CHAPTER 10

CONSUMPTION

Is the customer always right?

Aims

- To recognize the position and importance of the consumption process within the capitalist system
- To appreciate the changing geographies of consumption and in particular, retailing
- To understand how consumption spaces are actively designed and used
- To reflect on the ways in which consumption, place and identity are interrelated.

10.1   Introduction

Not many people in the UK have heard of 'dunnhumby'. Initially established in 1989 by Clive Humby and Edwina Dunn, by 2005, the firm employed 400 staff across offices in the UK, Ireland and USA, and had a turnover of £130 million. Dunnhumby has become a market leader in collecting and analysing information about consumers and their shopping patterns, in turn, using this information to advise clients on new ways of interacting with customers and enhancing 'brand value'. By contrast, almost everyone living in the UK will have heard of – and indeed visited the stores of – dunnhumby's majority shareholder and main client, the food retailer Tesco. Since 1995, the companies have worked together to introduce and develop Tesco's *Clubcard*, the card-based loyalty scheme that monitors members' shopping patterns in return for a one per cent rebate on money spent in Tesco stores. The scheme, used regularly by some 12 million shoppers, is widely credited with fuelling the retailer's explosive growth in the past decade – quite an accolade when one considers Tesco's current size and

status. One in every eight pounds spent in a British retailer goes to Tesco, and almost one in three in the grocery market. The company made £2 billion profits on turnover of £37 billion in 2004, employing 250,000 people across 1,800 stores in the UK, and another 100,000 across 600 stores in 12 overseas markets.

Dunnhumby's latest *Crucible* database is designed to profile every customer in the UK, whether they shop at Tesco or not. Pulling together a variety of data sources, it classifies individual consumers according to variables such as their wealth, travel patterns, credit levels, amount of free time, lifestyle, environmental ethic, charity contributions and susceptibility to promotions and new products. Promotional material for the company describes a 'Mrs Pumpkin', for example, who is careful about money when shopping, mostly uses cash, buys a steady range of goods but experiments with new products, shops at various times, buys some eco-friendly goods, is involved in charitable giving, travels rarely, and likes buying promotional products (*The Guardian*, 2005). Combining this detailed customer information with Clubcard data enables Tesco to develop individually targeted promotional and incentive schemes. The information can also be analysed geographically, of course. First, it allows the retailers to gauge the most appropriate locations for new stores by comparing local social and economic conditions with the profile of their wider customer base. Second, it enables them to adjust their product mix both spatially and temporally. For example, in Brixton, London, an area settled by immigrants from the Caribbean, Tesco sells plantains, a type of savoury banana. Tesco stores in central London do not, but instead are based on selling sandwiches to office workers in the middle of the day, and pre-prepared 'ready' meals to them in the evening. In short, technologies such as the Clubcard and Crucible help retailers 'to combine the local knowledge of the village shop with a multinational's economies of scale in buying and logistics' (*The Economist*, 2005: 23).

The example of dunnhumby and Tesco serves to introduce us to several important aspects of contemporary consumption dynamics. The sheer number and coverage of Tesco stores alert us to the fact that consumption is a necessarily geographically more extensive activity than production. It illustrates the growing influence of large transnational retailers on the range of products we buy, and where we are able to buy them. It reveals how this power is in part based upon access to highly detailed information about how and where we shop. It speaks to processes of retailer globalization and the development of similar retail experiences in many countries around the world. And yet, as the comparison of Tesco in Brixton and central London shows, the consumption experience remains highly geographically variable, even between the stores of the same retail corporation in the same city. Consumption spaces such as supermarkets are shaped by the economic, social and cultural spaces of which they are part. This chapter seeks not only to explore these geographies of consumption, but

also to consider where the power to shape these spaces lies – are our consumption spaces and decisions shaped for us, or 'is the customer always right'?

The argument proceeds in four stages. First, we consider different interpretations of who controls consumption dynamics, arguing for a perspective that takes the roles of both corporations and consumers seriously (Section 10.2). Second, we look at the changing geographies of consumption in the contemporary era, with a particular focus on shifting patterns of retail activity (Section 10.3). Third, we zoom in to look at how particular consumption spaces – the store, the mall, the theme park – are designed and used (Section 10.4). Fourth, we switch focus to consider how consumers use the commodities they buy as part of *place-specific* processes of identity construction (Section 10.5). In short, this chapter aims to reveal how consumption is as geographically varied and complex as processes of production.

10.2   The Consumption Process

What exactly do we mean when we talk of 'consumption'? As we saw in Chapter 4, the commodity chain concept allows us to see how consumption is the final step in a series of material transformations and value-adding activities. Importantly, consumption refers to the sale, purchase *and use* of commodities. Hence it is not only about the interface between those offering products/services for sale, and those making decisions about which products/services to buy, but is also about what people do with commodities after buying them. Consumption is thus not just about simple economic transactions at the point of sale. Rather, it is a *process* that includes socio-cultural aspects of commodities and their use, encompassing a range of activities: purchasing, shopping, using, discarding, recycling, reusing, wearing, washing, eating, leisure, tourism and home provisioning and renovation among others. Consumption is therefore underpinned by a wide range of activities such as shops, restaurants and hotels, and repair, servicing, cleaning and recycling operations, which are significant economic sectors in their own right.

The nature of the consumption process means it possesses an inherently different economic geography to production operations. Put simply, while not every large city or region will have a car or plastics factory, all will have supermarkets, cinemas, laundrettes, restaurants and the like. Due to the frequency and nature of the way in which we use such services, consumption activities necessarily have a more extensive and disparate geography than the other parts of the production chain. One key task, then, is to understand how this economic geography is structured by different kinds of capitalist firm as part of their profit-making strategies. Equally, however, we need to comprehend the ways in which the *nature* of consumption varies geographically, due in large part to its socio-cultural dimensions. In this regard, sustained research into consumption

has been a key characteristic of the 'new' economic geography that has emerged since the mid-1990s (see Box 1.2).

Before going any further, however, we need to consider the wider significance of consumption within the production chain. What role do final consumers play in shaping the chain and the nature of its operation? Clearly, production and consumption are two mutually dependent spheres of activity, but which drives which? Here we shall look at three important perspectives on this debate. The first, which can be characterized as the *consumer sovereignty* view, emphasizes the agency and free will of individual consumers. Deriving from *neoclassical economics*, consumption is seen here as an individual market-based economic transaction dependent on price-based decisions. Rational consumers, acting on full information about different products and prices, will make informed decisions about which products to buy. These are individual decisions taken by autonomous consumers unaffected by society and its various norms and expectations. In turn, these actions will have an impact on the production process as market information about which products are popular feeds back through retailers to manufacturers. In short, consumers can choose whether to buy the products on offer or not, and as such they have considerable sovereignty, or control, over the economic system as a whole. From this viewpoint, then, the customer *is* always right!

This can be contrasted with the *consumers-as-dupes* viewpoint, which emphasizes the primacy of *production* within the economic system as a whole. From such a perspective, consumption is read as the outcome of changes in the nature of the production process. It is a pleasure-seeking but ultimately regressive activity in which passive consumers are enticed into parting with their money, thereby delivering profits for producers and refuelling the basic capitalist model described in Chapter 3. As we shall see later in this chapter, this argument can be extended to explore how particular consumption spaces – for example, a shopping mall – are actively designed to induce consumers to spend as much money as possible during each visit. The rise of retail capital over the last few decades has complicated the picture in that consumption is increasingly shaped by *retail* rather than manufacturing corporations. Most importantly, however, the consumers-as-dupes perspective places capitalist corporations rather than consumers in control of consumption processes and spaces.

Third, what we might call a *culturalist* perspective emphasizes the way in which consumers actively construct their own identity through their consumption practices. Such an approach draws attention to the other intersecting facets of identity – such as gender, ethnicity, age and sexuality (see Chapters 12 and 13) – and looks at how consumers knowingly purchase certain commodities and use them in certain ways as part of an active process of identity construction. These processes of identity consumption, however, are not individualized as in the consumer sovereignty view, but rather are part of larger social forces and trends within society (e.g. teenage fashion). Here the interactions between

Table 10.1 Mass consumption and after-Fordist consumption compared

Characteristics of mass consumption	Characteristics of after-Fordist consumption
Collective consumption	Increased market segmentation
Demands for familiarity from consumers	Greater volatility of consumer preferences
Undifferentiated products/services	Highly differentiated products/services
Large-scale standardized production	Increased preference for non-mass produced commodities
Low prices	Price one of many purchasing considerations, alongside quality, design etc.
Stable products with long lives	Rapid turnover of new products with shorter lives
Large numbers of consumers	Multiple small niche markets
'Functional' consumption	Consumption less 'functional' and more about aesthetics
	Growth of consumer movements, alternative and ethical consumption

consumers and corporations are complex and two-way. Consumption processes will clearly be influenced by manufacturing and retail corporations and the commodities they offer, but consumers purchase such goods selectively and knowingly: firms, in turn, will respond to emerging consumption dynamics within society. As we shall see later, this approach also allows the geographies of consumption to be laid bare, as the processes of identity construction are very much place-specific. This perspective also has implications for how we might read particular consumption spaces, suggesting that consumers are actively aware of the way in which spaces are designed to induce consumption.

What is clear is that the *nature* of consumption has changed in the past few decades. In parallel with our discussion of after-Fordist production systems in Chapter 5, it is possible to identify the key attributes of what might be called *after-Fordist consumption* (Table 10.1). In general, the Fordist era was characterized by the large-scale, mass consumption of a relatively limited range of standardized commodities (originating, most famously, with the Model T car, available as Henry Ford declared, in 'any colour so long as it's black'). The

system was driven by economies of scale and low prices that enabled the widespread consumption of a broad range of household and personal goods. The after-Fordist era, by comparison, seems to have engendered a much more fragmented consumption pattern in which many highly differentiated products are offered to a wide range of consumer groups or *niches*. This mode of consumption is driven less by the price and functionality of commodities, and more by the aesthetic and symbolic value they bring to consumers. While there is general agreement among commentators on the nature of these changes, how might we explain them? For some, these changes have been *caused* by the shift from Fordist to more flexible after-Fordist production systems. In other words, after-Fordist consumption simply reflects a more nimble and subtle form of capitalism, but a production-driven one nonetheless. Alternatively, however, after-Fordist consumption can be seen as a mode of consumption shaped by more strategic and knowledgeable end consumers that have thrown off the constraints of mass consumption.

One characteristic of after-Fordist societies of the developed industrial world that is undisputable, however, is the growing importance of consumption-related employment. Box 10.1 points to some of the features of this type of work, not all of which are positive.

This chapter seeks to combine the insights from both the consumer-as-dupe and culturalist approaches to consumption: as already explained in Chapter 1, we see limited utility in approaches grounded in the assumptions of neoclassical economics. Consumption, then, is quite clearly neither entirely determined by corporations or consumers, but is a complex process of interaction between the two groups. More specifically, in this chapter we want to advance the more nuanced argument that the extent to which producers/retailers or consumers hold sway over the consumption process will vary both according to the commodity in question, and geographically. For example, in the UK food retailing sector introduced above it is hard to escape the huge influence wielded by Tesco and other leading retailers such as Sainsburys and Asda. In other less concentrated food retailing markets, however, consumers will have more choice and hence greater sovereignty over their food consumption choices. In different kinds of activities – such as independent high quality restaurants in global cities or high fashion – consumer choices will be crucial to the ongoing viability of the enterprises involved, and as a result the range of options may fluctuate quite rapidly depending on changing reputations and customers' reviews. It is, however, hard to escape the conclusion that there is a *growing* concentration of power and influence in the hand of large retail corporations. We now turn to look at their efforts to shape the geographies of consumption. In so doing, we will see how retail geography has moved beyond the mathematical modelling of the intra- and inter-urban distribution of retail outlets, a preoccupation during economic geography's quantitative phase (Box 10.2).

Box 10.1   Consumption work

Another important characteristic of what we are calling the after-Fordist era in developed economies is that a growing proportion of the workforce is accounted for by consumption-related jobs in sectors such as retailing, restaurants, tourism and entertainment. Tesco's 250,000 employees in the UK, for example, make it the largest private sector employer in the country. At the same time, the rapid growth in these kinds of jobs has raised questions about their quality and desirability. These doubts have prompted economic geographers (and other social scientists) to look *within* workplaces and explore the nature of work in the consumptive sphere. This work has revealed that consumption-related jobs tend to be characterized by some, or all, of the following features:

- socially constructed as low status jobs within society (e.g. 'the waitress', 'the flight attendant', 'the checkout assistant') and receiving relatively low wage rates;
- low levels, or indeed the complete absence of, collective representation and unionization;
- dominated by part-time and temporary contracts rather than full-time positions. In some instances (e.g. tourism) there may be a marked seasonality to availability of employment;
- technology-based surveillance of the workforce both to monitor workers (e.g. listening in to telephone sales calls, measuring productivity of fast-food operatives) and deploy them efficiently (e.g. gauging the appropriate number of checkout staff in a supermarket);
- based on labour-intensive, repetitive tasks which cannot be replaced by technology (e.g. waiting on tables or cutting hair);
- having a *performative* component in which workers are required to take on a particular role or personality. This can occur in both face-to-face (e.g. the scripts given to fast food workers) and technologically-mediated situations (e.g. Indian call centre workers taking on English names as part of scripted encounters with customers). These performances may challenge workers' true senses of identity and lead to substantial stress levels;
- the social construction of many of these jobs as essentially 'female' (e.g. flight attendants), reinforced through recruitment practices;
- the social construction of many of these jobs as being for young people (e.g. fast food workers, bar and nightclub staff), reinforced through recruitment practices;
- selective recruitment on the basis of a wide range of other personal attributes – ethnicity, bodily appearance, weight, bodily hygiene, dress and style, interpersonal skills – to fulfil the requirements of the performative encounter with customers.

Box 10.2   Central place theory

The development of central place theory was indicative of the quantitative modelling approach to economic geography that predominated during the 1950s and 1960s in the Anglo-American context (see Box 1.2). A central place is simply a place that offers a good, or goods, for sale. The theory concerned developing models of the size and distribution of urban settlements as determined by retail activity. Perhaps the best-known model is that developed – initially in the 1930s, but translated to English in the mid-1960s – by the German economic geographer Walter Christaller. His model was based on two key variables: the distance a consumer will travel to purchase a particular good (the *range* of a good), and the minimum level of business required for a retail business to be viable (the *threshold* of a good). These variables were used to group retail establishments into categories or *orders*. In deriving the geography of location for each order, he argued that retailers would establish their shops as close to their customers as possible in order to minimize travel costs and maximize turnover. His analysis revealed that this requirement of centrality would lead to an orderly spaced hexagonal network of shop locations in central places, reflecting the fact that hexagons are the most efficient geometrical figures for serving territory without overlap (Figure 10.1). When the distributions of all seven orders were intersected, a hypothetical urban hierarchy was created in which the lowest order shops were available in all locations, and higher order shops would be available further up the hierarchy. While such models have proved influential and have been applied historically in real-world settings, they are simplifications of a very complex reality. Their contemporary applicability to a world shaped by cheap and efficient transport systems, powerful retailers, variable regulatory and planning frameworks, and geographically uneven distributions of wealth is severely limited.

10.3   The Changing Geographies of Retailing

The development of large, powerful, highly profitable retailers has tremendous downstream implications for consumption processes. Such retailers have considerable power to shape the geography and nature of contemporary consumption patterns through influence over which products are sold, where they are sold, how they are sold, and at what price. In this section we will consider the changing geographies of contemporary retailing in three stages. First, we will profile the ongoing globalization of retail activity and its implication for consumption patterns. Second, we explore the shifting intra-national geographies
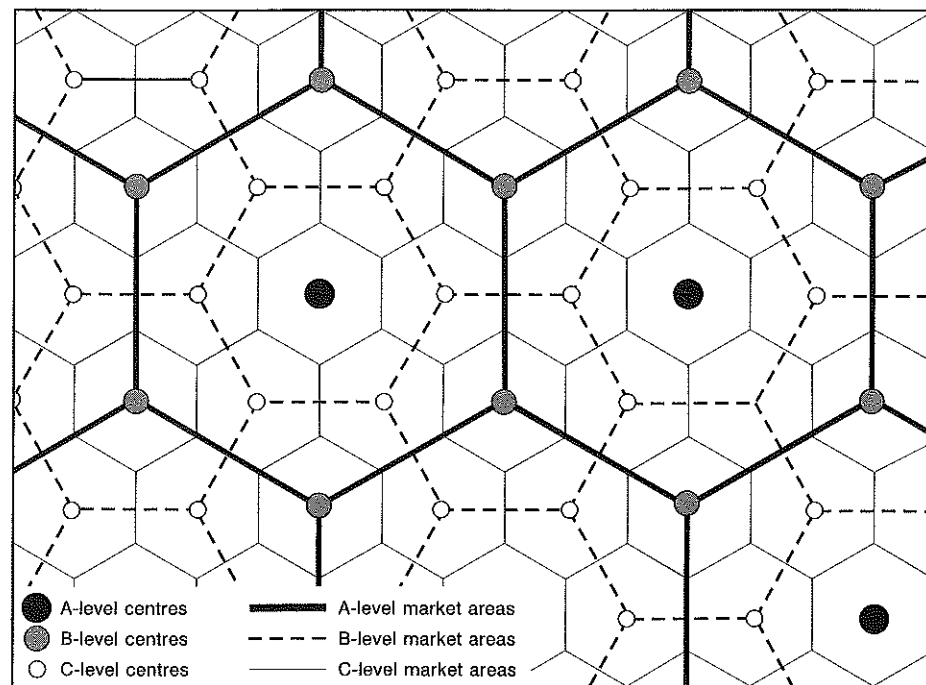
Figure 10.1 Christaller's hexagonal central place theory pattern
Source: Stutz and Warf (2005), Figure 10.10.

of retailing, and in particular, dynamics at the urban scale. Third, we move beyond the formal spaces of retailing to consider the significance of various *informal* modes of retailing.

The globalization of retailing

Perhaps the most important geographical outcome of the rise of retail capital has been a tremendous globalization of retailing over the past 10–15 years as retailers have sought new opportunities in which to invest the profits secured from their home markets (Coe, 2004). The period since the early 1990s has seen the emergence of a select group of transnational retailers that has used aggressive merger and acquisition activities, backed up by subsequent rapid organic growth, to assume dominant market positions across a range of countries. The leading transnational retailers, ranked in terms of their foreign sales, are detailed in Table 10.2. A number of important observations can be made from this data. First, it gives a sense of the *scale* of international retail operations, with all 15 retailers deriving over US$10bn of sales from foreign markets in 2005. Second,

Table 10.2   Leading transnational retailers, ranked by sales outside home market, 2005

Rank	Name of company	Country of origin	International sales (US$m)	International sales (% of total)	No. of countries of operation
1	Wal-Mart	US	62,700	20	15
2	Carrefour	France	50,050	52	29
3	Ahold	Netherlands	45,352	82	5
4	Metro	Germany	38,502	54	30
5	Aldi	Germany	20,119	45	12
6	Lidl & Schwarz	Germany	19,832	43	19
7	Tesco	UK	19,640	24	12
8	Auchan	France	19,535	45	12
9	Delhaize	Belgium	18,893	79	9
10	IKEA	Sweden	18,868	96	33
11	Tengelmann	Germany	16,706	51	16
12	Rewe	Germany	15,207	31	14
13	Ito-Yokado	Japan	12,010	34	4
14	Casino	France	11,849	42	19
15	Pinault	France	11,775	46	29

Source: Derived from Deloitte/Stores, *2006 Global Powers of Retailing*.

it gives a sense of the *scope* of international retailing, with many of the leading players having store operations in 20–30 countries, a level of international expansion comparable with many manufacturing sectors. Third, it reveals that the leading retail transnationals – with the notable exception of the world's largest retailer by far, Wal-Mart – are Western European, or more accurately, British, French, Dutch, German, Belgian and Swedish. While many of the world's very largest retailers hail from the US (e.g. Home Depot, Kroger, Target, Sears and Safeway), they can achieve that size without straying far beyond the borders of their home country. Fourth, it shows that the leading transnational retailers tend to be food retailers or general merchandisers, rather than specialty providers (e.g. toys or computer goods).

What, though, is the geography of this recent wave of expansion? The globalization of retailing is not a new process, dating back as far as the late 1800s. Foreign expansion really took off in the 1960s, however, and until the 1990s was largely dominated by investments between the leading economies of North America, Western Europe and Japan. Since the mid-1990s the expansion has taken on an entirely new geographical configuration. Figure 10.2, showing Tesco's global store distribution in 2004, is indicative. Tesco had stores in five markets in Eastern Europe and six in East Asia, in addition to the UK and
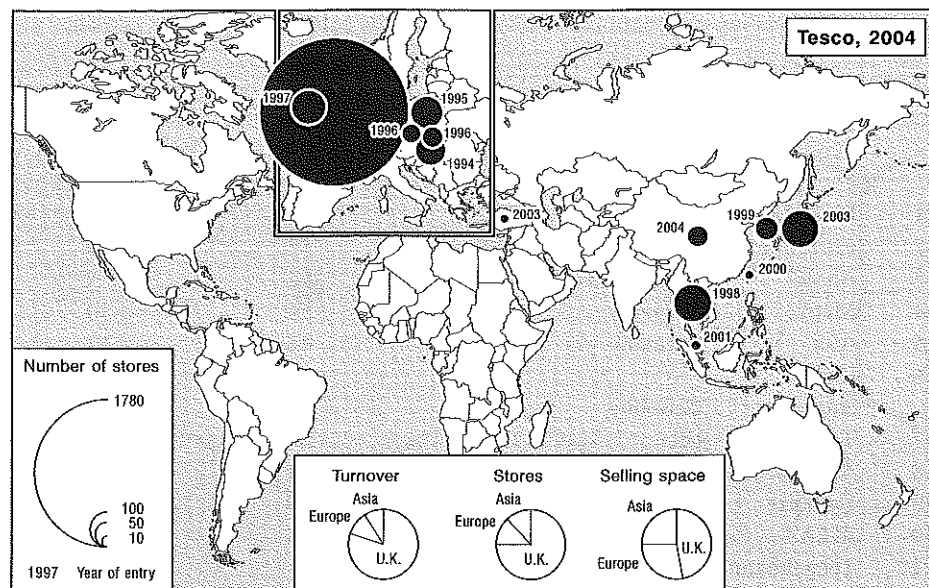
Figure 10.2 The global distribution of Tesco stores, 2004
Source: Company reports.

Table 10.3   Top ten retailers in Poland, 2004

Company	Ownership	Formats	No. of outlets (Sep 2004)	2004 sales (€bn)
Metro	Germany	Hypermarkets, cash & carry, specialty	85	2.64
Spolem	Poland	Grocery stores, discount, supermarkets	ca. 4,800	1.61
Tesco	UK	Hypermarkets, supermarkets	70	0.95
Jeronimo Martins	Portugal	Discount	700	0.91
Auchan	France	Hypermarkets, supermarkets	31	0.89
Ruch	Poland	Wholesale, kiosks, grocery stores	ca. 37,000	0.84
Carrefour	France	Hypermarkets, supermarkets	85	0.82
Eurocash	Poland	Cash & carry, grocery stores	1,930	0.80
Casino	France	Hypermarkets, discount	160	0.75
PSH Lewiatan	Poland	Grocery stores	1,610	0.66

Source: www.retailpoland.com, accessed 25 October 2005.

Ireland. In general, international retail investment by the leading retail transnationals is now targeted towards countries in so-called *emerging* regions, namely Latin and Central America, East Asia and Eastern Europe.

Three further characteristics distinguish this latest phase of retail globalization. First, the sheer *rapidity* of the international expansion is startling. As one measure, in 1990, Ahold was present in the Netherlands and USA, Carrefour was to be found in five countries outside of France, and Wal-Mart and Tesco were only present in their home market. By 2004, Ahold was present in 21 countries in total (operating brands such as Stop and Shop, and Tops, in the USA, for example), Carrefour in 30, Wal-Mart in 10, and Tesco in 13. Second, the *scale* of investment currently being undertaken is unprecedented. Static 'snapshots' such as Table 10.2 and Figure 10.2 may not give a real sense of the size of the phenomenon. For example, over the period 1994–2004, Tesco went from having no foreign floor space to having 53 per cent of its global total in its overseas territories. These huge expansion processes are creating retail giants with foreign operations of unprecedented size. Third, the *impacts* of this expansion on the retail structures of the host countries are significant. Table 10.3 profiles Poland's retail structure in 2004, and reveals that six of the top ten (and four of the top five) retailers are foreign, or more specifically Western European, owned. In the hypermarket segment, foreign dominance is particularly pronounced, with Tesco, Auchan, Metro, Carrefour and Casino together accounting for 81 per cent of the total national market. A similar story can be told for many leading economies across Eastern Europe, Latin America and East Asia.

Leading transnational retailers, then, are coordinating increasingly extensive networks of stores at the global scale. However, we need to be cautious about inferring from these trends that the nature of retail spaces is becoming identical around the world. Clearly, there are tendencies in that direction, with elements of store formats and signage, for example, being common across all markets. A British shopper entering a Tesco shop in Prague (Czech Republic) or Bangkok (Thailand) would quickly know they were in a Tesco store and see aspects of the store design that are very similar to stores in the UK. Equally, however, the same shopper would also notice significant variations in terms of the product range on offer, how goods are displayed to shoppers, and the physical structure of the store. In Prague, for example, Tesco has a city centre department store stretching over several storeys, and in Bangkok, Tesco hypermarkets are often part of large, multi-function developments including a range of other food, retail and leisure establishments (Figure 10.3). Both are quite different to the free-standing single storey supermarket that predominates in the UK. Importantly, transnational retailers vary in the extent to which they try and offer a standardized retail experience across all the countries in which they operate. While some companies, such as Wal-Mart and IKEA, operate in a highly *centralized* and uniform manner, others such as Ahold pursue a more *federal* strategy, operating as a collection of relatively autonomous national subsidiaries.

Figure 10.3   A Tesco hypermarket in Bangkok
Source: The authors.

From centre to suburbs, and back again?

Having established the contemporary importance of processes of retail globalization, we can now move on to consider the changing geography of retailing at the urban scale. In particular, we want to profile the shifting of retail investment from the inner city and downtown to the suburban periphery and back again, and in so doing, reveal how retail capital plays a central role in the constant re-making of the urban built environment and its consumption landscapes.

Up until the 1950s, retailing was essentially a *central* urban activity. The postwar suburbanization of retail capital and related decline of city-centre retailing were arguably pioneered – and indeed most evident – in the US. The scale and significance of these dynamics can be illustrated through briefly looking at developments in and around Chicago, Illinois, over the period from 1950 to the mid-1970s (drawing on Wrigley and Lowe, 2002). By the end of the 1950s, four large open-air shopping centres with ample parking provision had appeared on the periphery of Chicago as department stores began to realize the potential of shifting their focus to the rapidly expanding middle-class suburbs (Figure 10.4). The 1960s saw the building of a series of enclosed shopping centres or *malls* in a ring around Chicago, fuelled in part by the expanding urban expressway network. By the end of the decade, a total of 11 suburban shopping centres had combined retail sales to rival central Chicago. By 1974, the total was up to
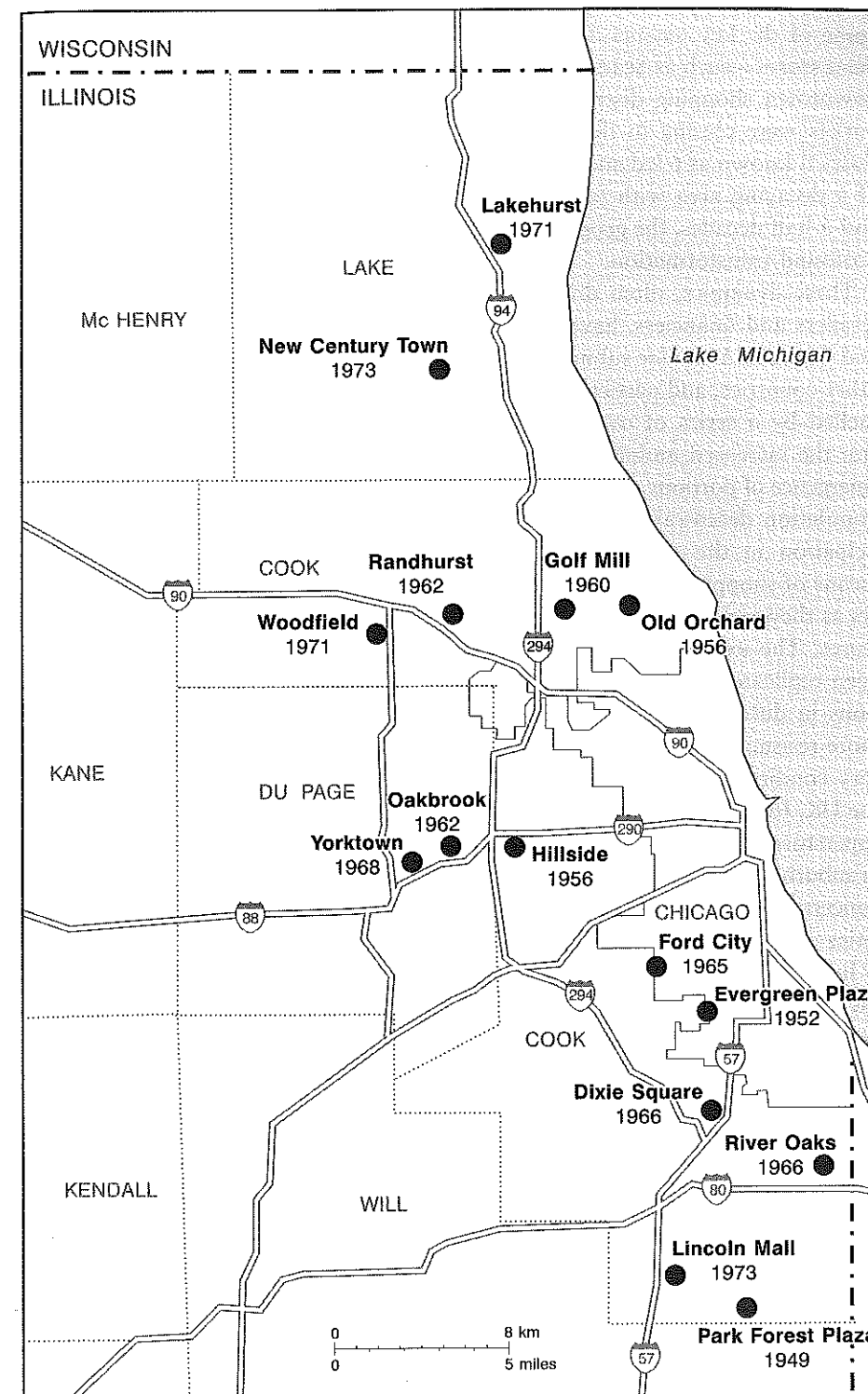
Figure 10.4   The development of Chicago's suburban shopping centres, 1949–74
Source: Adapted from Berry et al. (1976), Figure 22.

15 shopping centres, and a second 'ring' around Chicago was starting to emerge. Some of the key tenants of these new suburban centres were the very department stores – such as Sears Roebuck and J.C. Penney – that had once dominated downtown shopping districts. At the same time, central and inner city retail outlets were closing in their hundreds. Chicago's leading inner city shopping district, known as 63rd and Halsted, was severely hit, finding itself in the middle of a decaying area with falling income levels by the early 1970s. In just two-and-a-half decades, the geography of Chicago's retail provision had undergone a profound transformation.

These dynamics, often driven by powerful alliances of property developers, retailers and financiers, have been repeated in hundreds of cities across the US and Canada. A similar suburbanization of retail provision has occurred in many other countries, and particularly those of Western Europe. Such trends have been fuelled by a series of overlapping dynamics characteristic of the after-Fordist era: the increased mobility of consumers and high levels of car ownership; the emergence of portions of the population with large amounts of disposable income; population decentralization from urban to suburban areas; higher female participation in the workforce driving demand for quicker and more efficient means of shopping (e.g. the 'one-stop-shop'); and the growth strategies of retailers as they seek enhanced economies of scale through larger and more accessible stores. The *extent* to which the North American trends described above have been replicated elsewhere has been dictated by the strength of planning regulations in different countries: most European countries, for example, have been more resistant to suburban greenfield developments than in the US case. Regulatory conditions also critically affect the *timing* of decentralization processes. In the UK, for example, there was a boom in the development of out-of-town food superstores in the 1980s and early 1990s when planning guidelines on building in suburban areas were favourable. By the mid-1990s, these trends were promoting concerns about the development of *food deserts* – low-income areas of British cities characterized by the lack, or poor quality, of food retail provision.

In most countries, suburban retail parks are now a well established part of the consumption landscape. In the UK, the initial wave of food superstores has been joined by three subsequent phases of out-of-town development (Fernie, 1995). First, there has been a wave of retail parks housing, for example, home maintenance, carpet, furniture and electrical stores whose bulky products suit such accessible locations. Second, in contrast to the large scale decentralization of city centre retailing seen in the US, planning constraints have restricted such relocations (beyond the food superstores and retail parks just mentioned) to a small group of massive *regional* shopping centres that aim to serve more than their immediate urban hinterland. As shown in Figure 10.5, these are quite evenly spread across the country and, pioneers such as Brent Cross and the MetroCentre apart, were largely built in the 1990s. The Trafford Centre, for example, on the western outskirts of Manchester, has approximately 120,000 square metres of
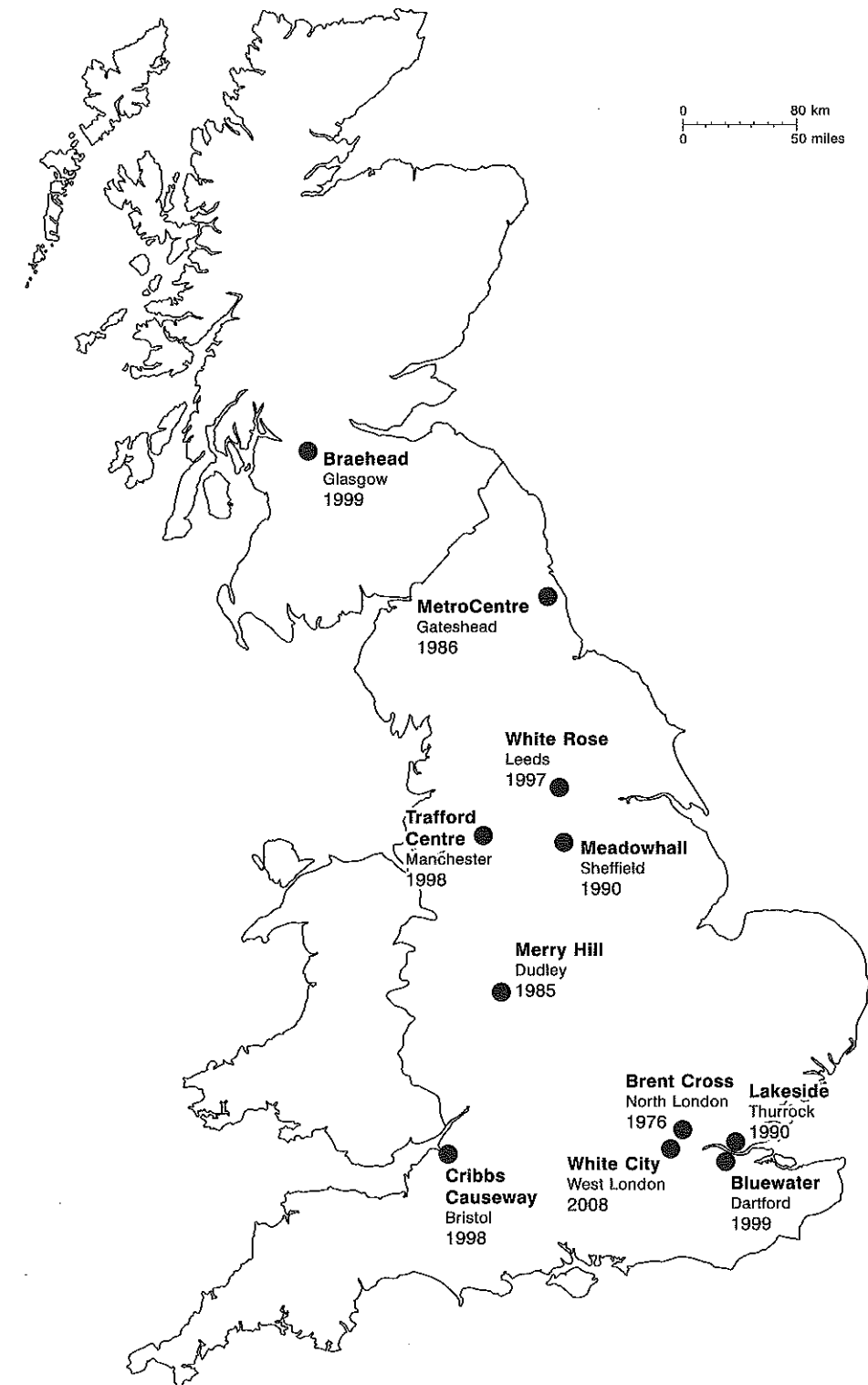
Figure 10.5   Britain's regional shopping centres
Source: Adapted from Lowe (2000), Figure 1.

retail space in addition to 30,000 square metres of catering and leisure space and 10,000 car parking spaces. The centre is home to 6000 employees working in 280 shops including six large 'anchor' tenants, 36 restaurants, a 1,600-seat food court, a 20-screen cinema and several other leisure attractions. The third, and latest, wave of suburban retail in the UK takes the form of outlet shopping malls that offer the excess stock of clothing manufacturers at reduced prices. Again, however, planning restrictions and property market conditions have meant that the expansion of such outlets has been much slower than predicted. Overall, then, it is important to recognize that the suburbanization of retailing now constitutes many different kinds and formats of retailing, and that its extensiveness varies significantly between different national regulatory contexts.

While suburbanization has had a massive and lasting impact on retail geographies, it is also important to note recent trends working in the opposite direction. While the nature and extent of the trend will again vary from context to context, three brief illustrations can be offered here to show the kinds of dynamics that are occurring. First, in the US context, since the mid-1970s when the level of retail decentralization was at its peak, considerable efforts have been made to *regenerate* the downtown districts of American cities. Central to such initiatives have been so-called *festival marketplaces*, stimulated by the success of the Faneuil Hall Marketplace which opened in Boston in 1976. The central idea here is to use combinations of architecture, cultural exhibits, concerts and ethnic festivals to attract people to speciality markets and shops, and restaurants. A different, but closely related, form of development has seen downtown retail revitalization as part of multiple use complexes comprising offices, hotels, leisure facilities and convention centres. Similar schemes have subsequently been tried in many cities around the world, including those where retail decentralization has been less pronounced. Second, in many of the post-industrial cities of developed countries (e.g. New York, Manchester) inner city retail has been boosted by *gentrification* processes which have seen the return of young middle-class professionals to live in new or renovated apartments in inner city areas. This has created high income areas that are attractive to shops, restaurants, nightclubs, and so on. These processes are also becoming apparent in certain developing country cities such as Shanghai. Third, and particularly in the UK context, large food retailers are starting to return to the inner city, prompted in part by the gentrification trends just mentioned, albeit in a patchy manner that does not mitigate the problems of food deserts identified above. Both Tesco and Sainsburys, for example, have established new small supermarket and convenience store formats to tap into these urban markets.

From formal to informal spaces of retailing

Thus far we have tended to focus on *formal* retail spaces as perhaps the most prevalent and important consumption spaces in capitalist society. It is important

to recognize, though, that beyond the formal spaces of retail lies a wide variety of *informal* trading and exchange practices and spaces. Some of these activities are transient and temporary in nature (e.g. mobile street vendors and street markets) while others are a more permanent feature of the built environment (e.g. charity shops and retro-vintage shops). While some will be entirely legal operations, others may operate at the very limits of the law, or even illegally. The importance and nature of these informal consumption spaces vary tremendously geographically, as the following brief examples illustrate.

A fascinating example of informal retail spaces in the developed world is that of *car boot sales* in the UK (for more, see Crewe and Gregson, 1998). Car boot sales first appeared in the late 1970s but were booming by the 1990s, with an estimated 1500 taking place every week, attracting over one million people as either buyers or sellers. Car boot sales, as transitory and informal sites of second-hand exchange, have much in common with jumble sales, flea markets, yard sales, garage sales, and the like. Their distinctiveness comes from the fact that the household and personal goods offered for sale are transported, displayed and sold from, and around, the back of participants' cars or vehicles. Car boot sales usually take place in fields, car parks, or on other available spaces at the edge of urban areas, and are organized either by private sector promoters or by institutions such as schools and churches as part of fund-raising initiatives. The car boot sale environment can be contrasted with formal retail spaces on a number of levels. First, prices are agreed through negotiation and bargaining, rather than being fixed. In this sense, there is more consumer agency than in the standard shopping experience structured by retailers. Second, car boot sales are less predictable, as attendees do not know what goods will be available, and at what prices. Instead, the shopping experience unfolds as an exciting and highly tactile (i.e. hands-on) search for bargains. Third, car boot sales are a more sociable retail environment in which ongoing discussion with sellers and other buyers is an integral part of the process. Such informal retail spaces can, then, thrive in developed market contexts, but tend to operate around the margins of the mainstream, formal retail sector.

Informal retail spaces take on far greater significance in the context of developing world cities, where such exchanges may be more important than formal sites of retailing. While there are always problems of definition and measurement when it comes to informal economic activities, it is nonetheless possible to gauge their overall significance. Estimates suggest, for example, that in the developing world, some 37 per cent of employment is provided by informal activity (ranging from 33 per cent in Latin America to 54 per cent in Africa) compared to 3 per cent in high income countries (Daniels, 2004). Such employment is particularly concentrated in urban areas, where formal employment growth often lags well behind population increases fuelled by high rates of rural to urban migration. In African cities, for example, informal work is estimated to provide two-thirds of urban employment. While some of this activity is

constituted by small scale manufacturing activity, a considerable proportion is derived from informal retailing activities.

Evidence from the Latin American city of Quito, Ecuador, gives an indication of the scale and varied nature of this informal retail activity (drawing on Bromley, 1998). Informal retailing has grown over a period of decades to occupy a variety of spaces in the central city. Here, several different types of informal retailing can be distinguished on the basis of their location, timing and legality. There are three main types of location: the market building (*mercado*), the open-air market (*plataforma*), and the street. The market buildings are permanent structures utilized daily, while the open-air markets vary in their frequency: both are generally legalized forms of retail. Street vending can be split into those who have a stall/site, and those who operate on the move, often illegally. In the mid-1990s, the historic centre of Quito city had 4,500 trading sites in 15 daily markets (up from 2,400 sites in 1976). In addition, there were 3,400 street traders operating daily, of which 2,800 had established some kind of temporary stall or site, and 600 carried their goods and moved continually. On one particular day, two key central streets (Chile and Cuenca) were found to have 666 and 411 traders operating on them. Recently, the scale and intensity of informal retail activity in central Quito have generated concern about the extent to which associated problems of hygiene and congestion are hampering attempts to re-model the area as a destination for wealthy tourists. The municipal authorities have responded by decentralizing market activities to the margins of the central area and clearing the key historic central plazas of all informal activity. Thus, even the geography of informal activity can be shaped by local regulatory conditions.

To summarize the arguments of this section, retail geographies are restless and continually changing. In the *formal* sector, these changes reflect both the growing size and power of retailers, and wider societal dynamics such as patterns of urban decay/renewal and the movement of high income segments of the population. Due to the acute sensitivity of retailing to planning and regulatory conditions, the timing, nature and extent of change will vary substantially from place to place. A range of *informal* retail activities and spaces exist alongside these formal retail operations. The importance of such activities varies geographically: in some contexts they will be relatively insignificant, filling particular market niches in a largely formal retail sector, while in others they form the mainstay of the urban economy, representing the only way for millions of poor city inhabitants to make a living.

10.4   The Changing Spaces of Consumption

In the previous section, we outlined some of the key changes to the geographies of consumption in contemporary societies. We now move to looking *within*

different kinds of consumption spaces to examine the way in which firms, designers and planners try to manipulate the layout and design of those spaces in order to try and stimulate consumption. Geography is important in two ways here: first, in terms of the management of space within these different consumption arenas, and second, in the way in which different places are invoked as part of the design strategy (reinforcing the importance of representations of place outlined in Chapter 1). A further theme running through the analysis is the tension between *public* and *private* space – in other words, the extent to which different consumption spaces are truly open access, freely usable spaces, or if they are closely monitored and policed by corporate interests. In order to do this we will look in turn at examples of four kinds of managed consumption space: the store, the street, the mall and the theme park (Wrigley and Lowe, 2002).

The store

As we have already seen in this chapter, the retail store is an absolutely critical space of consumption in contemporary capitalist society. Retailers actively use geography in stores to try and promote consumption in two ways. First, the interior layout and use of space within stores are designed to enhance sales levels. Many of the techniques used in a standard supermarket are now well known: placing attractive fresh produce near the store entrance, using the smells of fresh bread or roasting chicken to entice customers in, putting important products at eye level, stacking promotional goods at the end of aisles, the use of signage to attract attention to particular products, grouping functionally related products (e.g. stir fry vegetables and sauces), placing 'impulse' products (e.g. confectionery, magazines) near the checkouts and so on. Similar techniques are used in all kinds of shops: window displays, for example, are critical in defining the target consumer for a clothing store. What these practices reveal is a conscious micro-management of the store environment on the part of the retailer to try and maximize sales. Furthermore, as we saw earlier, the precise range of products in a store may have already been shaped in line with the social and demographic profile of the area in which it is located. More broadly, retailers use the exterior and interior design of their stores as a strategic resource designed to distinguish themselves from their competitors and develop a brand image aimed at certain portions of the population.

Second, particular places are evoked within the store environment. We can illustrate this idea by looking at the coffee chain Starbucks (here we draw on Smith, 1996: see also Box 4.1). Starbucks outlets conform to a broadly similar design that seeks to evoke a particular sense of place. The design combines associations with European coffee houses and bars, and a North American 'Pacific Northwest' lifestyle of relaxed living and outdoor activities (the latter reflecting the chain's roots in Seattle, Washington). These associations are manifest in a simple décor of green and brown colour schemes with metal trims, the

visibility of the machinery and experience of coffee-making, the prominence of educational information about coffee and its origins, and the use of large glass windows and bar-style seats that allow drinkers to observe and 'consume' the streetscape in front of them. Creating a particular notion of place – albeit a hybrid one in this instance – is central to Starbucks' strategy of bringing coffee to a mass market. Even more intriguingly, BritishIndia is a Southeast Asian retail chain that started in Malaysia in 1994, selling a range of clothes and furnishings evoking the British rule of India in the 1800s. With an emphasis on comfortable, elegant, high-quality products, the stores are explicitly aiming at middle class and expatriate portions of the population. The stores are decorated with photos and other memorabilia of 'British' India creating a colonial feel. Here, then, is a fascinating example of the contemporary mobilization of notions of place (and indeed time), with a retailer in postcolonial Southeast Asia using images of a colonial past in another part of Asia to sell products and develop a distinct brand identity.

The street

For centuries, streets have played a crucial role in the public and economic life of cities. As Jane Jacobs (1961: 29) once famously observed, 'Streets and their sidewalks, the most public places of a city, are its most vital organs. Think of a city and what comes to mind? Its streets. If a city's streets look interesting, the city looks interesting; if they look dull, the city looks dull.' What is of particular interest to us here is the relationship between the street and retailing. It is no coincidence that the main street (or streets) of most, if not all, cities is devoted to the retail function: think of Oxford and Regent Streets in London, Madison and 5th Avenues in New York, and Orchard Road in Singapore to name but a few iconic examples. This remains the case despite the processes of retail decentralization we have described above, and even though property prices and rental rates in these districts are some of the highest anywhere on the globe. This association between key streets and leading retailers has developed over time, reflecting the essentially urban nature of retailing for most of human history, and is reinforced through planning processes that seek to maintain important retail districts in a bid to attract both national and international visitors. The importance of these 'main streets', however, goes beyond the collection of stores they contain, as they become nationally and indeed internationally recognizable symbols of consumptive activity. In turn, retailers seek to feed off this reputation and benefit from the large numbers of visitors by maintaining a presence in these relatively expensive locations.

Beyond the prime importance of particular central urban streets for retailing in general, there is also a tendency for specific kinds of shops and restaurants to agglomerate in certain streets and districts of towns and cities. In part, they cluster together to benefit from agglomeration economies (see Chapter 5).

However, as with the 'main streets' just described, they also gather in particular streets for less tangible reasons to do with the image, reputation and mix of attractions in certain localities. In this way, certain streets become associated with specific forms of consumption, for example, foreign fashion designer outlets (Ralph Lauren, Calvin Klein, etc.) in Bond Street (Mayfair) and Sloane Street (Knightsbridge) in London. It is not just the shops themselves that are consumption spaces, but the street as a whole, leading some to suggest that the street itself is effectively *branded*. The street is also important on a more mundane level as an everyday retail and consumption environment found in almost every urban area. The street is largely shaped by two groups: urban planners, who determine what different zones of cities may or may not be used for, and property and retail corporations which invest in the urban built environment.

Retailers, for example, are highly *strategic* about where they choose to locate their stores as part of their efforts to distinguish themselves from competitors. This can be seen on two levels, using the example of high-quality women's clothing retailers such as Jigsaw, Monsoon and Oasis in the UK (Crewe and Lowe, 1995). First, during the early phase of their expansion in the 1990s, these retailers were highly selective about the kinds of urban areas they chose to locate in, tending to select locations in medium or large towns in the wealthy Southeast of the country, in addition to key sites in London. Second, during the same period, they were also very specific about the sites they chose *within* the urban area, tending to avoid both high street and mall locations in favour of less obvious locations towards the margins of central areas and in gentrifying districts, as part of building an image of exclusivity and difference. Building on this important early phase of development, all three of these retailers have now expanded into fully national operations with a mixture of location types including high street and mall sites. What this brief example serves to illustrate, however, is the strategic way in which retailers actively think about and shape their position within the urban streetscape.

The mall

In some instances, the notion of the street can blur into our next category of the mall. In Singapore, for example, Bugis Junction features an interior, air-conditioned street as part of the mall, and many other malls evoke notions of the street in their design. Importantly, however, malls are enclosed, privately owned and more controlled spaces than streets. As such, to understand them, we need to look beyond the surface 'magic of the mall' (drawing on Goss, 1993, 1999). Put another way, by exploring the form, function and meaning of shopping malls, it is possible to better understand how developers, retailers and designers actively encourage the purchase of goods and services. First, there are a wide range of seemingly mundane attributes of mall design that seek to promote consumer spending, including:

- the use of attractive central features to draw shoppers in particular directions and then direct them towards further options;
- the configuration of escalators, and the strategic positioning of toilet facilities and exits, in order to make consumers walk past as many shop fronts as possible;
- limiting long straight stretches so consumers are unaware how far they are walking;
- the use of signs and displays to encourage shoppers to keep walking;
- supplying rest points and seats for the weary consumer;
- the use of plants and vendor carts to encourage circulation within the walkways;
- the use of soft lighting and the absence of natural light to help suspend a sense of time;
- the use of mirrors and reflective glass to create an illusion of space;
- the manipulation of the ambient temperature;
- the use of 'soothing' background music to induce spending;
- the delineation of relatively segregated zones of shops designed to appeal to different types/classes of consumer;
- the presence of highly visible security staff to reinforce the safety of the environment;
- ongoing, regular cleaning to reinforce the cleanliness of the environment.

In sum, what at first might seem to be a rather bland shopping mall is in reality a highly designed and strategic space, reflective of the power of its owners, designers and tenants.

Second, and linking back to arguments made in Chapter 4, strenuous efforts are made to disconnect commodities from their real-world production systems and reposition them in a world of pleasure, fantasy and magic promoted through architecture, interior design, and theming that evokes other times and places. The huge Mall of America in Minneapolis, Minnesota, provides a powerful example. The Mall, which opened in 1992, covers some 4 million square feet, and contains over 520 specialty stores, four department stores, 30 fast food restaurants, 20 sit-down restaurants, a 14-screen cinema and many other leisure attractions including the 7-acre indoor theme park, Camp Snoopy. The Mall of America endeavours to create a sense of public, market and festival spaces through its design, and repeatedly evokes notions of travel, nature, primitiveness (through Native American references), childhood and heritage in its retail and leisure attractions. The Rainforest Café, for example, offers a 'safari' meal experience complete with passport, while there are many other 'destination' restaurants such as the California Café, Col. Muzzy's Texas Barbeque, Little Tokyo, Maui Wowi Smoothies and the Napa Valley Grill. The staging of events (e.g. fashion shows, cultural displays, children's entertainment, etc.) and the provision of a range of services to facilitate consumption (e.g. food courts, crèche facilities for small children) are also an integral part of the general strategy of encouraging

'guiltless' spending. Overall, as Goss (1993: 40) suggests: 'The shopping centre appears to be everything it is not. It contrives to be a public, civic place even though it is private and run for profit; it offers a place to commune and recreate, while it seeks retail dollars; and it borrows signs of other places and times to obscure its rootedness in contemporary capitalism.'

The theme park

Theme parks offer a particular, and increasingly ubiquitous form, of consumption experience (here we draw on Shaw and Williams, 2004). Visitors pay not just for a particular ride or show, but for admission to an entire complex. Hence they are paying to experience the whole built environment, which places particular emphasis on the architecture and its symbolism. Accordingly, theme parks are extremely carefully configured, and the use of space within them is heavily regulated and choreographed. In many cases they are explicitly designed to offer a contrast to the more messy spaces of everyday life, providing a safe, car-free environment in which entertainment is interactive rather than passive. At the heart of the theme park model is the consumption of multi-sensory experiences which may combine simulated environments (e.g. natural, cultural, historical or technological); the humanizing of those environments by live interpretations, performances and commentaries (e.g. re-enactments of historical events); state-of-the-art technological devices (e.g. films, rides and games); and themed exhibits and eating places. These experiences tend to be supported by high quality visitor services (shops, toilets, disabled provision etc.), a structuring of the experience to prevent information overload (route maps, suggested programmes etc.), and a constant overhauling and upgrading of facilities to attract repeat visitors. The net result is that – perhaps even more than in the cases of store and mall design – the theme park is a highly managed space designed to deliver a particular kind of structured consumption experience. In short, like the mall, it is a 'landscape of power' (Zukin, 1993: 221).

Within these spaces the use of geographical references and themes is rife. Consider Disneyland Paris, for example. This is a particularly interesting example, as it takes Disney's fantasy worlds, often derived from European-folklore, back to a European context (Warren, 1999). As in all Disney parks, upon entering, visitors find themselves on Main Street USA, an environment designed to replicate early twentieth-century urban America. In the Fantasyland zone, one can find Sleeping Beauty Castle, a French version of Disney's German-inspired original in Anaheim, California. Adventureland has a Pirates of the Caribbean attraction and the Frontierland zone offers the 'wild west'-style Fort Comstock and the Cowboy Cookout Barbeque. Discoveryland is the only area unique to Disneyland Paris, with a range of attractions – such as the Space Mountain rollercoaster – notionally inspired by the work of the French writer Jules Verne. The Hong Kong Disneyland which opened in 2005 has a very similar structure and layout with the exceptions that it has no Frontierland, and Discoveryland

is replaced by the standard Tomorrowland found in the US parks. What these examples show is that the mobilization of place representations – whether real or fantasy, historical or futuristic – is central to the theme park experience.

In sum, this section has shown the ways in which corporate interests – most particularly retailers and property developers – seek to manipulate the physical built environment in order to stimulate consumption spending and thereby enhance their profitability. The rise in significance of large retailers and mall and theme park environments over the last few decades means that such practices are arguably an increasingly powerful shaper of contemporary consumption dynamics. In certain places that rely heavily on these kinds of economic activities – such as Las Vegas (Box 10.3) – it is almost possible to conceive of the entire city as a themed consumption environment. We must stop short, however, of uncritically accepting the consumer-as-dupes scenario described earlier. Hence, in the next and final section of the chapter, we move to exploring the relationships between place, consumption and identity, and the ways in which consumers – either individually or in groups – may subvert the intended uses of consumption spaces.

Box 10.3   Viva Las Vegas!

It is hard to think of a more iconic example of a consumption space than the city of Las Vegas, in Nevada, US. The city, famously founded on the site of a small desert railroad and agricultural town in 1905, was by 2004 a city of 1.87 million people. As is well known, the city has now grown into a massive centre of gambling, leisure, entertainment and retailing, attracting some 37.4 million visitors in 2004 – 11% from outside the US – who spent some US$8.7bn on gambling alone. Indeed, Las Vegas now claims to be the second most popular tourist destination in the world after Disney World (Florida). The employment structure of the city clearly reflects its reliance on consumption activities: in September 2005, 267,000 workers (31 per cent of the total) were employed directly in leisure and tourism activities, with many others employed in related and support industries such as government, health, education, business services and construction. Manufacturing, on the other hand, employed only 25,000 workers (3 per cent of the total). This, clearly, is a massive urban economy founded on, and sustained by, consumption. Over the period from the mid-1970s until the mid-1990s, Las Vegas transformed itself from an American casino resort to a tourist attraction with global appeal, a transformation supported by national and local regulatory conditions which facilitated quick decision-making on planning and development requests. The leading theme park, retail and casino attractions now available on the city's famous 'Strip' are shown in Figure 10.6 (see also Figure 10.7),
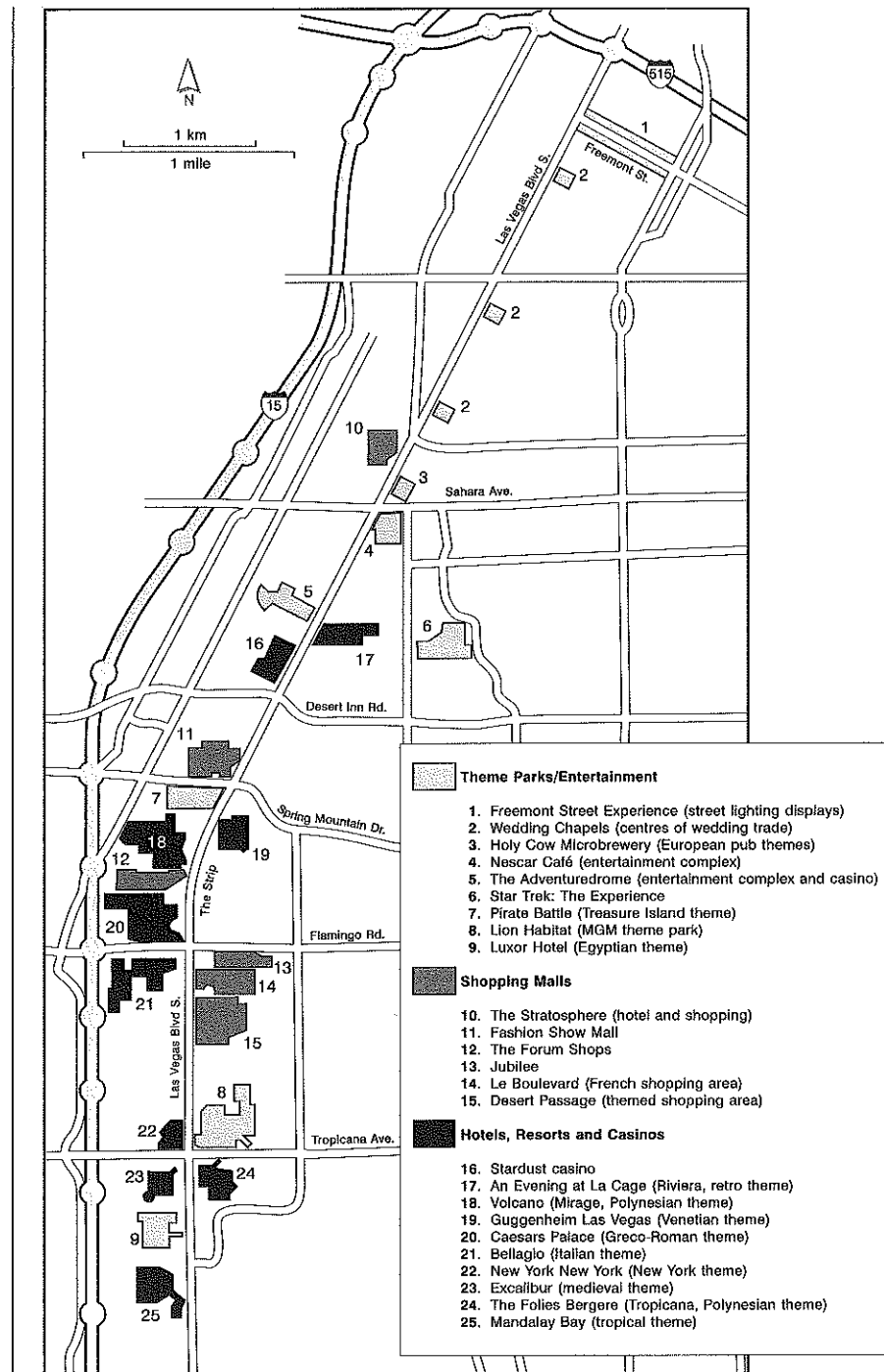

Figure 10.6   Major themes and attractions in Las Vegas
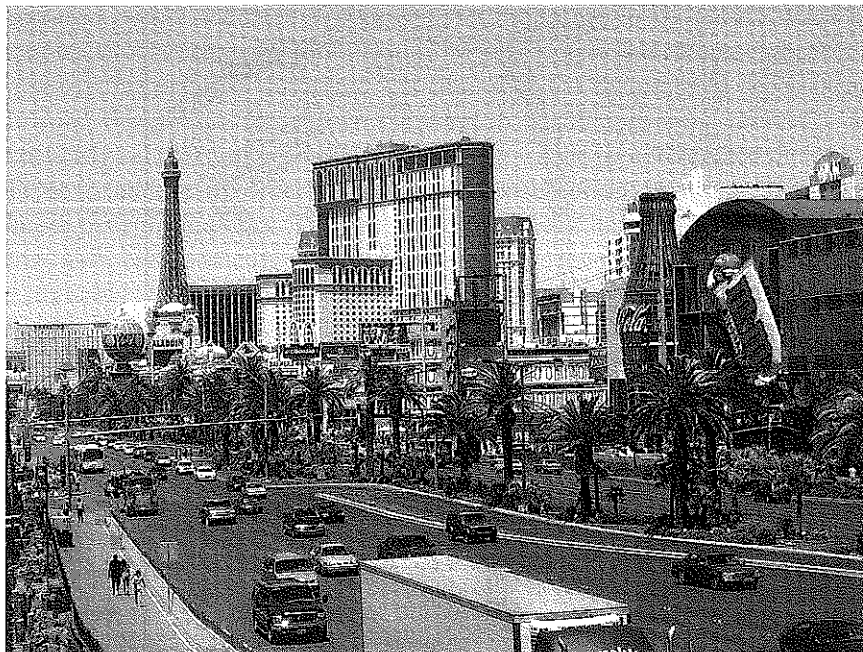*Source*: Adapted from Shaw and Williams (2004), Figure 10.1.

Figure 10.7   A themed landscape: Las Vegas, Nevada
Source: The authors.

which also reveals the way in which many of the sites have been *themed* in order to increase their attractiveness to visitors by 'transporting' them to alternative times and places. Places as far away as France, Venice, Egypt, and Polynesia are evoked, in addition to fantasy (e.g. Treasure Island) and historical (e.g. Greco-Roman) references. In the case of the MGM Grand, a 5,000-room hotel, casino and entertainment complex that includes a 17,000 seat auditorium, the theme is actually MGM's own Hollywood studio complex! Overall, the example of Las Vegas speaks both to the importance of consumption for the economy of particular places, and also the way in which attractions are themed as a strategy for inducing visitors to spend money, and in this instance, gamble.

Drawn from http://www.lasvegasnevada.gov/, accessed 27 October 2005, and Shaw and Williams (2004).

10.5   Consumption, Place and Identity

It is wrong to suggest that all consumers are simply at the mercy of corporate interests, consuming what firms want to sell them. Consumers are active agents making informed decisions about which commodities to buy in order to construct particular *identities*, or senses of self. This is particularly true of certain kinds of highly visible *symbolic goods* – such as clothing, jewellery and cars – that are often taken to signify a certain standing or position within society. Other consumptive activities including the choice of restaurants, bars, and holiday destinations may be part of the same process. Equally, purchases may be used as markers of difference, to indicate a position outside, or towards the margins of, the mainstream of society (e.g. buying a car that runs on vegetable oil or wearing distinctive forms of clothing). It is important to recognize, however, that the ability of consumers to engage in these forms of consumption varies both socially and spatially. Socially, it may only be certain groups within the total population, and particularly those with the necessary disposable income, who choose to take part in symbolic consumption. Spatially, such consumption will be more widespread in wealthy countries than in poorer countries, where simply meeting basic needs requirements (water, food, shelter, etc.) may be the only priority. Even within wealthier countries, poor urban or rural dwellers with low income levels, limited local retail provision, and poor access to transportation, may effectively be excluded from the consumption of symbolic goods. In short, we need to recognize the profound social and spatial variation in the degree of consumer agency.

Moreover, the *nature* of the relationship between consumption and identity works out differently in different places – in other words, it is *place-specific*. This is because of the social and cultural specificity of consumption practices such as shopping and eating (Figure 10.8 and Box 10.4). Even where the spaces of consumption are apparently being homogenized by the globalization of retailers, property developers, hotel companies and so on, how those spaces are used will vary from place to place. This variation may reflect a consumer's unique individuality, their membership of a particular group in society (e.g. youth or ethnic cultures), or their position within a particular regional or national culture. Take the cartoon in Figure 10.9, for example, which offers a tongue-in-cheek look at two national stereotypes in the Singapore context – 'the cosmopolitan' and 'the heartlander' – based on their consumption preferences and what this suggests about their position within both Singaporean society and the wider world. The clothes worn, bodily appearance, accessories carried and newspaper preference are all taken as signifiers of particular, place-specific social roles and categories. The same consumption practices may signify something different in another geographic context. There may be still more geographies at work in individual consumption practices. Commodities can be purchased and
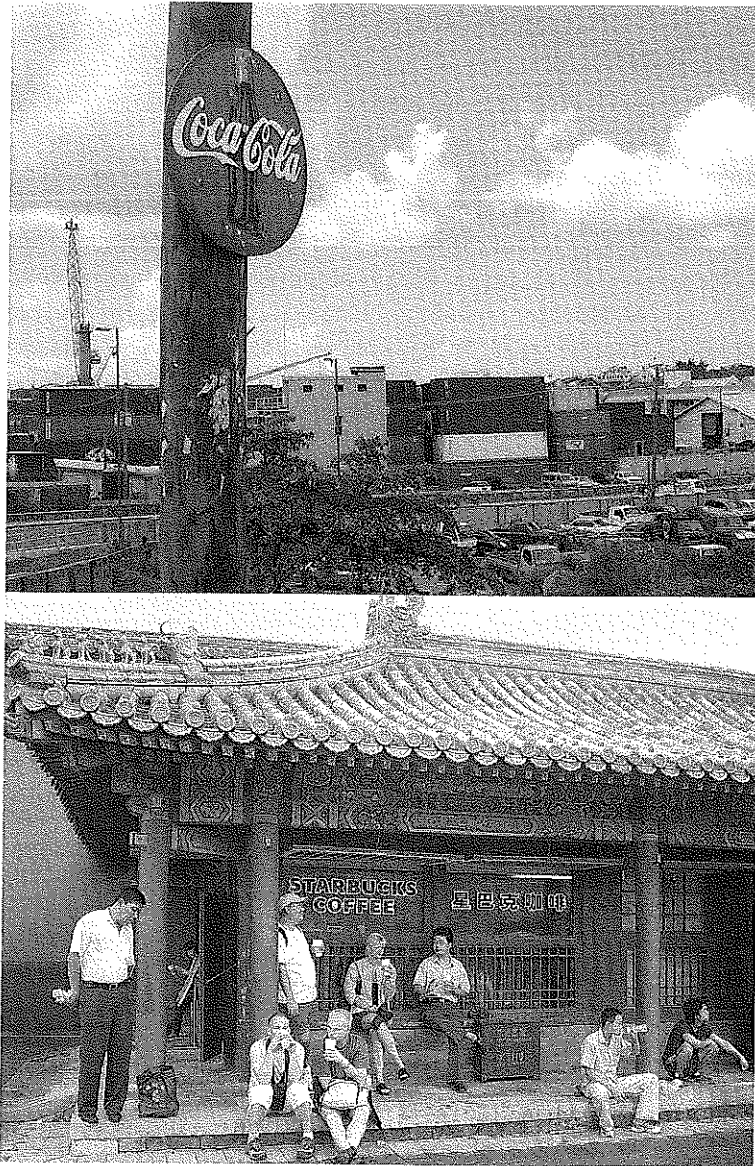
Figure 10.8 The same the world over? Coca-Cola in St. Lucia, the Caribbean, and Starbucks in the Forbidden City, China
Source: The authors.

combined to show pride in, and attachment to, particular places (e.g. elements of national dress), and/or places where one has visited (e.g. the tourist T-shirt or a souvenir displayed in the home). In short, the purchases and consumption practices we pursue as individuals are always, and inherently, geographical.

Box 10.4   *Shopping*

Shopping is clearly much more than a robotic response to the stimuli provided by retailers and shopping mall designers. Instead, it can be thought of as a culturally and societally specific *set of practices*. Shopping is a social activity as well as a simple exchange of commodities, entailing, for example, interaction with shop workers, and discussions with friends about the relative merits of products both before, and after, the act of purchase. Social relations within the family are particularly important, as many purchases are made for other members of the family group. Equally, shopping is an *everyday* activity, meaning that consumers do not constantly reflect on why and how they are shopping. However, it is based on certain skills (e.g. how to navigate round a supermarket, how to select a product) that are learnt within particular socio-cultural contexts. Shopping is not entirely unreflective, however. Consumers take decisions in relation to society-wide debates and dilemmas concerning, for example, what might constitute 'ethical' or 'environmentally responsible' consumption. Shopping is also about place and identity, with different facets of identity – such as family, class, ethnicity and gender – being constructed by participating in particular retail or shopping spaces.

With this nuanced understanding of shopping practices, we can revisit our discussion of shopping malls. Three observations can be made. First, while it is important to recognize the general ways in which shopping malls are designed, this does not mean that they are all the same. Shopping malls will each have their own distinctive histories, mixture of attractions, and senses of place, and consumers will make choices between different malls accordingly. Second, shopping malls are designed for an average, universal customer. In reality, different kinds of shoppers will use the mall in a wide range of ways. Not all shoppers, for example, will browse the space in a relaxed way as a form of leisure. Many will not be enjoying the experience, and will want to get in and out again as quickly as possible once a series of pre-determined purchases have been completed. Third, shopping malls have to be seen in the context of the other retail formats on offer in a particular society (e.g. home, second hand markets, city centre retailing etc.) Again, different shoppers will use a mall as part of different combinations of retail options.

Drawn from Miller et al. (1998).