

STEINFATT, Alexa Christin (2006) *The Evolution of the Canadian Retail Trade System and the Distinctive Situation in Greater Vancouver: An Analysis of the Retail Landscape in the Interplay of Extraneous Forces*. Aix-la-Chapelle (Aachen), Aachener Geographische Arbeiten, 326 p. (ISBN 3-9810903-1-4)

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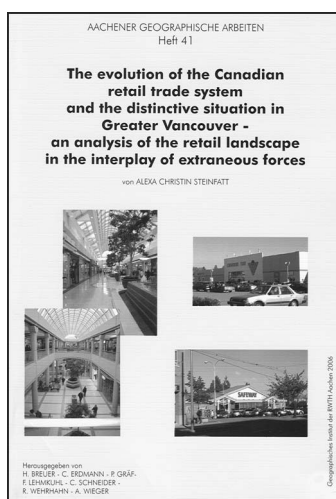
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entamés, il propose une approche ouverte de l'événement perçu comme *rupture de l'intelligibilité*, entre structure et temps long. On regrettera cependant que cette publication s'achève sans qu'une synthèse générale ne soit tirée. Les débats engagés n'en sont pas moins passionnants.

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This book follows in the long tradition of geographical monographs on Canadian topics written by German geographers. Initiated by Carl Schott in the 1930s and continued in the work of Axel Wieger (the supervisor of the thesis from which this work derives) Frank Nagel and Ludger Basten among others in the last quarter-century, these contributions form an important set of careful empirical analyses of one or another facet of the geography of Canada. Much of this work has focused on

rural eastern Canada and ranges from studies of the Nova Scotia marshlands to agriculture in New Brunswick and marginality in the Îles de la Madeleine. More recently, Basten has investigated “new urbanism” and Steinfatt – whose work is somewhat unusual in that it appears here in English (if not at times in the most felicitous translation) – has made the Canadian retail system the centre of her attention.

This is a ground-breaking and ambitious study. It first attempts to identify and describe changing patterns of retail activity on a national scale and to understand them as the products of such extraneous forces as demographic shifts, technical innovations, evolving consumer demand and political and planning processes. Slightly less than half of the text is devoted to a general consideration of retailing in industrialized countries and to the sequence of changes, from early general stores through the rise of department stores, mail-order businesses, shopping centres, specialty retailers and ethnic stores to e-commerce and big box stores, in Canada. Then a hundred pages or so are given to a history and analysis of retailing in Vancouver since ca 1920 (although more space is given to post-war than pre-war developments). Finally the author reports the results of consumer and retailer surveys conducted in Vancouver in 2003. All of this is accompanied and enhanced by an impressive array of approximately 100 figures (ranging from graphs and pie charts to histograms and maps) as well as some 25 useful photographs, many of them taken by the author herself.

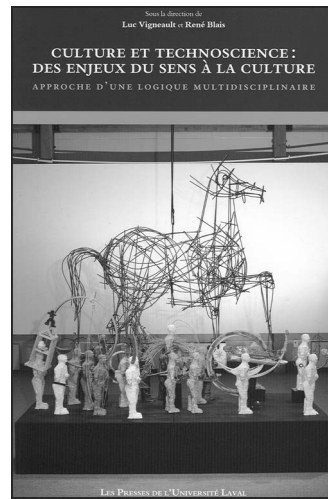
There is much of interest in this grand sweep. There is remarkably little scholarly geographical literature about Canadian retailing, tout suite, and by mapping the big picture Steinfatt provides a useful, and theoretically-informed, sketch of (and explanation for) changing retail patterns over time. By the same token, her detailed investigations in Vancouver throw new light on aspects of the retail story in that city. Although specialists highly knowled-



geable about this or that theoretical aspect of Steinfatt's argument, about one or another of the forms of enterprise that she discusses, or about Vancouver might find omissions or too-extensive claims in her discussion, the larger arguments that Steinfatt derives from her endeavours are important.

Fundamentally, this book achieves several things. It shows that the history and geography of retailing differ in important ways between Canada and the USA, that retailing in general is shaped by the interplay of the full range of the aforementioned extraneous forces, and (on the strength of the Vancouver case study) that the widely accepted belief that supply-side decisions ultimately shape the retail system needs to be reconsidered. In this latter point, particularly, there is hope. If nothing else, it reminds us that by working together to resist the imperatives of capitalism, "planners, politicians, retailers and residents" can create livable urban and retail environments and ensure that consumers are not left at the mercy of large retail corporations.

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VIGNEAULT, Luc et BLAIS, René (dir.) (2006) *Culture et technoscience : des enjeux du sens à la culture. Approche d'une logique multidisciplinaire*. Québec, Presses de l'Université Laval, 164 p. (ISBN 2-7637-8230-2)

L'ouvrage, au titre quelque peu énigmatique, rassemble des textes d'auteurs provenant de champs disciplinaires différents, proposant des perspectives multiples sur un même objet. Posant que ce que l'on appelle la technoscience aurait peut-être le pouvoir de transformer l'humain et non plus seulement la nature, Luc Vigneault, en introduction, émet l'hypothèse que puisque la technoscience étend son emprise jusqu'à l'univers symbolique, étant devenue le milieu même où l'on vit, il pourrait y avoir crise du sens pour l'humanité. Les textes du recueil examinent donc l'amalgame désormais classique des sciences et de la technique, de même que leurs modes d'immixtion dans la culture ou les rapports qu'elles entretiennent avec celle-ci.

Du constat des contraintes imposées par l'ubiquiste complexe technoscientifique dans nos sociétés à la crainte de la dilution du sujet qui en serait conséquente, de la dénonciation d'une rigidité présumée trop grande des technosciences à leur acceptation comme allant de soi, un flottement entre rejet et consentement se dégage de l'ensemble de l'ouvrage, à la fois