoy (2007; 2008; 2009) focuses instead on the role of artefacts. In a series of publications he argues that we need to take into account the

materialities involved in exchange. He argues that we need to get involved in what he calls a sociology of market-things (Cochoy 2007; Cochoy 2008; Cochoy 2009). Although the circulation of products, Cochoy argues, may involve culture or institutions it "also rests upon some very mundane, immediate and material 'market-things' such as boards, flags and shelves" (Cochoy 2007: 125). Therefore, he goes on to argue, the study of these things and their materiality deserves serious attention if we are to understand retail and consumption (Cochoy 2008). In his ethnographic examinations of supermarkets Cochoy (2007; 2008) shows us that mundane artefacts such as a shopping carts, shelves, price tags and other items can have great importance in practice of shopping, consumption, and market making by contributing to the consumer calculation capacity in different ways.

Taking a similar approach du Gay explores the development of self-service in the retail industry and how it is closely tied up with the making of a specific type of consumer subjectivity: the consumer as "creatures of freedom, of liberty, of personal powers of choice and self-realisation" (Gay 2004: 151). He investigates the growth of self-service retailing in mid twentieth-century Britain showing that this process was neither easy nor problem free. The introduction of self-service, at least in a British context, required not only the complete reorganization of shops but also the transformation of how shopping conduct was understood; it required in other words, the simultaneous reinvention of the both shops and consumers.

Other examples of this type of sociological retail studies include work that discusses the materiality of service work (Pettinger 2006), the gendering of both goods and work (Pettinger 2005) or the way in which the commodity (or type of commodity) influence both who is hired to work at shops and how they in turn view their work (Wright 2005). What all these studies have in common is that they explore what actually happens at shops. They investigate how these shops function both as work and consumption spaces, examining the myriad and complex relationships that are forged between managers, workers, consumers, commodities, and other retail artefacts. In relation to the semiotic reading of malls tradition, these studies offer a more nuanced analysis of retail, one that takes into account the historical background of retailing, the actual consumption and marketing practices carried out and the multiple and often conflicting meanings and identities produced at these sites. However, it is important to keep in mind that these studies are also trying to say something that goes beyond the specific empirical setting; they are trying to say something that goes beyond retail even. That is, keeping with the sociological tradition, these studies teach us something about the "larger issues" such as market exchange, the relation

between consumption and products or the interconnectivity of economy and culture.

Retail anthropology

Finally, retail has also been of interest to anthropologists. Perhaps most well-known is the work of Daniel Miller, in particular his often cited book "A Theory of Shopping" (Miller 1998; but see also Miller 2001). In this book Miller argues that far from being a hedonistic self-indulgent practice most shopping practices are about "making love". That is, everyday shopping practices are carried out with others, real or imagined, in mind. Miller observes that, in accordance with traditional gender roles, women carry out much of the shopping for the benefit of other members of the household or in hope of constituting such members. Everyday shopping practices are then carried out as a way of caring for others, a way of showing love. Shopping becomes a way in which these women constitute relationships with "desiring subjects". Here supermarkets, shopping centres and other retail sites are spaces which consumers navigate with great skill in order to accomplish their shopping and establish relationships. That is, looking at shopping as love making it becomes clear that retail sites are not only spaces to purchase the necessities of the household but also spaces where social relationships are stabilized.

Another example of Millers work on retail and consumption is the co-authored book "Shopping, place and identity" (Miller, Jackson et al. 1998)[ii]. In this book Miller, together with geographers Peter Jackson, Nigel Thrift and Beverley Holbrook and fellow anthropologist Michael Rowlands, examines shopping at two British shopping centres – Brent Cross and Wood Green – and its relation to household provisioning. This interdisciplinary research team show that shopping centres are not necessarily the tools of all conquering market capitalism, as critics would have it. Instead, shoppers commonly use these commercial spaces in ways that challenge the plans of designers and marketers. There are, the ethnography shows, many ways of shopping and most of these ways differ from the taken for granted understanding of shopping as a hedonistic practice. These authors show that shopping at these shopping centres is closely connected to the enactment of ethnicity, gender, and class identities. Particular shopping centres, shops, and forms of shopping become associated with certain social groups. And shoppers in turn, seek out these shopping spaces and practices in order to

express and renegotiate their ethnic/gender/class identities. Shopping and shopping centres are clearly associated with the making and remaking of identities. But, "Shopping, place and identity" shows that these commercial spaces are not only arenas were these identities are played out but they are instead spaces in where these identities are actively made and remade.

Anthropological work has of course not been focused solely on the formal spaces of retail. Clarke, for example, discusses the phenomenon of "home shopping" through a close examination of how *Loot* – a London based free-advertising paper sold daily - and *Argos* – a 500 page catalogues which focuses on "hardware" such as home electronics, sports equipment, toys and jewellery – are used in different households (Clarke 1998).

Shopping non-standardized second hand goods through Loot involves one-to-one negotiations with buyers and requires considerable skill to comprehend and assess the chaotic array of goods and their price levels. Loot offers its reader a way to stay in touch with what is on "the market", keep track of price levels, and the possibility of finding a bargain. It also serves as a venue through which people can (in a more sustainable and economically beneficiary manner) get rid of stuff they no longer need or want as a result changing taste, fashion, or life situation. Argos, on the other hand, is a standardized catalogue that sells brand-new products. Customers flip through the catalogue, choose the goods they want, and then order and purchased directly at a local showroom. To many it offers a portable shop window and a convenient and inexpensive way of shopping.

But Loot and Argos are, just like the other retail sites discussed above, more than simply practical/economic sites. The examination of six different household and their provisioning practices shows that *Loot* and *Argos*, although they have different roles and are ascribed different meanings, both serve as "vehicles of sociality and knowledge formation" (Clarke 1998: 96). As these very different retail artefacts become part of the wider provisioning systems of the different household they also come to play a part in the sustaining of family ties, the transformation of identities and the production of social class.

In another publication, but keeping to the same theme of informal retail venues, Clarke examines the exchange of second hand children's clothes in a nearly new sale in North London (Clarke 2000). Like the car boot sales discussed by Gregson and Crewe (1998; 1998), the nearly new sales studied by Clarke are alternative retail spaces characterized by face-to-face transactions, price negotiations, and a heterogeneity of goods. Vending and purchasing in these spaces require therefore considerable skill and knowledge of both buyers and sellers. Clarke shows how this informal retail

space serves as an arena for the production of a specific type of motherhood and femininity. These sales serve as spaces where women can through the practices of vending and shopping second hand clothes not only acquire valuable products for their children but also, and equally important, construct themselves as caring mothers and build a local community of mothers. The creation of this local second hand market is thus not motivated by economic or functional purposes alone. Instead, Clarke argues, "it operates as a public arena in which the "trafficking" of semi-devotional goods of babies and children is celebrated and the knowledges (sic) and skills of mothering practices" (Clarke 2000: 97).

An interdisciplinary field

There is a considerable body of work within the social sciences addressing retailing as a social and cultural phenomenon. As I have tried to illustrate, different disciplines have approached retailing in somewhat different ways. While spectacular retail sites and the experiential consumption of these spaces have been the topics of choice in marketing, geography has in contrast tried to bring into focus the alternative spaces of retail. And while sociology has made the relationships between work, consumers and commodities their central concern anthropology has focused more on shopping as a culturally rich and spatially dispersed practice. This body of work addresses multiple issues from a number of perspectives. It is a body of work characterized by theoretical and methodological pluralism.

But there is also much common ground. Most, not to say all, of these studies are either implicitly or explicitly influenced by cultural theory and use qualitative interpretive methods. Themes of inquiry and approaches to retail are also recurring. Critical semiotic readings of malls, for example, are present in several disciplines. Likewise, there is an effort to bring the experiences and practices of consumers into focus across disciplines. From marketing to anthropology there has been a concern that consumers and their experiences are being neglected.

Taken together, these studies have covered much ground. They have explored different types of retail spaces; mega-malls, shopping centres, brand stores, supermarkets, small retro shops, car boot sales, charity shops, the home and much more. And these studies have also discussed a number of different retail actors and entities such as shop managers, shop workers, consumers, and even the shop space and the retail artefacts that are part of this space. Finally, these studies have also explored different commodity

worlds; dolls, books, fashion clothes, children's clothes, sports equipment and sports memorabilia, foods and many other types of commodities have been the subject of close ethnographic examination.

While certain disciplines or streams of research can be criticized as being too focused on one type of retail space, type of commodity or type of retail actor, when putting these studies together one gets a body of work that displays a great deal of breadth. So, although some themes remain underdeveloped, such as the issue of ethics and citizenship for example (although see Barnett, Clarke et al. 2005; Popke 2006; Mansvelt 2008; Ählström, Macquet et al. 2009), this is an interdisciplinary field that has much to teach us.

Conclusions: Society in retail and retailing in society

But what exactly can retail marketing learn from the disparate body of work that I have called socio-cultural retail studies?

Retailing practices, these studies clearly indicate, are anchored in and also work to reproduce wider social and cultural processes. In other words, these are processes that influence the practices of these retail sites but that also are reproduced and remade through a by these retail sites. Involved in, for example, the retailing of outdoors products are ideas of nature, the good life, what being in the outdoors mean and much more (Fuentes 2011). Likewise the retailing of sports goods, such as Nike products, often draws on notions of performance and the importance of being "in shape" (Peñaloza 1999). Daily provisioning is closely connected to the idea and enactment of family (Miller 1998) and, as I discussed above, the retailing of children's toys is sometimes connected to the idea of the child as a pure and untainted being and ideas of a moral and virtuous family life (Borghini, Diamond et al. 2009). Malls and other retail spaces are also often used as social spaces where relationships are maintained and in where sociability plays an important role (Sandikci and Holt 1998; Haytko and Baker 2004). And, as mentioned in the review, shopping is also often intrinsically connected to the enactment of gender roles (Gregson and Crewe 1998; Pettinger 2005) and can furthermore be a way to renegotiate ethnic identities and categories (Miller, Jackson et al. 1998; Friend and Thompson 2003; Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009; Varman and Belk 2012).

Many more examples could be offered. The point is that retailing is social and cultural. Retailing does not exist part from socio-cultural processes of identity and meaning construction but is intrinsically interlinked with these

processes. What socio-cultural retailing research shows is that retailing, shopping and consumption practices and spaces both depend on and contribute to reproduce these socio-cultural processes.

This, I contend, has at least two important implications for the field of retail marketing. The first is that, given that we accept the argument made above, retailing cannot solely be understood in technical and/or psychological terms. To understand why some store concepts, marketing practices and products work and others fail; it is important to understand the socio-cultural processes underlying the practices of retailing, shopping and consumption. That is, if retail scholars and practitioners want to know why some brands are more desirable than others, how retail space should be organized, how staff should behave and how and why all this varies between countries, product groups and consumer segments, they need to understand the socio-cultural dimension of retailing (see also Kozinets, Sherry et al. 2002; Arnould 2005). This means understanding the cultural discourse marketing draws on and examining the cultural notions marketing practices are reproducing. It involves understanding how retailing practices and spaces work to make products and services meaningful to consumers (Fuentes 2011). But, also understanding why and how consumers shop products and put them to use. More specifically, this entails studying both marketing and consumption practices, and being willing to follow consumers from the store and to their homes (see e.g., Miller 1998; Cassinger 2010). And, as previous studies have shown, this involves drawing on social and cultural theory and using interpretive qualitative methods and examining retailing, shopping, and consumption practices in-depth.

The second implication has to do with what retail practices and spaces produce in the processes of making products meaningful to consumers. Accepting that retailing practices and spaces are not only linked to socio-cultural processes but also actively work to reproduce these processes means acknowledging the political role of retailing. From this perspective, retail practices and spaces are actively involved in the construction of identities, meanings and worldviews; they shape, to some extent, the way we view the world and ourselves. The play a part in making products and service meaningful to us and thereby are implicated in deciding what counts as "the good life" (Peñaloza 1999; Arnould, Kozinets et al. 2001; Brodin 2007). Retail practice and spaces are involved in defining beauty ideal and gender roles (Pettinger 2004; Pettinger 2005). They sometimes work to reproduce racism and class oppression (Friend and Thompson 2003; Houssay-Holzschuch and Teppo 2009). However, retail practices and spaces can also be used to express love (Miller 1998), work to promote sustainable

consumption (Fuentes 2011), or simply be a way to enjoy oneself (Bäckström 2011). Regardless of the type of outcome, the point is that retail practices and spaces do not merely exist in society; they also shape society. Acknowledging the performative work of retailing makes it possible to ask more critical questions; to examine not only what makes retailing work, but also what different retail practices and spaces do to society. It allows us to problematize retailing and, employing social and cultural theory, explore the performative effects of retail.

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[i] This is in turn part of a broader cultural turn in marketing which started within the field of consumer research in the mid 80s see

[ii] It can be worth noting that all these publication discussed in this section are the result of a joint one year ethnography of a street in North London referred to as Jay Street conducted by Daniel Miller and Alison Clarke. This ethnography was part of a larger interdisciplinary study conducted on "Consumption and Identity" in which also Peter Jackson, Nigel Thrift, Beverley Holbrook and Michael Rowlands participated.

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