

A World Made for Money: Economy, Geography, and the Way We Live Today. By Brett Wallach, Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2015. xvi + 470 pp., US\$40.00 (hardback), ISBN: 978-0-8032-9891-0

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In *A World Made for Money*, Brett Wallach presents a panoramic view of international business in the 21st century. The book's central premise, as captured by its title, is a simple one: the modern world is increasingly made and remade by money-seeking. For Wallach, this aspect of contemporary life has become so extreme that when he looks around himself, literally "everything [he] sees has been built to make money" (p. viii). Having stated this premise and offered a few brief caveats and clarifications in the book's brief introduction, Wallach launches into a series of chapters organized around basic realms or concepts associated with the conduct of globalized business: shopping, making, moving, fueling, and so on. While the book's subtitle, *Economy, Geography, and the Way We Live Today*, suggests a book at least partly about 'everyday life,' as well as economic and spatial analysis of some sort, the empirical content on offer focuses almost exclusively on various sectors of business and industry. This is because the material presented in the text is derived from articles in newspapers such as the *Wall Street Journal*, *Financial Times*, and the *New York Times*. One of the effects of this approach is that the book reflects and amplifies the frenetic and seemingly chaotic nature of business in the contemporary world. The reader is treated to a whirlwind of brief vignettes from places around the globe, in which we see not only the staggering scale of social and ecological changes wrought by political economic developments of recent years, but also the shocking rapidity with

which these changes take place.

The transformation of China's economy over the past several decades often presents the most striking examples of the vast and rapid economic processes that fill the text, as summarized succinctly by the following: "(I)n 2010, the country exported in a day what in 1978 it had exported in a year" (p. 264). The book is lengthy and replete with examples such as these, leaving the reader with a sense of awe, if not at times confusion and bewilderment, in the face of such far-reaching changes, occurring at unprecedented and accelerating speeds; 'all that is solid' indeed appears to melt into air in these pages.

And yet not without encountering considerable friction, of course, and the text does an excellent job of balancing the staggering feats of global business with stories of political struggle, whether in the form of union activity, state efforts to curb rampant market processes, or revolutionary movements. Wallach also offers numerous anecdotes illustrating that success in business requires careful attention to cultivating consumers as particular kinds of subjects, and working within existing local cultural milieus even as those milieus are transformed by global processes. The book tells us that Indian supermarket chain Big Bazaar, for example, initially modeled its stores on 'Western' supermarkets, but quickly realized that spacious, well-organized aisles and perfect produce lacked the 'theatricality' of "the Indian model of shopping," and thus failed to induce customers to browse and spend sufficiently. The company elected to redesign their stores to be tight, noisy, and chaotic, without air conditioning, and with some spoiled produce on display to give shoppers "a sense of victory" as they pick and choose among items (p. 291). Whether the arena is this sort of micropolitics of the subject, or the 'race to the bottom' that often accompanies market excesses, Wallach's book makes clear that global business is

political through and through, and thus the text is an important counterpoint to celebratory portraits of a supposedly ‘flattening’ world.

As cultural geography, the text might be read as successfully imparting some flavor of the cultural geographies of global business; this combined with its entertaining and easy-to-read style could make it a useful contribution to undergraduate courses dealing with globalization, business, and politics, with the caveat that students will find little in the way of analysis of either culture or economy. Indeed, Wallach explicitly states that his goal is not to analyze, but rather to “describe” and “survey” the ‘world made for money,’ allowing himself “only the occasional judgment” (p. xiv). As such, the book would benefit from being read in conjunction with more explicitly analytical and theoretical texts such as Thomas Piketty’s (2014) *Capital in the Twenty-First Century*, Melissa Wright’s (2006) *Disposable Women and Other Myths of Global Capitalism*, or Roelvink *et al.*’s (2015) edited volume *Making Other Worlds Possible*.

References

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